

Mill Valley Oral History Program
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ROB MOITOZA

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Rob Moitoza
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In this oral history, musician Rob Moitoza shares his memories of growing up in Mill Valley and participating in the local music scene since the 1970s. Rob recounts his first gigs as a teenager performing Hawaiian music with his parents while his two sisters hula danced at venues such as the Outdoor Art Club and the Marin Art and Garden Center. He describes getting into rock 'n' roll in the early 1970s and recalls his favorite bands of the time, touring bands he backed as a bassist, and some of the bands he formed, such as The Swingin' Deacons with John Cipollina and The Opposite Six with Bill Champlin. Beyond the music scene, Rob evokes what it was like to grow up in Mill Valley in the 1960s and '70s, remembering a number of quirky characters from Mill Valley's past and sharing his thoughts and feelings on how the town has changed over the course of his life.

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Oral History of Rob Moitoza

Index

- Albachten, Bob...p.12
Brown's Hall...p.12-13
Burgan, Bob...p.9
Champlin, Bill...p.9-10
Cipollina, Antonia...p.8
Cipollina, John...p.8-11, 14-15
Coasters, The...p.9
Clover...p.14
Cold Blood...p.10, 14
Corte Madera Recreation Center...p.13
Deal, Charlie...p.6, 9, 15
Dick and Dee Dee...p.9
Dinosaurs, The...p.11
Douvells, The...p.9
Duke, George...p.15, 19
Edna Maguire School...p.6
Finnegan, Mike...p.14
Golden Gate Bridge construction...p.4
Grateful Dead...p.14
Greenwood, Bob...p.8
Huey and the News...p.14
Joplin, Janis...p.14
Kelly, Charlie...p.15-16
Kustom Keys, The...p.12
Lewis, Huey...p.8, 14
Lion's Share...p.14
Margoliash, Ed...p.13
Marin Art and Garden Center...p.7
Marin City...p.19
Mello, Frank...p.2
Moitoza, Evelyn Dewolf (mother)...p.2, 7
Moitoza, Fran (sister)...p.5, 7, 18
Moitoza, Frank Garcia (father)...p.2, 3-4, 7
Moitoza, Sue (sister)...p.5, 7, 18
Napa resort...p.18
Old Mill School...p.6
Opposite Six, The...p.9, 10, 13, 19
Outdoor Art Club...p.7, 13
Park School...p.6
Pense, Lydia...p.10, 14
Quicksilver Messenger Service...p.10
Ram Rods, The...p.12
Righteous Brothers...p.9, 13
Sons of Champlin...p.10, 16
St. Hilary Catholic Church...p.3
Swingin' Deacons...p.9
Tamalpais High School...p.4, 6
Varney's Hardware...p.17
Vera (aunt)...p.17-18

Oral History of Rob Moitoza
June 4th, 2015

Editor's note: This transcript has been reviewed by Rob Moitoza, who made minor corrections and clarifications.

00:00 Debra Schwartz: Alright. So today's date is June 4th, 2015. And I am Debra Schwartz, the Mill Valley Historical Society representative for the Oral History program. And I'm sitting here with Rob Moitoza. Hi Rob.

00:23 Rob Moitoza: Hi.

00:24 Debra Schwartz: So nice of you to give us your time.

00:27 Rob Moitoza: Mmm-hmm. Sure.

00:28 Debra Schwartz: So Rob, you are a Mill Valley homeboy, right?

00:32 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

00:33 Debra Schwartz: We'll open with just a little background history about you and your family. And if you could be as specific as you can with times and names it would be most appreciated.

00:45 Rob Moitoza: Okay. Yeah.

00:45 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So first let's start a little with your background information about your family, your parents, if you would.

00:57 Rob Moitoza: Well, let's see. My mom and dad moved up here in 1959, and bulldozed the lot out and made [laughs] their house.

01:12 Debra Schwartz: So Rob, you're talking about specifically where we're sitting right now, in our recording, as fate would have it, is my home, which happens to be your home that was built by your parents.

01:25 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

01:26 Debra Schwartz: Here in Mill Valley on Blithedale Ridge.

