

Shirley Nootbaar

*Shirley Nootbaar: Artist, Donor, and Longtime Member of Save Mount Diablo*

Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2021

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Shirley Nootbaar

**Abstract**

Shirley Nootbaar was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, where she was exposed to both art and nature at a young age. She attended Occidental College and met her husband Robert in 1958. They got married in 1960 and moved to Lafayette, California. She took her children on trips to Mount Diablo when they were growing up and would paint the landscape. She became involved with the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association in the 1970s later joined Save Mount Diablo in the 1980s. In this interview, Nootbaar discusses her early life, education, exposure to art, learning to paint with watercolor, meeting her husband and raising their children in the Bay Area, getting involved with Save Mount Diablo, painting the mountain range, interest in peregrine falcons, desire to preserve open space, working with Seth Adams of Save Mount Diablo, earning her fine arts degree, teaching art, and her hopes for the future of the organization.

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## **Project History**

By the early 1970s, the Bay Area was in the midst of great social and cultural change. With plans for the extension of BART into the East Bay, and suburban sprawl threatening Mount Diablo and other open spaces, Save Mount Diablo (SMD) answered a call to action. SMD was founded by Dr. Mary Bowerman and Arthur Bonwell in 1971. It became a nationally accredited land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area comprised of biologists, conservationists, hikers, cyclists, equestrians, bird watchers, artists, and people who just loved to look at and enjoy the mountain. SMD has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since its founding. However, the organization's focus on educational programs and protecting Mount Diablo's connection to its sustaining Diablo Range has grown substantially over the last few years due in part to new leadership and the growing severity of the climate crisis. As an organization, Save Mount Diablo is both an exceptional example of local land conservation efforts, as well as representative of national and international environmental activism that extends beyond the Bay Area. This oral history project began in 2021 as SMD approached its fiftieth anniversary. All of the interviews were conducted remotely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

## Interview 1: July 14, 2021

01-00:09:48

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Shirley Nootbaar on Wednesday, July 14, 2021, and this is an interview for the Save Mount Diablo Fiftieth Anniversary Oral History Project. Shirley, can you start by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:10:12

Nootbaar: I was born in Los Angeles and in middle class kind of family. My father was an electrical engineer that worked for the Department of Water and Power, and my mother was a housewife. She had a lot of talents and she had a lot of fun occasions to pass things along to me. I am now very grateful for my artistic side, which I think came from my mother. Los Angeles, of course, was very enjoyable in those days, and I had a very nice childhood. I appreciate my family.

01-00:11:16

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about some of your memories of growing up in the Los Angeles area? I think you grew up in near Inglewood and so I'm wondering if you could maybe describe what the community you grew up in look like?

01-00:11:28

Nootbaar: Well, of course, it wasn't developed as it is now, and I was able to get to open space and areas. We had a vacant lot in the back of our house while I was growing up, and I loved going out there and crawling around in the weeds. There were probably hundreds of trapdoor spiders, and I loved watching those, and I had a lot of reports in my younger school years on trapdoor spiders, so obviously, I was interested in the outdoors. Then the other wonderful part of growing up is that Los Angeles had parks, and we would visit Griffith Park, and a nearby small local park called Ladera Park. I was a Girl Scout, and we did take trips in the open space, and my family were great campers, so I was exposed to outdoor life.

01-00:12:42

Farrell: You mentioned both of your parents, can you tell me what your father's name was and maybe some of the things he was interested in when you were growing up?

01-00:12:54

Nootbaar: His name was Robert Cedric Fink, F-i-n-k. I grew up as Finky in my school years. He as an engineer—could build things—and I picked up a little bit on that; I loved his workshop. But then he was also a wonderful camper, and our camp many times, was just put up without any kind of start on the campsite, you had to just make your own, and we had some pretty nice campsites with shower. I guess it was a five-gallon tin can that would get warmed on the fire, hang it upside down, and you could get under it and get washed off, and this was a part of his engineering. Of course, we were with other family and

friends, and we had great times. But he was mainly an engineer and not into the environment, and I now hate to report how he used to pick wildflowers and give them to my mother!

401-00:14:20

Farrell: It's a nice gesture, but I understand, yeah. And what was your mother's name?

01-00:14:25

Nootbaar: Her name was Charlotte Jean Welsh. My grandmother Welsh was born in San Luis Obispo so that makes me a third-generation Californian. I'm grateful to my mother for all of her crafty kind of influence. She did leatherwork, she made jigsaw puzzles, she was a great sewer, a great embroiderer, (I didn't get that part of the art—I am a painter) and she did draw cartoons. I remember that, and I still have some of those.

01-00:15:17

Farrell: Yeah. I know that you feel like you inherited your artistic side from your mother, and I appreciate you going over some of the things you used to do. Did you ever do those crafts with your mom growing up?

01-00:15:32

Nootbaar: I never learned how—I hated sewing, it was too meticulous for me, and I tried, but I didn't like to do it. I wish I had learned to do the jigsaw puzzles. My father had a jigsaw, and I was, I guess, too young to handle something like that. But the leatherwork, I did pick up a little bit, and now people really don't do that, so there's not a convenient place to pursue that hobby or art form. She made wallets and purses and book covers. I did like to do that.

01-00:16:29

Farrell: Did your mom ever encourage you going to art classes, or what kind of role did art play? Aside from what your mom would do in the house, what kind of role did art play in your early life?

01-00:16:43

Nootbaar: Well, I think my parents were both recognizing the fact that I was creative, and so, but I probably got a lot of it from my schooling. Going through elementary, junior high, and high school, I always had opportunities to express my talents in various projects. I didn't have an art teacher until high school, but I just had that within my background, and it was encouraging.

01-00:17:27

Farrell: What kinds of art did you like to do when you were growing up? I know you're a painter now, but was the only medium you were interested in or were there others you explored?

01-00:17:36

Nootbaar: I probably first started with Crayolas and a coloring book. My mother knew that any time she wanted to keep me quiet for a while, she'd hand me a brand-new coloring book and a new box of Crayolas, so that was the start probably of any art endeavors. I would get maybe a Christmas present of some fancy



pen or something like that. I took a class in my summer of high school senior from a very prominent watercolor teacher named Rex Brandt. He was centered in Laguna Beach and taught these seminars and workshops and I think that I signed up for one of those and that probably was the start of my watercolor medium as a creative force. I love watercolor, and it's easy to carry out on to location and record what you want to express.

