

Mill Valley Oral History Program
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ANNE SOLEM

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Anne Solem
INTERVIEWER: Joyce Kleiner
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In this oral history, passionate journalist, political campaign manager, consultant, and former Mill Valley mayor and city council member Anne Bardwell Solem recounts the details of her career and delves deep into the issues and implications of local government action. Anne was born in 1938 in Berkeley, California and was a product of Berkeley public schools, including the University of California, Berkeley, where she majored in journalism. After a brief stint with the Associated Press in New York, Anne moved back to the West Coast and took up reporting jobs for the *Mill Valley Record* and the *Marin Independent Journal (IJ)*.

Shortly after her time at the *IJ*, Anne was approached to manage the California campaign of Democratic presidential hopeful Hubert Humphrey. She went on to oversee the regional campaigns for Democratic hopefuls, as well as serve as a regional representative for the Carter administration. Around the same time, Anne embarked upon a career in consulting.

Anne served on the Mill Valley City Council and as mayor of Mill Valley at the turn of the millennium and through the early 2000s. Throughout the interview, Anne sheds light on the more general set-up and processes of local government as well as the specific challenges she faced while in office, particularly the Miller Avenue redevelopment project. Anne offers opinions on how to build and maintain a vibrant community, backed by examples from her ample experience in both local government and local volunteer work and her belief that small-town government provides an opportunity for “real citizen involvement” and tangible change.

Oral History of Anne Solem

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Oral History of Anne Solem
August 11th, 2011

Editor's note: This transcript differs in some ways from the audio recording. It was reviewed by the interviewee, Anne Solem, who made corrections and clarifications to the material.

Joyce Kleiner: Let's just start by today is August 11th, 2011. Why don't you just give me the basic stuff: your name, your age if you want —?

Anne Solem: I'm Anne Solem, Anne Bardwell Solem. The Bardwell is the name from my first husband, but because we were divorced and my son was named Bardwell and I didn't have a maiden name, I've kept it. My son's last name is Bardwell, so it's Anne Bardwell Solem. I am 72 years old. I will be 73 in three weeks. I have lived in Mill Valley since the spring, April 1st, 1966. I am married — just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary — to Don Solem. We have three children: my son Lee Bardwell from my first marriage, and Matt Solem — Lee is age 49, Matthew Allan Yosarian Solem is 37, and Katherine Solem is 35. We have four grandchildren: Emma and Jenny Bardwell, 16 and 13, who live in Irvine in Southern California, and Noah and Eli Solem who live here in Mill Valley. Noah is 8 and Eli is 4. I have no brothers or sisters and my parents dead.

My parents were both deaf. My mother was born deaf, probably German measles from when her mother was pregnant. My father had whooping cough at the age of 18 months and became deaf from that. If I can editorialize, that is why everybody should have whooping cough vaccination, the pertussis vaccination.

I was born in Berkeley, California. Aside from living in Oakland back and forth a couple of times during World War II, I lived in Berkeley my entire young life until I graduated from Cal¹ in 1960. I attended Berkeley public schools through high school, including Berkeley High School and the University of California for four years where I majored in journalism.

I married Jay Bardwell in 1961 and we were divorced five years later. Jay's family is in Sausalito. His family's home was in Sausalito so after moving around a bit, we came back and lived in Sausalito until we separated. I came to Mill Valley because, as I tell everybody, Mill Valley was affordable, had great schools, and it was a place that I could afford to live as a single mom, which is no longer true. But it was a place I could afford to live as a single mom in 1966.

I also had a job at that time. I had gotten a job working as a reporter for the *Mill Valley Record*, which is no longer functioning. I went to work for Ned and Katharine Mills who were owners and publishers of the *Mill Valley Record*, and Katherine was the editor. I worked there for two years at the *Mill Valley Record* and then I took a job with the *Marin Independent Journal* [*Marin IJ*] for two years. I left the *Independent Journal* in January, 1970. I refused to cross the picket line when they had their big strike and it was a matter of me saying they fired me and them saying I quit my job because I refused to cross the picket line. So that is my early background in Mill Valley.

Joyce Kleiner: Professionally, after being a journalist —

¹ University of California, Berkeley

Anne Solem: When I was at Cal, I majored in journalism and was the editor of the *Daily Cal*. I worked on the *Daily Cal*, which is the student newspaper there. It was an on-campus, five-days-a-week newspaper, tabloid, 12 pages minimum to 36 pages maximum. We worked both during the day doing the reporting and at night publishing the paper.

When I graduated from Cal, I was offered a job to work for Associated Press [AP] in New York City. So then I went to work for Associated Press in New York City. I wasn't really interested in going to New York but I felt that if I didn't take the job, I would somehow think, "I had a chance to go to New York and didn't do it." So I took it.

I have to explain a little bit about myself. I am a very good — and even then was — a very good news reporter. Government, politics, accidents, fires, all of the news. I have never been a good feature writer. Where they put me in New York, I was in Rockefeller Center, the AP headquarters in New York City, but they put me under a wonderful woman named Joy Miller doing women's news. Joy had been the bureau chief in Kansas City and had been promoted to New York as a reward for many years of being an outstanding bureau chief in Kansas City. She hated women's news. She was like me. She was a news reporter; she hated women's news. Here along I came to help her and I hated women's news, so we were a great team. So she would send me off to do things like cover the latest fashion show at the Waldorf Astoria. Eleanor Lambert was a big fashion icon at that time and she was putting on this big fashion show for New York designer fashions. I didn't know materials or hemlines or colors or anything like that. I came back so confused. I can always remember that, the iconic story of why I didn't make it in New York City. I tried to get a job on the news side, but of course that is really for veteran reporters. I love New York and it is great, but I finally said to the people, "You know, I can go home and live in San Francisco. I don't need to be in New York. Thanks very much but this is not how I see my career going."

So I came back to San Francisco, couldn't get a job as a reporter, and ended up doing other things and married Jay Bardwell who I knew in college. He had been editor of the *Daily Cal* for two years before I was. Having my son Lee born the next year, and living in Sacramento where Jay worked for the state legislature and then coming back out to the Bay Area and living in Sausalito until we split — and then I came to Mill Valley.

I had started when we were living in Sausalito writing for the *Sausalito News*, which was a local paper in Sausalito. I said I would like to cover news so they sent me to cover the City Council and the Planning Commission. I would go to these meetings and write it up and turn it into them. They paid me 25 cents a column inch for what was published, not what I wrote, but what was published. So I could write three pages on a long, complicated planning commission meeting and if they printed three inches, I got 75 cents. But it wasn't for the money so much as just getting back into writing. I had been out of journalistic writing for a few years and felt like I really needed to get my feet on the ground again and my confidence back.

When I decided I was going to split from my husband, I went to see Katharine Mills and see whether they had a full-time job. She hired me on, and it was just the two of us. She was the editor and I was the main reporter, assistant editor, copy editor, all of that, and then we had a bunch of stringers. When I went to the *IJ*, they had me do Southern Marin, basically. I was in the Southern Marin bureau sharing it with a guy by the name of Larry Hatfield. Between us, I covered Mill Valley, Tiburon, Belvedere, and

Larry covered Sausalito and West Marin, so we split it up. I did that for two years until the strike started. When I left the *IJ*, that was the last journalism I did. I have not been a reporter since then. I have done a lot of other things, but I haven't specifically done newspaper reporting since then.

Joyce Kleiner: Would you like to talk about what happened professionally after that?

Anne Solem: Well, when I left the *IJ*, there was a strike, right? Subsequently, somebody was killed and it was a very bitter, vicious strike. There was no union for the newspaper reporters; there was not a newspaper guild. The strike was against these guys, these people, most of whom — it was a family newspaper — most of whom started working for the *IJ* when they came out of high school, 18 years old. Now they were in their 50s and 60s and they were being squeezed out because the ownership wanted to cut costs and get rid of the unions. They worked for a year without a contract because it was a pure, "Let's get rid of the unions." Eventually, Dean Ledger, who owned the *Contra Costa Times* at that time, which was not a union paper, brought in one night — in the middle of the night, right after the New Year is 1970 — brought in scabs and took over the paper and put it in. So the unions were squeezed out.

