

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
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**JOE BREEZE**

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Joe Breeze  
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz  
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 34 pages  
INTERVIEW DATE: August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

In this oral history, bicycling legend Joe Breeze recounts a life devoted to riding, racing, designing, and building bicycles, as well as to fostering and promoting bicycle culture more generally. Born in San Francisco in 1953, Joe grew up in Mill Valley and, at the time of this oral history, had lived in Marin County his whole life. Joe recalls how his father introduced him to bicycling at a time in American history when it was a culturally marginal activity and recounts how, with his parents' support and encouragement, he and his brothers took epic summer rides on the highways and backroads of California and beyond beginning in their teenage years. In the early 1970s there was a bicycle boom in America that Joe and some of his friends from the Marin County bicycling community played no small part in as inventors of the mountain bike and pioneers of the sport. Joe describes designing and building his first Breezer bicycles in the mid-1970s and his participation over the decades in expanding bicycle culture, culminating in his founding of the Marin Museum of Bicycling in 2013. Throughout this oral history Joe expresses his love for the natural beauty of Marin and evokes the unique qualities of its culture that supported and nourished his life's work.

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**Oral History of Joe Breeze**  
**August 3, 2015**

**Editor's note:** This transcript has been reviewed by Joe Breeze, who made minor corrections and clarifications.

**0:00:00 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, today is August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. My name is Debra Schwartz and I'm sitting here with Joe Breeze, Mill Valley born — were you born here?

**0:00:13 Joe Breeze:** Born in San Francisco.

**0:00:13 Debra Schwartz:** Born in San Francisco, grew up in Mill Valley. You are a bicycle builder and designer. Hi.

**0:00:22 Joe Breeze:** Hi Debra.

**0:00:23 Debra Schwartz:** How are you doing?

**0:00:24 Joe Breeze:** Good. Thanks for having me here.

**0:00:26 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. Well, I am here interviewing you on behalf of the Mill Valley Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society and I really thank you very much for your time. You're a person of interest. You're infamous in Marin County for your bikes and the bicycle museum that you've recently opened. We'll talk about that later.

**0:00:47 Joe Breeze:** Famous, I hope.

**0:00:49 Debra Schwartz:** Yes you are, famous. Infamous, some people say they'd rather be infamous than famous. [laughter]

**0:00:55 Joe Breeze:** Okay, but anyway.

**0:00:57 Debra Schwartz:** So, let's start a little bit with your early life here in Mill Valley. First of all let's begin with your family, how you came to Mill Valley, if you would.

**0:01:08 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. So, my father grew up in San Francisco, and actually his father grew up in San Francisco, too. His father on the Breeze side was from Northern Ireland, came to San Francisco for the Gold Rush. So, a number of generations from the city, and my father moved to Ross to get out of the smoky city in 1947, I think. He was working in Crocker Bank in San Francisco, but his love was automobiles, and he started a business called the Sports Car Center in the late '40s. It was located down by the Richardson Bay Bridge, on the south side of the bridge in Manzanita, right on the water there just north of the heliport. There's some office buildings there now, but from the late '40s until 1966 that was his business. That's when he retired, and it went on to be Saab,

and Sven Sauna, and Quality Motorcycles, and now it's an office building there. But when he moved to Marin, I believe that was because he had that business there. So he lived in Ross, and in 1951 he married my mother, Ruth Breeze.

**0:03:04 Debra Schwartz:** Your father's name was?

**0:03:05 Joe Breeze:** Bill Breeze. And they bought a house up on Country Club Drive in Mill Valley, a one-story modern house there. It's still there. It's had an upper-story built on to it for his — eventually his five children, including me, I'm the last of five — that was designed by his car racing friend, Joe Esherick, pretty well-known architect in the Bay Area, and the world actually. That's my godfather. So that's where I grew up. I say I was born in San Francisco, which I was, as opposed to Marin General Hospital, which was just getting its start, but ever since I came home after being in the hospital I've lived in Mill Valley, for at least the next 35 years, I guess.

**0:04:09:** So, about what my father did, his sports car business, he was racing cars, and this was sports cars. He actually won the first sports car race in Northern California. It was 1949 down at the San Jose Speedway, of all the places for a sports car race. But anyway, he had done things in his life, like driving to Salt Lake City in like one day or some crazy low time. It was 800, 900 miles, or maybe 1,000 miles then, back when the roads were pretty poor. This was in a 1934 Model-C Ford Roadster that he had Edelbrock in Los Angeles mill the heads on. And so he was definitely into automobiles, but also bicycles, and he and his car racing buddies would ride their bicycles to stay in shape for car racing, and he would even ride his bicycle to work from our house in Mill Valley down to this place in Sausalito and Manzanita.

**0:05:29:** So growing up as a kid I would see this, and it was different from most of my friends' parents. I knew one other parent who rode to work. It was a man who worked for Chevron Oil, and he would ride his bicycle out of Warner Canyon where we lived, and down to I guess the bus, take the Greyhound Bus over to Richmond or something, to work in Standard Oil, Mr. Allis. And so growing up with this different situation where my parent, my father, rode his bicycle — at a time when pretty much bicycles were sidewalk toys in America, and you'd just see kids riding a bicycle — my father would occasionally ride to work. And so I had this view of cycling that was much wider than maybe most kids growing up. It wasn't just this kids' thing. It wasn't even just a recreational thing. It was much wider, and that it included everyday transportation even. Just growing up with that knowledge, and eventually getting my own bicycle, and riding and going, "Wow! This is kind of fun."

**0:06:45 Debra Schwartz:** What was your first bike?

**0:06:47 Joe Breeze:** Well, my own first bike was a three speed genuine English Lightweight from 1963. I got it in second or third grade. Third grade, I think. And I bought it — my father bought it, I went with him to buy it in Corte Madera. It was an old bike shop that was along 101, on the east side of 101 at Paradise Drive. Pretty much where Motorcycles Unlimited used to be. Just an older guy from — I learned later that he

was from Tiburon, or his family lived in Tiburon. I wish I knew his name — or maybe somebody will come up with that at some point. But it was an old funky old shop. They had this Sports Model bike made by Raleigh most likely, and an English bike with three speeds and fenders and that kind of thing, which I would ride to Park School, down the canyon — like a lot of my friends did, a lot there was, the bike racks were full there at Park School in the 1960s. And I was riding around with my friends, the neighborhood friends on Country Club Drive. Oh my gosh, growing up on Country Club Drive: This is a hill that goes from above the first fairway on the golf course, and heads up, I don't know, a quarter mile, half a mile, up the hill.

**0:08:22:** There were a lot of kids in the neighborhood in the '60s growing up. That hill came into play for just learning how to ride bikes and wheeled vehicles. And we would make coasters, right? We didn't have Flex — oh yeah, Duke Mahl had a Flexi-Flyer, maybe Brian Aureguy did, too. But we made our own coasters as well, and we'd just get some old wheels, I don't know, just simple wheels that maybe down at Varney's Hardware or something, or maybe a cast-off wheel here and there, and we'd piece together this coaster. I actually remember my dad welding a washer onto an axle or two to make it a little nicer. And my brother came up with the idea that you can have brakes by leaning back. You'd hinge your back rest, and they put a couple of pair of Keds in line with the wheels, so you'd lean back and you put the brakes on. And then we had rope steering, right? But you had to have your feet on the axles to control the front wheels. We'd pulled these with the rope up to the top of Country Club and race down. It was all fine with everybody's parents and —

**0:09:38 Debra Schwartz:** No helmets then?

**0:09:39 Joe Breeze:** Oh heck! What's a helmet? Yeah. That's kind of how we'd spend our summer days, or whatever. And then skateboards came out and we'd be riding. We'd get all these soda cans, beer cans and put them down the middle of the road, Country Club Drive, and have a slalom course. And that hill just taught us how to somehow handle bikes and handle things like that. We'd put X's where all the cans were for the good course and then we would remove them in the evening. But during the day the cans would be there and we'd have it set so the cars could straddle the cans if a car came along. All the parents were like, "This is great. Wow, cool. The kids are having fun." And somehow we never had a problem. Somehow in racing two-up on a Flexi-Flyer from the top of Country Club down to the baseball field, down to Boyle Park, we all survived somehow.

**0:10:42 Debra Schwartz:** No crashes?

**0:10:43 Joe Breeze:** Oh, maybe the occasional skinned elbow or something like that. But, I don't know, we were either very lucky in that we moved along with the learning curve well enough to escape injury. I don't know, I don't know how we managed to do it, but we had a lot of fun with that, and went on to riding. I know it was the fifth grade, when Duke Mahl and Brian Aureguy and my older brother Richard and I decided we were gonna ride to Greenbrae Lanes, the bowling alley in Greenbrae by 101 and Drake,

Sir Francis Drake, and we did that. I remember telling my dad that we were gonna ride up there, and he said, “Oh, you know that’s Corte Madera grade, that’s a big hill,” and then the next day when we do it, we go out there and we ride back.

**0:11:45 Debra Schwartz:** We’re talking Magnolia here, going that way?

**0:11:48 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. So we rode down to Blithedale off Carmelita, and down Blithedale to Camino Alto, and then took a left turn on the old county road, the old 101, and long after 101 had shifted over to its present location. But I rode over Corte Madera Grade and then all the way through Larkspur, and up to the Bon Air Bridge — I think that’s the first place we could cross to get over — and then down Sir Francis Drake, all the way down to 101, to Greenbrae Lanes, and then back afterwards. We had felt quite proud of ourselves for making it over Corte Madera Grade both directions. That was my first foray out of Mill Valley on a bicycle, and my brother got more into bikes. He was on the cross-country and track teams at Tam High School. He was 13 months older than I. He graduated in 1970 from Tam. I graduated in 1972. But along about sixth grade, my brother was getting more into bikes. Actually, an older brother, there are five kids in the family, and my second oldest brother, half-brother actually, Peter Breeze, rode down to where, he went to Webb School in Claremont, for high school, and he rode down from Mill Valley to there with a buddy of his, Michael Moore, in about 1960 or so, down the Central Valley.

**0:13:40 Debra Schwartz:** To L.A.?

**0:13:41 Joe Breeze:** To Los Angeles, yeah.

**0:13:42 Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh.

**0:13:43 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. So this is how it is in our family. We were into wheels and getting places on wheels, traveling under our own power, that kind of thing. And so this was a little bit of family lore ’cause I think he was 12 years older than I was. My oldest brother raced cars as well, sports cars some, and motorcycles too, but as far as — Peter was like, “Oh my gosh. He rode his bike to LA.” That was huge family lore and this older brother was like, “Well yeah, we can continue. We can carry on with that.”

