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Regional Cultural History Project

Lucy Sprague Mitchell

PIONEERING IN EDUCATION

An Interview Conducted by
Irene M. Prescott

Berkeley
1962

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FOREWORD

Lucy Sprague Mitchell, educator, founder of Bank Street College, and author of children's books, began her career in education in 1903 when President Benjamin Ide Wheeler invited her to come to the University of California. After several years of apprenticeship as a reader in the departments of economics and English, and as an instructor in English, the president appointed her dean of women and assistant professor of English in 1906. At that time there was only one other woman on the faculty -- Jessica Peixotto, lecturer in sociology -- and a cautious faculty had suggested that perhaps the new position should bear the title "warden of women."

At first glance the new dean would appear to meet few of the requirements of a post which called for administrative skills and those personal qualities generally associated with "motherliness." The then-Miss Sprague was just twenty-eight years old, had graduated from Radcliffe with honors in 1900, and had done some graduate work there. Her pictures reveal a beautiful young lady, demure and unsophisticated, with steadfast eyes, who appeared even younger than her years.

Perhaps it was this very absence of experience and training which prevented the inhibition of her creative imagination and resourcefulness and allowed her to depart from the traditional role of dean of women. Although routine problems of housing and counseling demanded much of her time, there were also poetry reading sessions held at her home on Ridge Road, the pageants written and produced by the co-eds, and the studies of the community at first hand -- its industries, hospitals, and welfare

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institutions. Though she herself had had little formal schooling prior to her matriculation in Radcliffe College, she was an "educated" woman who felt from the first the importance of providing for her charges experiences that were both enriching to themselves and relevant to society.

Born to wealth and position in Chicago, where her father was partner in the firm of Sprague-Warner Company, wholesale grocers, she had always had access to the best in literature, art, and music, and included among her intimate friends such educators as Alice Freeman Palmer and George Herbert Palmer, Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, Adolph Miller (her brother-in-law), and of course the Benjamin Ide Wheelers.

Although her work as dean was challenging, by 1912 Lucy Sprague knew that her paramount interest lay in working with children. Her decision to leave the University coincided with her acceptance of a long-standing proposal of marriage from Wesley Clair Mitchell, professor of political economy at the University, who had decided his profession could best be pursued in New York City, the hub of business activity in the United States. After a honeymoon in Europe, the two settled in New York where Dr. Mitchell (Robin, she always called him) was to distinguish himself as a professor of economics at Columbia University, founder of the National Bureau of Economic Research, and writer on monetary policies and business cycles, and Mrs. Mitchell immediately began her search for information and experiences that were to lead to the formation of Bank Street College.

In Two Lives (Simon & Schuster, 1953) Mrs. Mitchell relates the story of their life together. It is a moving story, well told, and this series of interviews was planned to repeat only such portions of the book as were needed to establish continuity.

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The early years in New York were crowded with the routine tasks required by a complex household which grew to include four children. However, the busy mother found the time -- and more astonishingly, the energy -- to pursue her "vision" of working with children in a setting which would encourage the development of the whole child. She came to know the older pioneers in experimental education, among them Harriet Johnson, Elizabeth Irwin, and Caroline Pratt, and from this association, aided by a generous gift from her cousin Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, grew the Bureau of Educational Experiments established in 1916. Later this was to become the Bank Street School, and still later the Bank Street College of Education. Ever encouraged and helped by her husband and a devoted core of associates, this institution was to be the center of her work from 1916 to retirement.

These interviews with Mrs. Mitchell were undertaken at the suggestion of Professor Walton E. Bean of the department of history as part of a series documenting the early history of the University of California. Mrs. Mitchell, who had retired to Palo Alto, had just been awarded an honorary degree and a new women's residence hall had been named in her honor.

The sessions, running over a period of several months in the winter and spring of 1960, were recorded in Mrs. Mitchell's inviting white cottage at 660 Kingston Avenue, Palo Alto, California. The modest house was set in a lovely garden dominated by a majestic live oak. Windows on three sides prompted each visit to open with references to the unfolding of spring -- first the daffodils, next the azaleas, and then the nesting birds. Pictures acquired in the early years of their marriage, interesting objects of art, books, furniture

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made by her husband, and the organized clutter that comes from writing and reading reflected Mrs. Mitchell's full life. The colored paisley dress which she often wore, the bright crocheted edging on her more sombre costumes, her distinctive Egyptian brooch, and the bright band of ribbon worn in her hair showed her love of color. Her alert mind seldom groped for name or date, and her penetrating observations on current problems of politics or education indicated an active interest in all about her. Now, at eighty-three, she said she at last felt free to spend her time as she liked, a grateful relief from the lifelong pressure of her Puritan background which dictated that all activity must be useful. Now she could write poetry just for the joy of writing, and her poems clearly reflect her deep love of nature and humanity and her delight in the English language.

The transcriptions of the interviews were first edited by the interviewer, then corrected and edited by Mrs. Mitchell, who donated photographs and a bibliography of her writings to accompany the manuscript. When an introduction to this manuscript was considered it was felt that only those closely associated with Bank Street College and Mrs. Mitchell could adequately define her role in education. It was after a visit in 1961 with Barbara Biber, Irma Simonton Black, and Charlotte Winson at Bank Street College that the interviewer received the following introduction by Irma Simonton Black and Joan Blos. It not only adds valuable insights into the professional life of Mrs. Mitchell, but is a testimony to the high regard and real affection which her staff has for her.

This interview forms a part of the collection of autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the development of Northern California conducted by the Regional Cultural History Project. The Project, headed by Willa Baum, is under

the administrative supervision of Assistant Librarian Julian Michel.

Irene M. Prescott
Interviewer

29 August 1962
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INTRODUCTION

by Irma Simonton Black, Director of the Publications Division; Teacher Training Division, and Joan W. Blos, Publications Division; Teacher Training Division, Bank Street College of Education

Lucy Sprague Mitchell is an impressive individual. To meet her now, at 83, is to encounter still the same sense of drama and delight, of wit and perceptivity, of talent and conviction that she has always conveyed to her colleagues. She is a person of tremendous vitality and intellectual power to whom learning is important, and intellectual excitement necessary.

A Theorist

This intellectual-creative capacity, so integral a part of her own make-up, may also be seen as an organizing force in her work with children and adults. Over and over, in various ways, she sought to communicate to others the satisfaction and excitement of learning which was expressed in her educational philosophy. Even at a time when many "progressive educators" mistook license for freedom, and a lack of structure for program flexibility, Lucy Mitchell saw the importance of subject matter and facts and tried to make them meaningful for children. She saw no point in letting children run around and get dirty for the sake of running around and getting dirty, but if she felt this might increase the pertinence of a learning experience, then she was willing to try it and see. She sought always to offer children the chance to think for themselves (because this was important to her, too), to create, to see relationships. And

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just as she would not tolerate permissiveness that had no purpose, so she refused to be bound by tradition simply because it was there. In the true sense of the word, one might say that Lucy Mitchell had a radical approach to education -- one which began with the basic meaning and importance of school experience and developed from there.

One of the things that gave power and persistence to her efforts was that she never for a moment doubted that the creative impulses of children included the intellectual impulses, and that the overall security and happiness, the mental health of children, was furthered by and dependent upon full use of the mind. To her this meant being able to comprehend the relationships among facts rather than the memorizing of isolated bits of information. Lucy Mitchell felt that the standard elementary school program of the day in which the curriculum was fragmented into artificially divided areas was, by its very nature, incompatible with a broad and purposeful approach to learning, and she set about the development of program in which children could be presented with meaningful bodies of knowledge. For instance, in the teaching of American history she did not stress the wars and dates related to colonial expansion. Rather she led children to understand the wonder and excitement, the nerve and audacity, the plain, hard courage of the people who came to this strange world to make it do their bidding. It was her belief that children who were taught in this way would learn the facts more easily and more eagerly than those who lacked empathy with people of another time. Thus she embarked upon what is now known as "social studies." As early as 1910 she wrote:

> The name Human Geography had not yet been invented but much of my later work in geography was a follow-up of [my] first fumbling effort to show the interdependence of people and the earth and how social institutions and attitudes grow out of the work that people do which is economically important to them.

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Today the theme of the dependence of every man upon every other man, of every function upon every other function, is the global concept and has, more and more, become the only belief by which society can maintain itself. We find the child initially in interdependence with his family and the school which is his community; from this Lucy Mitchell, with beautiful logic and emotion, guided the child's progress to a vision of man's interdependence with his world.

Here, as in other areas, Lucy Mitchell's insights into the educative process anticipated later developments by many years. For example, the modern theory of learning being developed by Jerome Bruner and his colleagues at Harvard resembles very much the "relationship thinking" emphasized by Lucy Mitchell. In his chapter on the importance of structure as the basis for learning, Dr. Bruner says that if teachers would divorce themselves from the idea that the children need to know operations and facts first, and would recognize that children need to know and understand the structure _about_ the facts, we could deal with children very much as we deal with adults in the learning process.

Lucy Mitchell saw from the beginning that a child can only make new experience meaningful when he relates it to his known experience. One of her favorite stories which illustrates this analysis of the learning process comes from the day when she took some underprivileged kindergartners out to the country. They stopped to examine a brook and when a school of minnows went by one of the children exclaimed, "My God! So many live sardines!"

A Teacher

It was not only on isolated occasions that Lucy Mitchell brought her gifts as a teacher to children other than those in the independent and admittedly selective schools in which she

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began her work. In addition to her theoretical considerations regarding the meaning and structure of the curriculum, Lucy Mitchell worked actively in New York City public schools as an in-service consultant. For many years (1942-1955) she served as a resource person to classroom teachers and with them worked out specific techniques for specific areas of knowledge. Colleagues who were then her assistants recall with mixed horror and appreciation their many map-laden descents of subway steps (Lucy Mitchell thought that taxis were for weaklings!) and the glee with which she approached each new challenge and situation. One faculty member still at Bank Street tells about the day when Lucy Mitchell conducted a sixth grade geography lesson in a "difficult class." After she left the room one little boy said to his teacher, "That lady must be a genius." When he was asked why he replied, "Because she makes us know things we didn't think we knew!"

It was in part the ability to let children (and adults) discover new facts by considering relationships among already known facts that made Lucy Mitchell a great teacher. But while it was always her intention to give the child opportunities for making his own discoveries, she realized that it was essential that the curriculum be supported by adequate reading materials. With characteristic vigor -- and talent -- she set about to remedy the deficiencies in existing texts and produced (not quite single-handed!) a series of social studies readers which is still in use today. Indeed, many of her writings for children reflect her profound interest in what we know today as the field of ecology, the study of the dynamic relationships which put man into equilibrium with his environment and how contemporary civilization reflects the basic geological "givens" and man's attempts to use and adjust to them.

Although theorizing, teaching children and their teachers,

and writing would be more than enough for most people, most people are not Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Relatively early in her professional life her interest in teaching and the techniques of teaching led her to become concerned with teacher education. In the School for Teachers, then known as the Cooperative School for Student Teachers, she was a dedicated experimenter. One of her favorite projects was a course that she called Environment, and which was actually a course in social studies for adults. It was her theory that the teacher whose own intellectual processes were stimulated by new insights and discoveries would be able to create for her children the same sense of excitement and discovery that she had found for herself. That is, if the teachers acquired a sense of the inter-relationships of the world in which _they_ lived as grown-ups, they could interpret to children the world in which _they_ lived, and make it a vital, breathing, exciting setting in which history takes place. She taught her students how to learn about and to observe their own environment. One of the assignments, for instance, was to get out on a street corner and simply observe everything there was to be seen, from manholes to the patterns of traffic, from fire hydrants to stores. Later on in the course the students observed an entire community and made charts of its resources, services, industries, and so on. This exercise was dictated by Lucy Sprague Mitchell's belief that it was more important to give teachers interesting and complex material on their own level than to teach them curriculum and methodology. Later, Lucy Mitchell revised her approach to her mature student teachers to include more technqiues for actual use in the classroom. Always alert to possibilities for improving her own method and curriculum, she came at last to realize that she was expecting more of these young teachers than they had to give -- the same kind of love for learning, the same kind of erudition that she herself had. Lucy Mitchell had and has a charming way of assuming that if she could do something, so could

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her students! But conversely, she never asked anyone to do something that she would not, or could not, do herself.

Perhaps one major reason for her shift in the direction of somewhat more specific curriculum content in the graduate courses for teachers was the opportunity to see the great need for such material in her work in the public schools. Not that she ever lost the earlier excitement and freshness, only that she could see the problem in the context of her experience with teachers of over-crowded classes and children from families where the cultural background was barren in comparison with that of the favored groups with whom she had worked at first. However, Lucy Sprague Mitchell's wisdom and restraint kept her from trying to impose her personal methods on the teachers in the public schools. She realized that many of the techniques that were successful in small groups needed to be modified if they were to prove useful at all under the very different conditions imposed by the public school situation.

These matters were of great importance to Lucy Mitchell because she had from the start seen her work in privileged groups and situations as being her opportunity to develop techniques and test hypotheses in order that she, and her co-workers, might then make their findings available to others. Indeed she saw this as being the main reason for the existence of private, experimental education, but valued also the fact that to work in these schools was to be able to work freely and with independence of the requirements of large, necessarily bureaucratic, education systems and school boards.

Although Lucy Mitchell's astounding versatility and energy allowed her to enter into almost every facet of the life of the institutions she helped to found, it would be an error to infer that she was a headstrong individualist running a one man show. Even if she was once driven to aver that the term cooperate

means that "they coo and we operate," she was a firm believer in group endeavor. In 1916, long before the multi-discipline approach was "invented," Lucy Mitchell brought together a group of teachers, psychologists, doctors, anthropologists, and social workers to study children and pool their findings.

That the group prospered and became an effective unit was due in large part to the talented and tactful leadership of Lucy Mitchell. Although she herself insisted that her major contribution was in the selection of the right people, those who worked with her speak with feelings not unlike those of the little boy who called her a genius. "The way she appreciated one's contribution made it seem more, and it became more." "She would come in and say, 'Now don't argue with me because I know you can do it,' and somehow you would find yourself doing it." "She really did have more faith in many of us than seemed reasonable to us." And Lucy Mitchell made that faith work. In time, the group she gathered together became the Bureau of Educational Experiments which in turn became today's Bank Street College of Education. It is interesting, looking back, to discover how many of the present activities of the College reflect and sustain Lucy Mitchell's interests, and the degree to which her beliefs and propositions are embodied in the school's educational philosophy.

A Researcher

From the very beginning Lucy Mitchell's approach to the study of children and schools was careful and systematic. However, at a time when many research workers and child psychologists were trying to reduce the study of development to a laboratory science, Lucy Mitchell and her colleagues -- perhaps in part because she herself was not inhibited by a formal research background -- kept to what would now be called "field research." In a

pad-and-pencil-in-smock-pocket era she and her associates developed narrative observations as their basic method.

Study of the records they obtained and thoughtful review of their own direct work with children enabled Bureau staff members to arrive at significant formulations which have since been accepted and demonstrated by other workers in the field of child development. Thus, for example, it is now recognized that a vitally important force for making schools good places for the intellectual emotional growth of children is the concept that the school program must be geared to the understanding of the developmental stages through which all children pass. For a long time these stages were referred to as "age levels" which, by implication, made them arbitrary and over-defined. Lucy Mitchell began to call these developmental stages "maturity levels" and in this way brought the term into line with a rather more flexible, more universal, view. One child of six, for instance, might be as mature as another one of eight if he had already accomplished the developmental tasks of the older child. Although this seems obvious now, it was a radical concept when Lucy Mitchell first put the term to use.

An Author

Equally radical in the 1920s, equally well established in widespread acceptance today, and equally dependent upon classroom knowledge and observation, was Lucy Mitchell's declaration that children need books which are relevant to their own experience. Unfortunately this has been misinterpreted as an attack on fantasy per se and a rather grim insistence on realism in juvenile literature. Actually all she meant was that the fantasy should be on the child's "level of maturity, not on that of the adult who is writing for him." (1) With regard to true-to-life stories

(1) Introduction, Believe and Make-Believe, 1956 (Dutton)

she found that "a story can best bring back to a child a pleasurable experience if it is told in the same sense and muscle terms in which he experienced it. And a story can also extend a child's experience if the new is not too far removed from what he has already experienced at first hand." (2) The extent to which these comments reflect observation of real children in spontaneous action, and their affinity for other phases of Lucy Mitchell's work and credo, are apparent.

In her first major effort to write stories for children which would comply with her challenging and exacting specifications, she presented a collection of experimental stories which were grouped according to the age for which they were intended and dealt with things which children might be expected to know. The Here and Now Story Book (first published by E.R. Dutton, 1921, and still available in revised edition) begins with a long and thoughtful foreword to parents and teachers which sets forth her views and beliefs. The stories themselves were not more prosaic accounts but attempted to move from the known to the comprehensible, from the evident to the deducible, from the ordinary to the wonderful. In her writing, as in her teaching, she was interested in developing relationships and inter-relationships and in helping children to understand and appreciate the myriad facets of the here and now world. (It is amusing to recall that when the Here and Now first appeared librarians complained because they didn't know whether to catalogue and shelve it with fact or fiction!)

Unfortunately, many who considered themselves to be Lucy Mitchell's admirers misunderstood her purpose as grievously as did her detractors. Many of these would-be followers produced a great deal of extremely pedestrian material for children, and as a result Lucy Mitchell has been unjustly criticized as the

(2) Ibid.

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originator of the dump-truck and clip-clop genre of juvenile literature. Actually she was never -- and temperamentally could not have been -- so arbitrary or fanatically literal as certain of her imitators. For instance, in writing for children of the third, fourth, or fifth grades she was well aware of the wish and need of children to extend themselves and to enter worlds beyond the here and now. She recognized this as a period when one of the greatest drives of the child is to free himself from complete immersion in the family scene and from the very things that made him feel secure when he was younger. Lucy Mitchell fully appreciated this as being important to his perception of himself as a member of the world society.

Lucy Mitchell's writing for children ranged widely, from very brief pieces in verse or prose for the youngest to carefully thought-out stories or exposition for children of the junior high school years.

While Lucy Mitchell's books for children were of major importance as an expression of her own thinking and in her work as an educator, her contribution was extended by her influence on authors who participated in her classes and who were members of the Writer's Laboratory which she began as a cooperative venture in 1937. A gifted teacher here, as in every other area she knew, she had a profound effect upon juvenile authors such as Louise Woodcock, Irma Simonton Black, Ruth Krauss, Edith Thacher Hurd, Betty Miles, Claudia Lewis, and Margaret Wise Brown, as well as on many who never achieved published recognition but whose classroom work or personal enjoyment of the language arts was greatly influenced and enhanced by their association with Lucy Mitchell.

Her first emphasis with a new group of writers was to try to get them to think on a child'd level, without the super-

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imposed logic which inhibits adults when they think as adults, and with the sensory immediacy characteristic of children's thinking. She was not interested in structured products in the beginning, and indeed ruled against them because she wanted her students to free themselves from the demands of internal discipline until they were able to recognize and be articulate about what they heard, smelled, tasted, and touched, as well as about what they saw. Only when students had been able to make sensory contact with the world and their experience in it and, further, gave evidence of being ready and able to use these direct impressions in their writing did she encourage them to try more disciplined pieces. The rationale here is essentially the same as that which led to her development of the environment course for teachers and expresses the profundity and pervasiveness of her belief in the dependence of learning and accurate communication upon direct, first-hand experience.

Conclusion

This quality of unity, of coherence and consistency, occurs not only within the frame of Lucy Mitchell's work life but also between her characteristics as an individual and the key qualities of the educational philosophy with which she worked and to which she contributed. Her essentially creative-intellectual approach, her belief in the value of learning by being and doing, her irreverent attitude toward dogma and convention, her love for people and faith in their worth and potential -- all are expressed in her credo as a teacher and all are necessary to her central, essential self.

In a lesser person it might be sufficient to attribute such correspondence of personal and professional attributes to good fortune and felicitous choice of career. In the case of Lucy Sprague Mitchell it seems necessary to suggest a more active

process. The unique impress of Lucy Mitchell is upon all that she has done as a creator, contributor, participant in the world of education, and her qualities as a magnificent human being are vivid to all those who know her.

New York City
January 1962

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ANCESTORS

Prescott: Both your maternal and paternal forebears came from England, didn't they?

Mitchell: Yes. I have no specific date excepting that it was in the fairly early 1600's. They were very proud of having been here for a long while.

Prescott: Were there specific reasons for their migration?

Mitchell: I don't know, excepting that I think that was a popular thing to do in those days. America was still a new place for a home. And I don't know what they did over there. I know that the Spragues, before they were Englishmen, were Dutchmen. The name is a Dutch name. Whether they came over when all the weavers flocked to England, I don't know. That probably is all in the history of Royalton, which is written up by my aunt and printed in a big, thick book. My son has it. I have never had the interest even to read it.

Both my father and my mother had a grandfather living with them, both of whom remembered when Vermont fought in the revolution as a separate republic. And I don't know what their ages were. I don't think they were old enough, either of them, to fight, but they both remembered it. Which seems to make us extraordinarily young as a nation.

Prescott: Were they farmers, tradesmen or professional people in England?

Mitchell: I don't know. They certainly became farmers the minute

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Mitchell: they came here. I don't know how much opportunity there was for anything else. They were hunting for homes.

Prescott: Were they in the group that came over because of religious convictions?

Mitchell: I don't know. Now, they settled in the central part of Vermont, or around White River Junction, though one settlement was on the east branch and one was on the west branch of the river. But they knew people all the way up the valley, and many years later I, my husband and the children had a Vermont home near Craftsbury. To this day they give a pageant showing the immigrant arrival and the early years in Craftsbury. This is a lovely New England town. Most of the people settling there did come over because of what they felt was religious persecution.

Prescott: Then they pushed up the White River Valley?

Mitchell: Yes, they pushed up to White River Junction. This was a favorite gathering place for the people who had settled on one branch of the White River, and those who went up on the other. They used to meet for periodical reunions. I remember well that my Aunt Nan, who was my mother's older sister, said that they met for a feast of apple pie at the White River Junction station. Of course, that was in the horse and buggy days, obviously.

All those people, apparently, had a great interest in singing. And they had what they called "sing festivals." They trained for them and then they gave performances. And both my father and my mother and all their neighbors, as far as I know, took part in them. It was a community performance. And as I think of my

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Mitchell: mother's and my father's remembrances, the interest in singing was far more of a bond than any religious interest.

Prescott: Have you any recollections of your grandparents?

Mitchell: No. All four were dead before I was born.

The Atwoods

Prescott: Your mother's family, the Atwoods, was a large family, wasn't it?

Mitchell: Yes. Thirteen; ten boys and three girls. But the oldest died as a baby. My mother, born in 1849, was the youngest; her brother, Foster, whom I knew well and called Uncle Foster, was twenty-five years older than she was, and he wasn't the oldest. So that means one mother had twenty-six or twenty-seven years of bearing children.

Prescott: How many of them grew to adulthood?

Mitchell: All twelve grew to adulthood. There were three of them who died in the war, and one who got lost and was frozen. A favorite story of my mother's was about the dog which had been with this brother, and had come home alone and whined until he led rescuers to his master, who was still alive. He died later.

Uncle Oliver was a milkman in Martha's Vineyard, and for that reason we spent one summer there. He used to deliver milk and we were allowed to get into the wagon and be driven around with him. I think there must have been seven of the thirteen who lived to old age. Four of them went west.

Prescott: Were they all farmers?

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Mitchell: One became a professional musician. Two who went west went into business. My mother's family was distinctly poorer, economically, than my father's. They were famous, the Atwoods, for their music and for their inability to make any money. That was just as true after they came to Chicago. They never could make any money.

Prescott: Your mother was one of those who migrated westward?

Mitchell: Yes. I think my Aunt Nan, who was twelve years older than my mother, and who really brought her up, was the first to go west. She married my father's brother.

Prescott: Your mother and her sister married brothers?

Mitchell: Yes.

Prescott: What recollections of life on the Vermont farm did your mother have?

Mitchell: I can remember that she told us about the man who came to make their shoes.

Prescott: An itinerant shoemaker?

Mitchell: An itinerant, yes. He was a yearly arrival, I think. He probably went around all of that community. I can remember Mother telling us that after a cow had been killed for eating, they tanned the hide and prepared it and softened it and had the hide all ready for him. You see, there were not only the twelve children and the father and mother, but there were two adopted children and an old aunt.

Prescott: Were they cousins of yours?

Mitchell: I think so.

Prescott: Let's go back to the shoes. This intrigues me. I've never heard of an itinerant shoemaker.

Mitchell: That was a common custom and shoes were much cheaper

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Mitchell: made this way.

Prescott: Your grandfather, then, actually tanned the hide?

Mitchell: Yes. This was my mother's family. I don't believe my father's family did that. I think they could afford to buy shoes.

Grandmother also must have been a very remarkable person. They were all so well read. It strikes me as very impressive, and I think perhaps it was very characteristic of the Vermont farmers. I can't remember ever speaking of anything that was a classic which my mother could possibly have known, that she hadn't read; that was also true of my father.

Prescott: Her education had taken her through high school?

Mitchell: Yes. The family had all been born in Barnard until my mother, who was the first one born in Royalton, where they had moved in order to get what they considered better schools. It was almost a prescribed thing for a girl to teach until she was married. Aunt Nan did that. Since the school board couldn't pay her enough salary, part of her salary was given in room and board for herself. She moved around from family to family. My mother was then left at home, the only little girl among all those boys. So Aunt Nan took Mother around with her. Naturally that reduced her salary that much, but my Aunt Nan felt that she could take care of her better than nine boys could. Later my mother taught school also, but that was after her father died. She and her mother moved to Malone in northern New York where my Uncle Foster was living then. Here she taught school and stayed until her mother died. I guess she postponed getting married a year because of that. Our whole family used to stop

Mitchell: at Malone when we went east in the summer, as we often did. Uncle Foster was twenty-five years older than Mother, so they were really a generation apart. He had only an adopted child; no children of his own. And he had carried on all the family customs. One practice that impressed me, and I'll never forget it, was that all of us were assembled, including what they called the hired man--shades of Robert Frost!--before they went out to work. Then Uncle Foster would take a tuning fork, put it in his mouth and jerk it out, and then listen for the tone. After all of us had the right note, he would, with dramatic gestures, lead a hymn before they went out to work. They would never fail to do this.

