

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley  
Historical Society and the Mill Valley  
Public Library*

**JOAN MURRAY**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2015**

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Joan Murray was born on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946. She and her mother moved from San Francisco to Mill Valley in October 1956. Joan attended Old Mill School, Edna Maguire School, and Tamalpais High School. She took courses at College of Marin and graduated from the University of San Francisco. Joan worked in banking and insurance until she retired in 2012, at which point she became incredibly active in volunteering with the community she so greatly loves.

Joan recounts her memories of Mill Valley, describing Jagtown, the population changes and political climate of Mill Valley in the 1960s, and the changes in downtown Mill Valley. Joan describes her extensive involvement in the Mill Valley community, serving as a member of the Library Board, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Outdoor Art Club, and the Mill Valley Historical Society. Joan discusses her work in forming Clean Mill Valley as well as her role in organizing the first City-wide Volunteer Day, which has become an annual event.

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## Oral History of Joan Murray

### Index

- 2AM Club....p.15  
189 Miller Ave....p.1  
200 Miller Ave....p.1, 16  
Bloomathon....p.11,13  
Brown's Hall....p.3  
Clean Mill Valley....p.11  
Creemer, Jeanie (mother)....p.1  
Creemer, Lloyd (stepfather)....p.1  
diversity in Mill Valley  
    community....p.7  
downtown Mill Valley in 60s....p.8  
early memories of Mill Valley....p.5-6  
education at College of Marin and  
    University of San Francisco....p.9, 10  
employment....p.10  
Fairfax residence....p.10  
Finn, John and Finn family....p.16  
Giacomino, Ray (husband)....p.6, 9  
Girl Scouts involvement....p.11  
Graver Lathan, Linda....p.1-2, 7  
Greenwood School....p.11  
Hanft, Julie....p.11, 12  
Jagtown....p.15  
Klyce Home at 189 Miller Ave...p.1  
Kott, Gerry....p.5  
Lucretia Little History Room....p.11  
Mill Valley Community Center....p.3-4  
Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival....p.6-7  
Mill Valley Historical Society....p.13  
Mill Valley Lumber Yard....p.1  
Mill Valley Public Library on Lovell  
    Ave....p.3  
Mill Valley Public Library Board....p.11  
Mill Valley Public Library  
Mill Valley Teen Association....p.3-4  
Old Mill Park....p.2, 15  
Old Mill School....p.1, 2  
Outdoor Art Club....p.3, 11-12  
Parks and Recreation  
    Commission....p.11  
political climate of Mill Valley....p.7  
Pollination (formerly  
    Bloomathon)....p.13  
Percy, Thelma....p.5  
population of Mill Valley....p.4  
San Francisco residence....p.2, 14  
Schwartz Family....p.1, 2  
traffic in Mill Valley....p.4  
travels into San Francisco....p.7-8  
transportation in Mill Valley....p.5  
Trubach, Gabriel and Serge....p.10  
Volunteer Day....p.13-14  
volunteerism in Mill Valley....p.13, 14  
Welte, Jim....p.12  
Wildwood....p.16  
Young, Dennis....p.7  
Young, Jill....p.1

**Oral History of Joan Murray**  
**April 8, 2015**

**Debra Schwartz:** Today is April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015. My name is Debra Schwartz and I am speaking today with Joan Murray. Hi Joan.

**Joan Murray:** Hi Debra. So I'll start off with telling you how and when I came to Mill Valley. We moved here on my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956. My mother had visited a friend. She was single, divorced, which was rather unusual at the time, and she came over to visit a friend and absolutely fell in love with Mill Valley. We lived in San Francisco at the time. We rented a house on Marion Avenue, 11 Marion, and we were living in the redwoods and it was pretty glorious. It was so interesting because I knew that when we moved here that it was a special place and that my life was different, and it was really wonderful.

I entered the fifth grade at Old Mill School and attended fifth and sixth grades there, went to Edna Maguire School for the seventh and eighth grade – that's before the middle school was built – and then went on to Tam and I was part of the class of '64. We just had our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion last year and I was on the organizing committee for that reunion, it was really fun.

My mother married when I was 14, remarried, and her name was Jeanie Creemer. That was her maiden name. Murray is my maiden name, which I've kept. My stepfather Lloyd Creemer worked at the Mill Valley Lumber Yard and he became the manager there. So we have very strong ties to the town, and to the hills and the trees and every part of it. He said he would sit on the bridge and drink his coffee in the morning and watch people go by on the buses to commute and knew how fortunate he really was. As an aside, when he died, I illegally, along with my daughters and sister, scattered his ashes at Mill Valley Lumber in the creek so [laughs] he's still there! So, we have really strong bonds.

I think one of things I realized when I came here, even as a child, was the importance of being in a small town and how much it nourished me. It was easy to know a lot of people and, you know, I can remember even once being in high school in a freshman history class and answering a question that, rather stupidly, got reported back to my dad the next day. He played basketball at night with the history teacher, right? So it was that kind of community. At one point we lived in just about every area of Mill Valley. I don't know what it was about my mom but she just moved about. At one point we lived on Miller Avenue, we were at 200 Miller Avenue. What was then at 205 was a really cute little boy, who I would later marry, and at 189 Miller was a friend who is still a friend, Fred Schwartz. He lived in a Klyce home that Klyce<sup>1</sup> built. That was a maternity hospital at one time.