**0:14:16:** And so he got me out riding some more, and I borrowed a friend — in sixth grade, just after sixth grade, I remember, that summer, I borrowed a bike from my friend Jimmy Bennett. He had a Schwinn Varsity, a rather heavy 10-speed bike, but still it was a better bike than my three-speed. Oh, and by the way, I should back up. In fifth grade, Duke Mahl, Brian Aureguy, and I rode up Mount Tam as far as Mountain Home Inn. Unfortunately, I got a flat tire, so we rode back down Pipeline or something. So that was my first little bit of off-road riding in there. Anyway, later in the sixth grade, my brother — or after sixth grade, my brother induced me to ride over Mount Tam and up to Bear Valley. We rode up Highway 1. I remember it taking so long, between Stinson Beach just 10 miles up to Olema, yeah.



**0:15:13:** We rode out Bear Valley out to the coast, and then on the way back to the ranger's station there, I got a flat tire. So we called my parents, and they were — actually, a cousin was visiting and so my parents wanted to show them Bear Valley, so they came out and they took us back.

**0:15:43:** When I was in seventh grade, my dad asked me what I wanted for my birthday, and I said I wanted a purple Schwinn Varsity, and my dad knew — well, to him, a Schwinn Varsity was not really a bike [laughter]. “You want a nicer bike than that.” I mean, that's a very heavy bike, and so he went and got — at that same shop in Corte Madera — he got an English-made Dawes Galaxy. This was 1967 or something like that, maybe '68, and oh, a beautiful bike. Green and gold. And my brother had the hand-me-down Follis bike made in Lyon, France, from my older brother, Peter. So we both had nice bikes now, and we rode — heck, when I was 13 or 14 — we rode up to the Russian River and back in a day, and that was 120 miles.

**0:16:50:** He was on the track team and cross-country, and probably in better shape than I was. I moved around. I was in decent shape, and I always hiked. In fact, I grew up hiking on Mount Tam. I should say, too, when I was five years old — my parents, they were big hikers on the mountain and kept in good shape, and they had me hiking to the top of Mount Tam when I was five years old. I think it was from Mountain Home Inn, and we hiked right up the Hogsback, right up Throckmorton Ridge to the top and back down. And we did these High Sierra camps in the summertime. Every other year from when I was five years old 'til I was, oh I don't know, 13 maybe, we would hike up in Yosemite in the High Sierra camps. They have this series of camps: May Lake, Glen Aulin, Tuolumne Meadows, Vogelsang, Merced Lake, and Sunrise, and then back into the valley would be this whole loop. So I did that when I was five years old. And this really nice thing, at that level anyway, is that they have all the cooking at these camps, and you don't have to carry all this stuff with you. They have tents and things like that and the food, and all you have to carry are your clothes and —

**0:18:22 Debra Schwartz:** Sleeping bags.

**0:18:23 Joe Breeze:** Maybe a sleeping bag. I guess you would have a sleeping bag.<sup>1</sup> Maybe they made the beds, I actually forget. I just remember having a square pack with my clothes, unless my dad schlepped it all, I'm not sure, or my mom. But I remember hiking up there. I remember to this day hiking from Tuolumne Meadows to Vogelsang up that mountain and hiking through the meadow there and just going, “Wait!” and my dad turning around and my mom says, “Don't pay any attention to him. Just keep walking.” [laughter] And it worked, you know? He just kept walking and I just became a really good hiker. [laughter] And a tough kid. So anyway, I was game for my brother to induce me to ride again, “Hey, let's go up the Russian River, Joey.”

**0:19:18 Debra Schwartz:** Was this in the summer when it was hot?

**0:19:20 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, in the summer, and it was hot, yes. I remember we had

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<sup>1</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Joe noted that there were no sleeping bags.

AAA maps. My parents were members of AAA and we had these great AAA maps that had just the right amount of detail for a bicycle ride. And we'd peruse these maps. I really got into maps. I remember when I was hiking in the Sierra; it's a matter of survival. It's like, "How long is that hike gonna be?"

**0:19:44 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**0:19:45 Joe Breeze:** And it's just, "How big is that hill?" You look at the contour maps. We really got into maps at that time, when I was probably about fourth grade or so. Bought my first map, it was a map of Yosemite. Anyway, so those AAA maps, really, we studied them carefully, too, and would check out all these — it'd be all back roads, and trying to figure out how to get around freeways, et cetera, and ride out through West Marin and on up to Guerneville and back in a day. It was like, "Oh my gosh." And so, actually, it continued. My brother said, "Hey, let's ride to Lake Tahoe." So when I was 14, we rode from Mill Valley, from our house in Mill Valley. And just trying to figure out how to get along 101 there — it's just we were on dirt roads — and I remember going through a field up by Ignacio, and we ran into a bull in the field. It was like, "Oh." It took a while to get around him, but we continued on along Highway 37 and through Fairfield and out Highway 12. And we got stopped by the highway patrol out by a little place called Denverton short of Rio Vista. He thought we were running away from home, and he called into dispatch and they got ahold of my parents and, "Hey, it's okay for Joey and Ritchie to be out there on the highway." And he just couldn't believe it.

**0:21:08 Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh.

**0:21:10 Joe Breeze:** He said, "Okay, well if you're gonna continue on here, I recommend that you hitchhike to Lodi 'cause Highway 12 is very narrow." And, "Okay." So, we hitchhiked and some guy with a sedan gave us a ride. We stuffed our bikes in the back, and he was probably 19 years old, the guy who gave us a ride, and got to Lodi, and we continued along our way up Carson Pass. Our first day we made it to Jackson in the foothills, and then we rode up to as far — well, I rode as far as Cook Station on 88. But anyway, I did that ride many times since. I could do it in one day up to Lake Tahoe. And we just got in better shape. Oh, and later that summer, we wanted to ride to Sequoia National Park, so my mom typed up a letter before we left, "It's okay for Joey and Ritchie to be out on the highway." Essentially, right? And we took it down to the notary, to Mario Cipollina's dad. Mr. Cipollina, right? Gino, is it Gino Cipollina?

**0:22:28 Debra Schwartz:** I don't remember. They lived down on Eldridge, right? The Cipollina family.

**0:22:33 Joe Breeze:** I was thinking they lived in the Cascades, but I don't know. I knew Mario when I was in junior high school. Anyway, Gino was the local notary public down on Blithedale, and so I remember going down there and having them reading it and stamping it with his approval, and we put it with the little — our meager belongings on our bicycle. Each of us would carry our own sleeping bag on a rack on the back with a little ground tarp and a little bag of tools. And we'd wear cut-off jeans, a white t-shirt,

and a pair of Jack Purcell tennis shoes. They're not cycling shoes at all, right? And so we got down, we went down El Camino Real, down to San Jose, down to Hollister, over Pacheco Pass to Los Banos, and then south on Highway 33 going down the middle of the valley down to Firebaugh. About Firebaugh, we got stopped by the highway patrolman as we expected, and they thought we were running away from home. So, I mean, this is at a time, you gotta know that there were next to nobody on bicycles out of town. There would be kids on a sidewalk in a town, and then if anybody was out on the highway it'd be, "Whoa! Wow!" Anybody we saw out on the highway it was like, "Wow! So cool!" We'd stop and we'd talk and share notes and et cetera, and it's like, "This is really crazy."

**0:24:12 Debra Schwartz:** What year is this now?

**0:24:12 Joe Breeze:** So this is, when we were riding to Tahoe and Sequoia, that's 1968, I think.

**0:24:18 Debra Schwartz:** You're seeing kids hitchhike though on the roads, right?

**0:24:21 Joe Breeze:** No.

**0:24:21 Debra Schwartz:** Because I remember there was a lot of hitchhiking going on.

**0:24:24 Joe Breeze:** Oh, okay. So maybe it's '67. Let's see. Okay, I gotta think about this. Born in '53, but not until December. So I'm maybe between junior high school and high school. So I was first in Tam in 1968, the fall of '68. So this is that summer, so it's '68. And I don't recall people hitchhiking.

**0:24:56 Debra Schwartz:** Probably not on those back roads.

**0:24:57 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. Right, right. And I know what you're talking about. There were a lot of people hitchhiking then. And I think it was before a lot of that, before you really noticed it, before I noticed it, right?

**0:25:08 Debra Schwartz:** But again, in the summer you're doing this?

**0:25:10 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, this was the summertime, yeah.

**0:25:12 Debra Schwartz:** So, a little warm in the Valley.

**0:25:14 Joe Breeze:** That's right. We didn't know about things like water bottles. So, we'd just stop at the A&W and have a root beer float or something, a root beer freeze to cool down our core temperature [laughter], and then you'd be out going through Terminus and out in the middle of nowhere, and it'd be like 95 or 100 degrees. That was on later trips though because we actually got a ride through the worst of it down through Lodi. It was still plenty hot in Lodi, right? But yeah, we suffered that later. So anyway, the highway patrolman stops us down at Firebaugh. We pull out that letter, and trying to

not have any sign of a smug look on our face, we hand it to the highway patrolman. He opens it up and reads the letter and sees that it's okay for Joey and Richie to be out on the highway, and his jaw just went slack. And it was, "Oh, my gosh." And so it was like, "Yeah, okay," and so we rode on to Fresno.

**0:26:18:** The first day we made it to Los Banos, and the second day we made it – we were south of Fresno on the old Golden State Highway toward Delano, I think it is. And my brother for some reason crossed over the median of the four-lane road and picked up a bunch of goat heads in his tires, and got a flat, got a bunch of flats. And so my parents knew, they were heading down there. We were going to a cabin up in the mountains, and they knew our route on that same AAA map. They had a copy of the same darn map with our line on there. And so we just waited for them. We didn't call them or anything, they had left much earlier. And we just waited until they came down the road and there they were and then we hopped in the car, went up to the mountains.

**0:27:07 Debra Schwartz:** How long did you wait?

**0:27:09 Joe Breeze:** Oh, it was probably just about an hour. [Chuckle] That's how I remember it, anyway. We eventually did that ride again, and did all 300 miles going up to Mineral King.

**0:27:28 Debra Schwartz:** And Sequoia National Forest.

**0:27:29 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, Sequoia National Park and Forest. In 1970 we got a little bit more ambitious, especially my brother. He figured, "Okay, I'm gonna ride to Alaska." I'm between being a sophomore and a junior in high school, and my brother's just graduated. So it's 1970, summer of 1970, and he wants to go to Alaska, and I go, "Well I'll go up to Leggett with you so I can ride down the coast." Because what I wanted to do that summer was hike down the John Muir Trail in the Sierra with my buddy Jim Acker. So we leave early in the morning like we always did, like five, just sunup, not even sunup, and we made it all the way to Laytonville the first day. It was 175 miles and I'm just 16 years old, 15 years old, I forget.<sup>2</sup> And my brother had got ahead. We got forced off the road by a car up south of Laytonville, so that delayed us some, but we still did 175 miles. And then stayed. We'd just stay on the side of the road in a blackberry patch or whatever.