If anyone was sick, they sang in the sick-room. This custom, I think, was brought down from his own childhood. Because my mother said it was a kind of alibi; if they didn't want to do anything else, they sang and everybody had to stop and sing.

Prescott: This certainly explains the interest in music which you find throughout your family.

Mitchell: Well, Mother was an extraordinarily musical person. I think she could have been a professional musician. She sang in the choir at church when she was so little that she had to stand on a chair to bring her head up with the level of the grownups. And I recall when going to concerts with Mother that she always took sheets of music paper so if she wanted to remember a score, she took notes on it, musical notes, just as you and I would take notes in English.

We always sang, and we had the old Arian and Anthion songs. They are written, you know, with the

Mitchell: tenor clef in the middle, and I was trained to read all three clefs, as a child.

The Spragues

Prescott: Did your father's family, the Spragues, live quite close to the Atwood family?

Mitchell: Fairly close. The Spragues lived on the other branch of the White River, but you had to go either over the hills or down to White River Junction to reach the Atwoods.

Prescott: Now, how many children were there in your Grandfather Sprague's family?

Mitchell: Only three; two boys and one girl. The girl never married. Albert was the oldest; my father, born in 1839, was the third; they married two of the Atwood girls, as we have said. Amelia was the middle one. She once was engaged to one of Mother's brothers, but she couldn't seem to make up her mind to marry, and he went west. Later she also went west, but he died before they were married.

Prescott: The Spragues were farmers?

Mitchell: They were farmers and I visited both of those two farms; it was after we had moved out to California for Father's health when I was perhaps sixteen or seventeen. My uncle and aunt and my father and mother and my brother, Albert, and myself drove all around the places where they had lived. We went up to their old farms, and I can remember how much my aunt and Mother were grieved that their farm had been allowed to run down. But it was never a very good farm. On the other hand, my father's farm was good, but they moved down to the village of West Randolph.

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Mitchell: And the barn which belonged to my grandfather, whose name was Ziba, is still standing. And Ziba himself, I think, is buried there. My father, as a boy, used to drive the cows over the hills--it was too long to drive the cows down the White River and up--for the market. The market was at Randolph, which was quite a good-sized town, much larger than West Randolph. Both my father and my mother remember when the first train came through. It didn't come past their house at all; it would have gone past Royalton, but it didn't go past Father's. But it went up to Montpelier.

Prescott: Your father's brother, Albert Sprague, went to Yale, didn't he? Wasn't it rather unusual for a farmer to send his son to Yale?

Mitchell: Well, I don't know. Both my uncle and my father were sent to Barton Academy. Barton is a town I'm very familiar with. It's about ten miles from where we had our summer place. And Barton Academy must have been a private school; I don't think it could have been a public school. It wouldn't have been called an academy. And, of course, it was a boys' academy. And Ezra Warner, who was the third partner in the Sprague-Warner & Co., which they later developed in Chicago, was also a Barton Academy boy. I think he came from Barton, itself. So many of the people that Father later knew in Chicago had college training before going west. Norman Williams from Woodstock had gone to college. And I think both Mr. Fairbanks from St. Johnsbury and Marshall Field went to college. They went to college if they weren't caught in the Civil War, which was what happened to my father. He

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Mitchell: joined the state militia. And I had his blanket that he used, the handwoven blanket with his name in the corner, which I have given to his oldest great-grandson.

Prescott: They brought their own guns, too, didn't they?

Mitchell: That I don't know. I have several pictures of him in his Civil War uniform. (I always want to say "costume;" I can never believe it, but they wore these very colorful sashes.) And they also wore full beards. But, of course, beards were usual in those days as compared with now.

Prescott: How long was he in the Civil War?

Mitchell: Not long. He was sent down to New Orleans. He was under General Butler, and they had a great deal of illness down there. There was yellow fever. But Father got the dysentery, which was so common then, and was shipped home. I really don't know how long he was there. Father would never say one word about the war.

Prescott: It must have been a disappointing experience?

Mitchell: I don't know. He was shipped home, and by one of those strange intuitions or myths, whatever you want to call it, they knew that he was on the way, but they didn't know when he was coming. And his father, Ziba, drove over the hills to Montpelier and met him at the train.

Prescott: Without really knowing he was coming?

Mitchell: Without really knowing. And this was very important because Father arrived on a stretcher. Later he developed tuberculosis. This seemed to happen to anybody who was sick with anything in Vermont in those days. All four of my grandparents died of tuberculosis, or as they used to call it, "galloping consumption," and three of my mother's brothers. I don't think that's

Mitchell: an unusual record.

Prescott: Were the Spragues active abolitionists?

Mitchell: Well, yes. I say "active" -- I don't know how active they were in Chicago, but they were very, very strong abolitionists.

Prescott: Now, Albert Sprague and your Aunt Nan had gone to Chicago during the Civil War?

Mitchell: I think they went before the war broke out. You see, they were older than my father. My father was born in 1839, so he was twenty, and that would have made his older brother twenty-five. I've never been sure of the date of my parents' births; I know Father was either born in 1838 or 1839 and was ten years older than Mother.

GIRLHOOD IN CHICAGO 1878-1896

Puritanism--
Recollections of Father, Mother, and Family

Prescott: You have said that when your parents came to Chicago they went to the home of your Uncle Albert Sprague. Would you describe briefly the neighborhood in which they settled?

Mitchell: The Albert Spragues had settled on the West Side. Chicago is divided into three parts by the Chicago River, called the North Side and the South Side and the West Side; the West Side is much the largest. With really uncanny foresight, the city fathers laid out a chain of parks encircling a huge area which it took Chicago years and years to grow out to. The West Side was the biggest of the earliest settlements. And my uncle had settled there, and so my parents went there also. Later there came that kind of change that comes in localities. It became less fashionable to live on the West Side, and they moved to Prairie Avenue on the South Side. But very soon the North Side became the swagger place to live and it still is. And I don't know whether my parents ever regretted going to Prairie Avenue. Very near on the lake front was a settlement of poor people. We were not in the wealthy area of Prairie Avenue.

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Prescott: You were born in Chicago?

Mitchell: I was born in Chicago in 1878, in the house on Washington Boulevard. Washington Boulevard was considered a very good residential street. However, on either side of us ran parallel streets on which there were streetcars, and these streets were simply lined with saloons. So one of my early memories is that I was never allowed, as a child, to walk on either side, on Lake Street or Randolph, because of the saloons. And the saloons in those days had those swinging half doors, so that you could see the feet below and the heads above. When I cast my first vote in Berkeley I felt that I was entering a saloon because the voting booth had a swinging half-door.

Prescott: Your family there on Washington Boulevard consisted of your mother and yourself and how many brothers and sisters?

Mitchell: There were six of us, and I was the fourth; my two younger brothers died, which made me the youngest. The youngest one died when he was six, the other one when he was twelve. So that when I was thirteen, I became the youngest.

Prescott: What did they die of?

Mitchell: The youngest died of diphtheria; it was called "membranous croup" then, but it was really diphtheria. And the second one died of typhoid.

Prescott: Was Albert your oldest brother?

Mitchell; Yes. He was named after his uncle, Albert Sprague.

Prescott: And your older sister's name?

Mitchell: Was Mary. The names go Mary, Albert, Nancy, Lucy (myself), Otho (which was my father's name), and Arnold. Arnold had been a family name for a long

Mitchell: while. Father's mother was an Arnold.

Prescott: What recollections have you of your mother?

Mitchell: My recollections of Mother are both delightful and tragic. Mother was an artist by temperament, and I think might well have been a professional musician; she had a quality that I can only describe gently as being gypsy-like. She was naturally a very impulsive and a very affectionate person, but shy about expressing her affection. And my father, who was ten years older than Mother, had very little sympathy with that type of spontaneity; he disapproved of any show of affection. He was, himself, a very controlled man, and a business-man. And he treated Mother, to whom I do think he was devoted, like an older daughter. She was afraid of him. We were all afraid of Father, but I think my mother was afraid of him because she was afraid she wouldn't live up to his concept of a good wife.

Prescott: A New England man with rigid ideas as to his pre-rogatives as a husband and head of a family.

Mitchell: Well, Mother was from New England too, and in some regards he was no stricter than she. As an example, it was absolutely taken for granted in those days that people wouldn't use first names. And my mother always spoke of him as "my husband." I never heard my mother say "Otho." In a few of the old letters that I have she used the address, "My dear husband." That tells a lot, and my father was what I would call an upright man in every sense of the word. He was scrupulous in business, and he was scrupulous in anything that he felt was a part of his code. But his code wasn't very broad and he had no tolerance for anything outside his code. My mother was not that way at all. My mother was friendly and protective of everything that

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Mitchell: was human.

Prescott: You speak of Puritanism as being a dominant force in your cultural pattern. How do you define Puritanism?

Mitchell: Oh, my own definition, as I think back on my childhood, was that a waste of time was the greatest sin. And what my father thought was a waste of time I think of as play. As an example, music was a legitimate pleasure if you took it seriously, but if you laughed, my father scowled. And Mother was very gay when we used to sing without Father. She had a great sense of humor, and if we did anything wrong in the singing she would laugh. But my father would always say, "Lucia, do you think this is an appropriately serious attitude?" But in some ways Father was a great wag. He had the reputation among business men of being a great storyteller and a person who could make everything humorous. We children didn't see that side of him at home excepting on Sunday evenings when he told stories to us. At storytelling time we each had a specified place. My youngest brother sat on one of his knees; my next youngest on the other knee; I sat on one arm of the chair and Nancy on the other; and Albert and Mary sat in separate chairs facing us. And then he told the most wonderful stories that were humorous but always ended with a moral.

Prescott: You mentioned at one point in your Two Lives characteristics which the Puritan training tended to develop. Your parents were a reflection of these tendencies, weren't they?

Mitchell: Yes, their training tended to develop these tendencies. You see, my father--I think my father literally believed in original sin. I cannot believe that my mother did.

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Mitchell: I don't think Mother believed much in sin, original or otherwise. [Laughter] But Father felt that the only road to grace was through a sense of one's unworthiness. And I was made to feel humble to the point of feeling guilty that I was the kind of person that I was. And I think one of the revealing stories of my childhood centers around the little record books in which we children pasted stars. A gold star was for no sin; a silver star was for a small sin; and a red star was for a big sin. Well, every night we had to go over our crimes for the day. We evaluated ourselves. This began when I was very young, and I was passionately fond of red. And not understanding at all the symbol involved, I always chose red and always put the stars on in a design. If the design needed another star I invented another sin. [Laughter] Now that was a typical situation with my father. We were to confess our sins every day. And, as a result, I grew up feeling that I was not a worthy person.

Prescott: What effect did this type of training in the home have on your father-child relationship?

Mitchell: I was scared of Father. And by the time I was fifteen I disapproved of him very much. I don't know exactly how that came about. I disapproved of him when I was a little child because he used to whip my brother Albert so. I was never spanked in any very serious way, but my brother Albert was really whipped and whipped, again and again and again. My mother just dreaded Father's coming home at the end of the day because my brother was a very brilliant and tempestuous and unhappy child, and Father thought the only way to reform him was to whip him.

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Prescott: Did they ever reach a relationship?

Mitchell: No, they never did. It got worse and worse. I resented Father and I, too, resented his coming home because I knew that this unpleasantness was going to happen.

The complex thing about my father is that in some respects he did not lay down the law to me at all. If, for example, I wanted to go and see Jane Addams, although he didn't approve of her at that time, I could go. That was when I was fifteen or sixteen.

Prescott: Allowing this freedom doesn't seem consistent, does it?

Mitchell: Well, it's true with everything. Yes, it is inconsistent, I think. Yet it is true that in my early teens Father allowed me many liberties. That was largely because I was such a nervous child that I never could go to school without breaking down. I don't know why. I don't think that I was ever really ill. I turned out to be one of the huskiest people in the world as soon as I got away from my family. But I was kept out of school so much, and became a kind of family nurse.

Prescott: I noticed there was a great deal of illness in the family. Do you think that some of it might have been psychosomatic rather than real physical illness?

Mitchell: I don't know. That word "psychosomatic" dominates the present scene so that I'm inclined to attribute more to it than I think is warranted. But I'm quite sure that there was a psychological element in this.

Prescott: This Puritanical atmosphere in the home didn't stifle inquiry in your case at all, did it?

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Mitchell: Oh, on the contrary. You see, I had lots of time on my hands.

Prescott: And you were permitted to use that as you wished?

Mitchell: I was entirely free to do as I wished, and I did it. I must have been thirteen or fourteen when I began to investigate all the churches. I went to the Catholic cathedral, and I went to the Jewish synagogue, and I tried out all the various Protestant churches.

Prescott: Your family was a member of which church?

Mitchell: There again Father was very liberal. The choice of church was determined by the distance from church and by the minister. So we rotated between the Congregational and the Presbyterian, according to the minister and according to the nearness of the church.

Prescott: But they didn't try to dissuade you from attending the Catholic and the Jewish churches?

Mitchell: No, I think it interested Father. But neither Father nor Mother ever talked to me about myself. Though I think both of them worried about me. And what else besides exploring was I to do? When I stayed at home I was either the nurse or I was reading. I read and read and read.

Prescott: Was it at this time that you became interested in Christian Science as a possible answer to your problems?

Mitchell: Yes, that was one of the parts of my investigation. I was a Christian Scientist when my brother Otho died; that would make me fourteen. I think I was a Christian Scientist for about a year, or perhaps a year and a half. Around the age of fourteen. And it was when I was fifteen that the Parliament of Religions came to Chicago in the summertime--that was in 1893--and

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Mitchell: all of these people of different religions were housed with Chicago families. We happened to have Henry Drummond at our house, which disappointed me because I wanted somebody that was a little further away from my way of life than England. But I knew Swami Vivakananda very well. And our next door neighbor, Mr. Bartlett, had a Buddhist living with them, which was a thrilling thing for me, but a difficult thing for the family. He dressed entirely in white and he would eat nothing that was animal, nor would he kill a mosquito. And to me that was a new idea and an idea that gripped me. For a little while I became a vegetarian as well as I could manage to in my household. I read parts of the holy books of these strange religions. Not all, of course, but the great ones of the East; and I think that that summer, perhaps, was the most educational period of my whole life. I was fifteen, and of course I didn't get out of those books what I would have if I had been older. Nevertheless, I got an appreciation of the fact that there are many cultures, of which ours is only one.

Prescott: And also a tolerance for those cultures.

Mitchell: More than a tolerance, a real appreciation. Because I was so susceptible, I almost believed each one as I read it, you know. [Laughter]

Prescott: Was the parliament planned by a local religious group in Chicago?

Mitchell: It was planned by Henry Barrows, who was a Presbyterian minister and a very close friend of ours. He thought of it and managed it.

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Sprague-Warner Company--Wholesale Grocers

Prescott: Let's return to your family and discuss your father in relationships outside the family. Your father was a tremendously successful businessman, wasn't he?

Mitchell: Yes.

Prescott: I suppose your age would have made it impossible for you to remember business techniques which he developed. Certainly people who read this would be interested to know how he expanded the business, or how he and his brother shared the work.

Mitchell: My only personal part of that is that we had to have breakfast at six so that Father could leave for business at seven. [Laughter]

Father was the imaginative member of the firm, which consisted of his brother and also Ezra Warner. Ezra Warner was an ultra-conservative. Father's job was to go west and open up new centers for groceries.

Prescott: And did they open up another office with a field man?

Mitchell: No. Father seemed to have almost faultless judgment as to whether a man could be trusted with a loan. And you must remember this was in the seventies before any of the now commonly accepted business practices had been thought of. The Chicago fire was in '71, and the Sprague-Warner firm burned to the ground, but it got on its feet right off, due to Father's energetic expansion in large part.

For example, he went to Denver, which was then a small town, and there he met Chester Morey whom he trusted and who grew to be one of the most effective

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Mitchell: business representatives in the western area. Then he went on to Salt Lake City, where he was so impressed with the Mormons that he became their ardent defender. He said that they were the most trustworthy group of people, as a total group, that he had ever dealt with.

Father was, at times, contradictory. He was usually very rigid in his standard of values, but when he had a personal experience like that with the Mormons, he would say, "They are honorable people; let them believe what they want to; let them have as many wives as they wish. They are very honorable people." And that was the only criteria that Father demanded.

Prescott: Then he would establish a business center in Denver and Salt Lake City?

Mitchell: No, not branches. Mr. Morey, for instance, opened his own store in which he carried all the Sprague-Warner products, you see. Sprague-Warner was a wholesale business. Therefore they sold only to retailers, never selling directly to the consumer. In fifteen years they had become the largest wholesale grocery business in the world. They amassed a fortune, as all their friends were doing.

Chicago, The Big Little Town

Mitchell: You see, Marshall Field, Armour, Pullman, McCormick, oh, I can't remember who else, Crane, Fairbanks -- all those were people I knew as a child. They were all Father's friends, and I think everyone I've named came originally from New England. I don't know where Armour came from, but most of them came from New England. And they formed a kind of spontaneous group who felt that they had made Chicago; they had built up Chicago, and therefore Chicago was theirs. It was kind of ownership which, having lived in New York now for forty-six years, I don't find there at all. There are a hundred New Yorks. But to these business pioneers this was their Chicago, their pride, and consequently, they were for culture. It represented what they felt was due.

Prescott: Were they actually appreciative of culture, or was it just the thing to do?

Mitchell: Well now, both Father and Mother were very musical, and so were my uncle and aunt. Their daughter, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, was not a professional musician, but she played with a professional orchestra, she was of that grade. Building that up, I think, was a real interest. I don't think my father had any real interest in paintings and sculpture, but he thought that these must be supported. We must have the best art institute that can be had, and with great pride he would take us down and show us any new acquisition.

Prescott: Well, that type of public leadership is tremendously important.

Mitchell: It is important; it is important. It wasn't superficial. It was, rather, sort of a civic pride, I think. I think pride is the word.

Prescott: Do you think it included a real desire to transplant New England culture to the western hinterland?

Mitchell: Oh no, the culture was European just as much as New England. I don't know how it is now, but then it was really very fine. The people who really built up our art institute were the Charles Hutchinsons and Martin Ryersons. The Charles Hutchinsons lived across the street from us; these four were as sophisticated people as you could find anywhere, in the way of art. They were the ones that made the selection. They knew. There was nothing amateurish about them at all, and neither was there anything like the Boston snobbishness. They wanted Chicago to be world famous. But I call it a "big small town" because it was owned by a small group of these people. At least they felt it was owned by them.

It was a town of tremendous space and that was so wise. Because they had planned for this encircling ring of parks, it was not until much later that they have had difficulty in finding space for recreation.

Prescott: You mentioned the fact that apartment living was something rare.

Mitchell: Yes, there were no apartments then. Of course, they were called flats when I was young. I can remember distinctly being taken over to the North Side as an educational visit to see some people who lived in a flat.

Prescott: Otherwise there were small neat houses with a tidy yard?

Mitchell: Yes, and I suppose there were tenements on the North Side, but I never saw any. And right near us, when we lived on Prairie Avenue, there were terrible slums down toward the river. That's one thing Chicago didn't

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Mitchell: catch onto until late. They let their slums grow up along the river on the South Side. The city had a long-time contract--I'm not sure it wasn't a permanent contract--with the Illinois Central to have their tracks run right down the river bank. Of course they did that in New York, too. And the houses along the river were terrible. Oddly enough, Father never minded my going over there and walking around; at least he never said so. I never made any bones about where I had been; in fact, I was very proud of having gone by myself.

Prescott: You speak of resenting the social standards and perhaps the money of your family. This is rather unusual.

Mitchell: There is no "perhaps" about it. I got the feeling that Father--and I think this was true of him--did judge people in large part by the amount of money they had. At least I think the amount of money that they had influenced his relations with them. Now as a contradiction to this attitude was his fondness for Jane Addams. I felt that Father's wanting to sit in a box at the Thomas symphony orchestra concerts was a show-off gesture. I used to hide behind the curtain because I was ashamed to be up there. And I don't think I got over that until I really was quite old. And I think it was one of the things that made it very difficult for me to take care of my father after we moved to California. Although then he had become a really much mellower man.

Prescott: There were certain incidents in Chicago at this time. I suppose that your recollections of them can be very slight. What about the Haymarket riot?

Mitchell: Oh, I remember it very vividly; but, of course, I was only eight, and my recollections are probably not

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Mitchell: historically correct. I remember it because there was such terror all through Chicago, that we children were not allowed out of doors on the day the "anarchists" were hanged. And not only that, we had a policeman on our block to see that no child escaped. And of course that made a terrific impression on me. The discussion that I remember between my father and mother made a deep impression because it was the only time I remember my mother venturing to disagree with Father. She was violently opposed to killing anybody. She would have been quite at home in California at the present moment. [Reference to Caryl Chessman case.] And Father, on the other hand, felt that it was a crime against humanity for workmen to organize in protest of low wages or working conditions. So it made a vivid impression upon me. Another memory of these riots concerns our move to the South Side on Prairie Avenue into a house that Father built. I was then nearly twelve. And I remember that in their little dressing room where there was a regular telephone, there were two buttons. One was marked "fire," and the other was marked "mob." This was because all the people who were connected with big business felt that after the anarchist riots, any of our houses might be attacked. Of course they never were.

Prescott: And the "mob" button, then, would bring the policeman directly to the house?

Mitchell: The "mob" would notify the police department not to come with one policeman, but to come prepared to fight a mob. I don't know whether such buttons were placed in other houses or not.

Prescott: The nineties found Chicago suffering from the panic. Did that touch your family?

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Mitchell: Oh yes; Father thought that we were going to be poor all of our lives. Of course we weren't. And I can remember Mother and Father talking in their front room and Mother crying very bitterly; she was not a crier. And my old Aunt Amelia going in to try to straighten things out, and coming rushing out of the room as Father's voice commanded her to leave. It was a very strained situation and my mother was very ill. She had lost her two younger boys, and my sister Nancy was developing an illness. It was altogether a very gloomy period.

Prescott: What do you recall of the Pullman strike?

Mitchell: I remember that it was over the Pullman strike that I developed my first real conscious opposition to my father; that I felt a social conflict that was more important to me than a family conflict. I mentioned before that I used to go and see Jane Addams in spite of my father's disapproval of her. Jane Addams came out for the strikers, and I felt sympathetic to her point of view. In the town of Pullman, Mr. Pullman built houses for all the workers, and he built morals right along with them. He handed out his code of conduct and he expected it to be followed. Father was very proud of that. Then, when Jane Addams came out for the strikers, and to this insult was added the fact that she was a woman, Father felt strongly about it. Here was an out-and-out conflict. She not only took the part of the strikers publicly, but the fact that she was a woman made Father doubly indignant. He had been a warm supporter of her when he could think of her uplifting the poor. That was something that he could approve of. But Father was a Pullman director and very proud of the paternalistic town of Pullman which Jane Addams resented.

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Mitchell: I took the side of Jane Addams. Not verbally, I assure you. I never said anything. But at that time I felt my father had something wrong with his standards and I never got over it.

Prescott: Was Jane Addams a friend of the family? Had you met her through social contacts?

Mitchell: No, I met her through my father and mother. They used to go down to her settlement house. I continued to go long after Father broke with her. Hull House was then an experiment. Jane Addams was one of the great influences in my life. I used to go to see her after we moved to California.

Prescott: A while back you were speaking of the cultural growth of the young Chicago. Now, your family life brought about cultural and art contacts which were very stimulating, didn't it?

Mitchell: Yes. Chicago was then in an explosive state of "growing up." There was an old saying often heard that "When Chicago gets around to culture, it will make it hum."

Prescott: And yet you describe the city as a "big little town."

Mitchell: Yes. It was sprawling, enormous in size, but it was unsophisticated. In the summer of 1893 we had the Columbian Exposition. It was a year late; Columbus happened to come in 1492, but we weren't ready for the fair until 1893.

That same summer of 1893 the university was a year old. The auditorium--both the great hotel and the auditorium had opened--it was there we had our first opera and also had the just-organized Thomas orchestra which is now called Chicago Symphony Orchestra. My musical training was guided by Theodore

Mitchell: Thomas. And we had Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse. Mary Garden didn't come until later. Mary Garden was a Chicago girl, you know; she was too young then, I think. But we had the very best opera, I guess, that has ever been.

Opera was a great social event. Because I studied poetry with the wife of the manager of the auditorium, I was invited to the social events she held for these visiting stars. To talk with Jean deReszke was almost more than a child of fifteen could stand.

Prescott: Was the Field Museum established at this time?

Mitchell: No, we had the art museum downtown, but the building that later housed the Field Museum was put up as the art building for the World's Fair. It wasn't actually called the World's Fair, but the Columbian Exposition.

Prescott: Now, something that impresses me as being entirely different from these interests is your interest in the tethered ballon on the midway.

Mitchell: Oh, no. I was interested in everything about me. I had so few playmates and so little contact with people my own age, that adventure was just another way I had of exploring the environment around me. But I also had a real air-minded interest, and this I've always had. I was invited and I went up in the first Zeppelin the winter I was in Berlin, just to get up. And I think that was one of the reasons I became a real mountain climber, too.

Prescott: You must really enjoy the jet age then.

Mitchell: Well, I haven't flown by jet yet, but I shall when I go to my sixtieth anniversary of graduation at Radcliffe College in the spring.

Prescott: Your father had indicated his disapproval of your

Prescott: going up in the balloon, I believe, and still you went.

Mitchell: Yes, I did, because I thought it was worth-while. I thought it was worth-while to be disciplined. And I took sandwiches with me so that I could just sit and go up and down. I had to pay each time, but I saved up and told the man that I wanted to go up and down as long as my money lasted. And I don't know how long it was. [Laughter]

Prescott: What did your father do when he found out that you had been up in the balloon?

Mitchell: Oh, I told him at once. He reproved me. He didn't do anything more, because I really think Father had that same love of adventure in him. And I think while he didn't approve of disobedience, he did approve of adventure.

Prescott: Young Chicago was a stimulating place for a young girl, wasn't it?

Mitchell: It was tremendous stimulation in spite of my not going to school, which was at that time, to me, a tragedy.

Education

Prescott: Let's talk about your education. Up to the time that you were about fifteen, you had always been tutored at home?