01-00:19:01

Farrell:

I know that you have a brother as well, and I'm wondering if you could tell me his name and some of your early memories of him?

01-00:19:09

Nootbaar:

I have not that much contact with my brother. He was a young man that did not really enjoy some of the structure of our family, and he had a wonderful, happy-go-lucky type of personality. But he got himself into some difficulties and I think was very disappointing to my parents. But he eventually joined the navy, and we would cross paths occasionally, but he died at a very young age, I think just wonderful living. It was in, as I say, an early time of his life, so I really can't say that I had real closeness to my brother, but he was a lot of fun. We teased each other a lot.

01-00:20:15

Farrell:

Thank you for sharing that; I appreciate you sharing that. I know you had mentioned that you went camping, and I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the role of the outdoors in your early life?

01-00:20:31

Nootbaar:

Oh, I think it was pretty big. In other words, I'm sure that that camping experience has formed a lot of my opinions about life itself and of course our environment. In those days really, camping was not as organized, the state parks were, of course, a lot less, a few and far between, but in fact some of the camping we did on the deserts, there weren't even campgrounds, we just would make our own campground. I'm speaking of Joshua Tree and some of those, Mojave areas. We, at first, went closer to Los Angeles in Sequoia National Park and then we went on to the east side of the Sierra in an area called Reds Meadows, which now, you have to take a bus to, but we just drove down the old dirt road; it's pretty rustic. We went on to Tuolumne Meadows, and of course that's in Yosemite, and we had some marvelous camping experiences there. As I say, our campgrounds were always so very well put together because of my father's engineering. But camping played such a big important part because I learned the value of conserving water and doing without some of the conveniences that we have in our homes.

01-00:22:15

Farrell:

How often would you go camping with your family?

01-00:22:18

Nootbaar:

Well, my father working for the Department of Water and Power got two weeks' vacation every year, and that was the main time that we would go

camping. It wasn't long—it was maybe a weekend in the spring for the desert, but it wasn't like we did a lot. My grandfather died in the flu of 1918, and my grandmother sold the ranch that they had—the cattle ranch—and the people would let us come back up there and stay in a little cabin in that area. That also had an effect on my love of the outdoors because this little valley, which is called Clark Valley, and it runs parallel with Los Osos Valley near San Luis Obispo. I used to love to hike around in there, and they did have a couple of horses, but it wasn't like we went riding on horses or anything, but I would hike around and appreciate all the environment there.

01-00:23:44

Farrell:

Yeah, so your grandparents had a ranch in San Luis Obispo, and how often would you visit?

01-00:23:53

Nootbaar:

Well, I really can't come up with an exact timing. We probably tried to get up there every couple of years for maybe a week in this funny, little cabin, which had no electricity and no water; we had to go down to the creek and get buckets of water. It was just a one-room cabin, so it was almost like camping in itself. It was a very important part of my childhood and growing up, but I don't think we were there more than a few days out of each year, so it wasn't like we did stay there for a month or something like that.

01-00:24:44

Farrell:

Okay, I see, I see. Given that you were interested in art, you've got an artistic mother, you're spending a lot of time outside, when you were outside, were you starting to notice the landscapes or some of the scenery that you were coming across?

01-00:25:01

Nootbaar:

Oh, of course, yeah. I love rolling hills, and I love canyons, and I love mountains, and so moving from Southern California, which has all that beauty but often is unavailable just to enjoy because they've built everything around it. I loved Northern California's attitude of trying to preserve some of those views and the environmental assets that we have.

01-00:25:44

Farrell:

When you would spend time outdoors, would you come home and draw what you had seen?

01-00:25:51

Nootbaar:

No, I don't recall that. I think landscape painting really has evolved. I have always been kind of a nut on horses since I was very young and always wanted a horse. I didn't get a horse until later in life, but I would draw horses for some reason. Horses are out in the landscape lots of times, so the landscape did come in on that, but I think the main subject that I probably zeroed in on in those early years was the horse animal. I also liked cattle, and it was probably from the ranch that my grandfather had.

01-00:26:34

Farrell:

Okay. I know that you went on to attend Occidental for college, but I'm wondering if you were interested in pursuing art when you were growing up at all? Did you ever think that might be something you wanted to study or pursue as a career?

01-00:26:50

Nootbaar:

I really did. I enjoyed illustrating, school reports and projects, and when I went to Occidental, they had an art department. It wasn't known for its art department however; it is known mainly for wonderful educators and so I guess I thought I was going to have to be an art teacher, which wasn't sitting really, really well with me at the time, but I thought that was what I was going to have to do.

01-00:27:31

Farrell:

I know that you decided to not do that, but when you attended Occidental, when were you there and what did you end up majoring in?

01-00:27:44

Nootbaar:

Let me think about what the title of the major. It might have been art education. I don't remember the actual title of my major, but I attended Occidental for two years, but two separate years. There was an in-between year that I worked to obtain some college money.

01-00:28:15

Farrell:

Okay, I see. Were there any teachers or people that were influential while you were in school?

01-00:28:25

Nootbaar:

Not really.

01-00:28:26

Farrell:

Okay, okay.

01-00:28:28

Nootbaar:

I can't pick out except in high school I had a Mrs. Jones, and I guess probably I remember because it's an easy name. But I was taking classes, and I mentioned Rex Brandt who—that was a workshop. But as far as Occidental, I can't tell you what kind of art I was doing if I did. I probably was sketching while we were camping and that sort of thing, and so I know I was still trying to produce art, but it wasn't like it was focused for a reason.

01-00:29:09

Farrell:

Okay, I see. When we had talked earlier on the phone, you mentioned that art was not a career that you felt women could pursue then. Usually women were going to be teachers or secretaries or nurses. What were your career aspirations at that point?

01-00:29:28  
Nootbaar: That's a good question. I guess I was an art teacher because I didn't have any idea that I would be a nurse. Probably, I was interested in getting married!

01-00:29:41  
Farrell: Okay.

