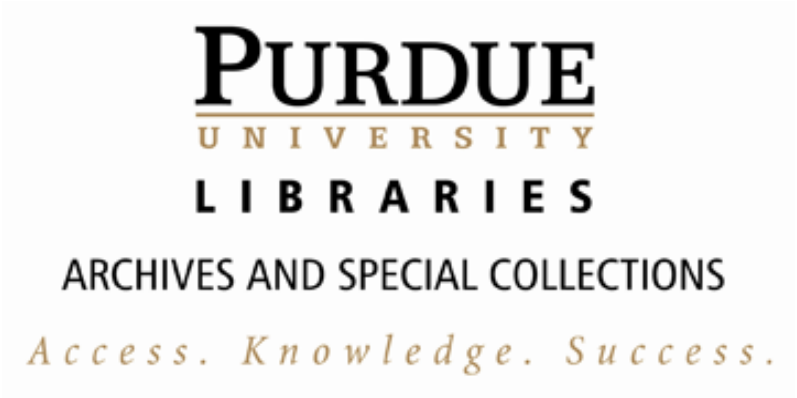
Ernestine Gilbreth Carey Interview

Conducted by Sammie Morris and Judith Schumaker on June 14, 2006



SM: Today is June 14, 2006 and we are in the home of Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, the third daughter of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth. The people here at the interview are myself, Sammie Morris (Acting Head, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries), Judith Schumaker (Purdue University Libraries, Director of Advancement), and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey and her two children, Charles Carey and Jill Carey ____. For the record, could you give us your full name and when you were born?

EC: My full name is Ernestine Moller Gilbreth Carey, Mrs. Charles E. Carey, and I was born on April 5, 1908.

SM: Were you born in New York?

EC: New York City, yes.

SM: Where did you go to high school?

EC: I went to Montclair High School.

SM: When did you graduate?

EC: I graduated in 1924, and then I took a postgraduate year after my father died, to be home and help.

SM: So you didn't go immediately on to college?

EC: No, I took that postgraduate year and it was very important for my mother and for me. That had a great influence in my life.

SM: What was your major in college?

EC: My major was English and my minor was economics.

SM: What year did you graduate?

EC: I graduated in 1929 from Smith College.

SM: What made you choose to go there?

EC: My father and mother had a lot of admiration for the fact that their women students and faculty were geared the way they were toward women. And I did not want to go there because my sister Anne went there and I wanted to be independent of Anne; but when I got all through I visited Anne and visited some of the other schools and I had fallen in love with Smith and I knew I had to go there.

SM: Anne was the oldest child?

EC: Anne was the oldest child, yes. Mary came next, she was deceased. Then I came next.

SM: What was it like, being an older middle child in such a large family?

EC: I wasn't in the middle, I was the number three. It was like being an
5:00 assistant mother. I was my mother's helper, especially in the office. I was not my mother's helper with the children or with the domestic part of things. I wanted to work in an office. So when you talk [about my parents']

papers, a lot of these papers I was handling as a six year old in Providence.

SM: That's amazing. Can you tell me a little about the Family Council?

EC: I think we'll suggest that people read that in *Cheaper by the Dozen*. We'll save ourselves some strength [laughter].

SM: Okay. How was conflict handled in your family—if two children disagreed on something how did your parents handle that?

EC: Well, very often with the boys it was handled with fists. And also Dad brought back at one point, from Boston, wonderful boxing gloves. He taught us all to box. I think he thought as we girls got older if we had any trouble with people coming to call we'd know how to protect ourselves.

SM: Did you ever have to use that training?

EC: I was one of the prize boxers of the family, but I didn't have to use it on anyone coming to call, no [laughter]. But we girls learned to be expert boxers. I don't think my children ever knew that. But the gloves were beautiful. And Dad himself taught us the uppercuts and all this other stuff. It came in handy. I roamed around New York a lot in my heyday. Even after my husband died I'd go to New York and wander around. I'd go to the theater and so on and walk back to my hotel, sometimes eight or nine blocks, and I was never nervous because I thought well, I can handle this.