01:28 Rob Moitoza: Pretty amazing.

01:29 Debra Schwartz: Kind of a coincidence, for those that are listening.

01:31 Rob Moitoza: Very amazing.

01:32 Debra Schwartz: Yes. But your father and mother, where were they born before they came here up onto the mountain?

01:41 Rob Moitoza: Mom was born in Oakland, and Dad was born in Pinole.

01:45 Debra Schwartz: And your mom's name, full name, was?

01:48 Rob Moitoza: Evelyn Dewolf Moitoza. Yeah.

01:51 Debra Schwartz: And your father's name?

01:52 Rob Moitoza: It was Frank Garcia Moitoza. His grandfather was from Portugal, from the Azores Islands. So we had the Portuguese side, and then the kind of European — mom was Irish/English — the kind of the mix of European. And I've been exploring my Portuguese roots lately, which is pretty interesting. Found out I had relatives that I never even knew about, so that's kinda interesting.

02:37 Debra Schwartz: There were a lot of Portuguese here in Mill Valley. They came as dairy farmers, correct? Is that when your family came over here? In the 1800s?

02:46 Rob Moitoza: I'm not sure exactly why my grandfather came here, because that side of my family was so private. They didn't share anything. It was very hard to get any information. 'Cause I found I have relatives around that I never met. But, yeah, it was an interesting family. Someday I hope to go to the Azores and study some. Oh, one interesting thing I found out though: I was looking at some old pictures from Pinole, which is where my father was born and where my grandfather lived, and my grandfather had a big blacksmith shop. And I guess Moitozas were pretty well known in that area, in Pinole.

03:41 Debra Schwartz: Where is Pinole exactly?

03:43 Rob Moitoza: It's over just north of Richmond and Oakland area. So I'm looking through the pictures, and I see this old Model T Ford with my grandfather's brother and another guy named Frank Mello, and I thought, "Well, one of my best friends in Seattle was named Frank Mello," and I said, "I wonder if he's related." So I sent this picture to my friend Frank, and he said, "That's my grandfather." So my grandfather and his grandfather were best friends — one of my best friends now, and we never put that together until we started researching. Is that weird or not?

04:35 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, yeah. Could have been a long lost brother for all we know.

04:37 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

04:39 Debra Schwartz: So your dad was born in Pinole. What year approximately?

04:43 Rob Moitoza: 1901, I wanna say?¹ Yeah.

04:47 Debra Schwartz: And your mom around the same time?

04:50 Rob Moitoza: Later. Yeah, she was 10 years later. So, yeah, 19 —² [chuckle]

05:01 Debra Schwartz: So, as far as your association to Marin County, how did that — how did your family make their way over here? Do you know?

05:13 Rob Moitoza: Well, let's see. My grandfather moved to Tiburon. I'm not sure why he moved to Tiburon, but he was a blacksmith, and there was a railroad down in Tiburon, and he may have been down in the shop. I know he worked down on that railroad, and maybe he moved because of the work. I'm not sure. I also know they — I think they lost a lot of property over there when they built some roads or something.

05:49 Debra Schwartz: In Pinole?

05:49 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. So he may have decided to just get out of there. I'm not sure. But, anyway, he moved to Tiburon and that's where my dad grew up.

06:02 Debra Schwartz: What part of Tiburon?

06:05 Rob Moitoza: Right up on the hill by — there's an old church there, St. Hilary's Church. And at that time my grandfather's house was the only house on that hillside.

06:20 Debra Schwartz: Before the church?

06:22 Rob Moitoza: I think the church might have been there, that was the only building there. So, we have pictures where it was just my grandfather's house and St. Hilary's and that's it, nothing else on that whole hillside. And now it's like wall to wall mansions that are millions of dollars each.

06:41 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. So this would have been what year?

06:45 Rob Moitoza: Oh gosh, I'd have to look up —

06:47 Debra Schwartz: You don't have to be exact.

06:47 Rob Moitoza: I have all those dates, so if you're interested I can give you some of that information, a little more precise.³

06:55 Debra Schwartz: It just helps puts things in context to the building and all that. So, we'll guess somewhere in the early 1900s?