01-00:29:43  
Nootbaar: A lot of my friends were and so I was kind of in-between, put it that way.

01-00:29:49  
Farrell: I see, okay. You ended meeting your husband, Robert, who you married in 1960. Can you tell me about how you met him?

01-00:29:58  
Nootbaar: I was painting actually. I was painting on the beach of Laguna down in a little cove, and he was swimming, and he came over to see what I was painting. His lead-in was, "What you painting?" which was very obvious, I was painting the cliffs on the ocean, but anyway, that was a good start I guess. Later on, he asked me for a date, and then we went from there. That was in 1958, and he was in the navy, so when he got back from that, we got married in 1960. After a year of staying there in Los Angeles area, we decided to move north, and we moved to Oakland and lived in an apartment for a year and then we bought our first house in 1962, which was in Lafayette.

01-00:31:06  
Farrell: Okay, and what was Robert doing for work at that point?

01-00:31:11  
Nootbaar: At that time, he got a job working for Encinal Terminals up in Oakland, and later, he worked in San Francisco with Coldwell Banker in commercial real estate, and that was really his vocation for the rest of his life.

01-00:31:33  
Farrell: Okay, okay, and so you both didn't move to the Bay area for a job, you just decided you wanted to? Or, can you tell me a little bit about what made you want to move to the Bay Area?

01-00:31:45  
Nootbaar: Well, we both had loving families, and they were just including us on a lot of things and a lot of events, and we just decided we needed to get off on our own. My husband Bob had an opportunity to work for a friend up in Encinal Terminals, and that's how we went ahead and made that decision of moving north, and it was as very good decision because I loved Northern California and the Bay Area, I really do.

01-00:32:21  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about what your first impressions of Oakland and then later Lafayette were and how it was for you to settle here and create a life?

01-00:32:36  
Nootbaar:

Well, I won't make the Oakland year too long, but we were in an apartment, and at that time in 1961, it was right near where they were building Highway or Freeway 580. It wasn't open yet, so I remember riding our bikes on 580 all the way down to practically—I guess it Hayward or it wouldn't have been that far, but anyway it was kind of fun. Well, Oakland was fine. I couldn't get the kind of job I needed because they didn't have that type of work, which was technical illustration back in the day I was working in Los Angeles. Actually, it was for an aircraft company. I ended up working for a kitchen decorator and that was kind of slow, so I really wasn't very happy with the kinds of jobs then. I was able to take some time and paint, and I was painting on the waterfront and some beautiful scenes around Alameda, and Bob was working of course over in San Francisco. That year went by, and we knew we wanted to get started on family and with a house, and Lafayette seemed like a nice little town, and it was at that point, and we were very lucky to find just the right house. So in 1962, we moved to Lafayette.

01-00:34:40  
Farrell:

Okay, great, and can you describe what Lafayette looked like in the '60s?

01-00:34:48  
Nootbaar:

Well, they had one signal to the main crossroads, and sometimes when it rained too hard, it would flood in the middle of the town. I discovered I can hike up to the Lafayette Ridge, which is a marvelous view of Mount Diablo. It has a marvelous view, a lead-in view of Lafayette ridges like rolling coaster of hills, and it goes right over to the east where Mount Diablo is, northeast. I painted a lot up there, and so Lafayette was a super place to raise our family.

01-00:35:40  
Farrell:

Yeah, so you have two children; your son was born in 1963 and your daughter in 1966. Can you tell me what their names are and a little bit about them?

01-00:35:50  
Nootbaar:

Well, Tom in 1963 was—[pauses] The next-door neighbor had a young man his age, and they became buddies, and they still are. They always have this connection, and even though their personalities are quite different, they both went through school together and attended University of California together, the same group of people, fraternity. He still lives in the area, which I'm very lucky for. He is a swimmer, he swims Masters, and my husband was doing that as well.

01-00:36:48

Our daughter Carey, she inherited a lot of the art genes. She's very creative, she doesn't paint, but she's very crafty, and she loved my mother, her grandmother, and she is a wonderful gardener. She is also an animal lover, as is our son and his wife. We have animals of course in our family; I do not have one. But back to the children, I feel very grateful that somehow, they came out in a very positive way, and I think a lot of it just plain old luck in raising kids.

01-00:37:36

Farrell:

Given that you were in Lafayette and so close to Mount Diablo and even the East Bay Park District, that system, were you having your kids spend time outdoors? Was that a role that played part in raising them?

01-00:37:55

Nootbaar:

Oh, yes, yes. I dutifully took them on to the top of Mount Diablo, and I remember my daughter used to get car sick on the winding road. But by gum, she still must have had some kind of connection because her husband, Bill Carpenter proposed to her on the top of Mount Diablo when they got hitched.

01-00:38:23

Farrell:

Oh, cool.

01-00:38:24

Nootbaar:

It is, yeah. Of course, my grandchildren have all been indoctrinated too.

01-00:38:32

Farrell:

Oh, that's fantastic. How about art, was that something that played a role in their childhood as well?

01-00:38:43

Nootbaar:

Yes. Well, Tom loved to do exacting types of renditions of ancient temples and things like that because he loves history, ancient history. But Carey, she was just more creative, and she did take up a little bit of sewing. She likes to make things. She became a grammar school teacher, and she's good at crafts for young children. When my granddaughter was going through all of the—and the grandson as well with the swimming programs in Lafayette, she would have crafts kind of things for the kids to do while they were waiting for their event. She probably really encouraged the art. Tom really isn't inclined that way, he's more business minded, so I'm grateful for that because he helps me with that.

01-00:39:53

Farrell:

That's great. I do want to move a little bit into Save Mount Diablo, and I know that you got involved with them in the early 1970s around the time that they were being formed. You learned about them from an event flyer, so I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about finding that event flyer and deciding to go to it and see what the event was, yeah, just a little bit more about that?

01-00:40:21

Nootbaar:

Well, Shanna, I will tell you probably I was reading about Save Mount Diablo of course in the paper. I didn't have any connection with them in the '70s and maybe not even so much as the '80s. However, they did in the '80s start acquiring property, and the first one I think was the Morgan Ranch, which was on the east side of the mountain, and they had a dedication of that. It was published in the newspaper, and I saw that and I thought, this really sounds wonderful that they're actually acquiring more property for the state park. My husband and I went to that event, which was on the top of the mountain, and

Mr. Morgan was there and the family and all. It was an interesting kind of experience because I had never attempted to or never been a part of anything like that where an organization acquired land for state park. I think that was the beginning.