SM: That's wonderful.

EC: I've been around in very tough circumstances in a great many places, and welcomed it.

SM: I know you talk about this in *Cheaper by the Dozen*, but could you give us some examples of how the children helped your parents with their time and motion studies?

EC: I think if you read the typewriting chapter in *Cheaper by the Dozen*, that will give you the best…in order to work with these typists involved in the contest, they (our parents) worked with the children first and while he (my father) was teaching us, he was also teaching himself so they knew how to teach these experts who went on to win the international championship for speed typing for Remington. And so I don't think there's any other example that's as vivid with me, because I won the white typewriter, and I love offices and office equipment and office everything, and without any question it came from my early years of working actually as a secretary with professional secretaries in that office. I had a little table and my little typewriter that I won, and I was there.

SM: Are you still a speed typist to this day?

EC: No, I wouldn't say with my failing eyesight that I really am, and my typewriter is old and cranky.

CC: When I was a kid she would be typing unbelievably fast.

SM: I think if someone was hitting me on the head with a pencil I would type fast, too [laughter].

EC: Well, I have never as an adult or a writer been a speed person. As a writer I'm slow.

SM: Well, that's the writing process, you sort of have to be that way.

EC: It's a joy.

SM: What about you and the other children, did any of you ever resist experiments like that?

EC: We welcomed it so much, because first of all Dad was not there a great deal, and secondly he was in Europe and places of this type so he came back with wonderful presents and everything, making it all very glamorous. This way he was sharing his work with us, and we were so flattered. We were actually flattered that he was doing this. And he was a wonderful showman, and he knew how to handle us. I guess he had been a pretty lively kid himself—we know he had been, from all the papers of his childhood. And he was constantly—he knew Mother was a genius, and he thought she was a genius teacher, and he thought we were all geniuses. Then of course along came Ernestine, very poor in math. Very poor in math. And he couldn't believe that a child of his, where he'd taught us all

these wonderful math things and so on had to repeat a class in high school, but I did. I had a terrible time with algebra and geometry, but I
10:00 finally mastered them with a good teacher. The teacher was very patient with me. I was just stupid in math.

SM: You're a writer, and I think a lot of really creative people have problems with math.

EC: Well I think that's true too, my friend. But the other thing is I went on to become a department supplier and I had to be good in math. That's when math teaching [?] buying pool tables and billiard tables and some of the stuff I bought…I had three departments and two children, so I had a very difficult and fulfilling 15 years or so of that in New York City. We're working on a book on that right now, trying to finish it up.

SM: How did people in the communities where you lived regard your parents?

EC: They thought they were crazy—most of them thought they were crazy…. My parents were very generous with their time, they always had some of our friends and some other young people in the community over there, trying to figure out what it would be like to be engineers. My parents attracted other people, and treated them like an extended family.

SM: I was fascinated, reading one of the books on your parents recently, that talked about a conflict between the engineers who believed in the stopwatch method and the engineers who believed in micromotion study,

pioneered by your parents. I was curious whether the colleagues of your parents ever discussed those things with them.

EC: Well, I don't know how much you've read about the big fracas in 1921 between Gilbreth and [Frederick] Taylor, where Taylor took credit for the Gilbreth work and then Mother had to stand up professionally and tell them that was not the right thing to do. At that point there were a lot of engineers, I'm sure, who said "Why don't you just keep peace?" But it would have been very stupid for them to keep peace because Taylor still today gets some credit—I have books there where he's getting credit for the Gilbreth work, and it's a sin. Now that's one thing [James?] Perkins corrected, he wrote the *New York Times* on a review of some book that came out and said, "You've got this mixed up again, you're giving Taylor credit for motion study. Taylor was time study, but he wasn't motion study." Frederick Taylor originally worked very closely with Dad and Mother was there as Dad's wife, not really as a fellow professional yet. And Taylor basically took credit for the Gilbreth work, and was afraid of it because it was making his own work with the stopwatch old fashioned and dead. So he was trying to save his neck. And Dad—in 1921 there was a confrontation—without any question I think that whole business brought on—that and World War I, brought on my father's early death. His heart couldn't take it, without any question, I think.