**Debra Schwartz:** Here in Mill Valley?

**Joan Murray:** Yup, and the family that lives there now is Schwartz, and they've allowed us to take pictures of the exterior of their home for an exhibit that's upcoming at the [Mill Valley Public] Library. At any rate, three of us lived in this little triangle. This

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey A. Klyce, one of Mill Valley's most prominent builders.

was in seventh grade. My friend Linda Graver Lathan lived down the street. She was at 254. So you were really close to your friends. Jim and Fred and Linda and I still share – they come over every Christmas Eve. Our bonds are pretty strong even though I don't necessarily see Linda very often. Because I am very involved in the community, if someone finds out that I actually grew up here they are absolutely astonished that there are other people who we all have known for many, many years. It's something that's really precious to me.

**Debra Schwartz:** So may I ask you a couple of questions? One, you mentioned that you knew when you were in fifth grade and moved here up to Marion that it was different, very different. Will you expand a little about that? What do you mean? I mean as a fifth grader you noticing something – what was it that you noticed that was different? You'd been living in the city –

**Joan Murray:** Where there were no trees.

**Debra Schwartz:** What part of the city were you living in?

**Joan Murray:** We had lived in the Mission, and we had lived in North Beach, and both [were] welcoming communities, but asphalt, mostly asphalt. And of course there were so far fewer homes at the time. There was a lot more open space when I was growing up. I used to walk down a dirt road to school from the lower part of Marion to Cascade, and now there's a house right in the middle of it. As a child, walking along there and surrounded by what, to me, were huge trees – I mean they certainly weren't first growth redwoods by any means – but to me they were astonishingly tall. Not having seen too many trees except at Golden Gate Park and those were not the same kinds of trees that we have here. There was something pretty sacred about it, too. I could go to Old Mill Park after school, and there wouldn't be anybody there. There would be no one there.

There was an interesting statistic from 2012 – because I served on the Parks and Rec Commission – there were 250,000 registered users of Old Mill Park in 2012. Those are registered users. Those are not the people who just come to bring their children to the park and swing, or who have a casual picnic. These are people who might be running through the park, it could be part of the Dipsea Race, it could be any number of things. But those numbers are just so astonishing for the time that I grew up. Now, if you go back to 1900, that's very different. You see pictures of town where there are hoards of hikers coming up the Dipsea Steps.

Victoria Schwartz, who was the mother of my friend Fred, who lived at 189 Miller, lived at 100 Lovell. Her grandmother had bought that property in the 1890 land auction. Victoria told me that they could sit on their porch and look up at the Dipsea Steps – actually see them – because there was so little growth at that time they could see right to the steps. So, you know, I think people like Victoria gave me an interest in Mill Valley and what it was, its history, etc. She's the first person who told me about the sulfur springs at Old Mill School. I knew nothing about that, even having grown up here. I was an adult before I learned about that. Listening to people who had been here for a long time really stirred up my interest in the town and its history, etc. I was really lucky that way.

But most of the people I knew, a great many of them, moved over here from the city<sup>2</sup>, particularly post-World War II. It was colder in the city and they wanted to be someplace where there was more sun but not have this horrendous wet commute into the city. So a lot of my friends' fathers commuted into the city, as did my mother. That's how a lot of people arrived, but I still was lucky enough to know some of the old-timers who gave me all kinds of information.

That leads me to think about, you know, one of the institutions in Mill Valley that has always been precious to me is the Library and we used the old Library on Lovell Avenue. Even on a really hot day – there aren't many hot days in Mill Valley – you could go downstairs at the old Library and there was a teenage room and a children's room. And again, because of the times, I could be the only one in one of those rooms, and it was always very cool and it was very comfortable. And so, you got to know the librarian and it was a really comfortable place to be and to go. My mother was an avid reader, I became an avid reader, so we spent a lot of time in the Library.

I think because of my comfort and my love of the community I became very involved. I became a volunteer very early on. My husband and I were talking about it very recently because we're in the same grade –although he went to Park School and I went to Old Mill – but we each were traffic patrol people. And [as a traffic patrol person] you had a badge and you had this – it's a hard thing to describe – this belt thing that looped over you, and you wore your badge, and you had your stop sign, and you stood out. And the idea of a 10- or 11-year-old holding a sign and standing out [in the street] today is pretty scary with the traffic that we have today.

**Debra Schwartz:** You were a crossing guard?

**Joan Murray:** We were crossing guards, and that was my first volunteer position I think. So that was really fun. I was with the Schwartzes, who again, lived at 189 Miller. They were really active. They founded, along with some other parents, the Mill Valley Teen Association. The point of that was to raise money so that we would have a permanent place for dances.

**Debra Schwartz:** What year was this exactly?

**Joan Murray:** This would have been '58. We had dances at the Outdoor Art Club, we had dances at the [Mill Valley] Golf Clubhouse. I look at those places now and I wonder, how many of us really were there? Certainly the Outdoor Art Club is larger than the floor area of the Golf Clubhouse. When we got older we had dances at Brown's Hall, which is now the Buddhist Temple [of Marin]. Those had a pretty bad reputation –

**Debra Schwartz:** At Brown's Hall?

**Joan Murray:** Yeah, I'm not sure why. I'm not sure if it was dirty dancing or what. But at any rate the whole point of the Mill Valley Teen Association was to raise money. We wanted a community center. I don't know if you've heard this story, but the community center, the one which proceeded the one we have now – this beautiful, I think

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<sup>2</sup> San Francisco

it was \$12 million to build this one – was actually an old restaurant that got barged over from Highway 101 and the City [of Mill Valley] bought it for a dollar.

