

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
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Public Library*

**FREDRIK CASSÉE**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Joyce Kleiner in 2011**

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TITLE: Oral History of Fredrik Cassée  
INTERVIEWER: Joyce Kleiner  
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In this oral history, Fredrik “Frits” Cassée recounts his life as a postwar wanderer and cosmopolitan baker who ended up rooting himself firmly in the community of Mill Valley. Born in Haarlem, Holland, in 1936, Frits came to the United States in 1957 as a trained and certified baker. Initially settling in Coalinga in the San Joaquin Valley, he soon moved north to San Francisco for better employment opportunities. After getting married in 1963 and moving to Mill Valley, Frits bought Locust Bakery, which he operated under the name Old Mill Bakery until 1975, specializing in wedding cakes and Saint Honorés. Frits poignantly evokes the “fraternity of bakers” that existed in Mill Valley, and across Marin, in the 1970s, and describes the gradual disappearance of small bakeries with the arrival of chain supermarkets in town. Though afflicted by wanderlust, Frits established himself in the community and developed a rich social life through his active involvement in the Masonic Lodge and the Methodist Church, and throughout this oral history he vividly recalls numerous Mill Valley residents, including some eccentrics. Frits concludes by celebrating the way Mill Valley has escaped the shopping mall fate of other small towns in America and praises the community spirit of the people it tends to attract, while assailing the scourge of real estate speculation and lamenting the rising cost of living.

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## Oral History of Fredrik Cassée

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**Oral History of Fredrik Cassée**  
**August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Editor's note:** The Mill Valley Public Library and Joyce Kleiner have provided a few minor clarifications as footnotes. Fredrik Cassée passed away before his oral history was finalized and he did not have a chance to review this transcript.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Let's just start with some basic stuff to warm up. Why don't you tell me your name, what year you were born, where you born. I know you said your family, and then a little bit about —

**Fredrik Cassée:** You mean like Gail and the kids?

**Joyce Kleiner:** Gail and the kids and stuff. And then, you know, where you were born and when you came to the United States and then, eventually, Mill Valley.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Okay, well, my name is Fredrik Cassée and my nickname is Frits, which I go by; I never use another name. I am married to Gail and have three sons: Jason, Christian, and Matthew. Officially, I was born in Haarlem, Holland, in 1936 in June and I came to the United States in January 1957. The first time I ever came to Mill Valley was in November 1957. When I saw this time, it reminded me of small towns in Holland and that is why I decided if I was ever gonna have a family, that is where I was going to live. So that's where my visit to Mill Valley left off because I was visiting.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Where did you live then?

**Fredrik Cassée:** I was living in Fresno, or really in Coalinga. I had a business there, so it was a visit and it was fruitful because then I could figure out what I wanted to do. So after the business in Coalinga failed, I think I was way ahead of my time in putting in a fancy pastry shop like we had in Europe, and people weren't used to it, especially people in the San Joaquin Valley weren't used to fancy stuff. It was just plain old American donuts and sweet rolls and they had never seen any petit fours or any stuff like that. So it made it very difficult to make a living. The thing is, once I went over to American baking, things got better, but by that time I was disappointed that people weren't more interested in what I had to offer.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Let's go back a bit. You said you were an apprentice baker in Holland. Can you give me a little information about that?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. In 1951 when I was 14, I went to baker school for three years and that was really my apprenticeship. When I graduated from baker school, I went to night schools a lot and that was cooking school, and I went to purser school for KLM airlines, but I was way too young, you had to be 21 to be a purser on an airline. I had my eye set on that but it did not materialize, but I did graduate. So when I went to work and I got all my requirements out of the way because you need to be licensed to be working in a trade in Europe. So after my apprenticeship, I started out as a third assistant, then a

second, then a first assistant. Then before in 1956, by special request — because you had to be 22 before you could apply for a master baker's degree — by special exemption, because I was going to go to the United States, they let me take the exam and I passed that. So I got the master exam, passed, and I got all the certificates. The ironic thing is that in Europe they look at your certificates because you need them to get employment. Ironically, since I have been in the United States, nobody has ever looked at them. Here they take it at face value. You may never have been a baker, you work in a bake shop and say you are a baker, but they will find out that you aren't, quickly. When I came to the United States, I just went to work here.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So you went straight to California.

**Fredrik Cassée:** I went straight to California. I arrived in New York on January 27, and then I had a train ride from New York straight to California, and I got off the train in Tulare, California, and I lived in Lindsay, California, which is the olive capital. I stayed there on an orange ranch with people and they found me a job in town in a local bakeshop. I quickly find out that having been born a city boy in Amsterdam, lived there for 20 years, that small towns like 7,000 people were just not what I had in mind. So when I brought up to my boss that the wages in San Francisco were a lot higher than working in the San Joaquin Valley, the Fresno area, he told me that if that's what you want, that's what you got to do.

So when I went to San Francisco, I went to the union — which I wasn't in the union — and I signed up at the union hall, and when I went to work in San Francisco, I doubled what I was making in the Valley. I was tickled pink of course. So after that, I have always maintained my union membership. I get a pension out of the union today. After I got to San Francisco and established the union membership, I worked all over. I didn't stay in San Francisco very long because I went to work. I was single, so from 1957 — I got married in '63 — so between '57 and '63, I worked all the resort places. I worked twice in Sequoia National Park as a baker and I worked twice at the Del Monte Hotel in Yosemite and I went to work in Monterey, in Pacific Grove. From Pacific Grove, went to work in Palm Springs, and from Palm Springs — by that time it got to be 1963 — I went back to work in Sequoia Park, I was the head baker there.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Where were you actually living at that time?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, all the jobs on the resort places, you usually have room and board from the company. When I was working in Pacific Grove and Monterey, I usually took room and board in private people that had that. That always seemed to work out. That was better than getting an apartment or whatever because I never knew how long I would stay.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Now, you said you came to Mill Valley in 1957.

**Fredrik Cassée:** That was a visit.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Oh, visit.

**Fredrik Cassée:** I stayed for a couple of days and scouted out the town, and they had several bakeries here, and one of them I had my eye on because that was Myers Bakery downtown, that I had told you about, and that was for sale. But that deal did not materialize, so I decided I couldn't stay here because there wasn't any employment in Mill Valley at the time.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Remind me about, because I want this on the tape, just a couple words about Myers Bakery before we go on.

**Fredrik Cassée:** I remember Myers Bakery. If I'm not mistaken, it was between Lockwood's pharmacy and Wells Fargo bank. On one side, they had an old fashioned — or for that time — the black and white tile floors, and they had a '50s sort of fountain that was just great, high stools and whatever. On the other side was their bakery, and Mr. Myers was a Dutchman and he made his own hollow chocolate figures, and he made a lot of things that I was familiar with, so I was kind of drawn to what he did. But since the bakery at that time was not for sale — it came up for sale later after Mr. Myers passed away.

**Joyce Kleiner:** He wasn't the first owner, though, was he? Wasn't there a German family that owned it before him?

**Fredrik Cassée:** I don't know the history of it, okay, someone else might. Rick Misuraca might know more about that. I know the history of the Locust Bakery, as it was called, which changed when I owned it to Old Mill Bakery. When I bought Locust Bakery in 1971 that had already been in town, I think, 70 years — 70 or 72 years — so it is a very old, established shop. The only one that I remember that used to own it was Jimmy Cruz owned the lease, and he was the bakery owner there from 1945 to I think 1965, and then Irwin Gushtenberg, a German baker, bought it and then I bought it from him. I sold my part in the bakery in 1975.

[Pause in the recording. New recording file started.]

Well, I was talking about from when I owned the bakery from '71 to '75, but then we need to skip back because 1963, when I was working in Sequoia Park, I met my wife Gail who had just graduated from UCLA and was on her way — or she was working there for the summer — on her way to get her master's at UC in the city.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What was her master's?

**Fredrik Cassée:** In nursing. So while she worked there and the season was over on her part, I drove her down to Los Angeles. When I drove her down and I left her and I went back to Sequoia Park, I told myself, "You know, it would be crazy to let this good catch get away." I went to my boss and told him I was quitting and drove back to LA and told Gail, I think we better get married if you want to. She agreed and the ironic thing is, five

days later, we left from North Hollywood where she lived. We drove to San Francisco to get her settled for school on Parnassus in San Francisco, and she went to get her degree and I got an apartment on Fourth Avenue and I went to work for Golden Brown Bakery. I worked there for — from '63 I worked at Golden Brown Bakery, and it was at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Irving Street. It was a great employer and I liked it there. But then I had my eye set on going to work for Albertsons, the big food chain. What that entailed was my first job was in San Pablo and then I got transferred to San Francisco. And all this time we were living at Park Merced, the cottages in Park Merced. In 1967, we had our first son. Just a couple of months after we had our first son, I went to work for Albertsons.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I want to make sure I get the order of the sons.