Mitchell: No, up to the age eleven. My sister, Nancy, who was two years older than I, was sent to a public school when she was six. My older sister and my older brother went to private schools. My sister, Nancy, in the public school around the corner from us, got into fights steadily. She used to come

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Mitchell: home battered, and my mother thought that was very bad for her. So I was never allowed to go to a public school. We had a governess for the four younger children and I was taught at home until I was eleven, when we moved to Prairie Avenue. Besides the three R's I was taught drawing and music. I think we were pretty well taught. We were taught quite a good deal of American history, also Greek history. My brother, who was two years younger than I, wrote a piece on American history when he was only eight or nine years old. It was a wonderful performance. He chose the most dramatic things from Greece and Chicago and early American history and mixed them all up with the Chicago fire.

I was very familiar with the classics, and I was always given loads of books to read. I began reading when I was four. I covered quite a good deal of ground. As far as information was concerned, I think I knew a great deal more than the average child. But as regards social experience and companionship, I was a lonely, lonely little girl.

Prescott: When you moved from the Washington Boulevard house you did attend the Miss Loring's school?

Mitchell: Yes, both my sister, Nancy, and I were sent there. I always broke down; I don't know why; I got so nervous and so did my sister, that we were taken out. It was, perhaps, partly because it was such a new experience, for at home we had never been subjected to competition. Each one of us was in a grade by herself. I don't know what was the matter, but I was sent back to school several times. Every time I went to pieces, and our family doctor, Dr. Billings, a very famous doctor at that time, said he thought it was unwise to push me.

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Prescott: So then you were tutored at home again?

Mitchell: No. I wasn't tutored. I studied by myself; later my mother became very ill and I took care of her. I became the family nurse.

Prescott: At age twelve to thirteen about?

Mitchell: Yes. Those were the years I was in and out of school. In the next two years I did arithmetic by myself from textbooks that were used in the school, but I had no really systematic instruction. For a while Nancy and I went to a friend of my cousin, Elizabeth Sprague, who was interested. But that was more conversation about books I had read, though I did read Caesar with her.

Prescott: Several times you've used the phrase "reading around" your father's library. This was no casual thing with you, was it?

Mitchell: Oh no. It was a desperate attempt to make up for not going to school. I was desperately unhappy; I felt that I was going to grow up an ignoramus and a disgrace to myself and to the family. And that was about the only way I could manage to bear it. Father had a gentleman's library, but a big library. And being a systematic human being, I started and I read right around. I read everything on two sides; I didn't get to the third side. But I think I got a kind of education through this reading that was very remarkable.

Prescott: And your favorite authors?

Mitchell: Oh, Victor Hugo. I read all through Victor Hugo. And father had the Tauchnitz edition of nearly everything. They were hard little books to read, very fine print. It was really a pirated English edition. He had hundreds of them; I don't think there was any classic that wasn't in them; I would

Mitchell: read a few of the authors I liked and were easy reading, such as Jane Austen, and then I'd go back and read straight through them all. But I also read Carlyle, Macaulay, and that I found hard going. I loved Green's history and Guizot's history and I read them two or three times. And I read loads of poetry. And Father had always been interested in archeology. He had quite a collection on archeology and he took an archeological magazine which I read steadily.

Prescott: Did you discuss these things with your father?

Mitchell: Oh yes, and that was a part, of course, of the urge to do it. Because I got attention and I got praise because I was able to bring into our conversation unexpected kinds of information.

Prescott: This must have built an interesting relationship between you and your father.

Mitchell: Yes, it was one which stimulated me and made any understanding between us possible, for at this time I was criticizing my father very bitterly because of his social attitudes. He never went to college. I think I told you that; he went to the Civil War and was returned as an invalid. And he always felt uneducated. As a matter of fact, he was a reader, and as such, a far better educated man than his brother who did go to college. But when the university opened, Father just thought it was the most wonderful thing that had happened in Chicago. And he made a point of inviting the professors and their wives for dinner, and Chicago welcomed them, you know, appreciatively. And that was when I first met the Deweys, both John and Alice Dewey. And though I was young, I was allowed to

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Mitchell: down to dinner very often, or at any rate to listen in. This was a wonderful experience.

Prescott: At this time you moved to California, didn't you?

Mitchell: Yes.

Prescott: And that was due to the illness of your father?

Mitchell: Well, it was due originally to the illness of my mother who went into a kind of depression. Her two younger boys had died and my sister was developing a very nervous condition. And Mother became very depressed. So, again, Dr. Billings thought a trip to California would be a good plan. And I, being on the loose always, went along to take care of them.

Prescott: At age fifteen.

Mitchell: Yes, at age fifteen. We went to the Sierra Madre Villa, where Mother had taken my younger brother and myself when we were younger. And we hadn't been there more than a month when my father had the most terrific of all his hemorrhages. And he never could return to live in Chicago. He did return for visits in the summer. But now we decided we must live in California.

Prescott: You nursed him there in Sierra Madre for a full year?

Mitchell: We moved to the town of Sierra Madre. We didn't stay in the Sierra Madre Villa; we rented a house from the old doctor who used to be our doctor in Chicago and who had developed tuberculosis and had come to Pasadena. It was the highest house in Sierra Madre because when we first arrived, Father was supposed to walk uphill to exercise his lungs. A little later his lung was strapped and he was allowed to walk only around and around the house. But all this was really a terrific experience for

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Mitchell: me because Sierra Madre was a home of invalids. I think Mother and I were the only people who didn't have tuberculosis. Of course, Mother did develop it and died of it long before Father did. I saw nobody excepting the Congregational minister, who used to come up and read philosophy with Father. Father now felt that he could get educated, and to get educated meant to read philosophy. And this darling little old minister felt that heaven had just sent him Father. So from the time I was fifteen or sixteen, the three of us read philosophy once a week, beginning with the Greeks and coming down through Kant. In the fall I was sent to school in Los Angeles.

Prescott: And this was the Marlborough school, again a private girls' school?

Mitchell: A private girls' school.

Prescott: About how large a school was it?

Mitchell: Oh, it seemed very large to me. I was a boarder, but I went home weekends. I think there must have been about twenty of us in the house as boarders and about a hundred who came in as day students. The school had a very able principal, Mrs. Caswell, who was really a remarkable person.

Prescott: And the emphasis was on academic subjects?

Mitchell: Yes. Mrs. Caswell's daughter, who was a great friend of mine, and three years younger than I, was the only person who was going to college. And consequently she was the only student taking Latin. And so when the time came when I was seventeen and wanted terribly to go to college, and finally received permission from my parents to go, I did some things in preparation then for college.

Mitchell: I'd had no science, and in Latin I'd only read Caesar. But the trouble was that the one girl who was studying Latin was very advanced. So after reading Caesar four or five years before, I was put into sight-reading Ovid. [Laughter] So I didn't get anything out of it and I had to read Cicero and Vergil by myself in the summer.

Prescott: Did you feel that you belonged to this group of girls?

Mitchell: Oh, very much.

Prescott: You welcomed the companionship?

Mitchell: Oh, I welcomed it with tears. And my only drawback was that I felt I was deserting my father and mother. Mother was never well and Father, of course, was a real invalid. And so I really became a split personality: gay and happy and studious during the week, and a trained nurse over the weekend.

Prescott: Now, tell us something about your invitation to go to Radcliffe.

Mitchell: That was because of the Palmers. George Herbert Palmer, who was professor of ethics in Harvard and Alice Freeman Palmer.

Prescott: Whom you had known in Chicago.

Mitchell: Yes. She had been president of Wellesley--I think she was twenty-six or so--and when she married she resigned from that, but she came on to be the first dean of women in the University of Chicago on half time. And she lived with us. How that came about I haven't the remotest idea, but she did. And Mrs. Palmer was to me one of the great women of the world. Here I was, this nervous, high-strung, lonely fifteen-year-old, and she used to talk a great deal with me. I think she became very

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Mitchell: fond of me then, and felt sorry about my being so much a family nurse and receiving so little education, excepting such as I grabbed by myself.

I wouldn't have been allowed to go to Radcliffe if it hadn't been for Mrs. Palmer, who wrote inviting me to live with them. And that came about by a letter that I had written in desperation to my sister, Mary, who was by that time married and in Paris on a honeymoon. And the Palmers happened to be there and Mary read my letter to them. So Mrs. Palmer wrote and said she would not allow me to break down, she would supervise me. So I went under those conditions, and at once became healthy!

Radcliffe and the Palmers opened a new world to me. That was the period of great philosophers at Harvard. I majored in philosophy and studied under Royce, Santayana, Münsterburg--all of whom taught at Radcliffe. I took honors in philosophy when I graduated. As a graduate student, I studied under William James. And as Mr. Palmer was in that department, I knew all these men who dropped into our house frequently.

THE YOUNG DEAN IN A YOUNG UNIVERSITY

Invitation to Come to Berkeley

Prescott: Mrs. Mitchell, I would like to hear about your invitation to come to the University as dean of women. Let's begin with your friendship with the Wheelers. You had known them a very long time, hadn't you? When did you first meet them?

Mitchell: I met them in Berkeley when I went up to visit my older sister whose husband, Adolph Miller, had been appointed a brief time before by President Wheeler to develop the department of economics. My father was a semi-invalid, and living in Pasadena.

Prescott: And then you had met them in the East?

Mitchell: No, but I saw quite a bit of them in Berkeley so that we struck up quite a friendship then, though they were much older than I. The Wheelers and the Millers were good friends and I tagged along, as was natural.

Prescott: The Millers lived quite close to the campus.

Mitchell: No. At that time they lived on Hillside Way, or Hillside Drive, up the hill from Euclid Avenue.

Prescott: Not on Ridge Road where they lived later?

Mitchell: No, no. That was considerably later. But I stayed with them as a relaxation. That was in the summertime when I was first out of college.

Prescott: Later you received the invitation to come to the University?

Mitchell: Yes. Some three years later. It seemed a very casual invitation. I don't know how much thought Mr. Wheeler

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Mitchell: had put into it. That was later, of course, and it came at a time when my own life was extremely confused and unfocused.

Prescott: You were in the East?

Mitchell: I was living with Mr. Palmer after graduation. As I have already mentioned, following Mrs. Palmer's sudden death while we were abroad, it seemed imperative for me to stay with Mr. Palmer until he got over the shock of it. So I took up housekeeping in his house at 11 Quincy, one of the three houses in the Harvard Yard. And it was while I was there that Mr. Wheeler came. Feeling I must be in Cambridge, I looked around for work, and, while taking some graduate courses at Radcliffe, I also became the secretary to the dean of Radcliffe, Agnes Irwin, and also to Miss Coes, Mary Coes, who afterwards became dean. I took that job to occupy myself while I was living with Mr. Palmer, who was working on his George Herbert books.

Prescott: And Mr. Palmer and Mr. Wheeler were acquaintances of long standing?

Mitchell: I presume they were. I don't remember the particulars surrounding the visit. I had no idea that he was coming for anything but a friendly courtesy, for Mr. Wheeler was always courteous. Or he may have been coming just to see me because I had been around with both of the Wheelers while visiting in Berkeley.

Prescott: Well, evidently he had been giving the deanship some thought, because he certainly had your qualifications in mind.

Mitchell: There is no doubt about that, but his plans were still pretty nebulous. He felt, I know, that something had to be done; but what, he wasn't at all sure. We had quite a talk. He put to me the proposition that I come to Berkeley and study the situation for a year,

Mitchell: or perhaps longer, preparatory to becoming dean of women.

Prescott: And how old were you then, Mrs. Mitchell?

Mitchell: I wasn't quite twenty-four.

Prescott: That was rather overwhelming for one so young.

Mitchell: It was sobering; still it was humorous to me, because when I talked it over with Mr. Palmer, who was very much in favor of my accepting, he said, "You mustn't go there just as an influence. You must be a member of the faculty."

Well, this would never have entered my timid mind, but Mr. Palmer insisted. Mr. Palmer, like my father, was a person to be obeyed. So when Mr. Wheeler came back I put it up to him, and as always, Mr. Wheeler agreed. What he wanted was to organize the job with me after I had been in Berkeley for a while. And I said, "Can't you give me any idea what you want that job to do?"

He said, "Yes. I want you to find out what needs to be done and to do it." [Laughter]

Prescott: Well, that sounds like a very good boss.

Mitchell: A good boss, but a rather terrifying one.

Prescott: What sort of a salary were you offered? We are always interested in comparisons.

Mitchell: Well, I was offered a salary when I became dean, and I can't remember what it was. It must be in the books.

Mr. Wheeler thought it was a good plan for me to see as much of the students as I could and I was eager to go on with graduate work. So I took several courses, one with old Mr. Howison. And I could tell you many amusing and lovable tales about both Mr. and Mrs. Howison. The other course was with Wesley Clair Mitchell, who had just come to the University, having been called there to the department of economics by my brother-in-law, Adolph Miller. But I also became a reader in the

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Mitchell: economics department. That was not through my brother-in-law. I became a reader to Thomas Walker Page. He was a southerner from Virginia and his wife was one of my friends, one of the few young friends that I had. I had worked a good deal on economics and was quite a Veblen fan. I don't know just how that happened, but I had done quite a lot of work in economics while working for my degree.

I was a Veblen fan and I was a John Dewey fan and I read everything that either of them wrote. I became a reader, and I did do some reading for Adolph Miller. That is, I reviewed books for him, economic books, and I also helped on the examination papers.

Prescott: And then the next year you worked in the English department.

Mitchell: That was under Chauncey Wells; and that was a real step in my learning. Chauncey Wells, and Mrs. Wells too, were perfectly delightful people to me. She had been a teacher and again, I was younger. How much all of this was indulgence to my youth I couldn't tell. But Chauncey Wells gave me a good training. So I was given some kind of a position in the department, where Professor Gayley was my boss. And I had to share the office with a number of them. I recall one incident involving a key. Though ordinarily a careful person, I forgot my key once, and I was taken to task like a little baby girl by this man whose name I can't remember. Perhaps that's the reason. [Laughter]

When I became dean I was given a teaching appointment.

Prescott: Assistant professor of English, I believe it was.

Mitchell: Yes, I think that was the first. It was irregular, and my promotion was put forward at an abnormal pace because Mr. Wheeler wanted me to get on with the job of being dean. I taught a section in freshman English, and later I also taught a course in "versification," given for seniors and graduate students.

Duties as Dean

Prescott: And your job of being dean included such things as counseling with students?

Mitchell: Yes, all the women in the freshman class--as I remember there were about five hundred of them--were put in my charge. Now that meant that I had to discuss what courses they would take and sign the card permitting them to take them. This was as an adviser. Technically, Mr. Edwards was dean of the college, and I was his assistant. But we never had one conversation, never one.

May Cheyney, who was the appointment secretary, had an office adjoining mine. And when I didn't know the ropes she would tell me. She was a very friendly person, who felt that she had the most wonderful job in the world, aside from raising nine boys.

Prescott: Your offices were in the administration building?

Mitchell: Yes, California Hall had just been opened. The administration was upstairs, and on the top floor was the Bancroft Library.

Prescott: How many students attended the University at that time?

Mitchell: Well, I'm probably exaggerating, but I have a feeling that there were about two thousand women, and they were insignificant in number to the men students.

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Mitchell: They seemed an overwhelming group to me, but I was used to very small classes in a small women's college.

Prescott: You had no coeducational background at all, did you?

Mitchell: None at all.

Prescott: Weren't you scared of the men?

Mitchell: I was no more scared of them than I was of everything. I was very, very scared, but I was so afraid that somebody would know I was scared, that I put on a facade which was quite convincing.

Prescott: You said that Professor Edwards and you had no discussion about what your job might entail. You and President Wheeler must have conferred on the direction in which the deanship was to develop.

Mitchell: Very carefully, and since Mr. Wheeler was anxious to understand the situation, I discussed practically everything with him. I can't remember that he ever gave me any specific plan to follow, but I always discussed plans with him before I took any practical step.

Prescott: And your program developed actually to fit needs as they came up.

Mitchell: One of the first orienting jobs that I did was to make a survey of what the women students were preparing to do after graduation. I found that more than ninety percent were preparing to be teachers. That was really the only professional training that the University offered women. From the beginning that troubled me. I thought a university should be more than a normal school--as teachers' colleges were then called.

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Mitchell: And you spoke of the budget business. I had a salary, which was the last straw for my poor father. He thought it was disgraceful enough to have a daughter who would work, but a daughter who would take a salary was incomprehensible to him. However, I insisted upon that. I had a secretary and all office supplies; I can't remember that I had anything else. I know all the entertaining I did, I did at my own expense. Yet I may be mistaken about this.

Prescott: I assume that there had been no budget set up for the organization yet, because the needs had not become really evident. Did you attend faculty staff meetings?

Mitchell: Faculty meetings, no. Jessica Peixotto (who was a trained economist) and I became the first women appointed to the faculty. She specialized in the labor branch of the field. We were very close friends, although she was much older than I, I think by about fourteen years. She lived with me during her first year, going home to San Francisco for weekends. We talked over the question of our attending faculty meetings, and we decided that we were conspicuous enough, and that we'd better take it easy. So neither of us ever went to a faculty meeting.

Prescott: Were you invited?

Mitchell: We could have gone. I don't remember what Mr. Wheeler thought about it. Certainly we could have gone, but I know that it would have prejudiced the men against us, and we already had enough prejudice to live down. Miss Peixotto didn't have so much because she was a trained person, and she had a professional teaching job, you see. But there was a

Mitchell: great deal of suspicion of me, until they found out how harmless I was. When my position was being discussed in faculty before I was appointed, my title was discussed. And some of the older men thought I should be called "warden of women." I got over that, but it reveals what they thought the duties of a dean of women were. But that disappeared. Indeed, the older men, almost to a man, became great friends of mine.

Prescott: Last time we closed with talking about your job as the dean of women, and particularly in regard to the counseling of students. You were just about to tell us about using a student committee in working with the girl students at the University.

Mitchell: Yes, that's very important, and I don't know whether it was characteristic of other universities. Neither do I remember whether the members of this committee were appointed--they certainly were not appointed by me--or elected by the student body .

This was for all the students. They were very fine women. They really had taken over the job of trying to supervise the conduct of the women on the campus before I was appointed. This I never really tried to do. And all the difficulties that came up the president referred to this group of students. And I think there was a men's committee that reported to Dean Edwards. He was the dean of all students until I came, and then I took over the girls.

This group of women, whenever they felt that they had a problem that they wanted me in on, would ask to come to my office to discuss it with me. And vice versa. I often asked them to come and advise me how to handle a special problem.

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Prescott: What were some of your special problems?

Mitchell: They were varied. One of the problems concerned the difference between the sorority girls, who were society-minded, and the girls living in clubs, who were, in the main, more intellectual. The sorority girls valued correct behavior and hated to have a scandal on the campus. The club girls were on the campus to learn and were not too concerned with dress and behavior.

Prescott: Was there a great difference in their economic status, too?

Mitchell: Yes, very distinctly. But I remember the women students as a whole as being very serious-minded, and absolutely unafraid. For instance, when the question of sex education came up, it came as a kind of avalanche all over the country. They used to call it "prophylaxis." But sex was approached entirely on the negative side...sex diseases. This sex hysteria hit us on the campus, and everybody said something must be done about it. It wasn't local, it was national in scope. Very obvious things came into the fore of the discussion. I can remember my sister, who was anything but a sophisticated person, but quite witty, said at that time, "If you're going to be modern, you have to say the word 'syphilis' at least once a day."

Prescott: How did you handle this sex education problem?

Mitchell: Jessica Peixotta and I talked it over with the two other women who worked with the women students. These women were Dr. Eleanor Bancroft, physician for the women students, and Dr. Ritter, who was in charge of their physical education. We decided to turn the actual work over to Dr. Bancroft and myself. We

Mitchell: decided, always with Mr. Wheeler's approval, to whom we referred everything, that the chief trouble had been caused by the negative approach which frightened the students. Dr. Reinhardt had given a course to the men students and dozens of them fainted. And so we thought, "What would happen if we gave a sex course to the girls, who were supposed to be more emotional!" (I don't think they are in that particular field.) Dr. Bancroft started off with simple physiological and psychological courses on sex. She had no difficulty at all. She held conferences afterwards with any of the students who wanted it, or went to any of the groups, such as the clubs or sororities. Then I, who had only recently learned the words syphilis and gonorrhea, was asked to do sex diseases! Which I did. And the student committee came in then very helpfully. They were told what was going to happen, and they said, "Now this is really a serious thing, and it isn't a shocking thing. It's a thing we ought to know," and arranged for a meeting at all the sororities and clubs. I went to every one of them. And I found, which was a surprise to me then--remember that I wasn't very old--that most of them knew more than I did.

Prescott: Well, of course you had not come from a coeducational institution at all.

Mitchell: No, and I had come from a family to whom the word "sex" was absolutely taboo. Never spoken, absolutely taboo!

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Prescott: Were there a great many pregnancies within the student body?

Mitchell: I don't think a great many. I can remember very well one pregnancy in which Mr. Wheeler felt very strongly that they should be married. So the boy said, "All right, if you want that, we'll get married." And then he left the day after the ceremony. I suppose it made the child legitimate. And that girl I remember very well because I gave her a job to do, sewing in my home. She was very hysterical and I made her keep on with her studies and get a degree. But I don't remember very many such episodes. I was talking the other day with an old graduate of Stanford, and she said there were practically no scandals on the campus in her day, which was also my day.

Prescott: I suppose that housing was the biggest problems that you had to meet.

Mitchell: Well, that was the most obvious one. There were no approved lists, no supervision of living quarters, and of course no dormitories. That seemed an obvious place to begin to bring me into contact with students themselves, and also with their living places. So that was the first job I took on. That and working with Mrs. Cheyney next door on what these women students were preparing themselves for. I have already talked about that.

Prescott: What was the woman student like? Where did she come from?

Mitchell: There were two distinct groups: much the larger group came from farms, or mining districts; they came down, really, with very little experience excepting country or small-town life. That was one

Mitchell: of the things that worried me. Nothing was done to help them understand the much more complicated communities that they had come into. I would say that the average age of the freshmen was about eighteen. Then we had another group of older women, who were distinctly more sophisticated in the academic world. They were working for Ph.D.'s. I saw a good many of these graduate students, but I wasn't supposed to be responsible for them.

Prescott: The undergraduates were your special responsibility?

Mitchell: Yes. I always seem to remember the ridiculous things. I remember one freshman interview in particular. I always used to begin, "Where's your home?" This little girl said, "I come from the East."

I said, "What part of the East?"

She said, "Nevada."

[Laughter] Which opened my eyes.

Prescott: To go back to the dormitories. In reading the records, I understand that most of the living quarters were run by clubs.

Mitchell: No, that isn't quite so; I think there were any number of mixed and unselected boarding houses. Then there were the sororities. They were new to me, you see, as we didn't have them in Radcliffe. And a lot of the girls who didn't make the sororities (which seemed to be the ambition of nearly everybody) went into the clubs. Now, the clubs were like sororities without the glamor. And for the most part, members of clubs didn't achieve the same social standing as did the sorority girls. I made a survey of all the places where women students lived, in my first year, and I made it a point to visit all the clubs and all

Mitchell: the boarding houses.

Prescott: What sort of restrictions in housing were you in a position to impose?

Mitchell: Well, that was for us to decide. And I don't even remember what restrictions we did decide on. I met landladies of every variety. There were "ladies," who wanted some "nice young girls" and wanted to "shelter" them. Several such requests were traced down to landladies who wanted prostitutes. And had them. It was happenings like that which I think would have upset me more than they did if it hadn't been for the support and advice that Mr. Wheeler gave me.

The Dean's House--A Social and Cultural Center

Prescott: Let's talk just a little bit about the students in relationship to the house which you had near the campus. They used that a great deal, didn't they?

Mitchell: Yes, I built the house as a stage for my official self. I never would have built such a house if it hadn't been that I felt cramped. Mr. John Galen Howard, who was the California architect--and that whole family was very dear to me--built my house next door to his house on Ridge Road. That was before the Miller house. The Miller house was built across the street. And it was built low enough so that Howards could see over it. I was on a hill sloping down to the west side of Euclid Avenue. It had a big terrace facing the hills over a garden that had a fairly good-sized, central lawn. I owned down to Euclid, but my high fence was only halfway down.

Mitchell: It seemed to be my job to jump in wherever there was a gap, whether I was equal to the situation or not. I remember another astonishing thing which happened during the preparation for the Parthenia. We had big choruses that were trained by a professional dancer who came over from San Francisco on special days. My lawn was a convenient place for rehearsals. We rolled my piano around in front of the open doors to the terrace, so that the piano could be heard outside, and when our professional dancer gave out, as she did, I was supposed to take over. And, with the courage of youth, I did. I don't think I did a good job, but I got through until she could come back.

Prescott: Your house really held a unique place among the students of the campus, then, didn't it?

Mitchell: Yes, I think so, but it's difficult for me to know. I know that hundreds of students passed through that house every week; and to me it was a stage. I needed a place where I could do what I wanted, and I tried to get the students to be as free as possible. Because I was so young, most of my friends outside were much older than I. One of these friends, Sadie Gregory (Mrs. Warren Gregory), called it "The story-book house." And this became the name of my house. To me, it has always been a good name for it. Without it, I couldn't have done any of the major things which I did with the students. All of the meetings held before we went off on trips were there; also, we had a ridiculous little group which we called "The Critics on the Hearth," where we practiced Robert's rules of order. It met there. I had only recently learned these rules myself. I gave out a

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Mitchell: topic, and the girls would make an impromptu speech on it. And then we criticized the talk for language, content and delivery. They learned to preside by each one taking turn in presiding. Then, of course, we always had chocolate and sandwiches at the close of the meeting. That was a small group, but a group that was very merry. This was due in part, I think, to the fact that I myself was learning just about as fast as they were. I knew a little more, but not very much.

Prescott: Do you think that this interest in Robert's rules of order had anything to do with the feminist movement and the vote?

Mitchell: That may be. That may be. There was a good deal of that, you know, at that time.

In the fall of 1911, my last year, we put on the first Parthenia. By that time I felt more---

Prescott: Secure?

Mitchell: Well, I'm afraid I really couldn't say I ever felt secure. Perhaps "established" is better. I began to see behind the superficial, and to understand what seemed to me to be the real educational problems or educational mistakes.

Prescott: Was this the time you planned trips into the community for the girls?

Mitchell: Probably I was still doing that; I began so many things at once that Ireally don't remember. I took students on trips for a number of years, and I think I must have begun quite early because I had not been to most of the places where we went before myself, and that seemed to me to be terrible. But I think the trips were a success partly because I was one of the learners.