The strike went on for two or three years and eventually the union lost and it has been a non-union paper ever since then. None of the reporters were union people, guild people, but we had had a lot of discussions. We knew what was going on and we had a lot of us decided that we wouldn't cross the picket line. When push came to shove, however, there were only three of us — when the call went out in the morning that pickets were up — who decided not to cross the picket line. There was myself, a young woman by the name of Joanne Grant who covered San Rafael, Fairfax, San Anselmo and Ross Valley, and Larry Hatfield, who was the other guy in Southern Marin with me. So we went out and we went looking for work.

Larry immediately got a job with the *San Francisco Examiner*. Gale Cook — who was the city editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, his son was working crossing the picket line at the *IJ* at the time — hired Larry. Larry stayed with the *Examiner* until he retired all those years later. Joanne and I went out looking for work.

Two things, it is hard to believe in today's world, but in 1970, most newspapers only had one woman in their newsroom and they weren't putting other women in. "You want to work for us? Fine, go work in the women's section." It was then called "the women's section," it wasn't "Scene" or whatever. We would say "No, neither one of us is interested in that." They would say, "Sorry, we have got our woman in the newsroom." Then we go to the smaller newspapers like the *Santa Rosa Press* and some of the others and they thought we were union organizers coming in and they didn't trust us. So the only newspaper that would talk to either one of us, and I mean, I was a single mom. Lee was what, 6, 7, 8? No, he was 7. I was a single mom living over here on Buena Vista Avenue. I had a flat, and Joanne was living in an apartment up in San Rafael. We decided she would move in with us to save money and pool our resources because neither one of us was working. So we went around together and separately to interview.

We went down to San Jose together and that was the only newspaper that was willing to consider us for the news. There were two newspapers then, the *Press Democrat* and the *San Jose News*. There was morning and afternoon and they had separate staffs.

The guy who was the city editor for those papers said, “Absolutely, we would consider you, but you don’t want women’s news? Okay, when we get an opening.” So they were the only ones who weren’t biased against us for one reason or another. I will come back to why this is significant.

Anyway, in the meantime, two friends had said to me, Michael Peevey — who was running for the state senate here and lived in San Rafael — he was looking for a press secretary. He is a very big labor guy. He was in the Kennedy administration, the John Kennedy administration, in the Labor Department. He is a big labor guy, a labor economist, with the AFL-CIO² in San Francisco. Mike carried me on his press secretary for a couple of reasons: One, he needed one, and secondly, it bolstered his credentials with all the labor guys that he gave me a job because the labor people around here knew what we were doing. So I got my first job in politics as a press secretary.

Well, it turns out, the person Mike was running against in the primary was Dick Adams from Belvedere. Dick Adams decided that he was going to drop out. Mike was paying \$135 a week. I asked for more money. Katharine Mills was paying me \$100 a week, \$90 in a check and \$10 under the table to help pay for daycare. I digress. I got \$120 from the *IJ*, I think, and while I was there, the *IJ* gave people, all the men on the editorial staff, a raise. They didn’t give any of the women a raise. Paul Petersell, who was a friend of mine, had gotten a \$5 a week raise. I was outraged, so I went in and said to Joanne, “You know, we should go in and talk to these people.” She said “No,” so I said, “I am going to do it because I need every penny I can get.” So I went in and talked to the publisher and he said, “Well, hang on, the men, they deserve the money.” I said, “Mr. Brown, I am a single mom with — whatever age Lee was at the time, 7 or 8 years old — and I am the sole supporter of that child, and I deserve the money too.” So he gave me the raise, but Joanne would never go in and argue for herself so she never got it.

Anyway, so when I went to Peevey, I wanted \$135 a week, which he paid me, which was great. But then when Dick Adams dropped out, he couldn’t afford to pay a press secretary anymore in the primaries, so I was out of work again. So he said, “I know somebody over at the Democratic Party and they are looking for a press secretary.” Another friend of mine, John Donhoff — who has been a lifetime friend ever since then, both he and his wife are deceased now — he had worked on the *Mill Valley Record* at one time and somebody referred me to him and he was in politics. I said, “Do you have any idea for jobs?” He said, “Yeah I do, the Democratic Party needs a press secretary.” So I went over and interviewed with Roger Boas, who was the chair of the Democratic Party at that time. Don Solem was the executive director. So one night after I had gone to interview with Roger, no, I guess it was before I had gone to interview with Roger, Don was on the afterhours working on Peter Donning’s supervisorial campaign here in Marin, so Don stopped by to meet me. We had never met, so he stopped by the house to meet me and see whether he thought I would be a good fit. So we chatted for a bit. Anyway, Roger eventually hired me and I got my job as press secretary for the Democratic Party. I did that for two years. That’s how I met Don.

Don left a few months later to go work for George Moscone in Sacramento and in San Francisco. We had started dating and we were married a year and a half later. We had started dating right as he was getting ready to leave. But I stayed on for a couple of years and left in the early spring of 1972 to go to work on Hubert Humphrey’s primary

² The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

campaign as press secretary. Don and I were married in August of 1971, so he and I were married by that point, but our two children had not been born yet, so I went to work for Hubert Humphrey's campaign. John Donhoff, the person who had referred me to Mike Peevey, had been hired on to run the Northern California campaign and I was the press secretary. He ended up with a terrible attack of ulcers and the doctors said, "John, either quit the campaign or you are going to have to go to the hospital with bleeding ulcers." So John quit the campaign.

A man well-known in politics by the name of Joe Cerrell — very well-known in politics and a counselor to Hubert Humphrey, to Lyndon Johnson, to Jack Kennedy, to a whole variety in Southern California — just died recently, a very good friend of Don and mine all these subsequent years. He had also been head of the Democratic Party in California. He was running the Hubert Humphrey campaign in California. He said, "Anne, I am not going to hire anybody else, I am going to put you in charge." It was a month and a half left, whatever it was. We were 20 points down in California; it was no big deal to put me in charge of the campaign. Or maybe it was a couple of months. He said, "I am going to send in some help." So he sent in an advanced team coming out of, originally out of Washington but working out in the Midwest, and this group came in to help me and to help do all the organizing. For years afterwards, Joe Cerrell boasts to anybody he can whenever I was around, you know, "I was the first person who ever put a woman in charge of running campaigns in this whole country and that is Anne Solem." Of course, my little corner of the world is very small, but he boasts that he was the one smart enough to start putting women in charge of campaigns. It always made me laugh. So I did that, and we actually brought it back to lose only by five points.

I met Hubert Humphrey, who was really an amazing man. I remember seeing him at one event in San Francisco down at Fishermen's Wharf where he got out of the car and you could see he was just dead tired. He was losing, he was campaigning all over the country, dead tired. He started going into that crowd and you could just see him drawing the energy and becoming not only energized but happy and outgoing. He was the most extraordinary people person in that regard of just sucking it in from the crowd.

So then at the general election, I went to work. The McGovern³ campaign already had a press secretary leftover from the primary, but I was hired on to do scheduling, which is bringing in people from all around the country to campaign and do the scheduling program. I worked with a good friend of ours, Phil Eisenberg, in Sacramento, who came down to run the campaign. Phil and I did most of the managing of the campaign and then we had Henry Weinstein, who eventually went on to become a top-rated reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, as the press secretary. Of course, McGovern won in Northern California but he lost every place else. That was '72.

'74 was the California campaign. '73, I had Matt. I had babies in between campaigns for a couple of years there. '72 was Humphrey, '73 was Matthew Solem, '74 I worked on — I was statewide press secretary for what was Prop 9. It was Jerry Brown's anti-lobbying FPPC⁴ reporting initiative that became law in California. I was the statewide press secretary for that out of San Francisco. Common Cause was the main backer of it and I worked with Common Cause people up on Union Street in San Francisco. In the fall, I was press secretary of Allan Cranston's Northern California

³ George McGovern, U.S. Senator and Democratic nominee for President in 1972

⁴ Fair Political Practices Commission

campaign. He was an incumbent US senator who was running for reelection. So that was '74. 1975, I was pregnant with Katherine. Katherine was born in September of 1975. Don opened our business, Solem and Associates, in August of 1976. So I didn't work at all in '75. '76, for the general election campaign, I went and worked for Carter, overseeing scheduling and press for Carter's Northern California campaign.