**Debra Schwartz:** The old community center was a barge restaurant? That old wooden one?

**Joan Murray:** No, it was a restaurant that had been barged over.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, barged over.

**Joan Murray:** I love telling this story because it's so amusing. By the time we actually had it available for dances, they were asking me to be a chaperone. That's how long it took to do that. But at any rate, so Mill Valley Teen Association, my parents were involved in that, and the Schwartzes and other parents as well. But that whole idea of doing something in your community that also benefits you and your friends and so forth.

**Debra Schwartz:** Basically Mill Valley was a place that created its own experience, and it was self-contained in that way.

**Joan Murray:** It was very self-contained.

**Debra Schwartz:** What was the population back then, when you're talking about?

**Joan Murray:** You know, it was probably around 10,000 people. But the difference was, there wasn't the growth that you see now in places like Tam Valley and Strawberry. Certainly those places were populated, but today people will talk about Mill Valley, "Well, it's only 14,000 people." You tell me that when you try to get in East Blithedale driving. All 14,000 people are not out there but it feels that way. The interesting thing is that if you add up the people who live in Strawberry, the people who live in Homestead, the people who live in Tam Valley, you're talking about 30,000 people. If you go outside the city limits, that's the population that the Community Center serves. When we have a City Council meeting and someone's complaining about the traffic, we've got people from Tam Valley or Homestead coming to talk about it. It's not just the people who live within the city limits.

**Debra Schwartz:** Okay, so when you came in '56, we know that Mill Valley itself was about 10,000 people, but what was the population difference with Strawberry and Homestead?

**Joan Murray:** Oh, I have no idea. I don't know. Now all those kids of course I grew up with because they went to Mill Valley schools, but the density that we have today, it's just phenomenal compared to what we've got now. Plus, cars! One of the things I've thought about recently is that we've had this resurgence of children. Within my block, one block, we have 19 kids and I think the oldest might be 12. The idea that all these 19 are all going to be driving within a short period of time is really astonishing.

**Debra Schwartz:** Let's go back and you talked about your father working at Mill Valley Lumber, and he saw the buses come and go. Let's get a picture of how it would have been different that people had less cars then. I mean there was transportation. The tracks were still out?

**Joan Murray:** No, well, the tracks had been taken up. The Greyhound Bus ran. It wasn't Golden Gate Transit yet.

**Debra Schwartz:** So was it running people locally around?

**Joan Murray:** No, there were the commute buses and beyond, but no, there was no local bus. There was really not much of a need for local transportation. So there were still freight trains, but not up Miller Avenue. They would go up what's now the multi-use path to Corte Madera, but there wasn't anything at that time serving Mill Valley. At any rate, it was just very different. When trying to paint a picture: First of all, my mother was very unusual in that when we moved here her being single was pretty unusual. In my fifth grade class there were two kids who had single mothers. That was it. The rest of them, everybody, was married. Their moms were at home, their fathers worked, there was one car in the family. That was it. It was pretty unusual that a kid would have their own car. Certainly boys did, more often by the time they got to be 16, 17, but it was not a common occurrence. My in-laws, they always had one car. He commuted, he worked for PG&E for 40 years, he took the bus in, and they only had that one car. That certainly hasn't been the case for me. We've always had two cars.

**Debra Schwartz:** But you're describing a community, it seems, correct me if I'm wrong, where it really was self-contained. There was a strong family unit here in town where the commuting parent, whoever worked, took the bus into town, and downtown was – when you went downtown, why did you go downtown? What did you see?

**Joan Murray:** Well I would go to the movies, the kiddies' matinee on Saturday. You'd go to the kiddies' matinee and spent one quarter, and you could get candy for a nickel. I was always the first person in line so that probably should have told me something about how I was developing my character. I just didn't want to be late. And I'm still not [laughs]! It was really fun to do. And I don't mean to paint a picture of, you know, something idyllic. One of my friends, one of the kids in my class, actually had a father who was in prison. And he was in San Quentin. He was a local builder, a really prominent local builder. His name was Gerry Kott, he's now deceased, and I recorded his oral history before he died. He wasn't a very honest person – that's his story. It's not like we were an idyllic community in any way.

One of the things I told Joyce Kleiner, who wrote the most recent book *Legendary Locals of Mill Valley* – Joyce is a neighbor of mine – and when we were talking about earlier Mill Valley, at least early in my time frame, I told her a story which she used in her book that our Head Librarian at the time, Thelma Percy, had told me. Thelma's mother was Russian and Jewish, and I'm not sure if she had immigrated, I'm not clear on that, but when she would come to visit Thelma she would say she didn't like Mill Valley because she couldn't tell where the good neighborhoods were. When Thelma told me that



I thought, wow, that's why I like it here, because you can't tell where the good neighborhoods are. Although now they're all good neighborhoods, unfortunately. But, as a time when a longshoreman lived right next door to a dentist, I liked that eclecticism of Mill Valley, and that's one of the things that made it special. You could have a kid whose father was in prison and then you had a friend whose father was one of the best pediatric dentists in the county. There was that kind of mix that you rarely get. There's such an artistic nucleus to the development of our community, and we are losing that because of affordability. People can't buy here.