**Fredrik Cassée:** That is Jason.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Jason, okay.

**Fredrik Cassée:** So then I went to work for Albertsons Food Company and I got transferred from the San Francisco store to a new store in Salinas, so we packed up with one son and we rented a house and then we bought a house in Salinas. Then I had two more sons, Christian, and then 17 months later, we had Matthew in 1970. By the time 1971 rolled around, I got restless again because I am a gypsy. But we were settled and bought a nice house there and we were all settled. In 1971 my mind sprung back to Mill Valley. I found out having taken a trip with Gail coming to Mill Valley and the kids that Locust Bakery was for sale, and then we started negotiating for the bakery, which took about four or five months. We finalized that and so I came here in March '71 when I bought the shop and we packed up from Salinas and we moved in our cottage home here on Amicita.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Let's get on the record here how much you paid for that.

**Fredrik Cassée:** I rented the house in 1971, did a lease option to buy, and the lease option was for five years at a price of \$23,950.

**Joyce Kleiner:** A year?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, that was the lease option price to buy out.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I see.

**Fredrik Cassée:** The rent was \$200 a month. So when it got to be 1975, when I sold the bakery, I exercised the option to buy the house. It was \$3295, what I paid for my home, and then the payment was \$204 a month.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Okay, \$3295.

**Fredrik Cassée:** \$32,950. My neighbor bought the house for \$17,000, alright, where she still lives, and I still live there.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So you lived in the house starting in 1971.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So I want to hear more about the bakery, and then I want to hear about the neighborhood. So let's go back to the bakery. I loved you talking about the fraternity of bakers that you belonged to.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, to go back to the bakery, at that time, we had Locust Bakery and then we had a bakery outlet from Lady Baltimore. Their main plant was in San Rafael, but they were really a small bakery. They had, I think five outlets: one in Strawberry, in Corte Madera, one in Mill Valley. The other two, I think, might have been Novato, but their main bakery was Miracle Mile in San Rafael. They were really famous for their fruit basket. They were really a good outfit, a family affair. Ted Whitesell owned that bakery. Then in Mill Valley they used to have Sunrise Donuts on Blithedale, and I don't remember the bakery downtown had gone. So by Sunrise Donuts, almost closely next door to it, I'm not quite sure, it may have been a couple of buildings in between, there was Lady Baltimore. Then they had Valters Bakery in Strawberry, which was owned by Fritz and Bruno Richter. Then there was the bakery in Sausalito. I'm trying to think of its name, it was a Danish guy who owned it. I worked with him later on again. I'm trying to think of his name.

**Joyce Kleiner:** That's okay. You can always call me about that.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. One of the things is, there was very good cooperation between the small owners in exchanging ideas, supplies. Maybe if we ran short on one thing or another, if we didn't have it, or being helpful if one was overloaded, he could help the other one out. It was a very close knit group of bakers, it was almost like a fraternity. So there were other shops, a good shop in Larkspur — names escape me at this point — and there was Viking Pastry, and there was Lafayette Bakery in San Rafael, and they are all gone. In the '70s when Safeway moved in, little bit by little bit — Safeway and Albertsons had in-store bakeries — all those small family tradition pastry shops disappeared.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Tell me more about your bakery, and you had something that you specialized in.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, I enjoyed the bakery. I had figured out that if you wanted to be successful, I mainly stayed with American-type baked goods and threw in some things that I thought — the European-type pastries. I went slowly but that seemed to be very well received. But my mainstay in Mill Valley was making wedding cakes and still today having lived here for such a long time now, I still have people stop me and say, "Hey, you made my daughter's and my son's wedding cakes." My gosh, I can't remember faces



or names, but after all those years, to be told — oh, you know, it's kind of nice to hear that. The thing is about being in the food industry, you can only look back and have memories, but you can't take somebody by the hand and say, "Here, let me show you what I did," except if you have pictures, which we don't. But if you are a gardener, you can say, well, I designed this and put this in, and you have something to look at. With us, we only have the memories. It gets eaten and that is the end of it.

**Joyce Kleiner:** The other cake you were famous for was the Saint Honoré.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, I made a lot of Saint Honorés. Those were well received because they had a lot of tiny little cream puffs and lots of whipped cream and they are a fancy-looking cake to look at. They are usually a holiday item. They're very popular around Christmas but not so much around Easter. Then there were lots of people from European backgrounds that were ordering all year round, but not at the scale that we have to make them at Christmas. So the mainstay of my business was — donuts is a very lucrative business to be in, and so were Danish pastries or sweet rolls and of course cookies, tea cookies, were a very large part. I enjoyed the work.

I was so used to it from my training that you hop around to a lot of different employers because that is where you learn your skills. To stay at one job, you learn just the skills of this one particular individual. I've had a wanderlust. After three years or four years, I get itchy feet. By that time in Mill Valley, I just got itchy feet again, you know. So I sold the business and we parked the kids for a week and Gail and I took a trip because I didn't have anything lined up after I sold the business.

Several reasons I came to Mill Valley: One, it is a great place to start growing a family, and the second part of it is that Mill Valley is so greatly, centrally located in the Bay Area, that if one were to look for employment, you have a 20-mile radius of lots of shops. At that time, what I am talking about in '70s still, there were 600 retail shops in San Francisco alone, they were all union. So I had my pick of where I wanted to go if I needed to be. So that made Mill Valley a nice community to live in, with very little traveling. So when we came back from the trip — a vacation to get my head together — I went back to work for a while for Safeway.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Safeway here in Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** The first job that I had for Safeway was in San Anselmo. There I was a bakery manager and then I became the bakery manager in Mill Valley, and then for the Safeway in Novato, and then I went back to San Anselmo. Then I went back finally to Mill Valley. When I came back to Mill Valley for the final time, I retired out of the union at 55 with a full union pension because I had always stayed in the union. There was a small interlude — I have got to remember the time, from '75 I went to work for Safeway, then I can't remember, it might have been, I think 1978 to 1982 — I left Safeway and went to work at Lady Baltimore. For the reason is, when I had sold the bakery to a Danish guy and the Danish guy sold to Floyd, the foreman of Lady Baltimore, and then he bought in '77 or '78, and then Floyd left Lady Baltimore and bought my old bakery. I

left Safeway and I went to work and became the foreman at Lady Baltimore. It seems logical, right? I had 17 men and women working in that bakery and I worked there [until] '82.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Here in Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** In San Rafael, at the main plant. My employer was — he was younger than I was — Bruce Rosenthreader, married to Teddy, and he and I got along fine, and after a few months, when he found out that I was more than capable, he let me run the whole show, and he worked in the shop. He let me run the show and I enjoyed it. The hours were great, from 7:30 in the morning 'til 3:30 in the afternoon.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Wow, that's late for a baker.

**Fredrik Cassée:** The reason is that they had changed their operation because the largest percentage of their business was done with Hamilton Air Force base, the commissary, with baked goods and pastries and all that for many years. I don't remember, dates kind of fly by, but when Hamilton Air Force Base closed, Lady Baltimore lost a huge chunk of their business because they had more people working there. The air force base had closed by the time I went to work there, so we were only dealing with those five satellite shops. I enjoyed the work there immensely, had a great boss, great pay, great hours, great fellow workers. It was a really good team; it was a very pleasant time. Then in 1982 my boss and his wife decided to separate and then they got divorced and it turned a little nasty, and then they turned around and they sold the bakery. When they sold the bakery, they sold it to people who had absolutely no understanding of what a bakery business is like. I quickly decided that it would be difficult for me to work under the new employer, so I went back to work for Safeway. I came back to Mill Valley.

**Joyce Kleiner:** The Safeway you worked for is the one here?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. So I came and managed Safeway in Mill Valley and then took another turn and went back to San Anselmo, went back to Novato because people are always leaving. So when I finally came back — I think that was the last five years of all of that, I would say '87 to '92 — I was strictly only in Mill Valley.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Hold on a second, I am going to make sure my answering machine doesn't interrupt us. I am going to turn the sound down. Frits, can we spend a little time talking about the neighborhood, because I don't want to get too far off that and lose time. So you lived, what is the address?

**Fredrik Cassée:** 208 Amicita.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I'm sorry, can you say that again?

**Fredrik Cassée:** 208 Amicita.

**Joyce Kleiner:** And you moved into that house in 1971, right?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Tell me about the neighborhood then and what it was like.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh, the neighborhood, you know, the street that we live on, Amicita, is really basically much unchanged. My neighbors on the left, at the corner house, Annitol Bajor lived there; he was an old Russian engineer. He had three engineering degrees. He was old, I think he was 87. He would sit in his front yard at 3 o'clock when I went to work at the bakery, and he plays balalaika, and balalaika sounds are wonderful, so when I used to go to work he would be playing there and he would stop and say "Hello" at 3 a.m. I would ask him why he was playing. He would say, "Frits, I have a short time to live, I am going to make the most of it."