¹ 1907, in fact—Rob Moitoza

² 1916—Rob Moitoza

³ Approximately 1925—Rob Moitoza

07:01 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, but then why my dad moved to Mill Valley, I'm not real sure why, he just liked the area. Liked the mountain, liked the area. And he worked in San Francisco. So the beauty of this area of Mill Valley, and this area is — it's still kind of a country town in a way, but it's 20 minutes away from San Francisco, you know what I mean? So it's almost the best of both worlds, in a way. You have access to the big city, but you're basically living in more of a country area.

07:44 Debra Schwartz: Your father was a photographer wasn't he? Or he was —

07:48 Rob Moitoza: He took pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge when it was being constructed. He was a photographer for Roebling Steel, so he had all these pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge construction. But his main job was, later on, was he was the head of a voluntary union in San Francisco, San Francisco Federation of Municipal Employees; and it was police, fireman, teachers, various public workers.

08:23 Debra Schwartz: Did he go to school here in the area?

08:25 Rob Moitoza: I went to Tam.

08:26 Debra Schwartz: But did your dad go to school here or in Pinole?

08:29 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, he went to Tamalpais High.

08:30 Debra Schwartz: He did?

08:31 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. He was a track star, and he held the pole vaulting record for a while way back then, so he was a real athlete.

08:45 Debra Schwartz: Now before we get off the topic of his photography, as I recall hearing, he took some pretty popular photos, or photos that are iconic to the building of the bridge, the span coming together —

09:00 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, yeah.

09:01 Debra Schwartz: Is that the photo that we all see so frequently of the bridge span?

09:08 Rob Moitoza: It's possible, there were two or three photographers. There was one for Roebling Steel, there was one for the bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge District itself or something, but my dad took some pictures probably that nobody else has, so yeah.

09:29 Debra Schwartz: So you grew up, your folks carved out this piece of property right here where we're sitting and built their homes in the '50s.

09:38 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, because my dad said he wanted to live on a hill, but he wanted to be on the flat. He didn't want to have any more than two steps to get into his house. [laughs] So that was his idea.

09:53 Debra Schwartz: Good thinking.

09:54 Rob Moitoza: And in those days you could afford to bulldoze out, now it'd cost you a fortune.

10:00 Debra Schwartz: Well could you even?

10:00 Rob Moitoza: I don't know.

10:01 Debra Schwartz: I doubt it.

10:02 Rob Moitoza: The environmental thing, they might not let you do that. I don't know.

10:07 Debra Schwartz: It certainly is a beautiful place. He created for himself a lovely perch.

10:12 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, yeah.

10:15 Debra Schwartz: So your family came to live in this house, and then commenced your —

10:23 Rob Moitoza: Well, actually, when we moved to Mill Valley originally we lived down on East Blithedale, 74 East Blithedale. My mom and dad lived above — there was a donut shop there, and it was right across from where the post office was, which is now something else.⁴

10:38 Debra Schwartz: Sunnyside?

10:40 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. And there was a donut shop. So we lived right over the donut shop and you'd smell those donuts all the time.

10:49 Debra Schwartz: Do you like donuts?

10:50 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. Sure. [laughs]

10:53 Debra Schwartz: And it's you and your two sisters, Fran and Sue?

10:56 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. But then we moved up here. I was 9 years old when we moved up here so that means Sue was 5 and Fran was 7 when we moved up here.

⁴ A paint company!—Rob Moitoza

11:09 Debra Schwartz: So tell me a little bit about your experience growing up here in Mill Valley, if you would.

11:19 Rob Moitoza: Well, gee, where do I start? [chuckle] I just remember some of the people and stuff. You're kind of isolated up here on the hillside, which had its pros and cons 'cause it's a ways for kids to walk, if you wanted to walk all the way down that hill, hillside, but it was peaceful and quiet, sunny and nice, at the same time.

11:57 Debra Schwartz: Which primary school did you go to?

12:00 Rob Moitoza: Let's see. Old Mill School, which I think is still there.

12:05 Debra Schwartz: Yep.