01-00:41:34

Of course, then in the '90s, growth versus urban life was really taking hold and Save Mount Diablo became really very active and I started to really get interested in helping with them. There were many years that I just really knew about them, but when I say them, they were very small at the time; I think there were three people that were running it. In the '90s they began to enlarge their staff and board, and of course now in the turn of the century, in 2000 and on up to today, the staff is a big staff. They all have specialized jobs, and it's just really quite a machine. Of course, the acquisitions that they've been taking or promoting and helping purchase for our state park is just absolutely remarkable.

01-00:42:52

Did I mention the fact that back in the 1970s, or actually 1970, when we were living in Lafayette and I was interested in state parks, I bought this magazine from the *Sunset* publication? It was printed in 1970, and it tells about the different California State Parks, and there's this one page that tells about Mount Diablo State Park. This is 1970, and it's probably announcing that it has 7000 acres, this is the state park in 1970. Today, 2021, I think it's 120,000 acres, and a lot of that of course is thank you to the work, the fine work of those people at Save Mount Diablo.

01-00:43:57

Farrell:

Yeah, the amount of land that they've acquired is pretty incredible. When did you start painting the landscape of Mount Diablo?

01-00:44:12

Nootbaar:

I think well the Lafayette ridge I mentioned, that was not on the mountain, but during the 1960s, of course, I drove over there, and when I could, I probably did some sketching. But probably I didn't start painting the mountain till the '70s when the kids were in school and I had some block of time that I could get over there and find little spots. Of course then a lot of the trails were just kind of deer trails; they weren't even marked as far as what the name of that particular trail was. That all came about later with a lot of work of the supporting organization called Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, which I did join that in the seventies.

01-00:45:06

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about that and what your involvement with them was like?

01-00:45:15

Nootbaar:

It I think got officially started as a nonprofit to support the state park, Mount Diablo in 1974, and I was thinking that was a great idea to have an

organization do that. There was a lady named Judy Adler that was promoting that organization, and she was a good organizer, and she had a group of people that wanted to have this organization come about. I wasn't on the board of Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, but I was interested in what they were doing and was keeping up with what they were doing. In 1983, I think it was, they were able to open up the museum at the top of the mountain after it was closed for a number of years because of leaks in the roof. That was built way back in the '30, but there were a number of problems with it. But it finally did open, and there was a staircase that had walls that would make good areas for showing paintings and so we formed an art committee through the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, and the art committee created these various shows, probably four times a year and hung work of the various people that would submit work, and it was different themes of either a particular area or maybe it was a high school group or whatever and some could be photography as well of course. This was a contribution I think that happened for ten years, and I thought it was very successful.

01-00:47:41

Farrell: Did you have pieces that would go up in those shows?

01-00:47:44

Nootbaar: Oh, yeah, I used to try to put something in in a particular show of my work, but I knew a number of artists that I would ask as well. I mean it wasn't just one person; it was several people from the area. There are a lot of fine artists in the Contra Costa County, well in the Bay Area.

01-00:48:07

Farrell: Do you remember what some of those pieces were or maybe what landscapes or parts of the mountain they were?

01-00:48:17

Nootbaar: I have to talk about Liz Piatt. The son was on the art committee, Greg Piatt, and he is a painter, but his mother did stitchery, and she would create these beautiful wall hangings out of material. When we had a theme of, say, animals on Mount Diablo or something like that, she had these beautiful pieces, and I think we sold a number of them too. We sold any of the items, there was a huge percent that went to the state park or actually to the Save Mount Diablo, I guess it was the Interpretive Association, but eventually helped the park.

01-00:49:10

Farrell: Who were some of other artist that you would invite to show pieces?

01-00:49:17

Nootbaar: Well, I'd have to go back and get the list. I was teaching a class at the time, an outdoor painting class through Acalanes Adult Education and so a lot of those people submitted work. I also belong to an art society, several of them, and I would announce people the show so that they could submit work. One time, we had poetry as the art form, and it was a local poetry group. They had poems about the mountain, and we typed them up and hung them on the walls.



They actually produced a little book, booklet with the poems in it, and I tried to illustrate that.

01-00:50:13

Farrell: Oh, that's great, yeah. How long were you involved with the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association for?

01-00:50:22

Nootbaar: Well, I think in the mid-'70s until now.

01-00:50:28

Farrell: Oh, okay.

01-00:50:30

Nootbaar: I'm not involved in the board or in the meetings, but I'm a part of the Peregrine Team, which is an offshoot of that group.

01-00:50:42

Farrell: For the peregrine falcons?

01-00:50:44

Nootbaar: Yes.

01-00:50:44

Farrell: Oh, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

01-00:50:52

Nootbaar: The Peregrines were first started back on the mountain back in the end of the '80s, like 1989 I think it was. They tried to encourage nesting, and it went on through then. It's a hard situation to explain, but they would substitute—these are your expert bird people that belong to the Peregrine group, not Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, and I think Seth Adams was part of that group. They would have prairie falcons incubate the vital eggs of peregrines that they had produced in probably zoos, and that was the way they finally got the wild peregrines to start in Pine Canyon, which is right near where I live right now. At any rate, they started a team of peregrine falcon people as an offshoot of Mount Diablo Interpretive Association in 2015. Their job was to, during the season of nesting, to be informative for the public in the park. This is the regional park that they start up, but the rocks that the peregrines are in are in the State Park part of the canyon. The education would happen with these volunteers, and they would also try to keep an eye out for illegal rock climbers because they closed those rocks for the nesting for six months from February through to the end of July.

