

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
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**LOCKE McCORKLE**

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Locke McCorkle  
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz  
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 32 pages  
INTERVIEW DATE: May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015

In this rollicking oral history, Locke McCorkle recounts a colorful life full of passion, humor, and adventure. Born in San Jose in 1930 — and at the time of this interview proudly “as old as God and as young as spring”— Locke grew up in Eureka, California. After studying English and French at Humboldt State University, he moved down to the Bay Area to attend graduate school at Berkeley, but changed his course when he heard Alan Watts’ lectures on eastern spirituality. While studying with Watts in San Francisco, he befriended the poet Gary Snyder with whom he moved over to Mill Valley in the late 1950s. Through Snyder, Locke became acquainted with many of the Beats — serving as a model for one of the major characters of Jack Kerouac’s 1958 novel *The Dharma Bums* — and he vividly describes the parties and personalities of this period in Mill Valley’s postwar history. Throughout the interview Locke recollects his friendships, adventures, and marriages, as well as his various forms of employment, including a number of years working as a house manager for Erdhard Seminars Training founder Werner Erhard. Locke ends his oral history with a poignant evocation of community in Mill Valley and a paean to the spirituality of motorcycle riding.

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## Oral History of Locke McCorkle

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**Oral History of Locke McCorkle**  
**May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Debra Schwartz:** Alright, so today is May 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Locke McCorkle:** May 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Debra Schwartz:** May 8<sup>th</sup>, thank you. I am Debra Schwartz and I am sitting here on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 with Locke McCorkle. I'm saying it right? McCorkle? And Locke, thank you very much for being interviewed by the Mill Valley Historical Society.

**Locke McCorkle:** You're welcome.

**Debra Schwartz:** In our pre-interview I've learned a little bit about your very interesting life, and why don't we start with the beginning: Where you were born and a little bit about your family?

**Locke McCorkle:** I was born in San Jose, California when it was a city of some 22,000 people and the rest were orange groves. Now there's probably not an orange tree in town. [laughs] I was the firstborn son of my dad and mom. My mom came from Missouri and my dad from Texas, and they met in Portland, Oregon, and fell in love and moved to California.

**Debra Schwartz:** And McCorkle? That's kind of an interesting name. You said that's — what is the origin of that name?

**Locke McCorkle:** It's Scottish.

**Debra Schwartz:** Scottish?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah. I think I'm the only Locke McCorkle in the United States, but if you got into the highlands of Scotland, they're like fleas on a dog up there.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So your parents came from Portland to San Jose?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** What brought them?

**Locke McCorkle:** I think it was work because, you know, I was born in 1930 and that was — you know, the country had blown up the year before and jobs were tough, and so forth. But, you know, they always seemed to get one. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So if you were born in 1930, how old does that make you?

**Locke McCorkle:** I'm as old as God and as young as spring [laughs].

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] That's a good age. Alright, so you grew up in San Jose, and tell me a little bit about your early childhood, just a little bit about, you know, the proximity to San Francisco and your experiences here.

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, actually, my family moved around quite a bit. My dad was an interior decorator and usually managed a furniture store for somebody. And so we went San Jose, Modesto, Sacramento, and finally when I was 10 years old, we went to Eureka, so that's kinda where I grew up, in Eureka. My dad always wanted a place in the country so we got one. We had three and a half acres, and I learned — I joined the 4H Club and I learned to plant things, and I raised chickens and rabbits, and I had a truck garden. It was Greek gardeners across the street, and I used to go thin out carrots for them. Here I am, 11 years old, and the row of carrots to thin out looked like it went *forever*. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] What is a truck garden?

**Locke McCorkle:** They call the stuff that those farmers made — they called it “truck.” The vegetables and stuff were called truck. I don't know why they were called truck but it was Theodore Kokolinis and Peter Apostilinis, the two guys that lived there who did it, and they'd give me 15 cents to thin that whole row. But to me it was like found money, right? [laughs] And we had big redwood stumps from old-growth redwoods, so they were 25 feet wide, and they were close to the house, and Peter knew how to blast 'em with dynamite. So he'd come over and put dynamite under 'em. And, you know, didn't blow up our house, but we blew up the stumps! [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So that's where you stayed through primary school, and junior high, and high school?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Uh huh. But since I'm in the Mill Valley Historical Society, I know that you made your way south from Eureka, towards the Bay Area at some point.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. That was essentially after college, 'cause I went to Humboldt State College in Arcata.

**Debra Schwartz:** And you studied?

**Locke McCorkle:** I majored in English, minored in French.

**Debra Schwartz:** Ah!

**Locke McCorkle:** And came down to do graduate work at the University of California in Berkeley. That brought me down here, and the summer before I went to Berkeley, my brother, Bob, who left us in, I think, 1940 or about, or '50 maybe — he said, “I want you to hear this program.” He said it's called “A Way Beyond the West,” and a guy named

Alan Watts talks. And he turned that on. It was on Sunday nights. It was a half hour. 20 minutes into that program I said, “Oh, I did not know that what he has to say was even on the menu,” and I just abandoned all ideas of going to the University of California and being a university professor, and turned around and went across the bridge to the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco and studied with Alan Watts, and Frederic Spiegelberg, and Haridas Chaudhuri. I was like a kid in a candy store with a whole bag of nickels. [laughs] I was probably more enlightened then than I have been since because I just said, “I’ll have it! You know, I like it. I like the menu, please serve, you know?” [laughs] And I didn’t see any obstacles. It’s really true. There aren’t any obstacles. You know, you get in your own way or you don’t. Now we’ve got some very good people who are good at helping you get out of your own way because that’s essentially what you have to do. And after I’d studied there for a while, and I was supporting myself by washing pots in a place that made food for restaurants, I just got the — oh, that’s where I met Gary Snyder, the poet, and —

**Debra Schwartz:** At the school you were studying at?

**Locke McCorkle:** Uh huh.

**Debra Schwartz:** Was he a teacher? Was he a fellow student?

**Locke McCorkle:** Fellow student. Fellow student. And he had been a great student of Native American stuff. And he’d been a bit of a revolutionary too, a communist, which I would’ve been — I would’ve been a communist if there’d been a cell because it sounded like — it sounded better than anything else, you know? I didn’t know anything about Joe Stalin and what a menace he was to everybody. Back in the first days, I thought, if you had a revolution, things would get better. I know much better than that now. You have a revolution, [laughs] then the revolutionaries run you the same way the people that they deposed ran you before, but it’s just different people running you. Oh god.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you had Gary Snyder, yourself —

**Locke McCorkle:** And Gary said, “You know, it’s really nice over in Marin.” He says, “I know a realtor that might be able to help us.” So I got in touch with him — I’ve forgotten his name yet — and he found me this place in Homestead Valley, in Mill Valley. It was two acres with two houses on it, and it was \$25 a month, and I got a five-year lease on the place. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** What’d it look like?

**Locke McCorkle:** It was rather primitive. The house nearest the road had four rooms. It was 25 feet square, divided into four rooms. And he raised — the Italian that built it — he raised a dozen kids in it. Then up at the other end of the property, he built himself a retreat. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Do you remember the guy’s name?