12:08 Rob Moitoza: And then there was another little school, Park School. I guess when I was in kindergarten I went to Park School. Then we moved to Old Mill, and then Edna Maguire. Is that still there, Edna Maguire School?

12:26 Debra Schwartz: It's a primary school now.

12:28 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

12:29 Debra Schwartz: And then they have the middle school⁵ now. So, and then on to Tam High.

12:34 Rob Moitoza: And then Tam High. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

12:38 Debra Schwartz: So, tell me a little bit about the people that you remember.

12:42 Rob Moitoza: Well, right off, I remember all the unusual quirky people, like Charlie Deal and —

12:50 Debra Schwartz: Talk about Charlie Deal.

12:53 Rob Moitoza: Well, when I first met him, as kids, we were kind of scared of some of these characters 'cause they were so strange. And then we all started to love them dearly later on 'cause the quirkiest the character is, the more interesting it was. But he had a pout or cleft, something with his mouth. So you couldn't understand him real well. Then he got that fixed later on in his life, so then it was easier to understand him.

13:24 Debra Schwartz: Is he the creator of the toilet seat guitar? [chuckle]

13:26 Rob Moitoza: He is the creator of the toilet seat guitar, yeah, yeah.

13:29 Debra Schwartz: One thing I wanna mention that I know about because of the

⁵ Mill Valley Middle School—Ed.

property is that you come from a musical family, correct?

13:37 Rob Moitoza: Right, yeah.

13:37 Debra Schwartz: Why don't you talk a little bit about the music that was created at your family home? As I recall, there were performances out in the yard.

13:49 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. But mostly we played out for parties and different things. But my mom and dad played Hawaiian music 'cause my mom was gonna be a — she wanted to be an opera singer. She played classical piano and stuff. And then when she met my dad he said, "Why don't you learn guitar and back me up?" I don't know how he talked her into playing Hawaiian music. But anyway — [laughs]

14:22: And dad, he just liked the sound of the Hawaiian steel guitar, and he took lessons from a guy named Sol Bright who was a pretty famous Hawaiian steel guitar player. So anyway, and then mom started learning guitar, and sang, and she was a consummate performer 'cause she absolutely had no fear of audiences at all. She was just, "Hey everybody, how you doing?" It was great. And then I started playing because they wanted somebody to play bass.

15:06 Debra Schwartz: In your family band?

15:07 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. I think I started playing bass on the four bottom strings of a regular guitar. Then when I got into school, I took up string bass in the orchestra and learned string bass a little bit, and then gravitated eventually to electric. And then my two sisters did hula dance. So they danced and we played.

15:38 Debra Schwartz: And did they sing as well?

15:39 Rob Moitoza: Pardon?

15:40 Debra Schwartz: Did they sing as well?

15:42 Rob Moitoza: My sisters? Not really at that time, no.

15:48 Debra Schwartz: So, you performed gigs as a family, and then you —

15:53 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. We used to play at the Boyle Park Lions Club picnic every year, I remember, down there.

16:02 Debra Schwartz: Any other local venues?

16:07 Rob Moitoza: Well, then I started getting into the rock and roll years. 'Cause mostly my parents played at the Outdoor Art Club and Marin Art and Garden Center, things like that. But, more often than not, we were playing for private parties.

16:42 Debra Schwartz: So, I have to say that one of the reasons why we're sitting here today is because Huey Lewis said I should — the performer Huey Lewis said I should interview you. So, let's go into the '60s — would it be the '70s when you were playing rock and roll?

16:58 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

16:58 Debra Schwartz: And maybe we could talk a little bit about the people you played with and —

17:03 Rob Moitoza: Well, how I got started really with that — I brought you a thing that I had written after my friend John Cipollina passed away. This was my recollections of John Cipollina. He lived right down a hill from us, right down on Shady Lane. And his sister, Antonia, still lives there. She lives in the house right down below and teaches piano. But John was a couple years older than me. He came up one day and I was in my Zorro costume as a little boy, and he had a real sword and he was chasing me around, and I was scared to death. I ran in the car and locked the doors. [laughs]

17:57: But then, ironically, I don't know exactly how it all came about, but we became great friends. He was the first person that really introduced me to blues records. He came up and played me some Lightnin' Hopkins and Muddy Waters and different things.