**Debra Schwartz:** Tell me, how about safety? How was it for you to get around as a child? Were you an independent child?

**Joan Murray:** Oh yes, absolutely.

**Debra Schwartz:** Was there much crime in the area at the time?

**Joan Murray:** No, no, no. When we lived on Miller Avenue we lived across the street from Chief McGowan and he was just the loveliest man, and you knew all the policemen.

**Debra Schwartz:** The policemen lived here in town?

**Joan Murray:** All of the policemen lived here.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did all of the fireman live here?

**Joan Murray:** Yep. The firemen lived here, the teachers lived here, everyone was your neighbor, and that doesn't happen anymore either. When my husband was a firefighter for Alto Richardson Bay, which became part of Southern Marin, and when he retired – which was 1989, he went out on early disability retirement – he and the chief were the only two firefighters who lived here in town. Today, like San Francisco, they all live outside of the city. Today in Mill Valley they all live outside. I don't think we have any firefighters who live in Mill Valley.

**Debra Schwartz:** Can you remember anything that happened in Mill Valley distinctly, that left an impression with you? Something that happened with the community, some kind of event?

**Joan Murray:** Well, sure. You know if you think of the art festival [Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival], it started with paintings in the windows of downtown merchants. That was the very first one in 1956.

**Debra Schwartz:** Was it just agreed upon by the merchants they were going to have a week of paintings?

**Joan Murray:** Well, I don't know, I was 10 years old and I haven't researched it and I don't know how it came about. But I do remember that there were paintings in the

windows of various stores and it evolved from there. At one point it expanded and they had it in the parking lot by the Depot, which is now the drive-through part, and the Plaza, and they closed all that off. Then for a while it was at Boyle Park and then it came to Old Mill, I don't remember what year.

**Debra Schwartz:** What year did it start?

**Joan Murray:** '56. That was really evident of part of our artistic culture and community, and you knew, just as I said, people who might be a dentist or a longshoreman, and you also knew artists. I mean, there was such a healthy, wonderful mix of people and occupations. There certainly wasn't much diversity. I remember the controversy of the Collins' being the first African-American family in town. A friend of ours who we grew up with and who I went to school with at Old Mill, Dennis Young, has told me about his Chinese-American family and how hard it was to buy a house on Tamalpais Avenue. That would've been in the mid-'50s. There wasn't a lot of diversity, but people were starting to break that bubble.

**Debra Schwartz:** Would you consider it a blend of artists and blue collar and professionals?

**Joan Murray:** Oh yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** But was it liberal? Non-liberal?

**Joan Murray:** Well, that's interesting. We were a Republican community. If you go back historically you will see at that time Marin County was Republican, and Mill Valley wasn't any different. However, what else was here were people like the secretary of the Longshoreman's Union lived here, there were the artists I mentioned, there were a lot of liberals. In fact, our friend Dennis Young said that the reason that his Chinese-American family was able to buy here is because a real estate agent went to the various people around them and said, "Would you mind if a Chinese-American family moves here?", and they said, "No." He said they felt fortunate that the people who were approached were all very liberal in their thinking, which was not the case in other areas.

**Debra Schwartz:** So, let me ask, you are living in a very self-contained area, and when you ventured out to Sausalito or San Rafael, did you have that same feeling of home that you had here in Mill Valley? Did Mill Valley represent basically Marin County in many ways?

**Joan Murray:** I think each town was really different. I can remember getting on the Greyhound Bus at 12 [years old] and going into the city. I can remember my friend Linda Graver and I going in to see Sandra Dee, the movie star, at Macy's and we were 12 years old. The idea today of putting two 12-year-old girls on a bus to go in to the city is not something that I would do. It was different. You didn't think twice of it. Now, it's just kind of scary. Yeah, it just doesn't even occur to me that I would let my grandkids go there, but we did. But, you know, until we were in high school we really didn't venture

far. My mother would take us to the ballet. Most often she just sent us to the ballet but she wouldn't go with us. She'd say, "Here, get on the bus and go see the Nutcracker or get on the bus and go to Macy's." You couldn't shop here [in Mill Valley] to speak of. We did have a department store at the corner of Miller and Throckmorton. We had a department store called Mayer's, but it was very expensive. So we had to go into the city. At that time, there was no Northgate<sup>3</sup>. There weren't malls. You went into the city to do your shopping. So that's what we did. You'd get on the bus and go do your shopping.

**Debra Schwartz:** So maybe you can tell me if you can remember back, how Mill Valley changed with time? The '50s, then the '60s, and then toward the late '60s things were really changing in San Francisco. How did it affect Mill Valley?

**Joan Murray:** Well, you know, it's interesting. Even in the '60s there literally was no traffic downtown. I mean there was none. I walked a lot. We had a number of bars downtown, and that's the only place cars would be parked. They would be clustered around the three bars that were downtown.