Prescott: But it was very unusual for the girls at that time to be interested in civic affairs.

Mitchell: Well, there was nothing in the University to tempt them. Absolutely nothing. And to me this was shocking.

Prescott: Did they have a group of women who were agitating for the vote?

Mitchell: Yes, we did have a few feminists, but they represented a special group that I never joined. My first vote for president, I cast in Berkeley for Eugene Debs in prison. My feeling was that it was terrible to have to cast a protest vote. I lost my vote again when I went to New York. New York women didn't have the vote then. But that was a kind of militant thing; it wasn't that kind of thing I was trying to do. I was trying to have students understand how the community works, which really had nothing to do with women's rights as such.

Prescott: So you took them to the wharf.

Mitchell: Oh, the wharf! I took them every place! Of course, during that time we had the bubonic plague scare; the ships from the Orient brought over the rats carrying the fleas that carried the plague. And the fleas got transferred to our Berkeley gophers. So I had the traps set by the federal government around my house on Ridge Road. Our group saw Dr. Blue's prevention measures at the wharf, but that was incidental. Our purpose was to see where the imports came from and to understand the function of a port.

Also, we made a number of visits to see how our children were cared for in orphan asylums and clinics. Octavia Briggs was then running one of the first settlements here. We went to that. Octavia

Mitchell: Briggs was the sister of Professor Moses' wife. We went to the poor house in Alameda and to the leper home nearby. Yes, I did a great deal of that kind of thing with the students.

Prescott: And then you also had your "at homes" where you read poetry.

Mitchell: Well, poetry came later. I felt desperate about not knowing the students. So many of them, and so scattered, that I started having Wednesday afternoon teas at home. That was after I had my house and I had a fair-sized garden and a terrace. The students used to come and I would have chocolate and heaps of sandwiches and so forth. They could help themselves, and they would wander around and I would go from one to another. I had a remarkable memory then. I can remember perfectly that I could always introduce any two freshmen. But this all seemed to me to be kind of pointless, and I thought I'd try to get going something worth-while that might interest them. So I took what interested me, which was poetry, having been read to by Mr. Palmer for a solid five years. He was a great reader and a great scholar in poetry. I began to do this, and it didn't interest all of them, and some of them wandered--but why not wander? But it did interest probably a couple of hundred or so, who would sit on the floor where they could hear. I'd read poetry, and that led to discussion. And that's what really led to the Parthenia.

Prescott: Tell us about the first Parthenia.

Mitchell: The first one was a play; it was really a masque written in rhythmic language by a woman student and put on by the women students on the campus. Such a thing had never happened before. The plan developed

Mitchell: at one of the Wednesday meetings at my house in my last year at the University. I thought having the women students take part in a regular competition had interesting possibilities. It might give them more standing in the eyes of the public, and more important, in their own eyes. And it really caught on. I haven't ever seen students anywhere more excited than they were. And full of questions, full of questions! This and that, how could they do it? Who should be on a committee? Would Mr. Wheeler let them? And so on and so forth. That fall I went to New York, and was not here when the manuscripts came in. Porter Garnet was one of the people who I remember helped us so much. We had a good committee to judge manuscripts, and when I came back and read them, there were five or six that seemed to me really good. The one that was accepted was by Nan Reardon, a senior whose father was a Greek scholar. The Parthenia--let me see what that means exactly, it's the "women of the Parthenon"-- I still have one of those programs that were printed. The competition was to be something about women. It could be an imaginary woman, an historical woman, a woman of the future; it could be a play, it could be an opera, it could be anything as long as it featured women. It had to be built around some definite event or problem. What Nan Reardon did was to choose a number of famous women who represented different aspirations or roles of women in historic times.

The masque was given under the LeConte oaks, which were much bigger than they are now--or perhaps they have disappeared now? Under the LeConte oaks

Mitchell: an altar was set up on which a flame burned. This was all symbolic, representing the altar of hope, and various historic women appeared and after stating their hopes, laid an offering on the altar. This was the main theme of the play. But it was supplemented by large choruses who reflected emotional responses as in Greek drama, either by intoning their speeches or in dance. I can remember Joan of Arc dashing in on a white charger. There also was Greek Sappho. The museum in Berkeley provided the play with real properties, which aroused great interest among the faculty. Sappho came in bearing a real amphora on her head. It scared me out of my wits, but we finally got it back to the museum safely.

We involved about a thousand women students in some capacity, either directly in the play, or in the organization aspects. We had some truly theatrical effects. I remember one chorus representing rain, where the girls came up from the brook below in grey clouds of gauze. When, in this dance, they threw off the gauze rain clouds, they looked as if the sun had just come out, for they were not only clad in yellow, they all had flowing yellow hair.

Prescott: How very dramatic! There are many references to performances given in the Greek Theatre.

Mitchell: Oh, the Greek Theatre was a flight of imagination. My, the things they did there! Do you want me to describe some incidents I remember? I recall the time they used camels in a play. They got the camels from the zoo in San Francisco!

Prescott: Would that be a Christmas play?

Mitchell: Yes. It was an old miracle play. I am using that

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Mitchell: word loosely. I don't know how many thousand people can be seated in that place, but it was filled, and people were sitting all around the edges, too. The camels came in from three different directions onto that great stage. And the three wise men talked. As one of them cried, "The star!" he pointed over the heads of the audience. And the audience pivoted, and there, above the eucalyptus trees, was the real evening star. I have never in my life known any other moment so dramatic.

They often used the zoo. Once they had the elephants come over when they did The Little Clay Cart, which Arthur Ryder had translated. And then, of course, we had all kinds of people and players. Sarah Bernhardt came, Margaret Anglin, oh, everybody! And we had the orchestra there with Frederick Wolle conducting. He had created and produced the Bach Festivals at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. I often went to hear them, but that was after he had left.

Deans of Women--Early Professional Meetings

Prescott: I suppose deans of women all over the United States had problems in common. Did deans have status as a profession? Did you attend meetings with other deans?

Mitchell: Yes, I did meet other deans at professional meetings. I've been thinking over those memories. They're not a bit sharp. And I rather think that's because I got very little out of them for my own thinking. As I think over the group, I think they must have been deans of state colleges. Or so it seems to me, for I knew that Mrs. Allan, the first dean of women at

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Mitchell: Stanford University, never went. I don't remember any from the colleges in the far eastern states. Most eastern colleges, excepting state ones, were for women only. And they usually had women presidents, which made a difference in what the dean would do. The presidents of the other colleges were men. And the deans were given jobs to do which these presidents assigned them. Which was, for the most part, supervising behavior.

Prescott: In other words, they were supposed to discipline and to direct behavior.

Mitchell: Discipline, yes. But a great deal of it was just training in good manners and chaperoning. Now I never chaperoned anything, as far as I remember. The sororities and clubs all had house mothers who did that; I was invited, but never invited as a chaperon. I would not have accepted a position of that sort. That's the reason that I insisted upon being on the faculty, which would give me a different standing. Ada Comstock of Minnesota, who afterwards became the president of Radcliffe, was the only dean I recall as having an educational responsibility.

Prescott: Do you recall if there were discussions of possible qualifications of those early deans?

Mitchell: When Miss Comstock and I brought up questions of that sort they were all interested, but all said they were powerless to do anything. The things I remember being discussed were dormitory rules, hours for dances, the time students should return to the house. If there were sororities, they discussed what to do about the girls who were left out. And there was a great deal of discussion of financial help to the women students.

Mitchell: I remember only two meetings vividly; one was in Salt Lake City, and one in New York City. There were others, but I don't remember much about them.

We were all concerned with housing for women students. This I was reminded of only recently when President Kerr told me that I had raised six hundred and fifty dollars for dormitories during my years as dean of women. I now recall that, and I know what I did with it. I made it into a revolving loan fund for women students.

Prescott: Do you recall how you raised it?

Mitchell: I raised it by going to individuals.

Prescott: There were numerous contributions by individuals and organizations to the University. I noticed in the yearly reports that the federated women's clubs had furnished several of the club houses.

Mitchell: That may well be. My mind is vague about these things. But I do remember the loan fund. We made it a loan fund, not a scholarship fund. And the majority of the students paid back, so that it became a revolving fund.

Prescott: Do you recall if these pioneer deans thought in terms of extending educational opportunities of women into other professions than teaching?

Mitchell: Ada Comstock, who had great influence in the faculty, was very much concerned about that. At least I remember discussing things of that sort with her. She and I usually roomed together.

Prescott: Had you known her previously?

Mitchell: No. She was older than I.

I was the youngest always, but always the senior in position. This was interesting, and very confusing. Not only to me, but to our hostesses. We were usually asked to a Sunday dinner which was

Mitchell: given to us as dean of women. I can remember in New York it was given by a faculty wife. And when I was introduced as "the dean of deans" to Mrs. John Clark, the wife of a very noted economist, she almost screamed! [Laughter]

Prescott: You must have been only about twenty-seven years old.

Mitchell: Yes. As I remember them, most of the women looked old to me. I know Mrs. Allan was in her sixties. I think most of them were in their fifties or sixties, and the motherly type.

Prescott: Had they come from a faculty position to the deanship, rather than having been trained specifically for the handling of students?

Mitchell: They hadn't come from the faculty. They were just appointed from the blue, mostly. As I remember going around to the clubs and sororities, I always met this same type of woman. The friendly person who could be at ease with students and had a motherly disposition. You know, one of the older club mothers grasped my twenty-six-year-old hand when I first went there and said, "You have come to be a mother to us all." [Laughter]

Mrs. Allan at Stanford had a house to which she invited people, and she did have some teaching responsibility in English. The students called her "The Lady." Now, nobody would have ever thought of calling me "The Lady." She groomed the girls for sororities; she helped them to know how to dress, how to do their hair. If she saw a student walking on the campus whom she thought was improperly dressed, she would take that up with the student.

Barnard Library

Mitchell: That was as far from my job as anything I can think of.

This difference in my responsibilities was due, I think, to Mr. Wheeler's keen interest in the education of women. And I don't think that was an interest to be commonly found in men professors, or presidents, at that time.

Prescott: Did others share your interest in educating the woman student as a member of society?

Mitchell: No, I don't remember that anybody else was doing that. I don't remember talking that over at all with Ada Comstock.

Prescott: And such possible future professions as, oh, domestic science, or journalism, were not on the horizon at all?

Mitchell: No, just teaching.

Prescott: Ada Comstock went on as president of Radcliffe. Were there other women whose futures were as interesting and as promising as hers?

Mitchell: No, not among the early deans I knew. Of course, Barnard and Radcliffe had somewhat comparable positions, though Barnard was actually a part of Columbia, but had its own president. Later I was invited by President Butler to consider coming to the presidency of Barnard. This was after he and Mrs. Butler had visited the Wheelers in Berkeley (when my witty older sister said, "We all did Butler service for a couple of weeks "). I had come to know him then and he knew what my job was. That invitation from him was put into writing the year I was abroad with the Wheelers. And I came

Mitchell: mighty near accepting it; though I can't imagine why, because I was trying to get out of administrative work.

Prescott: That would have been a larger administrative job.

Mitchell: Yes. I think I would have been nailed to it for good. My name was never put up. I refused to have that done.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE WHEELERS

Prescott: Let us talk about President and Mrs. Wheeler as you knew them as friends. Did you find it difficult to bring your problems to President Wheeler?

Mitchell: Mr. Wheeler was a man of the world, and I was not a woman of the world. And he was the easiest person to approach with any problem. He never was surprised at my ignorance.

Prescott: You found it very easy to work with him.

Mitchell: Absolutely. I can't imagine any easier relationship between two people. It's difficult for me now to separate the man from the president. I often took the kind of things to him that were not necessarily strictly professional, or that I would have been supposed to know about myself. I always received the kindest attention.

Prescott: Did you feel that the relationship between the faculty and Mr. Wheeler was congenial?

Mitchell: Well, you see I didn't see that at first hand. I had no knowledge that everything wasn't very easy. Adolph Miller never had any criticism of him, and I wouldn't have got the criticism, I think, from other people. But I found Mr. Wheeler, as a human being and as a boss, the easiest person that I have ever worked with.

Prescott: You also knew Mrs. Wheeler very well, didn't you?

Mitchell: I certainly did.

Prescott: Why don't you describe her to us?

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Mitchell: I can never think of Mrs. Wheeler without a smile. She was amusing. Now let me see. First of all, I think of her height. She was one of the shortest little people that I ever knew. I can remember being with her later, when we were in Germany, in a crowd out in the theatre foyer. I can remember her looking up at me and saying, "You have so much better air up there." I think of Mrs. Wheeler's eyes. They were the only eyes that I've ever seen that really snapped.

Prescott: Were they brown?

Mitchell: They were brown, solid brown, and they darted like a bird's. And her motions were like a bird's, too; quick, and, like her speech, darting. Her talk was, of course, the most outstanding thing about her. She was, I think, the most uninhibited grown-up that I've ever known.

Prescott: Sounds delightful.

Mitchell: It was delightful to those who liked frankness. She, of course, was the wife of a president, and I don't think she liked that role. But she did it with never flinching. She never shirked anything. She had the highest standards of housekeeping that I have ever known. Her dinners, and the stage set of everything, were wonderful. And cleanliness was in her mind, I think, put a little above godliness. I remember this particularly, because after I had a house of my own, she and I had the same window washer. He was quite a character in the little town of Berkeley, then. And he used to clean with Bon Ami, which he called "Bonny Amy," and this seemed to me so symbolic of Mrs. Wheeler that my pet name for her was "Bonny Amey."

Mitchell: Mrs. Wheeler's uninhibited remarks might have been very difficult for Mr. Wheeler. Mr. Wheeler hated conflict. And he hated rudeness. He was always courteous. Now, Mrs. Wheeler I can't say was exactly rude, because she wasn't. She was hardly aware of what she was doing. She was just being herself. But I never heard Mr. Wheeler reprove her for any impromptu remark she may have made. I just remember this particular instance when San Francisco was going through all that scandal in regard to Mayor Schmitz, and Heney was shot. After the scandal subsided a bit, Mr. Wheeler did invite the mayor to the presidential house. And I was invited also. I was often invited just as a fill-in. Of course, their guests were likely to be just men, or predominantly men. The mayor was seated down toward Mr. Wheeler, and I was seated near Mrs. Wheeler, and she said to me, casually, across a few people, but in a voice that could easily penetrate to the other end of the room, "I never thought that I should be called upon to have a man like that at my table," all the while staring at the mayor. Now, Mr. Wheeler laughed at it.

He'd often say, "Oh Amey!" But never in a sharp voice or in a reproving manner.

Mrs. Wheeler's humorous episodes taken without the feeling of her lovability would distort her. But she did make the most extraordinary remarks at the wrong time, and never

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Mitchell: repented them. Mr. Wheeler must have been embarrassed at times, though he never showed it. I think he was more amused.

I remember particularly some of the things that she did in Berlin where life was so controlled and formal that it's incredible to an American. It was court life, and when you were at court you'd behave, or try to behave the way court people do, though we found it quite difficult. At dinners, for instance, they still had the old custom of host and hostess sitting opposite each other on the narrow side of the table. But they didn't sit in the middle. The most important person sat in the middle, and the host sat at his right hand. It is above and below the salt, absolutely. When the Wheelers gave a dinner, Mrs. Wheeler was always given a list of how people should be seated at the table, which ones were further and further away from the salt. I myself, when I went to their dinners, was given a high position because of the word "dekan."* She was given absolute and detailed instructions, and not only instructions of this sort, but instructions when we went to dinner as to what she should wear--how low a neckline, and how high or long our gloves should be. Every detail of etiquette.

Prescott: The Germans really had it all sewed up and put on paper.

* See note page 72

Mitchell: We were assigned a faculty member to supervise us. Well, it was just too formal and just the opposite of Mrs. Wheeler's frank manner and her whole personality. She was so spontaneous and crisp and neat, with her glossy hair pulled back into a neat little wad on her neck. I can remember--I don't know whether it's appropriate to tell them--but I can remember some of the most amusing things in the world. The first time we went to a formal dinner, the host was representing the Kaiser. It was the most formal of all the dinners. I mean the people who were invited were closest to the Kaiser. It was an occasion half representing the royalty, and half representing the university, because Mr. Wheeler was a scholar and was treated always as a scholar. This helped to modify, to take a few edges off. Well, at this dinner each man was given the name of the person he should take in, and Mrs. Wheeler was just ahead of me. She was being escorted in by an enormous man, a man who just fitted one's conception of a German general: austere, big, and in a blazing uniform with medals covering his chest. As we went in to dinner, I heard Mrs. Wheeler say in her crisp voice, as she looked way up into this austere face, "I didn't catch your name." And from above came one word: "Moltke."

Prescott: That must have been most disturbing to him.

Mitchell: I don't know. They were geared for disturbances, because, after all, we were Americans. And not only that, here was an American woman who had an important name. They were geared to that. At one of our later dinners I remember another incident

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Mitchell: that amused me so. At that time we wore not exactly court trains, surely, but dresses which dragged a little in the back. That wasn't German, that was just American. Now, Mrs. Wheeler always had a naive idea that if she talked out of the corner of her mouth nobody could hear her but the person next to her. And after dinner Mrs. Wheeler was talking with our host, who spoke English quite as freely as we did, and I walked past her aimed in a certain direction. She twisted her mouth and said to me, "Don't walk over there, Lucy, there's mashed potato on the floor."

Prescott: And did the man hear it?

Mitchell; Of course he must have heard it. I heard it. But somehow or other, those things seemed amusing in the same kind of lovable way that a child is amusing.

She was very popular, very popular, at home. And popular in Berlin, too. One other funny remark: we were invited to the Kaiser's birthday celebration. There was always a theatre party, and the audience was all by invitation. And there again, we were told just how high our gloves should be, and how low our necklines; no risks taken. During the interim between acts we went out into the foyer, as did the whole audience, so it was very crowded. I stuck pretty close to Mrs. Wheeler, and she leaned back with fatigue against something she thought was solid. Suddenly she felt this prop move. She jumped and turned around and looked up at a man and said, "I thought you were a box!"

Prescott: That must have been amusing. Mrs. Wheeler's personality must have been very helpful to her as president's wife on the campus, too.

Mitchell: Distinctly, but it ought to be clearly emphasized that along with her spontaneity, she was a very expert hostess. She took her job very seriously. She found out everything that was supposed to be done and she did it with her great sense of perfection. She was in a contradictory position; she really wasn't made for the role, but she played her role beautifully.

Prescott: She was very well organized, wasn't she?

Mitchell: Very well. And I don't recall that I have ever heard of any resentment of these things that might be considered faux pas in most society.

Prescott: She had a gift for being formal and still being very much an individual.

Mitchell: Yes. And the formal bulked very large. They entertained a great deal. To begin with, it seemed to me that all the really important people that came through San Francisco came over to talk, or to be entertained, at the president's house. That was a part of the fascination that made San Francisco seem a cosmopolitan city.

Prescott: There was a close touch between the town and the gown, as far as the University was concerned, wasn't there?

Mitchell: There really wasn't much "town," besides the "gown." Not in the early days. However, after the earthquake and fire, Berkeley was discovered and became important for itself and not just as an extension of San Francisco. Mr. Wheeler knew all the important people in San Francisco, and the regents were very prominent in the social life of both the University and San Francisco.

Prescott: The social life of the president was, in a way, political?

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Mitchell: Yes. It was a state university, you see. Now, Mr. Wheeler really fulfilled my image of an ideal university president.

Prescott: Let's talk about your ideal of a university president. You had the opportunity of meeting several university presidents while you were living in Cambridge, didn't you?

Mitchell: Yes, while living with the Palmers. Mrs. Palmer had been a college president, and Mr. Palmer was a professor of philosophy at Harvard, and nearly every president who wanted to appoint a young philosopher in his department (and remember that philosophy included psychology then) would come to Mr. Palmer. So that I saw a stream of college presidents going through, and sat at the table and heard their talk. Of course President Eliot lived next door, and hundreds and hundreds of times we exchanged a formal remark.

Prescott: You had a great deal of data, then, on which to base your ideas of what makes a great university president.

Mitchell: President Tucker from Princeton was there; President Hyde from Bowdoin, and President Angell from Michigan turned up regularly. Mrs. Palmer was one of the early graduates from there and they regarded her as his special protégé. Oh, there were any number of them. And they were all scholars, and they all had social ease.

Now, Mr. Wheeler possessed both scholarly prerequisites and social ease to an impressive

Mitchell: degree. And that social ease was very important in the University when I was there. And I must say, in spite of the humorous incidents I have reported about Mrs. Wheeler, that she also had complete social ease. She was never flabbergasted by anything. And nothing in Germany, no formality, nor any situation in America ever fazed Mrs. Wheeler. She just took it.

Prescott: To return to Mr. Wheeler a moment: your concept, then, of a university president implies real stature as a scholar.

Mitchell: Yes, I felt that very strongly. I didn't know Greek, but in Berlin Mr. Wheeler read Greek with his boy, Benjamin, and when we went to see the wonderful Greek vases in the art museum, which was right near us, he just bubbled with excitement.

Prescott: This university president must also have a personality which makes him a person that can meet any social situation.

Mitchell: Yes, and Mr. Wheeler was never awkward. I think he never lost his dignity. Nor did he ever need, as I have known other presidents to, to do something that was a little gauche in order to relax and keep in touch with the "common man." This was no effort for Mr. Wheeler. He was just made that way. He was always courteous.

Prescott: Did you find Mr. Wheeler a good administrator?

Mitchell: I don't know too much about that side of him. Neither do I know about the money-raising phase which now plays so large a part in the work of a college president. You see, I didn't go to faculty meetings, so I never saw him in that

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Mitchell: kind of situation.

Prescott: But the growth of the University during his presidency would certainly be testimony to his getting money from the legislature.

Mitchell: Yes, and also from individuals. Of course, people were devoted to Mr. Wheeler as a person. Speaking of size, growth makes me think of another thing. It may not be appropiate, but this story makes me think of Mr. Wheeler's humor. It was one of the things that relieved any situation. I can remember when people were bragging about the growth of the University, which of course was phanomenal, Mr. Wheeler would often tell this story of the man who went to the side show in the circus to see the dwarf. He came out raging and went to the manager and said, "You're a cheat; that man is no dwarf; he's almost five feet tall." And the manager said, "That's what's so wonderful about it; he's the biggest dwarf alive." [Laughter] That is the way Mr. Wheeler would counter, would get his point across by an apt story without a real criticism.

Prescott: That takes real skill.

Mitchell: It takes skill, and it takes nimbleness of mind. And I think it takes kindliness, too.

In Germany with the Wheelers

Prescott: You have referred briefly to your trip to Germany with the Wheelers. I would like to ask you about this trip in more detail. You were invited to go abroad with the Wheelers in the summer of 1909?

Mitchell: Yes, 1909 to 1910. So I wintered in Europe.

Prescott: Tell us something about your experience. Where did you stay?

Mitchell: We stayed at the Hotel de Rome, on the Unter den Linden nearer the Brandenburger Tor than the university or the Alte Schloss.

Prescott: Why was Mr. Wheeler going to Berlin?

Mitchell: He was the Austausch professor, the exchange professor, the second one. Theodore Roosevelt had been the first one. This was one of the early exchanges, and an imaginative thing to do. Mr. Wheeler, like all the Austausch men, had his own point of view and was supposed to interpret the United States.

Prescott: Was it a long series of lectures?

Mitchell: I think it was about thirteen to fourteen. I went to all of them. Mr. Wheeler had been in Germany and had gotten his degree in Germany (this was after the Wheelers were married) so they both spoke German, Mr. Wheeler far more fluently than Mrs. Wheeler.

I'll never forget his first lecture. He lectured in German, which made a great hit. His first lecture was attended by all the important people from the court. I'd have to check it in my diary to give you the exact title of the lecture. We were all seated according to rank.

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Mitchell: the Kaiser and the Kaiserin sitting in front. And the ladies of the court on one side and the gentlemen of the court on the other. Then the professional people were in one place. Mrs. Wheeler and I were put well up with them. And Benjamin was there--I mustn't forget Benjamin, he went with us everywhere. Mr. Wheeler didn't seem to be in the least nervous. Mrs. Wheeler and I were so nervous we could hardly sit. Mr. Wheeler talked with the same relaxed feeling that he talked with at home; he was just like himself; he came out with his humorous remarks, and he spoke German well enough so that he could use colloquial language and humor. He gave one lecture on American humor which was very popular. And he gave one on coeducation which was so successful that he had to do a second one. That caused a real commotion in the academic world there.

Prescott: The idea was so new to them?

Mitchell: So new that they couldn't believe that it would work. Of course I was a curiosity because I was a female dean or "dekan." Dekan is a very high honor in German and they never had heard of a feminine one. So they invented a name for me. I was called Fräulein Dekanin.

Prescott: Had the Wheelers known the Kaiser from their previous experience in Germany?

Mitchell: Oh, I don't know about that; I doubt it very much. I don't see how he could have. I don't see how a young student could have, but I don't know. He knew Germany intimately, and I always had the feeling when we went anywhere--and we did travel

Mitchell: a little outside of Berlin--that he was having the excitement of coming home again. It was like a home to him. They lived there for several years.

Prescott: And he must have been very appreciative of German culture?

Mitchell: Yes. Of course the fact that the Kaiser liked him so much made his visit and his whole life there entirely different. Because of the Kaiser's attitude, we were what they call there, " Hof-lieferant" (under semi-protection of the court).

Prescott: Official guests?

Mitchell; Yes, in a way, though a little more than that; we were the Kaiser's guests too, you see. We were presented at court and invited to court balls.

Prescott: You were staying in one of his houses, weren't you?

Mitchell: No, we stayed at the Hotel de Rome. It was an old hotel and was very pleasant. It had a little plumbing, nothing too startling. The old Kaiser Wilhelm had no tubs at all in the Alte Schloss. So the Kaiser used to come down to the Hotel de Rome for his baths. And also that's where he put up his guests. But we were in no sense his personal guests. It was very pleasant and not at all far from the university.

Prescott: Did you feel any of the tension which was predominant in European political circles at that time?