18:17 Debra Schwartz: He came up to your house here?

18:18 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

18:20 Debra Schwartz: Wasn't his father a music teacher at Tam or something?

18:23 Rob Moitoza: No, he was a real estate guy or something. I remember Bob Greenwood was the great music teacher at Tam High, but that's a different — yeah, a different thing.

18:38 Debra Schwartz: So, the Cipollina family — was he the only musician in the family?

18:46 Rob Moitoza: His mom played piano and taught piano her whole life. Then Antonia is teaching piano to this day, so yeah. But he was the only kinda pop rock guy. I think Antonia dabbled in it for a little while, but wasn't really her thing.

19:10 Debra Schwartz: So when you say pop rock maybe you can talk about John Cipollina and your affiliation with his bands.

19:17 Rob Moitoza: Well, as I say, he kind of turned me on to blues, and when I first heard these old blues records I was thinking, "This guy is all out of tune, he doesn't know." I was very critical, and then after a while I was buying every darn blues record I could get my hands on. [laughs]

19:34 Debra Schwartz: And this is what year?

19:37 Rob Moitoza: Well, let's see. It must've been around '59, '60. Right when we moved up here pretty much.

19:47 Debra Schwartz: Oh, so you were probably just a kid?

19:49 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

19:50 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

19:51 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, and we formed a band called the Deacons with John Cipollina and me. And there was a little person — there's a picture of us playing at Boyle Park, and it was with Charlie Deal and me and John and Bob Burgan, who was a midget who played drums.⁶ I often wonder what became of him, but haven't seen him for years. Anyway, we played with that Deacons band but it was mostly doing blues and maybe some old rock and roll at the time, old '50s rock and roll and stuff. Yeah.

20:53: And then I went on and joined another band that was doing more ventures and kind of instrumental music and stuff. Then I formed my own band with Bill Champlin and that was called The Opposite Six. And that's where we started backing different touring artists that were coming through Marin, so I got to play behind the Righteous Brothers, and Dick and Dee Dee, and the Douvells, and the Coasters, all these people that were touring through at the time. So that was quite a thing as kids to be able to do that.

21:36 Debra Schwartz: Now how old are you?

21:38 Rob Moitoza: Well, we were in high school then.

21:40 Debra Schwartz: Wow, wow.

21:43 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. And Bill Champlin told me that years later he ran into Bill Medley, and Bill Medley actually remembered doing that gig with us because he said none of the bands knew the material as well. He said when they first walked in and saw all these kids, they were like, "Oh no. What's this gonna be?" But we had meticulously learned all the songs that they had on their albums, so we played them exactly the way they wanted.

22:14 Debra Schwartz: The Righteous Brothers?

22:15 Rob Moitoza: And they were kinda blown away. And Bill Medley evidently actually remembered that, which is pretty neat. Yeah. [laughs]

⁶ This little band with John and Bob and Charlie Deal was actually thrown together for one gig at Boyle Park. The Swingin' Deacons were Adam Fourman on piano, Rob Moitoza on bass, John Cipollina on guitar, and Steve Regalia on drums.—Rob Moitoza

22:27 Debra Schwartz: What was the name of your band that you had, your own band?

22:30 Rob Moitoza: The Opposite Six.

22:32 Debra Schwartz: The Opposite Six.

22:32 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

22:36 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever rejoin a band with John again? Cipollina?

22:41 Rob Moitoza: No, strangely enough I didn't. And I kind of in some ways wish I had. After The Opposite Six broke up, I joined the Navy because my number was coming up. The draft lottery was happening then and my number was coming up, so I joined the Navy. Then Bill Champlin went on and formed Sons of Champlin, which became pretty popular around Marin. And they're still playing here and there, now.

23:12 Debra Schwartz: He's still around?

23:13 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. Then he moved to LA and joined Chicago in, I guess late '70s, early '80s, and wrote some hit songs and did real well. Had a lot of success in the music thing. I came back from the Navy and joined up with Cold Blood, which was a rhythm and blues band with Lydia Pense — Cold Blood, and got to play the Fillmore and the Avalon and all the haunts around here. So that was a lot of fun.