He was a character. He loved young mothers; he always had candy for the kids. His house inside was unbelievable. It was clean like a lot of Russian people that had education; they were just immaculate. But any nook and cranny, every bench, chair, whatever, had stacks of books. I have never seen so many books in my life. And he was so proud of his three different engineering degrees. He was just a delight, and a delight in the neighborhood. One day, he just, you know, he died.

**Joyce Kleiner:** In his home?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What is balalaika?

**Fredrik Cassée:** It looks like a guitar but it has a rounded belly on the back. It is a special instrument that they use in those eastern countries; his had a wonderful sound. So his daughter Vicky Bajor used to have the toy shop downtown here, you know, the old brown building.

**Joyce Kleiner:** On Miller?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah. She was married to —

**Joyce Kleiner:** Miller near what street?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, it is the old Brown building, where Jenny Low's was, and that is gone.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Okay, so downtown.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah. So Vicky Bajor inherited the house and her husband was Walter Bajor and he was a teacher in San Francisco State. Their son Steve, he moved into the house, and has been there since and has bought it.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Which house is that?

**Fredrik Cassée:** The one on the corner of Amicita and Matilda.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Right across the street from you?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Next to me.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Oh, okay.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Facing, across. So then Steve bought the house. Steve today still lives there. Across the street from me lives Russ Smith, he was a postman in Mill Valley. My gosh, he is really a historical character. I think he has been in Mill Valley ever since World War II and lived in that house and he retired from the postal service, until a few years ago he passed away. He and his wife Ethyl had three sons, and they used to play wiffle ball in the front yard. That was fantastic, they were fantastic neighbors. They belonged to the same church.

**Joyce Kleiner:** That church is?

**Fredrik Cassée:** The Methodist Church in Mill Valley, on Camino Alto.

**Joyce Kleiner:** He was the postman here in Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh, yeah. He was an old timer, since World War II. He was originally from Minnesota, quite a character. I used to call him my Norwegian knucklehead.

**Joyce Kleiner:** He wasn't from Norway, though, right?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Pardon me?

**Joyce Kleiner:** He wasn't born in Norway, was he?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, he was from Minnesota.

**Joyce Kleiner:** You said he was quite a character. I remember you telling me that Mill Valley doesn't have as many characters as it used to.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, I don't know, maybe Mill Valley still has all the characters. When you live in a neighborhood, everybody seems to become a character. That is from Steve Bajor next door to me and my friends, my wife's two friends Bueller Slanicker and, I'm trying to think, John Delatore's wife Sloof. Bueller was Charlie Deal's sister.

Charlie Deal used to spend a lot of time with Steve. He used to — at our house, Gail and I, after church we used to have a Christmas party and we invited Charlie Deal one year. We had a party every year after that and Charlie Deal faithfully showed up, invited or not invited, much to our delight. Charlie became a fixture going to church with us on Christmas Eve and then coming to the party and I thought that was the most delightful thing to have this relationship with Charlie. Steve took very good care of him. Steve and myself and other people watched very closely over Charlie's health and tried to make sure he had the right nutrition. The people here on Miller Avenue at Mamas, they really kind of adopted Charlie in his later years. Charlie and I, we are the same age. I found it kind of a shock. Well, he had fast food problems and then he passed away. He was the most colorful person we had in Mill Valley. I still miss him.

On the other side from Steve lived Monique and Michael Doors, Michael being an Irishman, Monique is born in Spain and was French. They had three kids. They are very good neighbors. One couldn't ask for better neighbors than they were. Then Michael passed away, I think about eight or nine years ago, he had a heart attack. Monique is still there, lives in the little in-law unit in the back and the house is rented up front. I couldn't ask for better neighbors, with the tenants or Monique. It is great, we have great cooperation.

Next to Monique used to live Ivan Kamph and he was known for B&G. He used to own the B&G garage on La Goma for many years and then he went into the landscaping business and I think he had three kids. I remember the last one growing up that became — I think he worked for the fire department in Mill Valley. In the meantime, he is retired. I am trying to think of the name, might have been Steve. Then Ivan got cancer and he passed away around the time Michael passed away.

Next door lived Frasier and I only know about his comings and goings. I think he was in the building trade, he was very friendly. He lived by himself. His wife had left, I think. I'm not sure what the situation was but that really doesn't matter; he was a very good neighbor. He has since passed away. So Michael and Ivan, they passed away about the same time he did.

Next door to that lived, I always called them Mr. and Mrs. Barber because they were a much older couple and they lived across the street from the house that you [gestures to interviewer Joyce Kleiner] used to own. They had a great big tree up in the front yard. It got cut down and then somebody planted hedges a mile high because I don't know what his problem was. His name was John and he was a character and he had a telephone pole moved from in front of his house to exactly between him and his neighbor's driveway and I still don't know what that was all about, but that sure was asinine. That pole is still there so people that come home to negotiate into their garages have to deal with the telephone pole.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Is John still there?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, he is gone.

**Joyce Kleiner:** He sold it?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. The people who live there now have no idea who they are.

**Joyce Kleiner:** My house on Amicita, you must have known the woman that had the roses, before the people who we bought the house from, do you remember?

**Fredrik Cassée:** I have no idea who lived in the house or the neighbors that lived in your house and the next house over to the corner. I don't know any of that. I know the house across the street from you on Amicita and Juanita, right. There lives Ed, he works for the postal department. That is all I know; his name is Ed. Now he is retired but he worked for the post office in the city for many years. He is a quiet character, does a lot of walking.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What about Gwen and Bill?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Gwen and Bill Perin have been there ever since I lived there. They were young. They went to Monterey for a while and lived there and then came back. Lucky for them, they didn't ever sell their house so they moved back to Mill Valley. She is the daughter of a brother from the Masonic Hall that I am very fond of, Bert Stocking. She teaches school.

**Joyce Kleiner:** She said she is the art teacher.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yes, she is the art teacher and she is a very delightful woman and they had two kids, a son and a daughter, and we had good relationships with them. We would go to each other's parties and they would come to the Masonic parties. Next to them lives a gentleman that I don't know. He is a contractor, I never see him, just his truck. I don't know who he is. On the corner lived a woman — you know, when you are busy working, you don't always pay attention when you don't see people, then it is just a house.

**Joyce Kleiner:** You know, before we get to you being a Mason, because I want to make sure we spend some time talking about that, I wanted to ask how you know Eddie and Anne-Marie across the street from my house, and I wanted to find out if you would tell the story about the buck that was walking down Locust.

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, we are not going to go there, no, that is Eddie's story to tell and Eddie is a very sensitive human being. I am not so sure — it is not my privilege to talk about that and it is sensitive with Eddie. The reason I know — which is ironic, that I had moved to Mill Valley — as I told you before, I worked at the Ahwahnee Hotel, and the first time — this I didn't know at the time, of course — but Anna-Marie had just come

from Switzerland and she was a young woman, and I worked in the bakery and she was a waitress, and Eddie worked at the hotel as a cook.

**Joyce Kleiner:** And Anne-Marie was a waitress at the Ahwahnee?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah. And Eddie worked in the kitchen, was a chef and also did most of the meat cutting. I didn't know Eddie that well but I know that Eddie worked in the kitchen because we had at least 40, 45 people working at the Ahwahnee Hotel kitchen. So when I left, I never gave him a thought, it's just like meeting anybody. But when I moved to Mill Valley, in 1981, I was a Little League coach for many years, and a person that signed up was little Eddie Walder. Well, his name was Eddie Walder, and that struck a chord and I said, "Hey, I knew a guy once." So then the parents showed up at the game and I recognized both of them and had no idea that the Walders had moved like me to Mill Valley and they had a bought a house on, is that Locust or Walnut?

**Joyce Kleiner:** It's Locust.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. They had bought a house out there and that is how I met them, through their son at Little League games because he was on my team. I did Little League for many years; it was very enjoyable with my own kids. As a matter of fact, it is still very enjoyable because I meet all those kids now that are, now they have all professions, they have all moved up in the world, they are all grown men and grown women. I see them at parties here, at funerals. They are all around 40 to 45, and it is delightful to see them. I don't recognize them but they recognize me and they tell me who they are.

My son Chris was telling me that the other day after we had a funeral at Arden Garden — I met a lot of those kids, and they informed me that a lot of the kids from Tam that had graduated with this particular class, that one third of them, they are not alive anymore today. Kind of in an aside, I was told, a lot of it was drug or alcohol related that they prematurely went. I was really surprised because Mill Valley had had quite a bit of drug problems but most of the drug problems I think centered more around middle school than they did around high school. Of course, I haven't been involved in the drug culture but that was really surprising to hear this today, and I don't think we really want to, people don't really want to, discuss it today. It happened, it past, that is a long time ago, you know. But it is there.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I might want to come back to it if we have time, but I want to talk about you being a Mason, I think that is —

**Fredrik Cassée:** Alright. I've always been a member of the Mill Valley Methodist Church with Gail, and I have always been interested to further my spiritual growth. I always traveled around so much I never really had time to get involved in local things. I thought, since I live in Mill Valley and — here we go back to Eddie Walder — I had met some people that my sons were in DeMolay, and I did a lot of activities with them.