01-00:53:14

I was interested in all of this, but I had enough doing on my platter, so I really didn't participate until last year. I had to put my horse down, so I, well, had a little more free time, and I joined the Peregrine Team, and of course last year was COVID year. It turned out to be a wonderful time because you could go up the canyon and with a mask. You're outdoors, so you're not really exposed,

it's not a group situation. You had to observe the peregrines and see how they were doing and that sort of thing, and I never recorded a lot of that, which a lot of the team members do; they're very scientific. This year was an active year, or last year, they did not produce any chicks. This year, they did, and it was exciting. The Peregrine Team was overjoyed. The pair of peregrines had four eggs that blossomed into chicks. They got expert people from Pinnacles National Park and they came up and rock climbed and banded these chicks and they were all ready to fledge, and everybody was so excited, but a great horned owl came along and ate them.

01-00:55:04

Farrell: All four?

01-00:55:06

Nootbaar: Yes.

01-00:55:07

Farrell: Oh, no.

01-00:55:09

Nootbaar: So this year, it was not successful at producing chicks. That's all right because this is Mother Nature and the great horned owl probably had to feed its chicks.

01-00:55:21

Farrell: It's true. It's true, yeah, it's the food chain, and there are a couple on the Campanile right now on UC Berkeley's campus.

01-00:55:27

Nootbaar: And they fledged very successfully, and there were also a pair that was on the PG&E Building in San Francisco.

01-00:55:36

Farrell: Oh, oh, okay, yeah.

01-00:55:39

Nootbaar: It had a live camera as well, so the peregrine thing is for a lot of us weird people!

01-00:55:47

Farrell: Yeah, you know, I actually have interviewed one of the falconers who helped bring them back for the [park district].

01-00:55:52

Nootbaar: You did?

01-00:55:53

Farrell: I did, yeah, yeah.

01-00:55:55

Nootbaar: Do you mind just briefly telling me about that?

01-00:55:59

Farrell:

His name was Bill Swearingen, and he grew up learning how to be a falconer and worked as a volunteer with the park district to help, with his knowledge, to help. Kind of what you were mentioning where they had some experts come in, he was likely one of those experts that came in.

01-00:56:16

Nootbaar:

Yes.

01-00:56:17

Farrell:

Yeah but, yeah. I'm from the East Coast, and I hadn't really heard of peregrines until I came out here, so this is a really interesting story.

01-00:56:31

Nootbaar:

They are actually all over the world, but they have been on the East Coast. In fact, there was nesting in a great, tall building there by Central Park, and they made a movie of that.

01-00:56:49

Farrell:

Oh.

01-00:56:50

Nootbaar:

They fledged, and people there in New York were just absolutely excited about this because it showed people in the park observing these peregrines.

01-00:57:07

Farrell:

Yes, that's interesting. I'm wondering given that you are involved with the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association and then the offshoot with the Peregrines, at what point did you specifically get involved with Save Mount Diablo?

01-00:57:26

Nootbaar:

I had mentioned the Morgan Ranch dedication, and I think I started to think more about the organization then, and we may have started to financially write a check every once in a while to support their efforts. But I think my real interest in really being involved and helping with some things didn't start until maybe the '90s.

01-00:58:04

Farrell:

Aside from writing the checks and then also going to that Morgan Territory dedication, what compelled you to start getting more actively involved in the '90s?

01-00:58:14

Nootbaar:

Oh, definitely the growth that was happening in our county. It just was coming along faster and faster, and, as you know, it's still happening. Right now, Save Mount Diablo is involved in two big projects as well as others, but the two are the Concord Naval Weapons site near Pittsburg—the developer is trying to go up on top of the ridge there, which would destroy the open space of the weapons site, which is going to be parkland, which has been dedicated

as parkland. The other area is out there near Antioch in a valley that is very, very beautiful, and the developer is wanting to put houses in there. I'm just going to support them on these efforts and try to encourage them to keep it open space.

01-00:59:31

Farrell:

Given that there were development issues happening in your backyard and things like that, when you were getting more involved with them in the '90s and that was the inspiration, what was your involvement like?

01-00:59:47

Nootbaar:

Well probably, one of the main things that happened was in 1997, Joann Hanna who was associated with the Walnut Creek City at some point and had been involved with the Walnut Creek Open Space back in the '70s was asked to help with the design of housing, what would be the best design for housing on this property that was right near the entrance to the state park. She came to me, and she said, "What do you think? What kind of houses should they have on that property?" It was thirty-six acres, and we began to try to visualize these houses on that acreage, which was a view looking right at the mountain from Castle Rock Road and the Northgate High School, which was a very prominent, lovely view that artists used to like to paint. We were working on it, we decided along with discussions, we didn't want ANY houses, and we approached Save Mount Diablo, and Seth Adams was a big, big support on all of that effort. We formed an alliance with the neighbors. My husband was involved, and he was very creative because of his knowledge of real estate, and he proposed a conservation easement on this property, which eventually happened, but it took a long while. The property wasn't dedicated until 2007 after he died. But that was in 1997 when Joann was asked to help with the housing. It was a little bit of a doing working with Save Mount Diablo, and Seth was invaluable, he really was.

01-01:02:06

Farrell:

What were some of your first impressions of Seth?

01-01:02:12

Nootbaar:

Well, he's rather curt. He's mellowed in his older years, but he didn't fool around with gobbledygook. I didn't really know him; I was kind of fearful of approaching him actually because I knew he was rather formidable. He's a well-built kid, and he was a kid then practically. I talked to him on the phone and said that "I would like to have our art group paint some of the areas that you're interested in and helping with, and it can be kind of a tool to help out with some of your PR and selling of the property and getting funding." He listened to me for a while on the phone, and he came back with, "Are you any good?" I was a little taken back on that, here I was trying to be helpful and then I gathered up enough energy and retorted that I thought that a group of ours would be very, very welcome and actually would—could help the organization a lot and then I would be very happy to help support that. Anyway, the Artists for Action was started at that point, and he has since

acknowledged the fact that the artists are helpful in trying to get the images out there for beautiful landscapes.

01-01:04:12

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about the Artists for Action and maybe how many people are involved and how it's organized, if there's somebody like yourself who's doing painting or if there's someone doing photographs or just how it works?

