

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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JOHN GODDARD

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Alison Owings in 2006**

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Born and raised in Marin, John Goddard had an active Mill Valley childhood, participating in numerous clubs and sports. His love for music also blossomed at this time. He began working at the local music store, Village Music, as a teenager. At the age of 24, John took over the store. Under his ownership, Village Music transformed into a hotspot for local and international celebrities, such as Grateful Dead band members and George Lucas, as well as casual record collectors. John's anniversary parties at the Sweetwater Music Hall became legendary around town, attracting musicians like B.B. King and Elvis Costello. Because of a shift in Mill Valley's economy, Village Music faced possible closure as rents rose and the number of customers declined. Sadly, a year after this interview was conducted, John was no longer able to keep Village Music open and it officially closed September of 2007. Afterwards, John continued to maintain his storeroom on Sunnyside Avenue, selling and trading music as a hobby. John's impact on the local music scene has left an indelible mark on Mill Valley.

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Oral History of John Goddard
December 7, 2006

Editor's note: The oral history below was originally recorded as a video. The audio recording and transcript were edited to remove information outside the scope of this oral history. For the full, unedited video interview and additional information on this oral history, please visit the Lucretia Little History Room.

Alison Owings: This is an interview with John Goddard at Village Music on December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day, 2006. I'm Alison Owings and Tim Amyx is doing the video. And I want to ask you sort of going backwards first, that you had a Taiwan buyer who came in last week and he had a big order. What did he or she buy?

John Goddard: He works for a chain of 15 stores in Taiwan and he bought \$20,000 of all genres of music.

Alison Owings: Nothing in particular?

Tim Amyx: Wow, that'll keep you in business for a month or two, huh?

John Goddard: Cleans out my storeroom a little bit, I probably had 80 percent of it, more copies in stock.

Alison Owings: Speaking of your store room, tell me where it is and I wondered if you can give me a sense of inventory here and there?

John Goddard: I share a wall with the kitchen of Toast, back across the street, and I would say in here I probably got 100,000 albums and probably a couple hundred thousand 45s and about 10,000 78s, and my storeroom has almost as many albums and probably twice as many 45s.

Alison Owings: And when did you decide to face the music, so to speak, and start carrying CDs and tapes?

John Goddard: I've carried them all along, I've been primarily a record store because when I got into this it was because I was a record collector and I wanted to feed my habit. I've been a record store, I haven't been an entertainment center so I haven't like jumped head first into all the new formats but I've always carried cassettes, I used to carry eight-tracks, in fact I still have some. I've always carried CDs, actually I carry a lot of CDs, it just doesn't seem like it because they're overwhelmed by the records. I've probably got an inventory of 15,000 CDs which is not bad.

Alison Owings: And how many records, 45s, whatever, CDs do you have at home?

John Goddard: I've actually been cleaning out my collection the last couple years and decided I don't need all the records of the world. I probably got maybe 7,000 or 8,000 albums and maybe 5,000 45s and maybe 7,000 or 8,000 78s and maybe 1,000 CDs.

Alison Owings: How do you organize them?

John Goddard: They're all alphabetical by category of music and all that, I can pretty much find anything, anything that I haven't gotten in the last year or two because sometimes it takes me a while to get it all processed, but I can pretty much find anything. Same in the store. I'm a firm believer in if you can't find it, you might as well not have it, if you can't find it you certainly can't sell it.

Alison Owings: Are you computerized?

John Goddard: It's just up here. [points to his head] When that goes, that's it. My hard drive is between my ears and getting softer.

Alison Owings: I wondered if you could tell me — I want to talk more about the store of course — tell me about your early growing up and your family history here.

John Goddard: My mother's¹ parents moved here in the 1890s, my grandfather was an importer, lived in a couple of houses on Miller Avenue until I think 1908, 1909, somewhere around there, and then they built a house down on Sycamore and they had four kids, my mom was actually born in the master bedroom down there. My father was from Texas, probably 10 generations of Texans, I mean they go back hundreds of years and he came out here in the early-30s because his brother had come out here to set up practice, so when my dad graduated and got his degree in medicine, he came out here and set up practice with my uncle.

Alison Owings: Where did your grandparents who moved here come from?

John Goddard: My grandfather was from France, my grandmother was from Ireland, I'm not sure, they met back east somewhere but I'm not sure where.

Alison Owings: Did you ever consider not living here?

John Goddard: I consider it, you know I'm not necessarily thrilled with what the town's become in the last many, many years. I toy with the idea but I can't imagine moving. There are parts about the town I really love, I love my house, I can see retiring and never leaving the house, but I love where I am and I fantasize about moving somewhere but I'd be real surprised if I ever did it.

Alison Owings: Where is your house?

¹ Lorraine Goddard

John Goddard: Back up in Blithedale Canyon.

Alison Owings: How long have you lived there?

John Goddard: Since 1969.

Alison Owings: Did you build it?

John Goddard: No, I bought it from one of the Buck family actually, Mrs. Buck's son, and he had bought it, the next door neighbor had built it in the late-40s for he and his wife, by the time he finished the house his wife was too sick to navigate stairs so they never moved in, there were a couple owners, two or three owners before I bought it.