So in 1983, I thought it was a good opportunity to start thinking more about spiritual growth and I made an application to the Masonic Lodge in Mill Valley, member 356. Much to my surprise, Eddie Walder was there, a member already. He had just been recently initiated. I met Bruce Rossman and I met many wonderful men. A lot of them today have passed away, but we have fond memories. So in 1983 I was initiated and when I joined, that organization made an incredible impact on my life. I think what the Masons have is in an incredible fraternity of sincere affection for each other. It is rare to see a large group of men having that sincere affection for each other as a group.

It is not easy to break into a group, but once you get into it, it doesn't seem to make any difference if you have been there six months or 30 years, it is equal. They are so good with each other. That was impressive. They always have each other's back when it comes to do memory work or whatever needs to be done. They are always there when a brother needs help; they are always there. It is amazing what a strong group of men with very good women behind them — because those men's groups are only as good as the women that support their husbands, which is different today. A lot of wives don't support their husbands belonging to men's groups because I think they feel threatened or whatever it is, but there is nothing to feel threatened about. So I started in '83, and then they asked me to become an officer. I started on the bottom and I became a junior steward and then I went to junior deacon, and the idea was that you go up the line and it takes about seven years of really hard work of doing lots of memory work.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What is memory work exactly?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Memory work is all ritual that is passed on orally to each other. Of course, they always told me, I said, "How come you can remember all this stuff?" I sit here on the couch on Locust Avenue, Ed Kemp used to live on Locust too, and I said, "How can you remember all this?" He says, "There is no book, we do this all from memory." But then I used to notice that while we were doing the one-on-one memory work where I had to learn that, that he would go in his kitchen a lot and then he would come back and then we would start on the next lines to work. I always thought he was nipping in the kitchen, but what I realized many years later on — yes, there was such a book to coach out, so I think he was just refreshing his memory back and forth. But I don't think he was refreshing drinks, because he didn't seem like a drinker.

He was a great old man, and it is unfortunate he passed away like everything else in life. So after many years, in '92, I became master of Mill Valley Lodge for the first time. It was an incredible good year to be elected by your brethren to become the worshipful master of this Lodge. I enjoyed that one year and after one has been master for a year, you step down and you step back among your brothers, so you are back amongst your own peers. So you better do a skillful job of being a very considerate master instead of being autocratic because autocratic stuff doesn't work with your brothers when you have to step back and be equal with them again later on.

This is only fraternal stuff that I am talking about. Somebody has got to lead and somebody has got to follow, but after that year, you have got to step back and you follow



the next master. It was incredible. I will never forget stepping back and down and being among the brothers and the affection with all the past masters. The relationship we have today is incredibly closer. I became master again in '97, and I became master again in — no, it was '92, '97, and 2005, I was master again. So I was master for three separate years at Mill Valley Lodge, and I am still a member there. I am not an officer anymore for the last two years. It is time for the younger ones to step in and run, but I am a member of Mill Valley Lodge, and I am the president of the Hall Association, which is responsible for all the aspects of the physical maintenance and upkeep of the Masonic Hall on 19<sup>th</sup> and Corte Madera.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What kind of social opportunities beyond the meetings did you get? You got close to your brothers and their families, I would assume. There was also social time spent in the hall itself like dinners and stuff like that?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, there were a lot of dinners. Usually, it was to honor an outstanding mason or at installations of the officers. Then we had other award dinners that went to individuals; and also, the officers have a relationship which is mandatory. You have to go to the county-wide meetings, to the officer school of instruction, which we only have two lodges left here in Marin, one in Larkspur and then there is one in San Rafael. The officers of each lodge meet once a month and they do the same kind of work and ritual stuff that we do in individual lodges but it is more or less like additional training. So that opens up the group into a broader scale and you get to meet the wives later on because they also have get-togethers and their dinners and then we have a St. Patrick's Day dinner, Valentine's dinner, and we have the installation dinners again at all these other levels.

You can also go up like I did. You can become a royal archmason and then you become a cryptic mason, and then you become a knight's templar like I did, and you meet more men and more women and their kids and then there are more dinners and more learning of different things. So the masonic body is much broader than just Mill Valley. And then it becomes — to the grand lodge in San Francisco once a year, so you have all the members of the state of California there, especially past masters because they have a big voice in the process. So that becomes like one great big family.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So how are you guys feeling about the future of the Mill Valley Mason Hall?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, you know what, I think we all got together and we were unanimous in deciding to do it, to rent it out long term and to make this a music venture with a café, and because our finances had gotten low and we didn't think we could keep on supporting that large building that is 105 years old now, since 1903 when it was built. So we were sort of forced to find a solution to get stable financial footing for the future for the young guys.

I think the feelings are really mixed, okay. I think we all voted 100 percent to support it, but I think maybe half of us feel we wished we wouldn't have had to do it because to give

it up is like giving up half your house, you know. If it was done out of economic necessity — but I think we haven't, they are remodeling now and so it is a mess downstairs and I don't know, we will see how this all plays out. I have relatively good feelings that when it is all done, I would like to see them succeed.

But the past is the past and we need to move on, and I am not going to sit there grieving about — we have all the memories for all those years, and those men have the memories, and I know that a lot of widows of older members in town are very upset — the decision we made, very, very upset. They tell us, you know, “Our husbands are turning over in their graves with what you guys have done, and are undoing the work of the men before us.” But life changes.

**Joyce Kleiner:** But the work is downstairs, right, it is all downstairs?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Right. We have our lodge upstairs and the building is still ours. It is leased out and we are making good money, and the fortunate thing was that when we were down to our last money, a couple years ago when we made this deal, we had one of the brethren gave an incredible and significant endowment to the lodge. Now, if we had not had to remodel downstairs, Dan Diamond would have kept us in business just fine, but we had this mortgage on downstairs and that gave us the opportunity to take care of that, so that would still keep us tight. But overall, I like to look to the future for Masonic Hall very positively, but I don't know how it is all going to play out. Rock 'n' roll is not everybody's cup of tea.

**Joyce Kleiner:** On the other hand, one of the first Mason Halls, the one in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was over a public market, over fruit stands.

**Fredrik Cassée:** So we are fortunate to still have our lodge because I took a trip a couple of years ago to Washington to fish with my son and I wanted to drive rather than fly, which we did, and I found out that driving north between here and the island, that we passed through many small communities. We noticed that from Redding on going to Washington, that all those small towns on the left side or the right side of the freeway, we have all these modern malls, all the same cookie stamp stores in the same color and on the other side across the malls are the old towns with their old small businesses. Most of them are boarded up. Most of the churches had been conformed into shops, and most of the Masonic Halls were closed, but you could see the symbols still in their little steeples over where they had them. Life in America has changed, especially in the last 20 years, but if you travel, you notice. If you fly, you aren't even aware of it. But the whole landscape has changed and it is to me very painful, to have come here in the '50s, to see what represented America and we didn't have malls. Now, to see this where all these communities that are really, in reality dying. We have become mall town.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What do you think about Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Mill Valley is great. We have really escaped. We have Strawberry Village, that is great, but it is across the freeway. You cannot mall up Mill Valley

because we are still a distinct community. So all the communities here, Larkspur, San Anselmo — you can't put a mall in there. The way they are now, I think, is about the best you can do. But then you go more up north, you go south, you go into the San Joaquin Valley, they have so much land, they can plant these things. To me, it is the passing of a whole lifestyle. This is what makes Mill Valley so unique. We still have Mill Valley like it was a long time ago, and a lot of us don't realize how well off we are. We don't have the problems like a lot of other areas. Sure, there may be problems, but not like some areas.

**Joyce Kleiner:** How has Mill Valley changed and what would you say are some of the good things that have changed? Some things that have gotten better?

**Fredrik Cassée:** I don't necessarily want to label them good or bad because how can I be the judge of what is good or bad? But when I moved here, when I first was here in the '50s and when I moved here in the '70s, Mill Valley was strictly a working man's town. All my neighbors were people in the trades. You look at the cost of the houses. The original houses on my street, all of them on Locust, in 1954, I think sold for \$5,995 — that is fifty-nine hundred bucks. So you are talking about \$6,000 to buy a house and then you had to spend a couple of hundred dollars to put a garage there. They didn't come with garages, so that is why these garages are sitting so hopscotch. They are all sort of packed together. You take a look sometimes.