01-01:04:28

Nootbaar:

Well, it hasn't really been working that much lately that I'm aware of. I couldn't take on organizing it too much beyond my husband's passing. There was a staff member named Julie Seelen at Save Mount Diablo. She once in a while would want to have a group of artists paint on an area and so she would pass that job along to one of the board members. There was a Sue Ohanian that was in charge of some of the artists. I just really haven't recently helped to gather them. We did have a paint out at Curry Canyon back about three years ago, I think it was four years ago, but I wasn't really involved in acquiring a lot of those artists. I did give them names of people that I knew would like to participate, but it was a small group. They didn't want to have a large group. That's the story of what's happening with the Artists for Action right now. They know that they can use them. But I don't think anybody on the board right now is using them for a particular project.

01-01:05:59

I have not been on the Concord Weapons site, and I would love to get over there and paint, and that's what they're working for. I've seen lovely photographs, there's beautiful photographs of that ridgeline, and I would love to paint in there, but I don't know whether they're going to instigate something like that.

01-01:06:24

Farrell:

Yeah. How do you feel art helps connect people to this land and motivate them to want to preserve the open space?

01-01:06:37

Nootbaar:

Well, naturally, I am a visual person and so I think to have a visual representation of an area is—and there are some wonderful photographs. Scott Hein in the Save Mount Diablo organization does a beautiful job with photographs, and Steven Joseph. But there are other ways, of course, of expressing your love of nature—music and poetry and writing, but as a visual person, I feel that a painting can—if you're inclined to be in that category, I mean that's the way to say what you want to say.

01-01:07:40

Farrell:

Have there ever been pieces of art that have been up for auction during the Moonlight on the Mountain fundraising event?

01-01:07:48

Nootbaar: Oh, yes.

01-01:07:49

Farrell: What has been the response to having those items, those pieces as part of the auction?

01-01:07:56

Nootbaar: Well, I guess they're doing well. They seem to be able to raise money with them, and that's the point.

01-01:08:06

Farrell: Have you attended any of the Moonlight on the Mountain events?

01-01:08:11

Nootbaar: I did back in 2003 just after my husband passed. They awarded us, Bob and Shirley Nootbaar, with a leadership award, and that was very kind and very moving. There was one other time that we had a group of old neighbors from Lafayette that I bought a table, and we attended. I've only done it twice. Now the last couple of years or next time as well or last year and this next year are going to be virtual, which is not the same experience, so I may do it again when they get back on the mountain as a real dinner event.

01-01:09:01

Farrell: What are some of the things that you remember from the couple of times that you've attended? Maybe what are some of the sights or the sounds or even the smells that you remember hearing and or absorbing?

01-01:09:14

Nootbaar: Well, any part of the environment has those, and I love where I live, I love to hear the birds, and I love the animals, and when I go up into the park, I'm always aware of that. I'm not a botanist, I'm not a biologist, I'm not a zoologist, I'm not a geologist, but I do appreciate all of those things. It's just a wonderful trip kind of thing; it's much my therapy and my love.

01-01:09:51

Farrell: Have you ever been on any of the Save Mount Diablo hikes or participated in any of the other events?

01-01:09:59

Nootbaar: I have not been on their biggest hike, which is a five-day hike with four overnights camping. I have been on some of the hikes that they have started for introducing a piece of land. I don't join hiking groups just to be hiking because I enjoy doing that myself, maybe with my own friends and family. They do now have a lot of organized hikes, but I have not been on them except for the ones that they're trying to explain the property that they're trying to acquire, as well as tours. They sometimes have land tours where they actually get a vehicle that's going to accommodate people and drive around and show different areas.

01-01:11:03

Farrell: How often now do you get to Mount Diablo to paint?

01-01:11:10

Nootbaar: Well, I can paint every day if I need to because I'm probably half an hour away from the state park and walking. I will have to say that I did a lot of painting last year because we were sheltered in place, and I didn't have a calendar that was all filled up. This year, I will have to say I have not painted that much, and I'm going to have to figure out how to change that, but life is very, very busy. I am taking care of this property, and I enjoy my friends and of course my family, which is close by. I intend to paint a lot more for Mount Diablo and its environments.

01-01:12:05

Farrell: What are some of your favorite spots or your favorite scenes to paint?

01-01:12:10

Nootbaar: Right now, I love Pine Canyon because that's where the peregrines are, and of course, I spent a lot of time up there these last six months, and the rocks up there are just absolutely fabulous. They're called Castle Rocks. There's one particular section that is a Castle Rock named that, but the whole area is called Castle Rocks sort of, and I love that subject matter. I love to paint mainly either in the morning hours or the late afternoon hours. I just think the shadows are more interesting because the mountain itself, if you're doing a portrait, it has a lot of personality in its hills and its canyons and its chaparral as opposed to the grasslands, which is a change of value and color and so the mornings and afternoons give that a little more interest with the shadows. If I had my slate completely free, I'd probably go out this afternoon and figure out some place on the North Gate Road and paint.

01-01:13:42

Farrell: What are some of the sights or the colors that you feel like capture the mountain?

01-01:13:53

Nootbaar: Well, because we all can see the trees are rich green and right now the grasses are golden and the sky is blue, I mean those colors, green, a raw umber, or raw sienna kind of color, which is, and the beautiful of the sky. But, you know, it's fun as an artist to try to change all of that, see if you can capture the subject matter with another range of color, another group of color. Maybe you want to just take analogous colors like the browns and maybe going a little toward the yellows and just take that section of the color wheel and so you would not have a blue sky, you might have a slightly yellow sky. As far the colors of painting the mountain, it depends on what's your mood or your idea at the time is, and it changes all the time. I mean it isn't like you have this absolute formula that you're going to be using certain colors. I paint a larger painting in my house, I don't paint on location with a large painting and so I usually have to decide my colors from and on location and sometimes I change that, and I work it out in the studio.

01-01:15:48

Farrell:

Do you have a studio on your property that you're able to use?

01-01:15:53

Nootbaar:

I do. It's downstairs, it's a wonderful area. However, because I'm getting older, and I fortunately still can go up and down the stairs very easily, I know that eventually I'm not going to be able to do that. I'm trying at this time to move my things upstairs in a smaller room, which is very difficult because downstairs has all kinds of storage, and I have a lot of equipment and a lot of supplies and so I'm trying to simplify that. So, yes, I have a studio that I can do the larger paintings, but as I grow into my more elderly years, I want to be able to just continue to paint in a smaller area.