Mitchell: Well, we did occasionally. I have wondered a great deal why we didn't feel it more. As I look over my diary, Mrs. Wheeler and I seemed to be always rushing to change our clothes to go to another party or something. I would say that most of the academic people whom we met were--I can't find a word that is quite right. Perhaps "cowed" is the word I want. They were so subservient to the

Mitchell: slightest move or opinion of the Kaiser, and the whole court and they seemed to be so scared of being "out of step." That was prevalent.

Prescott: And of course you would feel it, coming from America.

Mitchell: We felt it. We felt it and we hated it. But there were also quite a number of the professors who felt the way we did. I can remember some of their names; we dined with all of these people. I dined with many high court administrators, too. Well, let me recall some of these people who were really afraid that we were going to have war and that the Kaiser was going to get us into it. There was Professor Penck, Professor Gieriche, Professor Harnach. There were others, but those are the names that I remember. They told us frankly that they were afraid that war was on the way, that they had heard of toasts to Der Tag. Now, we heard nothing of that, as was true of most of the people. And I don't think Mr. Wheeler took the rumors seriously. Perhaps he should have, I don't know.

Prescott: But the press, of course, wouldn't carry any of it because it was a controlled press.

Mitchell: Oh, no! And the people that he was talking to at the university didn't feel it. At least they didn't give us any indication of that.

I was going to talk about Mr. Wheeler and the Kaiser. Mr. Wheeler was often asked to come up for informal talks with the Kaiser. Nothing like that had ever happened to an American before, and the university people as well as the court people were atwitter. Now, Mr. Wheeler always said that he felt that the Kaiser was very intelligent and very serious. They talked about serious matters; they certainly

Mitchell: were informal, as he always described the Kaiser as sitting on the arm of a chair eating apples. Mr. Wheeler loved apples. I can remember one time when the Wheelers themselves were going to give a big dinner; they had to respond and the Hotel de Rome was very well equipped to do that kind of thing. Well, this was one of those return dinners and everybody was invited, and the day came and in the afternoon the Kaiser sent down word that he wanted to see Mr. Wheeler and have a talk with him. Sometimes they had a little supper up in the Kaiser's room. Well, Mrs. Wheeler and I thought, "Mercy, this is an insult to our guests!" But on the contrary, the guests were just thrilled to know that their host was with their Kaiser. This was so foreign to our thinking that, for myself, I never took it seriously. The whole court thing seemed like a show. There wasn't any Hollywood then, or I would have called it "Hollywood." It was all so stagey.

Prescott: Did you get to know your own age group?

Mitchell: Only Agnes Harnach. I knew her. I can't say I knew her awfully well, but I did go with her to theatres and music; I find in my diary that I called her a "pre-Raphaelite girl, with blonde auburn hair." She was beautiful and she wanted very much to come to America for a visit. And she was to come to visit me, but the war interfered and I never heard from her afterward. I never heard from a single friend.

Prescott: You never heard from any of the group that you met?

Mitchell: Not after the war began. Not our entry, but the war. Now I don't know what became of those people.

Prescott: When Mr. Wheeler came back to the University, then, in 1910, you came back and were here for two years more?

Mitchell: I didn't come back at once. Mr. Wheeler went back, but Mrs. Wheeler and Benjamin and I went to Italy. The Millers were there, too. We returned together in the fall.

A NEW CAREER IN EDUCATION

Sampling Professions for Women

Prescott: In talking about your professional life, Mrs. Mitchell, let's go back to your return from Berlin. Before you left the University of California with the Wheelers for Berlin, you had indicated you were not to stay on, had you not?

Mitchell: Yes. I hadn't set a definite date, but I felt that it was not a job I wanted to spend my life in. And so I asked President Wheeler to appoint an assistant, hoping that she would prove my successor. This assistant was Lucy Ward Stebbins, whom I had known in Radcliffe; she was a year behind me at Radcliffe.

Prescott: You were still undecided as to what your chief interest in life was going to be.

Mitchell: Well, I was pretty sure it was going to be education, but not administration. I never have liked administration, although I've done a lot of it. It's been the fly in the ointment of my professional life. It was quite clear to me that I did not want to do the type of thing that I would be doing were I to stay on at the University.

Prescott: And at this point you conceived of the very imaginative plan of going to New York to find yourself. Tell us about that.

Mitchell: If that was the "plan," as you call it, it was unconscious; it wasn't my official reason. I had become extremely concerned about the lack of professional training for women excepting in the field of teaching. And not everybody is equipped to be a

Mitchell: teacher, nor wants to be a teacher. But it was the only thing that the University offered to women. And my official reason for requesting a leave, and I think it was my real reason too, was to try to explore different fields of work that women could enter and for which the University could train them. Now that sounds very naive. It was naive, but it wasn't as naive as it sounds.

Prescott: How did you plan to accomplish this?

Mitchell: I felt the only way that I could really understand what a job demanded was to do it myself for at least a brief time. If I were to plan how to train women for these jobs, I myself had to know what they entailed. So I picked out six different kinds of social organizations and told each that I was distressed that women's education everywhere was so narrow, professionally. I said I should like to extend the opportunities for professional training for women at the University of California, and I wanted to explore the different fields which might be open to them. Would they take me on as a microscopic staff member for three weeks or so and let me go to their discussions? Without exception I was welcomed. I think all these people were equally concerned about women's education at that time.

Prescott: Let's list those organizations with which you worked.

Mitchell: Well, I went first to the Henry Street Settlement, because I had been given an invitation by Miss Lillian Wald to come there. The dramatic part of the Henry Street Settlement experience was going

Mitchell: out with the trained nurses. I went with them as an assistant nurse and thus I saw much of the tenements of the Lower East Side.

One unforgettable experience at the settlement was rooming with Florence Kelley, the great figure in labor problems. She was more of a human dynamo than any other person that I have ever met. We had one floor of one of the houses, one long room. She lived at one end and I lived at the other. She gave me a regular job at her office and I worked over one small piece of labor legislation. She took me around on her calls with her and I followed like a spry shadow. I've never forgotten the New York traffic which seemed to me terrible then. Now it would seem leisurely. But Florence Kelley, if she was in a hurry, paid very little attention to traffic. She would hold up her hand and walk out into the street and traffic would stop. I've always said it was like the Israelites and the Red Sea. Everything stopped, and I would scamper after Mrs. Kelley. [Laughter] That was her temperament.

Prescott: Later you saw the New York problem through the eyes of a research foundation?

Mitchell: Yes, with Pauline Goldmark, who was one of the most beautiful human beings and had one of the loveliest minds that I have ever known.

Prescott: And that was where you learned real respect for gathering statistics in order to solve social problems.

Mitchell: Yes. I worked with her on some of her analyses of case studies and that was a great relief to me. Although it was enlightening, it wasn't the great

Mitchell: emotional shock that I got either with Lillian Wald or Florence Kelly. But then I was so ignorant! The whole New York career was emotional, but this part was intellectual rather than emotional. At that time Pauline Goldmark was working on the upper West Side in the Fifties in New York.

After I finished my study with her I thought I'd like to know these same people whom I had met only on paper. So I signed up with the Salvation Army to do field work in the same area where I had done surveys with Pauline. Of all the differences among points of view that I encountered, that was the most dramatic. I was supposed, of course, to help these people not only physically, but spiritually. And I did it with great zeal because these people were so pathetic. I had never before encountered the poverty that I saw there. I had gone through the tenements when I was there working with the nurses at the Henry Street Settlement, but never did I see such pathetic cases. Let me give one example: I would be told that this woman, who was incurably ill, would have to go to the poorhouse on Welfare Island. And I was to take her. The old lady was terribly agitated. She knew that Welfare Island meant forever; she didn't know how bad it was going to be, but she imagined it was going to be awful. It was a disgrace as well as a life sentence. How she clung to me! I can remember one of the things she said to me. "Just pretend you're a cousin, dearie, just pretend you are a cousin. It helps so." Well, that was the type of thing that I did. And the poor children, their condition

Mitchell: almost killed me. They were a very large influence in my determining what I should do for my life's work.

Prescott: And next you went to the public schools?

Mitchell: No. I went to two other places in between. I went to the Glenns for a little while. They were doing a different kind of research in the Russell Sage Foundation. I didn't get much out of that. I also went to Mary Richmond; she was with the charity organization. I was placed in the department that was responsible for children who had no homes. Most of them were babies. During this time Florence Kelly, who thought of this as a waste of time, wouldn't speak to me. [Laughter]

Prescott: But your last few weeks you spent with the public schools?

Mitchell: Yes, and that was with Julia Richman, principal of a high school that was named after her following her death. There I was not allowed to do anything excepting listen. That was true in all New York schools. Nobody was allowed to participate and it was a great concession to allow me to visit in any way. I appealed to Julia Richman in the same way I appealed to others. She was a very unusual person.

Prescott: Were you an observer in the teaching of classes or in the teacher training classes?

Mitchell: Both. She just took me on as her shadow; that's what they all did. I was just kind of a shadow. Most of the time was spent in a vocational high school. I was very impressed and decided then and there that working with children in the public

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Mitchell: schools was the work which I really wanted to do.

Aside from these professional experiences, I enjoyed a social whirl such as I had never experienced before. This came through John Graham Brooks, who visited me in my Berkeley home. He introduced and sent me to Lillian Wald, and also sent letters of introduction to other friends--people like Miss Morgan, who took me to her club to meet Lillian Russell. [Laughter] You can't imagine the pace. I can't even remember all the names.

There was a Yiddish newspaper editor (Moskovitch) who was living at the settlement house. He took me to luncheon with a lot of Jewish newspaper people, and they always addressed me as "Miss Gentile," in which light I had never thought of myself before. I had never really and truly thought of Jew or Gentile as representing anything other than religion. And they would ask me about the Gentile press, and the Gentile this and that. They just threw this word at me.

Marriage to Dr. Wesley Clair Mitchell--1912

Prescott: You were also making a decision as to your marriage to Dr. Mitchell at this time, weren't you?

Mitchell: Yes. Our friendship had had an interruption, quite a long interruption. The summer before I went to New York, we were members of the same party that went to the Sierra; it was my first trip to the Sierra. I had never been able to go anywhere in the summertime. I had always gone down to Pasadena to take care of my father.

Prescott: Then it was a rather prolonged courtship.

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Mitchell: Yes and no. Robin had first asked me to marry him four years before, but there had been a really long period during which neither of us were considering it. We were married May 8, 1912.

Prescott: You've documented the honeymoon and your experience in Europe so well in Two Lives that we'll leave that for the time being.

Mitchell: Yes, I should not like to go over it all again.

Influence of John Dewey

Prescott: Let's go back to your training yourself for your profession in New York. You came back to New York from your European honeymoon and your husband was located at Columbia University.

Mitchell: Yes. Not at first, but it didn't take very long to become located.

Presocott: And quite soon you found yourself drawn again into some phase of education. Did you take courses at Columbia University?

Mitchell: Well, I wasn't drawn; I went with a very definite aim. I wanted to try to be a teacher of children. The work that I had enjoyed rapturously in California in the University was teaching. I have always enjoyed teaching and I wanted to teach, and I wanted to teach children. Yes, while I was trying to get acquainted with New York, which is really quite an assignment for a person who has never been there excepting as a tourist, I took one course with Dewey, whom I had known for a long time.

Prescott: You had known him from the Chicago days.

Mitchell: Yes, and I think that Dewey really turned me in the right direction as much as any outside influence.

Mitchell: He gave me a vocabulary even when I was fifteen. His school was called a laboratory school. I don't believe there was another such school for children in the United States at that time.

Prescott: Now you met him again in New York as a teacher, and you were then an adult. Did you still find him inspiring?

Mitchell: Yes I did. I think the remarkable thing about him is the number of people in different areas whom he has stimulated. My husband, of course, was an economist, but he got an enormous amount from Dewey, with whom he studied in the University of Chicago. He took Dewey's thinking, the attitude toward human beings, and applied it to his area, economics. I find that others did the same thing. I don't think I should call myself a follower of Dewey, but he stimulated me to a kind of new, fresh attitude. I don't know what to call it other than an attitude toward people, or children and people together.

Prescott: In Chicago he was working with Mrs. Dewey?

Mitchell: Yes, Mrs. Dewey was the practical director of the laboratory school. One of the first things we did, when we organized the Bureau of Educational Experiments, was to ask Mrs. Dewey if she would work with us on the records that she had kept. These records had never been published. So I worked with her on her records for quite a while, but we never published them because Mrs. Dewey, though one of the great women that I have known, was difficult inasmuch as she never questioned that she was right, and she wanted us to do just what she wanted. And what she wanted was just

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Mitchell: the printing of these records with no comment or analysis. We felt that the records that she had kept were not the kind of records we wanted to stand for. She kept only a record of what was presented to the children; there wasn't anything about the children's reactions, which is what we were working on. The records were interesting reading, but they did not give us any direction in the study of children. I think John Dewey would have done very different things if he were organizing a laboratory school now. I think he would have seen how inadequate the records were that Mrs. Dewey kept.

And by the way, I was delighted and very much surprised to be asked to be on the honorary committee for John Dewey at Columbia University which is commemorating his hundredth anniversary.

BANK STREET COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Organizing the Bureau of Educational Experiments

Prescott: All this training, which was to prepare you for your work as an educator, lacked specialization, didn't it?

Mitchell: You see, I knew I wanted to find out about children, and I wanted very much to get into the public schools, and I was naive enough to think that I could. The only place that I could get in was in what they called the "ungraded" classes or "opportunity" classes. For a while they were called the "low IQ" classes. They had just been started in New York City and they needed volunteers as helpers. I worked with Miss Farrell, the head of that department. She was certainly a wonderful person. She let me handle the children, which involved doing many things. I learned to test their eyes; I went to an oculist and got trained for this. I learned to test their ears; I went to an aurist and got trained for that. I went to Alexander on posture, and I did posture exercises with them.

A little later I worked with Frederick Ellis, then at the Neurological Institute, on experimental tests for the ungraded children. This was done in a public school. Still later, I got permission to give various types of tests to children in five schools located in very different neighborhoods. This was called the psychological survey. Beardsley

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Mitchell: Ruml, who was then a young psychologist, and Evelyn Dewey were members of the group who had headquarters in my house. All these early years, I attended the public meetings of the board of education which was then on Park Avenue.

This gave me a wide variety of experiences with a wide variety of children. Then, quite soon I began to teach in the City and Country School. This was in 1914 or 1915.

Prescott: And there you were teaching at the nursery school level?

Mitchell: Yes. The school started with four-year-olds, and was called the Play School. My first class was age five, and my second class was age seven. I was on the staff as a teacher , scared out of my wits and happier than I'd ever been over anything in the way of work.

Prescott: And then in 1916 the Bureau of Educational Experiments was organized?

Mitchell: Yes, and in 1950, when we were granted the right to give the master's degree, we became the Bank Street College of Education.

Prescott: Tell us something about the origin of the idea behind this experimental school.

Mitchell: The idea included more than just an experimental school. You see, I was very distressed because children were being studied by scores of specialists who never spoke to each other. And I was so ignorant that I didn't know how very difficult the situation really was. The doctor had his file; the social worker had his file; the school had its file. These people never talked to each other, though they were all dealing with the same child. This seemed absolutely

Mitchell: crazy to me, and it really was. So I had this plan. It was a plan that grew out of my visit to New York. I called it a vision, and I think that was a good name for it because I never had any idea that it could really materialize. I envisaged a school where the staff had various specialists on it who were interested in observing each child and who would pool their information and work toward a school program best fitted to meet the needs of these children. Now that was a vision that I brought with me to New York. And one of the first things that I did when I got to New York was to go to the Public Education Association and offer myself as an ignorant volunteer. I was put on as an assistant to Harriet Johnson, head of an experiment called "visiting teachers." That was a job that she had invented, and it meant being the liaison between the home and the school in the cases of difficult children. This was the first move that had been made in this direction. Of course, Harriet Johnson was one of the greatest women that I have known. (The list would include Alice Freeman Palmer, Jane Addams and Harriet Johnson.) Now Harriet, and I as her assistant, visited homes as well as schools. So here I was introduced not only to the school and to the teachers, but to the homes of the children. I had told Harriet quite early of this vision of mine, and she was all for it. So when we did organize the Bureau of Educational Experiments, she left her work with the Public Education Association to come with us full time, and became the director of our first nursery school.

Prescott: Your husband played a very intimate part in this?

Mitchell: Yes. He was much interested in this scheme. He himself was one of the people who believed very strongly in the group attack. A little later he organized the National Bureau of Economics as a working group and there he was the director of research and also was a staff member. That is, he was a working director. So naturally he approved this group idea. His help was invaluable when it came to handling our records of children. These records included both numerical measurements and behavior records. He had faced a somewhat similar problem in his work on business cycles. There he had worked out new methods of handling records of human behavior, either statistically or non-statistically, in a way which would throw light upon a sequence of events in business cycles.

Prescott: Certainly this plan must have posed a real financial problem.

Mitchell: This scheme of mine? Well, of course the answer to the financial question was one of the dramatic incidents in my life. In some ways I have lived a dramatic life; I really don't know whether all lives are as dramatic as mine has been or not. Well, Robin, my husband, and Harriet and I had talked and talked about this scheme and what to do. And my cousin, really my double cousin, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (we had the same grandparents on both sides) had inherited large amounts of money after the death of her parents and her husband. She was a musician and her real interest was in music, but she knew it would take time to start anything that represented what she wanted to do in music. So she

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Mitchell: came down one evening to talk with Robin and Harriet and me about what she could do for education. I can remember her remark now. She was an extraordinary woman. She said, "My only interest, my real interest in life is music. But I don't think music is going to get me into heaven. I have a feeling that my best chance of heaven is to do something for education. But I don't know anything about education, and I don't want to know anything about education. I will underwrite any scheme that you approve of for ten years if you will promise not to make me try to understand or be interested in it." Now, could there be a more astonishing remark!

Harriet and Robin and I worked fast to get this plan of ours into some kind of organized form which she liked, and then we were launched.

Researches of the Bank Street College of Education

Prescott: The early Bureau of Educational Experiments, later called the Bank Street Schools, is well documented in numerous places, but I think that for this particular transcription we ought to talk briefly about the curriculum, because it seems to me very, very significant. Just how did you build a curriculum for the school for children?

Mitchell: Well, of course a curriculum for any school is a very complicated thing; it was particularly so within the framework of our Bureau. It was complicated when it began. Our first Bureau faculty was composed of a medical doctor, a social worker, two psychologists, and the director in our nursery school and the director in the City and Country

Mitchell: School, where we were going to work with the older children and a couple of parents, all to work together. We had no president. We had a chairman. I felt, and the others agreed with me, that a chairman is more readily accepted as a member of the staff than a president. And I was chairman. The chairman had to do a lot of the administrative work because we had no president. Now our job was to have all of these people study the same children. And we worked together both on the records and on the kind of environment that a child needed at home and in the school.

Prescott: How old were the children?

Mitchell: At first the children were very little. We thought we would do better to begin with the very young child, and our first children were taken as soon as they got their legs.

Prescott: Was that two years old?

Mitchell: For the most part. But some of them were as young as eighteen months, though these were very few. I don't remember how many there were at first, but not more than ten, I think, in the first group. And Harriet Johnson was the first person to take records of a child in a group and also of the group as a unit. There had been so few records of children over a long span.

Harriet's were real behavior records. Each specialist also took records. The psychologist took records; I went in and took records on the children's language; the doctor made systematic examinations; the social worker made records of the homes. And then we would have meetings on one

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Mitchell: child after another, and later on one age-group after another. And we came to talk not so much about the age as about what we called the "maturity level."

Prescott: The level at which they could do certain things?

Mitchell: Yes, we were trying to work out what was to be expected of the average child at a given age, but also the maturity level of an individual child which might be above or below his chronological age. Do you think it's worth-while giving you an illustration?

Prescott: Oh yes, please do.

Mitchell: Harriet Johnson, with these babies--really, they were just babies--Harriet had many toddlers pulling a wagon and getting the wheel caught. She never had a toddler of twenty months do anything excepting either throw a fit or pull and pull and then drop it. At twenty-four months she never had a child who would not turn around and look and investigate what was keeping the wheel from turning.

Prescott: And try to solve it?

Mitchell: And try to solve it. Now those different behaviors were what we would call maturity levels. I'm just giving you an early illustration. Later, we had recorders on special activities: one worked especially on block building. Harriet Johnson worked on that; she wrote a fascinating book on the development of design and representation in block building in nursery school children. In her work with the student teachers she often had them experiment with blocks. We had a recorder on children's language. We had Barbara Biber, who

Mitchell: began with us as a recorder on children's drawing. She has been for many, many years the head of our research department.

Prescott: And then from these records you would evolve a curriculum?

Mitchell: We would evolve a tentative plan, and keep records of those ideas which proved most successful. Harriet took records not only of children, but she took records of any new thing that was introduced, such as a toy or a swing. She took records on who used it and how many times it was used. Records of this type had never been kept. You'd find one thing would be very interesting to one child, who would be delighted, but would have no appeal to another. Eventually you would discover what toys brought about group play.

Prescott: Your husband certainly must have been helpful in correlating these observations.

Mitchell: He was helpful on the records; he was absorbed. And he had children, which certainly added to his interest.

Prescott: I presume you observed your own children in the home.

Mitchell: Yes, I even kept records of each child all of the time. This was chiefly in the field of language development.

Prescott: At the time you were doing this interesting research in your Bureau, what was the status of research in other experimental schools?

Mitchell: There wasn't any to speak of.

Attention was centered on children by two different groups with very different purposes and methods. The experimental school group were a motley

Mitchell: lot. Most of them were interested in what children got out of life in school, which included both content offered to them in the curriculum and the intellectual and emotional response of the children. Yet I would hesitate to call experiments in many of these schools "research" since they kept no records. The other group studying children were research institutes. As far as I know, we were the first organization to combine both groups in a study of children. The early institutes were organized to follow methods that had been used in the physical sciences; that is, to take exact measurements of children, and what could not be measured was simply left out. They began with physical measurements, since these seemed the simplest to make. Even here they ran into difficulties. One instance was really very striking. When the research institute in Iowa wanted to measure children's physical growth, the children wiggled and they would appear to grow one day and shrink the next. So the research staff put the children into casts in order to measure them. That is, they knew the children wiggled, but wiggling seemed unimportant because that couldn't be measured. And they knew that it was an emotional strain for the children, but you couldn't measure that, so that was disregarded. Science ought to be obeyed, and science has measurements. Now, we cared, really, more about the wiggle and the emotional strain than we cared about the physical growth.

But the difficulty was how to use behavior records. The problem was how to put them into a form that would show growth, and thus could be compared with other growth records. We had

Mitchell: psychologist after psychologist, but none of them wanted to tackle the problem of behavior records; it didn't seem important to them.

Finally Barbara Biber came. In the study which she did in her early years with us--she was just out of college with her master's degree--she first analyzed successive stages of behavior in learning a given skill and called these stages maturity levels. She used children's drawings to analyze the successive stages through which children grew in skill and in purpose. The very young children scribbled clear across the page and off the page. Then they'll begin to make spots. After a while--and this is distinctly a new stage--they see the limitation of the page and they accept this limitation as a framework, and work within it. I'm just trying to illustrate how even drawing reveals the stage of the maturity of the young child. If he wants to draw a face, very often he will draw a rough circle representing the face and then draw the eyes outside of the face. Now, no child thinks the eyes are really outside of the face, but he thinks "face" first, and then he thinks "eyes." One at a time, you see, for at this age he doesn't necessarily carry over the relationship between face and eyes. Similarily, many of the children draw something that they call a house and then they put a chair or a bed way outside of the house. From such studies in various behavior situations we worked out stages of development not only in terms of ages, but in terms of maturity levels, which are much broader than age levels.

Prescott: Was there a great variation of age within that maturity level?

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Mitchell: Sometimes. Usually not a great variation, but more than was recognized in the school situation.

Prescott: Was there a direct correlation between the socio-economic position of the family and accomplishment?

Mitchell: Well, we tried to work out the influence of social environment. We have always known, of course, that there was a certain amount of effect reflected from the social and economic position of the family, but only now are we doing a study which should show this relationship more clearly.

Prescott: Do you consider the IQ a safe guide?

Mitchell: This was one of the studies which we did in the early days, but it was never published because the man who did it, Frederick Ellis, who came to us from the neurological institute, was a perfectionist. If there is anything that is awful to have on your staff, it's a perfectionist. They are never satisfied. But Mr. Ellis began an intensive analysis of the IQ. And of course, as we know now, he found that the IQ is not made up of one single ability, but is a composite of different abilities with a very irregular skyline on a chart. The language score may go way down; other scores may go way up. And we found that a development like language, for instance, was very much affected by the home situation. And the IQ test itself was disproportionately weighted by language development. He also found that the reading speed was dependent on many factors. These findings changed our attitude toward learning. Growth in an individual became more important than his actual achievement.

Prescott: And the teacher's cooperation became the key to the success of the observation.

Mitchell: Yes; though our research staff went in and took their own records, the teachers also kept their own records. Records, records! That's where we split with the City and Country School. That was Caroline Pratt's school, and she had no interest in records at all, not at all. She said that if you aren't smart enough to see what the child is doing, then your records won't do anything for you.

Prescott: And she discouraged the publication of your book, the Here and Now Story Book?

Mitchell: She discouraged the introduction, which was an analysis of what language means to children, made from my records in her school. She liked the stories, but she didn't want me to publish the introductory part. Most of the teachers, however, were very eager to keep records and to use our records. That is why we eventually stopped using her school for our study of children.

Teacher Education

Prescott: When did the Bureau become a school?

Mitchell: A school for children was always an essential part of the plan of the Bureau, though it took us two years to organize it. It was first called the Nursery School of the Bureau of Educational Experiments--a preposterous name! When we moved to Bank Street, people began to call us the Bank Street Schools. For we moved to Bank Street to begin our School for Teachers, a new venture planned with eight "cooperating schools," as we called them.

Mitchell: Also we moved to enlarge our nursery school and to provide more space for our research. We enlarged our nursery school through age five; we didn't do that before because we used the City and Country School children, the fours and fives. We had already found in our work, before we moved, that there were numerous schools trying to find out what to do, feeling that something was wrong with public school methods and attitudes. Our Bureau library became a meeting ground of a lot of these restless schools. I think they really should be called experimental schools rather than leaders of the progressive school movement. That word "progressive" was very restrictive to begin with. It later covered a wide gamut of people, from anarchists who thought any amount of freedom was good, to people who thought having dolls in the kindergarten was radical. We made a survey of twelve early schools in our first year; only three of them survived. But the group with whom we worked decided that we needed a teachers' education school. They wanted it for their own schools. The directors of these eight cooperating schools helped to plan such a school and asked us to conduct it. We placed our early student teachers, all of whom were college graduates, with these schools.