Alison Owings: Could you tell me something about your childhood here and what is probably a segue I guess into what you did and still do like about the town, or what you no longer like so much about it?

John Goddard: You really want to go there? Okay, all right. Well I was born here, I went to Park School, I went to Marin Catholic², and I went away to college in '61 and was in college for seven years until I flunked my draft physical. I went to University of Santa Clara for two years and West Valley Junior College for two years and San Jose State for two and a half years. And right about the time I was getting out of school, I had worked here in high school, I started working here when I was 13 and about the time I was getting out of college, they decided to get out of the business, through a long and involved process, I ended up here. You know, I was born in this town, I've seen it change a lot. I did all the ballroom dancing, tumbling, I was a member of the tennis club, did all the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, all that kind of stuff.

Alison Owings: And today? You can mention SUVs [laughs].

John Goddard: I'll give you a couple of examples that to me explain the town as much as anything else. Twenty years ago, 80 percent of my business was local. Now 80 percent of my business is from out of town. I was recently written up very nicely in the Pacific Sun, I mean it was a half-page article, it was really well done and it fascinated me that I had one person come in the store and mention they'd seen it. I don't have a local clientele and I think on some level I resent that, but on another level the town doesn't feel comfortable like it was when I was a kid and maybe, again, that could have just been my perception. You know when I went away to college, nobody locked their doors. When I came back from college, people had started locking doors and burglary had become a problem. It was a very wide open town.

Alison Owings: What about the money factor here these days?

John Goddard: I'm a little bothered by it; I'm bothered by the money factor on a couple of levels. I don't think it's right that children that grew up in this town can't afford to live here, and

² Marin Catholic High School

that has been true for a long time. I mean most of the people I went to school with couldn't afford to live here. If I'd waited, I bought my house in '69, if I'd waited five years I never would have had the money to buy a house in Mill Valley. I got in right under the wire. I paid \$38,000 for my house and my parents thought I was crazy for paying that much but if I waited just even a few years, I never, ever would have had the income to buy a house here, and I don't think that's right. Children should have the option of living where they grow up if they want to. I have a big problem with the fact that teachers and firefighters and police can't afford to live in the town that they work in. There's something fundamentally wrong with the community when that's the case.

Alison Owings: I think that's a national sentiment, maybe international sentiment.

John Goddard: Yeah, I mean the people that help us should be able to live where they work because God forbid we ever had a disaster, I certainly couldn't blame any firefighters or paramedics or police officers for going to their family, and their families aren't here.

Tim Amyx: Can I jump in with a question? It's a follow up question on what you said a minute ago on most of your buyers are out of town people. And you probably seen the same thing with hardware stores and department stores where pretty much everything — the way economics have changed, there the bigger stores, the super stores, they're in Novato and San Rafael — how have those affected you and how close have you come to saying "You know I just can't cut it in Mill valley, everyone is buying their records from Tower Records in Corte Madera"?

John Goddard: I mean on a perfectly selfish level, yes, that's very true, but I think it goes beyond that, I don't think the residents in this town shop in the town and I don't know if that's on the residents for not shopping here or if it's on the town for having a lot of businesses that to me don't seem functional. I mean how many nail places do you need? How many beauty salons and spas do you need? How many women's clothing stores do you need? How many little pseudo furniture stores do you need? I mean you can't buy a pair of socks downtown, you can't buy sheets downtown, there's not a hardware store downtown, there's not a drugstore downtown, and one of the things I used to love about Mill Valley is that there were all these little stores, there was a good bookstore, the Depot serves a purpose but it's not what I would call a good bookstore. I think that's true and it's a catch 22, I mean I think people don't shop in the town because there's no place to shop and there's no place to shop because you have to depend on the tourists because the people don't shop in the town, and I don't know where it started. It's kind of the chicken and the egg thing.

Alison Owings: It certainly must have started in part by raising rents. And that brings me to your store, do you own your building?

John Goddard: I don't own my building and I will be closing probably in the not-too-distant future because of the rent. I mean it's a lot of factors but the deciding factor when and if I close will be the rent. You know in the last 10-15-20 years, I imagine you can check with the sales tax

board, sales have gone down in Mill Valley, they're probably half what they were 20 years ago, taxable sales, but the rents are quadrupled and more.

Alison Owings: Would you say how much your rent is?

John Goddard: Including my storeroom I'm at about \$11,000 a month, without my storeroom I'm over \$9,000, which is just not, you can do a restaurant on that kind of rent, you can't do a retail business.

Alison Owings: Who's your landlord?

John Goddard: The guy that owns Stefano's, Bob Valentino.

Tim Amyx: How many landlords have you had over the years?