**Debra Schwartz:** Which were called?

**Joan Murray:** There was Quinn's, which was near where Mill Valley Flowers is now. There was The Old Mill, where Vasco<sup>4</sup> is. Then there was The Office, which is where the Old Sweetwater<sup>5</sup> is on Throckmorton. So you might see a couple cars parked downtown there after dinnertime. Other than that there wasn't anything in sight.

**Debra Schwartz:** Wow.

**Joan Murray:** Not a car in sight. It was really boring to us that there was nothing to do, but I knew enough to have the sense that one day I would rue that there was nothing to do here and nobody around. But certainly the changes that started happening were really more obvious in the late '60s, '70s. I'd say more the early '70s when there were certainly more people.

One issue we had were dogs. Dogs were just running everywhere! There was no such thing as a poop bag [laughs]. Nobody would have ever considered picking up pet stuff.

**Debra Schwartz:** So these were locally owned dogs that would run amok?

**Joan Murray:** They would come out in packs, and it was a huge issue because we had dogs everywhere!

**Debra Schwartz:** [Laughs] I've never heard that!

**Joan Murray:** It's nice to be done with that.

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<sup>3</sup> A shopping mall in San Rafael.

<sup>4</sup> Italian restaurant located at 106 Throckmorton Ave.

<sup>5</sup> Live music venue and bar located at 153 Throckmorton Ave.

**Debra Schwartz:** So how was it contained?

**Joan Murray:** Well, you know, it was probably leash laws etc., and there was just a certain intolerance and we moved past it, but it was quite a problem. You know another thing, particularly in the downtown area, is that you did know the merchants. I knew when I went to buy my Campfire Girl uniform where I was going. I knew when I went to buy my kids' shoes I would go to Mosher's Shoes, and their daughter was in my Brownie troop. You had these kinds of connections that we still do to a degree. There are some connections, not as many, but I really cherish them. I really appreciate knowing the people I'm doing business with. There's a not a lot of them, but there's a few. That I think I do miss.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you leave for school, when you went to college?

**Joan Murray:** No. No, in fact I got married when I was 18.

**Debra Schwartz:** Right out of high school?

**Joan Murray:** Right of high school.

**Debra Schwartz:** To a man in your high school class?

**Joan Murray:** He was ahead of me. Talk about social change. He went to Vietnam, and so before he left we got married.

**Debra Schwartz:** His name?

**Joan Murray:** Ray Giacomino. Had he not been going to Vietnam, I probably wouldn't have married him, which means I wouldn't have had my two daughters. So that was absolutely worthwhile. We were married for nine years, then divorced, and that was that.

**Debra Schwartz:** But you didn't go away to school then?

**Joan Murray:** No, I would take one class a semester because I had kids.

**Debra Schwartz:** Right away you had children?

**Joan Murray:** No. I had my first daughter when I was 22 and my second at 23. So I was working, I would take one class a semester.

**Debra Schwartz:** Where?

**Joan Murray:** Oh, I went to College of Marin and got my first 30 units, I think, there. Then I went to USF [University of San Francisco] and graduated from USF. That's the

way it happened, and that was pretty common. I had a number of friends who got married very young, went back to school. I have a friend who is an anthropologist who actually worked in the Chamber of Commerce in downtown in Mill Valley after school. We had work experience in high school. She worked there. So she became an anthropologist. I have another friend, she's really interesting, her father was a really interesting Sausalito artist.

**Debra Schwartz:** Maybe you can give names?

**Joan Murray:** Sure. So that was Gabriel Trubach, her father was Serge Trubach, and he was a pretty well-known artist in Sausalito. So she was one of my good friends, and we all, as I say a number of us, got married young.

**Debra Schwartz:** Back then, of course, it was very common for women not to go to college, encouraged by some parents, as I recall. So to have small children and be taking class, some people might consider it not necessary, but you did.

**Joan Murray:** Yes, but I was taking one class a semester, period. And that's what I could manage to do. But it took me a long time.

**Debra Schwartz:** You stayed in Mill Valley when you married your high school sweetheart?

**Joan Murray:** Well, you know, we bought a house in Fairfax, and the reason we bought in Fairfax – this was 1969 – the house was \$18,500. We had looked at a house on Walnut here in Mill Valley, and it was \$22,000 and we couldn't afford it. We could buy the house there for \$18,500.

**Debra Schwartz:** And your mother still lived in Mill Valley?

**Joan Murray:** Yes, and of course, I spent most of my time here during the day anyway because she had a pool. I brought my kids down.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did she ever buy a home or was she just renting place to place?

**Joan Murray:** Oh yes, she had a home.

**Debra Schwartz:** On Miller?

**Joan Murray:** No, she actually bought a home in Tam Valley. I spent a lot of time there in those three years. Then we sold that house and moved back. I divorced, I went to work, and worked my way up the corporate ladder. And actually, corporate America paid for a large part of my education because at the time taking classes at USF was pretty expensive. That's what enabled me to go there, is just having a lot of help from corporate America. I worked in banking, in insurance, and I retired in 2012.