At the same time, Don opened the business Solem and Associates, which we still have. We opened it with no money, a baby — how old was she? — 6 or 7 months old — another one who was 18 months old, a teenager son, and a load of debt. We just thought, well, Don had a couple of contracts. He said, "If it doesn't work out, we will go find work." We had great optimism, especially if I could get Katherine over the age of 1 year old so that I could go back to work.

We had great optimism that we could find work, which is something that you definitely don't see today. People don't have that same kind of optimism. I think it is harder today. We just thought, what the heck, you know? PG&E loaned us furniture from some office they had because they were involved in the campaign that Don was involved in. We had a couple of contract clients and that was to pay the rent and the phone bill, and anything after that was gravy.

Anyway, so that was in '76. I worked for the Carter campaign and Carter won. So January 1977, I went to work in the business. Don had been working in the business for four or five months and after I finished with Carter and got through the holidays, I went to work for Solem and have worked for Solem ever since until I retired. When I was on the Mill Valley City Council, I decided I didn't want to go into the city anymore, so I retired from the business, although I still own a significant portion of it and am involved in management of it. But I still have a couple of clients I was handling that were really my clients and it didn't make any sense to hand them off to people at the office. So I went down to City Hall and got a business license and federal tax ID number and made myself Solem Consulting. For the last four or five years, I've been doing that. I have two or three clients that I take care of out of the house and pay my business license fee every year and continue to that. That is my career.

Joyce Kleiner: I don't think I realized until now how long your journalism career lasted. But I didn't know about all the political work, I knew some of it. So you have a really impressive resume.

Anne Solem: Oh, I forgot, I should add something else in. 1980, the spring of 1980, I was working at the office for Solem. I was approached by a man who was the Deputy Secretary of Transportation in the Carter administration, asking me if I would be willing to be the regional representative in the Transportation Department for the Carter administration working on San Francisco. I said no about five times but finally I decided it would be something worthwhile and I went and interviewed with the Secretary of Transportation, who was Neil Goldschmidt. Halfway through the Carter administration, things were going so badly for Carter. He was only two years into his term and things were going so badly for him that he shook up his cabinet and reappointed a new Housing and Urban Development Secretary, a new Transportation Secretary, and I have forgotten who the others — Education Secretary and Commerce Secretary. Anyway, he appointed four or five new members.

One of them was Neil Goldschmidt, who had a very good reputation as the mayor of Portland for developing transit-oriented transportation systems. Goldschmidt wanted to get a woman into the Transportation Department at a higher level. So Phil Eisenberg, who I had worked with on the government campaign, had recommended me. By that time Phil was mayor of Sacramento. So they came and talked to me and I said “Look, I have two small children, a teenage son, a business I am working with, my husband and I have a business together, and I’m not —.” Well, eventually I decided that it would be interesting and it would be fun and the business could do without me. I had to travel some but I could work out of San Francisco so the issue about the children was okay. So I did that, really only for about six months because Carter lost. I mean they did this towards the end. By the time it all went through and I actually got the job, it was only about six months.

It was really interesting. It was Federal Highways, Coast Guard, Federal Rail Administration, NITSA, which is the national transportation safety people, the people for safe seatbelts and drunk driving and all that, and transit. For the Coast Guard, I had to have security clearance because there were issues there. So I had to get security clearance, which I did. So I went out and I was liaison to the heads of all these agencies here and Region IX. Region IX was California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and the Pacific Trust territories, which is Guam and all that area out there. After I left, Region IX was combined with Region X, which is Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Utah. So it is a much bigger district now, but then it was those four states. I had to go make speeches and go to conferences and that sort of thing. It was really good training and pretty interesting.

But Carter lost the election, so my inclination was to submit my resignation. But Goldschmidt’s office sent out a memo saying, “Please don’t submit your resignation, the President will ask you for your resignation as of January 20th and we want you to stay until that point.” So I said okay. One day after Christmas, maybe after New Year’s, the mail came in and on my desk were three envelopes. “Dear Mrs. Solem, congratulations, you have received a 5 percent raise.” Second letter, “Dear Mrs. Solem, congratulations, you have received your security clearance.” Third letter was, “Dear Mrs. Solem, please submit your resignation immediately.” It was literally those three in a row. I have always told that story because it has always tickled me. There were three of them right in a row. But other than that diversion into federal government, which was very interesting and I will come back to that later, all these years I have worked for the company or for myself.

Joyce Kleiner: I looked at your bio of volunteer experience and it is not even going to cover everything because this is old. What I would like you to do is before we go into any specific volunteer experience, can you just write all of the volunteer roles you had in Mill Valley for me?

Anne Solem: Oh, pretty much just what is there. The Library,⁵ and we didn’t live in Mill Valley, we lived in the county up on Homestead for 17 years. Don was active in Kiddo! and Little League, but in terms of City of Mill Valley stuff, I didn’t get asked, or even considered anything, until we actually moved into this house in the city proper, and then the inquiries started. That was 23 years ago. The first inquiry was for the Library Board. So I did the Library Board. I was chair of the Library Board and the point of my

⁵The Mill Valley Public Library

being there was, in San Francisco, I had been on the Friends of San Francisco Library Board, mainly because they were looking for somebody in the communications and public relations sector to round out their board. This was right before they getting ready to build a new library and they were having troubles getting the whole idea of rebuilding their library off the ground. I was instrumental in helping them figure out the strategy to get it started. So when I came here, people said, “We have our library, why don’t you — .” So I said I would.

So my focus all those years was really around the library, both being on the board and then being chair and then when the City Council was ready to move ahead with actually rehabbing the library, being chair of the building committee to find and interview architects, and subsequently after we chose an architect, to oversee the rebuilding process. Also, I would co-chair with Cathy Barnes, who was a City Council member at the time of the bond committee. She raised the money to pay for it. I served on a variety of other committees within the city at that time — small, temporary, ad hoc committees. One was about how to improve campaigning and election procedures, and another was to assess how to finance both the library expansion and the new community center, which approach was better for those, and there were probably a couple of others, I don’t remember anymore.

Also at the same time, I was recruited, mainly by Bob Canepa, to become a member of the Redwoods Board because the Redwoods Board had grown out of the Community Church of Mill Valley, who had built the Redwoods and had been very much oriented towards Community Church members. Bob had developed it to be a community board and not a church board. So he was instrumental in recruiting. There were a whole wide range of people who were not affiliated with the Community Church. I was asked and agreed to serve on the Redwoods Board. After one year, I was asked to be chair in the transitional chair. The chair had always been a church member and I was asked to be a transitional chair, which I did. After I finished my term on the Library Board and we had built the library and opened it in, I was 60 years old. We celebrated my 60th birthday at the opening dinner because it was on my birthday, September 4. That was 13 years ago, so what was that, 1998 or 1999? I can’t remember. Must have been 1998, yeah. After that, I decided I would, people had been after me to run for the City Council and I ran for the City Council. So I chose not to extend my term of the Redwoods Board when I completed my term on the Library Board and I ran for City Council. I served eight years on City Council and two years as mayor.

Joyce Kleiner: Okay, just a recap — a couple things I hope to go back to if we have time, since this is an oral history of Mill Valley and some of the things that I find most interesting —

Anne Solem: — aren’t pertinent to it.

Joyce Kleiner: Not as much, although just who you are as a Mill Valley resident is interesting. But I do want to go back later and find out more about the Mills family because I think that that is — I don’t know how many reporters are being interviewed — the Mills family is fascinating. But before I do, let’s talk a little bit about your experience on the City Council and what some of the issues were foremost in your mind when you

ran. Then once you began, what were the things that you cared the most about as a candidate for City Council.

Anne Solem: Well, the issues aren't much different today than they were then: affordable housing, fire protection. Basically, wildfire, it hadn't been too long before that the whole brouhaha over fire insurance being cut back after the Oakland fire. Community outreach, there had been a big uproar in the prior council about approving development downtown and it stirred up a whole bunch of people. So it had to do with, how do you reach out to people, communications to the community, how do you improve the planning process, make it more accessible. It is not much different. Downtown parking, downtown reutilization. But the issue I was most interested in among all that was affordable housing.

Joyce Kleiner: What made that such an important issue for you?