SM: All of the stress of it?

EC: And Taylor could be very charming and everything, and it's just too bad. But Mother liked peace, but she was totally—they had to defend this, or they would have been wiped out, and Taylor would get all the credit and you wouldn't have heard of the Gilbreths.

CC: You wouldn't mind if that's printed? That Taylor brought about your dad's
15:00 death?

EC: Well, I was saying that I think, without being unkind to Taylor, that the stress of that whole thing helped to bring that on—I think we could also say a big family could possibly have brought that on, I think, and earning all the money for that. I think there are a lot of reasons, but I think that was one. I don't think it's kind to say it was the only one.

SM: Were there other colleagues that your parents felt very close with, in their work?

EC: Yes, very, very much so. Robert Kent certainly was. The ones that went with Mother after Dad died, to Czechoslovakia. There was Roy Wright, there was—let me think who they were—Henry Gantt died earlier. We moved to Montclair in I think 1919—yes, because Grandma Gilbreth died in Montclair—about 1919, to be near the Gantts and other people like that. Then Gantt himself died, which was a great blow I think to everybody. We loved him and his wife Mary. But our house was filled with his fellow engineers all the time.

SM: Your father had been involved with Taylor and his group early on—

EC: Yes, he was, early on. I think he got his whole inspiration from Taylor, and he got others to form the Taylor Society, if you recall that whole thing. It was a surprise to him when suddenly he felt betrayed. And I think it surprised Taylor that he [Frank Gilbreth] had the guts to fight him, which he did. And Mother had that fight thereafter. And Dean Potter- I think that was one reason Dean [Andrey] Potter loved my mother so much, you know. That entire Potter family misses Potter, and Helen Potter, who was on the faculty, she was a very dear friend of mine. Every time I'd come to Purdue I'd see Helen—and we were like sisters, actually. And Mother would have Helen play the piano, and Helen would cook a special supper at the house. I can't tell you how close the Potters were to the Gilbreths. Helen took me to see him [Dean Potter] in his last days. He was still The Dean, walking like The Dean and so forth, but his mind had gone. She never should have taken me there—it just broke my heart. But anyhow, I think she knew we loved each other and she thought she was doing a kindness, and perhaps she was.

SM: Well, how did your parents discipline you children when you were too rowdy or out of hand?

EC: Well, again I refer you back to *Cheaper by the Dozen.* Dad was very tough in discipline, and Mother had no discipline at all for us. Mother had her habit, inherited from her own mother, of looking grieved down at the

floor. If Mother looked grieved down at the floor, which was a picture of disappointment, [as if to say] "I have a child that I thought was going to turn out well, and I have this *sad* child that's disappointed me." That would break our hearts.

SM: More effective than a good spanking?

EC: That was worse than a spanking. But Mother had patience and love, and my father had no patience. Lots of love, but a lot of things he did were not particularly wise [chuckle]. I think that—and his mother was constantly scolding him before us, and we thought that was wonderful. She would scold him as if he was a small boy. And to see her scold him and he'd be like a little boy with it— that was a joy of the world.

SM: Didn't his mother live with you?

EC: Yes, she lived throughout, from the day Mother was married to the day Grandma died, she lived [with us]—my father had been raised by his
20:00 mother and his mother's sister—he had two older sisters, and the family had been left quite a bit of money. You know about his father's death, when he went out with his horse—and his father had a big estate and a brother-in-law, either through investments or I don't know what, and within a year had left my grandmother penniless. She didn't have a nickel. So she moved them all eventually to Boston. She opened a boarding house, where she had wonderful Irish help, and did the cooking—she was a

marvelous cook. Then my father passed his exams for Tech [M.I.T.] but then decided to take this other offer. In any case, several years later he met Mother. And he had sworn he would never marry, and he had sworn his mother could always live with him and he would support her. And that's what happened.