Before we started the recording I mentioned to you it's hard to remember what I did in my work. I was primarily in operations and customer service management, and I loved what I did. But it seems so distant now. I still remained intact and involved in my community. I always felt there was one thing I could commit to while I was working and being a parent. For a while I was a Brownie leader and had a Brownie troop that met on Saturdays, which was the first troop that ever had done that because that was the only time I could do it. And that was really fun. I served on the Library Board, I was chair of the task force that developed the Library Foundation, and I served on the Foundation Board after that. At the time that I was on the Library Board, that's when we were putting together the History Room, and at the time we had gotten a grant that allowed us to actually hire a History Librarian who started cataloging all of the donations that we had gotten from Lucretia Little, all of her donations. That was the beginning of the History Room, and that was while I was on the Library Board, from 1976 to 1982. That's what really sparked, renewed my interest. I had been so focused on raising kids and working but I figured I could be involved with the Library. I saw what was happening with the History Room and that was pretty exciting.

**Debra Schwartz:** Let's talk about what you've been doing since 2012 when you retired. I know you through Clean Mill Valley and the various boards you're on and the various groups you've created. Let's talk about how you see Mill Valley now and how you see it going into the future.

**Joan Murray:** I just came off the Parks and Recreation Commission, I was there for six years. One of the things that I really wanted to do while I was on the commission, and I wasn't successful at it, was to create a park – we had selected Sycamore Park as a possible site for this – was to create a place where it was pack it in, pack it out as an environment because it has concerned me that litter has such a huge impact on our environment. Not only is it not attractive, obviously, but also it goes into the streams and goes out to the ocean. So I wasn't able to get that done there. But because I was retired and I had the time, in 2012 I contacted people from multiple groups, including Mill Valley Streamkeepers, the Outdoor Art Club, Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce. I'm sure I'm missing some, but key organizations in town, and we talked about what are we going to do to address litter? Now the Outdoor Art Club, of which I'm a member, has a long history of cleaning up the community and beautifying it. So I was sure to include the Outdoor Art Club in that, and they have been incredibly supportive.

We formed an organization called Clean Mill Valley, and we have been so incredibly fortunate in the people who work with us. Bloomathon, which is a Mill Valley institution, has been beautifying Mill Valley by planting bulbs and cleaning up for Earth Day. Jill Young from Bloomathon has been, you know, just a stalwart contributor and part of this. We meet monthly, we have developed relationships with all of the organizations I've mentioned, we have periodic clean-ups, we got a grant from the Outdoor Art Club for almost \$1,800 for materials, which include decals. We have a merchant pledge, merchants who are pledging to sweep the front of their stores, and recycle, and educate their employees about recycling and so forth. That's been really interesting. We have, to date, 91 merchants signed up for this program.

What makes it so unique is that we have been working with Greenwood School, which is at the site of the old Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, and the environmental studies teacher there, Julie Hanft, has been this incredible ball of energy, and leading her kids, her students, mostly sixth graders, to do environmental work. They go into merchant locations and sign them up on pledge, give them a sticker to put on their window, and then they follow-up to make sure that the merchant is adhering to the pledge they signed up for.

**Debra Schwartz:** How do they follow-up? And how old are these children?

**Joan Murray:** They are 11 years old. They are far more effective than I would be I'm sure. They haven't started this phase yet, but they will walk into a store and say, "How are you doing, I see there is some litter outside of your store." It's just been –

**Debra Schwartz:** [Laughs] Whose idea was this? Because who could say no to a child, right?

**Joan Murray:** Exactly! Well you know what's so interesting about this project is that the students, some of their parents, and certainly Julie, their teacher, come to our monthly meetings, which we hold at the Outdoor Art Club, and we make sure that those students are very much a part of the process. They are not discounted because they are 11 years old. We sat down and wrote the pledge together, something that could resonate with them. We made sure that we had other shareholders, for instance we work with Jim Welte, who is one of the key people at the [Mill Valley] Chamber of Commerce because he could tell us: What will merchants agree to and what won't they? Are we asking them to do too much? Is this acceptable? He worked with us. So the students had an idea of really coordinating with adults. And I don't think they ever felt like they were kids. They weren't kids, they were just part of the solution. And they come to these meetings and are just so, oh my gosh, they are so enthusiastic, and they are just terrific. So terrific.

**Debra Schwartz:** I've actually been to the meetings before, and I have to say that they lead the meetings quite a bit. These are very pro-active children.

**Joan Murray:** Yes, and we want that to happen. We don't want to take over, we want them to feel empowered, because that's what's making this work.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well to me, what you're describing is that community involvement, where people are very much involved with merchants, as you are describing to me when you were younger of having a sense of people knowing each other and having a familiar exchange, as a community member. Which is very much what this program you are describing is not just initiating, but it describes more than just a project.

**Joan Murray:** Yes, absolutely. Well so our next step is – Julie has already made a connection with Tam High and we are going to be meeting this month with some students at Tam, and I have gotten a sizable donation from a fairy godmother in the community because I said, "What I really want to do next is get out and educate students in the

schools.” We had that in the ’70s, and you have to keep on with these things. Founders of the Outdoor Art Club were paying kids to pick up litter in the first part of the 1900s, you know? You can’t stop it. I mean, littering is not going to stop, but if you continue the education, the sense of community that this belongs to you, then people are going to stay involved. So it’s just something to keep on doing.