**0:28:45:** There were no parks, we didn't have any money. Then the next day, just in 10 miles or so we got to Leggett, and I thought, "Well, I'll go to Eureka just to go to the coast." So, then we camped out in southern Eureka, just out by the marsh there. And the next day I figured, "Well, I'll go to the Oregon border," and so we went up to Crescent City, and out the road toward Oregon Caves and Grants Pass, and got to the top of that hill through a tunnel, I guess. And I thought, "Well, heck. I'm here, let's go to Crater Lake. I'll go to Crater Lake with you." So we were camped the next day at Selma, Oregon and — oh no, actually we made it to Crater Lake. Maybe we stayed in Selma and then rode up to Crater Lake. So that's four days to Crater Lake. And it was freezing cold

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<sup>2</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Joe noted he would have been 16 at the time.

up there. I remember going down, on that trip we brought along a dress shirt, an Arrow dress shirt. I remember this light blue Arrow dress shirt and that was my long sleeve jersey essentially, right?

**0:29:56 Debra Schwartz:** And you're not bringing water yet?

**0:29:58 Joe Breeze:** I don't think we still got a clue to that water bottle thing.

**0:30:01 Debra Schwartz:** So you're still in your shorts and —

**0:30:02 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, shorts and a long sleeve — but now I had the long sleeve shirt on peddling downhill in low gear trying to stay warm going around Crater Lake. We just stopped and got out the sleeping bags. It was just too cold to go on. And then we continued, "I'll go to Washington with you," and so down over Willamette Pass, down to Eugene, down the Willamette Valley and into Portland. And then we rode across the Kelso Bridge and across and down the Washington side of the Columbia River, down to Astoria. And my brother at that point said, "You know, I think I'll just ride down the coast," so he didn't go to Alaska. We compromised at Astoria and headed all the way down the coast. Just had a great ride, and by the way, that whole time, it was 1,400 miles of riding. We did 100 miles every day. It was like a two-man team time trial the whole way. We got down to Fort Bragg actually — oh and on that trip, the whole way, we saw, I think, a total of four other people riding bicycles outside of kids riding on the sidewalk in each town we went through. And every time it was like, "Whoa," and we'd talk. Just a few years later in 1976 for the bicentennial, they made that the Bicentennial Bike Route, and there were thousands of people riding down the coast. Hopefully down, not up the coast, because of the prevailing winds.

**0:31:41 Debra Schwartz:** And you factored that in when you were on your courses? You considered the winds?

**0:31:45 Joe Breeze:** Oh yeah, we would never ride up the coast. We were seasoned cyclists by then, and as a cyclist you really pay attention to wind patterns and the weather. Certain times of year you don't do this, and in the springtime, after a storm goes through, you go up inland and then you come down the coast 'cause you're gonna have a blower wind that clears out the storm. You just learn all these things.

**0:32:08 Debra Schwartz:** Were you researching this at all? Were you reading the —

**0:32:12 Joe Breeze:** It's just being out in the elements. It's amazing what you learn by riding a bicycle where you're not gonna pick it up in a car. All these things are important to you, and the steepness of a hill and stuff, these just go right by you in a car, but when you're riding a bike it's like all this stuff is really important, vitally important.

**0:32:29 Debra Schwartz:** So you have an accumulated, through your experiences you had accumulated, an awareness of the world around you that you just automatically applied? You didn't read some bicyclist's journal?

**0:32:38 Joe Breeze:** Right, well there weren't any. There weren't any. This was back when bicycling in the U.S. was at its nadir practically. And like I say, it's kids riding on sidewalks in cities, in towns. Hey, I shouldn't make it look as bleak as that perhaps, 'cause there was racing going on from the 19 — probably the nadir was the early '60s or mid '60s for bicycling here, but there was some racing still going on in California across the country. There were national championships all the years from the 1880s or whatever to now. There was never a gap in that. But there were just fewer people doing it.

**0:33:24 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I recall quite a few 10-speeds as graduation gifts when I was growing up.

**0:33:29 Joe Breeze:** Yeah.

**0:33:30 Debra Schwartz:** We're about the same age.

**0:33:30 Joe Breeze:** Okay, right, right. Well now, a bike boom hit in 1971, okay, and this was 1970 when we did this trip up to Washington and back. In '71, yeah, then you would start to see that, and bikes becoming more prevalent. I mean, it was a boom — where a lot of vectors all came together and bicycles were the solution for whatever it was, just having fun out there recreationally, or there was an environmental movement. There were a number of things coming together, a back-to-the-earth movement, a bit of a quest for maybe simpler-times movement as a backlash to the space age and the Jetsons, et cetera, and certainly conservation, and it's all woven together, right?

**0:34:30:** But at that point in time, it just was like, "Bicycles, yeah sign me up." 1971, '72, it was huge. Especially all across the country by '73 — mostly on the coasts in '71 and '72 in San Francisco, in L.A., and in New York City, and then kinda filled in the middle over the next couple of years to the point where there were bike shortages. Bicycle shops didn't have enough bikes. There was a waiting line for bikes at that time. A lot of people got bikes, and maybe it wasn't the perfect bike for most people at the time — which was a skinny tire, drop handlebar, road racing bike, or road racing bike wannabe, heavy sled — but I think it certainly wasn't the perfect bike for everybody to just have an enjoyable time on a bicycle. I think there were a lot of kind of aching backs or whatever. I mean, you really have to be adept at riding a road racing bike to enjoy it, and I think a lot of those bikes got hung up in garages shortly thereafter.

**0:35:51:** And along in there, I am really getting into bikes. I just loved this bicycle thing, and other people are getting into it too, of course. There was a group — the Community Church in Mill Valley, put together a ride in Europe. There were 14 of us that went over to Europe to ride in 1971 in the summer for two months. And this was through England and France and Italy, Switzerland, Germany, down the Rhine to Holland and then back from Amsterdam. We did a lot of rides warming up for it, and some Mill Valley friends who did that, the Wornum kids, Mandy, Chris, Claudia, did it. And one of their cousins, and friends from high school, Chuck Cutting, and John Uhte, and a number of others. We would train by doing rides around Marin and then go up to Sonoma. And I

went down into the Mill Valley Library and I looked into the European phone books and I wrote down names of all the builders. The famous bicycle builders and their shops in Paris and Milan — and wherever I could — and in London, mostly those three cities. And I made a list of all the important players in bicycles in Europe that I might see. Is this too much detail?

**0:37:57 Debra Schwartz:** No, it's really interesting.

**0:37:58 Joe Breeze:** Okay.

**0:37:58 Debra Schwartz:** But I am gonna make you a little more comfortable [adjusts recording device]. There we go.

**0:38:03 Joe Breeze:** So, down in the South of France, staying at a little town called Golfe-Juan, I ran into — at a construction zone, a car stopped suddenly in front of me. It was a Rambler with a soft top, with the top down, and I hit the back of it, went right into the backseat of the car, but it bent the fork. And these three French people turned around and like, “Da, da, da, da, da,” and I go, “Sorry, sorry, sorry.”

**0:38:27 Debra Schwartz:** You're in their backseat?

**0:38:29 Joe Breeze:** I'm in the backseat with the bike, yeah. So everybody's okay and I go back to where I'm staying and there was a torch. There was a guy doing plumbing on the house next door, and I had seen my father working in his machine shop at the Sports Car Center and at home, and knew that, “Hey, I can straighten this fork with a little help from this plumber here.” So I went next door and with sign language — I didn't know French very well — and actually was able to straighten out the fork using his hearth and without burning the paint too badly on the fork, 'cause it had a chrome-plated top.

**0:39:11:** When we got to Milan, I looked up Cinelli & Company and went down there and thought, “Hey, I'm gonna buy a Cinelli fork.” And Cinelli was it. That was the *it bike* at that moment, and so I thought, “I'm gonna get this chrome-plated Cinelli fork for my Legnano bike.” And I went into the Cinelli factory there, to the front desk, the front counter, and asked for, “I'd like to buy a Cinelli fork.” The guy says, “Well, so what kind of bike you have?” “Oh, a Legnano.” “No, sorry. I can't sell you a Cinelli fork, but Mr. Cinelli will be back from lunch in a few minutes here.” And I thought, “Oh, think I'll stick around for that.” I tell you, for this bike-crazed kid at 17-years-old, shaking hands with Cino Cinelli was like shaking hands with God. If I wasn't already totally passionate about cycling, I was for life now.

**0:40:08:** Actually, at a bike shop in Amsterdam I saw some tubing, a singular set of bicycle tubing at this Presto bike shop in Amsterdam and I thought, “You know, that's something I could probably do.” And after doing that little bit of torch work in the south of France, I thought, “Yeah, I can probably do this.” I got back to the States and it took a little while but a builder, Albert Eisentraut in Oakland, was starting to — had been building frames from the — I don't know, the '60s, at some point. He was handed the

torch by some famous builders in Chicago, the Wastyns, Emil and Oscar Wastyn. Albert Eisentraut was essentially the Renaissance frame builder in America who did actually teach many young upstarts like myself how to build frames and carry on the tradition, the European tradition or the American tradition, of bicycle frame building, custom frame building.

**0:41:04:** I took his class in 1974 and made myself a road racing frame, which I rode for 50,000 miles before getting forced off the road down on Blithedale and put into a rain grate, one of those long rain grates. I made a flying leap and hit the far end of it and went over the handlebars. It was 1979. I had made a brand new frame. I had just cut the head tube over at The Cove Bike Shop in Tiburon. Somehow, that frame didn't — I had it strapped to my back, and somehow it didn't hit the pavement, but it destroyed Joe Breeze number one.

**0:41:44 Debra Schwartz:** At what point did you know or decide to start making your own bikes?

**0:41:52 Joe Breeze:** Well, I took that class from Albert Eisentraut. It was a really intensive class, it was like 14 days, 10 hours a day, and I would commute over to Oakland. I didn't get my license 'til I was 26 years old.

**0:42:07 Debra Schwartz:** Your driver's license?

**0:42:08 Joe Breeze:** Okay, like I told you, I think I told you, my dad raced cars. He raced sports cars, he raced Jags, et cetera, MGs and Jags. But he was aware of our — for Richard and I — our need for speed, and he's determined that it would probably be best that we didn't get our license at that magic moment of 15 and a half years old, or even 16, and that we needed to wait until we were 18 to get our license. Probably a wise move on his part. But it was interesting that that magic moment came and went, and it was like I was getting everywhere on a bicycle. In fact, at 18, I thought, "I'm getting everywhere on a bicycle," and so I didn't even bother getting a license. I only did when I was 26 years old because at that point, that was 1978, and we heard about this event, a mountain bike event in Crested Butte, Colorado, and I just didn't wanna be sitting there in the car going out there, so instead, I —

**0:43:20 Debra Schwartz:** Is this the —

**0:43:21 Joe Breeze:** The Pearl Pass, the Crested Butte, the Pearl Pass ride.

**0:43:25 Debra Schwartz:** Where you went with Charlie Kelly, and those at that little group?

**0:43:26 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, that's right, that's right. Getting a little ahead of things there, but that's why I got my license, so I wasn't sitting there like a sack of potatoes the whole ride. And I ended up driving the whole way there and the whole way back.