SM: I've read about your parents meeting each other, I know your mother was getting ready to travel to Europe and had stopped in Boston and met your father, but did they ever talk about what it was like when they first met each other?

EC: She has written that up in a book called *As I Remember*, and I think rather than my trying to tell it—it was him seeing her with children when the car broke down and her telling a story [to the children] that really won his heart, and I think it made him want a big family.

SM: I do remember that, I just thought—

EC: Where it's in a book, I'm just going to save our time [laughter].

SM: That sounds like an efficiency expert's opinion [laughter].

EC: Are you having as much fun as I am?

SM: I'm enjoying it very much! I was curious about your mother—her real interests, before she met your father, were literature, and she was writing some poetry and song lyrics—

EC: She got her Master's in a very, very academic subject.

SM: Yes. What do you think might have happened with her if your parents had never met?

EC: I think she would have been a dean of a college. I think she'd have been a dean of a very top college—Stanford might have gotten her in there. She could have gone any place. She was very ambitious, and she was very tied up—I think she was fed up, probably, with the confinements of her setup with her parents in California.

CC: She wasn't strong. When I knew her, she would never speak out. I never heard her yell, when she'd come visit. She was so quiet, and loving, and peaceful—that's what I remember about Grandere. But down deep, she had this toughness, I think. It was different from today, where people just speak out whatever is on their mind. But I never remember her yelling, but maybe she did, you'd have to answer that, Mother. Did she ever speak out or yell or anything?

EC: Never, that was not her way. She did speak out—she is known, there are several stories about her that tell about a couple of men that were arguing in a big engineering meeting and Mother stood up between them and said, "Really, boys, you must stop this!"

CC: And that was about her limit.

EC: And then she told them why.

CC: She never lost her temper.

EC: Oh no, she just was kindness.

J: But Mom was like this, too, as a mother. She would tell Charles, "You're grounded until further notice," but she would say it quietly. I don't ever remember Mom yelling at us or anything, ever. She always spoke quietly at us, even if you were angry you always spoke with a quiet tone of voice.

SM: It's part of a refined upbringing for ladies, to have a quiet strength.
25:00

EC: It was true of all of them. They were just raised that way.

J: And you too, Mom. You were the same, you never yelled at us.

EC: I hope I didn't. I'm sure there were times when I wanted to. But she was a wonderful example for all of us, and very close to my children, loved them very specially. That's why it's so nice to have them here. She would come out and see us a great deal when we lived in New York until you were two years old and then we moved to Van Hassan, New York, and that was not as convenient for her. She still came out to see what was what. She was very close to my husband. She felt that my husband's appearance reminded her, interestingly, of her father, who I was crazy about—my grandfather. When I met my husband and planned to marry, she said, "You know, I have to tell you he looks just like your grandfather's

boyhood pictures." And I said, "Well, I loved my grandfather as much as I could love anyone in the world." I just thought he was the most dear—he used to take me downtown and buy me—we'd stop at a store with all the family, we'd take all the ones that were old enough to walk—he'd jingle money in his pockets, I guess that's why we're interested in making money now and again, Charlie. Anyway, he would jingle that and now and again we'd stop at a store that had gifts, like leather sewing—or these bon-bons they had that snapped. I remember one time that's what I wanted, a whole box of those snapping things. But he'd say, "Now children, let's look at this thing and you come and each one of you figure out what one thing that you want more than anything else, and your Granddaddy will get it for you." So that spoiled us, you know. But he did that—and I think I was close to him because I think I looked a bit like my mother. But I remember he chided her one time—I remember this so well, that summer in California that we describe in *Cheaper by the Dozen*—I had a mini-blouse on with a red…and he said, "Lily, you should *never* dress this child in red, her hair is red, and you've made her hair look horrible." And Mother looked so surprised, because my mother was not really much interested in clothes and he was chiding her just like a small child, and I was embarrassed by this whole thing. I mean, how could you forget a scene like that?