01-01:16:50

Farrell:

This is moving back a little bit in time, but I know that you got your Fine Arts degree from the California College of Arts and Crafts, which is now CCA. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your interest in going back to school and then also I know you've mentioned that you've been teaching art and if you ever take your classes to Mount Diablo?

01-01:17:19

Nootbaar:

All right, well the teaching part, and of course at the beginning of this conversation, I think I've mentioned that I just didn't want to be an art teacher, and of course that would've been in a high school and I would've been working with high school students. But that scared the heck out of me, number one, so I knew I didn't want to be an art teacher there. This was an adult education situation, and that's an entirely different teaching position, and of course it was doing the kind of teaching, which I absolutely love, and that was location painting. When I got my degree, which I'll tell you in a minute, finally in fine arts, I felt confident enough to have this class and so I signed up to go ahead and use that as an adult education class, and it was very enjoyable. I asked a lot of the ranchers and private owners around if we could come and paint on their property, but of course there were areas in the park, the state park that I could just go to with a class, and in most cases, that's what we did. There are many places on the mountain, and I would warn them if there wasn't facilities that they had to accommodate themselves in that. Everybody was pretty efficient at bringing their own supplies and staying out in sometimes pretty extreme weather I'll say because the winter can get pretty chilly up on Mount Diablo.

01-01:19:15

But now back to the art degree, yes, I started back in the '70s taking classes at DVC. I think it was 1977 was my first class, and I can't tell you how inexpensive it was to take a class at DVC then. I think it was two dollars or something like this. But I gradually got the kind of background and it was mainly art history, which I hadn't had at Occidental. Of course, I could use some of the units that I achieved at Occidental and worked up enough to continue the education at California College of Arts and Crafts, which was of



course a little more expensive. But I got that Fine Arts degree, and I had to choose an exact major, which turned out I couldn't have two which I wanted, in illustration. I got a Fine Arts degree in illustration from the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1980 and then started teaching a class in 1981.

01-01:20:38

Farrell:

When you're out in the field or you're on location, what are some of the things that you're asking or teaching your students to be aware of or what they should be observing?

01-01:20:52

Nootbaar:

You know what, I didn't even call myself a teacher. I called myself a director, and I preferred to let them come up with what they wanted to do. I would provide the space, the plan on where they were going to be, and this was at the beginning of the term or the semester, and they knew where they were going to be. Some of them were probably looking for photographs or doing whatever they wanted to do on that. But at the site, I didn't have a lot of direction because I wanted them to come up with that. If they asked me something, I would tell them, "Well, if you don't want to make a blue sky, what kind of weather would you like to have it or what would fit in with the idea, the subject matter that you're doing?" I could guide and direct, but I didn't want to tell them, "You paint that house blue" or whatever. I think that's important for anybody. Your creative efforts have to come from you, you can get direction, and I surely do because even now I need direction. But it is an inner thing that comes from your soul and sometimes, it doesn't always fit with someone else's input.

01-01:22:35

Farrell:

Thank you for describing that, that's, yeah, really interesting to think about. Given that you have lived in Lafayette since the early '60s and you've been out painting this landscape for so long and being a keen observer of what's going on and also your involvement with Mount Diablo in different ways, how have you seen the area change over time?

01-01:23:02

Nootbaar:

Hmm, well, of course, it's just built up, and the open space has been disappearing. When we first moved up here, I would take my parents on an outdoor kind of tour from Lafayette to Danville and down what they call I guess San Ramon Road, and that was just all open space, it was like country. Now it's just solid houses, and there's a wall, and you can't even hardly see Mount Diablo, the big freeway wall. The freeway was not there, the freeways have come in, they were all coming in as we moved into Lafayette. I mentioned the 580 over there in Oakland. Lafayette, the main road was Mount Diablo Boulevard, and there was a frontage road, but all of that now is a freeway and a frontage road and parking area for BART. In the north end of Lafayette or I should say the east end were just a few little stores or businesses, and they had a lot of big signs. In those days, a big sign was the way you advertised yourself, and of course Lafayette was not even

incorporated in the early '60s. The people did what they wanted to do, and they could make a big sign if they wanted to. The visual part was very different. Now it takes probably twenty minutes at least to drive across that half a mile because every block is a signal. There are beautiful buildings on both sides and going up to four stories in some cases. Well, not four stories, that's in Walnut Creek, probably it's three stories now. But the hills, they just passed in Lafayette an area for another—I've forgotten how many apartments or condos, and I used to love to paint on that hill, and that's going to be all covered with houses.

01-01:25:49

How shall I explain the difference between? This is only, what, fifty years. If it kept going this way, we would not have any open space, which for everybody that had the open space available last year when they had to be sheltered, they realized what a benefit it is. They could get a breather outside and get refreshed. I hope we can continue with this kind of thinking of preserving some spots for nature instead of houses. And Contra Costa County is growing right as we speak, so we have to be careful about that.

01-01:26:49

Farrell:

How have you seen Mount Diablo change over the years?

01-01:26:55

Nootbaar:

Well, people do value it I think even more than they did when they we moved up north from, what, Southern California. There might have been a few people that really cherished it, but I think now, people are really aware of the fact that it's a wonderful icon in our county and we need to keep it that way.

01-01:27:19

Farrell:

Given that you've seen these changes, there's more development, and also you've seen people start to value Mount Diablo more, you have been sustaining your involvement with Save Mount Diablo over the years. What's kept you interested in working with them and the Interpretive Association and now the Peregrine offshoot?

01-01:27:45

Nootbaar:

Yes. Well, I don't very often, but I could call Save Mount Diablo if I had a real concern about something, and they would listen. I think the director right now is Ted Clement. He's a very understanding and empathetic man, and I think he is a good administrator. I think they're doing a good job, and of course, Seth Adams has been with the organization for thirty-three years, and he is a good friend, he really is in spite of some of the difficulties I had with him in the past. There was a woman that was kind of an office manager named Julie Seelen, she's gone now, but I don't know too much about the present staff. They're all good people and so I think that it's just nice to know that I have a connection with Save Mount Diablo if I need it.

01-01:29:00

Farrell:

I know that over the years, your support has shifted, has been financial, and so I'm wondering what some of the program areas or the things that you're really interested in seeing them do by giving them some of that financial support?