Anne Solem: Well, I wouldn't be in Mill Valley if there wasn't affordable housing at one time. Maybe I would be living in Walnut Creek with my parents, which is what they wanted us to do when I left my husband. Well, when I came to Mill Valley, it is not just that I, as a single mom, could afford to live here. The city was — as Sausalito was at the time, too — full of artists, musicians. His name escapes me at the moment — I did an interview with him once, and somewhere in my clips buried in boxes somewhere in our storage is a clip from it. One of the great poster artists from the time was working here, had a studio right up by where Sweetwater eventually was.

There were also, you know, families through our Outdoor Art Club group and longtime Mill Valley residents where the husbands still commuted to the city on the bus at that time. A lot of wives still weren't working like they are today, so they were active in the Outdoor Art Club and all that. It was a very diverse community, though not ethnically and not even culturally. Except for it did have this great artistic community — if you talk about cultural diversity — not nationalistic culture, but artistic culture. It was a diverse community economically. A lot of these people lived here because they could afford to, and the same thing was true with Sausalito. When I first moved to Sausalito with my husband and my little one-and-a-half-year-old son, there was a vibrant artistic community in Sausalito that could afford to live there. And here, while there were a lot of painters and all that here, Mill Valley was much more music-oriented. Besides the poster artist, this guy did a lot of Bill Graham⁶ stuff in San Francisco.

I mean, it had nothing to do with gardeners or housekeepers or nannies, although that is the issue today. But if you don't have a variety of housing so that you can have a variety of people who are living in your community, people who can contribute to your community, or who do contribute by working here but don't make a high enough level of money to buy a house — you have to have these people as part of your community, otherwise you become one-dimensional. And young families, you know, I am always surprised at how many young families there are in Mill Valley. You go down to the Memorial Day pancake breakfast and the place is overrun to kids. I don't know if half of them go to private schools or not, but there are a lot of kids. But you need young families, you need the plumbers and the carpenters and the city employees and the firemen and all

⁶ Bill Graham was a rock concert promoter from the 1960s until 1991.

that to live here too. Generally the way that happens is if you have affordable housing. Mill Valley — this has been said over and over and over again — if we had a fire, besides when the firemen are here, they are up in Cloverdale. Or if we had an earthquake, you know, down around here. It's not just us, it's every community in the Bay Area right now that is facing the same thing. But one would hope that we have the ability and understanding to see that our community would be much better off if we could expand the range of housing available to people.

Joyce Kleiner: Also, none of the seniors can or —

Anne Solem: That's right. That's the whole other aspect of it. Can you stay at home? Where do you go if you are too old to stay in your own house?

Joyce Kleiner: I have a number of neighbors who are fairly independent but they can't manage the stairs anymore. Cottage houses would be perfect for them, but every time one of them goes on the market, they get torn down because of the property value.

Anne Solem: Exactly. So that is something I feel strongly about.

Joyce Kleiner: Yeah. Before I go on to the other things on my list, let's go back to Katharine Mills' family because I think that is an interesting couple.

Anne Solem: Ned and Katharine were Easterners, from Chicago. Ned and Katharine met when Ned was working as a sports writer in New York City for a newspaper service, sort of like AP or UPI.⁷ It was National Editorial Association, NEA. It provided both wire and clips. In the old days, at a lot of the smaller newspapers — not the *Chronicle* or the *New York Times*, but mid-size papers like the *Santa Rosa Press* — you would get stories and this is what the people would do. Women's news in AP that I went to work for, they supplied clips out. Big clip sheets — you would get these clips with all these different stories on them and you could clip them and either convert them into hot type, or, if you had a photo offset process, you could paste them as part of your page paste up. There was your story. There were usually feature stories and this, that, and the other thing. Ned was a sports writer for NEA. Katharine had come out of Wisconsin, I think, originally. She had gone to work as a reporter and had worked in, mostly in furniture and how you design your house and all that side of it. She was working in New York and they met and got married. Then she transferred because Ned had left the sports side and got involved in management, and then left and went to Barrington, Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago. They lived there for a number of years. Katharine was covering the Chicago Merchandise Mart and Ned was doing management work for NEA.

But their dream had always been to have a small town newspaper. So Ned got a broker who looked around for him and she went and visited newspapers here and there. They had three children and they really wanted a small town, the right environment, not just environment in terms of safe, but they wanted a community style. It was important to them that it reminded them of the Midwest and where they lived in Barrington. I can't remember which town Ned came out to California to see. It was a small town in the

⁷ United Press International

Central Valley or on the coast — San Luis Obispo, somewhere — it was a smaller town. The newspaper just wasn't right, the cost wasn't right. They said, "Well, it is not what we are looking for, don't you have anything else?" They said, "Well, there is this paper up in this town called Mill Valley that I think is going to be for sale. Do you want to go look at it?" Ned said, "As long as I am out here, I might as well go look at it."

It is sort of like when we bought this house, I said, "Don, I don't want to be in the canyon, I don't want to be in redwoods, I want sun. Don had seen this advertisement that came by and he came home and said, "You have to go see this, it is the perfect house." I said, "It's a canyon, I won't go, I won't go." He said, "Go see it." So I walked in the door and I said, "Absolutely, we will buy it."

The same thing, Ned said to Katharine, "You have to come out and see this because this is really it." So she came out and they agreed and they bought it and moved their family out here. They become very much integrated in the community. I mean, Ned was a born salesman and handled the business side and did all the advertising. The paper was in, I don't know that it was in disarray, but it hadn't been well managed for a while and had gone through a series of owners. It had been around forever. I mean, when the *Mill Valley Record* shut down, it was a loss, over a hundred years worth of newspaper.

One of the things that he found was that he couldn't get the grocery ads. In those days, Wednesday was the grocery ad day with the sales for the weekend. You had to get a full-page spread for them from the Mill Valley Market and from Safeway and from Lucky, which was here at the same time, and so on and so forth. So he persuaded the city council to move its meetings from Tuesday nights to Monday night so that he could print their stories in the paper that came out on Wednesday morning. Otherwise, if it was Tuesday night, the news was a week old and nobody cared anymore. So that was the first thing he did, lobbied the City Council and finally convinced them that they should change their meetings from Tuesday night to Monday night so that their news would be fresh in their local newspaper. Then he had the grocery ads on Wednesday. The paper always came out on Wednesday morning because he had to compete with the *IJ*, not too much with the *Chronicle*, but with the *IJ* to have the grocery ads out. So he was able to do that. Then things took off after that.

So Ned ran the business side and Katharine ran the editorial side. She always had usually just one person working with her, and then a bunch of stringers. So she had somebody who reviewed the plays and the concerts and somebody else, Alice Yarrish, who was a stringer for a whole variety of weekly newspapers covering the city center. Alice used to be an *Examiner* reporter and got a little business going covering the Civic Center, Board of Supervisors and all of that and sending out these stories to all the local newspapers. She would have high school kids doing sports, reporting the sports and Little League and that sort of thing. So she had a bunch of stringers. She would pay as much as she could support, but that was basically community news from Tam Valley and community news from Homestead and that sort of thing.

But she was such a lovely woman, everybody liked her, everybody did. She joined the Outdoor Art Club and she got to know people. I mean, she really integrated herself in the community. They lived up on Hillside up by Eleanor and she used to walk down and they always had a dog, Brownie, Mr. Brown, he walked down with them into the valley. When I went to work for Katharine, they were in the building that was right across from City Hall that was the home of the *Pacific Sun* for many years. It was a big

cavern and now it is, you know, cut into offices. The big cavern had the brick walkway, a wishing well inside the door that you threw pennies into, a real wishing well, and a big cavern where all the sales and this and that and the other thing. Then it had a big huge back where they had a big rotary press, a huge rotary press and linotype machines. We were there for about a year and we moved over to the corner on Blithedale, what is the street there where, you know Title 9, where the sports shop is? About one block down from Artisan's, where Sunnyside used to be. They moved into that building and the whole back of it, they had a big pit and a big rotary press back there too. You have to remember this is before computers, Internet, this other stuff. So they moved down there and the *Pacific Sun* took over the space that Ned and Katharine had across the street from City Hall.