23:52 Debra Schwartz: What was some of the more popular songs of Cold Blood? I remember the name but I don't —

24:00 Rob Moitoza: Most of her things were cover tunes. She did a version of "You Got Me Humming," and she did "I Just Wanna Make Love to You." And she did kind of blues-oriented, but we did it more in an R&B soul vein 'cause we had a horn section and the whole nine yards. She's still performing today too, which is interesting.

24:22 Debra Schwartz: And John Cipollina, what happened to him?

24:27 Rob Moitoza: I just remember getting back from the Navy, and walking in and seeing John's huge guitar setup, because things had changed radically in a couple years. All of a sudden, they were making great big amplifiers and big equipment. [laughs] And I remember opening for his band which he started, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and I remember opening for him at the Fillmore and — with Cold Blood. And I was up there playing, and all of a sudden John walks in, and just walks right in front of the stage and waves at me. And I hadn't seen him, I don't think, for years. That was the first time I had seen him. I went, "Wow!"

25:22 Debra Schwartz: While you're playing he's waving?

25:23 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, and so it came around in that way. But why I never played with John — probably because I went off into the soul and funk band part of it, and John was more into the blues and rock thing. So it might have just been a difference in styles of what we liked as kids, but it was fun to re-hook up just playing on the same bills and everything.

26:00 Debra Schwartz: All those years later. But he died pretty young, didn't he?

26:05 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, because he had always had lung problems. I think he had — I don't know if it's emphysema or something. He's always had problems with that. And then of course, all our years of smoking dope, and all that. I wasn't much of a dope smoker, but there was a lot of that going on, that's for sure. That certainly didn't help matters any either if you have lung problems. So I don't know if that's ultimately what took him out. What was really weird though is that later on I ended up moving to Seattle, Washington, and I heard one day that John was coming through with his — being out at that time, way past Quicksilver, he had this band called the Dinosaurs, which was a bunch of old guys still playing the blues and rock and roll. I took my card backstage and he said, "Oh, come on back," and I ended up singing a song with him or doing something onstage.

27:21: And then he invited us to come back to his hotel after the gig, and I was a little reticent. I went, "Oh God, he probably needs some rest." And my friends that I was with said, "It sounded like he really wanted you to come." I said, "Well, okay." So we go over there, we of course stay up talking all night long. And he was an amazing historian. He was telling me all this history of the Catholic Church and then this and that and all these things. I was like, "Wow, that guy." Stuff that I never knew about John because we hadn't — we'd crossed paths through the years, but we really had gone our separate ways. But what was so ironic about the thing is, then, about a few months later, I just got this feeling that I should call him. So I call him up and we had a great conversation. Two days later he died. It was almost like wow, all those years, I never talked to him that much, and then just all of a sudden, I happened out of the blue to think, "I've gotta call John." And then he dies two days later. I went, "Wow!" It was almost like it was meant to be that I was supposed to talk to him.

28:53 Debra Schwartz: Interesting.

28:54 Rob Moitoza: Pretty weird. [chuckle]

29:00 Debra Schwartz: How old was he when he died?

29:02 Rob Moitoza: I'm not really sure, I'd have to look it up.⁷

29:06 Debra Schwartz: How old were you when you called him, do you remember? And you can be vague.

⁷ John was only 45! Born: August 24, 1943. Died: May 29, 1989.—Rob Moitoza

29:09 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, I'm not real sure. I must have been, let's see — I bet you I was in my mid-40s or something, I would think, yeah.⁸

29:22 Debra Schwartz: So who were some of the other people you performed with or knew in the area that —

29:30 Rob Moitoza: Can I go back a little bit?

29:34 Debra Schwartz: Sure, just give us the time you're going back to, that helps us keep the thread.