**0:43:40 Debra Schwartz:** Can I just ask one thing?

**0:43:41 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, sure.

**0:43:42 Debra Schwartz:** So you're riding all over hill-and-dale with no real precautions of any kind. Aren't your parents worried?

**0:43:53 Joe Breeze:** Oh, right, that. [chuckle]

**0:43:55 Debra Schwartz:** That.

**0:43:58 Joe Breeze:** I imagine there was some worry on their part. They were very encouraging of our independent living and felt that we needed to experience life to really get the most out of it. I think that was it. I don't think I ever heard them articulate that, but you gotta think that's what it was. They weren't trying to kill us. [laughter]

**0:44:23:** Families, they had more kids back then. There are five kids, "Hey, you miss one or two, what's the —" It's so different, it's hard to comprehend today. Parents have become so protective and maybe it is because families are smaller, but back then not so. It's really hard to imagine. Maybe your parents were more protective. You're a woman, we were boys. My parents were probably a little farther along in that category of allowing us our freedom and willing to allow their children to experience life *at its fullest*.

**0:45:18 Debra Schwartz:** At no time —

**0:45:18 Joe Breeze:** I never broke a bone in my life, I gotta tell you. And I think it has a lot to do with taking these risks, being lucky, but surviving a lot of calamity. I think my parents understood that we weren't stupid about throwing our bodies around and taking — I mean, hey, who's gonna deny that being out there on the highway isn't risky, or is risky? But they're calculated risks to some degree. There's a lot of, you don't know what's going to happen now. You could be hit by a meteorite, right? But, it's a greater risk than some out there in the world.

**0:46:08 Debra Schwartz:** Less crowded then, it's true and those back roads weren't always that busy.

**0:46:12 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. It's maybe something about having faith that is an important thing to learn in life. It can kill you too, right? But I've always felt that, riding out on the highway, is my belief that I can survive, and if I don't do it, that's a calamity in itself. That if you give up the highways to just automobiles, that's a tragedy, that's a real tragedy. For America that's a tragedy that bicycles and cars cannot share the highways, that people on bicycles cannot get where they need to go, in America, with a helpful tool such as a bicycle. There's some faith in humanity that they are not gonna squish you, and certainly it happens. If you just acquiesce to it, that makes America weaker. So that's kind of been my feeling in doing this, and I praise my parents for giving us the ability to be stronger, and be braver, and have faith in America. That's kind

of it in a nutshell. They're part of the community, and this is an important thing to them. They never articulated that. This is with a feeling that I totally admired my parents. They were just stellar people, and I have the utmost respect for them, in what they showed us in life, and how to treat others in life.

**0:48:08:** Okay, so I'll get onto some more stuff a little later. God, this is a tome here. So anyway, Joey and Richie are out riding on the highway. And after that 1970 trip, here comes Earth Day at Tam High School. I'm in Tam High, first Earth Day, and Rob Gross puts on a bike race that goes from the front of Tam High there at Camino Alto and Miller, up Miller to, I don't know, Santa's Toys, somewhere up by Brown's Hall, or something, Molino, maybe — Montford, that is, right? — yeah, and then comes back down the other side of Miller, and then the road's all closed for this event, this glorious event. There were lots of kids from the high school doing it. And Earth Day was a huge thing. I forget exactly what the date of that was. I was thinking it was the fall, not the spring when Earth Day usually happens. But maybe that first one, that's when they had it, it was September. I don't know, maybe it was in the spring.

**0:49:19:** But, as I recall it, I had just ridden that summer, this 1,400-mile bike ride, and I was in pretty good shape, right? 100 miles a day for 14 days. Oh, I didn't tell you one part about that trip to do with Mill Valley. My brother got some flat tires, he always seemed to be getting flat tires to end rides, and we hitchhiked. He lost the needle to sew up his sew-up tires up by Fort Bragg, and these guys, these kids from Los Angeles, I don't know, they were 16, probably 17 years old, or 18, not even, and they came along in a VW bus. And we hung out. They picked us up, and we spent the night with them out on the beach. We just had a great time, and we went to the Navarro River and swam. They took us down the coast. The song, "Mill Valley," by Rita Abrams had come out, and they wanted to give us a ride all the way to Mill Valley so they could hear those kids singin'. [laughter] It was a huge hit. Actually, in 1971 when I rode through Europe, that song was on the radio.

**0:50:36 Debra Schwartz:** Get out!

**0:50:37 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, "Mill Valley, California, that's my home."

**0:50:40 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, sing the song! Do you remember it?

**0:50:42 Joe Breeze:** "Oh, they tell me about Mill Valley." It's been so long.

**0:50:48 Debra Schwartz:** I don't remember it.

**0:50:49 Joe Breeze:** Oh, my gosh, it was a worldwide hit that Rita Abrams put together with the third and fourth grade class at Strawberry Point School. And that's what brought a lot of people to Mill Valley, perhaps, I don't know.

**0:51:04 Debra Schwartz:** Interesting.

**0:51:05 Joe Breeze:** But those two boys needed to hear that song being sung in Mill Valley. They gave us a ride right back to our house. [laughter]

**0:51:15 Debra Schwartz:** But how do you get an instant replay with the kids singing that song? Did they sing it everyday?

**0:51:20 Joe Breeze:** “Well, I’m sorry, guys, but they’re not performing today. Maybe come back later next week, I don’t know.” So anyway, this race happens, the Ecofest, and the — what was it?

**0:51:41 Debra Schwartz:** Earth Day?

**0:51:42 Joe Breeze:** Earth Day. So yeah, that was a big thing going on. When I was going through high school, it was about —

**0:51:47 Debra Schwartz:** Well, how did you do on the race?<sup>3</sup>

**0:51:49 Joe Breeze:** —the environment. This whole bicycle thing was about the environment, and we just got healthy along the way. And oh, there was another one of these guys who was racing before I raced, who did the formal Amateur Bicycle League of America racing, before I got into it. Joe Harvin had a Cinelli, and he won the race. I was merely on a Legnano. [smiles] Yeah, I knew of Joe Harvin. He was the stud bike racer around town at that point. Okay, so I had that three-speed from fifth grade. And Joey Hodgedon who lived nearby, was a member of the tennis club also, and he had a three-speed that he had modified with drop handlebars. And so I had to do that for my bike. I bought a pair of handlebars from Richard Simmons for \$3 and put ’em on my three-speed bike, and I had a race bike now, whoa! Not really, right? But then I eventually got that real kind of race bike, Dawes Galaxy, which was not really the high end race bike. And then, when I got my Legnano, in 1970 —

**0:53:11 Debra Schwartz:** How much did it cost?

**0:53:12 Joe Breeze:** The Legnano, that was a real deal race bike. That was all Campagnolo with Reynolds tubing. Pros could race on this bike. It had all the top stuff on it, including the sew-up tires, et cetera, the whole deal. And I bought that in 1970 from Kezar Cyclery on Stanyan Street by Golden Gate Park. It was \$250. Screamin’ deal, \$250. A Cinelli would set you back maybe \$350 at the time. So I felt really lucky. It was a nice bike. And I raced on that bike. In fact, I started racing soon after I got back from that 1970 ride to Washington. I raced The Tam Hill Climb, that was my first bike race. I was a junior, in the junior class, that is 18 and under. Just the week before I got a pair of cycling shoes from Oscar Juner at American Cyclery in San Francisco. Real leather Italian racing shoes. I joined the Marin Cyclists, which you had to be a member of a club to race. And I didn’t even know about the Marin Cyclists until the week before that Mount Tam Hill Climb. I raced in my blue Tam PE shorts and a white tee shirt. I didn’t know about all that stuff. And I got fifth place. I felt I did pretty well. So, I raced. In two

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<sup>3</sup> In reviewing his transcript, Joe indicated that he came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place to Joe Harvin.

weeks time I did the Columbus Day Handicap over at Lake Merritt, and a criterium around the lake, and did okay in that. I got into racing after that. And then my next bike was a Joe Breeze, my first one.

**0:55:05 Debra Schwartz:** The first bike you ever made was for yourself?

**0:55:08 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's right. Painted it and everything. Blue.

**0:55:15 Debra Schwartz:** Where did you learn to do the actual craftsmanship of it?

**0:55:19 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. That was Albert Eisentraut, and that was at that 14-day class.

**0:55:22 Debra Schwartz:** At that one class, it wasn't at Tam High?

**0:55:25 Joe Breeze:** Okay, so in 1974 I took that class from Albert over in Oakland down at his factory. And I would go there by — 'cause I didn't drive, that's what got me to the 26-years-old thing. In '74 I didn't drive. So I took Golden Gate Transit down to Transbay Terminal. It was before BART across the Bay. So I took the bus across the Bay Bridge to BART down in one of the three stations down in Oakland and then took BART down to — he was down by the Colosseum. And so I'd reverse that process. It took a long time to get over there and back each day. All day long I was involved in this thing, and I'd get home and I'd draw on my drafting machine, my dad's drafting machine, actually. When he retired in 1966 he moved everything he could fit into a two-and-a-half car garage into our house at 28 Country Club. And so I had a machine shop right there.

**0:56:27:** I never took the machine shop program at Tam High School. Tam High School was rather old. Tamalpais High School used to be a trade school. And they had machine shop, they had wood shop, they had a printing shop. They had a full drafting program. I took all four years of drafting from Dan Dutra. Engineering drafting, architectural drafting, and I was gonna be an architect. My grandfather was an architect in San Francisco. He did the St. Francis Hotel. And my godfather was a world-famous architect, in fact. That's what I was going to do until I got sidetracked with bicycles. I eventually took the two-year associate arts course up at Marin JC, College of Marin. They had Machine and Metals Technology where I learned welding and machining, really intensive two-year program, to essentially become a machinist from that. And my father said, "Yeah, if you take that I'll teach you how to be a machinist." He was the machinist down at his Sports Car Center. It was kind of a combine there. They had a guy beating panels, making aluminum bodies for different cars. They made race cars down there.

**0:57:52:** And they worked on them. They had the whole pits. Bob Winkleman, who lives down in Muir Beach now, was part of the team from 1955 on to '66. Bob opened up his own sports car place down on Caledonia with the Formula Ford cars down there, I think, and Cortinas. But anyway, so my dad brought all this machine shop [stuff] home

with him that he could fit in. And so, with my learning about frame building and machining, then I started just building the frames right there. First custom-built road racing frames, not many. Then this fat tire thing came along. The whole balloon tire, fat tire, thing started in 1973.