John Goddard: Not that many. My original landlord, let me say while I'm talking about Bob, I don't blame the landlord, I have to admit the rent is probably cheaper per square foot in this particular building than it is in most of the buildings in town. I've got a big space, I mean to do what I do, I need a lot of space and that's a big factor, it's not that he is gouging the tenants, he paid a lot of money for the building and has to pay for it, and as it is, it's lower than most of the places in town. When I took over the store, there was a guy in Tiburon named Fred Palmer that owned it, and he died right about the time I took over the store in the late-60s and it was in a bank trust for probably 25 years, so I was dealing with banks and various and sundry administrators for a long, long time, and then they sold the building six years ago. So I've had a lot of bank administrators but I haven't had a lot of landlords.

Alison Owings: Do you have any problem with shop lifters?

John Goddard: Not so much anymore because I think the mentality of shoplifting tends to be stuff, it is mostly kids, I hate to be ageist about it but it is mostly kids, and they tend not to be that interested in records and the CDs aren't out available, they're in back, so I probably lose more than I think I do but not enough to be a problem. I'm a firm believer that if I don't catch them and I don't know what's been taken, I don't care. It's when I find out about it.

Alison Owings: Do you not have the CDs here for space? Or for shop lifting?

John Goddard: It's a space problem. It was a conscious, I mean shoplifting is part of it of course, but it was a conscious decision when I started carrying CDs am I going to expand my CD selection at the expense of my record inventory or am I not, and I didn't. I mean I can hold 15,000 CDs here.

Alison Owings: And you get these cards from the manufacturer?

John Goddard: No, I Xerox them myself. It's all done by hand. It's color Xerox.

Alison Owings: Where do you get them done?

John Goddard: RAM³.

Alison Owings: I'd like to go back to music and your music taste and some of the people you run across who are coming here. I wonder if sometimes you hear a particular song or a particular artist and suddenly there is a hair on the back of your neck standing up feeling?

John Goddard: Not so much anymore. It has certainly happened. I went and saw Little Richard when I was 13 and it changed my life, that was the first rock-and-roll show I went to. I got that feeling the first time I saw Janis Joplin. I got that feeling the first time I saw Ry Cooder, got it the first time I saw Jerry Lee Lewis, got it the first time I saw Otis Redding, I got it big time when I saw Judy Garland, got it big time when I saw Frank Sinatra. It covers a lot of areas, there's a couple of gospel shows that just turned my head around. There's a lot of different kinds of music that have done that to me through the years.

Alison Owings: All your examples though are live music. What about hearing a record?

John Goddard: Yeah, "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" by the Righteous Brothers was a good example. "Don't Worry Baby" by the Beach Boys was a good example, of course, "Heartbreak Hotel" was the first example, that's the first record I bought. The first time I heard a Muddy Waters' single. But a lot of it was live music because I started going when I was 13 years old.

Alison Owings: Where did you go?

John Goddard: I saw Little Richard at Mission High School in San Francisco, then I went to a show at the Cow Palace about two months later and saw Fats Domino and Frankie Lymon and Clyde McPhatter and the Everly Brothers and Paul Anka and Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran, you know it was one of those big package shows, and then that summer, I was 13, I convinced my parents that it was absolutely perfectly safe for me to hop on a Greyhound bus and go to the San Jose Civic Auditorium by myself and I started doing that, which was nuts, because there were knife fights, I'd take a local bus back from San Jose at 1 o'clock in the morning, here I am a little 13-year-old with my Brownie camera, hanging out in the San Jose bus depot, but my parents went for it and I got to criticize them for the stupidity involved, but it's what made me what I was and I never had a problem. So I saw Ray Charles when "What I Say" was his first record.

Alison Owings: You saw him there?

John Goddard: Yeah. I saw James Brown when "Try Me" was his current record, I saw the Everly Brothers when "Wake Up Little Suzie" was their current record. I saw people like Buddy

³ RAM Print and Communications, Mill Valley, California

Holly and Richie Valens and I saw Elvis Presley before he went in the Army in his gold lame suit, and my parents used to let me go, and they were nuts to let me do it. But as a result of it, I got real involved in music, I've been a collector all my life, I used to collect rocks and I used to collect bird nests and I collected comic books and I collected coins and I collected stamps, then music happened and I started collecting records and I started working for Village Music because I got a discount on my records.

Tim Amyx: Let me ask you a question that might lead that. You went to Marin Catholic?

John Goddard: I went to Marin Catholic. My parents did not approve of me going to a school where there were actually Black people involved.

Tim Amyx: While you were at Marin Catholic, did you play an instrument or were you influenced by any music teachers that led to your fascination?

John Goddard: Not at all. I got an electric guitar in '58 when I was 14, and I got an electric guitar for a Christmas present and I couldn't play "What I Say" by New Year's so I gave up. I really wanted to do that guitar intro and I never went any further. I didn't play an instrument in high school, I did however have the only record collection, so I went to a lot of parties and I played music at a lot of school dances. I made a humongous leap too, I mean I started out in like March with, well I started out at Christmas with Elvis Presley, in March I moved onto Little Richard, and by the end of summer I was listening to Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters, you know I made a huge leap really quickly.

Alison Owings: you didn't stick with the King?

John Goddard: No, I pretty much moved into Black music and really that's where my heart was until I started going to the Fillmore and Avalon.