**Locke McCorkle:** Nuh uh.

**Debra Schwartz:** Who built it?

**Locke McCorkle:** I never knew his name.

**Debra Schwartz:** Do you remember the address of the place?

**Locke McCorkle:** It was on Montford Avenue — no, I don't. I think —

**Debra Schwartz:** Is it still there?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh!

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, it's still there. Yeah. The retreat isn't, it fell down.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** — got torn down.

**Debra Schwartz:** The boys club.

**Locke McCorkle:** But the retreat is where Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac lived for a while.

**Debra Schwartz:** And so what year are we talking right now?

**Locke McCorkle:** [sigh]

**Debra Schwartz:** Approximately, you don't have to give me exact.

**Locke McCorkle:** The late '50s. And so that seemed like a good deal, and I went over there and I learned to be a carpenter, after I got tired of washing pots. I became an apprentice carpenter in San Francisco, and I just moved over there and took my carpentry trade with me. I thought I was minting money there because to go from the kind of work most people do, whether you're a student or anything else, and you go into construction, they pay you five times as much money, you know? [laughs] And I thought "Oh! This is great! I will just work half the year and I'll have more money than I know what to do with." The problem is when an employer finds out that you take responsibility for things, they don't want you to even take one day off, much less six months. [laughs] So that never worked out. I had to work more, but —

**Debra Schwartz:** How did your parents view you moving to Marin County and — ?

**Locke McCorkle:** I — let's see —

**Debra Schwartz:** And hanging out with these — ?

**Locke McCorkle:** They weren't here then. I had — oh — where in the heck were they? I'm trying to think where they were because when I left Mill Valley the first time, which was when I was — be 19, '39, '57, '58 — somewhere along there, I went to Tucson, Arizona and my dad and mom lived in Eureka, or in the country in there, but they had — my dad had bronchitis and cirrhosis of the liver and Lou Gehrig's Disease. He's a wonderful guy, but he really had a lot of stuff. And the Lou Gehrig's Disease really bothered him a lot 'cause it's painful. He liked life and he liked — he had a flash in his eyes, but they kinda dimmed with that. But I talked him into coming to Arizona because the air would be better. And it was. So by the time I really moved in — 'cause I was in Mill Valley twice — then I moved away when I went to Arizona, with my second wife. Then I went to Spain after that, and then I came back and lived in Florida for a couple years, and then my marriage broke up, with her, and I came back to San Francisco. And after San Francisco for a while, I went back to Mill Valley.

**Debra Schwartz:** And so you came in the —

**Locke McCorkle:** '50s.

**Debra Schwartz:** '50s.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** And you left around — ?

**Locke McCorkle:** I left around '59 or '60.

**Debra Schwartz:** And then when did you come back?

**Locke McCorkle:** When did I come back? '54, let's see. The '80s.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh! Okay, so let's go back to the '50s, 'cause you had that really good lease going on.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] And so you're living there and — in your little rental with —

**Locke McCorkle:** With Valerie, my wife, and Sita, who was our first-born daughter, who was born in San Francisco. And so was Tasha. But Sean, my third child, the boy, was born right there in the house on Montford. I think it was 248 Montford, but I'm not

sure of the address. But it's still there. If anybody wants to go, I could take them there. In fact, I took some French journalists there because they wanted to interview me and see where Jack Kerouac and — because there was a movie coming out on Kerouac and they wanted to tie in the background and I'm, you know, I'm healthy, and I don't die like a lot of people. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] You *do* look really healthy.

**Locke McCorkle:** I end up being interviewed because the rest of them died. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac are living in the chicken coop, or whatever you said?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well Gary was essentially there with them for most time and then Jack got to stay there. And then Gary went, for a few years, to Japan. And Jack lived there for a while. It was interesting, of all the Beats, he was the only one my wife would trust to babysit the children.

**Debra Schwartz:** Jack Kerouac?

**Locke McCorkle:** Jack Kerouac. And if she knew anything about him in his later years when he drank like a fish and was just a mess — but when he was sober, he was just the nicest guy you can imagine. But when he was drunk, he — you wouldn't want to be around him. I didn't anyway.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, so you're living in Mill Valley and — and how was it for the Beats and you and your family to be in Mill Valley at that time? What was, you know —

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, it was great! We had parties in that little house, where those of us who were willing to — we didn't have orgies, but we would dance naked to Hindu music.

**Debra Schwartz:** Continue —

**Locke McCorkle:** Except Jack, Jack would never take his clothes off. He would just sit and watch.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Continue. So that's a good party.

**Locke McCorkle:** [laughs] It was a lot of fun!

**Debra Schwartz:** What other fun things did you come up with?

**Locke McCorkle:** You know, it had sexual overtones, but it wasn't, you know, any — we weren't doing that. Not that we wouldn't, but we didn't.

**Debra Schwartz:** Is this when —

**Locke McCorkle:** And then Gary would have meditations up there. He converted one of the rooms to a Zen meditation room. He'd have two-hour meditations, and a half hour was always — you'd leave there and walk up Mount Tamalpais for — that was the walking meditation part, and so forth. And we had a wood stove. There was eucalyptus over the property, and we'd rent a chainsaw and cut a couple of 'em down and slice 'em up and I'd split 'em up into fire wood and it would last for a whole year. Keep the house warm and we cooked with it and everything like that.

**Debra Schwartz:** Any other Beats come and hang out with you there?

**Locke McCorkle:** Neal Cassady.

**Debra Schwartz:** How was that?

**Locke McCorkle:** The driver — well, Neal would arrive with a vial of marijuana joints and 'course the marijuana in those days was not anything like you have today. The marijuana in those days, you had to smoke a whole joint, or a whole cigarette, and you had to hold your breath till you almost died.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** And you'd get a bit of a buzz. If you were good at it, you could make it more because drugs are kinda funny. Actually, you do everything and the drug is just a trigger. So, if you can use the trigger properly, you can go off of it. Like some people can take one alcoholic drink and have a great party, and others can drink a whole bottle of whiskey and they just get stupid.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** [laughs] You know, it's not the drug, it's how you use it.

**Debra Schwartz:** So he would show up with his jar of drugs —

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, and then he'd challenge you to a game of chess, and he chatted constantly. Well, you know, you couldn't even think.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** You know, even if you didn't smoke. He didn't care if you smoked with him or not.

**Debra Schwartz:** He's a brain scrambler, was he?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. Well, he just was a very intense human being and he would tell you about the latest books he'd been reading or something like that, and so forth. You know, he worked for the railroad and Kerouac worked for the railroad a little bit too at that time. You know, even though marijuana was absolutely illegal — on that the government list, which is an absolute lie. They tell you all kinds of lies about it. And they still do, to this day! The government of the United States lies about marijuana. There's never been one single recorded incident of anybody being harmed by it, ever. [laughs] You know, and they act like you take one joint and your brain's fried for the rest of your life. So, he would come by — there was another great poet.

**Debra Schwartz:** Alan Ginsberg?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, Alan Ginsberg. Yeah, sometimes he would be there. There was another poet that — I can see him very well, but I can't think of his name right now — that would come, but it was kind of a special place for the Beats, even though I was not a writer. You know, Kenneth Rexroth would say, "Well what's McCorkle doin' here? He doesn't write anything." And, I don't know, Gary would tell him something, and I'd keep getting invited. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** And how about Alan?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, when I was in San Francisco, I'd studied with Alan Watts and then he moved to a house that was just two blocks away. And in fact, Jack and I got the idea that — we said, "Let's turn Alan on to marijuana." So we went over there with what we had and we taught him what we taught him.