**0:58:46:** Back to my father and how he showed me that bikes can be part of transportation, I had always been trying to get the secret out about cycling. This vast secret in America that, “Wow, you can get places, get healthy, have fun on this amazing machine. The most efficient machine ever devised for transport.” It’s amazing. And it just seemed like nobody knew about this secret. Even when I started racing road bikes the hope was that people would maybe see a squib in the newspaper that somebody raced from A to B in this very short amount of time and, “Wow, how about that? I just thought bicycles were sidewalk toys.” And little by little, people might learn about bikes.

**0:59:38:** So another thing I wanted to do — and as we started Velo Club Tamalpais, eventually, we branched out from Marin Cyclists, and there were a lot of us in Marin, us young upstarts who started our own young guys road racing club, Velo Club Tamalpais, which we started in 1972. I was working at a bike shop in Sausalito called Mom’s Apple Bikes at the foot of Spring Street, 2001 Bridgeway. And that’s where I met my buddy Otis Guy. Someone came in and said, “Let’s start a bike club.” Chris Lang and Gil de la Roza, and Steve Wild started Velo Club Tam in September ’72. Now we were getting into racing, going to races a lot more often, and I was starting to get into older bikes. I wanted to — my buddy Otis Guy and also Marc Vendetti — we wanted to restore bikes from the 19th century and show them before people so that they could appreciate cycling through its vast heritage, from the golden age of cycling back in the 1890s, when everybody was head long into the craze of cycling.

**1:01:06:** And where in New York City, in a one-mile radius, there were 80 bicycle shops to feed the need, and when things were happening so fast and furious that in Washington, DC, there were two patent buildings, one for bicycle patents, and one for everything else. Every other patent was for a bicycle. It was like the computer of its day, and people were just fascinated with, “Oh my gosh, I can travel out my door and to this town, and the next town, and the next town. I don’t have to stable a horse, and I don’t have to wait for the train. I can just go when I want.” Now there were wheels so you could do that. That’s why it was so remarkable, and as the bicycle was perfected, or neared perfection — the pneumatic tire and the safety bike and et cetera — it just got huge in the 1890s. And they were beautifully made bikes. We wanted to display these bikes so people would go, “Oh my gosh, I had no idea bicycles at one point in this country were such an amazing thing and led to emancipation of women, and suffrage, and all these amazing things in our past which has just kinda been erased from history.”

**1:02:16:** So we were looking for old bikes, when we went to road races in the early ’70s.<sup>4</sup> And so I’m with Marc Vendetti one day down in Santa Cruz, and we come to this bike shop, Soquel Bikes, and they’ve got some old bikes in back, and we spotted something down the street that looked like some cool old bikes. So we’re checking it out,

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<sup>4</sup> 1973, according to Joe.

but we can't find these 1890s bikes like we want to. And my buddy Marc says, "Hey, Joe, why don't you offer this guy \$5 for this old Schwinn." A Schwinn balloon tire bike, this crusty bike, 1941, it's all covered with red house paint including the tires. I look at him like he's half-crazy, and like, "What the heck am I gonna do with this, Marc?" And he says, "Well, couple years ago, when I was at Redwood High School, I'd ride down Mount Tam on the fire roads, and I don't know, you might enjoy it."

**1:03:10:** So I tried it. I bought the bike and took it over to Marc's place, and he had pumped up the tires on his old bike. I was at San Rafael and I'm looking out towards Mount Tam going, "Wow, interesting. Yeah, I could ride this up on Mount Tam. This is kind of fun." It's very different, and heavy and a bit of a sled, for sure, but rugged, had the big balloon tires, 26 inch by two and an eighth inch tires, high volume, big volume tires at the time. And I went home and I kinda fell in love with this bike, this 1941 Schwinn DX. I got a kitchen knife out and I carefully scraped off the old red paint down to the older original blue and feather-head ivory, livery of the bike, and little by little resurrected it, and stripped off the fenders and the racks and the chain guards, and all this other clutter. And had me a bike like Marc's bike, and called him up and I said, "Hey, let's meet up on the top of the mountain." He and Otis were gonna hitchhike up the backside of the mountain from Fairfax, from San Anselmo from where they lived, and I was gonna hitchhike up the front side.

**1:04:36:** So I went down to the 2 AM Club, down to the "Deuce," and put out my thumb. And everybody was just going up the street. Eventually somebody came by with a pickup truck, and I threw my bike in the back and I got a ride eventually up to the top of the mountain somehow, up to the East Peak parking lot, and waited for Otis and Marc, and waited, and they never made it. It was harder to get a ride up from Fairfax, and so I rode down Railroad Grade, and that was my first balloon tire ride off-road, and riding down the Railroad Grade from the top, from the old Tamalpais Tavern site and right down past West Point and Double Bow Knot, around Horseshoe Bend and all the way down into Mill Valley. I just had a ball. "This is just amazing, wow." And I grew up hiking on Mount Tam and just conjuring up the ideas of, "Oh my gosh, we know the roads between San Francisco, from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Russian River like the back of our hand," cause we were training like 300 miles a week or so, and we would ride up the Russian River a lot, Coleman Valley Road, and down the coast all the way. But here right in our backyard was all this amazing territory, that wow, with a bicycle I could go out and see some sites, get pretty far out and get an amazing ride in a day, and that's what we did.

**1:06:00:** Otis and Marc would come down when we weren't at school and we'd hitchhike from the Deuce. Eventually we weeded that out, we would go, "Okay." We were, in the early '70s, we were all category two racers, eventually category one road racers, top category, and we were in great shape, right? And we would just ride. We'd ride up Jane Street and then eventually we'd, "Oh, let's just ride." We'd ride up to Four Corners on Panoramic where we could get people that are really going up Mount Tam, weed out the local traffic, and do that. At first I guess we did Pipeline Trail to Mountain Home, we'd hitchhike from there, and then after a while it's like, yeah, we would just

ride up the mountain, Jane Street, up Molino, out Molino to Pipeline Trail, and come out on Panoramic at Mountain Home Inn and then up the highway. We'd just ride the whole way up and we didn't bother with hitchhiking.

**1:07:04 Debra Schwartz:** Pipeline's pretty narrow too.

**1:07:06 Joe Breeze:** Oh yeah, it's single track, but it's totally rideable. Not totally rideable, there're some spots where you — because you're going uphill in that direction, right? I haven't ridden in years, but it was very rideable then. You kind of have to cross over that pipe every now and then. I don't know if that pipe's still there.

**1:07:21 Debra Schwartz:** It is.

**1:07:21 Joe Breeze:** The real deal pipe. Yeah, from Belvedere Reservoir.

**1:07:24 Debra Schwartz:** Up towards the Mountain Home Inn it is.

**1:07:25 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. So we would go up the mountain, usually to Mountain Theatre, Sidney B. Cushing Theatre, and we would ride down Rock Springs Trail down to West Point Inn. And it was back when this was legal, that is, there isn't a law outlawing who's gonna ride a bike up there. I actually was riding bikes off-road on Tam earlier I should say, back when I was in junior high school. I would borrow the neighbor's Stingray bikes, polo bikes with the promise that I would fix them up better than they were before I used them. And I would do this a few times. An older sister would give us a ride up, Jordan's sister, Andy Jordan's sister. Sorry, I forget her name.

**1:08:31 Debra Schwartz:** It'll come to you after the interview and we can edit it.

**1:08:33 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. Martha Jordan.

**1:08:34 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, there you go.

**1:08:36 Joe Breeze:** So Martha would give us a ride up the East Peak parking lot, and we'd ride down on — and this was like 1967 or something like that — ride down Railroad Grade back home. And then I'd fix up the twins, the Nestler twins bikes, Peter and Brad's bikes.

**1:08:56 Debra Schwartz:** Well, you have amazing recall, actually.

**1:08:58 Joe Breeze:** I keep track of the boys in the hood.

**1:09:04 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, so let's move on to a little bit more about your early manufacturing, actually when you became —

**1:09:11 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, let me tell you about this — we'll get to that in a moment, if I can — just an experience of riding down the mountain this first time. Like I said, I grew

up hiking on Mount Tam, and I knew the experience and the feeling of quietude and how calm that is out there or can be or was.

**1:09:38 Debra Schwartz:** Is.

**1:09:40 Joe Breeze:** Is, thank you. Well, okay so here we're on bicycles, right? It's like, "This could be a problem." So the first people we come across, they're hikers of course, and we just hop off our bikes. I'm leading 'cause this is the trail I know, so I lead, that's how it worked. And it's like, "Okay, off the bikes." We're there and the hikers come along to us and go, we're talking, "How are you?" All the niceties, and they say, "Oh, what a novel way to get around." There was no animosity to it at all, it's like, "There's no problem here." That's what we experienced, until of course there's always gonna be a bad apple that screws it up for everybody, and this happened, right? Eventually in 1979 it was made illegal. But anyway, that was the first deal.

**1:10:41 Debra Schwartz:** What? You couldn't ride your bike on Mount Tam?

**1:10:44 Joe Breeze:** No, you couldn't ride on single track on Mount Tam, in fact you couldn't at that time ride on Railroad Grade even when that happened. But anyhow, you're gonna have bad apples with any group, right? And it happened here and this is a problem. People need to be able to enjoy a calm experience out on the trails. I totally respect that to this day, and it's a very important message to get across to people that there's a time and a place for everything and having access to all trails with a mountain bike is nothing anybody should hope for. But to have some access for mountain bikes, I think, would be quite fair. We're not to that point yet, if some trails on Mount Tam proper were opened up, single track was opened to mountain bikers, I think that would be very fair. And I think it will happen someday. It's way overdue, really, and I think that will help heal the animosity between — if there are any animosities still left with groups about the hiking and biking. There are so many people who hike and bike and understand the situation, there's no problem at all. There are bad apples in every group and if you're gonna have people just hating people —

**1:12:00 Debra Schwartz:** Well, it seems like there was sort of a wave of contention there for a while.

**1:12:03 Joe Breeze:** Well, it continues on to this day. I'm not gonna pretend it doesn't. But, like I said, there are bad apples in every group, and if there are people who just don't wanna see bikes, bike people on Mount Tam, well that's, I consider that, a bad apple.

**1:12:18 Debra Schwartz:** Sometimes there are some pretty wild riders, too.

**1:12:21 Joe Breeze:** Well absolutely, but that doesn't mean that the whole mountain should be shut down to bicycles. I don't think it's a healthy thing to keep it going like this. It's a public mountain and there are a lot of public agencies, and I think it is absolutely reasonable to open up some of the mountain, some of the time even. They have the even-odd day, I think is a little kooky. But to have some trails that are open to



bicycles right on Mount Tam proper — and it will happen at some point, as people calm down a little bit and see things as being fair. But anyway, back to your question about the building of the bikes or the building of the mountain bikes, or the building of the road bikes.