Along those lines, the other thing you asked is what have you done since you retired? Part of that, you know, having a sense of the community and how it’s changing, you asked about that earlier too. My mother-in-law, Pat Stephenson, belonged to the [Mill Valley] Community Church for many, many years. She told me they would have an “opportunity sale.” It was a big church rummage sale, a big, big deal. The biggest part of their budget came from this rummage sale. As she got older and older and her whole generation was literally dying off, they couldn’t find volunteers to do this. And I became aware, especially because of other organizations I was involved with, like the Historical Society, finding board members, finding volunteers for anything was difficult. Because, one, we were speeding up the demands we had on people’s time. People with children who at one point may have been able to do homework entirely on their own could no longer do that. There were parents that were typically much more involved. When I went to school, my parents weren’t involved in the school. They let the school do that job. That’s not where we’ve evolved. Parents are having to spend more time, and enjoying it too, I’m sure. But it meant that we had fewer volunteers.

A couple of years ago I went to the Historical Society and I talked with Bloomathon because these were two organizations that I knew were looking for volunteers, and I said, “If we were to put together some kind of event where we could solicit volunteers, this smorgasbord of different organizations in town where people could learn about volunteer opportunities and sign up, would you be interested?” The Historical Society said yes. Bloomathon said yes. And, to make a point, Bloomathon is no longer. They aged out. These women were in their 80s, some in their 90s, some maybe younger, but not much. The City [of Mill Valley] was looking to let go of Bloomathon and they were looking for ways – they have a new name for it, it’s called “Pollination.”

**Debra Schwartz:** Bloomathon, for those that don’t know about Bloomathon, is a city beautification program where you plant flowers, things like this.

**Joan Murray:** Right, right. And they were very much in conjunction with the City. The City acted as their financial arm. We would get donations but the City would retain the money and they would purchase the bulbs or make sure we had the money to purchase the bulbs.

**Debra Schwartz:** So now it’s called Pollination?

**Joan Murray:** Now it’s called Pollination, but there are some challenges to finding people to take over, where the older people can no longer do it. Two years ago we had our first Volunteer Day event at the [Mill Valley Depot] Plaza. It was 2014, we had about 30 nonprofits in the Plaza during National Volunteer Week. The City Council issued a proclamation acknowledging National Volunteer Week. They provide the tables and the chairs and I’ve done the organizing. We have a City Council member or two come down



and who talks about running for City Council. We have the City Clerk there talking about commissions. We have firemen talking about the Volunteer Fire Department, and the Emergency Planning Commission, all of the Library associations, all our environmental groups. There's just so much – the arts and entertainment. These are all, by the way, Mill Valley organizations. We did not invite organizations that are serving all of Marin County, they have to serve Mill Valley. Somehow we weren't able to get an interest from Tam High last year. This year Tam High will be there. They have an outreach committee, which is equivalent to what you and I probably knew as the student council. So they're going to be there.

**Debra Schwartz:** What's the date that this takes place?

**Joan Murray:** This is April 18<sup>th</sup>, and it will be 10-2 in the Plaza. The Historical Society will be there, there will be the Chamber of Commerce, a lot of different groups. One of the things when the Mayor issued the proclamation at the most recent City Council meeting, which was Monday night, the 6<sup>th</sup>, I accepted the proclamation, and one of the things I said in accepting it is that what was so joyous last year is that we had such a good time. All these various groups, we had a great time together, we got to know one another, it was like a big community picnic. And of course, if you're involved you know a lot of the same people, but nonetheless there were plenty more to meet. It was just a wonderful event. We're doing it again this year. Those are a couple of things I've done with my retirement. I lead a hiking group for the Outdoor Art Club, moderate hiking. We have two women are in their 80s who hike with us.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you hike a lot as a child growing up here?

**Joan Murray:** I hiked a fair amount as a child. Once I hit high school, no, I didn't. But as an adult, yes.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, I'm enjoying listening to you describe some of the things that you've done and your involvement in the town, especially with the volunteer program that's coming up, the Volunteer Day. For those that are moving here, or that are recent to moving here in the last few years, it is a real opportunity to plug in quite quickly to our town. As a way to swiftly come to know each other, to be mentored by those who have been doing what they have been doing for a long time, to learn about the history, about the people, the legacy of the people that have lived here before.

**Joan Murray:** And to be included. To be included.

**Debra Schwartz:** Do you think that that's what you felt when you first came here to Mill Valley from a large urban area to suddenly you'd come to a place where you were really home and included?

**Joan Murray:** Yes, although, I think I've always felt that way. Because you form communities wherever you are. Living in North Beach, it was a very Italian-American enclave, and I felt very cared for, I attended Saint Peter's and Paul Church and went to

catechism there and went to mass there. You know there is continuity. When we moved to Mill Valley, I went to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and so forth. So I would find community wherever I am.

**Debra Schwartz:** And make community as well I suspect.

**Joan Murray:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Alright so, what haven't we talked about so far that you would like to share with the people who are listening to this interview?

**Joan Murray:** You know, I think there are changes that have occurred that are so unimaginable. Some of the things we were talking about earlier, like being on a bus and going into the city when you're 12, that wouldn't happen today. One of the things I think about with amusement is the Old Mill. Well when I was in high school, we carved our initials into the Old Mill. It would never have occurred to me that it was a historic monument. It wasn't at the time – it was falling down, it wasn't really cared for. There wasn't any local appreciation for it other than it was there and we knew the town was named for it but that was about it.