SM: So you had your mother's red hair?

EC: Well, we all had red hair, or the color of Jill's. I'd say half had the color of Jill's. I had the darkest hair, it was kind of a darker red. Martha had the beautiful hair, and everybody wished they had Martha's hair.

SM: Wasn't hers kind of curly?

EC: It was auburn, and it was curly, and it was thick, and it was alive, and people just couldn't help wanting to touch it.

SM: Have you seen any of the poems or song lyrics that your mother wrote?

EC: I've seen them in the Purdue collection. "My Sierras" is one—she wrote several for my father. Those are some of the most precious stuff you have—they have been used in some of the books, [Jane] Lancaster used some, and—

CC: I hate to interrupt, but could we break for lunch?

[End of tape, side one]

[Tape side two]

30:00

SM: Ernestine, you talked a little about when your mother was first getting started with the business after your father passed away, that she was being discriminated against sometimes in engineering work—

EC: She would continue to be. This is was why my father had her go to Brown and get her Ph.D. in educational psychology and so forth, so she would be accepted in academic and engineering circles.

SM: After she was doing things on her own, did she ever talk about this, about being discriminated against as a woman?

EC: Well, I was with her enough to see it. And then if you come back to Frank's and my writings it tells very clearly about the fact that she went to dinners and they wouldn't let her in. She went to a luncheon and she was late for her next date because they had to have a waiter, a man escort her out of the club. It was the professional, top engineers that were the snooty ones.

SM: In terms of all the work your parents did, what do you think they were most proud of, in terms of their accomplishments?

EC: Without any question, they were most proud of the work that came out in the Providence [Rhode Island] days, at the New England Butt Company. It was a Taylor installation, I believe, to begin with there. It was a braiding

place in Providence, Rhode Island. The building still exists as I saw it a few years ago. They went in there, and turned the production—they did phenomenal things in increasing production, and so on. In the meantime working out happier labor movements, the whole business of [ergonomics], fitting the chair to the worker, and fitting the desk to the worker. They are the originators of that, and they don't always get the credit for that they should. So I would say motion study and ergonomics. But they were the first to say that the happiness of the worker was of top importance—and that had not been done. Taylor talked about how good shovels were [?], and this and that but he didn't get the worker's mind and heart.

SM: I've wondered if it was because of your mother's focus on psychology that made their partnership so unique, because your father focused more on the technical side and she focused more on the individual, is that true?

EC: Well, he recognized all that. Remember, there he was, a successful contractor, who had begun on his own as a bricklayer, and he gets through the academia. And here's Mother, with a Master's from Berkeley and everything else, and Phi Beta Kappa and everything else, and he realizes that he better encourage the two brains to supplement each other, which is what he did. A lot of the ingenious ideas as to pushing ahead

35:00

were his. But she's the one that made him work. She really—each day she did about a six-person job. Quite apart from everything else she had—

she had her mother-in-law to keep an eye on, [who] wasn't very well, she had Irish temperamental help in the kitchen, she had us, her babies, coming—she was always pregnant. And then he [Frank] would say, "I worry about you, because I think you look thin," and then he would give her about ten days work to do in about one day. So he might have been worried, but he still dumped the work.

SM: How did she do all that? Did she ever sleep?

EC: She came from very sturdy long-lived fine German stock, there's no question about it. Her grandfather had been a farmer there, and he came over and had learned his trade as a shoe maker, and got involved in real estate. He made a fortune in real estate, and became one of the wealthiest men in California, I suppose. By the time my mother died all the money had been given to the children, and there was none left. So they were never—Mother knew how to handle money, but the others never did, they were just—they were not encouraged to marry, very few of them [Lillian's siblings?] married.