Anyway, you know, all my neighbors were in the trades, butchers, bakers, they would go to the city and work in an office. Then in '77 we started to have inflation. You know, from '74, we started to have this horrible inflation and interest rates went up to 18 percent and all that. You had to have three or four loans on your house and a balloon payment and things went nuts. People were buying properties here in Mill Valley like crazy. You cosmetically fix them up, not remodel them, just cosmetically fix them, paint, do this, do that, and then make a quick turnover sale. So that is when speculation started, around '76, and it never did stop.

So when we want to label good or bad — and I hate speculators, and they came in and people took advantage of them. There is nothing wrong with making money but when you speculate into housing, I think it takes a different aspect. You see all of these houses being bought and sold, people found a quick way to make money, and it just grew and grew. And then instead of the remodeling or the cosmetic remodeling, they started to tear down houses and start putting big houses on small lots and that continued and continued and then we have these incredibly upticks in prices in homes of 7- to 12- to 15 percent increases a year.

At one time that I know of a few years ago before the big meltdown in September of what was in, September '08 — that is when my son lost his job — about two and a half years, these homes on our street where you and I used to live, they were selling for over a million dollars. Now here you go from \$33,000 to a million dollars in 30 years, it is a nice profit. People say, "Why are you complaining?" Well, it is not real. If it were, if it had continued from 2008 and now it is 2011, continued with upticks of 10, 15 percent

and you keep doing this, that cannot last, it is impossible. This showing off now that a lot of people got hurt.

I am really glad that the speculators seem to be gone. To build the two stories home, to buy the lot, tear the house down, buy and build this two-story home, with the thought of living there is fine. I am going to live there for thirty years, that is great. But then there are people that don't. There are a lot of people that, people on my street that bought a house, promised the neighbors that they would live there, and they get the house remodeled and boom, they sell, take their profit, and run. Well, the people that bought after 2008, now they are paying the price because now their houses are not worth that much.

So a house to me is a home where you live in and if you are going to speculate it, then you take your chances. You know, you lived in a nice house and you saw the potential, how you wanted to live. I have a feeling that you and Robert are going to be here a long time, you built this dream place here, and I don't see you going out there wanting to sell.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Oh no, we built this house to live in the rest of our lives. Otherwise, we wouldn't have built it this way. It was just for our family and it works.

**Fredrik Cassée:** I also had this sense that that is what you wanted and now you have it.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I used to walk by this house when it was — before we got it, remember what it looked like? I thought it looked like a farmhouse and I wanted this house so badly. There are so many houses in this neighborhood that look like that.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Like that house that was on the second of the corner, that old bag lady used to live there. I don't have to call her bag lady, but you know, she was a character. The house is all redone. But the thing is that now, we have all this speculation, a lot of speculators — and a lot of people that bought houses here are not speculators, okay, most of them are not, they bought a house to live in. If you live in my neighborhood, like you and I used to be neighbors, the houses rise because everything else — they go up accordingly. The neighborhood is still as good as ever with people. So what changed is that it just got so expensive.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Now, Frits, you meet a lot of people in Mill Valley, partly because what you do now is install irrigation systems for people. So you tend to be there right at the beginning when someone has just bought a house. So you have this great perspective on new families that are moving into Mill Valley, you have met a lot of them. Didn't you do the watering for the houses across the street?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh, yeah.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Yeah, so tell me a little bit about the people you are meeting when you do these things.

**Fredrik Cassée:** You know, working in Mill Valley and working in Tiburon or Belvedere, I really have difficult feelings about the irrigation business. I love doing it because being outside, the lifestyles of the homes in Belvedere, in Tiburon, the homes are so incredibly big. You know, I am being — I believe in community sharing, and I believe in, well — they may call me a socialist, so what. I believe that what is good for the community is good for the rest of them. We need to have community first before we can think about our own selfish interests. That is Europe, so if you call that socialism, that is fine, I'll go with that. I don't go for bigger is better and just because one has all the money in the world doesn't mean you build 7-, 8-, 9,000-square-foot homes and live in there with two people and use that many resources. You may have a right to do it, but I think morally and ethically and ecologically, that is way, way more than you need. You can edit all this stuff out if you want to, alright.

**Joyce Kleiner:** No.

**Fredrik Cassée:** That is just my own personal bias. But working in Mill Valley, there are so many, there is a lot of old money here, people that have been here a long time and live in these big houses. Well, they may be sitting on a lot of money, but they don't behave like big money. Most of the people that I know don't behave like big money. But then I have had some clients, and you know, a lot of them have already moved, they bought too high and they have moved on and subsequently sold.

Most of them are great, the young families that want to live here a long time, that is great. What they pay — it is very expensive to live here. The character of the time has changed. Basically, people as a whole, I don't think change. I think the people are great with the kids, everything is great; I see why they move here. But there is a big uptick in income levels so we don't, I think, the mix is changing. Now, I don't know if that is good or bad, but I know that the mix is changing.

**Joyce Kleiner:** But you get to know these people, though. What I like about your perspective is, you know these younger families that are moving in, you get to know them pretty well because you are working on their land for a long time. I think there are lots of sort of myths about what the people are like. I would like to know what you feel about the people that are moving in, what they really are like.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, you know, I've met a lot of people now and I always used to be the youngest with everything, now I almost seem to be the oldest. I can't believe I grew this old this fast. But all the younger families that are moving in now, I get to be, I either get to be involved with them in church or in social life in the Masonic Hall or other activities in town. Now that the kids are grown up and not going to Little League, I go back and take a look. How hard they have to work and how dedicated they are to take care of their families, what they are doing.

A lot of them moved here because of the schools and the community. I think it is very safe, a very safe community. It has problems like everywhere else, but they are problems — but I feel that they have got to work so hard, much harder than I ever had to to live

where I am in Mill Valley. I never had any dreams of wanting a bigger house and I didn't wind up remodeling it until my kids were — I raised three kids in three bedrooms and it worked fine. And in the last five years I have remodeled my whole house from top to bottom, in and outside the walls. I love that little house. So when I work at these huge houses — but then, that is, I think what people need today with two or three kids to have more room. They just want more space. It is difficult to raise kids in a 1,200-square-foot house. Today's standard is 2,400, really, that is normal.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Do you like the younger families that are moving in?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yes, absolutely, they are delightful. I like the kids, I like the women, I like the men. But most of them today are instead of tradesmen, they are professionals and architects and lawyers. You need to make a lot of money to live here. Once we take our professional hats off and go into normal everyday life, they are just like the rest of us. I never get caught in the trap of, oh, this guy is a doctor and that guy is a butcher. I never have. I move easily through that whole spectrum and it is comfortable, you know. So when I meet people on a professional basis, if I need to talk to a lawyer, I have proper deference for his skills and knowledge, but as a human being we are at the same level. I don't get influenced by who is what or what he or she does. So I don't do it.

I feel very comfortable in this community because it is great people. The way we are in Mill Valley — and I'm not so sure if you have a lot of other places, I didn't see that in Fresno — the closeness in Mill Valley, because we share this really good community, and we know the value of this community, okay. I don't mean worth of houses; no, I mean the worth of the education system in Mill Valley, the schools and the teachers and how dedicated they are, and the workers.

I might disagree sometimes with the policies, but the people as a whole at City Hall are great people, and they are doing it — really, who would want that job, to be abused when people disagree? People are going to disagree 50 percent of the time or whatever it is, but the people at City Hall, they really are dedicated, hardworking people. Even if I sometimes — well, I don't disagree with them very often, but on a county level, it changes a little bit. I don't feel that closeness at the county level. But in our city, it is really a great community. So when you have good neighbors and when you have good relationships in town and I like — I do most of all my shopping here, I am not a big store shopper, that is where things are.

**Joyce Kleiner:** That's changed a little bit. You used to be able to do all your shopping in Mill Valley, you know, whether you needed socks or a battery for your car. That has changed.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, you know, for example, you used to have a little Montgomery Ward store down here.

**Joyce Kleiner:** I didn't know that.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Across from Brown's building, those little stores there, where Baskin Robbins is<sup>1</sup>. So we had that and then we had, where the exercise shop is, down there on Miller Avenue, used to be the PG&E office. It used to be we had all those little things here. We used to be self-contained. You could buy everything in Mill Valley, but not anymore. These people in Mill Valley today — with the high rents, my bakery rent was only \$200 a month. The last one I remembered, I think they were Vietnamese people, they were \$3,000 a month for the same 2,000 square feet. They couldn't maintain staying in business at that old building. People, small merchants, unless they are really high-end boutiques —

And I have seen a lot of people coming in and a lot of people going out, it is almost like Grass Valley. In Grass Valley, for example, a lot of rich divorcees come down and they are going to make big-time money and they open up all these fancy boutique stores up in Grass Valley, and they are in and out. A year and a half later, they are broke because you got to be a business person. Being a business person is a different skill than being a merchant.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Tell me about some of the stores that aren't here anymore, like Montgomery Ward, and any of the other ones like that where you could do your local business.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, I'm not quite sure anymore. You know, how many pairs of shoes do you need? We had Mosher's shoe store here. I don't know exactly where they were.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Was there a dime store?