**Debra Schwartz:** Which was what?

**Locke McCorkle:** We had these joints, and he said, "Well, I don't know. Sounds to me like a glass of sherry before dinner." But he hadn't caught on to it yet. 'Cause eventually, he caught on and even said this over the air, he said, "Marijuana is nature's attempt to save itself from mankind." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** He could think of — damn, he could think of things to say that were —

**Debra Schwartz:** When I first spoke to you on the phone, I called you a rascal. What is it he said to you about —

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, "I never trust a man who's innate rascality doesn't show." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Once I was at a party, this was in Mill Valley or someplace, and this guy was saying, “Well, so and so can only get to the sixth level, and this one that I’ve been studying with can get to the eighth level.” And Alan says, “Well, if a man’s a damn fool in the first level, he’s gonna be a damn fool in the eighth.” [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So you had your cadre of Buddhist —

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Beat —

**Locke McCorkle:** Buddhists and Beats.

**Debra Schwartz:** Beats and family members. With your family and your children —

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, and I had a good job as a carpenter. In fact, I worked in San Francisco most of the time because I worked for a contractor that did remodeling work. And that’s where I first got into motorcycles. I had a motorcycle that I used to go to work on. They thought that, “How do you take a motorcycle? Where are you gonna put your tools?” [mimicking]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, I’d take a car and get the tools to the job, then I’d leave them there until the job was done, right?

**Debra Schwartz:** Uh huh. So, you mentioned a little bit ago that they asked, “What’s McCorkle doing here ’cause he’s not a writer,” but in fact you did become a writer.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, I wanted to be, but I didn’t know what to say. And that’s when I went away from there with my second wife, and we went — we went to Spain because she read that if you’re gonna write a book, and you’re an American, you have to be in Greece or Spain where you have enough time. But we had — my fourth child was David and he was an extremely retarded Down syndrome [child]. I mean, he had — really all he did was go, “Aaaahhhh,” with his tongue hanging out, all the time. And Mary and I kept him for eight years, which I do not recommend anybody do that. It’s too hard on everybody. Even though mongoloids are not demanding, they just require a lot of attention and the other kids get neglected ’cause you only got so much time. But what’d I start with?

**Debra Schwartz:** You were saying you went to Spain — your writing —

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, and when I was over there Mary said, “I’ve got a suggestion for a book for you to write, but you’ve gotta promise me you’re gonna seriously consider it or I won’t even mention it. Because —” And I said, “Okay”. She said, “I’ve had quite a

few lovers and none of them compare with you. Why don't you write a book on how to make love?" And I said, "Okay!"

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** And we smoked some hashish. You get hashish over there instead of marijuana. And I came up with all the chapter headings at once, and then I sat down six mornings a week at 9:00 a.m., and I didn't get out of the chair till 1:00 p.m. Whether the writing either came or it didn't. And when I got it all written, I sent it to Grove Press, to an editor there that I knew, that Gary had introduced me to, and they said, "Yeah, we'll publish it." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** And the book is *How to Make Love: The Spiritual Nature of Sex* by Locke McCorkle.

**Locke McCorkle:** You know, I was just using that title as a working title. I wanted a title — three-word title like, I don't know, *Good, Bad and Indifferent* or *Eat, Pray, Love* — you know, something ringy like that, but they didn't want to change it. They liked it. They liked that *How to Make Love* thing.

**Debra Schwartz:** How did the Beats take this book? Were any of them still around by then? What year is this?

**Locke McCorkle:** This was published — and it doesn't mean anything 'cause I don't talk about it in the book — but 1969.

**Debra Schwartz:** Ah.

**Locke McCorkle:** And —

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, now you're a writer!

**Locke McCorkle:** [laughs] Yes!

**Debra Schwartz:** And you must have done an awful lot of research.

**Locke McCorkle:** I just wrote it. And partly, one of the reasons I wrote it is that I'd met this incredible teacher while I was living in Mill Valley, who taught in San Francisco. He taught drama. His name was David Hunter. And he taught drama in the adult division of the San Francisco City Schools. And there was a little school in Pacific Heights. Well this drama class that he taught was beyond anything I've ever heard of or seen even since. This was back in the '50s. It was an approach that was so profound. You didn't interpret a character, you didn't memorize the lines or anything. He taught you how to focus on your senses. You started out with hearing, and then seeing, but when you're seeing, he just had you slightly open your eyes and so forth. It was all designed to get you into present time. Humans are hardly ever experiencing present time. Or when

they are, experiencing present time, they don't know it because that's when their thinking is not functioning. And they are really here, but don't know they're here. [laughs] But he had a way of getting it. So you would just let the words just kinda come out of your mouth, whatever way they would come out. And when they came out in a way that he liked, he'd say, "Set that," and then he expected you to come out exactly the same way every time. But you still had this focus. It would be on your senses, you know, I mean, it was touch, sight, sound. I know one of my Buddhist friends I lived with — we did this play called *The Orange Cellar* that David Hunter wrote, and Claude Dalenberg came to it, who was a Zen person, and he came to every performance and he said, "I never saw anything like the same play twice." I didn't know 'cause I was just in it.

**Debra Schwartz:** But you were interested [in taking] this acting class?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** What —

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, I'd taken acting in high school, and I'd taken acting in college at Humboldt State. I liked acting. I have a certain amount of charisma, which David called brain radiation. He said that "People that have that, the audience will look at 'em, whether they're any good or not."

**Debra Schwartz:** How does a person have that?

**Locke McCorkle:** I don't know. It's like George Clooney. I mean, he's a hell of a good actor, but it wouldn't matter because he is so magnetic to look at. You know? [laughs] You're gonna look at him, if he's on the screen, you're gonna look at him.

**Debra Schwartz:** How about your friends? Which of your friends had that quality? Do you think any of them did?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, Ginsberg kinda did. Probably more than any of the rest of 'em. Yeah, it's interesting. And then if you can combine that with learning your craft, you can be something really terrific. But I didn't want to learn to be an actor, and also, nobody, no movie company or theater company, was interested in his approach because it was too unusual. We had some professional actors come and take it and love it, but they said, "I can't take it back with me and use it there because there's not the context."

**Debra Schwartz:** I'm sort of getting that it was a life philosophy as well.

**Locke McCorkle:** Not only that, I had a peak experience on it that actually went to my head a lot. You know, one of the things about enlightenment or anything else, if the ego gets a hold of it, then you're in trouble. [laughs] No matter what. And mine did. I moved into a state where I thought I was something really special and I could do anything. And then, you know, I apologized to anybody I might've run over at that time. And when it went away I felt like I just lost my mother. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** I didn't like losing it at all.

**Debra Schwartz:** How long did you have it for?

**Locke McCorkle:** Six weeks.

**Debra Schwartz:** So those classes took you to that place?

**Locke McCorkle:** Something happened, yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Interesting —

**Locke McCorkle:** It was a combination of things, right? And, oh! When David Hunter was sick or something, I would teach the class. [laughs] You know, 'cause he'd not show up and so I would just do what he did. Oh! And why I did it — 'cause the book on how to make love, the first chapter, is based on what I learned from David Hunter. As to making love because, as I mentioned before, I wrote it for men, although, women bought it. And some of the women told me, "How do I get my guy to read it?" And I said, "Almost hide it." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Well you can't hand a man a book on sex and say, "You need this," because he just shrivels up at the thought, right?