Alison Owings: Now would you tell me something about the musicians who have come here and bought — I've read some stories but maybe you can tell me some highlights or I'll ask you about ones if —

John Goddard: Well you can check my website and get a fairly complete list but it's been a really broad spectrum. I mean I've had Elvis Costello and Mick Jagger and Jerry Garcia and Bonnie Raitt and Carlos Santana and Van Morrison and all the San Francisco bands. On another level, Cab Calloway's been in here, Mel Torme's been here. On another level, Wayne Shorter's been in here, John McLaughlin's been in here. On another level, George Lucas, Drew Barrymore, Matthew Broderick, Matt Dillon, there's different areas. George Lucas once told me he researched the entire soundtrack of *American Graffiti* out of my store. He came in right after *Star Wars* opened and I thanked for making one of my favorite movies, and he was ready for the *Star Wars* rap and I said, "American Graffiti," and he said "I have to thank you, I researched the entire soundtrack out of this store."

Alison Owings: That's wonderful. Now, I would like just your impressions of Mick.

John Goddard: Short, he's very short. That's a real good story. He was rehearsing for his first solo tour back when his first solo album came out, and he was rehearsing at the Skywalker Ranch and he was living at Bill Graham's house up on the hill in Corte Madera. He was here for three weeks and I pulled every string I had to get somebody to him into coming by the store. I talked to BGP, I talked to a couple of disc jockeys, I talked to some people I knew up at Skywalker Ranch, I mean I really wanted it to happen. In fact, Bill Graham walked in one afternoon and he says I hear you'd like my houseguest to come by your store, and I said yeah, I really would. Then there was an article in Herb Caen that he left and had gone to Japan. The next day, I'm working, it's like 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and these two heavy metal head bangers come walking in the door and go, "Hey dude, Mick Jagger just drove by," and I'm thinking to myself, yeah sure, he left town yesterday numbskull, and then Jagger walked in, with his entourage of two, and he walked in and he goes, "I've been told this is a stop I should make before I leave town." He seemed really nice, he signed some stuff with no problem at all, he was looking — I got some old ads for the Apollo Theater along the bottom down here and he was looking at those and going, "I went to that show, I went to that show." He was charming. It was the only time he came in.

Tim Amyx: Did he buy anything?

John Goddard: He bought about \$400 worth of cassettes to listen to on the flight to Australia. He was on a reggae phase at the time, he bought some other stuff, but he bought a lot of reggae.

Alison Owings: What phase are you in now? I understand that you say you go through lots of them.

John Goddard: Not really one so much anymore. I started out in rock-and-roll, I moved to blues and R&B and stayed there for a lot of years. Now I'll listen to gospel music for a week or I'll listen to country music for a week or I'll get into a Judy Garland kick. When I go home, I listen to classical music because that's what my wife usually listens to, which is something I've never done before. It depends on what mood I'm in. I listen to a lot more do-wop than any of my help here would care to hear. I've been listening to a lot of Gerry and the Pacemakers and Freddie and the Dreamers the last couple of weeks because somebody traded in some British invasion CDs and I've just been whipping through those. You know there's no pattern to it, there's no pattern to it.

Alison Owings: Can you tell me about your wife?

John Goddard: Again, born and raised in town, her father was a real estate agent here in town, her mother was a classical pianist who gave piano lessons, her twin brother was John Cipollina in Quicksilver Messenger Service, her younger brother was Mario Cipollina and he was in Huey Lewis and the News. A local.

Alison Owings: What's her name?

John Goddard: Michael Cipollina. Like "Mike." We knew each other growing up, I was in Boy Scouts with her brother, I knew her in high school, asked her out a couple times, we never went out, and we actually connected in the late '80s at a memorial for her mother at Sweetwater⁴, and I asked her out for a cup of coffee and we've been together ever since.

Alison Owings: Is this the first marriage for you both?

John Goddard: No, she has been married twice before and I was married twice to the same person before, so I don't know if that counts as one or two. But that was 30 years ago.

Alison Owings: Any children?

John Goddard: She's got five.

Alison Owings: Now, I would imagine that on an emotional level, almost more than a musical level, you must miss Jerry Garcia terribly.

John Goddard: I miss him because I felt like he was a friend. I mean we didn't hang out together but we were friends. He'd come in regularly, the first time he came in he was amazed I had Joseph Spence records in the store, and was a customer ever since. I don't know if you know who he is, he's a Bahaman guitarist, pretty esoteric, and this was 30 years ago, more than 30 years ago. But we connected. He and David Grisman did their first public performance at one of my Christmas parties.

Alison Owings: I've been reading about Grisman, I didn't realize he lived in Mill Valley.

John Goddard: Actually he's in Petaluma now but he lived in Mill Valley for years and years.

Alison Owings: This might sound extremely kind of esoteric, but do you find yourself kind of dreaming one music or another?

John Goddard: I hardly ever remember my dreams, let me start there, but I hardly ever dream about music.

Alison Owings: Well you probably have no need [laughs]. Do you listen with headsets?