**Fredrik Cassée:** A gun store?

**Joyce Kleiner:** A dime store, five and ten store, you know, a general store?

**Fredrik Cassée:** I only remember where CVS is now, that used to be Purity Store, Purity market. We had more regular shops where you could buy more practical things, but to put my fingers on it — we had the shoe store and that was competitive. We didn't have any big name stores, but now —

**Joyce Kleiner:** There were lots of gas stations, too, right? So everybody had their favorite gas station that they would go to.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah, yeah. And then we had the Union Oil on this side where John Olivari used to have — and where the Silver Screen is now — there was a gas station right there, a company that closed. You know, I have been so caught up in my own life, and Mill Valley, I know it so well, but when it comes to shopping, I'm the wrong person to ask.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mill Valley Baskin Robbins store closed in 2011.—Ed.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Let's talk about your church. You said you have been a member of the church. Did you guys join as soon as you moved to Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah, as soon as we moved here, the same Sunday we went to that church. The original Methodist church used to be right here on Sycamore, you know, that brown —

**Joyce Kleiner:** Yeah, yeah, that was the Methodist church?

**Fredrik Cassée:** That was the original Methodist church. So then I think they moved over there in the '50s. Some lady just sold us that 10-acre piece of property for \$10,000 that is right next to the sewage treatment plant and across the street from the middle school. So in '71, the middle school was finished, '72. In the '50s, they built the Methodist church there. We belonged to that. We have had eight different ministers, and are still members there. We had a big turnover in ministers because ministers in the Methodist church don't stay long, but we have had, I think, eight ministers since I have had been there. We have had three in the last eight years.

We have, a new minister started last July, her name is Kim Smith and she is absolutely a fantastic person. And she and her partner Lindy, they live in our parsonage, and they have one daughter. They are an incredible couple. Most churches have difficulty with gay and lesbian relationships or homosexual relationships and most people fear. You find out how conservative or broad-minded one is. And the bishop sent Kim to us, and it is absolutely the most fantastic thing that maybe has happened to us, okay. I may have some feelings, but I think she is a great person. She is good for us, I love her. To be judging, you know, when you are actively involved, then it is — there are no problems. I think for people, what they need to do, if you get a gay minister participating, and not having ever been involved and then they have judgments, but when they are sent to you and they come and you sort of get into the relationship, it is very comfortable, okay.

I always have my misgivings to say well, "If he ever had a gay teacher, would I want him to teach my kids?" I am being old fashioned and I always have these hesitations. Even then, I have my own uncle who was gay, and I have never really broke that through, but now I have, I think. Now to have more knowledge of people that I have worked with like that, why not teach my kids, and why not have a spiritual minister to me, because there is no difference between them and you or my wife or my best women friends. A curtain drops of awareness that is quite comfortable, and to come to that realization, a lot of prejudices fall away.

I don't think you can get there by trying to do rational thinking. It actually needs to happen in your life. It is almost like it needs to be confrontational, that you are forced in that position and then you got to decide, you know, am I going to make this relationship work? To me, that is very comforting because I have done my share of maybe bashing in the past because it was odd or maybe I didn't understand or never paid any attention to it. I never needed to be with people that were different than I was. And this is part of one's



growth. If you didn't get it at 10 or 20 or 30, many of us grow at 60, 70, some of the other ones at 80. We change, and it is comfortable, okay.

I am very happy we have her. It is a significant change. I think most of those people — like I said about the Masonic Lodge, how they feel — we have accepted that woman and her partner and daughter. It is awesome. But that is my point of view, and I think most people are that way today. That is good, that is why I like this. I never would have dreamed to go away. We haven't lost members, okay. We lost members with the previous pastor which was a woman, but she had been a business type of minister in New York, and she was taking care of white Methodist stuff, and she wasn't familiar with a small parish like us, and she kind of tried to dictate down in Mill Valley her big-time city stuff and that didn't go over well. But then after a while we made peace, but she wasn't the right fit. It wasn't a gender problem, not male or female or orientation or whatever it is. So we have just always had great ministers. I am pleased, happy as a clam.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Are there lots of people in your church that you have known since you first joined?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Not lots anymore, okay. There are some people in our church that were teachers, they were librarians. There are two women there that were librarians at Mill Valley Middle School. My son's teachers. You know, I now, at the age of 75, where the older generation was — they were the generation that I am at now — they have gone. Even that a lot of them just retired and then they moved elsewhere because in the '70s with this incredible inflation break, they sold their houses and they moved up around Santa Rosa or Sacramento. But they have passed away, most of them now, just like the older ones in the Mill Valley Masonic Lodge. That is hard to deal with. Moving away is different than you know when people pass on. But that is our history, you know, that is what makes me feel like close to this community because that is my history, that is their history, and it was real.

**Joyce Kleiner:** It seems like part of the reason why you are so well connected community-wise is because you belong to the church and the Masonic Hall. Do you feel that membership in community groups like that has been helpful to make you feel —

**Fredrik Cassée:** [looking outside] I saw something crawling off the roof, it might have been a squirrel. Okay, I don't know if membership makes any difference. But to be involved —

**Joyce Kleiner:** That's what I mean, belonging to a community group.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yes, I don't know if you need membership or whatever it is, but to be involved and to be aware. You know, basically, you have known me a long time, I am a people person. I love people, you know. I basically get along with about everybody and I think they get along with me, and I have met a lot of people and most of my clients in the last 20 years have become either friends or close friendships in other things. So that has become a whole other family, you know. I see them on a social basis. I have done a lot of

reflecting in the last few years because I am rather pensive now about what a great life I have had here in Mill Valley.

But that didn't always feel that way when I had to make a living and take care of three kids. I have a wife and she is a nurse and my wife is in a way like, I think, lots of women. We call it being demanding — well, if it wasn't for demanding women, us guys, we wouldn't get a lot of things. I'm glad for demanding women because they teach us a lot. I am very fond of women. The simple reason is that they have a way of — I think most European women are there that way too, a lot of women — they have a way of letting us know that we are sort of the boss. That is a way for women to place us there so we can feel that yes, we are important.

But when it all comes down to it, you know, everything really turns right with the two of them. If a man is smart, he can figure it out, that he gets his role to play. It is a thing of trust. A lot of people may not have this; they wind up divorced. But if you can elevate your partner, and it doesn't bother you, and he or she is good at taking charge, do it. Yeah. A lot of people will say, she sure is bossy. Fine, you don't have to live in that life. What is bossy, no, this is a person that is very assertive, knows what he or she wants, that is good. So if you call it aggressive, it is fine. There are aggressive people and those are not easy to feel with, but their motivation is different than people who are assertive because they know precisely what they want, how they want it, when they want it. So I just sort of am winding down in my business, and I miss a lot of contacts because physically it gets more difficult to do it, but meeting people is no more difficult. As a matter of fact, it is, when you get older, it is easy to get the conversation going, you know, it is comfortable.

**Joyce Kleiner:** It sounded like when you were first here, lots of your neighbors were from Europe. Was that true, was it just more Europeans?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, I think there was a lot more. At one time, before my time, but I know a lot of people that were here in the '50s, a lot of Portuguese people because they had dairy farms. My neighbor is French and Irish, Ivan, I don't know, solid American. Frasier was American, but next door lived Jean Fandel, and her husband was a Hungarian. Then we had the Russian and the guy from Minnesota, Russ, not a foreign country.

I had a boat in the '60s. When I used to come in Mill Valley from Sausalito there were a lot of people here that were boat builders that lived in the Valley. Those were a lot of French and a lot of Belgian people. I think at that time, I don't know what it is like now, we still have plenty of European people here. Eddie is Swiss and my other friend in the Hall is Swiss and we have got Russian people at the Lodge. All my American friends in Mill Valley — it seems to blend easy. I did not find like in some communities where the European-born separate themselves off from the American-born. We assimilate, maybe as individuals we assimilated better. I didn't have to stay in a group with Dutch people.