**1:13:05 Debra Schwartz:** Well, you're a bike builder, but obviously from what we've discussed so far, you are a bike enthusiast first and foremost. I mean, as a lifestyle choice and as a technology. I can see that now.

**1:13:15 Joe Breeze:** Yeah.

**1:13:16 Debra Schwartz:** I mean, you're enthralled with bikes.

**1:13:24 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. My dad had a lot to do with that early on with — I actually got him back into cycling. He rode, he got his first bike from Ernie Ohrt — a famous bicycle proprietor in San Francisco, Ohrt's Cycle Institute — in 1947, a nice European Reynolds-tubed four-speed is all they had then, but a road racing bike. And that's what he rode back and forth to the Sports Car Center when he did ride and his race car buddies had a similar thing but similar kind of bikes. But he did that until the '50s and then he was not cycling at all during the '60s. He was still a hiker. He still kept in good shape hiking up and down Steep Ravine with our golden retriever and things like that or hiking in the Sierra or whatever. He was always in good shape. But in 1970 I got him back into bikes. I sold him the bicycle, my first all Campagnolo bike. Actually, I failed to mention my Carlton, 1965 Carlton that I purchased, or my father purchased, from Rob Gross in 1970. 1969 or '70. That's the bike I rode up to Washington and back, was a big red Carlton bike.

**1:14:57 Debra Schwartz:** Wait, wait. You sold your dad the bike he bought for you?

**1:15:00 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, I think so. I think that's how it worked, 'cause then I had the money to buy my Legnano. [laughter] You could tell he was a little supportive of my bicycle interests.

**1:15:07 Debra Schwartz:** Oh boy, he loved you. Yes.

**1:15:14 Joe Breeze:** There was a time I remember at Tam where my grades weren't as good as he thought they should be. He wanted me to go to MIT or Stanford or something. He went to Stanford, and he wanted to encourage my grades to be better, and he said, "You're not gonna be able to ride your bicycle until your grades come up." And it was only a week later when he felt that that was not a good thing because I was so into bikes, and he saw bicycles as such a good thing for me, and he rescinded that actually. Okay, well, maybe I would have gone to MIT if he hadn't. I don't know.

**1:16:00 Debra Schwartz:** But did you go to college?

**1:16:00 Joe Breeze:** I went to College of Marin. That's as far as I got with college.

**1:16:02 Debra Schwartz:** Those two years.

**1:16:03 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. But my dad taught me a whole heck of a lot about machining and just, I was gonna say, that when I got him back into bikes, he eventually, he got a Cinelli, and he started making his own bicycle parts for people out of our machine shop at 28 Country Club. We would modify, before I was even making frames, we were whittling away people's bike parts to make their bikes lighter. Drilling holes in the chain rings, fluting seat posts. We had a whole set up and tooling to do all this. I made some money from doing that special machining. Eventually I was doing bike repair right out of the house and repairing people's bikes in a huge way, the really nice bikes.

**1:16:57 Debra Schwartz:** Did you have any of the other bike manufacturers that would hang out with you in the shop? I mean, you've got a shop, right?

**1:17:04 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. Well, there were none.

**1:17:05 Debra Schwartz:** I mean, the ones that later became manufacturers.

**1:17:08 Joe Breeze:** Well, yeah, yeah. That's a bit later. But at first, it's just my dad and myself. So he would scrutinize bikes. We'd sit down and we'd look at this Cinelli or that Carlton or that Legnano, whatever came into the shop, and he'd be telling me, "Okay, this design has its merits. This design has its merits. This is just junk," and really critique all these bikes we'd get in. He was, like I told you, he was the machinist down at the Sports Car Center, but he was also —<sup>5</sup> he was really into the space program. He wanted to be an astronaut. He was too old to be an astronaut, but that was his love, outer space. He built telescopes and he was really into technology. We had sitting on our coffee tables at home *Aviation Week and Space Technology* and *Scientific American* and all the metal magazines. So I just thumbed through these besides architectural this and that but — so I just grew up, just osmosis from my father, and learning all about structure and materials, material science, and what worked and what didn't, and why you build things the way you build them. It was just a quite an education.

**1:18:35 Debra Schwartz:** It was like an apprenticeship to your father then.

**1:18:38 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, he was definitely my mentor and, yeah, he was telling me everything he could 'cause he learned a whole lot, and he wanted to — he was not actually a schooled engineer, but he knew way more than most engineers. His brother-in-law worked for Douglas Aircraft and he followed all sorts of technology in depth, and so I was really fortunate to have that font of knowledge to lead the way for me. So when I eventually started building my own frames, I had already had ideas in my head about how it should be done, and how to make the best bike in the world. That was my goal.

**1:19:24 Debra Schwartz:** What, really? Is that what you thought? "I'm gonna make the best bike in the world."

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<sup>5</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Joe filled this line in with "all about modernity".

**1:19:27 Joe Breeze:** Well, I wanted to make the best bikes in the world, the lightest road racing bikes on the planet. And I figured at that time, probably in the early '70s, that — well, maybe a little bit later after I took the machining program and was a real machinist. I knew all the ins and outs, and through all the textbooks and everything on just how you did all those — get down to a machining at tenth of a thousandth of an inch, et cetera. And I figured, “Okay, I really love this frame building thing.” I saw myself 20 years from now being a frame builder, a custom frame builder, maybe a starving artist frame builder, I don’t know. But because at that point in time, there wasn’t this future for it ’cause, “yeah, so there was a bike boom in the early '70s, but hey who knows how big this is gonna get.” But it’s just been a steady climb the whole way, more and more people getting into bikes, and that secret getting out little by little and —

**1:20:38 Debra Schwartz:** So your passion really has been the driving force in your — I mean, you had no real security that you were gonna be able to do anything with your passion, but you did.

**1:20:50 Joe Breeze:** This is my love, yeah. I had to be doing this and was gonna figure out some way to make it work.

**1:20:57 Debra Schwartz:** You never had a doubt this would — you always thought “this is how I’m gonna go”?

**1:21:01 Joe Breeze:** Well, like I told you, I might be a starving artist kind of guy, but I would be —

**1:21:08 Debra Schwartz:** But you knew what you wanted to do.

**1:21:10 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, I knew I could support myself somehow, doing what I love doing.

**1:21:16 Debra Schwartz:** Could you anticipate that you would —

**1:21:17 Joe Breeze:** Making a ton of money wasn’t my goal, just doing what I loved doing was my goal.

**1:21:23 Debra Schwartz:** Have you ever looked back and said, “Wow I got to totally —”

**1:21:27 Joe Breeze:** Well, looking back on it in hindsight it’s a lot easier. It’s just, you can look back on it and I can just see all these stepping stones, “Yeah, that’s what I needed to do.” I did it and I did it and I did it and I kept doing it, and then really, I’m fortunate that to be in a time where cycling has become so popular. It’s funny, I still see it as a secret in America, how amazing a bicycle is, and how few people will really understand it. And I have in my mind — maybe I’m an eternal optimist, I don’t know —

but I just see cycling as being so much huger in the future. And it's happened. It just keeps going. And I see so many vectors pointing at cycling as a solution for health in so many ways whether it's personal or environmental, whether it's just putting that smile on your face, and just seeing cycling getting huger, mostly for transportation 'cause now it has become not just a want but a need. We need to get to places, we need health. Put the two together and you save time. You have a richer life through cycling.

**1:22:38 Debra Schwartz:** This is how people can have their original life back?

**1:22:41 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. And it's no secret in some parts of the world.

**1:22:43 Debra Schwartz:** This is where you can have your cake and eat it, too. You can eat the healthy thing and use it as a vehicle to travel.

**1:22:49 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, keep that smile on your face. And so, anyway you can imagine a lot of different vectors pointing at it whether it's oil or just health. Just health in so many ways. Keep it at that.

**1:23:03 Debra Schwartz:** You look pretty healthy.

**1:23:05 Joe Breeze:** I'm okay at 61 years old, yeah, yeah. I rode down here today, right? I hope I make it home. [laughter]

**1:23:12 Debra Schwartz:** We can always say if you get a flat, we can call your mom or dad.

**1:23:15 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, that's right, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

**1:23:19 Debra Schwartz:** It's interesting, 'cause I've gotta say that we've got another guy that's going to — Charlie's gonna interview you more about — he's gonna probably wanna do some of the technical stuff, but I do wanna say that it is interesting to me to see —and this is no pun — how driven you are with this passion you have. I mean, somehow right from a very young age, you just took to it. I mean, Charlie will talk to you about the cars too, but have you ever thought of doing anything but bicycles?

**1:23:54 Joe Breeze:** Well I did, I was originally —

**1:23:57 Debra Schwartz:** Besides the architecture thing, which didn't last very long.

**1:24:01 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah, soon sidetracked with cycling. No, no, bicycling has been my passion all my adult life at least.

**1:24:09 Debra Schwartz:** Have you ever not been able to ride because of an injury or something? Have you ever gone a period in your life where you haven't been able to get your —

**1:24:16 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, in 1976, Otis Guy and I tried to set the transcontinental record on a tandem bicycle, or any bicycle, from the Golden Gate Bridge, from San Francisco to New York City. The record at the time was 13 days, five hours, 20 minutes. And we made it to Lincoln, Nebraska in five days or something, but my knees went south. I abraded my knees, and so I had to be off the bike for six months, something like that. So that was a moment in time.

**1:24:57 Debra Schwartz:** How was that?

**1:25:00 Joe Breeze:** It was kind of a drag. I went out for soccer at College of Marin, didn't really, I don't know, just didn't hit it off. But actually, for some reason I did a 6K run, the *Pacific Sun*, the 10K, six-mile run. That was not immediately after I got back, but I don't know, I think that was —

**1:25:27 Debra Schwartz:** I just can't imagine you not being able to ride.

**1:25:30 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah, right. And like I told you, I think, I never broke a bone in my life. So there haven't been too many times when I haven't been able to ride. We tried the record attempt again in '79, but my knees showed up. We were sponsored by Fritz Maytag who used to live in Mill Valley from Anchor Steam Beer. Anchor Steam sponsored. And we rode the "Anchor Steamer" all the way to Parley's Canyon above Salt Lake City this time and my knees were like, "Oh, no. Not good."

**1:26:01 Debra Schwartz:** So you grew up here in Mill Valley, you've lived in Marin County all this time. In what way do you think growing up here affected your life in the larger sense?