John Goddard: No, can't stand them. I like to be doing stuff when I listen to music. I can't just sit and listen much anymore. If I'm lying in bed I'll listen to the radio maybe. When I'm home I watch movies more than I listen to music. I get music eight hours a day and that's pretty much a good fix.

Alison Owings: So no iPod either?

⁴ Sweetwater Music Hall, Mill Valley, California

John Goddard: No, I don't know how to work a computer. My wife handles my website and I couldn't get you to my website if my life depended on it.

Alison Owings: The website is very sophisticated, I must say, I was very surprised

John Goddard: Thank you. My wife thinks it's in serious need of updating and I think it looks just fine.

Alison Owings: Well for someone who doesn't computerize his inventory —

John Goddard: A friend of mine did that for me for free.

Alison Owings: It's really nice.

John Goddard: Thank you.

Alison Owings: I want to hear about Burton, is it James Burton? Elvis' guitarist? What was he like and did he tell you any stories?

John Goddard: Not too many so much. I don't get awestruck very often but I was awestruck by James Burton. I mean that was one of the musical highlights of my life was actually having James Burton play at one of my store's anniversary parties. In fact, subconsciously I think the reason I asked Elvis that particular year to do it was because he was touring with James Burton. I mean James Burton is a God as far as I'm concerned, he's just a major guy.

Alison Owings: You asked Elvis to the party?

John Goddard: Yeah, he played one of my anniversary parties.

Alison Owings: No way, this is called burying the lead [laughs].

John Goddard: Really, my 21st anniversary party was an evening with Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe and Friends, and Elvis did a solo set and then Nick Lowe did a solo set and then Elvis came out and played a set with James Burton and Jerry Garcia. Charles Brown performed, a couple of the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Sammy Hagar, Bob Weir, it was a pretty much endless nonstop stream of music. But it was the first time Elvis had met Jerry Garcia, I had the joy of introducing them.

Alison Owings: You're talking about Elvis Costello

John Goddard: No, Costello, yeah.

Alison Owings: Oh, so James Burton was Elvis Costello's guitarist?

John Goddard: James toured with Elvis for two years. He started out playing with Rick Nelson for years, then he went to Elvis Presley for years, but at the time I met him he had been touring with Elvis Costello, now he's touring with Jerry Lee Lewis.

Alison Owings: Did you happen to see Elvis Costello at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass⁵?

John Goddard: I saw him Friday, yeah. I actually went to the rehearsal the night before too which was a lot of fun. I've pretty much been to three shows this year, I don't go to concerts much anymore because one, I've seen everybody I want to see a dozen times and everybody else is dead. But I've been to like three major shows this year — Elvis Costello at Louise Davies, Elvis Costello and Allen Toussaint at the Paramount, Elvis Costello at Golden Gate Park — that's been about it.

Alison Owings: He just seemed too comfortable in himself.

John Goddard: The breadth of what he's doing now, I mean this year he toured with symphony orchestras performing the symphonic piece that he composed, he toured with the New Orleans Rhythm and Blues Band and Allen Toussaint, then he did the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, and he's been doing dates just all over the place with all kinds of people. I mean he's recording with Tony Bennett, he's sitting in with Wanda Jackson, he's dueting with Emmylou Harris. I mean the breadth of what he's doing is just phenomenal. He's so knowledgeable about music.

Alison Owings: Do you go with your wife to concerts?

John Goddard: She has in the past, she doesn't much anymore, she's got emphysema and can't do large venues much anymore.

Alison Owings: Do you sing?

John Goddard: No, I sing along in my car and that's about it.

Alison Owings: What do you play in your car?

John Goddard: Actually I've got an eight-track in my '56 Chevy and I've got a CD player and radio in my '57 Chevy.

Alison Owings: What kind of changes would you like to see, if any, in Mill Valley as well as in the music business?

John Goddard: I'd like to see people lighten up a little bit. I'd like to see some maybe Black people or Brown people living in town. When I went to Marin Catholic, there was one Black person in school. When I went to Edna Maguire, there was one Black person in the school. The town really hasn't changed that much since then. It's still pretty homogenized. The people, to

⁵ Annual music festival in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California

me, seem to be interchangeable. There doesn't seem to be a lot of "there" there, and I can say the same thing about the music business, there doesn't seem to be a lot of "there" there.

Alison Owings: Would you be willing to mention any musicians or singers whom you think their career has been overrated?

John Goddard: Oh God where do I begin? Get me a billboard chart and I'll read off the top 20 for you. You know it's not even a matter of overrated, there's some great voices out there, there's some country singers out there that have incredible voices but the songs are sterile, the music in the background, it's just sterile. I mean you can only do so much with a drum machine, you can only do so much with a synthesizer. The songs don't grab me. I can't remember the last time I heard a new song that said oh, go out and buy me, buy me, buy me. You used to get that all the time, all the time. You could listen to a new album and there were like six or seven songs on it that you just not only liked a little bit but knocked your socks off, and it doesn't happen anymore. You find a good single with a hook on it and the rest of the album usually sounds like a single where there's just nothing there. The record companies don't seem to be building careers anymore, they're building songs. They'll have an album that sells five million copies but they're not establishing a career. By the next album, that group is gone. They've become the CD version of a one-hit wonder, there's no legs, and if that had been true 30 years ago, Bonnie Raitt never would have kept a career, Ry Cooder never would have kept a career, Elvis Costello never would have kept a career, Randy Newman never would have kept a career. They don't build careers anymore and the result of it is there's no careers out there.