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Men are — what was it? Mary White said something like, "Balls? Who wants to have balls? They are sensitive." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, Betty — was it the actress?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** In her 90s now.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, right, right.

**Debra Schwartz:** She said, "You should want to be a uterus, those things could take a pounding."

**Locke McCorkle:** Right! [laughs] Right, yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. [laughs] Or a vagina.

**Locke McCorkle:** Like a vagina, it takes a pounding. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** So —

**Locke McCorkle:** But, that's how *that* got there.

**Debra Schwartz:** And did you, at that time — and you don't have to answer this if you don't care to — while you were in this acting class, which is a rather esoteric experience, there were other things going on in the '60s as well that were rather esoteric. You had been smoking pot, but new drugs were coming into the scene then, too.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. Hm. Hm. Well I have to kind of separate the two times I lived in Mill Valley because they were such different times. I did all that then, and then it was after I came back from Spain and Florida and San Francisco, and took EST<sup>1</sup> and went to Mexico as a dropout. And I hated it. I did not hate Mexico, I love Mexico, but I hated being a dropout. It's not my style. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** So when you drop off, you mean like tune in, turn on and drop out?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah. Not my style. In fact, one of the things I found out — I thought — I used to think I wanted to be a European, but really I wanted espresso coffee and cappuccinos, which they had there and didn't have here, which has all been changed now.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** But when I lived in Spain, I said, "I could never stay here. They're much too slow." [laughs] I really realized how American I was. We're an energetic lot here. At our best, you know? And down here in Silicon Valley, it's almost worse because they even race you to the stop sign in their cars.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] For those that are listening, you left Mill Valley and you're now living in Palo Alto.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're back in the '60s in Mill Valley, and you've traveled a bit, and you've tuned in, turned on, and dropped out, and then you're — how would you say? You reapplied, or you regained —

**Locke McCorkle:** Now let's see. I'm trying to think of how I got from there to here. Well, when I thought I was a reborn god incarnate —

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<sup>1</sup> Erhard Seminars Training

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** I left my first wife and children. I mean, I saw that they were lined up with a wonderful old friend of mine who married my ex-wife and raised my children for me, and did a wonderful job, but still, I wouldn't — I don't recommend [laughs] doing that. At least the way I did it. And I ended up apologizing to my children and my ex-wife much later. And, bless their hearts, they accepted the apology. Well, they're really good people. [laughs] Wonderful people. They still live up there in the woods in a place called Whitethorn, which is west of Garberville, which is north of Mill Valley about 200 miles. And, let's see, how did that happen? 'Cause I came back — when I came back from Europe, I lived in San Francisco for a while and worked construction again. Had my own company.

**Debra Schwartz:** And were your friends gone by then? Had they moved on to other places or —

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Were you still reconnected to —?

**Locke McCorkle:** No. I sort of pretty well lost connection with them when I spent five years in the desert, in Tucson. You know, I didn't even discover The Beatles until — what's that great album they were — *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* came out, and I read about it in *Time* magazine in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and I said, "Wow, this looks really interesting!" [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** So I was kind of out of town when a lot of things were going on. And when the great hippie movement set in, I was kind of — I was kind of not interested in it because one, they all talked about — they wanted to smoke pot and go to the country. I had lived in the country, and I knew what it was like, and I thought the country is good, but it's a lot of work. You don't just sit around smokin' pot. You dig and you garden and you take care of the hogs and the chickens and the rabbits and the calves and the sheep and — it's a lot of work, you know! And that isn't what they were thinking at all. You know, they were kids that were born — they thought milk came out of a carton and water comes out of a tap. Well I was lowered down into a 45-foot well by my dad to take a dead rat out of it, so I knew that water just didn't come out of a tap. You had to take care of it and keep it clean and so forth.

**Debra Schwartz:** So the hippies didn't really interest you so much.

**Locke McCorkle:** No, nuh-uh. I remember remodeling a dope dealer's house in the Haight. He said, "I don't think my house is too firm." I went underneath it and every one of the studs holding the house up would collapse in my hand. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** The house was held up by its habit of being there for a hundred years.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Held up by its habit.

**Locke McCorkle:** And the houses — the houses on either side — they were all playin' the same game, right? He said, "Well, can you straighten this out? I put a marble on the floor, no matter what room I'm in, it rolls some other way." And I said, "No, it's not gonna change. It's gotten that way, it's settled into it, you know?" [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're going to Haight–Ashbury at this time?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** And all that's going on over there?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, I was building secret places for him to put his stash of marijuana so he, you know, wouldn't be obvious. 'Cause it was — well, it's still against the law except for, you got medical marijuana in California, but —

**Debra Schwartz:** So what was it like over there in the Haight? What year is this about? Is this the Summer of Love?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're going in and out of Haight-Ashbury —

**Locke McCorkle:** And now I just fixed his house. I pretty much just followed my own sense of what I wanted to do with my life. And I knew what really turned me on. You know, the one thing that I thought was a miracle about it was at how everybody could have sex with everybody and nobody ever caught anything. And now, you do anything and you get some sort of disease. You know, we didn't have AIDS, we didn't have — you know, we had syphilis and gonorrhea, but you practically never caught that even, you know? So I thought it was a special age that somehow those rules were suspended, or so forth, or whatever. It's a mysterious world we live in. It goes through periods. But my second stint in Mill Valley was largely when I came over there and I didn't — when I came back from — oh, yeah — then I went into business in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which I am still in business in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I have 16 Super Cuts salons in Tulsa that are — the business part is run by a 44-year-old blonde, type-A bombshell who takes control of everything, bless her sweet heart. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** And mostly sends me checks every month. We love each other a lot. [laughs] But she takes care of all that. And when I — my third wife, Barbara, flew out there, when I was building the stores in Tulsa. We were living in, not Homestead Valley where I lived in before, but the place a little bit south of that. You know, they got a —

**Debra Schwartz:** Tam Valley?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. We were living in Tam Valley where they had all those big shingle houses. And we bought one of those. I mortgaged it to build the first store. And Barbara flew out once, and she says, “I can’t get it up for you anymore, let’s get a divorce.”

**Debra Schwartz:** So that’s number three?

**Locke McCorkle:** That was number three. Right. That’s right.

**Debra Schwartz:** You know, would you like me to get you a glass of water? Would you like to pause for a moment?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah okay, let’s just pause for just a sec.

**Debra Schwartz:** Okay, we are recording now. Alright. Fresh. So you’re —

**Locke McCorkle:** It was interesting, though we did get a divorce, many years later I was at a class that I was really interested in, and Barbara, my third wife, was in there. She says, “Come up here in the front row and sit with me.” And then she announces to the whole group, she says, “Ours was a divorce that never needed to happen.” That’s the first I heard of it! [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Then when the class was over and we parted, I said, “But, if you hadn’t divorced me, I wouldn’t have met Sumire and we wouldn’t have discovered this class.” It was in health realization and it was fantastic. And she smiled and looked at me and she says, “Well, one door closes, another one opens.” [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** That’s a good attitude.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** You know, you mentioned earlier about EST. When did EST become a part of your life?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, it was after I came back from Spain. Oh, and then my second wife, Mary, she forgave me for my sins, and we were living together in San Francisco, but it didn't work out. So she went back to Florida, and I fell in love with this Filipina lady. Half Filipina, half Irish. Her name was Lydia. She's still a close friend. She lives in New York. She got interested in the EST training so we took it together. And I saw that it was like the happening thing in San Francisco and I liked to be where things are happening. So I went to — is it workin'?