**1:26:14 Joe Breeze:** Well, okay, so Marin County over the last 100 years or so has attracted to it people who come here for its beauty, and a number of them enjoy hiking in the beauty, enjoying the beauty up close. I think just it's a thing about California even, that people have been moving west across America, leaving where they were, going for something better, seeking something better, and willing to try new things. And those people have ended up in San Francisco. The Gold Rush brought a lot of people into San Francisco willing to try new things, accepting of new things. And I think the gene pool in the Bay Area is rich in people accepting ideas, not just going, "Oh, that'll never fly." You hear it everywhere else. You hear it here some, but I don't think you hear it as much. Even today in the Bay Area, from that echo from the Gold Rush, and just being this wall of the Pacific Ocean. That, "Hey, you can't go any further." [laughter]

**1:27:38:** And people just being more accepting around here. Then Marin, in itself, has the beauty. And so people are attracted in that special way to Marin who love that beauty, and being in the great outdoors. So naturally, some of us, like my parents who came here for the beauty, and have some of that gene pool about being accepting and willing to try new ideas and allowing people to try different ideas, that we sort of created this — have this critical mass of people on bicycles trying that out and having enough of them to have a club, and having this social unit to continue with it and try things like the mountain

bike, which it all comes from the love of the outdoors, and the love of getting around in the outdoors. And heck, just the bicycle itself, I think, makes you a happier person. It's a fun thing to do, and it puts a smile on your face. I'm sure there's some people who go, "Well, that hill was really hard. I don't want to do that. I need a motor instead."

**1:29:02:** But there were enough people who experienced the cycling thing who just loved it, without the motor, and because it didn't have a motor even — and continue to this day. But that got together this group willing to try road bikes, and eventually the mountain bike thing, and that's what made it all happen right here in Marin. They say it's the birthplace of the mountain bike, which it is, and it happened right here. What happened in Marin was not another isolated occurrence, of which there were many from back in the early days of cycling. There is a direct linkage to what happened here in Marin County in Mill Valley that connects to the Olympic mountain bikes and people riding mountain bikes today essentially. It wasn't an isolated occurrence and that's because of Repack.

**1:29:54:** Repack brought all us bike-passionate, off-road passionate kids together from all around Mount Tam — Mill Valley, Corte Madera, Larkspur, Kentfield, San Anselmo, Fairfax — on a regular basis to share this new bicycle through the 20 Repack races that happened in the late '70s. It got to a point where *Evening Magazine* from KPIX Channel 5 in San Francisco came out to do a segment on it. Steve Fox came out and did a segment on Repack in January of 1979 and it was one of their most popular shows they ever aired, and they aired it a second time on many of the CBS affiliates around the country, where a lot of people saw it and, "Wow, that's amazing! I'd like to do that," or I'm sure there are plenty of people who go, "Hey, we used to do that. Remember that summer we'd go to the fishing hole?" It's something that's been happening since there were big fat tires from the 1930s.

**1:31:04:** So that exposed the rest of the world, all at that moment, to this new bike, the mountain bike, or what it became called all around the world the news went. So there's direct linkage right back to this point in time in the 1970s in Marin where mountain biking essentially started — that is, riding with that kind of flavor on a bicycle started. And my little claim to fame in it is that as I was already building road racing bikes and doing this fat tire thing as much as anybody at that time. My friends, Charlie Kelly specifically and Larry Cragg, all the big guys, all the tall guys, all the guys who are breaking stuff on these old Schwinn bikes, including the frames, were saying, "Joe, make me a mountain bike frame," essentially, or "Make a new frame for what we're doing."

**1:32:07:** So I eventually acquiesced and said, "Okay, I'm a busy guy. I'll make 10 frames that will all be the same, all be nickel plated and then you'll have your frames." And that was 1977. Larry Cragg<sup>6</sup> fronted me \$300 for the tubing to build ten frames, aircraft chrome-moly tubing, and I made a prototype for myself in 1977 — what was it, September, October 1977 — raced it to victory in one of the Repack races, and all of a sudden it was like — and that was the very first bike built specifically for what we were doing, a frame built specifically for riding on the mountain, as we were, built up with all

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<sup>6</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Joe noted that it was actually Charlie Kelly who fronted him the \$300.

shiny brand new parts. It was the first time you had a shiny new modern mountain bike, and same with the next nine of 'em, those were all the first shiny new mountain bikes.

**1:33:16:** And Breezer #1 — I built all those frames right at 28 Country Club up by the golf course in '77 and '78 — Breezer #1 is now in the Smithsonian Museum, the national museum back in Washington, DC, where it will always live, I guess.

**1:33:36 Debra Schwartz:** Gee, that must have made your daddy proud.

**1:33:38 Joe Breeze:** Well, my father died in 1980. He had an aneurysm and he was gone in a second. New Year's Day 1980, and that was hard. He had taught me so much in my life. And my mother, I remember, she telling me that, "You know, I talked to your father" — this is like 1979-ish — and he said he pretty much taught me everything he could teach me. And so, I don't know, she was doing that to console me or what, but anyway, he had a lot of great ideas that I'm still trying to make to this day, and hopefully will. But back in 1978 there were a lot of happy people from Mill Valley actually in that first group. I'll talk about a few things in Mill Valley to do with that.

**1:34:43:** Larry Cragg was eventually the owner of Prune Music down on Locust Avenue, and that was kind of a bicycle hot spot there 'cause Larry had gotten into the fat tire bikes from his neighbor. He moved up to Fairfax. His neighbor Fred Wolf turned him on to fat tire bikes about 1974 or '75 or something. So he was showing his music friends down at Prune Music, and then going around the corner to Mill Valley Cyclery, that was my home bike shop, Mill Valley Cyclery, which is still there. I think it's moved two doors up the street or something, but that was Mr. Reynolds' Schwinn bike shop originally who sold it to his employee John Lewis about 1968. That's somebody you should interview, John Lewis. He lives in Novato. So they were trading ideas back and forth. Anyway, so Larry was gonna get a Schwinn as his wife Wende Cragg was also. And those are the two people who took a lot of the photos from way back when.

**1:36:03 Debra Schwartz:** She was the one female rider.

**1:36:05 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. Yeah. She was the queen of clunkin' right then in —

**1:36:07 Debra Schwartz:** The queen of clunkin'. [chuckle]

**1:36:09 Joe Breeze:** In the late '70s, Larry taught Wende how to — Larry had a Nikon and taught Wende how to use it, too, and so the two of them were out taking photos of what we were doing, documenting what we were doing. I think if they hadn't taken all those great 35-millimeter color images people would ask, "Well, what did you used to do?" They wouldn't have any idea what —

**1:36:37 Debra Schwartz:** They wouldn't have the book which I'm gonna have you sign before —

**1:36:39 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah, Charlie's *Fat Tire Flyer*. So anyway, down at Prune

Music people were coming in there from the Jefferson Starship, Craig Chaquico, he wanted a Breezer. And Lee Michaels had the hit “You Know What I Mean” about that time, and was doing well living in Alto, and he was character. He wanted his Breezer to have one speed only. So I had to make those. I had to adjust my design just for him so it could have a rear dropout that you could adjust the chain with for that single speed. It turned out I guess he moved to LA and he wasn’t so keen on getting a Breezer. And Craig Chaquico, the Starship —

**1:37:38 Debra Schwartz:** He was a young guy. He came in young, right?

**1:37:40 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. They were performing in 1978, early in ’78 they performed at Lorelei in Germany on the Rhine, and Grace Slick had a problem with her, I don’t know, sore throat or whatever, and so they didn’t go on, and the fans rioted and they shredded — they went up on the stage and they destroyed their equipment.

**1:38:10 Debra Schwartz:** Whoa!

**1:38:11 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, and so Craig got back and he couldn’t afford a Breezer. His insurance hadn’t come through, and he was scrambling to get his guitar money together, et cetera, and so he never did actually get one. But I sold one to Fritz Maytag in Mill Valley. He had just got his Gunnar Caylor Fresno-made road bike stolen. He lived up by the railroad grade up on Ralston, I think.

**1:38:40 Debra Schwartz:** Who else has your bikes?

**1:38:41 Joe Breeze:** Well, let’s see. I made Breezer #1 for myself. Charlie Kelly has #2, essentially.

**1:38:50 Debra Schwartz:** I think he said it took a while.

**1:38:52 Joe Breeze:** Oh, and it did. I had to get it just right. I didn’t just wanna have some crusty frame, sloppy frame or anything. I always wanted my bikes — I kinda saw as art. Although it was a mountain bike, I expected it to be covered with mud and nobody would really look at it anyway. So I didn’t require them to be quite like my road-racing bike frames. But anyway, they were nicely put together and all. They were thought out. I sampled everybody’s geometry from all the 1930s, 1940s, bikes and came up with a good geometry. And they took a while to build. Charlie got his in probably June of 1978, I guess. That’s when they were all done, about then, and I built a fair number of them up. But Larry Cragg, Wende Cragg, Fred Wolf, Fritz Maytag, Jerry Heidenreich. Oh, Terry Haggerty from The Sons of Champlin bought one, and a fellow named Michael Dux. I think that comes to about 10 right there, including me.

**1:40:09 Debra Schwartz:** How many bikes have you made in your career now, do you know?

**1:40:11 Joe Breeze:** Not many. Not many. Actually, me welding together, not many.



It's probably about 100.

**1:40:17 Debra Schwartz:** How many of your bike manufacturing —

**1:40:19 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, I don't know, it's 100,000, but I've been doing my designs. There was an American Breezer built in St. Cloud, Minnesota back in the late '80s, made out of aluminum. And then I went into a project with a Japanese trading company called Interjet all during the '90s. People will remember this Schwinn's spearpoint-esque paint jobs. Then I got into transportation bikes in the year 2000 or so and focused 100 percent on transportation. And then I do mountain bikes again today. So all along the way, with all those larger productions, maybe it's — I haven't tried to add it all up — maybe it's over 100,000 bikes in total. But the ones I actually built myself, raced together, it's 100, including a tandem.

**1:41:18 Debra Schwartz:** You have a 21-year-old son. Does he ride?

**1:41:21 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, Tommy rides quite a bit and he raced on the — when he went into his first-grade class that was the first year that Oak Manor School had Safe Routes to School. That was the year 2000. I had gone back to Washington, D.C., to encourage people to see that as a good program. I went with a contingent from the Marin County Bike Coalition and the Marin Board of Supervisors and we were able to have his school in Marin be the model for Safe Routes to School in America, along with one in Chicago and one in Boston. So he went through the grade school with encouragement to ride, from his parents, too, right? And when he got to high school, or before he got to high school, the high school Pirates coach was out trying to get him on the team, and he was pretty chuffed about that. Then when he got there, you can imagine all these kids coming through the program with encouragement for cycling, they get to high school and it's like, "Mountain bike racing? Sign us up!" They had about 50 kids on the team that year, Tommy's freshman year. And Tommy's first year was the first year there was a Southern California league as well as the Northern California league, which actually started in the year 2000, and all four of his high school years they were California State Champions, because they had the head-start with the Safe Routes program.

**1:43:06 Debra Schwartz:** And he's got a family name to live up to, too. [laughter]

**1:43:10 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, maybe.

**1:43:10 Debra Schwartz:** The legacy lives.

**1:43:12 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, I mean, definitely. I mean, he rode a bicycle to school just about every day of his life, whether I was riding him there or him doing it under his own steam entirely, but yeah.