Alison Owings: Now, I'm thinking of some of the people whom you liked a lot and who went to your parties. You mentioned a few times you have some legendary parties, I gather.

John Goddard: I have had on and off, I get inspired. I mean here I am sitting at Sweetwater with Elvis Costello and James Burton and Jerry Garcia on stage at the same time, two years later I'm sitting at Sweetwater with Albert Collins, John Lee Hooker, Ry Cooder, and Carlos Santana on stage at the same time. I just call in favors, you know.

Alison Owings: Do all these parties take place at Sweetwater?

John Goddard: Yeah.

Alison Owings: And you do it every single year?

John Goddard: No, for a while I was doing it twice a year but it got really expensive and it got out of hand. I started trying to top myself every time and it just got top heavy and it was taking the fun out of it. I had scheduled an anniversary party with the Grateful Dead and B.B. King and Jerry went and died. But he'd agreed to it. Garcia was in buying some stuff and I said you know I'd really like to have just you and Phil and Bob Weir and Bill Kreitzman and Mickey Hart, you know just the five of you do a set at Sweetwater for my anniversary party, and he

agreed to it and he not only agreed to it, Bob Weir came in about two weeks later and said I hear we're doing a party. Then it got to the point trying to schedule a date and then working with B.B. King trying to schedule a date where he could do it because he never has a night off. It got real top heavy and it was getting to the point where it wasn't fun anymore, and I just kicked back and said you know, I can't do this anymore. So I did a few more but I did them with people that I loved when I was growing up and that maybe nobody had ever heard of. The last one I did was probably two of my favorite soul singers out of the 60s, both of whom I had thought were dead, and just through a lot of this and that and weird coincidences, they were both alive and working, a guy named Howard Tate and a lady named Bettye LaVette, and the one I did before that was a rockabilly duo called the Collins Kids that I loved when I was 15 years old, an R&B singer named Tommy Hunt that used to be with the Flamingos and hadn't performed in this country in 30 years, and a guy from LA named Swamp Dogg. They were great. On some level, those two parties were better than the Elvis Costellos and the Jerry Garcias and the John Lee Hookers and the Ry Cooders and the Carlos Santanas because this is who I am and this is where I came from and this is what I love. If somebody told me when I was 14 years old that someday the Collins Kids would play for a party for me, yeah, right. Or when I was 14 years old that John Lee Hooker would play for a party for me. It's mind blowing to me.

Alison Owings: Well it's a thrill to meet your heroes and find that you like them as well.

John Goddard: Yeah. And it's not always true but when it is, it's wonderful, it's just wonderful. One of my favorite musical moments was going to the W. C. Handy Blues Awards Show in Memphis and going backstage after the show and having B.B. King introduce me to Carl Perkins as the owner of the best record store in the world. For a music freak, it doesn't get any better. Sex is really cool but for a music freak it just doesn't get any better. There's moments like that. The first time B.B. King came in the store, it just happened to be on a day when one of the Coasters came in the store and Al Kooper came in the store, it was a triple header day. B.B. King walked in, and again I had been trying to finesse getting him to come over to the store through various and sundry people for a long time.

Alison Owings: Was he living here?

John Goddard: No, he used to come in every tour. In fact one tour, he pulled up both his tour buses across the street before they went to the hotel, the whole band and entourage waited in the bus while he came in and bought his records. First time he came in, I was showing some music videos back here and I knew he was a Louis Jordan freak and I put on some Louis Jordan videos and B.B. King is a large man and I don't know if you've noticed, but half my inventory is on the floor. At one point, I turned around and B.B. King was gone. I found him sitting on the floor over on the aisle there with legs kind of spread out looking through Oscar Peterson albums with one hand, waving his arms singing along with Louis Jordan, I thought oh Jesus, nobody will believe this.

Alison Owings: Sounds like he's a nice man.

John Goddard: Oh he's wonderful, he's one of my favorite people. He's a real sweetheart, he's almost too nice to be in the music business and it amazes me that he's as successful as he is. I mean he's just a gentleman, he's a nice man, he's conversant about, I mean we've sat and talked for hours on end and he's just conversant about everything. Plus, I'd say three of my best friends that I've developed through the years in the music business are probably B.B. King, Elvis Costello, and Ry Cooder, and the one thing the three of them have in common is we can sit and talk for hours and none of the three seem to be real chatty people, but we get rolling about so many different kinds of music. B.B. King, we can talk about Tony Martin, Frank Sinatra. Elvis Costello, we can talk about Aretha Franklin or George Jones. Ry Cooder, we can talk about almost anybody in the world. The breadth, and it's one of the reasons they're as talented as they are, is the breadth of knowledge they have about not just what they do but all kinds of music.