But she was terrific and she always had one person. The first person I think was Paul Peterzell, who worked for her for a while and then went off to work and stayed forever at the *IJ*. I was the second one, and after that she hired people who had just graduated from journalism at San Francisco State. Leonard Anderson was first, and then there was a whole series of them. They would all stay for about two or three years, get some experience, and then move on elsewhere. That was when newspapers were hiring so you could always move on elsewhere. For a long time, there was this rotation. I mean, Paul went from the *Mill Valley Record* to the *IJ*. I went, Leonard didn't, he stayed at the *Mill Valley Record* and then he went to work in the city for the *Wall Street Journal* for a while, and then the *Christian Science Monitor*, and then he ended up in corporate PR. But you had a whole series of these people. Some of them went down to Hayward and worked for the *Hayward Daily Review*. So she was tremendous training ground for young reporters, want-to-be reporters coming out of school. Just as the *Herald* is now, Ryan White did move on to another newspaper and somebody else got in there. That would be a good job. You learn how to write, do the stories, edit other people's copy. You learn how to write headlines, deal with deadlines, and then you're a little bit seasoned enough to go on to work for a bigger newspaper.

Katharine's health was never great; she always had health issues. Ned was just really out and about and chatting it up with people all the time, very popular. They both made a point of being very much known in all of the groups and everything. They were the perfect small-town people. They had two daughters. Both girls live here, women now, of course. Mary still lives up in the family house on Hillside. She is a single mom with a young son, probably not so young anymore. Tyler lives out in the San Geronimo Valley and she is a teacher, and of course is out there with her husband. Their son lives and works out in Washington, D.C., as an attorney, and has been out there for many years. But they all went through school here, the Mill Valley schools.

[Pause in recording.]

Anne Solem: The other person I should mention is Bruce Coleman. Bruce was the *IJ* reporter working in Southern Marin when I was working for Ned and Katharine. His wife, Jean Coleman, still lives here in Mill Valley behind Old Mill School and she is very active in the Friends of the Library and the book sales and all that and a variety of other things. Their son Steve — they have two children, I don't know where their other son is — but Steve Coleman lives here in town and does all the wonderful sets and set designs

for 142 Throckmorton and for theater. You may not know him yourself, but he is around town and he is a very well-known and lovely young — well he is probably in his forties now.

Bruce was a wonderful reporter, wonderful writer, but he was the opposite of me. His feature stories were just fabulous. He really could capture the feeling of the town or whatever he was writing about. He was highly regarded and well loved here in town and he eventually left and went off with his family to New Mexico to teach English as a second language to Indian reservations down there, and then came back year nine years later. Jean and Steve still live here. He once wrote a story about the library cat that was just absolutely lovely. There was a cat that used to hang out at the library. But for old timers, Bruce Coleman was well-known and well-liked and a very good writer.

Joyce Kleiner: I think there's a plaque by the fireplace in honor of a cat?

Anne Solem: Probably, yeah.

Joyce Kleiner: Okay. Well I, of course, would like to spend a little time talking about the years that you were on the Mill Valley City Council. The first thing is sort of, you observed City Council for a long time before you were serving on it. While I realize that of course there were years before women were even on City Council, would you say, in the 10 years before you joined and you observed a lot, what was the mood of the Council? How long did they work together? What was the expectation?

Anne Solem: Well, let me say this. I probably observed the Council more when I was a reporter than I did in those 10 years before, although I did pay some attention. When I was a reporter, it was always all men. It took forever. They sat up where they do now and there was a table down in front where the reporters sat. There were usually two or three reporters there, and you would sit there and say, "Jesus, I could do this better." You know, on and on and on over everything. Often it was midnight or one o'clock before they got out. Everybody would go off down the street to Jimmy Quinn's and have cocktails until the bar closed. Jimmy Quinn's was where the Mill Valley Market deli is. There were a lot more bars around downtown and the office, Jimmy Quinn's and so on and so forth, Old Mill Tavern. So everybody would go out afterwards, the staff, usually one or two of us reporters. I lived right downtown, so it was easy.

You would just think, "There has to be a more efficient way of dealing with city business." I did watch the City Council once I got into town. But when we moved into this house, since I was inside the city when I got involved with the library, I never particularly thought, I am doing it so I can run for the City Council. Did I follow it in a way of somebody was thinking — no, but I paid attention because I was interested. So there wasn't anything in particular that I said I could do better or different. It's just, I like public policy, I like public issues, and I like small town government because it is real citizen involvement. I still like it and think that it is the one place where you can really have a direct impact. Somebody says something to you, a complaint or an idea, and you can often do something about it. The feedback is immediate, the impact of what you do is felt at a local level and you can see it. And I thought, well, I have been working in public

policy all of my adult life, basically. It is something I ought to be able to do. So that is what I did.

Joyce Kleiner: So tell me a little bit about, you served two terms, which was eight years. What were some of the highlights and if you want, some of the experiences that weren't so positive. I'd like to hear about those.

Anne Solem: Well, we tried to do, you know, when you were talking about women on the Council, early on there weren't any women. Jean Bernard was an early woman on the City Council and there were a couple of others. But before I came on the Council, I was the only woman on it for two years, four years, two years, six years. Six years, I was the only woman on it. Shawn⁸ and Andy⁹ didn't come on until the last two years. There were a lot of women: Betsey,¹⁰ Kathleen,¹¹ Cathy Barnes.¹² Betsey and Cathy Barnes were on at the same time, and there were other women when Kathleen was on. So it was not an unusual thing to have women on the Council. In fact, it was somewhat unusual that I was the only woman for those years.

I was elected with Dick Swanson and Chris Raker. Chris is an architect and Dick is a finance guy, but mostly in government transportation finance, and all of that for transportation agencies. Sitting on the Council at that time were Clifford Waldek and Dennis Fisco. Both were very much involved in the community, and Dennis, not only involved in the community but a mover and shaker in terms of Friends of the Fields, rebuilding all of the playing fields in town, a developer, Seagate Development. He was very much involved from a charitable point of view in the community, both the city and Marin County, an outstanding person. Clifford knew everybody. I swear he knew everybody and then some. Don Hunter was the city manager.

It was a very good time to be on the Council in those early years because we were opening the community center, we had just done the library. We worked hard. There were three or four new staff members replacing people who retired. Don Hunter had just become city manager, and there was a new planner director, a new public works director. So there were lots of opportunities to take a look at where there maybe had been some problems, especially governmental processes to see if we could improve them, which we worked hard trying to do. The first time I was mayor, the Olympic Torch came through town; Dick Swanson said to me, "You are so fortunate. Your first year as mayor, it is all on the up." And then when he was mayor, I can't remember, but there was a whole series of the budget crisis; we had to cut budgets and everything. So it was not as much fun for him. But yeah, I think there was a lot of optimism.

Now, Miller Avenue is something that has been a drag for a number of years here in town but it shouldn't be and wasn't intended to be. The point of doing Miller Avenue — and I'll just briefly say what happened. When I came on the City Council, we were talking about affordable housing and it was also the dot-com boom, and there were a lot of older properties down on Miller Avenue that were ripe for redevelopment. I started

⁸ Shawn Marshall

⁹ Andy Berman

¹⁰ Betsey Cutler

¹¹ Kathleen Foote

talking to the planning director and the city manager and saying, “Look, shouldn’t we have a plan in place, a blueprint, at least a set of ideas in place so that if some of these properties start turning over and people come in wanting to redevelop them or remodel or whatever, that we have a vision of how we would like Miller Avenue to look?” Miller Avenue looks like the 1950s, you know, and we were almost in the year 2000, so let’s do something about it. That was the beginning of the process. We put together a citizens committee, we hired a consultant, blah blah blah, and tried to do some community input on how Miller Avenue should look. As these properties turn over — not that they were cookie-cutter architecture — and then we knew we had problems in terms of bike lanes and pedestrian lanes and there were whole sections of Miller Avenue where it was too difficult to cross. At the same time, we didn’t want to lose the things that were important on Miller Avenue: the auto repair shops, the blue-collar businesses, as well as the local-serving businesses like the hardware store and the pet store and the paint shop and all that.

Going in, there was a lot of opportunity down there. You had some dead property like Hillhaven, which had been a nursing home and had been bankrupt for a number of years, and just sat there empty down next to the Wells Fargo bank almost down to the end of Miller Avenue. And then you had a whole population of seniors down at the Redwoods, who, besides walking over to Safeway, really had no place to go to have a cup of coffee or to get some lunch. It was just dead down there and difficult to get across the street. You had the high school kids. There was a lot of potential and a lot of — it was very clear to me anyway, that with the proper division, we could over time have Miller Avenue develop in a way that was beneficial to the city.