01-01:29:18

Nootbaar:

Well, they just finished acquiring a conservation easement over on the north side of the mountain, which is a beautiful oak savannah area where a private club own the property, but the public couldn't walk in there. Now that it is a conservation easement, it can be opened up a little bit it, and it was a very amiable type of agreement. Save Mount Diablo had to buy this conservation easement, and I helped with that. I can't come up with the exact acreage, but it was a key square next to the state park. I'm hoping I can get over some time with paint, so, except it takes a little while to get in there, you have to hike in there. What was the question again?

01-01:30:32

Farrell:

Just some of the program areas that you're interested in seeing grow.

01-01:30:36

Nootbaar:

Oh, yeah. Well, they just finished. They just finished also a great campaign that they had going for five years, and they achieved what they were going to achieve.

01-01:30:51

Farrell:

Was that the Forever Wild Campaign?

01-01:30:54

Nootbaar:

Yes.

01-01:31:02

Nootbaar:

I'm really glad that they were able to do that. I think that was amazing that they were able to put together that campaign and achieve that as they had planned.

01-01:31:13

Farrell:

Especially in the face of COVID too I think.

01-01:31:17

Nootbaar:

Oh yes, yes, yeah.

01-01:31:19

Farrell:

Given that you and Bob had won the leadership award for Save Mount Diablo, what did it mean to you to be recognized in that way?

01-01:31:32

Nootbaar:

Well, I am not really the type of person that needs a lot of accolades. I was pleased, Bob is. That property that we were able to conserve as a conservation easement is his legacy really. It's a beautiful open space now. But as far being nominated leadership, well I have plaque, a framed thing and I like to look at it, but I don't need to broadcast that kind of thing. I just want to get things

done with the good workers that we have and there's a lot of them. I'll be a part of it, but I'm not going to be recognized as a wonderful part. [Laughs]

01-01:32:25

Farrell:

What impact do you feel that Mount Diablo and Save Mount Diablo to that end have had on the Bay Area and quality of life here?

01-01:32:36

Nootbaar:

That's a heavy question. I'm hearing something in the back. I think it's an acorn woodpecker. Do you hear it?

01-01:32:48

Farrell:

I hear it a little bit, and I've seen some birds fly around in the backyard.

01-01:32:57

Nootbaar:

What Mount Diablo is going to mean for the rest of the years in the future and—?

01-01:33:03

Farrell:

Yeah, and what impact they've had on the Bay Area?

01-01:33:06

Nootbaar:

Yeah, it's tremendous, it is remarkable. When you think of '72 when they started, and it's going to be a fiftieth anniversary I believe, isn't it? I can't do the math.

01-01:33:29

Farrell:

Yeah, fiftieth.

01-01:33:32

Nootbaar:

Of all the things that they've done from a little 6000 at the beginning acreage at the top to a hundred and twenty, I'm just in great admiration, and it warms my heart to know that this is continuing. And then this challenge that they've presented, they want to have the open space continue down the spine of California with the Diablo Range, we can't think of anything better than that. To have the main section down the middle of California somehow helped with open space and kept rural is a wonderful thought. I'll be gone, but I'm sure that that could be accomplished.

01-01:34:25

Farrell:

I want to ask you some reflective questions, but first, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to make sure that we mention?

01-01:34:39

Nootbaar:

I think you've pretty much asked the main things. I don't know who's ever going to listen to this but it says enough about Save Mount Diablo that shows that they're doing a pretty good job. They probably have made mistakes, but I'm not aware of them.

01-01:35:06

Farrell:

What has it meant to you to be involved with them for so long?

01-01:35:12  
Nootbaar:

Well, the fact that I have the satisfaction of knowing that I've helped an organization save some of these beautiful areas. It's a selfish reason really because I'm a visual person, I love to paint these areas, and now they're forever. They can be for my great-great-great-grandchildren. Right now, they're just for my grandchildren, but let's think eventually great-great-great-grandchildren.

01-01:35:50  
Farrell:

What has it meant to you to make art based on the local landscapes and Mount Diablo over the years?

01-01:36:02  
Nootbaar:

Well, I think it's very important. I have to give credits also to the photographers. Everybody relates to a different kind of art. Some people even love nonobjective pieces of art, and I'm sure you could do a nonobjective piece of Mount Diablo, but I just like the real thing, and I try to capture its moods, and to me that's important. I do think these images are a part of our life and gives us pleasure and balance.

01-01:36:48  
Farrell:

What are your hopes for the future of Save Mount Diablo?

01-01:36:55  
Nootbaar:

Well, there's a number of organizations that I've been a part of or have heard of that have gotten to the point where they're too big and it's just like a plant that gets to be a certain age, and after a while, it dies. I hope that Save Mount Diablo can realize that it can keep itself focused and not split up in their focus and their ability to keep and educate about the environment in our area. Yes, that's what I hope.

01-01:37:47  
Farrell:

How about for the future of the East Bay and the environment, what are your hopes for those two things?

01-01:37:57  
Nootbaar:

The same thing as I just said. I want to continue to have this thrust that really started in the '70s of being aware of our wonderful area, and California certainly is blessed with that. All of the areas of California, there's different moods and different types of scenery, but Contra Costa that and in large from that has just remarkable scenery. I guess to continue this snowball effect from the seventies that people are aware of the fact that we can't take all of these things for housing and people. Maybe what will happen is we'll get to the dead end of there isn't enough water to have all this development, so then it'll all stop anyway.

01-01:39:10  
Farrell:

Yeah, particularly relevant these days, yeah. Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we wrap up?

01-01:39:19  
Nootbaar: No, I don't think so. I think you're a wonderful interviewer; you're very soft and not aggressive.

01-01:39:27  
Farrell: Oh, thank you, thank you.

01-01:39:28  
Nootbaar: Yeah.

01-01:39:29  
Farrell: Well, it's been a pleasure to interview and to talk with you and to hear your stories. Yeah, just it's been great, so I very, very much appreciate your time and your willingness to do this.

01-01:39:43  
Nootbaar: Thank you.

01-01:39:43  
Farrell: Thank you.

[End of Interview]