For a number of years directors of these schools rotated on our planning group who discussed and decided the curriculum. In 1930, our first year, we had no student teachers; instead we conducted courses for all the teachers in these eight schools. I gave two; one was what we used to call the course in environment, in which I stressed how to use the environment in the curriculum for

Mitchell: children; the other was in language, which stressed the language of children and writing for children. After we began placing students for practice teaching in these schools, Jessie Stanton became the consultant for the groups through age six, and I became the one for the older groups. We met with the faculty in all of these schools regularly and also took over classes once in a while when a teacher wanted us to, and discussed her particular curriculum in her particular environment. I made really quite a big survey of my own of the environment of these schools.

Prescott: Were these schools all in New York?

Mitchell: No. Our first theory, which was perfectly sound but didn't work out in practice, was that we wanted a city, a suburban, and a rural school because the environments were so completely different and therefore the direct experiences a school could open up to children were so different. And we also felt that the flexibility would keep us from getting snooty, which was one of our horrors. I mean getting hardened into an attitude of "We know the way." But we found this plan was too wasteful of time and energy, both to the staff and to the students, because the student teachers were in the school room four days and then with us for two days. At first we had one school way down in Flowertown outside of Philadelphia. It was called Carson College. It wasn't really a college, it was a home for orphan girls. They also took girls assigned to them by the court whose parents were judged unsuitable to take care of them. Our experience here revealed a very interesting thing. As the school was held on their grounds, these girls had very little contact with the outside world, and more than anything in

Mitchell: the world they wanted to be like everybody else. So finally the school was closed and their students went to the public school. Their grounds, which were beautiful, big grounds, were opened for social events and recreational activities to the town children. The nursery school was still run on the grounds. It's very interesting to see how much of the knowledge that we now take for granted about children has all been discovered in my lifetime.

Prescott: As you went along, you found that you had to pay more and more attention to the training of teachers, didn't you?

Mitchell: Yes, only we prefer to say the "education" of teachers rather than "training." We started, as I have said, what we called the Cooperative School for Teachers. Do you know why we had to give up that name? Because two federal departments complained. "Cooperative" means that you share the profit. And they told us we were breaking the law. So we just dropped the word. We didn't call ourselves "uncooperative," but we just called ourselves the Bank Street School for Teachers.

Prescott: And then when did you become a college?

Mitchell: At first we were refused a charter by the regents at Albany who had charge of such matters when we applied as the Bureau of Educational Experiments. I can't resist telling you why they refused: the chairman wrote me that they did not approve of "untried experiments!" But later when we applied to give the master's degree in education, they granted it to us. They wrote they granted the charter to us because we had had such long experience in experimental education! Now that

Mitchell: certainly means progress. Our name was then changed to Bank Street College of Education. That was in 1952 or 1953, and since then we have given the master's degree.* We have always taken only college graduates as our students. We have never offered undergraduate work in our college.

Prescott: You have now a status of president emeritus of Bank Street College?

Mitchell: Oh yes, and that is rather ridiculous. You see, at first none of us wanted a president. We all felt that a "chairman" more accurately described what such a person did in our organization. So when we got into our one and only big mess with one member of the staff, the board of trustees asked me if I would be president. The staff approved. I refused. But I said I would be acting president. That title sounded tentative enough not to scare me. I agreed because I thought I was the best person to be the goat. I was acting president for three years. Then I resigned and prepared to "fade away." John Neimeyer had been appointed president and had been working with us for a year before he assumed the office. He was still the head of a school near Philadelphia. At almost our last board meeting, the board of trustees asked me if I would become president until the end of the term, which was about two months away, I think. In this way I might be emeritus.

Prescott: That was a nice compliment.

Mitchell: Emeritus has always been a title that I loved. We have always used the word "emeritus," and I'm called "emeritus," not "emerita."

Prescott: What is the present enrollment at Bank Street College?

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*since 1950

Mitchell: That is complicated to state in numbers because we have enrollments for both children and teachers at Bank Street and in our service program. We have about 100 children in our Bank Street School for Children, ages two through seven. We are also responsible for a child care center and appoint and also advise the teachers in two parent-organized nursery schools in public housing apartments. In the department of teacher education carried on in the college building, we have about ninety students in two groups who are preparing to be teachers, and a third group who are currently teaching; they number some 200 each term. For two years we have run a summer school--I don't remember the number of students. And I have no ~~accurate~~ idea of the number of teachers currently in our public school workshops--probably about 200--and in our integration experiment, which is conducted by our research department, there are probably 100 more.

Let me describe in more detail our work with students at Bank Street, which is basic, always combined with research. We have two groups who are preparing to be teachers. Both groups are candidates for the master's degree. Elaborate records are kept to determine which type of preparation brings the best results. One group of students have the regular two terms at Bank Street. The second is an experiment, done under a Ford Foundation subsidy. Its purpose is to see if teacher education time can be shortened. We've always felt that one year was terribly short, but about half our students now come to

Mitchell: us for only one term and then are put into a teaching job in the public schools where we follow them during their first term in teaching just as closely as we would if they were full time at Bank Street. Once in a while the Bank Street staff observes each student in classroom and has weekly conferences with her. The whole group comes back to the college for Saturday classes.

This program does two things: it helps get more teachers into the field quickly, and it cuts down the percentage of drop-outs. If student teachers are supported through their first term of teaching, the turnover is less and we do not lose so many of our trained teachers.

We also offer a wide variety of evening courses for teachers currently teaching, in which teachers may or may not work for a master's degree. This started out largely for the training of teachers in child care centers when the city announced required preparatory work for teachers in these centers that had had hitherto no standards. Now this course attracts the public school people as well as teachers in child care centers. In this course we have about two hundred each term.

Recent Studies of the Bank Street College of Education

Prescott: Do foundations support much of your program?

Mitchell: Oh yes, a great deal. Our major support, recently, has come from the National Mental Health Foundation for research in the role of mental health in schools.

Mitchell: Two big pieces of research that are going on now come from this source. A third big piece of research is the school integration experiment. That is being supported by the type of foundation that is interested in sociological problems, like the Field Foundation and the New York Children's Foundation. But we have support from a rather wide gamut of foundations, and we seem to be in good standing with them now. However, we always have a deficit because foundation moneys solve neither space nor salary problems.

Prescott: So true. You mentioned having National Mental Health Foundation money. What type of research does it support?

Mitchell: We have two programs in progress now. The first one is called "school effects study" and is an attempt to turn hunches into some kind of evidence as to the effect upon the development of children in different types of schools, schools with differing educational philosophies. Four schools were selected. They are all supposed to be good schools; that is, each really carries out its own philosophies in discipline, in methods of teaching conforming to its belief in how children learn, and with a principal who approved of the philosophy and would cooperate in the experiment. The curriculum has to be the same for all schools. One school was a distinctly traditional school. The second one was a school that was trying as hard as it could, and had gone as far as it could, with the newer type of attitude toward learning. And there was one private school. There was a fourth school, but I really can't remember what that school represented, except that it was in

Mitchell: an entirely different environment. Now all of these schools represented as nearly as possible the same social and economic background. The study involved nine-year-olds in all of the schools. These nine-year-olds had come up through the school system, and they were studied as members of school groups as well as individuals. The parents were also interviewed. An anthropologist made a study of each community, in which he attempted to define the differences in the expectation of the mother and those of the teacher concerning the same child.

Now, the other mental health project is very large. They call it the "role of the school in mental health."

Another big project is called the "integration experiment." I referred to it earlier. This project involves two housing situations, one entirely white and one entirely Negro. A third school was being built close by and they hoped to work with teachers and parents in the two schools that were already there and with the common community to see whether we could get an integrated situation in the new school. And that really meant in the housing.

Prescott: And the fund for this research was coming from where?

Mitchell: That was coming from private organizations within New York. I think both the Field Foundation and the Duke Foundation participated. Both were local foundations.

Prescott: Has that project been completed?

Mitchell: No, it wasn't intended to be completed because before the new school which they hoped would be

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Mitchell: integrated opened, a new and disappointing community developed. What happened was what happens so often: many white people moved away. Nevertheless, the staff think they have made a good deal of progress in changing the thinking of the community. The way the Negro mothers responded was really quite startling. The staff came to the conclusion last year that the general defensive attitude that had been built up by segregation, not merely in schools, but everywhere, caused the Negro parents to approach the school with suspicion, not expecting anything good. And suspecting got over to the children, and they did not try nearly as hard as they would have if they had not been discouraged. As a result, their IQ's didn't show up in tests as well as they should have. Now this situation, they feel, has been broken down because the Negroes are now taking community responsibilities and a few community white people are working with them. The Negro mothers have now developed the ability to express themselves. We think this has happened partly through the work of Eve Merriam, who as a young poet, got the Yale prize. She has been in our Bank Street Writers Laboratory many years. She has been inspired to try a writers' workshop with the teachers in both of these schools. And she has got the most wonderful results from working with the Negro mothers and the teachers. Sometimes the staff would hold a meeting with one group and then with the other, and then with both groups together. But now there is no need of that.

Prescott: That's a significant step forward, surely.

Mitchell: It's a step forward, and to them it points the way to something more. So the Bank Street staff does not feel discouraged. If they can make a beginning in this problem, they feel that it's well worth carrying on. And they are carrying on. Now I have a long report on that, but it is largely the report of their findings last year.

Prescott: There must be research projects which are closely tied to the school in the way of guidance and curricula and so on.

Mitchell: All of our projects in research, teacher education or anything else, are really tied up with schools. That is, we are a college of _education_. And working in public schools was our aim from the very beginning, but the public school system wouldn't permit it. We got our first workshop placed in a public school in 1943.

At the college itself we have evening sessions. But our workshops take place right in the schools and attendance is always voluntary. We have never wanted to have anybody there who wasn't anxious to attend, nor did we want to be in a school where the principal and faculty weren't anxious to have us.

Prescott: You're invited by individual schools?

Mitchell: Yes, we're invited. And now since we have a reputation, we receive more invitations from schools than we can possibly accept. We also have undertaken some research studies in these workshop schools.

Prescott: You plan the research project with the principals and the teachers and the college staff?

Mitchell: Yes, they are all interrelated; this cooperative planning is what makes Bank Street College

Mitchell: different.

Prescott: And also makes it so valuable.

Mitchell: Well, from our point of view it does. Everything we undertake has the teaching aspect and the children's aspect. And our research projects grow, sometimes out of problems raised in our teaching experiments; sometimes the problem is started in the research and then goes back to the teachers and to a particular group of children for experimentation. Presently the teachers and staff at Bank Street are making a study of the differences in the background and expectations of the parents in the Bank Street School for Children as compared with the parents of the children at the Child Care Center for which we are responsible. It is run for difficult children, who are difficult largely because of the parental problems. These are all working parents. There are significant differences in the way of approaching a curriculum for these children in the Child Care Center, who have not known nearly as much home life as have the children in the Bank Street School.

Prescott: You plan a curriculum to provide homelife experiences.

Mitchell: Yes. We plan distinctly to do home things, such as shelling peas, running the carpet sweeper, and cleaning up, going to shop with the teacher for food for luncheon, then, helping to serve it. Few children in the Child Care Center have homes where the mother is really attentive, and the child can trail her in her housework. And the children do a little cooking in school and they have their stories taken down and their pictures put up on the walls. The mothers have become so

Mitchell: pathetically appreciative. The building is one of the most beautiful buildings I know; it belongs to the welfare department. We work with them. But again, one of the things that happens there, which we feel is very rewarding, is that we work with three municipal departments: welfare, health and education. There is, I think, perhaps a better understanding because all three departments have to take part in our project.

Prescott: And they all get to understand the aims of each other.

Mitchell: That's what I mean. When we first began to work in the public schools these departments were very separate, very separate.

Prescott: What is the age limit in the Child Care Center in New York?

Mitchell: Sometimes five, usually they begin at four, and in some cases a six-year-old is carried. And the city also has a ruling now that any teacher who goes into the Child Care Center or kindergarten must have had work with either the first or second grades or both, and vice versa. Any teacher who is to teach a first grade must have had some experience either in a kindergarten or in a child care center. It was an enormous improvement. Two Bank Street staff members served on the committee that drew up the requirements.

Prescott: Are the physical quarters of the college adequate?

Mitchell: No, that is one of our really great problems. We don't want to move because we are established, and because we have already changed our name twice. We've got a silly name because it confines us to Bank Street, which nobody ever heard of until we used it. We hesitate to move because it is a tremendous expense. We cannot expand to include

Mitchell: children beyond seven because we have no play space. Our only play space is the roof.

Prescott: I suppose planning ahead would include some physical expansion.

Mitchell: Oh, we have a hundred different plans, new ones; and the staff doesn't want to move and the board of trustees of Bank Street don't want to move. We're a community member there. Many of our parents have moved down there just to place their children with us. I don't know what we shall do.

Prescott: I have been interested in talking with people about the Bank Street Associates. That is an organization of interested persons outside of the immediate Bank Street circle.

Mitchell: Yes, people who approved of the Bank Street idea and want to help. Many of them help in a practical way. All of them help by paying ten dollars a year. For a while there were two groups. Now the parents' organization has joined them; they call themselves the Parent Associates. This is a great relief and the money which they raise all goes through the Bank Street books, though the parents can raise money for scholarships for their school. But everything goes through the Bank Street books now, which is a great help. It used to be very confusing. Three years ago we started the West Coast Associates. Its activities have been largely centered in Palo Alto just because I and Mrs. Bruce Bliven are here. Mrs. Rosie Bliven worked with us for fourteen years in New York as a volunteer. And also because we happened to have five graduates teaching in Palo Alto schools; four in public schools and one in a private school. Now the graduates have taken it over, and I don't

Mitchell: do much excepting talk. I guess I'll always talk. This summer we are going to give a Bank Street workshop for writing for children.

Prescott: Here in Palo Alto?

Mitchell: Here in Palo Alto, but we expect to get people from a distance.

Prescott: What do you do in the way of guidance with your student teachers?

Mitchell: Well, that's a long story. That has developed into a complex research study where our staff has a seminar with a psychoanalyst to guide them to distinguish very sharply between professional guidance, which is not our job, and guidance in the way of their attitudes toward themselves and their work.

Prescott: That's a difficult distinction to make, isn't it?

Mitchell: Well, it is one that is very necessary, I think. Some people feel that teachers are equipped to deal with psychiatric problems, but they're not, and they don't want to be. We have plans to give a course for those who wish to become school psychologists. This study with student teachers has been in process for a long while and we do carry on probably the most complete program in guidance of any college. We feel that it is worth all the trials, and the students feel that value very strongly. Each student is assigned a staff member as her adviser, and they meet together. Sometimes all of the students meet together. The adviser supervises them in their teacher-training work in the schools. You know, we have them all work in the schools from the word "go" four days a week.

EDUCATIONAL CREDO--
FROM THE WHOLE CHILD TO THE WHOLE WORLD

Prescott: Your entire life has really been spent on education, Mrs. Mitchell. Tell us something about the educational credo which you've evolved, that you've worked with and toward.

Mitchell: I think the basic thing to say is that we believe that learning is active. Now that doesn't mean just finger activity or a leg activity; it means thinking is active, and feeling is active. It is something that the child is stimulated to do.

Learning is not a hypodermic injection which the student is to receive in a passive way and repeat. This is perhaps a caricature,, but not too much of a caricature, of the old type of schooling. It means less emphasis on rote, excepting where rote is the only method that works. The early experimental schools started many things which people later accepted. But the public still remembers their early failures because they did do some crazy things, some of them. But I don't think what we aimed to do is disproved. There is a great deal of rote in learning a multiplication table, for instance.

Prescott: Or learning to spell.

Mitchell: Perhaps even more in learning to spell. But learning the multiplication does not teach you to understand it. Now, we feel that understanding in any situation is seeing relationships, and that often you go into regular rote learning after

Mitchell: the understanding is established. And you do that just to reinforce your memory.

Prescott: Do you feel that the experimental schools have a particular function in plotting out a course in education?

Mitchell: Yes, I do. I think there are some public schools now that are doing some very good experimental work. But this wasn't so when we began. Experimentation was anathema.

Prescott: The fact that public schools are supported by public funds narrows their imaginative approach to problems, don't you think?

Mitchell: Yes, I do. Now we have very warm associations with the New York Board of Education, which is something that one could hardly have dared to hope for when we began our work within the school system.

Prescott: Did you plan to have your research findings used by the public schools?

Mitchell: The aim was always that, but we often had to work outside the public schools before we really knew how to tackle the situation within the public schools. In a private school you can have smaller classes and the faculty can be more flexible in planning its approach to problems.

Prescott: Yes, the more intimate contact with both teachers and families would be important, too.

Mitchell: Yes, these interrelationships are carefully considered in our public school workshops. A clear understanding of all the forces which go to make up a child's world is basic to effective public education, and public education seems to me the hope of the future. The bulk of our children are going to be what we make them in our public schools. And what we make them is of tremendous importance;

Mitchell: this has always been true, but now it seems of crucial importance. This concept of the whole child has been talked about so much that it has become a meaningless slogan, but we wanted to get away from the separate faculty psychology which encouraged the teaching of each subject irrespective of its relationship to other areas of learning. We wanted to get a child's total response. We wanted him to find learning an adventure. It's always been that to me, and I think that is one of our great contributions. Certainly no school should be allowed to exist unless children learn while in it, but we wanted to make each step in learning an exciting step which would, by sustaining interest, naturally lead to the next step. While interest is certainly involved, it isn't followed capriciously no matter where it goes.

Prescott: You would challenge their interests by bringing the material to them within a frame of reference which is readily understood?

Mitchell: Yes. Not only that; we give them a job to do and to think and to work out for themselves within a definite piece of information. Well, as an illustration, we might go to maps. I invented what I call "tool maps" as distinguished from demonstration maps. Demonstration maps are maps on which you look up information.

Prescott: Where you find the capital of a state.

Mitchell: Yes, or find anything else. It's a kind of dictionary, like an encyclopedia, where you look up information. Now I tried, and I suceeded I think, in inventing what I would call "tool maps;" one map I'll mention as an example was a large map painted in oils on oil cloth. When I say large, I mean it probably was something like nine

Mitchell: by twelve feet. It was meant to be used on the floor, and it was painted in graphic relief, which means that the mountains were drawn to look like mountains. The high ones were not liver-colored as they are on the ordinary maps.

Prescott: They were green, in other words.

Mitchell: Or brown with white to suggest snow on those above 10,000 feet. And the plains looked like plains, and the rivers looked as if they were running into the ocean. The land forms were suggested by shapes rather than color.

Prescott: Did you use clay or anything to build the mountains or were these painted on?

Mitchell: No, these were painted. I did do plastic relief maps, too. Once I helped a class of eleven-year-olds make a huge out-of-doors one. Plastic relief maps were more difficult to use, but they're better than graphic relief maps. Let me explain how I used these maps with the students: (This I could also have done with the high-school-age group.) We started our study with people landing on the eastern seacoast, and then followed them across the country, noting what geographical features would affect the work they could do, and where they could settle. As we leave the Atlantic Coast, which has beautiful flat land, and proceed westward, we reach a sudden drop from the Piedmont, the foothills of the Appalachians, which is called the "Fall Line." This is never shown on maps which show height by color symbols, and is seldom mentioned by school geographies, yet it determined history because the settlers couldn't get their boats past it, so they settled along this line. It also gave them the power, thus

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Mitchell: determining the location of industries. And on my map I painted the Fall Line, for though it is out of scale, geographically, it is in correct scale in relationship to human living.

In this way we went westward across the country. I've done this with eight-year-olds: when we started on the western drive from Independence, the children would paint on the graphic relief map, with watercolors which could be washed off, whatever they imagined would be happening to the people in the covered wagons. They had painted little covered wagons which they moved as they went along. And when they came to a river they discussed what they would have to do to cross this river. How big was this river? How could they get their cows across? And then, when we got to the desert, what could they do? You know, children are so enchanting. Every once in a while a child would say, "I'll have to leave my bureau here. I don't think my cow or oxen can carry anything more." And then she would paint a little bureau on the side of the trail and somebody would paint an ox's skull. I shall never forget the poignancy of this and the way they showed the grass on the plains growing drier and drier and drier, and then when they came to the Rocky Mountains, they hunted for a pass and found South Pass. And on the other side of the mountains they followed the Columbia River on the map, which took them to Oregon, just as it did the pioneers. They had followed the Oregon trail. But again, like later pioneers, they didn't want to go there. They wanted to go to California. But to do that, they had to cross the desert and the Big Basin and Salt Lake. That worried them. Here I showed

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Mitchell: them pictures and talked about water holes and the way the rivers disappear. I had painted the rivers that do disappear and then they would paint in water holes and signs reading, "This way to water hole." When we came to the Sierra, we lived through the snow and the rescue at Donner Pass, omitting the grimmest experience. Well, we got to California all right. But how intensely they lived it all! And all of it was what the pioneers really did.

Prescott: Actually this was teaching them geography, history and earth science all together.

Mitchell: Yes, these eight-year-old children learned to think about what I like to call earth forces--mountains, plains, rivers, vegetation, climate in a simple way--and the relationship of human work to these earth forces. I also used these maps to study climate with slightly older children. The nine-and ten- and eleven-year-olds learned to use demonstration maps; maps that told them facts, to discover relationships.

Prescott: These demonstration maps were drawn on transparent material?

Mitchell: Yes. They were painted with transparent paint. The base map was black and white graphic relief. Take climate, for instance. I painted a rain map, with the number of inches shown in deepening shades of blue. When superimposed on base map, this showed relationship between land forms and rain. Another map, painted in deepening shades of yellow, showed the number of hours of sunshine. This map placed over the rain map showed green--a climate map with the two chief elements in climate. A vegetation map could now be put over

Mitchell: the climate map and another relationship discovered. Now, it takes a very intellectual and mature person to hold one fact in mind taken from one map and superimpose it on another.

Prescott: What other kind of maps did you make?

Mitchell: Oh, I did every kind of a map that you can think of. I called them tool maps because they were tools for studying relationships. Older children, for instance, wanted to go into social matters. I can remember doing a social study with eleven-to twelve-year-olds. This study involved a current coal strike in which they were very much interested. They wrote a play about it, which they gave to an audience of parents. In order to understand it better, they used the regular, thick volume that was published by the federal government. They made transparent maps that showed where there were unions, for without unions, there could be no strikes. With unions these smart little youngsters wanted to correlate what do you think? Accidents! Then they wanted to correlate these maps with Negroes and white population figures and with the maps that Odum made of distribution of wealth, health and education.

Prescott: Isn't that interesting! How old were these students?

Mitchell: They were twelve. They worked and worked. I helped them quite a bit in making the maps because so many of the maps used different scales. But they loved to remake a map to the right scale. And they made it a real study.

Prescott: How large was this school?

Mitchell: This was a private school. The class would be about twenty.

Prescott: That type of teaching certainly requires an imaginative teacher. It's a hard job.

Mitchell: But you see, the teacher is also excited. For you can see the relationships suddenly bursting inside the child's mind.

Prescott: In order to use this in a public school, you would have to have an integrated curriculum, wouldn't you?

Mitchell: Yes. And that wasn't possible when I began working. Nor when we began our workshops. Now an integrated curriculum is a common thing in the public schools. There's been a great deal of common sense worked into the curriculum, and I think a good deal of the attitude of valuing a child's thinking process as well as his information. The emphasis used to be all on the information.

Prescott: Training the child to understand these relationships certainly develops a mature point of view.

Mitchell: But I should not call it "training." Rather, it is giving a child a situation which stimulates him to think actively. It leads toward what I used to call the "SQ," the social quotient.

And you see this business of "wholeness" that we were talking about doesn't stop with the whole child. You go on from there and want to make a whole teacher. And she wants to be made a teacher, a whole teacher. She's usually very dissatisfied after she gets this attitude. Then you go on to wondering about the whole system, and there you strike the difficulty of education in our democracy. We have a hierarchy in status and in salary in our public school systems. And that means that there is an urge to move up the hierarchy in which the teacher occupies the lowest rung of the ladder.

Prescott: And the principal is half-way up.

Mitchell: The principal is half-way up, and then the supervisor, then the district supervisor, and finally, the superintendent, highest of all. And with each step of the rung, you are further away from the children for whom the whole towering system is set up. You see less and less of them. And you even get to where you don't even see the teachers.

Prescott: And they're all lost in budget planning and housing.

Mitchell: And they're all lost in making theoretic curriculum.

Prescott: All this while your findings were showing the value of an integrated curriculum.

Mitchell: The whole educational world was just beginning to ferment when I began. And of course the ferment is going on violently now. This training for one-world living, I don't think we've got hold of it very well yet. But I think it is becoming an aim, though, don't you?

Prescott: Oh, definitely. I was interested in your pointing out that it really is not international understanding we're interested in any more. It's intercultural understanding. There is a phenomenally big difference between the two concepts.

Mitchell: If I were to begin work in education now, I would concentrate on that idea primarily. In writing, and in working out methods of making peoples and their cultures real.

Prescott: To the child right here.

Mitchell: To the child right here, and to the teachers. I don't just know what I would do, but that's where my work stopped. I mean my active work with children and their schools.

Prescott: Certainly effective education for world living at the elementary and secondary school levels would lead to

Prescott: beautiful results.

Mitchell: Yes, and the beginnings are being made. But the books that they get out are so informational without being human. And the illustrations that they give! I have been recently going over some of the new textbooks about Asia, for instance. There's nothing in them at all that would make you want to go to Asia. And nothing to prepare you for the impact of Asia. I have been to Asia, and I've never been the same since. I've never been the same since because of the beauty, the differences in beauty, the color that they use everywhere; the fact that everybody in what we would call the farming class works with his hands, and in his creations he is just as anxious to have a spoon a beautiful thing as an artist is a picture.

Prescott: Is that because he doesn't have so many spoons?

Mitchell: I don't know. I don't know. This mass production of ours---we used to have more of that feeling than we have now. I'm afraid that as the Asia that I happen to know becomes industrialized, and has mass production, there too it may lose some of this individuality. But the color that they use! They love color. When I came back onto an English train, I literally wept because the people were so drab, everything was so drab. Drab! Why?