**1:43:22 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, you guys used to ride to school together?

**1:43:23 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, every day.

**1:43:24 Debra Schwartz:** That's awfully sweet.

**1:43:25 Joe Breeze:** Every day. Rainy days, hey, we'd just figure it out. You don't melt when it rains.

**1:43:28 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm. So what are the other things, because we've got about 10 more minutes I'd say to commit, and there's a lot to talk about. And actually, somebody's gonna come in later and talk a little bit more about the technology of it, but you have — now you've described as a bike designer, a rider, innovator. You've gotten involved, you've helped create safe bike routes to schools, and what other things before we even go to your recent —?

**1:44:03 Joe Breeze:** I don't know, let's see. I went down to New Zealand with Steve Potts. That was a fun trip, in 1981. We were probably the first mountain bikes in New Zealand. We rode about 1,000 miles across the country there.

**1:44:14 Debra Schwartz:** He includes that in his interview.

**1:44:15 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, okay.

**1:44:16 Debra Schwartz:** It's really funny, about you didn't wanna leave where the food was good or something? Or was that he didn't wanna leave?

**1:44:21 Joe Breeze:** Oh, I don't know.

**1:44:23 Debra Schwartz:** One of you, someone was feeding you young boys and it's time to go and he tells the story of, I think it's you, saying, "No, this is good food. Let's stay."

**1:44:33 Joe Breeze:** I don't know.

**1:44:34 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, I could be wrong.

**1:44:35 Joe Breeze:** It was a long time ago. We had a fun time, there's no question. Took a lot of photos down there, too. I don't know if Steve's shown you those.

**1:44:45 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, he has.

**1:44:45 Joe Breeze:** He has? Alright. So, anyway that's —

**1:44:47 Debra Schwartz:** When he had more hair.

**1:44:48 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah.

**1:44:49 Debra Schwartz:** But he's not lost that much.

**1:44:50 Joe Breeze:** Yeah.

**1:44:51 Debra Schwartz:** Young and strong men.

**1:44:52 Joe Breeze:** So all through the 1970s I raced road bikes in concurrent with the whole mountain bike thing. I told you some of the frame-building things I was up to. I eventually moved my machine shop. My mother sold the house. I had actually worked in the machine shop there until 1985 when she sold the house — after my father died, five years after he died — and moved up, moved the machines to Petaluma. Shared space with Ross Shafer at Salsa Cycles for a number of years until we moved 'em back actually to our house in Fairfax in 1991. But then what I should mention is the part about the transportation bikes. I was one of the founders of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, 1998. Started April Fool's Day, 1998. Chris Lang started that, and found an excellent executive director in Deb Hubsmith. She had hooked us up with a lot of important people and got us going back to Washington, D.C., and she eventually headed up the national Safe Routes to Schools program, which did in fact go national because the pilot programs — and the three pilot projects in America were so successful that it became a national program in 2005.

**1:46:36:** Not that it's entirely national, but there is a national network of Safe Routes to Schools programs now from 2005. And in 2001, I started focusing more on transportation biking and decided the only way I'm gonna be able to make a difference in this, and it was really about getting the American bike industry off the dime regarding bike transportation, trying to have some impact in influencing them to get more into bike transportation. So I decided that what I needed to do was do transportation bikes, and transportation bikes only, just because it's a pretty small company, right? And just focus on that, try to push the needle a little bit on that one to get it started. Because at that time when we started we were the only company in America focused 100% on transportation bikes. So what I mean by transportation is bikes with racks, fenders, chain guards, lights, things that make your bicycle a car, that you can carry stuff.

**1:47:44 Debra Schwartz:** Super cool looking, too.

**1:47:44 Joe Breeze:** You can park it and it doesn't fall over because it has a kick stand, and you can ride them maybe when it gets a little darker. Maybe you can ride it when the roads are wet and you're not gonna end up with a stripe up your back, et cetera. Just things that make a bike civilized. It was high time in America I felt that for this to happen. And so in the model year 2002, we rolled out our Breezer transportation bikes at the Las Vegas show and had the *New York Times* do a story in the business section. That was right off the bat. And bike shops coming into our booth from urban-transportation-name bike shops and stuff like that, at a time when few people were thinking about this at all. So we just kept going at that until eventually I sold the brand in 2008 to Advanced Sports in Philadelphia, the makers of Fuji Bikes and Kestrel Bikes and SE BMX Bikes. Then, actually, at that point with a little more horsepower, we started doing mountain bikes again.

**1:48:49 Debra Schwartz:** You have more horsepower.

**1:48:49 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. Yeah.

**1:48:51 Debra Schwartz:** So, before we close up though — I'm gonna shut this door. I wanted to ask you about your bike museum.

**1:49:00 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, right. So, in June, we opened up the Marin Museum of Bicycling, and it's a museum including 19th century bikes, all the way back to 1868 from the first commercial maker of bicycles, Michaux in Paris, and up to including mountain bikes. The museum actually is the new home of the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame, which had been 25 years in Crested Butte, Colorado. So we got a good little thing going there. It's our bicycle cultural center for Marin essentially, and we'll have more programs, lectures, movies, and displays that rotate in and out of the museum to keep things fresh.

**1:49:57 Debra Schwartz:** And so you're a nonprofit?

**1:50:00 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. And we are a nonprofit, a 501c3.

**1:50:02 Debra Schwartz:** And you require or you enlist volunteers, do you? Or you pay employees?

**1:50:07 Joe Breeze:** Yeah. So far it's all volunteer, everybody who works there. And all the work on it, I probably put 2,000 hours into building that place, and many of my friends. Actually, it's interesting that my buddies from way back in cycling, Otis Guy and Marc Vendetti, the three of us are on the board doing — living that dream that we started way back in the early '70s when we first were trying to track down bikes to restore and show before people.

**1:50:37 Debra Schwartz:** Is there anywhere else in the United States that you know of that has a museum quite like yours?

**1:50:46 Joe Breeze:** Bicycle museums have come and gone. There was a really good one in Buffalo, New York, the Burgwardts', both passed away and the bikes were sold. There was a nice one in Freehold, New Jersey. Dave Metz had a wonderful museum — had been in the industry for many generations, I think, in the bike industry from the 1880s or '90s with Waltham Manufacturing Company, but today I'm not sure what — there are other museums around.

**1:51:18 Debra Schwartz:** In California, too?

**1:51:19 Debra Schwartz:** In the United States. I don't know about California. I know that there are bikes around at different museums, not a bike specific museum. I've heard of them, but I don't actually know.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In his transcript review, Joe added: California Bike Museum and U.S. Bicycle Hall of Fame, Davis, CA.

**1:51:39 Debra Schwartz:** I have one question to ask you about your museum. Who made the bike in front, the sculpture in front?

**1:51:44 Joe Breeze:** Oh, right. Right. That's made by a fellow in Fort Bragg and his name is —<sup>8</sup> Oh, I can almost pick it up. My photographic memory is failing me. Anyway, so he made that for Ibis Cycles and it's a dead ringer for an Ibis Mojo Mountain Bike, and it's about two and a half times scale.

**1:52:16 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. No kidding.

**1:52:17 Joe Breeze:** You'd have to be 15-feet tall to ride it. [laughter]

**1:52:20 Debra Schwartz:** It's hard to miss. It's a great sign for your business.

**1:52:23 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. We have bicycles all over that building, don't we?

**1:52:27 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. But if you're going down —

**1:52:28 Joe Breeze:** Downtown Fairfax.

**1:52:30 Debra Schwartz:** Look for the big bike and then they'll find you.

**1:52:32 Joe Breeze:** That's right. Right.

**1:52:33 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. I always have a couple of last questions that I ask people. Well, I'll ask you just one. Is there something that we haven't talked about that you wish we had?

**1:52:49 Joe Breeze:** Alright. Probably. [laughter] I can hear all the questions at the other end of the tape. "Joe, what about? You forgot to mention — you've said too much." I don't know.

**1:53:06 Debra Schwartz:** I guess biking, listening to your story, I have to say especially in association to Mill Valley and to Mount Tam, I hear you say that Mount Tam is the birthplace of mountain biking.

**1:53:21 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, that's right.

**1:53:22 Debra Schwartz:** But I think Mount Tam, in the mountain's own way has created you, the creators of the mountain bike.

**1:53:30 Joe Breeze:** Absolutely, absolutely. From an early age, just knowing all the nooks and crannies on Mount Tam. The other thing, it opened me — Fred Wolf got a number of us into wildflowers and we'd be out there on our mountain bikes and with our

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<sup>8</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Joe filled in the artist's name: Nick Taylor.

— well, we probably wouldn't carry our Munz out there, but we might have our Sharsmith with us to open up and try to identify flowers until we got home. We'd look it up in Munz or in Howell's *Marin Flora*, but we really got into that. It became another little side passion there amongst a few of us and I still can look at flowers and I can rattle off the Latin names today, all from that mountain biking from way back when.

**1:54:22 Debra Schwartz:** Wow, that's something I never heard.

**1:54:25 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah, and big, gnarly Fred Wolfe, it's like somebody's gonna tease him about wildflowers? Ha! If Fred could do it, any guy could do it, you know? I learned some of it from my mom when I was a kid, too.

**1:54:44 Debra Schwartz:** Oh wow, Tam certainly does inspire in many ways.

**1:54:46 Joe Breeze:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, all the full moon rides and sunrise rides, sunset rides, and the moon-rise rides, and moon-set rides and sunrise rides, all together, sometimes connected all the way through, and going out to Stinson Beach and body surfing and — yeah, just going out with friends and having a fun time on Mount Tam, enjoying it, enjoying the mountain. The mountain has always been very special to me and tend to gravitate toward people who love Mount Tam.

**1:55:26 Debra Schwartz:** Well, this is a great story.

**1:55:28 Joe Breeze:** I'm a docent, actually, up at the top of the mountain.

**1:55:30 Debra Schwartz:** Are you?

**1:55:31 Joe Breeze:** Occasionally with the Gravity Car Barn. My dad got me the Mount Tam Railroad book back when I was in 4th grade, and I've been fascinated with it ever since, and seeing the sites. You can still see, regarding the railroad on the mountain, and so when they started that Gravity Car Barn I felt I needed to be part of it. Occasionally, I'll be up there at the top of the mountain.

**1:55:58 Debra Schwartz:** Well, maybe I'll see you up on the top someday.

**1:56:00 Joe Breeze:** Yeah, yeah. Running by.

**1:56:01 Debra Schwartz:** Well, thank you much, Joe, for giving your time and your story to the Mill Valley Library and the Historical Society and the Oral History Program. What a ride.

**1:56:11 Joe Breeze:** Well, my pleasure, Debra. You're welcome. Thank you very much.

**1:56:16 Debra Schwartz:** Thank you.