As a matter of fact, I know very few Dutch people. Eddie and Anna-Marie, they all assimilated into the culture. We still have strong bonds and ties to Europe and that is like you have strong bonds to where you were born and raised and you might go back. For us, it is just the mileage is a bigger distance, you know. I don't go back. I might go back next year, I don't know, but most of us came here in our 20s. The only thing we don't have in this country in relation to our American neighbors — I am American — but we don't have our childhoods and our teen and college years; that is missing. So you are missing a third of your life when it comes to conversations. Where you went to school comes up and where you lived comes up and what you did as a teenager comes up, and what was in the '50s. By getting older now, that kind of disappeared. But it was more important earlier.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Right. When did you move, 1957, did you say, you moved to this country?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So that was only a few years after the war, was that part of the reason?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Yeah, a big part of the reason. 1956, I was in the army. I went in the army 1954, '55, I was conscripted in the Dutch army. I was a little over 18 and I served my time, and my dad died in May of 1956 and that left me with my mother and a 14-year-old brother. Holland was still rebuilding. I took one look. This is a decision I had to make at 20. The devastation after World War II was so huge in Europe that I didn't think they were ever going to rebuild in my lifetime. Thank God I am wrong. They have built it more beautiful and better and it is great. At that time the politics were very difficult, we had political upheavals and it was difficult, and the Dutch being a democratic constitutional monarchy —

Over here they would call our system socialism; that is fine with me, it works for us out there, it is great. It worked for me like the rest of Western Europe. They are happy, healthy, but I didn't see for the long run that they could rebuild. I thought, "I have a much better opportunity to go to the United States."

Well, you know, this might sound negative but I went from a place that was devastated — Amsterdam was fine but jobs were hard, the pay was very little. I made 35 cents an hour as opposed to I got \$125 a week in San Francisco, you know. The money there was 4 to 1, so the 35 cents was really 7 cents over here. So all of a sudden you go to \$125 a week; so 40 hours at 7 cents an hour wasn't even enough to buy a pack of cigarettes, to tell you the truth. So then I have been here a long time, but then this country has changed a lot.

I don't want to get into politics, but I wish we had more decent dialogue with people, and that seems to — it permeates in our whole culture now. People are antagonistic, politicians aren't trusted, we are polarized. It goes from the top of our country to the small communities. When there are difficulties, everything seems to be much more

difficult to accomplish. It is not only in politics but it gets environmentalists, “You get this and you get that and you want to build a house.” It starts on a small scale like between two neighbors, “No I don’t want this.” I have never seen that before, but that is what we live in now.

This is what I really would like to see: let’s be Americans first before we are whatever party label you put on it. I belong to neither party, I just — but I know what is right and I think I know what is decent and cooperation with each other is what is going to help us in the long run. That is where I have conflicted feelings today; gosh, first it is almost like a marriage. You are in love, and then you are going to have some friction, and then you are going to have conflict, and if you don’t work out the conflict — and this is with government or cities or individuals — then you are going to be in conflict, and then you are going to have to go into a state of either mediation or something, and then you are going to have healing. I feel like I have been in marriage for a long time, 47 years, we have had our conflict and we go through this, and things are great. I think we are in a state of conflict with each other and now we have got to come out, go find ways to find a resolution and find a way to get along and then the healing can take place. I don’t know, that is a long process, okay, a very long process.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Does it feel to you that Mill Valley has gotten a little — people in Mill Valley are having more trouble working out their differences than it used to be?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, as individuals, as neighbors — you mean as individuals, day to day living?

**Joyce Kleiner:** Well, whatever you observe.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Nah, I think we are kind of mellow, sort of laid back. I think sometimes we are too laid back. You know, at the local level, I think we are doing pretty good. I think the disagreements with the city or whatever it is — I would expect people today to be a lot more angry, and a lot more upset of things happening in their lives that are done to us or said to us that we have absolutely no control over, and that we cannot remedy, we don’t know how to remedy. I think we can remedy it if we speak up, but we have a whole generation of people that —

I have a great admiration for Howard Zinn, and he points out a kind of history that is not taught to us in schools. A whole American history is different than what Howard Zinn presents as the struggle of women and the struggle of unions, and the struggle in America was a much bigger scale than what we hear about. So when we talk about unions today and people pooh-pooh it, I feel sad that these great struggles from the past are not recognized. What it took from the 1870s ’til now, what has been achieved by unions and women groups, just blow it off — hey, we still need that, and we still need to be outspoken, and we still need that big struggle. I am amazed that people today — I think they were much more activists, and I think activists today are different. But that is just my personal feeling. I have only really gotten into politics since I became a citizen in ’95. 1996, Bill Clinton, he kind of inspired me.

**Joyce Kleiner:** So you became a citizen in —

**Fredrik Cassée:** '96, yeah, I became a citizen late. I was always torn between being a Dutchman or being American, and I didn't want to get involved in politics. I figured, if I am a Dutchman, a foreigner living in this country, I can keep my mouth shut, and I don't keep my mouth shut anymore. I speak out and I tell them what I don't like or what I do. Now that I am an American I fully can participate in the process, so I can be outspoken now, and I am. But we need, you know, we need to move toward the future in a better way. That is all how I can put it. Mill Valley is great.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Let me just bring it back to Mill Valley before we stop. You left Europe when it was far from rebuilt and money wasn't good, and I'm sure a lot of people were struggling, and then you came here. Did you feel grateful to be in a place with so many opportunities? Were you nervous or excited, what was it like?

**Fredrik Cassée:** You know what, I was 20 and I was excited and I saw all this space, came to California, all this space and all this land. We had seven million people in California in 1957 — now we have what, 38 million? I have seen all the changes. They told me, buy property in and around San Jose, which I never did. I would have been a multi-millionaire today if I had invested all my money there. Whole Silicon Valley didn't exist, nothing existed. So seven million people, the roads, you could travel here, it was fantastic being on the freeway, no problem.

Now, anyway, I was like every other young man, idealistic, oblivious to politics. Governor Brown was governor here, his father. They were looking at digging the canal. They had big dreams and California had big dreams and it was quiet. It was the Eisenhower years, okay. People had — they didn't make a lot of money. Americans didn't make a lot of money, but I think they were hopeful; and it was dull. It was not very exciting. When you see those teenage movies with the drive-ins and everything else and high school, everything was built around local. But now, it almost gives you a heart attack to keep up on everything that is going on. And it is so fast. We had a slow life. Thanksgiving, for example, every town had their own local football game, that was their local ball game. Olive Bowl in Lindsey — we didn't have all this stuff; that stuff, it all disappeared.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Did Mill Valley have a Thanksgiving football game?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, but we had a semi-pro baseball team here in town. A lot of the guys that I knew belonged to that. There are just lots of good baseball players out of Mill Valley. Everything was just geared local. Now, you know, when the Giants came, that is when things started to change. We had the Seals. But grown men had their local semi-pro baseball teams and Mill Valley was a big baseball town. So it is hard to describe, after 55 years, how different it was. It was slower, a different place. It is like you read, people would say, "how dull," and I thought it was great. Changes, you know, when you move, and you move to San Francisco and you go here, go back to LA and see how LA grew,

and how the Valley grew. Between Sacramento and Fresno, there was hardly any — it was all farmland. Now it is town to town to town. I watched it grow and after a while, you don't notice anymore, one more mall or one more housing development. Now you go, you see Dixon, all these housing areas, when did this all happen, you know? But that is growth.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What about rentals in Mill Valley, do you have an opinion about how, the number of places that people can rent to live in Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** You know, I really don't know. I think the rental market is selective. I don't think you have a lot to pick from for price-wise, and if you have pets or kids or whatever it is not cheap. You know, renting is not cheap. I don't know. I know what my neighbor gets for rent in that house, and it is beyond me. But I also have sons that make a lot of money. For me, it is mind boggling what people have to pay for housing, either rental or buying a house. But I know one thing, if I had kept working — let's say, everything had stayed the same up until now, for all I know, the amount of money that you made working certainly hasn't gone and kept track with what housing costs have become. Housing cost for me was a very small part. You know, it was \$200 a month. Now I know that they are paying at least \$2,500, \$2,800, a month for a little house on my street. But my salary, or whatever my wages, people's salaries haven't gone up 20 times. So I don't know how you look at that. But there is a rental market and if you can afford it, you do it. If something happened to me, for example, if I had to look for my rental — my son is looking for a rental, it is very hard. He is looking, he wants to be on his own, it is very difficult.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Before we end, tell me a little bit about what school life was like for your kids in Mill Valley.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh, schools.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Yeah, what it was like.

**Fredrik Cassée:** You know, I am a big proponent of public schools, and it is part of being a Mason. They are big proponents of public schools. I believe in public schools. I went to public schools. As a matter of fact, no, I did not go to public schools in Holland. We have a population of Catholics, Protestants; and then there are public schools. People usually go either to the Protestant schools or the Catholic schools, and I knew that they were teaching — actually, if you go to Holland, they teach three different kinds of history. It is like the schools here. The people — they are not necessarily atheist or whatever it is — they teach one history of Europe, and the Protestants teach their history from their point of view, so that is what is taught in the public schools. The Catholic school, parochial schools, they teach their history from the 1500s until now. So I grew up in the Protestant school system.