Prescott: Because they're not venturesome?

Mitchell: Not now. I don't know why.

Prescott: You went to Asia at what point in your life?

Mitchell: I went to Asia the year I was sixty. I got a feeling that I was stale. My children were grown, and didn't need me particularly. And I felt that in my thinking I had got onto a kind of treadmill. And I had been teaching geography for a long while without knowing

Mitchell: much, without seeing much; and I thought I had better learn something. So I went with a friend to the International Geographic Association meeting which met in Antwerp. We were taken on trips through the Netherlands, and then we went with the International Geographic group, seventeen of us, representing six nations, to the Dutch East Indies. There we were shown around by the Dutch geographers, and we went to many places that are not open to regular tourists.

Prescott: You mentioned that you were so exhilarated and excited about the color. Were there features of the trip which depressed you?

Mitchell: Poverty, of course, particularly when we got to India. We went from Indonesia to Burma and then India, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. Color everywhere. And beautiful, lovely things. And lovely babies; babies that were loved. I never heard a baby cry in Bali.

Prescott: You had this stimulating experience under the guidance of International Geographic Association. Have you found membership in other associations valuable or stimulating, Mrs. Mitchell?

Mitchell: I don't quite know how to answer that. When I think back to where I actually worked with groups other than at Bank Street, the New York City Board of Education stands out as the most important one. I worked with them very closely, and was actually put on the committee for reorganizing a curriculum, which was a great honor for a layman. And I worked a year as a fellow in the American Geographical Society at my own suggestion. I felt I ought to have more technical background than I had. I went

Mitchell: to the museum with a couple of my maps toshow to Isaiah Bowman, who was then president. I asked them to educate me. So they made me a fellow and told me to bring a report in on Queens, across the river from Manhattan; its past, present, future. I learned a tremendous amount there because this was treated as a thesis.

I had few working contacts with other professional societies, though I was a member of many. I was content, I think, to let others at Bank Street keep up these connections. I was working at the time with a doctor, with a psychologist--sometimes with two or three of them--with an anthropologist, with a social worker, and all of these had their professional societies. As chairman, mine was the integrating role of this crazy lot of maniacs for work, and I was terribly busy, I tell you. I had four children, and I was writing.

I did a great deal of public talking, however. I talked at a great many places, a great many. I liked to talk.

Prescott: These were before educational groups, teachers?

Mitchell: Yes. A great many school groups. I talked at PTA's, and other groups which were interested in children. Oh, it seems to me that I was talking all the time.

Honors Received

Prescott: Your work has brought with it much satisfaction and many honors. Tell us about receiving this Radcliffe plaque which I am holding.

Mitchell: That was a great surprise to me. My kind of education that I have worked for, experimental education, and children, were as far from Radcliffe

Mitchell: philosophy when I was there as can be imagined. And I was really very much moved to receive this graduate medal. Radcliffe, as a college, is not allowed to give an honorary degree. That has to come from Harvard. But this is what they give in its place. It was the only one that they had given in the field of education.

Prescott: It says on the back of it: "For distinguished achievement in the field of education. Awarded to Lucy Sprague Mitchell, June 9, 1956."

Mitchell: Yes, it was a great surprise. Another surprise came earlier, when Harvard began giving the Phi Beta Kappa honor to Radcliffe students. They went back over earlier graduates, and I was one of those selected to receive the Phi Beta Kappa key.

The whole visit back to Radcliffe was an astonishment to me all the way around. When I was there as a student, Radcliffe students weren't allowed to put foot in the Harvard Yard at all. And our Radcliffe luncheon was held in Memorial Hall, and that was where I received the award.

Prescott: Now let's talk about your receiving the honorary degree of LL.D. from the University of California. This award must have special significance for you, as so few women are so honored. If I recall correctly, you were among the first group to whom President Kerr awarded honorary degrees. Won't you tell us about it?

Mitchell: Well, that was awarded for my having been the first dean of women. I don't know how much was known about the work that I had done after I

Mitchell: left the University.

Prescott: Oh, I'm sure that it was known. [See appendix]

Mitchell: Well, I would like to think so. I am president emeritus of Bank Street College, but that wasn't mentioned in the award ceremony.

The first time I went back to the University was at an invitation from Mr. Kerr, who was then chancellor, to throw the first bit of dirt out of the ground for the women's dormitory.

Prescott: Yes, we have a charming picture of you doing that.

Mitchell: It was really a very pleasant occasion. I was welcomed by a few old friends and by many new ones. And then because I was the first dean of women, and also because I was one of the first women on the faculty, President Kerr included me in the first group of honorary degrees that he awarded.

Prescott: Yes, many of us were present at that particular time and remember it with a great deal of pleasure. You mentioned being a member of the Dewey Hundredth Anniversary Committee, also.

Mitchell: That's an honorary member. Dewey was very highly regarded and had a great following not only in this country, but abroad. I was surprised to be asked to be one of the eighteen from the United States on the honorary committee. I've always felt I owed a great debt to Dewey. And my husband, who studied under Dewey when an undergraduate in the University of Chicago, also felt that. But on the committee they had the most impressive people from all over the world. The only one who comes to my mind at the moment is Nehru, but there were a great many more.

Prescott: I suppose that you also have been a member of the White House Conference on Youth?

Mitchell: I have never been on the national committee, but I have attended. I got a great deal out of the meetings. Partly, I must say, what I got was rage. [Laughter] It was very stimulating. I always came back and wrote like mad.

Prescott: Because you felt that things weren't moving fast enough?

Mitchell: Yes, and then, I felt that there was a political element that had no business to be in on an educational conference. That was evident in various groups. And also in the, well...I don't know...it was a kind of feeling, almost like smell. You can sense when something is done for a political reason, or from an earnest desire to help children.

Prescott: Would it be better to plan it differently?

Mitchell: I don't know. I don't know. I don't feel at all sophisticated. I get mad very easily when I feel that the chief attention is not for the good of the child. I get very mad.

Prescott: And you thought these meetings were pretty much used as political instruments, that the child was being used as a political instrument to further some political aim?

Mitchell: Well, it seemed to me that the hierarchies were using the meeting this way.

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Observations on Present Day Education

Prescott: Mrs. Mitchell, after a long life of participation in education, do you feel that the slow evolutionary changes which eventually come out of public opinion reacting on education are sufficient to solve the problems in this rapidly changing world?

Mitchell: No, but I have learned that public opinion reacts very slowly. And there's always been something that irritates me, and that is the voices against are so much louder than the voices for.

Prescott: We have never really learned how to dramatize the pros, have we?

Mitchell: We have never learned to dramatize the pros. That I used to feel in the White House Conferences on Youth. I've felt that in so many public performances. I have just learned to accept it. Perhaps if I were a youngster, I would not. Progress moves slowly.

Prescott: Yes, that is so.

You spent such a long time in New York working with the board of education. Before the administrators really accepted the idea of your research program, were you discouraged?

Mitchell: No, I can't say I was discouraged. I think perhaps the greatest virtue that I have is patience. And after all, there have been many, many acceptances in the New York public schools in my lifetime. They really are considering questions and problems that they weren't aware existed when I first came.

Prescott: Such as the integration programs?

Mitchell: Oh, I think they've always been aware of that, but the trouble with the integration program is, of course, that it really is a housing problem. It's always been against the law to segregate, but if your children go to the nearest school, and there is housing segregation, segregation naturally results in the school.

No, I mean in the ways of working with children. When I first went into public education, there were twenty-six syllabi that had to be followed on different subjects, but not one of these subjects was a child.

Prescott: And I suppose that these courses of study were not coordinated?

Mitchell: No, yet I think they were very much aware of that. Of course, New York is so vast that you get everything, from the bad to the very good. But our work in Bank Street and our workshops in public schools have been so cordially received by the board. Oh, we've had flareups; but on the whole, our work has been cordially received and fairly rapidly. They also realize they need teachers who have more than just plain facts. I would say that teacher education is the biggest lag in education. I think that is true everywhere. But I also think that the lag in educating really open-minded administrators comes a close second. In New York, most school administrators start as teachers. As they progress up the administrative ladder, they get further and further away from the child. And the power goes to their heads. They like to have the teachers looking up to them and obeying them, and I think this attitude is passed on, and the teachers then want the children to look up to

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Mitchell: them and obey them.

Prescott: In your experience, has teachers' education been most successful in small groups?

Mitchell: No, I taught at The Little Red School House, where the number of students was always kept at the same level as in the public schools. I would rather have freedom with a large class than I would have inhibitions with a small class. I have never found it difficult to handle twenty-five children. Never. In my kindergarten, when I first taught in the public school, I had thirty-nine. That was against the law. The principal said, "Well, don't let that bother you, because they're not on the register. We just do it to please the parents." In the first grade I had forty-three. I would rather teach that number than I would twelve---

Prescott: You must have some interesting thoughts about present-day educational problems. Do you think public education is answering the need?

Mitchell: Oh, I hesitate to answer for two reasons: first, I am not so close to education now; and second, there is always need for change.

Prescott: Have you thoughts as to the changes you should like to see brought about in your grandchildren's education?

Mitchell: Well, I have ten grandchildren, and some of them go to public schools, and some of them go to private. This may be just a happenstance, but I think the public schools which my grandchildren go to are better than the private schools my other grandchildren attend.

Prescott: Isn't that interesting! Is that because the program is more imaginative, or because the teachers are better?

Mitchell: Both.

Prescott: Do you think that our public schools are becoming better able to serve present day needs?

Mitchell: I think they're trying to. I think the teachers as a whole, those that I have come in contact with, which of course is a comparatively small number, have been very, very eager to improve their work. I have great faith in teachers. I think they have been kicked about and, as I say, they are at the lowest end of the ladder. In New York suddenly they were told to be experimental. That doesn't come about just because you're told. And you can't be experimental unless you're allowed to be. All my work with teachers has led me to respect them. Oh, I won't say one hundred percent, but a higher average than in most groups. They are conscientious and they're very, very eager to improve. And they love children.

I feel that there is real progress. I feel that the thing which is blocking us now is the administration of the schools.

WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Prescott: This morning we are going to talk about the books you have written. A few of them are on the table between us, and we will talk about each one briefly as we leaf through it. You early decided to write the material for your own teaching, didn't you?

Mitchell: Yes, but I don't know that that is really the way I approached it. I arrived in New York with a very great interest in language. I think I arrived in the world with that interest. I had taught versification to graduate students in the University of California. I was much intrigued by children's language, and began to take records when I had children of my own, and I also took very full records of language, first in the nursery school, and later in the elementary schools. And when I began to teach, I kept these records as accurately as I could; and I'll never forget the excitement--because it is exciting when you make a discovery in things you've been familiar with and not understood at all before --when I found out that if they weren't always being corrected on grammar or promunciation, children naturally used the very elements that I had taught in the analysis of writing verse. And these elements were rhyme, rhythm, and pattern or design. And I also found that none of the stories for children that were being written nowadays really tried to do that. Subject matter which touched the children's lives was not being written in rhythm, or in a rhythmic pattern.

The first thing that I wrote in this form

Mitchell: was Here and Now Story Book. I was accused of not appreciating the children's classics such as King Arthur tales and Mother Goose. Now, that was never, never true. My claim was that fantasy is a child's natural way of thinking, and that you should not give really historic material until the child has a grasp of what is fantasy and what is reality. Because he doesn't distinguish; he can't distinguish; so I felt that something like the King Arthur legends should wait until there was some comprehension of the background in which King Arthur lived.

To me, the classics, including Mother Goose, have lived as classics just because they have the rhythms and design. The whole language is put into pattern. And I thought, well, why not try to put the familiar, every-day life of little children into pattern? To bring to them their own familiar experiences, things they naturally love and re-create in fantasy of their own. "Me" is so dominant with little children. So I began to dig into my records with this in mind, and then, with the courage I'm not sure I could summon now, I wrote the stories around the content that the children had given me in their own free language.

Prescott: And that accounts for such interesting titles as Pedro's Feet, which deals with a little dog, and The Farmer Tries to Sleep?

Mitchell: Yes. And I always read my stories to children to note their responses and modify the language accordingly. Also I let them act, do things they wanted to do while I was reading.

Prescott: Oh, you used dramatic play?

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Mitchell: Well, not really that, but when I read Kipling's White Seal I let the children swing to the rhythms of the two songs that the mother seal sings to her baby. One is a long, slow swing of a lullaby on the waves, and the other is a choppy, scolding song. Younger children more often respond with their muscles rather than with words. I had noticed that when I told a story about a strong horse (and of course, horses were very much in our world then), the children all straightened up. Oh, they were feeling like a horse inside! When I told a story about a kitten, they all relaxed their shoulders. Some of them even folded their arms over as if they were holding a kitten. So I thought that this was a part of the way they appreciated, really identified with, the characters and the situation. So I encouraged such muscle responses and I think I was right. I still think I was right. Children used their bodies spontaneously, and what children do spontaneously is usually right for them. And I had discovered some simple ways to use memories of muscular experiences to supplement visual description even before I left California. I had taken my niece, who was nearly four, on a walk up the Berkeley hill on which she lived. The next day I tried to make her recall this walk. I spoke of my adult memories of houses we passed and the view of the bay. Her face remained blank. Suddenly it lighted up. "Oh!" she said, "You mean the place where the legs ache!" Her memories.

I remember telling a story of a child who had to cross the street under the elevated on the way to school. I told it to eight four-year-olds who did this every school day. I spoke of

Mitchell: the train approaching on the elevated track. All the children were afraid the child would be run over until I said, "And the child threw back his head and looked up, and there was the great train coming." Then they understood. They think "up" in the back of their necks. That is what I call "direct language." If you put what a child has to do in order to perceive, he is with you. Otherwise, you lose him.

Prescott: Isn't that interesting!

I was fascinated by these little things I read in Here and Now Story Book, how Marni gets dressed in the morning, for instance.

Mitchell: Well, that particular story originated to ease the actual chore of getting a wriggling child dressed. I read simple stories like that to groups of young children partly to just ease boring situations. They'll go right along doing things just as long as you keep up a flow of rhythmic language.

Prescott: And you were teaching your daughter Marni to dress herself. And about the hair: "Brush it so, brush it slow, brush it here and brush it there, and brush it all over your dear little head."

Mitchell: Well, she thought it was funny when I did that. It made the hated brushing of her hair into a gay experience.

That book has a long introduction about language, which wasn't changed at all when it was reprinted, except for a footnote about fantasy. I thought it stood up just as it was.

Prescott: This introduction to Here and Now really summarizes your thinking in the field of language for young children.

Mitchell: Yes, and I think it was one of the best things I ever did.

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Prescott: This other book which I have in my hand is called Horses Now and Long Ago. That is also an early publication.

Mitchell: Yes, I was already in the geography stage then.

Prescott: You were doing research to fit into your teaching of geography.

Mitchell: I found that interest in the horse was a distinct epoch with my own children and their playmates. I never knew a child who was exposed to horses who didn't adore them at some time. To get up on a horse is really a great experience. Of course I took all the school children to see the stables, and in those days there were blacksmiths, too, you know. And I found that interest in horses provided means of getting children to identify with long ago and far away.

Prescott: Yes, I notice that you end up in the research on the three-toed horse.

Mitchell: Yes. I began with the present and went back, because I thought that that was normal for children. I alternate exposition about a horse in a special period of history with a story that illustrates it. I think that the fault in that book is that the exposition part is older than the stories. I don't think that they match. I think that the stories stand by themselves, and are much younger. I don't know whether the stories are too young, or the exposition is too old; but I don't think that they quite match in age interest.

Prescott: What age group was this planned for?

Mitchell: Nine and ten; about the fourth and fifth grades.

Prescott: These horse stories were written at the time you were interested in map work, weren't they?

Mitchell: Yes, I had already begun what was later called

Mitchell: "social studies." I had written North America with the same general pattern of alternating expository material with stories. This is out-of-date now, and is out of print. So many things have happened since it was published. Just think what has been added to the picture of our United States since then.

Prescott: I opened the book to one little poem which is called "Who Will Eat the Corn Crop," which seems rather current.

Mitchell: Yes, of course there are some of them that are current. But others would have to be brought up-to-date.

Prescott: This publication date was 1931. The illustrations are perfectly delightful. Tell me something about Kurt Weise, the illustrator.

Mitchell: He was one illustrator who really studied the text. He's a writer himself as well as an illustrator; he has lived in the Orient a good deal, and has written stories about China for children. He was a brilliant, charming man, and he was devoted to children. If a child in the room was a bother, he'd just draw the most wonderful animal and give it to him.

Prescott: Well, I noticed this one of the cows on the grassy plain. What a nice thing!

Mitchell: Yes. He worked very closely with me. It was a wonderful privilege, because so many artists just grab the book and do it all wrong.

Prescott: Hendrik Van Loon did some illustrating for you, didn't he?

Mitchell: Yes. He did the first Here and Now book. And he never read the text at all. He hadn't thought it necessary. He just opened the book, and if he

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Mitchell: found something he wanted to do, he would do it. He was a geographer, and I admired him very much. But he was, oh, he was just a law unto himself! The author had no rights at all.

Prescott: Now this 1940 publication, My Country 'Tis of Thee marches across the United States, doesn't it?

Mitchell: That was an effort to explain to adults the need of conservation. This was a gloomy period, and the book is dated both emotionally and factually. It was written at the time when everybody, including Stuart Chase, an old friend of ours, said that the oil was all going to give out, and gave absolute proof that there could never be any more. We have since found lots of oil where they said oil couldn't be found. The world has opened up so. I think that was a good book, and I did it partly for teachers, because teachers seemed to have no idea of regions. History and geography were both taught within the political boundaries of states. States and their boundaries, boundaries and more boundaries, that's all they taught. The curriculum was made up by states. There was nothing on regions at all.

When I taught the children nine or older, I would have amusing interpretations on my big maps resulting from this lack of knowledge of regions. Suppose we were going to discuss the effects of a big storm in the Rockies. I would ask a child to trace where the rain would run from a particular spot. Of course most of it went down the Mississippi, which flowed south. When it ran into the Red River, and the child

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Mitchell: had to start north with his finger, then he would say, "I'm wrong. I'm going to get into Canada." You see, the political boundary was given first. That was a thing that was entirely unreal to them. Absolutely unreal. I remember a child who was trying to trace a route across the continent on a horse, and I said, "Now here is a state boundary, what are you going to do?" And she said, "Oh, my horse is a fine jumper!" She thought it was something visible. She wasn't old enough to understand the abstract idea that had been given her.

Prescott: I like your idea of teaching geography and history in conjunction with river systems, because they're all so interrelated. Our Country was meant for students of the third grade.

Mitchell: Yes, that was one of the social study textbooks called This Growing World that we were doing in the Bank Street Writers' Laboratory. Margaret Wise Brown, a member then, and Mary Phelps. Heath & Co. were the publishers. We were supposed to do six grades. We published the first three grades, but I got so angry that we never finished the last three. This was too bad as they were very good ones. The fourth grade one, for instance, was a very simple explanation of how the earth and life on earth developed, once more written with stories of the work of people or animals in different regions, followed by an explanatory section. It was called The Earth and Its Homes. In that, for instance, the publishers asked me if I couldn't modify the part dealing with the age of the earth. They said, "You make the earth seem so very old. We never could sell this in Tennessee." [Laughter] Well, it isn't funny, you know; it isn't funny.

Mitchell: The book for sixth grade which was The Americas, North and South was never published. (I think that's the best piece of writing I ever did.) We were told that they wanted us to take up controversial subjects, but we were not allowed to mention Negroes in the United States, as most of their sales were in the South. This is what I mean by political influence. They would say, "Now, we want you to get something good in each book about Texas. We make more out of our textbooks there because that is one of the places, like California, where the state adopts the text." One of the things I've always wanted to write was Alibi Baby on the Treetop. I thought of the title a long while ago, and I've never written it and now I probably never shall. One of the alibiers would be publishers. I published with eight different publishers; not all were alibiers.

Prescott: Your writing falls into two groups, one presenting material for children and the other for teachers, such as the reports of your experiments as are contained in Our Children and Our Schools. This is a recent publication, isn't it?

Mitchell: Relatively recent. It was published in 1955, and it was all done from records kept by the staff at the Bank Street workshop. Mine was among them. I don't suppose I used a twentieth of what we had.

As I grew older I didn't teach children as much. I taught the students preparing to be teachers at Bank Street College. When we started our workshop in public schools, I was chairman

Mitchell: for the first years. I used the same material, but prepared it for a different audience. I had a good deal of help from Charlotte Windsor and Agnes Snyder.

Prescott: As I read the book I was impressed with how clearly you managed to put down the research techniques in this very difficult field. The people at the school of education assure me that they use it quite extensively as a reference book.

Mitchell: Well, I think techniques are important. And I wanted to show the way teachers respond, just as do children, if you can get them to identify with a situation. And I wanted to show the growth of confidence that went on there. The reason so many people fail is that they never acquire confidence. Almost always, when we first went into a public school, they thought we were there for something. "What are you going to get out of this?" I remember one of the superintendents asked me what Bank Street was getting out of the workshop.

Prescott: Your most recent publication is Two Lives, the story of Mr. Mitchell's and your life?

Mitchell: Yes, that's my last publication except for a few stories and introductions written for Bank Steet anthologies for children. Two Lives was written entirely after Mr. Mitchell died. I was encouraged by his friends to write that. Particularly by the staff of the National Bureau of Economic Research with whom he worked as director of research. They were very anxious to have a record of something besides his scientific work. It was a terribly difficult book to write, not only emotionally, but because there was a tremendous amount of material from which to select. I wrote that, and at the same time put all his files in order and sent

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Mitchell: up the manuscript material to Columbia. A good deal of his material is still at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Prescott: The task of integrating two lives as busy and full as yours and Mr. Mitchell's was a momentous task, really.

Mitchell: Yes, and the most difficult task was that of deciding what was personal and what was private material.

Prescott: How did your children receive the book?

Mitchell: Well, I had four of them and they received it four different ways. Two of them helped me a great deal. They read all their father's manuscripts that I had selected as possibilities for the book, and then read my manuscript, all that I had written.

Prescott: I think one question that everyone would appreciate your answering is this: How did you ever find time to write twenty-six publications?

Mitchell: Well, that number includes publications of which I was a co-author, and also sometimes, as in the case of the anthologies, I was editor as well as contributor. I don't know how I ever did find the time. I know that when the babies were little and I had to get up very early to care for them, I always wrote an hour when I went back to bed before breakfast. That is still one of my habits. And I never went anywhere without a pencil and a piece of paper. I was so afraid I might have a good idea and not remember it until I got home! It is literally true that I wrote a great deal of Here and Now on a Fifth Avenue bus.

Prescott: Of course your husband was interested in writing all of the time.

Mitchell: Yes, and in the summers I wrote when I wasn't

Mitchell: teaching. Of course, I had the children and they always had guests. I think the average number of children, including our four, staying with us in our Vermont summer home would be seven. But I don't know...I learned to never waste a moment. And I've always liked to write. It has always been a form of release or relaxation, so it didn't seem a chore, but rather something I very much enjoyed doing.

WIFE AND MOTHER

Prescott: This morning let's talk about your own immediate family, Mrs. Mitchell.

Mitchell: All right, in so far as I can.

Prescott: And I think that we'll think of this as just a supplement to Two Lives and not a reproduction of the story of your marriage and your professional life which you tell so effectively in your autobiography. You met your husband, when?

Mitchell: I met him while I was at Radcliffe; I met him at my sister's house. She had married Adolph Miller, who was then at the University of Chicago, one of the original faculty members. And I met him, but that was about all.

Prescott: And he was just a young student at Chicago University at this time?

Mitchell: When I met him he was a fellow; it was just before he got his Ph.D.

Prescott: Did he enter with the first class at the University?

Mitchell: He entered with the first class, and the two big professional influences in his life were teachers of his; one was John Dewey and the other was Thorstein Veblen.

Prescott: And they were there at the university in the very beginning?

Mitchell: Yes, they were a part of that extraordinary first faculty that was gathered by the abnormally bright young President Harper, who invented the scheme of big salaries.

Prescott: What do you suppose they paid these faculty members?

Mitchell: I think the first ten thousand salary that had ever been given to a university man in the United States was paid by President Harper.

Prescott: Do you know to whom he paid it?

Mitchell: No, I don't know. Anybody he wanted he got. He was a very remarkable person, as shrewd a politician as ever was in a university, I think. He invented the method of counting some students twice in order to make the university seem larger than it was, because bigness seemed to be a desirable goal in the United States in general, but particularly in Chicago. He established four quarters, so that students who worked right through the four quarters could get their degree in three years. But they were counted both as regular winter students and also as summer students. It was ingenious. My husband called those one of his "delicate fancies."

Prescott: And you next met your husband when you came to Berkeley?

Mitchell: When I came to Berkeley I met him then quite naturally, as he had been called to Berkeley by my brother-in-law, Adolph Miller, who had recently been appointed to organize a faculty of economics, as completely distinguished from political science.

Prescott: That break came that early?

Mitchell: That break came, and came through President Wheeler's desire. He and Adolph Miller had been on the faculty together at Cornell. Adolph Miller called my husband, who had been a student of his in Chicago, to be part of the new economics faculty.

Prescott: Shall we call your husband Dr. Mitchell or Mr. Mitchell or--

Mitchell: Well, I always called him Robin.

Prescott: Explain why you called him Robin.

Mitchell: You know in those days you wouldn't think of calling a person by his first name unless you were

Mitchell: at least engaged to the man. And when we went to the mountains together the summer of 1911, we were still saying "Mr. Mitchell" and "Miss Sprague." It seemed too formal, so I invented the name Robin, partly because he was such an outdoor personality and because he always had very, very pink cheeks. His mother called him "Bonnie" for the same reason. And I didn't like his real name; Wesley seemed so terribly grim to me and Clair seemed over sweet, so I just invented Robin.

Prescott: What did he call you?

Mitchell: He called me "Alta" after Alta Peak for a while, but that didn't last.

Prescott: You speak of hiking together. You tell very interestingly of a trip to Tamalpais.

Mitchell: Yes. People walked in those days. That was just a part of our regular trails. To get to Tamalpais in those days you had to take the two ferries across the bay; one from Berkeley to San Francisco, and then one across to Sausalito. There were no bridges in those days.

Presoott: You write also of sharing the poetry and the social occasions.