Alison Owings: Do you also talk politics with them?

John Goddard: Hardly ever, no. Not at all.

Alison Owings: Or personal things?

John Goddard: Ry I do because I've spent a lot of time staying at his house and we went to Havana for a week together, I mean we actually spend a lot of time together. So Ry yes, Elvis a little bit, B.B. King not so much.

Alison Owings: Were you involved with the Buena Vista Social Club?

John Goddard: Not at all. I went down with Ry and his wife to Havana for a week to rehearse one of their tours, spent a week in the rehearsal hall with them, which was just wonderful.

Alison Owings: That's the sort of thing you can't replicate.

John Goddard: No, not at all. It's perks to the business, I don't make any money but I get a lot of perks.

Alison Owings: I was going to get to that too, speaking of money, it's 10 of 10, so you probably have to get ready, choose your selection of today [laughs], do you make enough to get by?

John Goddard: I have, when I took over this store it was the idea that I could live in Mill Valley, eat three meals a day, and feed my record collection and I've done that for 35 years.

Alison Owings: I hate to think that it would ever come to an end, but you obviously have been thinking about it.

John Goddard: I think it's going to happen, yeah.

Alison Owings: Do you have any staff that would buy it?

John Goddard: The store doesn't make any money. Nobody's going to buy the store, you would have to be independently wealthy and have all the time in the world and absolutely love music and not need to draw a paycheck.

Alison Owings: Well that sounds like half the people that live in Mill Valley [laughs].

John Goddard: Yeah, it's very true [laughs]. At some point I'll announce that I am closing and I would certainly entertain an offer if somebody wanted to buy it, but I don't foresee it happening. It would involve a humongous amount of money. The memorabilia on the walls alone is probably worth half a million.

Alison Owings: Lots of it is signed too.

Tim Amyx: Speaking of that, it's kind of interesting that your security is so minimal, after so many years, you never had a concern for —

John Goddard: It's not the kind of stuff that your basic run-of-the-mill burglar is going to take. There's never much money in the store and to do any real damage, they would have to park a truck outside and take all night to load it. If the place got broken into in the middle of the night and one particular item was taken, I think depending on what the item was I'd have a pretty good idea who took it. Every once in a while something will get ripped off the wall when nobody's looking, but the alternative is to have it all in a bank vault or in a drawer at home, and it's a conscious decision I made 30 years ago that if people can't enjoy it, if I can't enjoy it, then what's the point in having it?

Tim Amyx: Can you give me a quick rundown of the layout of the building, what it was like when you took over, and the stages of how you expanded, expanded, expanded?

John Goddard: When I worked for Village Music in high school, it was in the little store that's in the Sequoia Theater building. She moved up here in '61 when the gas station was torn down and this building was built. When I took over in '68 it was this space, to this first wall. I took the second space in '71, took the third space in '74.

Tim Amyx: How about back here?

John Goddard: That I just, there was a wall where that doorway is and I just took that out.

Tim Amyx: So you're actually in three buildings?

John Goddard: They were originally built so it could be done in different combinations. Like this section here was just sheetrock and 2x4, that doorway there was sheetrock and 2x4, and then the equivalent of this section here on the other wall was just sheetrock and 2x4. So there's only, there could be two stores, there could be three, there could be four, or they could be one.

Alison Owings: Did you ever acquire something that just made you almost drop it you were so excited to see it?

John Goddard: Yeah, Howling Wolf's first royalty check right there, Bing Crosby's Army ID card which is up there, Janis Joplin's mug shots from when she was busted for shoplifting in Berkeley over there. They're not up, they're at home, but I've got Billie Holliday's passport, I've got a letter she wrote to her husband/drug dealer when she was in prison, a pencil-drawn two-page letter, stuff like that just gets me off.

Alison Owings: What about a particular album?

John Goddard: Not so much, again it depends on what mood I'm in. Most of my really emotionally favorite albums I got when I was way young. They were emotionally my favorites at the time and it stayed that way.

Alison Owings: That makes sense. It is said you remember all the lyrics when you were 15 and 16.

John Goddard: That's what keeps a store like this in business. People buy their memories. I have really elderly people coming in and buying Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey, I have people my age coming in and buying Chuck Berry and Little Richard, I have people a little bit younger coming in and buying the Supremes and the Temptations, and a little bit younger buying the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and a little bit younger buying David Bowie, and a little bit younger buying the Clash and Elvis Costello. On some level you go back to what you remember listening to when you were growing up because it's an impressionable age. My favorite, favorite songs are 45s that meant something to me at a particular time in my life and they may not have been hits, I may have picked them up for a nickel at Walgreens in the City, but they connected with me on some level at the time and they're still there.

Alison Owings: When you have an anniversary party, is it the anniversary of when you bought the store or is it Christmas?