You come out here and it is all public school system, so there is no religion involved; there is no separation of the church and state in Holland. It is Protestant, not Catholic like

Spain. So you come to Mill Valley and I am very fond of this community. Park School for me was a great school. I am trying to think, Dr. — the principal of Park — they wanted to close Park in the '70s because they were selling schools. They had put down that they had wanted to close Park and we had 300, 400, people at meetings and we kept Park School open, thank God, that Park School has been there a long time. And then they remodeled.

Today, Park School is one of the places people want to be; and then Old Mill. Park School is older than Old Mill and they had the choir, which was — so my kids went to Park. I loved Park, there was a really close family thing. You went to school by your neighborhood. We didn't have open enrollment, which I think was fantastic, I wish we could go back to regular enrollment so kids could walk to school again. The traffic is just nuts, okay, but that is another thing. But the kids in that part of the neighborhood go to Park, and then people over there go to Old Mill, and they go to Homestead, they go over there. There was very little traffic by driving kids.

So then they went to middle school and middle school to me has always been a difficult school for boys and girls. That age is a difficult age, but that worked. I like K through 8 because I like older kids to take care of younger kids. It is my feedback on it; people take care of each other for a long time. Kids used to do that, the older kids took care of us. So we made this change; middle school was a big change. I didn't like middle school. But they went to high school; the high school is a great school.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Tam.

**Fredrik Cassée:** My kids, they did not realize how good Tam was until Chris went to UCLA and Jason went to Cal Poly and Matthew went to New York; and Chris went to Davis later to get his veterinary degree. But they find out when they move out of the community how good our school system is in comparison to their peers — grades and knowledges, what they bring in from other parts of the country to those schools where they are going. They are finding out that their learning curve has been much better, that kids that were straight A students from Wichita, Kansas, with straight As who have never been the straight As or level of education they would have had at Tam or Redwood, but I am only talking about Tam. But Tam is a very good school, so is Redwood, so is Drake. And you only realize that when you have gone through it. A lot of people don't realize what a fantastic public school we have until their kids will tell you later.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Can you remember the names of some of your favorite teachers for your kids?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No, a lot of them are gone. They have had good experiences. They liked it because they all played baseball except Chris and they were very active in school and had great teachers. The only one that I can think of is John Nicholson that lived in Sycamore.

**Joyce Kleiner:** That is the other thing, the teachers lived in Mill Valley, right?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh yes, they lived in Mill Valley. They had teachers that I could more relate to because they were veterans of World War II. They had experience of the Korean War and, if you like it or not, they passed this onto the kids. It is important to me. What is the most important part in one's life is not only being able to have a good command of the language but the other one is to have a good command of history of everything because if you don't know anything about history, then how can you make any decisions today? History is so important to people that we need to know who we are, where we came from. That determines where we are going. If you don't have that, then, for my part, how can you lay out a road map when where you have been is a mystery? And you know, I mean, you have to know, it starts in your own family when you are small, you know what your roots are, and you learn about your grandpa and you learn about your great grandpa, and that is oral history taught and done. So I am not sure — in a lot of families, I have noticed, that is missing. I am not saying that was always there. In certain families, that is there. You know your background, you are Norwegian, right?

**Joyce Kleiner:** Swedish.

**Fredrik Cassée:** Swedish. And we all have that. In some families, that is missing and I just think, "Wow, that is an important part of your growth." That is also through — if you step forward in the world about your own community and your own state and your own country — I am sometimes flabbergasted at how poor some people are with that. But then there are people I meet all the time that are so good at history. Then we get bogged down talking history.

So I like the schools here. Tam has always been a well-known school when Redwood wasn't here. If you see or read obituaries today, you know, from people all over the county that stayed in this area, you will always see that they are Tam graduates. You know, before the '50s, there wasn't a Redwood school. There are people in San Rafael who came to Tam, people from all over the county came. Before '46 or '42, they came on the train to Mill Valley to go to school. It always has been a highly rated school. I think for us, it is amazing.

**Joyce Kleiner:** One thing I was wondering, you might know, do you know of any kids that went and fought in Vietnam that didn't come home?

**Fredrik Cassée:** No. You know what, I was at the age where I was eligible. I had no intention, I was classified III-A which means — I was a I-A which is eligible to go in the army, but I had two dependents so as III-A they wouldn't draft me. After I already served my years in the Dutch army and I saw in '57 Eisenhower was already involved in Vietnam — that was not, didn't come out ahead. We started to support the French; we should have supported Ho Chi Minh; he wanted an independent country. He was not a communist, he was a nationalist. He wanted a country just like we wanted a country and we didn't listen to him. So people went to Vietnam. In this country, there were a lot of hard feelings to us being in Vietnam in the '60s. I was not a citizen, I figured, it is not my



fight, I don't want any part of it. I didn't see why we should be there, and I really haven't struggled with it. I really didn't pay much attention to the Vietnam War, except when I lived in Park Merced when Dr. Hayakawa that I met later that lived on Eldridge — <sup>2</sup>

**Joyce Kleiner:** Hayakawa lived on Eldridge?

**Fredrik Cassée:** He lived on Eldridge. Hayakawa, he is gone. When I was sitting in my living room in the cottage — I forgot the name of the street, you know, the cottages down below the big towers. The riots were three blocks away, two blocks away. If I had opened the front door — here, I'm watching all this turmoil happening, with Mario Savio in Berkeley and all. I am so outside of that, so oblivious of that, I wasn't into it. I was 27, 28 years old. As a matter of fact, it wasn't my war. I couldn't care less at that time. I didn't realize it would have such big repercussions for this country. It started shaping for me my political thoughts.

When I came from Europe, I believed in the same principles that Dutch people and their way of government — believe it or not, is very close to the Republican type of government of the United States. I am not saying they are Republicans, but we had the big revolution in France and a lot of people sympathetic. The Dutch and the Americans are very close when it comes to government. I would have made a very good government when I came in this country with what they believed in at that time. But that has shifted for me, so I am not a Democrat either. As a matter of fact, I am a Green.

A lot of my political shapings were taking place before I became a citizen. My outlook at the country from what I learned from history books about America is so far out different than the reality that I experienced here that it was a long road to go. I wished at times — because I basically really grew up from 20 to 75, I spent most of the time here — I wish a lot of natives — well not natives, because they are not Indians — but Americans would have spent as much time not being necessarily actively political but know more. I think most of us, we are spouting off things, but there is so much ignorance and we just shove it all away. But it is a big part of our life. We should be more intelligently informed.

What pains me today is that my brother told me when I was leaving Holland, he was older, he said, "You are making a big mistake going to a country that is going to disappoint you." I laughed at him, and at 40 I laughed at him, and at 50 I laughed at him, and at 60 I started to grimace, and now I think, "Gosh, in a way, you are so right, why did I ever leave? That was so good there." To see here, and I am not being negative on the United States, to see it all sort of falling apart. We are not taking care of infrastructure, and the inability for people to make all the — I think the connections. Our streets have gone to hell, our beautiful freeways that we had in the '50s that were designed like the German Autobahns. Eisenhower designed the freeways in the United States after the Autobahn in Germany. The freeways were beautiful but they weren't designed for this. Living today is very difficult. I watch my sons, they struggle much more. They make

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<sup>2</sup> S.I. Hayakawa was President of San Francisco State University during the student unrest of the 1970s and served as U.S. Senator from 1977 to 1983.—Joyce Kleiner

good money, but they — the average person that works, they are, they have big stress levels today.

**Joyce Kleiner:** We are going to stop now but before we do, I want to ask —

**Fredrik Cassée:** Wow, look at that.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Yeah, I've been watching the clock, I know the timer is going to go off in my kitchen. I want to ask you two questions. The first question is what is your wish for the future of Mill Valley, and the second question is what is your wish for the future in general. First, what is your wish for the future of Mill Valley?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Well, I think the future of Mill Valley — I see the future of Mill Valley and it looks very promising. I think it is going to keep on evolving just like it has been evolving and I would say if I were going to come back 40, 50, years from now, I would probably find it much the same and much changed. But if I were to get a peek for 15 minutes or so, they would say, "Oh, it is still lovely." That is what I perceive for Mill Valley. And what I perceive for the future as a whole — well, to look, you know, from where the changes have been so incredibly big in 54 years, I cannot even fathom what it would look like in 50 years from now.

**Joyce Kleiner:** What do you hope it would look like, what would you like it to look like?

**Fredrik Cassée:** Oh, I would like it to be very peaceful where people are just at a level of happiness and a level of health at very high levels. That would take importance over the big struggles about health insurances and to be who you want to be and to have a very healthy education system that should be very affordable for everybody. One of the things why I am hesitant to say that, if we continue to be a country that is aggressive and likes going to war, then I think our future is not going to be very good. That is all I got.

**Joyce Kleiner:** Thanks, Frits. I need to stop now, but I just want to thank you so much.