The properties on the east side of Miller were double-deep, so there was room for retail on the street and housing behind, which is the case further up Miller Avenue and towards the Lumber Company. You will see double-deep housing, duplexes — these lots are very deep. You will see different kinds of housing on those properties. On the west side, it was too hilly, there was no opportunity. So we started that process, we thought it would be beneficial. I still think it would be beneficial.

It got caught up. First of all, the process stopped halfway through because of budget considerations. We stopped the planning process. We made some mistakes and when we came back to it, we didn’t go back to the beginning and bring everybody back along again. It led to a lot of people in the community thinking we were trying to run something by them, and a lot of that was just misrepresentation about what we were trying to do. A lot of businesses down there got scared that we were going to try to zone them out, upscale them out of business.

So today — what is this, 2011? — 12 years later, a plan for a portion of Miller Avenue has been approved by the City Council, and that is for the bike lanes and the sidewalk and the traffic. They haven’t dealt with the parking issue yet, and they haven’t dealt with whether they want to change the configuration of the street in certain sections at all. But it is important. To me, I long ago started arguing that the zoning and height limits and that kind of thing on Miller Avenue — which was part of the original plan — should be put aside and we should just deal with the traffic and parking and bicycle lanes and pedestrians. That other stuff will get taken care of eventually, nobody is building anyway, and we are in another recession. Nothing is going to happen. Our job is to keep our businesses going. But that street is not safe for bicycles. Now it is safer than

Blithedale, but it is still not safe for bicycles and kids. It should be the primary route because Sycamore is not safe for kids to ride their bikes, so I think it is an imperative in this city that we get the sidewalks, the bike lanes, the street configuration, the parking, and the repaving of the streets sorted out so that people can walk and bike comfortably, and so that some of those businesses down there start to thrive.

Joyce Kleiner: What is your impression of what the City Council wants to see as far as commercial businesses in Mill Valley? I sometimes wonder if you really should be promoting the addition of new businesses when the ones we have, you know, are barely staying open. You had said to me at one point that you think the best model is to have businesses that serve people within a walking distance.

Anne Solem: Certainly on Miller Avenue I think that is true. It is tough, it is tough. When I first came to town, when I first went to work for Ned and Katharine, the downtown was a mess. Businesses were closed, storefronts were empty, Miller Avenue was a worse mess. It had had a bunch of auto dealerships. The highway had opened five years before. It is hard to imagine that Highway 101. And the Strawberry shopping center¹³ had opened and it had drawn the auto dealerships out of the highway. Then the economy was slow, so it left people with —

The Chamber of Commerce, which was a much more vital organization then, you know, said, “What do we do?”, and there was this long discussion. How do you bring business back? One of the things that they did — the economy is what eventually brings business back — but one of the things they did, they decided that downtown looked a mess so they put together a paint-up, clean-up campaign. So they got an architect, a woman, Jan Mountjoy, who was a color specialist. She was an architect but also a designer, and she put together a color palette for the buildings downtown. They went around to building owner after building owner getting them to agree to paint the buildings and clean up and spruce up the downtown. That was a very controversial move.

In those days, we had a hardware store right downtown where Banana Republic eventually went and now where Tyler Florence’s place is. The liquor store was still there, we had a movie theater, we had Sonapa Farms,¹⁴ which is where Champagne¹⁵ is now. But you had two pet stores downtown, two variety stores downtown, you had, you know, real variety stores where you went in to buy thread and dishpans and that sort of thing. You had a children’s shoe store downtown, a department store downtown where La Coppa is — a two-floor department store, small, but it was a department store. You had two furniture stores and a variety of other shops, some of which were specialty. You didn’t have very many clothing stores, but for the most part, the property owners agreed to do it. The only hold out was the O’Shaughnessy sisters that owned the building where Tyler Florence is now. Their father was an engineer who built the dam that supplies water to San Francisco.

¹³ Strawberry Village Shopping Center

¹⁴ A longtime, “legendary” delicatessen and café serving breakfast and lunch, located at 41 Throckmorton Avenue (1959-1995)

¹⁵ Champagne French Bakery Café, located at 41 Throckmorton Avenue (2002 to circa 2014)

Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, he had a lot to do with the original layout of Mill Valley, right?

Anne Solem: He had two spinster daughters and he said to them, “Never sell your property, never.” So they never did, and they never improved it and never fixed it up. It took forever to get them to agree to paint the front of the building. But they were legends around town when I first came, the O’Shaughnessy sisters. They had all this property and they wouldn’t do anything with it.

Anyway, it helped, you know, it spruced things up. People started to want to come downtown and shop. Now, the difference then was, you could come downtown and go to the hardware store, the shoe store, blah blah blah. Today, I think the problem with downtown is that, yeah, how many nail salons do we need? How many high-end dress shops do we need? We had Rexall drugstore downtown, you know. There were two drugstores right downtown, three if you count where Pharmaca was, you know.

I think the problem with downtown now is that there is nothing. I know a lot of people buy clothes at the various clothing stores and all that, but it doesn’t have a broad enough basis to the community at large. I go to the bank, I go to Tony¹⁶ to get my shoes repaired, I go to the Mill Valley Market, I go to Mill Valley Flowers, I go to Champagne, blah blah blah. There were at least two bookstores downtown in those days. Not that you can bring all that back, but it is tilted towards the affluent. Once you are in your car and going someplace, you are going to go to the Village, the Town Center¹⁷, or Strawberry to shop. There is nothing along Miller Avenue to stop you. So I mean, now, how do you fix that? I haven’t got a clue, I don’t have a clue. I think what is happening down on lower Miller Avenue is terrific. I think Dish and the toy store, Henry’s Toy Store — it used to be Baskin Robbins, but why Baskin Robbins left — I mean I know why they left town, but you think well —. The owner retired and couldn’t find anybody who wanted to take over the franchise. I can understand that, but it is just — it is tough. How do you tilt it back towards — because hardware stores don’t make enough money to pay the rent. It starts with the property owners who charge the rent. It starts with the inflated prices for property, and how do you tilt all that back? I don’t know. Except we don’t need more nail salons and designer clothing shops, little boutique clothing shops.

Joyce Kleiner: It is my understanding that a landlord has the right to decide what goes in as long as there aren’t any —

Anne Solem: Can’t change use.

Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, but it is like, if one retail shop closes and another one comes in, even if it is redundant, if the landlord wants to rent it, he can?

Anne Solem: Oh sure, the landlord can get the prime rent for that. The landlord is not interested in, “Are we getting, do we have a nice balance in town?”

Joyce Kleiner: Right. And the City can’t command it.

¹⁶ Misak Pirinjian, owner and operator of Tony’s Shoe Repair

¹⁷ Two outdoor shopping centers in Mill Valley’s neighboring town of Corte Madera

Anne Solem: Not unless you change your use. You could when you redo the General Plan, do a downtown subsection of it and say, “Our goal is to have x number of —.” There was always a complaint that there were too many restaurants. Do you need another restaurant, another pizza parlor? There is always somebody out of balance. One person may not like what somebody else thinks is terrific. Somebody might think that Tyler Florence’s shop is unnecessary, but it does a good business. So I don’t know, can you say, “Well, we can only have three nail salons in downtown?” I mean, no. So it is what the market will hold.

Joyce Kleiner: I don’t understand why the nail salons want to be here. Are they all used?

Anne Solem: I have no idea. I never go to a nail salon. [laughs]

[Pause in recording.]

Joyce Kleiner: — and also your experience with what was involved in working with the city manager.

Anne Solem: Okay, there are two kinds of government. There is the city manager form of government, general law form, which is established by the state constitution. In the city manager form of government, the city manager is the primary executive to the city and has the authority to hire all city staff, department heads and so forth. The city manager acts as the primary staff for the city council. But the only employee that the city council hires and fires on its own — aside from the city manager — is the city attorney.

The city attorney advises the council on issues that may relate to the performance of the city manager, among other things, or issues around city managers. So the city council needs its own independent counsel. A council member or mayor cannot command a department head or member of the police department or planning staff person what to do. You just can’t, it’s not allowed. Now, in some cities, Ross for example, the town of Ross, they have not had the city manager form of government and the council members are responsible for the various departments. Now they may be changing that a bit, but it is such a small town. With so few responsibilities, you know — they may have changed it since. You should check that.