**Debra Schwartz:** Yep, it's workin'.

**Locke McCorkle:** So, I said, they had a class that the teacher, seminar leaders — and I went in it and I kind of flunked the class, like Stewart Emery said, "I don't know if we're ever going to get you in front of 250 people doing this or not. But, I tell you one thing, Werner needs help over in his house, and you really like him and you're a carpenter and a tradesman and such, so why don't you go over there?"

**Debra Schwartz:** Why don't you say, for people that may not know about EST, who Werner is?

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, Werner Erhard was the founder of EST. EST means Erhard Seminars Training. And he had a way of getting people to see beyond what they usually see. He developed his training and it became very, very popular in San Francisco during, let's see, the early '70s. Yeah, 'cause I worked for him actually five years to the day. I quit after four years, but it took a year for him to find somebody to take my place. In fact, they never did. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** So you were first a carpenter, and then what did you have to —

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, then the guy that was managing Werner's house said, "I'm leaving, how 'bout you being the house manager?" So I said okay. Well, I did everything I — my dad taught me how to cook, so I was a pretty good cook. So I'd cook him his food, and he never told me what to fix, so I always cooked what I wanted. And it turned out that he wanted it, too.

**Debra Schwartz:** Give me an example of a typical Locke meal.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, I don't remember what I cooked in those days. It might have been a beef stew, or gosh knows what, you know? Sometimes I'd get creative and do stuff. And if he didn't eat it all, I'd eat the rest and sometimes he'd say, "Hey, I want seconds!" And I'd say "Too late!" [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Did you eat together or did he —

**Locke McCorkle:** No, no. I didn't eat with him. The only thing together we did is after everybody had left for the day, he and I would sit in his expanded office on the third floor of his house on Franklin Street and smoke great Cuban cigars that I imported from

Switzerland. [laughs] I had people say, “Aren’t you afraid they’re gonna arrest you for those forbidden cigars?” I said, “No, the — I’m only afraid the post guys – the post guys are gonna steal ’em, but I don’t —”

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** And sip 1945 port wine and talk about the beauties of ladies and stuff like that.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, this is quite gentlemanly.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, well I was seven years older than he, you know, so it wasn’t like I was the same as the young people that were idolizing him.

**Debra Schwartz:** How old were you then, about? Oh well, didn’t you —

**Locke McCorkle:** I’d say in my —

**Debra Schwartz:** Forties?

**Locke McCorkle:** Forties.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**Locke McCorkle:** Right. And he was seven years younger. But I liked him, you know. Eventually I got him a really great cook, who turned out to be my fourth wife —

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** That’s Sumire. [laughs] Not then, but she’s just an old friend at that time.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you mentioned on the phone that people, all kinds of people, came and went from that house.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh yeah, I think the biggest thing was, he got this idea that he wanted to put the top particle physicists of the world together in a room under ideal circumstances and see what would happen to have those minds all in one. So, the thing was, how is this guy, Werner Erhard, who does Erhard Seminars Training, which my fourth wife, Sumire, called him the Tom Jones of the guru set. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** You mean the singer?

**Locke McCorkle:** But how was he —

**Debra Schwartz:** Or the character?

**Locke McCorkle:** How was he gonna get these physicists to take him seriously? So, the plan was we'd start with the one over in Berkeley who had a French wife. So we invited him —

**Debra Schwartz:** His name? Do you recall?

**Locke McCorkle:** I don't remember it. But I remember his French — the funny thing about it was, I was the greeter at the door, I was the maître d'. I ran everything, and I made sure everything happened while at the dinner, but towards the end of it, I liked to participate in — and I often would. And some of the people that came there, I had known in other contexts, from the American Academy of Asian Studies or stuff like that. And the rest of the staff didn't like it, but it didn't bother Werner that I participated. But in this one, he said, "Okay, your job is to charm his wife." So I got really good French wines, and I made sure she saw the labels when I was pouring it and so forth. And about halfway through the meal, she looks at her husband — her husband's name was Geoffrey. I don't remember the rest. Geoffrey with a G. I don't know the rest of it. And she looked over at him and she says, "Geoffrey, I'm charmed." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** And I said, "I wonder if that's how a golfer feels when he makes a really long putt." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] "I'm charmed."

**Locke McCorkle:** "I'm charmed." And that built it into — we finally did, we had, well, Feynman was the one that I liked the best 'cause he was the most at home, but the most famous one we had there was Hawking.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh! Stephen Hawking came?

**Locke McCorkle:** Stephen Hawking, right.

**Debra Schwartz:** But Feynman's pretty famous too.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah. Well, the atomic bomb and everything else. But he was really, very friendly. We just sat and talked for a while, and stuff like that. It didn't matter that I was just a waiter, so to speak. And stuff like that. When we got 'em all together, they were down at Amelio's having dinner when Stephen Hawking showed up. I thought he'd wanna be sent to a quiet room or something like that. He said, "No! I want to join the party!"

**Debra Schwartz:** He was talking then?

**Locke McCorkle:** No, through interpreter. He talked, but I didn't understand what he said. So I found a guy that had a van, and I got him in there and so forth. And we went down there and the owner of Amelio's met us at the door and stuff like that. Oh, and the meeting room was three stories up these narrow stairs and I had to, you know, get Stephen Hawking carried up there in his wheelchair. And the head of the staff said, "Locke, if you drop Stephen Hawking..." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** How 'bout —

**Locke McCorkle:** The interesting thing was, I was the only non-physicist in the room. And, you know, they talked mathematics, of course, and I didn't know anything. But I could hear the music in it. I was just supplyin' them with cappuccinos and stuff like that. It was —

**Debra Schwartz:** Werner wasn't there?

**Locke McCorkle:** No.

**Debra Schwartz:** Was Carl Sagan? Did he come?

**Locke McCorkle:** Who?

**Debra Schwartz:** Carl Sagan?

**Locke McCorkle:** No.

**Debra Schwartz:** No? It was just these physicists.

**Locke McCorkle:** Huh?

**Debra Schwartz:** Just the physicists.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yep. Yep. Wheeler was one of them. I can't remember, let's see, it was a while back, but there was, I don't know, 15 or so. And whatever actually came of it, I think he did another one after I left. Then the other thing that Werner always liked to do, he liked to turn people on to, I'm thinkin', the great black comedian —

**Debra Schwartz:** Richard Pryor?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yes. He would play Richard Pryor records for — I don't care what guest it was or anything like that. [laughs] 'Cause, you know, he picked up that Pryor was an incredible comedian. He just was out of this world.

**Debra Schwartz:** He was a cultural mirror. He somehow managed to distill that culture at that time.

**Locke McCorkle:** And he never made fun of somebody else at that person's expense. He made fun of himself, but the himself that he made fun of was just like you and me so he made fun of all of us, including himself. [laughs] And it was great. And at some time, as I said, I got my third wife, Sumire, over there 'cause she was a world-class cook.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well I thought this was the fourth?