So there are things like that that occur, that you think that the kinds of things you did as a kid you wouldn't do in another time. It's not that we didn't know better. That's what everybody did. Everybody let their dogs out and never cleaned up after them. We're all stretching it a bit, but it was certainly not as neat and tidy as it is in some ways. Not that we don't have issues with litter, but we don't have the kinds of issues – we wouldn't have needed a dog park, for instance. People would have laughed at the idea of a dog park. Or thinking that you would have a park where the garbage dump was.

When I think of Mill Valley history and how we've moved out – at one time, the city limit, what they called Jagtown, which was around Hill and Grove, that was the bad area. The 2AM Club, which is at Montford, was the 2AM Club because the bars in town had to close at midnight and the 2AM Club could stay open until 2 a.m. It's what we consider certainly within the city limits of town. When I was growing up there was certainly nothing like the Redwoods across from the high school. There was nothing out there at all on that side of Camino Alto. There was the train that came through, the tracks that came through, and that was it.

**Debra Schwartz:** Why don't you explain for people that don't know what Jagtown was, actually why it was called Jagtown.

**Joan Murray:** You may know more about that than I do, but I know there was a bar there, bars, and there was rumored to be a house of prostitution. I'm not sure that that's accurate, but it was the wild part of town, along East Blithedale, near Hill, Grove, Dell, and around that area.

**Debra Schwartz:** In the town's early conception, drinking within the town limits was not allowed. Whether that was legal or not to state, that was the reality. So outside the town limits was where the bars were. Jagtown as in "going on a jag," it's an idiom from

that era, it meant to go wild, to have fun. Now I hadn't heard about the house of prostitution, but I wouldn't be surprised.

**Joan Murray:** Yeah, well that's supposed to be the house that is, it's now I believe apartments and it very well may have been at the time, but right at the corner of East Blithedale and Dell Lane. But some of the things that you'll read – I really think the truth can be stretched, and a good example would be, I knew the grandson of John Finn, the original Finn who owned Wildwood on Miller Avenue. Now Wildwood was a home that was – oh my God, I can't imagine what it was like at the time they bought it – but it was seven acres on Miller Avenue near Millwood, and the Finns had a lot of kids. 200 Miller, which my mother rented for a while, was built for one of their sons as a wedding gift. Their grandson, who was raised for part of his life there, was someone I got to know in my adulthood. He's been dead some years. If he were alive today he would certainly be, probably in his late 80s. He would tell me stories, like the house at 200 Miller his grandparents built for his Uncle Bob as a wedding gift, and he said they purchased or built, bought a house for each one of their kids. They had a whole pile of them.

There's this story that their house, which at the time was one of the largest in Southern Marin, was a Bernard Maybeck architecturally-designed property. When I was very active with the Historical Society I communicated in writing with the director of the Maybeck Society, who said, "That is most certainly not a Maybeck house." This real estate agent was advertising it as a Maybeck-designed house. So we were trying to figure out, where did this information come from? So it came from the oral history of one of the daughters. The grandson said to me, "Oh, you know, that's aunt so-and-so. She always likes to feel important and she knows darn well that Maybeck didn't design that house."

So it's stuff like that, you get this incorrect information that's perpetuated and we did get the real estate agent to back off the claim that it was Maybeck-designed because the person who was head of the Maybeck Society said, "There's nothing consistent about the style, there's nothing in it that he's ever done, there's nothing in his files, etc., etc." But this oral history that got collected some time ago, where the woman claimed it was Maybeck-designed, was going to be perpetuated, and certainly by the real estate person that wanted to sell the house at a greater price.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well that's how it is with history sometimes.

**Joan Murray:** Yeah, it is.

**Debra Schwartz:** As we're closing up here, if you were to think about how you'd like to see Mill Valley going into the future – you really caught a wave of this idyllic small town in many ways next to this interesting urban area, and there have been many changes over the years. What would you like to see going forward for your community? You're going to stay here right?

**Joan Murray:** I have no intention of leaving. But I'll tell you, what I want is not possible. It won't happen. I raised my children here, both sets of grandparents were here. If I couldn't get to an event, my father, my mother were there to watch the kids, if I was on a business trip or something like that and they were in a play. I couldn't do that with

my grandchildren because they live in Sonoma County, and trying to get through the traffic after working in the city to go to a play on a weeknight, or a game, just wasn't going to happen. So I missed that sense of closeness and that certainly impacted my relationship with my children and my grandchildren. But my kids certainly couldn't afford to buy here and we were very fortunate to be able to purchase when we did, and so we've been lucky that way. It saddens me that there is no room anymore for people like who my mother was when she came here. There's no way that a single woman with a high school education could move to Mill Valley and buy a home, which she eventually did. That saddens me. I don't think anything that I would want that's really valuable is doable. It's just that simple. The economics of today will not stop me from doing what I do, building community and taking part in it.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yes, well, we may not be able to have that kind of community with our merchants and the various stores and the support with the Police Chief and our firemen that live in our community but we certainly can reach out to the others that live here and find another way to have community. So having said that I think that concludes our interview. Thank you so much for all your time and all of the interesting stories, and we'll see you on Volunteer Day.