Joyce Kleiner: It’s a city manager now because I just wrote a column about Ross.

Anne Solem: Well, the city council has already had hands on the various departments. So the city manager is the executive of the city, the employees, the services. If the city council is dissatisfied with what is going on in the city or with a department head, they can tell the city manager. If the city manager doesn’t behave or respond in the way they want, they fire the city manager, but they can’t go down and fire the planning director. So that is what the city manager form of government is. So it is a limitation to some degree on the powers of the city council.

A general law — if I am correct, you would have to do a little research on that — is one in which city council elects its own mayor. The mayor is not elected

independently. The city of San Rafael is the only city in Marin that has a mayor elected independently. San Francisco is unique because it is a city and county and they both serve as one. Los Angeles has both a board of supervisors and a city council, so the city council and the mayor are independent of the board of supervisors. Anyway, that is the different setup where the mayor is elected directly. In that case the mayor has more power, although he still is a member of the city council. So Al Boro¹⁸ is still a voting member of the city council, but the city council operates separately. He is elected separately, and has his own power because he is elected directly.

In Mill Valley, we are a full-service city. That means we have our own fire departments, police departments, sewage departments, as well as planning and so on and so forth. Some cities, some of those functions are handled by agencies outside of the city's authority. So there can be a sewer agency — now we have SASM,¹⁹ but that's a cooperative — but we still handle our own sewage. In some cities, things like sewers may be handled by an outside authority, or fire. Sausalito has a big debate right now about having the fire department merge with Southern Marin, which is a separate district, not under the city of Sausalito. In Corte Madera, they have a merged fire and police, so the city doesn't have as much direct authority over them. But Mill Valley is a full-service general law city, so we have all these departments underneath us. The city manager is responsible for that. That is what he or she does.

Joyce Kleiner: The city manager actually hires and fires firefighters and police?

Anne Solem: The city manager hires, now, I mean, yeah, the city manager appoints a police chief. The police chief may go off and hire his or her own police force members and if the city manager is not pleased with the way that the fire department is functioning or the police department, they can fire the police chief but can't fire the policemen. It has this line of authority.

Joyce Kleiner: Can you describe the perfect relationship between city council members and the city manager?

Anne Solem: Well, I don't know that there is ever a perfect relationship, but what you really want from your city manager is a cooperative arrangement where the city manager keeps you fully informed about what is going on and discusses with you issues of concern and shares, when necessary, his or her approach to solving problems. And consults with the city council so that the city council has an ability to influence. Yet at the same time, the city manager himself protects the staff from undue influence from the city council and tinkering. There was always a rule in Mill Valley that if you had a concern, I never called, or seldom called, the planning director or the public works director directly without asking Don Hunter or Anne²⁰ first. "I'd like to talk to so and so, is it all right to call them? And this is what I am calling them about." Now there are times when people don't do that and that is of concern to the city manager. But what you really want is a relationship of trust and mutual working together of solving the problems of the city. You

¹⁸ Mayor of the City of San Rafael from 1991-2011

¹⁹ Sewerage Agency of Southern Marin

²⁰ Anne Montgomery

want a city manager who has his pulse on the community, has the ability to go out and make himself or herself a part of the community and get to know different people so that he knows what is going on, and who is also a good manager.

Now, Don Hunter lived here, grew up here. He became city manager when we came on the Council, so we were all new. Rory Walsh was the new planning director; we had a new public works director, a new city manager. But Don had grown up in Mill Valley and was head of Parks and Rec for years, and then assistant city manager before he became city manager. So he knew everybody. He could talk to people and reach out and do this, that, and the other thing. He had a good feeling for what was going on in the community. But there were areas where he wasn't as strong and he relied upon city council members for that. But he was perhaps weaker in internal management. He had done all of the labor negotiations, so he knew all of the employees very well, but sometimes he wasn't as firm a hand on improving performance and stuff. He was a wonderful man; he still is, of course.

Anne's experience when she came on is that she had been here and knew everybody. She had been a very good manager of the reconstruction of the library and she was a very strong personnel person: annual reviews, job performance reviews, this and that and the other things, and really tightened up the staff a lot. But she was not — she is much shyer, so it wasn't as easy for her to go out and mingle in the community. So you have different city managers with different strengths and weaknesses. In the case of Anne, you try to make up for that with the city council. Spotswood²¹ always criticized her for never voicing her opinion, not being a strong enough leader with the council. Now, there would be council members who would say, "I don't want my city manager telling me what to do." Doug Dawson, who was highly regarded, before Don Hunter, was well-known for having a very tight hand on his city council, getting them to move in the direction he thought they should be moving. Don could be quite persuasive about things, but none of them sit at council meetings and say, "This is what you want to do," but they make their opinions known. Anne was much more, "Here are the pros and cons." She didn't make a lot of recommendations, which is one of the things that she was really criticized for, I think somewhat unfairly. When you worked with her, you knew what she was thinking.

Joyce Kleiner: The city council as Andy describes it — Andy Berman — is policy and direction. Tell me if I have got this right. This is through my hierarchy and job description of different players in the role of the city management. You have the city manager whose job it is to implement the policy and direction, right?

Anne Solem: And manage the staff and keep the city running and keep us on budget and so on. Fiscal responsibility, just like you are running a company.

Joyce Kleiner: Right. The rest of the staff does the specific tasks.

Anne Solem: Right.

Joyce Kleiner: The commissioner's jobs are to report, to —

²¹ Dick Spotswood

Anne Solem: Well, the commissioner's job, you have commissions to help the city council do its job. So the city council can't review every planning application and the ones that need to have city approval, above and beyond staff approval. So the parks and recreation commission is there to play a policy and advice role for the parks and recreation department. The planning department and the planning commission is the same thing, except they get called with things like, "Should this house get a variance?", and all of the applications. So that is what the boards and commissions are there for, to do work under the city council, work that the city council is responsible for. But the city council, in all reality, wouldn't have time to do it all by themselves, so you have boards and commissions to do that work for you.

Joyce Kleiner: Then you've got ad-hoc task force committees, and their primary job, as I understand it, is to collect additional information.

Anne Solem: You give them a task, you say, "We want to build a community center and enlarge the library, how can we best finance it?" Their job is to examine this problem or issue, come up with a recommendation, and take it back to the city council.

Joyce Kleiner: Okay, it's for recommendation. And then finally: citizens, to inform from an individual's point of view. So it is not the non-elected citizen's job to advise as much as simply to provide information that maybe has slipped through the cracks.

Anne Solem: Certainly, citizens have the responsibility to provide information. They also have the responsibility to make their opinions known. They certainly have the responsibility to organize protests if that is what they think they should be doing on any particular issue to influence the city council. If they have a strong opinion about something, they have elected people to represent them in the city council. Let's go back to the city council. The city council is there to set policy and provide a direction for the city, right? Provide a long-term vision for the city. It is also there to be responsive to the citizens of the community. They are elected to be the people's representatives, so it is their job to be available, listen, respond to both individual and group concerns within the city.

Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

Anne Solem: So I think as a citizen, you don't want somebody who is an obstructionist. On the other hand, if I have a point of view and I feel strongly about it, not only am I going to go down there and tell you why my neighbor is violating the code because he is 3 feet above the height limit, but why I think it is a terrible thing and why aren't you doing something about it? Just because he is your best friend doesn't mean that you get to give him a variance. It can be unpleasant at times, but that is democracy; it is messy.

Joyce Kleiner: Right. So the balance for the city council is to envision the long-term health of the city, which sometimes is in conflict with the short-term requests of

individual citizens, right, and you have to keep that balance. You have to think about what the city will look like in 50 years as well as what is going on right now.

Anne Solem: Sure, absolutely. That is the point of the General Plan. I mean, you have a General Plan because the state says you have to have a General Plan, but the point of the General Plan is that you would look ahead and say, “Okay, this is how we want our city to be.” Civil things, this is where the houses ought to be and the businesses ought to be and the streets ought to go. This is where the schools ought to be and how do we accommodate — we envision x amount of growth in the next 10 years, how do we accommodate that? So that kind of thing, as well as more specific things like how do you deal with housing on hillsides and hillside ordinances and how do you protect the environment and things like that.