**Locke McCorkle:** Fourth!

**Debra Schwartz:** Yep.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. She was hired –

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Hard to keep track.

**Locke McCorkle:** — as a cook. 'Cause she'd come over here when she was 22, and I met her through her father who came over to teach at the American Academy of Asian Studies where I was studying with Alan Watts and stuff before. So, I'd known Sumire since she was in her early 20s. And this was much later. But I got her to come there and Werner said, "You really should take the training." You know, you had to take a vow that you wouldn't get up and go to the bathroom or anything else like that, you know. And she said, "Well I'm not going to do that." She went to her doctor and had him write up a bunch of stuff that she could come and go 'cause she wasn't going to play that game, you know.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you do that? Did you do the training where you couldn't go to the bathroom and all that? Where they break you down, correct?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. But you know, in those days I could hold it forever anyway, so I didn't have to pee down my leg like god knows how many people did. [laughs] I couldn't do it now. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Did Werner take those trainings where he was put in those positions?

**Locke McCorkle:** No. No, he just thought 'em up.

**Debra Schwartz:** What was it like for you living in a household where there may very likely have been a lot of sycophants or idol worshipping or the whole notoriety of being this new thing, this new spiritual — ?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. I just liked it that I was doing a goin' thing. I liked it for four years, and then I didn't want to do it anymore, and I said, "I quit." And Werner said, he announced to staff, he said, "Locke is one of the few people that I'm going to let resign." But then they kept trying to get somebody to take my place. And we'd get these people that were really qualified. They'd run hotel divisions or somethin' like that. But when

they really got what my job involved, they would disappear in the middle of the night like people who didn't want to pay the rent. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Why? What was it that was so particular?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, I can remember once, in the morning I was doing some tai chi and I just fell over and landed on the floor 'cause I just had so little sleep I couldn't stand up.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, they just ran you into the ground then?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Work, work, work.

**Locke McCorkle:** Work, work, work, work. He would have everything that he'd thought of written up into a thing that he called — I don't know — so it couldn't get lost, so he'd keep it. So he would give me all these things to do while he was awake and then there's all these written things to do while he slept. Like, what am I gonna do, right? So there was a big drawer in the library and I said, "You know what, I think I'm gonna take these things and throw them in that drawer every time I get one and see if anything comes of it." Nothing did. [laughs] So I found ways to do the job. I was probably perfect for the job because my personality worked really good, but I wasn't very conscious about taking care of the plants and Werner's a Virgo, and you know, he sees everything and he's fussy. So I got a lot of chewing out for not taking care of the plants.

**Debra Schwartz:** How did it pay?

**Locke McCorkle:** The pay was \$75 a week for a long time. I think it got up to \$1500 a month or something like that. The period that I was working for him is before they made a lot of money. It was when he was doing everything he could to avoid taxes so he could reinvest in his company and you know, later it got him in trouble. But it wasn't real trouble because the tax guy that he's using was really smart. The government does that, it'll tax you so much that you can't function.

**Debra Schwartz:** So after four years you put in your resignation, and you lasted a little longer, and now you —

**Locke McCorkle:** I went into real estate for a couple of years, but I didn't like it.

**Debra Schwartz:** Still in the Bay Area?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you go back to Mill Valley?

**Locke McCorkle:** Not yet. Not yet. I went back to Mill Valley when I fell — when my old friend Sumire became my new love. I really, I fell as hard as you could about somebody you never even knew, and we'd known each other for years and liked each other for years, and suddenly it was something else. She divorced her husband 10 years ago. And so, that's when I came back over there — was in the, let's see, I think it's about — I'll have to stick with "I'm as old as God and as young as spring!"

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** You know one of the things — if anybody listening to this — you can try is if you pretend that nobody told you, and you just sit there and say, "How old am I?" You won't come up with an age, 'cause there isn't one. You know, it's like time. There isn't any time, either. We put that on, you know, the days, the weeks, the months, the hours, and so forth. 'Cause I live with a dog and he doesn't, he knows when it's —

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] And a very nice wife.

**Locke McCorkle:** That's right, it's a very nice wife. He knows when it's time to eat and go to bed but you know, as far as, he doesn't wear a paw watch.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] So you're now in Mill Valley, later.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** At a later time?

**Locke McCorkle:** A later time.

**Debra Schwartz:** And has Mill Valley changed?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, it did for me because I was in a completely different — we lived up on Tamalpais Avenue.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, where?

**Locke McCorkle:** 77 Tamalpais Avenue. It was the banana belt. The hills over where Tam Valley is would catch the fog and it would stop there and the sun would shine down. So it never got really hot, but it never got really cold.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, I lived on Tamalpais. It's lovely, that middle ridge.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh yeah?

**Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hm. Were you below Magee or above it?

**Locke McCorkle:** Below what?

**Debra Schwartz:** Magee or above it? The street, Magee. You know how Tamalpais goes up and then there's Magee and then you can go further and it's Ralston. If you keep on going?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, no it was just on Tamalpais Avenue, which is that sharp left.

**Debra Schwartz:** Uh-huh, so right up there.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Between Summit and Magee?

**Locke McCorkle:** Right.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, very nice.

**Locke McCorkle:** Right, right.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're there now and you're in the banana belt, it's warmer.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, it was fantastic. That's where I had another great experience there because — what was it '89 when they had the big quake and then the big fire over in Oakland? And I looked around at where I was living in Mill Valley and it was a tinder box. And so my then wife, Sumire, said, "Well, why don't you organize something?" She said, "I'll support you in it, but I won't do it." And so I invited the neighbors of about 30 houses in kind of a circle, and we got together and then we got into a project. There was no way out except through the regular road but there was a canyon near our house that was full of brush and stuff like that. And we organized volunteers and took the brush out of it and built some stairs so that we could get the kids out and stuff like that. And I'd have meetings and the people would come to meetings. And it was funny, people who had lived in the same neighborhood for 20 or 30 years, and had only said "hi" to each other, got to know each other. And then we did this project together, especially with the people that worked on it every week like I did, 'cause I had my carpenter skills. And we had an architect who came from elsewhere. His name was Frank and he helped us. And then the neighbors that worked on it. We really bonded through that. You know, you may get to know somebody in a coffee shop but you don't know 'em like you know 'em if you work shoulder to shoulder. And especially if it's manual. There was a lot of that. And two of them, Jarion Monroe and Annie, were actors. But they were really good workers and stuff like that. And we worked at it and we'd have the whole community come on days when we had to take dirt and take down and fill up the steps.

**Debra Schwartz:** Is it the steps that are right above Magee? Or that drop down to Throckmorton?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** You built those?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh.

**Locke McCorkle:** [laughs] It was quite a project. I have a picture sittin' up there, of all of us that they put together when Simone had — she gave me a 70th birthday party here and it was a surprise party. How she managed to do that, I have no idea. But I was out with a friend motorcycling and came home. I was in my leathers and my whole suit, and one of her friends walked me through the house and in the backyard. I opened the door to the backyard and they said, 70 people said, "Happy Birthday!" I thought I was in a movie because I had never seen anything like that except in the movies. You know, they do it quite often in the movies. And then I said, "But it can't be a movie! There's my firstborn daughter and her husband [laughs], and my business partner from Tulsa." [laughs] And so —

**Debra Schwartz:** Was it in this house, here?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, in the backyard.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh my goodness.