John Goddard: I had some anniversary parties which were just roughly "X" number of years in business, and I had some Christmas parties which were roughly, it mainly was, if I can get such-and-such a person on such-and-such a date, if it's not in December we'll call it an anniversary party. Actually I took over this store in February, some of my anniversary parties have been April or May, some of them have been August or September, it just depends on when I can line up what I've got going.

Alison Owings: Did you ever have any of your parties in the store?

John Goddard: I've had some live performances in here, some in-stores, and I certainly had a lot of recording artists signing albums in here.

Alison Owings: Ok, well that's just about it for me, unless there's something that you can think of that you were hoping to be asked or glad you weren't asked [laughter]?

John Goddard: Well, you skirted politics and then you just dropped it [laughs].

Alison Owings: Well, I have a feeling you're not really high on the Iraq war. I don't know why I think that [laughs]. I wanted to ask you about Vietnam actually because you said you avoided the draft? How did you do that?

John Goddard: Yeah, I did. My father spent several years telling me the Army would make a man of me and by the time it actually got to the point, my student deferment was no longer working anymore because I was going on seven years and hadn't gotten a degree, I was changing majors once a year and barely passing. By the time that happened, he decided maybe the Vietnam War, maybe the Army was not the greatest idea for me. He got a friend of his who was a doctor down in San Jose to write a letter saying I had an ulcer and it worked.

Alison Owings: And you didn't?

John Goddard: "Incipient ulcer" I think he called it. He said if you keep drinking to the extent you're drinking in college, you will have an ulcer and that's good enough, and the doctor wrote a cover letter and it worked. The day it worked, I went back down to San Jose and I dropped out of school and I called Sarah up here and said "Yes, I would love to take over the store", which was just a quick — which was kind of a weird karmic thing anyway. I mean Sarah called me, Sarah Wilcox was the owner of the store, she called me and said she was tired of it, she just didn't want to do it anymore and she had a buyer. He was a retired sheet music salesman that she'd been dealing with for years and years. He wanted to buy the store and he wanted somebody to run it and would I be interested in managing the store for him. I said, yeah I can do that, I wouldn't mind doing that if I get this draft thing out of the way. So I got the draft thing out of the way, I called her, I met the guy, he was like 70 I think, and we got along great, he said sure we'll do it. He was literally on his way to the attorney's office to sign the papers and dropped dead of a heart attack, literally in his car on the way. By that time, Sarah had made the mental mindset she just didn't want to be here anymore, and I suggested why don't I work for you for a year or two for a percentage of the profits and earn enough money to buy the business from you, and so we did it.

Tim Amyx: How old were you?

John Goddard: I was 24.

Alison Owings: Was it more difficult or easier than you expected one you became the owner?

John Goddard: Well it happened gradually. One, I had an established business, it's not like I was starting from scratch. Two, I had a vision of what I wanted to do. I'd run a department store record department down in San Jose and I worked as an assistant manager of a record store in

San Jose while I was in college, and I knew what I wanted. When I took this store over, it was like, I don't know if you know the term, a typical little mom-and-pop record store. I mean it had records, it had saxophone reeds and guitar strings and tambourines and radios and record players and guitars and drums, you know all of this stuff. The first thing I did was get rid of all of it and I was going to be a record store, I was going to be a record store. When I took over, there was one bin of rock and there were 40 bins of classical. I rearranged my focus, there were like three blues records. I was still pretty much a blues freak at the time, I was working — I don't know if you ever heard of Gemco, it was kind of like White Front, it was a discount — it was kind of a small version of Target, and I worked in their record department in San Jose, and when I left they had probably the largest blues and bluegrass collection on vinyl on the West Coast, they didn't sell it but it was there, I had a killer record department there. No business, but a killer record department. So I changed my focus and I put in records and then it was just a gradual thing, but I had the time to be gradual because the store had been in business for 25 years already, so I had a built-in clientele that I could finesse, it wasn't a matter of starting just from scratch.

Alison Owings: When tapes starting coming in did you feel a dread?

John Goddard: Not really because cassettes never impacted the record business.

Alison Owings: What about CDs?

John Goddard: Well, CDs impacted the record business to the extent that the record companies quit making records. They impacted it to that extent. If they kept making vinyl all along, there would not have been a problem, but they didn't. They made it impossible to buy new vinyl, then they sold it one way, you couldn't return it if it was defective, you couldn't return it if it was a miss-shipment, they did everything they did to discourage stores from ordering it and then they turned around and said well, stores aren't ordering, we'll quit making them, but it was totally engineered.

Alison Owings: Very few places make vinyl now, right?

John Goddard: Well a lot do but once the record companies realized that you could call it a limited edition and sell it for more than you can the CD, then vinyl looked like a good idea again. I mean they put out a lot of records on vinyl now and most of them cost more than CDs, but it's a specialty market.

Alison Owings: Tell me your politics [laughs].

John Goddard: I think the town's very liberal, but it's liberal on its own terms and I think it always has been. I don't think they stand up for what they believe. I think they believe what they think they should believe, but I don't think they fight for it. My dad used to call them pseudo-liberals and I've never quit using the terms and I still think it's there.

Alison Owings: Thank you.