When I was on the Council, we really became involved in recycling and green initiatives. It is something that they hadn’t done before, but Anne said, “I think we ought to do this,” and the City Council said, “That is a great idea, you come back to us with recommendations on how we can implement these.” And she came back and said she would like to hire so and so as a consultant to help me. She is an expert and she can help set up initiatives. Then when the consultant put together her recommendations, Anne brought them back to the City Council and said, “These are the things we would like to undertake and I will report back to you periodically.” Most of them were internal within the staff, but also things that the City Council had to approve. So that is sort of in a nutshell, a nice little example of that interaction between the City Council and the city manager.

Joyce Kleiner: Right. Do you think that the efforts to improve community assets like the webpage and improved newsletter — do you think those things have all been as effective as one was hoping?

Anne Solem: I think they have been very good. Shawn Marshall worked very hard when she came on the City Council to improve the webpage and it is great.

Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, I think so.

Anne Solem: It is much better than it used to be, and it is her initiative that had it happen. People had talked about how City Council members weren’t accessible, and people at various times have tried to have office hours at City Hall, but it never works. Well, Ken Wachtel, bless his heart, was the one who said, “Let’s go set up a card table in the Depot Plaza.” It works. I mean, it is a good thing. The newsletter, we used to send out newsletters but now it is all on the webpage instead of spending money to send out newsletters. But on the other hand, I get a postcard every once in a while about something from the Fire Department or this, that, the other thing that is going on. I think broadcasting the City Council meetings on the web, the problem with broadcasting the City Council meetings or Planning meetings is that everybody talks to the — instead of saying, “I am against it, let’s move on, I have to give a 10-minute speech as to why I am against it , so that is the downside of it. We know that people don’t come to city council meetings so therefore — unless they have a gripe or particular point of view — so why

not put it on the web? I think the more you can do to make transparency, the better off you are.

Joyce Kleiner: Do you feel like there is a point at which community input has been taken and it is time to —

Anne Solem: I can say this until I'm blue in the face and you've heard me say it. The role of the individual council members and the city council members is to say "yes" or "no." They are not there to punt. You can study, you can reexamine, listen to testimony, do this, that, and the other thing. But ultimately, your job is to say yes or no along with setting long-term policies, envisioning, all that sort of thing. So, when there is a community debate, there is a point at which you have to say, "Okay, we have heard you. Now, this is our decision, however it goes, 3 to 2, 5 to nothing, whatever, but if you don't like it, throw us out of office, this is the decision we have made."

So you see a lot of new council members come on and somebody stands up and says, "My neighbors have eucalyptus trees that are now blocking our redwood trees." I say redwood because redwood trees are sacred, right? "They are now blocking my view, so can't we have a tree ordinance so I get my view back?" Somebody stands up and says, "I am for trees, I don't want you to cut any trees or chop trees, certainly not redwoods. I don't care what size they are, they could be this size or that size." A new council member will say, "Can't we study this?" Well, we have studied it ad infinitum and we don't have an ordinance because there is no way of solving that problem, but a new council member says, "Well, we might be able to."

Miller Avenue is a prime example, let's study it to death. We didn't set out to study it to death, but we have to reexamine it, and then we have to reexamine the reexamining because somebody else is complaining and then we have to go at it a different way. There are a lot of mistakes that have been made with Miller Avenue, but there was a point at which it should have been dropped, bifurcated, or approved. That is the city council's job. For better or for worse, are you going to allow this person to have the third-story addition to their house or not, are you going to allow them to build a swimming pool or not? — whatever it is. Are you going to allow this restaurant to go into this space even though they don't have enough parking for it, or not? You have to decide yes or no, that is your job. You shouldn't be on the city council if you aren't prepared to say yes or no. To me, anyway, that is the bottom line. You can find solutions, you can find compromises, but ultimately, you have to make a decision.

Joyce Kleiner: Right, I understand what you are saying. So it is kind of time to wrap up, so I would like to know here is what you are feeling about your expectations, hopes, concerns about the future of Mill Valley.

Anne Solem: Well, I am concerned that the city gets richer and richer and not diverse. I am concerned that my kids can't live here. They live here with me; our house is expandable so we have our family living here. But our son Matt, it is interesting. Katherine is two years younger than Matt. None of Katherine's friends live in Mill Valley. They live in Petaluma; they are all over the Bay, some of them in San Francisco. Matt's friends, there are a whole bunch of those boys who have come back to Mill Valley

to raise their kids. Some are like Matt who lives happily here and elsewhere, but others, you know, have taken over their parents' homes, bought out their parents, whatever it is. They have found a way to do it. But I am concerned that it is becoming harder and harder to live here. I am concerned that we are losing our downtown in terms of diversity and vitality, in terms of resident serving. Maybe we just can't. Again, it goes back to how much property is worth and the cost of renting and the cost of building and all that. But on the other hand, Mill Valley is a beautiful community with great access to the mountain and trails. It has a population base that is passionate about preserving it, and I don't mean freezing it in aspic, but promoting the things that are good and important about it and keeping those aspects vital. And I think it is going to be fine. I mean, it is well-managed, it doesn't have the fiscal problems that a lot of communities have. Its city council has always been very conservative. It has always through its own voluntary term-limit orientation been able to provide space for new ideas and new people to move up through the system. So I think it is going to be fine. I am just sorry that is going to be such a wealthy, single cultural type of community.

Joyce Kleiner: Do you see any change in how much the younger spectrum of the middle-aged population is getting involved in civic leadership?

Anne Solem: Are they? I don't know. I wonder where the new leadership is coming from. But then again, you see people like Kira Keene for example, let's go back, she is still involved in the schools, her kids are still in the schools, you get the whole bracket of people. Now are they going to turn around and be involved in city government? I don't know. But I think that it is the responsibility of current city council members and people to reach out to the folks that are active in Kiddo!²² and that are active in the schools to say, "Okay, now it is time to turn your focus to the civic side."

There has been a whole generational change in Mill Valley leadership in the last few years. The Betsy Cutlers, Kathleen Footes, Anne Solems, Dennis Fiscos, we are all moving on. Dennis is younger, but a lot of us are in our late 60s, 70s. Our kids are growing and we have done our community service and it is time for the people in their 40s and 50s to start picking that up. I think younger than that is hard because you have kids in school. The only other thing, to some degree, and I think it has always been true, you see people who are so self-centered and it is all me, me, me, me. I am sure that when I came to town, there was a whole generation of 60-year-olds who said, "God, those people, they are all me, me, me," you know? And our commitment to the environment, which is a result of living on this mountain, is really very important.

Joyce Kleiner: One thing Don Hunter said to me years ago — and I want to know if you agree with it — he thinks that one of the things that makes the leadership in Mill Valley so good or made it so good is because for the most part — and there are always exceptions, but for the most part — people did not run for city council as a stepping stone into higher government opportunities like county supervisor. Do you agree with that?

²² Kiddo! is the Mill Valley Schools Community Foundation, a nonprofit that raises funds to supplement school budgets.

Anne Solem: I do. Kathleen was approached to run for supervisor when she was on but she couldn't afford to do it because she had two kids to support, she is a single mom. I think Shawn has always been interested but she turned it down, at least she didn't push for it ultimately because she had two young children she had to worry about. But yes, I think there are — we are small towns, you know? I think that Mill Valley generally has been free of that. Now it is interesting. I find it interesting that one of the springboards around here has been the water district board. Huffman came off the water board, Joe — Joe Nation. He came off the water district board. I don't know, was Charles on the water board? He may have been. You know, it is the environmental credentials that the water district board gives you. So yeah, no, I don't know why it is. Is Mill Valley unique? Sausalito? I think it has to do with the size of the towns here.

Joyce Kleiner: It seems like a healthy trend.

Anne Solem: I think it is.

Joyce Kleiner: You have one foot in the campaign for supervisors then you are not always thinking about what is best for the town. Or maybe you are not. Okay, I have some off the record questions for you, so let me turn this back on and then I just want to ask you one last question. If you had one wish for Mill Valley, what would it be?

Anne Solem: I don't know. I suppose from my own point of view, I wish it would be more aggressive about expanding the diversity of housing and ability for people to live here, especially seniors. I mean, it is a point that you made and I skipped over, the seniors like myself who are not going to live up in this hill forever, but also for people, blue-collar working class people too.