SM: You and your brother Frank Jr. wrote so much about your lives already, and I know you get tired of being asked the same questions over and over. Is there anything you can tell me about growing up with your parents that might surprise us?

EC: I have to think on that one. [Pause] Well, I think one of the things that might surprise you—anyone that reads Mother's biography understands that she was a very shy girl, had trouble socially, and when she went to college she had to fight to do that. And still with her family she had trouble getting over shyness, and what not, and establishing real pleasure in social things. And the thing that surprises me is that when we girls came along, where some of the other mothers were helping them begin this business of dating and all that stuff, and helping them get particularly pretty clothes for dances and so on—my mother was never aware of clothes and things like that at all. That might surprise people, because as children, we wanted her to be like other mothers. And the stories that we tell about her girlhood, where she would wear her hats backward and such were true.

As a mother, I'm sure we must have looked clumsily dressed—and I know that in many years, I would say between the years of 1912 and 1918, we would go to a boy's department [store] and pick out things like mini-[?] and shirts and sailor hats and things that were all alike, and then they could be handed down—of course, by the time they reached the boys they had been worn out by the girls. Therefore, we looked very tailored, but not very attractive, I must say. And it made most of us very eager to develop that kind of a side in us, where as grown women we kept up with fashion—I

40:00 found that [working] in department stores, you didn't have any choice, you had to be leading in fashion. You had to wear hats, you had to wear high-

heeled shoes—and if you didn't, you'd get fired because you were representative of the fact that they had attractive buyers and so on there. So I think that might surprise people, that Mother, having gone through the embarrassment of this herself—either she didn't have time, which might have been the whole thing, or her natural instincts which had made her blind to this, wearing hats and things herself, may have also made her blind to the fact that we children wanted to look a little bit more individually attractively dressed, let's put it that way, instead of looking like an orphanage.

J: Did Grandere always wear black?

EC: No, she wore—my dad loved her in black the best, so that's why she wore it. But also on trips and so on, black, as we all know, is easier to handle on a trip than other colors, it doesn't seem to wrinkle as badly and you can wear it more times, I think. But she so often did wear black when you saw her, and that's because she traveled so much it was more practical.

SM: Do you think that is one of the reasons you went into buying in retail, because you were attracted to fashion?

EC: Oh, without any question. Without any question. We were encouraged to sew, and design clothes and so forth. Dad wouldn't really give us any money for clothes, but if we made them ourselves, and I made all kinds of

things—which were kind of bizarre, but anyhow that's what I did, so, yes, I loved them [clothes]. I still do.

SM: How did the idea for writing *Cheaper by the Dozen* come about?

EC: Oh, we've known from the time we were telling stories to our fellow schoolmates, and they were convulsed with laughter, that they were timeless, and we just knew that from the time we were born almost.

SM: Did you and Frank always assume that it would be you two who told the story?

EC: No, we stepped up, as I said in Teddy's article. We had been in various projects before. We were in one, where we used an empty room in our Providence house—motion study was developed in that house—and we had a calendar and gift card business and this and that and everything, that we sold to people of the household, and had Billy deliver it. It was that place where Dad came back with pictures of engineers and himself with the Prince of Wales and the King and Queen visiting. We had a family magazine that he edited, and we turned down all those pictures that he submitted to us because we didn't think they were of *great general interest*—one of his prize things. Anyhow, he started another magazine, but that's been written up a good bit. We did turn that down because we thought that our own happenings were more interesting than those in England. But I do have right here some wonderful stuff about that

exhibit—it was a special Olympia or something or other exhibit about the year 1919, I think. There was a lot of publicity in all the papers there, Queen Mary and my dad and everything else. And to have us reject it for our magazine, really half killed him. I don't know as I answered your question.

SM: Well, I think you did. It sounds like you had always been thinking it was something you would do.