**Locke McCorkle:** And there was a jazz band and caterers and —

**Debra Schwartz:** And were the people from Tamalpais there?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** I'm going to take a photograph before I go of that if you don't mind.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah, and they made up that picture that's up there on the stairway, as a present for it. They came here and so forth.

**Debra Schwartz:** So that was your community. It brought the entire neighborhood closer together.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yeah. I tried to do the same here when I moved to Palo Alto. I couldn't do it. People wouldn't do it. You have a slight threat of flooding here, but I guess it was just the times. The fact that there'd been this horrific fire over in the East Bay and — oh! I used to get fire people to come to our meetings. And I remember one guy, he used to tickle me, because he'd call a shingle house, "kindling." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Of course, now Mill Valley has the evacuation routes clearly marked and with arrows.

**Locke McCorkle:** Well they need 'em. They need 'em. 'Cause if that catches fire, you're not going to stop it.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, so 1929 —

**Locke McCorkle:** One of the things that's happened to all these communities around here is the real estate values, prices, have gone up so high that the people that do the work like firemen and policemen, stuff like that, can't afford to live there. So they're not going to come off duty and help 'cause they're not going to be there.

**Debra Schwartz:** Very good point.

**Locke McCorkle:** It's really a bad idea to have that. But, even if they lived there, you're still — they all told us, “You guys gotta count on yourselves and each other because it will be more than we can handle.”

**Debra Schwartz:** Right.

**Locke McCorkle:** And it's still that way. If you're not in a community — I know we had that, who would you call, whose kids would need help, who's got old people in their house that might need some help. All that stuff. And we were really into it. And I tell ya, it felt great. You know. Thank god we never got really tested. But it had a great feeling. So I lived there on Tamalpais for about 12 years and then Sumire passed away with cancer.

**Debra Schwartz:** I'm sorry.

**Locke McCorkle:** And the house wasn't mine. She was going to give part of it to me, and I said, “No, no, no. It's your children's house.” You know. So I ended up homeless. My parents are dead so I'm an orphan, and I don't own the house so I'm homeless. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** You've got your motorcycle, I suspect.

**Locke McCorkle:** Right.

**Debra Schwartz:** Let's go back a little when you first were with Alan Watts and Gary Snyder and all those and you were a practicing Buddhist then, correct?

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, I was a serious student of it. I never joined a religion. You know, because it was almost pretty much that time that they had the Zen Center in San Francisco and Suzuki, the master of it, was just about as good as anybody you're ever gonna get any place in the world. You know, he was fantastic. But I, if they organize it [laughs] I'm leery of organizations. You know, I don't like 'em. The Supreme Court says, “These organizations are people.” I thought, “You gotta be kidding.” [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, you have in your book, *The Spiritual Nature of Sex*, so maybe you can explain a little about what you regard as spiritual.

**Locke McCorkle:** Ultimately, everything. But some things are more obvious to me. Sex is one of them for me. Although, when a *Playboy* reviewer reviewed my book, he says, “It’s a good book but it sounds towards the end like he says, “Have sex and see god.” [laughs] And that didn’t fly too well with *Playboy*.

**Debra Schwartz:** May I ask when you said your wives forgave you for your sins, would one of those sins have been — were you a bit of a playboy?

**Locke McCorkle:** No.

**Debra Schwartz:** No. Okay.

**Locke McCorkle:** I really wasn’t. You know, and given the times and how loose they were —

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**Locke McCorkle:** I wasn’t a prude. But no, my sin was just abandoning that family the way I did. I mean, of course it wasn’t obvious how I helped set it up for them to all get taken care of. I certainly would’ve taken care of them if I hadn’t, but I really wanted to be — when I realized that my first wife was not interested in the spirit like I was, I just didn’t feel that we could continue on that. And it’s still that way. She is an artist, that’s her connection. And she’s good. She connects that way. But —

**Debra Schwartz:** But for you spirit is something else.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. Well, sometimes, I don’t usually talk this way because motorcyclists are mostly, you know, they kind of think of themselves as He-Man, but to me, riding motorcycles fast is spiritual. And riding ’em the way we used to ride ’em— for 10 years I did the Marin County Ride that starts at that Arco station. That’s Mill Valley, where the Arco is, right?

**Debra Schwartz:** Over on Seminary Drive?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Right off 101?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yes, ok, yes.

**Locke McCorkle:** That's where we'd start. And then we'd go Highway 1 all the way up to Tomales Bay.

**Debra Schwartz:** Gosh, I haven't seen those riders in a very long time.

**Locke McCorkle:** I think they're still doing it every Sunday. I did it for 10 years, and why I'm still alive, I don't know. I'm a much better rider now. I took chances then. I can't imagine how I got away with them. But the leaders of that ride knew it was spiritual. Even though a lot of people thought it was competition, or something like that. It's that way with me now. To me, there's no meditation more profound than riding a motorcycle at speed on a racetrack when you forget that you have a name, even, much less a wife, and a home, and a business, and children and so forth. You don't have anything. There's just you and the motorcycle. And you'd better be paying attention and be really tuned into it, you know. And at the end of the day, it's like everything has been washed away. You're no longer — it's just like an intense vacation, even though it was only for a day.

**Debra Schwartz:** But doesn't it require great concentration to do it?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** That is your vacation?

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, yep. Because your idle thoughts just — there ain't no room for 'em. You can't even think, you know, if you do something, if you take a corner particularly well, and you think, "Boy, I did that one good," you're screwed. Because you went backwards and your bike is going forward and you ain't there. So you'll probably bungle the next two or three corners.

**Debra Schwartz:** So it really keeps you in that present moment at all times.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah. 'Cause mistakes hurt and they cost money. "Oops!" on a motorcycle is not like knocking the milk off the table. [laughs] You know, it's a nuisance to have milk all over the table and the floor but when it's "oops" on your motorcycle —

**Debra Schwartz:** Have you fallen? Have you "oopsed" on your motorcycle?

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh yeah. I've fallen off at a 100 miles an hour on a racetrack. And it was no big deal. I mean, I dress for it, stuff like that. And I didn't hit anything that stopped my body. Long as it slides and rolls and tumbles, it's usually okay. If you hit something solid, it's like jumping off the top of the Empire State building, if you didn't hit the ground, you'd be okay, right? [laughs] But it's the hitting the ground that causes the problem, see, and motorcyclists dress to crash and try not to.

**Debra Schwartz:** And what is your motorcycle that you ride? What's the kind of motorcycle? I mean, I've got a photo but for those listening —

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh, it's a 1,000 CC. It's actually a very powerful race bike that's friendly enough you can ride it on the street.

**Debra Schwartz:** A BMW.

**Locke McCorkle:** The BMW, right. It's an HP4 they call it. BMW, in 2009, decided to make a race bike. They'd never made one before. They'd made all these touring bikes. And they did a great job. They copied the best. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** So let's go back just a little, and then we'll start to get closer to the end of this, but you're orphaned, your wife is gone, your house is gone, and we sort of walked away from that a little bit ago. And you're in the opportunity for — one door's shut, another's opened. What happened?