Mitchell: Yes, I organized a little poetry circle composed of the Howards, and the Gregorys and the Walter Harts, the Noyeses--several people and Robin. I don't remember how often we met; whether it was every week or every two weeks. You know Berkeley was very social in those days. And we met for supper, and of course none of us had maids, so it was a great rivalry to invent a supper that you could serve to twelve

Mitchell: people and still continue a part of the conversation. But we loved those suppers. One person took responsibility for one night and read whatever he wanted to and then we had the discussion afterwards. So we ranged.

Prescott: And this was confined to University people only, or did you bring in people who belonged to the town?

Mitchell: The Gregorys were from the town, but they didn't join us until very late. All my friends were from the University; I really knew practically nobody else excepting the Warren Gregorys who were not part of the faculty.

Prescott: Then you were married in 1912.

Mitchell: On May 8, 1912, in Dr. Worcester's little Swedenborgian church in San Francisco. He was a friend of both Robin's and mine.

Prescott: And you went, almost immediately, for a honeymoon in Europe?

Mitchell: Yes, we took almost a year off. Robin had finished his great book Business Cycles, but the proofs had still to be read and there were pages and pages and pages of figures. He kept receiving proofs all the time that we were abroad and I helped him proofread the text. I also helped him on the other part. But he used to be afraid that I wasn't reading the figures accurately, so sometimes he would read them wrong to me to see if I also read them wrong.

Prescott: Then, when you returned from Europe neither of you had a position?

Mitchell: Yes, both of us had resigned, and resigned independently. Robin felt that for an economist he must have the experience of New York. And I had resigned several years before and was just

Mitchell: waiting until it seemed the right time to leave.

Prescott: Had he resigned to go to New York because of the publishing possibilities there?

Mitchell: No, because of the business possibilities, to watch at first hand what was going on in the economic world. I suppose for such observation New York is the best place. He had never lived in a metropolis except in Chicago. But he felt that in Berkeley he was dealing with materials and not with the men who make the materials, and he always was very anxious to understand the human whys that were beyond the practical business world that he was trying to understand.

Prescott: Your immediate family consists of four children, doesn't it?

Mitchell: Four children.

Prescott: Would you tell us something of what they are doing?

Mitchell: John McClellan Mitchell is the oldest. He is an economist at Ebasco. It is an engineering firm primarily, and he is the economist for the engineers. He has three boys. Our second son is Sprague Mitchell; he is in the publicity department of a publishing firm. He has three girls, the oldest two being twins. Then came our only daughter, Marni. She never abandoned her love of horses. And she taught riding for a good many years at a riding school in Colorado Springs. Then she went into breeding horses and exhibiting them and selling them as a regular business. She was supposed to be the great woman jumper of the Middle West, but she always kept her amateur standing. She died September 1958. She never married. She lived in Kansas City; she had a little

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Mitchell: shack there, not much more than that. She spent a good deal of time at Stamford, particularly in the later years when we moved out to Stamford from New York.

Prescott: Did you have horses there; is that where her interest started?

Mitchell: No, we didn't have horses there, but we did have them in our summer home in Vermont. And even as a child she used to manage gymkhanas in our meadow, in which both the farmers and the summer people took part. The proceeds were used to start a hospital in Greensboro.

Then I have a third son, Arnold, who is with the Stanford Research Institute. He is the technical editor and is responsible for the reports that go out from the research center; that is, he is responsible for having them made intelligible to the laymen for whom they are written.

Prescott: And he lives quite close to you here.

Mitchell: He does, and he has four children.

Prescott: So you have ten grandchildren?

Mitchell: Ten grandchildren.

Prescott: In your work at the Bank Street College did you use your own children as experimental subjects?

Mitchell: Well,[laughter] I can't say I used them as experimental subjects; that sounds a little too academic. But I kept very full records both of the children in the school where I was teaching and in other schools where I went just to make records, and of my own children. I kept records of their language very, very fully. I early became intrigued by the way children spontaneously used the same elements that I thought grownups used in what we call poetry. And I had

Mitchell: thousands of records of the younger ages.

Prescott: The schedule for the family must have been an intricate thing to work out.

Mitchell: Yes, because, well, for instance, each of my children had an instrument to play. Marni played the violin; Sprague, the cello; Arnold, the clarinet; Jack changed to the viola so we could have a real quartet; and I played the piano. Well, that meant attending four lessons a week until they were old enough to go by themselves, and then it meant practicing with them.

Prescott: Your home was always with your school, wasn't it? I mean in the same building.

Mitchell: Yes, it was. I don't think I could have done it otherwise, particularly when I was nursing babies, as we did in those days.

Prescott: Your husband must have been very interested in your own professional life to permit the sort of freedom which you would need to pursue something that required as much of you as your research did.

Mitchell: Yes, but you have used a word that I don't think ever came into his vocabulary or to his mind, and that is the word "permit." At any time he would have been a remarkable person, I think; but in those days it was especially remarkable that he considered me a human being with individual interests and capabilities.

Prescott: He encouraged you?

Mitchell: More than that. He also took part in some of my work, which was technically very helpful in working out records, behavior records and how to get them into order to be compared with numerical numbers.

Prescott: He was one of the three who originated the idea of Bank Street College?

Mitchell: Yes. Or, as it was called then, the Bureau of Educational Experiments.

Prescott: It is such a long title.

Mitchell: Yes, he called it "polysyllabic intimidation." And he was always a member of the board of trustees, and for a time the treasurer.

Prescott: And then finally when you incorporated, he stayed close to the organization.

Mitchell: Yes, he always took an active part and he always gave at least one yearly talk to the students in some regular course,and another one at our house. All the Bank Street students who were being educated to be teachers were college graduates. We always had them for one supper at our house and then he gave them a talk. And very, very often, when there was some particular economic national crisis, he would come over and talk to the students.

Prescott: Your responsibilities as the wife of a noted economist must have brought some social responsibilities. Did you entertain a lot?

Mitchell: "Entertain" is too pompous a word; there were people flowing in and out all the time. He used his own study as his office for visitors, and there were streams of them. And usually that meant some meal. I never took very much part in any of the social things at Columbia; it never seemed necessary. I saw much more of his colleagues at the National Bureau of Economic Research. I knew them as people. And as far as Columbia is concerned, he held some of his graduate seminars at home. Sometimes he held them there all the year, and then I usually came and listened and always gave them beer and sandwiches at the end. But I wouldn't say that I had heavy social

Mitchell: responsibilities. I think that my colleagues were at the house quite as much as his.

Prescott: Your family interests sound so fascinating; you mentioned the music; and finding a weekend home outside the city. All of you were terribly interested in the out-of-doors. What other things did you do together?

Mitchell: For a time, Robin did carpentry with the City and Country School children after schooltime. And, of course, that included our children; they all went there. He was really a master craftsman, and we had a big shop at our summer place where he and the children worked together.

Prescott: Had he learned carpentry as a boy?

Mitchell: Yes, he learned it working with his Great Uncle Seeley who had a wood working shop. Robin had always liked to work with his hands, doing anything with his hands he loved. But in carpentry he was also a real designer. He'd work and work and draw and redraw his design. Was this curve right? Was that curve right? And practically all the furniture that we had in Greensboro, he made. And the lamps he made. Now that became a great family occupation. Because he trained the children. He built each child a carpenter's bench of the appropriate size.

HERE AND NOW

Prescott: Mrs. Mitchell, at what age did you retire from active participation at Bank Street College?

Mitchell: I was seventy-eight the day after I retired.

Prescott: Well, that's a great deal older than the usual retirement age. And you retired from choice?

Mitchell: Oh, yes. And I was very active in trying to find my successor.

Prescott: You've already told us why your title was changed from "chairman" to "acting president."

Mitchell: Yes, but at the very end the board of trustees insisted that I take the title of president so that I could be called "emeritus," which is a halo that I have valued very much.

Prescott: Did you come west directly after your retirement?

Mitchell: When I retired I told our new president that I would stay one year to be available for consultation because of my long experience. But I was really very nervous about the possibility of my getting in his way. I have seen a good many professional people retire and not step out. So I decided that it was best for me to remove myself. I did live in Stamford, Connecticut entirely, and commuting was more or less difficult; but I felt that it would be safer for me to commute from Stamford for a brief time rather than make my permanent home there.

Prescott: Many of the people who retire are very much concerned with financial worries. This isn't true in your case, is it?

Mitchell: No, I have never needed to worry about money. My fear

Mitchell: had been that I would not be accepted as a worker, that I would be considered a "patron." It was really a kind of fetish with me. The word "patron" just made me bristle.

Prescott: You health is good, too, isn't it?

Mitchell: Yes, on the whole. I did have tuberculosis, but they said long after that it had ceased to be active, which probably accounts for a good many of my attacks of pneumonia. I've had pneumonia four times.

Prescott: Do you carry medical insurance now?

Mitchell: No, I have never carried medical insurance.

Prescott: How do you feel about the federal government providing medical care to the retired?

Mitchell: Oh, I think it's very important, very important.

Prescott: Are medical costs quite a concern to you?

Mitchell: Well, I'm still awfully well, you know. My medicines cost more than my doctors.

Prescott: I was much impressed with the fact that you just had your second major dental work since we have started these interviews.

Mitchell: Yes, I never lost a tooth until I was eighty-one. And I think that's one of the things that I call my luck. We're always proud of the things we're not responsible for. [Laughter]

Prescott: Have your professional interests made it easier for you to make the transition from an active to a less active life?

Mitchell: Well, I haven't carried over much of my really professional life as distinct from my personal life. Children dominated both. And I came to feel as I grew really old--I don't know, people are always saying "you are as old as you feel," --that's nonsense. I think you are as old as you are allowed to be in many ways. So many

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Mitchell: families decide that at a certain age you must be taken care of. And that means that you must not do anything that they don't approve of. Now my family has been wonderful. They are available at any moment, and they never hover over me with this apprehensive affection which drives a person crazy who wants to be independent and who is happy only when independent. You see, I can still take complete care of myself. Since you were here last I haven't had one stroke of work done by any one else, either in the house or in the garden.

Prescott: And look at these shining windows!

Mitchell: Yes, I washed a few of them yesterday. Now that's unusual, but I think it's not as unusual as it would be if more older people had both the financial ability to do for themselves and families who wanted them to, and who cared more about having them happy than they did keeping them alive.

Prescott: It gives you a great deal of satisfaction, both physically and mentally, to be able to do these things, doesn't it?

Mitchell: Well, it lets me be myself, and I feel strongly that it is a great social problem to have old people live so long. The middle generation has both the children and older people to support, and there is no question in my mind which is the more important group. But I feel that as long as old people aren't a menace to others, they should not be denied as much independence as possible.

Prescott: You have mentioned several times that you are doing things which you have wanted to do all

Prescott: your life, but haven't had time for.

Mitchell: Some people have been denied things for financial reasons. I have never been denied on that ground, but I was denied, as a child, all the art expressions that I think are very deep in me. I was never allowed to choose the color of a dress because I was told I wasn't old enough. My father was really upset if he found that I had written anything. When I was seven and eight I wrote poems by the yard, but my terror in life was that he would find them. I would have actually been disciplined.

Prescott: And now you find a great release in writing?

Mitchell: I've certainly written during all my mature life. I have written things for what I would perhaps call service; things that I thought were right for children or right for teachers. Now I am writing what I want to write for myself. I don't think that anything I write will ever be published; I have no audience that I feel dutiful toward. And I'm having a grand time. I'm enjoying it. This is what I mean by that expression which has been used by me quite often of "becoming more so." I think I am more like my real self now than I ever was before. I think I have just outgrown inappropriate inhibitions; some that were laid upon me early and others that I laid upon myself.

Prescott: And responsibilities toward your family placed inhibitions on you.

Mitchell: They always do; they should. I don't mean that there should be no inhibitions, but I mean the inappropriate inhibitions. It is certainly inappropriate to discipline a child for wearing a red ribbon if she likes red. Well, I was

Mitchell: disciplined for that. It's also inappropriate to make a child confess, and make her feel really and truly guilty because she has written something that to her was precious when she was eight years old. Those are the inhibitions that I mean that I have now escaped from. I was always told I mustn't waste a moment of my time and I now have got rid of that inhibition, too, and I can stand and look at a fuchsia as long as I want to and marvel at the color and the design. And I can love my big tree. Even in my seventies I didn't permit myself to "waste time" in such pleasures--not if they side-tracked me from doing good somewhere.

Prescott: This is the heavy weight of Puritanism which has followed many of your generation.

Mitchell: That is the only thing that I think I have a grievance about. Yet, I now recognize my father was simply a product of his generation, as I am of mine. I have been lucky in many, many ways, and I think I've had a wonderful life and I'm having a wonderful life now.

Prescott: One certainly doesn't doubt that as you sit here in a beautiful purple dress, looking so vibrant and alert. We're very interested in the social relationships which you are now finding the most satisfying. Do you prefer association with groups your own age, or with the younger age groups?

Mitchell: I like them both. I like people; I have always liked people. I can hardly remember any time in my life being bored by anybody. Now that seems queer, but when people don't say interesting things, I wonder why. I wonder if they would

Mitchell: have been more creative and experimental in their thinking if they had had a different upbringing, or if they were just born different. I don't meet many old people excepting my old friends, and I have very few of them left now. Mrs. John Galen Howard, who is now ninety-six, and who came around in the car to see me the day before yesterday, I loved being with.

Prescott: Do you take part in any organized club activity?

Mitchell: No.

Prescott: Did you ever?

Mitchell: Not very much. I did when I first went to New York and I felt I ought to know people. I was an active member when the Women's City Club was founded because it combined school and lay people; and I used to belong to the University Women's Club. But clubs in general I've never seemed to need.

Prescott: Do you maintain any church association?

Mitchell: No.

Prescott: Your professional groups we discussed before. They never really held a great deal of interest for you, did they?

Mitchell: No. I belonged to everything and I talked. I talked, and I love to talk, and I talked to a wide range of people and so did Robin. Robin talked to church people; he talked to the young society women who were organized to support some undertaking for children; we both did that. But it was a part of this thing that had a taint to it for him; he called it "popular" service instead of "public" service.

Prescott: Do you attend any of the senior citizens activities?

Mitchell: No, I never have. I have a friend in the East,

Mitchell: Ruth Andrus, who was at the head of one of these--what do you call them--geriatrics experiments. I used to go up there quite often and talk with her and talk with old people there. That was really quite a wonderful experiment. But I did that because I knew Ruth Andrus so well. She's quite a distinguished person. For years she was the head of the education of the younger children, nursery and grades one, two and three, in Albany. For many years she was a member of our Bank Street board of trustees; she's really a distinguished person. I don't know where she is now. Do I want to see old people? I want to see my generation; I'd like immensely to go on and see my classmates. We have our sixtieth anniversary of our graduation at Radcliffe this June. But I am just as interested in my son's young friends. I like people and I like them in all their stages. That doesn't mean I don't get mad. I get scandalously mad at people sometimes.

Prescott: What entertainment do you find most diverting? You don't have television?

Mitchell: I don't have television because I don't find much in television that I want. I'd rather use my eyes for reading. I do listen a great deal to KPFA which I find a wonderful resource. It keeps me up with the things that are happening in the world much better than I could in any other way, and it gives me a return to music which is the only thing I lost when I married Robin. He was not musical; he was almost tone deaf. And I let my music slip excepting for the children. And I read. I would rather read than look at television.

Prescott: What about your poetry and your art?

Mitchell: Well, I gave those up long ago. As a young woman, music, poetry and art were my main interests, and when they were combined as they were in Blake, William Blake, I often made a collection of both. I had everything Blake had ever written, and I had an original Job, and I had, I think, six or seven of his sketches. I had the replica of Songs of Innocence and Experience. At an old book store in London they let me come and copy his original paintings onto my replica. I did all kinds of things like that.

Prescott: Yes, I remember even early, when you went across with the Palmers, you were doing copying.

Mitchell: Yes, and I also worked with Mr. Palmer on his fully annotated poems of George Herbert. That was after Mrs. Palmer died.

I love beautiful things, you see. I give them all away. I don't want them to be unused. I had a complete collection of Arundel prints. I gave them to a high school in New York.

Prescott: It is quite evident that you have no difficulty keeping yourself occupied, but for so many people of yourage that isn't true, and they combine and live in communities for senior citizens. Do you have any reaction toward communities so planned?

Mitchell: Oh, I think they can be wonderful. Now I am both financially and physically equal, still, to taking care of myself completely and I love it. And I want to do that as long as I can. But when I can't do that, I shall move to an apartment house for the aged that is to be built here in Palo Alto. I have already made my reservation. It is distinctly my plan and my children are well

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Mitchell: aware of it.

Prescott: Would you like that community segregated and apart from normal community activities?

Mitchell: As far as I'm concerned, I would like to move to a home which will give me the three things that I would most like to have: first, I shall have easy access to living things, both trees and garden; second, I shall have a wide view and can live with what I call the earth forces that mean more and more to me--storms and changing clouds and sunrise. And third, I shall be near one of my sons, his wife and four children, who can easily drop in to see me, but need not worry about my care. Lots of people would want to be near shopping centers; it doesn't make any difference to me. But they are individuals. And that's what I mean; I think that old people can't be lumped together as similar any more than you can say all mothers are alike, or all teachers are alike. My own feeling that has come to me now is that the way to manage this new problem of having old people live so much longer is to find the things that they have missed, that they have wanted to do all their lives and have been denied. It might be just learning something, not merely busy-work, but learning something. I knew an old lady who started to learn Russian. She had wanted all her life to learn Russian. All right, but you can't lay down general rules. People are not more alike, in fact I think they are more different, as they grow older.

Prescott: Well, that's logical because they are experienced.

Mitchell: And if you could find out what each one wanted,

Mitchell: life would become gay again.

Prescott: And then help them on to acquiring it. Think what a contribution they would make to society, too.

Mitchell: One worry that is a problem to most old people is that of independent income. Most old people worry about being a burden. Unless they enjoy being professional invalids. I had a sister who enjoyed that, and she wanted to live. She said all she asked of life was to be alive, which seems to me a terrible way to feel.

Prescott: Yes, it is. Do you feel that you have arrived at a greater degree of self-acceptance?

Mitchell: Oh yes. Oh, there is absolutely no question about it. Of course, I was brought up to think that it was a sin to accept yourself. But I married; Robin accepted me, and I learned to accept myself to a very large degree. When he died, I lost my self-confidence again, lost it for quite a number of years. It was rather shocking to me that I reverted so, but I have come back and I really rather like myself now. [Laughter] That is a thing I never in the world would have expected--to enjoy myself. [Laughter] I carry on conversations with myself--ask myself questions--

Presoott: And you like the answers to the questions?

Mitchell: Yes.

Prescott: Self-conversation. Well, I can see that. You can control both ends and that would be a help. [Laughter] Retiring as late as you did, you didn't find any difficulty in relinquishing leadership, which many retired people do?

Mitchell: Oh, I know they do. I have seen that. I did regret that I was no longer capable of doing my old job, but I never regretted giving it up.

Mitchell: There is a distinction there.

Prescott: Yes, and you are still being used as an elder statesman in your field.

Mitchell: Yes, in a way.

Prescott: Which is gratifying.

Mitchell: It is gratifying, but the world changes too fast. The problems of the world and the educational world now are changing too quickly for me to keep up.

Presoott: One almost has to be an active participant.

Mitchell: You have to be a participant. That I am not now.

Presoott: But you're an optimist.

Mitchell: Yes, I'm an optimist. At least, most of the time!

Presoott: About youth?

Mitchell: Yes, very distinctly about youth. Distinctly about youth. I feel sorry, terribly sorry for youth.

Prescott: In what respect?

Mitchell: I think they've had such a disturbed life, such a disturbed world to grow up in; everything has been disturbed and changes have come so fast that very few people have been able to change enough, fast enough to give the youth a chance.

Presoott: For a feeling of stability.

Mitchell: For a feeling of stability.

And I think that we're in the worst mess we have ever been in. We are not really mature, yet we are supposed to be a leader of the world. And so few adults recognize that the world does not stop changing and that we must change with it.

Prescott: You say you are very optimistic about the youth of the country...do you feel the same way about education?

Mitchell: Yes. All these things have to be modified; I

Mitchell: feel that all the real turbulence there is now about education is good. When I first began, I think there was either apathy or smugness. I don't think we've arrived yet by any manner of means, but I think that we are recognizing that we have a problem that we have not successfully met. That's a first step forward and I can't help believing that some time we'll be smart enough to do what's right with children. [Laughter] Children seem to me the great chance because they all come fresh again.

Prescott: And they are all so basic to what we're going to become as a nation.

Mitchell: Absolutely. They all appear just as if nobody had ever been abused. So that each generation has a brand new chance. That keeps me optimistic. That isn't true about lots of things.

Prescott: No, I can see why. Of course, the emphasis on education and its searching for its own path at the present time is closely tied to the fact that we've had a competitor on the national scene which seems to have a little different approach.

Mitchell: We have always had children. To me, it seems humiliating that we needed a foreign competitor to stimulate much interest in our children's education.

Prescott: Yes, but I don't think we've ever become frightened by them before, have we?

Mitchell: "Frightened," that's the word, I think. I think fear cramps one's style more than anything else in the world because it leads to hate. In thinking about the hate that dominates the world today, a phrase which of course is a paraphrase of Franklin Roosevelt's phrase about fear, came into my mind. It is as near as I can come to

Mitchell: my present credo: "There is nothing to hate but hate."

Prescott: Have your political views become more liberal or more conservative as you've grown older, Mrs. Mitchell?

Mitchell: Well, I don't know. I've always been fairly liberal. I don't know just how I got that way.

Prescott: It was part of your revolt, don't you think?

Mitchell: Probably. The first presidential vote that I had I cast for Debs when he was in prison. I'm not sure I wouldn't do that now if we had a Debs. But I hate to cast a protest vote. Usually I'm a Democrat.

Prescott: Did you vote for Al Smith in '28?

Mitchell: Let's see. Al Smith was defeated by Hoover. Yes, I voted for Al Smith.

Prescott: There was a religious issue there as there is at present, you know, and that's why I asked the question.

Mitchell: Yes, I certainly do know.

Just yesterday I became a California citizen, so now I'm trying to equip myself to tackle the water problem of California, which is one of my deepest interests.

Prescott: When you first came to California, water wasn't then the problem it is now?

Mitchell: It was a much worse problem in one sense. Because where I lived in Sierra Madre in the foothills before any reservoirs were built, we were rationed on water. I was in school during the week at Los Angeles, and time and time again I couldn't get home. The dry arroyo that I had passed over on the train in the morning on Monday was by Friday a roaring stream.

Prescott: Well, California is working very hard at its water problems. It has long been plagued with

Prescott: water problems.

Mitchell: But it's been one of my deepest interests always. It's one of the things, you know, that I call earth forces.

Prescott: Have your social values changed, do you think?

Mitchell: I don't know. They've changed in particulars, but I don't know whether they've changed basically. I think the practical situations change so much that your judgments change, but I'm not sure that your values really change. I think that I have always believed that hate was wrong and I have always believed that love was right. Now, what you mean by love changes. It widens. The world has widened so since I was a child that my values have widened, but basically I think they're still found in "man's humanity to man."

Presoott: We have talked a lot about education, and I wonder if you have any thoughts about how our education might be modified so as to better prepare the people who are going through the process now for the years of retirement.

Mitchell: Well, of course, generalizations are so general. [Laughter] I feel that if people are going to be at peace with themselves when they are old---

Presoott: Do you feel you have an inner peace?

Mitchell: I feel I have a peace that has nothing to do with the intellect. I feel that I have strained all my life for values that were scientifically sound and I have felt that feelings must be subdued. I don't feel that way now. I don't feel that understanding in the strictly intellectual sense is the whole of life. And I want to say this because it is in a new sense that I feel that I have a peace that passes, surpasses

Mitchell; understanding in the intellectual sense.

Prescott: Well, now that comes, in part, from a life that is satisfactorily lived, don't you think.

Mitchell: Oh, I don't know where it comes from, but I know that people try and try and try and they are fighting the wrong thing, the thing that shouldn't be fought. I have fought so hard not to waste a minute on play, not to waste a minute on beauty; it is wrong; it is wrong; I'm sure it's wrong. And that gets so distorted if you put it into educational terms.

Prescott: Do you think it submerges the urge to be creative?

Mitchell: I think that words--expressions--go bad on you. And I think the word "creative" has gone bad on us. Creative means anything that one wants it to, now. That isn't true. What I want is children to grow up with their own potentialities developed as far as possible. What have I said? I have said only what can be interpreted in every way imaginable.

Prescott: And that includes not only education, but all of the other avenues which go into the development of a potentially effective human being.

Mitchell: Sure, sure.

Prescott: I liked your phrase which you used in your article called "Becoming More So." The phrase was that as you grew older you actually were pretty much the same as a child, only more so.

Mitchell: That isn't completely what I meant by that expression. I often think now of the expression "second childhood," which is always thought of in the negative sense. The way Shakespeare expressed the last stage, his climax "sans everything." But there is a second childhood

Mitchell: that I have found that is positive, just as children are positive. I really and truly now find that I am more like myself, but in a different learning situation. It is still a learning situation; I think that's always satisfying. I agree, of course, that the physical limitations, of which I have comparatively few, are real and frustrating. But just as real is one's emotional life, which is not subject to the same limitations. I have found a fine new meaning to the characterization of old age as "second childhood." Like children, I am filled with wonder and take time to observe and enjoy the beauty of living things around me and the miracle of growth. And like children, I dare to express myself emotionally. My expression is in the form of writing for myself for the sheer pleasure it gives me; not, as in younger years, as a "service" to schools. These are new and learning experiences which one can indulge in freely in old age. They have brought me a sense of being a part of the vast living world, where death arises from life and life arises from death. And this feeling brings me a new kind of peace with myself.

Trans: MW
Typed: RC

APPENDIX

Citation with LL.D. Given by President Clark Kerr to Lucy Sprague Mitchell on 2 September 1958

"First dean of women at University of California, self-styled 'first such creature west of the Rockies'; sympathetic friend and wise counselor of students; far-seeing proponent of wider educational opportunities for women; leader in theory and practice of elementary instruction; founder of the Bank Street College of Education; charming author; understanding mother; devoted life partner of eminent economist, Wesley Clair Mitchell, one of our greatest professors of half a century ago."

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BOOKS BY LUCY SPRAGUE MITCHELL

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