EC: Oh, [working] with Frank—so we had the first thing, where we sold the calendars, then we had a chicken business—we had about 24 of them, Rhode Island reds that were behind our garage there. We didn't feed them properly, so they were taken away from us and we began to eat them each Sunday, which was like eating a member of the family. Each
45:00 one had a name. But anyhow, so that was our second business together. Frank and I tend to team up. We're much, I think, more like Mother than a good many of the others. I think Bob Gilbreth, who is my youngest brother now, has taken over for Dad representing the ones in the family, [but] he is the spitting image of Mother, it's amazing. He looks just like her. I don't think he's Mother's temperament, nor do I think he's Frank's or my temperament, but when I see a picture of him I get a startled feeling.

SM: Can you tell me about some of your other writings you've done since those two books? I know you've written other books since then.

EC: I have written three [more] published books, and one of them was on our marriage. I don't think the books tell any story that the children do about marriage today, so I was particularly interested in their stories. Anyhow, that was called *Rings Around Us*, and then I've written two novels on a department store, and now [my assistant] Sarah and I are working on the typing and finishing of a memoir of my years in the 1930s in the department store, as an assistant buyer of toys in Macy's in [?] Square, which was one of my jobs. That is a book that was written earlier in Arizona, but never completely finished because of interruptions. So we're beginning to pull out some old manuscript and trying to begin to think about it through our agent. I don't know whether we'll be successful, but we'll try. So I have a bunch of juvenile stories, every now and again if I feel like it I'll sit down and write a children's story. I have a bunch of manuscripts and I've done all kinds of things. But the thing I love best is research, I love the research.

SM: Looking back on your life, what is one of your fondest memories?

EC: Well, some of my memories are not my fondest, but they are—I don't think I really have very many fond memories, I think I have intriguing ones, but they're not fond. Here's one that I'll tell you, that's not fond at all. I've always been crazy about plants, as you can see outside, and when I was about five or six Mother took me downtown with her. I was the only one with her that day, and she bought me a book—I guess I had a birthday

coming up, and I selected Stephenson's "Does it not seem sad to you/When all the sky is clear and blue…" [by] Robert Louis Stephenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses*. So anyhow, we had that but it wasn't enough for me, so we went through a department store and there was a table filled with hyacinths in bloom, and they were blue, most of them. I think they were 29 cents, and I had to have one. I said to Mother, "I have to have one," and she said, "Well, I'm sorry, Dear, but we're late, and we're not going to pause and buy that now." I realize today that she realized if I came home with something like that beyond the book there would be trouble with everybody who didn't get the same thing. But anyhow, I was so angry with her that I just threw myself down on the floor—I liked to do that a lot when I was a child. And I just cried and hollered and people gathered around, they thought she'd hurt me. So Mother looked at the situation and said, "Well, I'm sorry, Dear, but we're late going home. I'm going to go, and if you want to follow me, you can." Of course I was right up in an instant following her. Now, that's not my fondest memory by any means, but it's one of my most vivid.

And I have another one about my grandmother—these are not in my books, but they will be in memorandums I hope some day, here. My grandmother taught us all to read, and she would sometimes have six of us around her, in the sunshine, in her room on the second floor in Providence. And she would read, and I always was old enough that I had

50:00 to squat on the floor on my knees and put my chin on the primer. So then

it came time for me to go to Kindergarten, and while these other children didn't have the skill, I had announced right away that I could read and my teacher said, "That's just lovely, Ernestine, why don't you get up here and read to us." So I welcomed that, I evidently thought I was great. So she handed me the primer and I couldn't read a thing! So I just broke down and cried all over the thing. And then I took the book and turned it upside down and I read fine. It was because my chin had been on the book [when I was learning] and this way I had learned to read upside down. So my grandmother was a teacher, and she said, "This child is never going to enjoy reading, she's always going to be slow in writing and everything else because of this". And my father said, "You're a trained teacher, you taught in Maine for many years, and you never should have let that happen." He teased her terribly about it—she said we're going to see a [?] child on the subject. It didn't hurt me at all. And today and in my New York years I could read the newspaper—other people would be reading the newspapers and I'd look down and could read the newspaper fine when it was upside down. And I can do some writing upside down, too. So that's not one of my fondest memories at all, but it's one of the fresh ones.