**Locke McCorkle:** You mean, after Sumire passed?

**Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**Locke McCorkle:** I had a neighbor up there on Tamalpais Avenue that lived up the street a ways. She says, "I think I know why Sumire died." She says, "You'll probably get a glimpse if you listen to these tapes by Caroline Myss."

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, I know Caroline Myss.

**Locke McCorkle:** And I did, and it made a lot of sense to me.

**Debra Schwartz:** *Why People Don't Heal*, I believe is the name.

**Locke McCorkle:** This was something else. But I mean, she's written quite a few things. But this was, I forget what it was, but it was an album of CDs, and I got so interested, I decided to go up to Washington State and go to a seminar that she was doing. And when I got on the plane, I saw these two ladies walk by with one of her books under their arms. I put two and two together. I said, "They're probably going to the same place I am." So I walked back and said, "Are you interested in sharing a taxi?" I used to live that way, too. When I worked for Werner Erhard, in fact, large parts of my life — the first house I had in Tamalpais Valley, I rented a big house and then rented out rooms. I found that out — and I did that when I was going to the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco — that I could live much more elegantly that way than I could living in a little apartment. You just have to have a few rules and get everybody to agree on them and then you live it. And so I got very used to that. Wait a minute, I forgot what I was —

**Debra Schwartz:** Caroline Myss.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh! So I went to her thing and I liked it a lot, and one of the things she said in it, she had a challenge. She says, "I want you to do something that you're

afraid to do.” And I have a tough time finding anything that I’m afraid to do, so she said, she challenged us to do something that you’re scared of. And I thought, “Well, what am I scared of? Oh, I think it’d be kind of scary if I got up in front of everybody and asked her to go out with me tonight.” [laughs] So I did. [laughs] I said, “How about going out with me tonight?” And you know what she said? She said, “Did my mother put you up to this?” I said, “No.” [laughs] And she said, “Well, my traditional way of doing things is I take the staff of all the people that helped me put this on out, and that’s what I’m going to do. I’ll take a rain check.”

But I think the two ladies that I met on the plane kind of got impressed with that and a week after I was there, one of them called me and said that she knew a very beautiful lady that might be interested in me, [and] would I like her number? And so they gave me Simone’s number. I called her up and she was disgusted with men at that time, and she just blew me off. And I think a week later, I decided to call again and that time she, I don’t know, she asked me — I didn’t know she was an astrologist and a psychic and all that stuff, but she got my astrological stuff and took it to another astrologer and she says, “My God, he’s 18 years older than I am! Couldn’t you get me somebody younger?” And the astrologer said, “You couldn’t have handled the guy he was 18 years ago.” [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Enter wife number five! [laughs]

**Locke McCorkle:** Right.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, my gosh. I know we’re a little short on time here, so I just — that’s a great story. I just want to say, now you’ve had a very interesting life. You’ve been — listening to your story — you have been surrounded by great minds. Articulate voices.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Innovators.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Social activists.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yep.

**Debra Schwartz:** Maniacs, you know. Charismatic leaders.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** You’ve seen a lot.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** And you're now old as god and young as spring, you're still going strong, and you're very articulate yourself. Maybe you would share a little bit, if you could say anything to anybody younger listening to this interview about your observations or thoughts about as you've gotten older, maneuvering through life.

**Locke McCorkle:** Well I think one of the best things anybody can do that's younger was google Steve Jobs' commencement address at Stanford University and pay attention to every word he said, which is no problem. If you're going to be a follower, it's not going to be a very interesting life. You wanna break loose of all that. Don't put any head above yours. Like one of the great Zen masters said, "Put no head above your own."

That doesn't mean you don't consult with other people and so forth, but you don't think anybody is going to take care of you. Not the President, not the Congress, not the police force, not the church, nobody is gonna take care of you. *You* need to take care of you. And you need to take care of yourself *well*. You've gotta be — your first choice should be to take care of yourself because your happiness will lie in taking care and serving other people, but if you're not in good shape, you can't do it. So it's not selfish to take care of yourself because that's the only self you've got to share.

So I know all kinds of people that just don't take care of themselves. They let their bodies go too. I usually tell people, "You get 30 years from your birth to 30 years old, you can do almost anything with your body you want, but after that, you'd better pay attention and take care of it or you're going to have a tough time." I was having some dizzy spells, so they had me go to the heart doctor, which I did, yesterday. They did heart murmurs, throat things, they did blood tests, they did about everything you can think of, and the doctor comes in to me and he says, "You know, there's nothing wrong with anything. You got one little piece of calcium in one of your aortas that is never gonna bother you a bit and everything is just the way it's supposed to be." You know, and I haven't been fussy. I've smoked hundreds of cigars, I've smoked thousands of cigarettes. I don't smoke much now but I smoked long enough. And my dad smoked all the time, so it was secondhand smoke, and it didn't bother me. I'm not recommending that people smoke because you know, I think it's a bad habit. I'm down to one a week. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** I mean, you certainly look healthy and you have plans. I mean, you are gonna go on a trip soon.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah, I'm going out on a high alpine motorcycle tour through Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Italy.

**Debra Schwartz:** Wow. Oh, one thing I neglected to ask you about: I think we kind of passed this one over and I know I'm going to get in trouble if I don't ask about it. *Dharma Bums*, the book. Jack Kerouac's book.

**Locke McCorkle:** Oh yeah. Well, Jack wrote *Dharma Bums*. It was principally about Gary, who he called Japhy Ryder, but since I was the other guy in it, he put me in, I think is called Sean Monahan. Well, Jack was one of the — I guess I was one of the few people that had followed Buddhist philosophy that he'd ever met because until he came out here, he never knew anything about Buddhism. He learned it all from Gary.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're immortalized in that book.

**Locke McCorkle:** [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Do you think it's a good representation of yourself?

**Locke McCorkle:** I'd have to take a look at it again. I just think it's an interesting one because there's a lot of "mes." I feel that I've had probably half a dozen lifetimes. Every one of my marriages has been an entirely different life, 'cause I count on the woman in my life a whole lot. The spirit of it, to me, a man's mate is the foundation of all his movements. To me, that's a spiritual arrangement. Because you know, whether there's any sex involved or not, it's actually irrelevant in this issue. I know Simone sometimes says, "Well, you're so independent, what do I mean to you?" And I say, "You mean everything to me." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, now my last question for you is this: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you wish I had?

**Locke McCorkle:** I can't think of it now. If I think of it later, I'll call you up and say, "Turn your recorder on!" [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, Locke, this has been a wonderful journey with you. Thank you so much for sharing.

**Locke McCorkle:** Well, thanks for coming over and it's probably improper to plug my wife's literary works —

**Debra Schwartz:** Hey, this is your interview and you can do what you want.

**Locke McCorkle:** Aha! Well, I'd like everybody to know that Carol Simone, that I'm married to, is a wonderful writer and her first novel was called *The Goddess of Fifth Avenue*. It's a wonderful book. And her second one is *The Kiss of the Shaman*, and she's written a bunch of screenplays. She has a CD out, *Being Quanyin*, that is beautifully done, if you want to come deep into that kind of spirit. And I'm just very glad I'm married to her.

**Debra Schwartz:** Call you the proud husband.

**Locke McCorkle:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** All right, we'll close there.

**Locke McCorkle:** Thank you.

**Debra Schwartz:** Thank you.