SM: How old were you when you went with your mother, to see the blue hyacinths?

EC: Well, I was at different ages. I think that, first of all, when I would fall in love with something, [like] I had to have a desk, I didn't like the one—and I

was half sick until we [would buy?] the desk. So I had a special trip with Mother to get the desk, and she got it early and then gave it to me for my birthday. But she had it tucked away and supposedly hidden but I knew where it was and I would go and look at it, and—but she would usually take you at a time when you really needed to be, or at a time where I think she had to get away from the household. She took me one day, I recall, to church, very impossibly. And I think the whole household probably for the moment was just too much. She would tend, if things were too much for her, she would always tend to grab me by the arm—I think I reminded her of her own childhood. And my father would take Frank with him if things were often too much for him. He would put the hat on Frank and he'd say—he called him Franko, he'd say "Come on Franko, let's get out of here." I remember that—where they went, I don't know. But I do remember going to church with Mother and feeling that something was wrong, and that church was going to straighten it out.

SM: Would you do anything differently in your life now, looking back?

EC: Oh, I probably could've done 99,000 things differently, it just happened that I usually chose the most difficult thing, I don't know why, to see whether I could come through with it. I think I have a lot of my father in my there, it doesn't show, but I think I thrive under challenge, and even if I'm dead tired, and all the odds are against me I still am quite interested in trying to beat that situation. I enjoy things that are hard. And with careful

thought you can figure out a way of doing it and succeeding. But I'm sure I would've done 99,000 things differently, I might have married 8 or 10 different men in my life, but it just happened that I married the one I thought I would enjoy the most.

SM: If you could leave future generations with one thought, or one impression of your life, or your parents' lives, what would it be?

EC: I would say to have your work amount to something that communicates it with other people. That means a lot to me. And having it affect them in a positive way. And perhaps steer them on to try to do it themselves. I think that's one thing about a big family—it's not easy, but it wants you to benefit and have other people benefit from that experience. And it's all three…. So then ask me why I had just had two children.

SM: I thought you probably got sick of that question, but I will ask it [laughter].

EC: Two children were all we could fit into our lives, and my husband had to be
55:00 persuaded to have two, so there we are.

SM: So that was two more than he thought he would have.

EC: He didn't want any kids, in the beginning.

SM: It sounds like he changed his mind.

EC: Well, I guess life changed his mind. I think when he saw some of his nieces and nephews he couldn't [laughter]…

SM: One final question. You've been a lifelong supporter of libraries, and education, and literacy. What have libraries meant to you throughout your life?

EC: Well, it's the strongest influence on my life. Without any question, I'm a product of libraries for better or for worse. Certainly in every difficult situation in my life where I had to—I guess like the way Mother had to get to church that time—so I've had to go to libraries. There have been a lot of times where I've just needed to get a sense of refreshment and balance, and that's where I get it—it's my passion, if you will. And I care.

SM: Is there anything you'd like to say, for the record?

EC: With Purdue, I carry with me today as you talk to me, a great—I'm not a graduate of Purdue, but because of the family relationship I just literally have a love affair with Purdue, there's no question about that. At the same time, as often with a person you love, you can be critical of them, and I have had some quiet criticisms of them, and some have come up in our conversations today, and I'm thrilled that Purdue is aware of this problem [preservation and access to the Gilbreth collection] and is finding ways of solving it today. You're going to try and see how we're going to fit into that picture and help you. That makes me happy.

SM: Thank you so much for letting me interview you.

EC: Your questions were good, Dear, and they made me think.

SM: I enjoyed it very much.

EC: Me too.

[End of Interview]

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