29:39 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm thinking, when I was growing up in Mill Valley, the first rock and roll band I ever saw was called The Ram Rods, and that was with another guy who lived right down the hill named Bob Albachten, and he played keyboards.⁹ And there was another band at the time that was actually before them I guess, but I don't think I ever got to see, called The Kustom Keys, and they played downtown in what's now where the — it was a bus depot; it's a book depot now or something. And that was the first time I'd ever seen any rock and roll band or any rock and roll. I thought, "Oh! That's what I wanna do." [laughs] And then when I hooked up with John later on there were some venues down here that aren't here anymore. There was a place called Brown's Hall and it was — now it's a Buddhist temple or something.

30:55 Debra Schwartz: You mean the Old Mill, right near across — I gotta update everything — to the left of D'Angelo's Restaurant where used to be Old Brown's Store, is that it? Or is it —

31:09 Rob Moitoza: It was right up about a block from the 2 AM Club, right over there.

31:13 Debra Schwartz: Oh! Yes, I know. Okay.

31:15 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

31:15 Debra Schwartz: So I'm not aware of this.

31:16 Rob Moitoza: In between the 2 AM Club and that where Whole Foods is now.

31:20 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

31:20 Rob Moitoza: And it's —

31:21 Debra Schwartz: Alright, the Buddhist —

⁸ I was 43.—Rob Moitoza

⁹ That was 1960.—Rob Moitoza

31:23 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. I'd love to go in there sometime, maybe I'll have to go to one of their yoga nights or something just to see that place, but I'd really be curious if they still have the stage and if it looks the same inside that place.¹⁰ But that used to be our rock and roll place and my mom would drive me down there when I was 15 years old and pick me up after the gig. [laughs] And that's one of the first places I remember playing, Brown's Hall and the Outdoor Art Club down there were the two venues where I played with John Cipollina. And then when I started my own band with the Opposite Six it was mostly at the Corte Madera Recreation Center, because we knew this guy named Ed Margoliash and he was a local promoter, and somehow he had managed to contact all these touring acts that were coming through, as I say like The Righteous Brothers. And he would hire us to be the backup band. Now, how he made all those contacts in that day and age, I have no idea of it.

32:40 Debra Schwartz: I guess he let his fingers do the walking.

32:43 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

32:44 Debra Schwartz: Picked up the phone.

32:45 Rob Moitoza: I guess so.

32:46 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

32:46 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, yeah.

32:46 Debra Schwartz: That's how they used to do it back then.

32:49 Rob Moitoza: I don't know if they have any events at that — the Corte Madera Rec Center.

32:56 Debra Schwartz: I think they're still — young bands play there.

32:57 Rob Moitoza: They do?

32:58 Debra Schwartz: Yes, at least they have. I went probably 10 years ago so —

33:03 Rob Moitoza: Wow.

33:03 Debra Schwartz: I suspect, yes.

33:05 Rob Moitoza: Probably not.

33:06 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

¹⁰ I went into Brown's Hall in January 2016. It still has beautiful hardwood floors, and the old stage is still there, but it is now an "altar" for the Buddhist temple!—Rob Moitoza

33:07 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

33:08 Debra Schwartz: So, as things progressed you said you went to Seattle, but you're playing music in the '60s here locally —

33:18 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

33:19 Debra Schwartz: — and into the '70s. How do you know Huey? He was more of a '70s band.

33:26 Rob Moitoza: Who was that?

33:27 Debra Schwartz: Huey Lewis, who told me I should interview you.

33:33 Rob Moitoza: Huey was in a band called Clover.

33:36 Debra Schwartz: I remember.

33:38 Rob Moitoza: I didn't know him real well, but I knew of him; we were acquaintances I guess you'd say. And then later on he started Huey and the News.

33:52 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever play with Clover or open or —

33:54 Rob Moitoza: No. Well, we played on the same bills. I'm not even sure whom I had been playing with at that time but [laughs] — yeah, 'cause they had a place in San Rafael called the Lion's Share. It was a club that had rock bands, that's where I remember seeing Huey a lot. And Mike Finnegan, who was a keyboard player that became pretty well known, and played with everybody. Yeah there were quite a few little Marin people that ended up moving on and hooking up with various pretty well-known bands.

34:41 Debra Schwartz: Did you remember some of the San Francisco performers, Janis Joplin and Grateful Dead folk, and people that have lived over in this area?

34:52 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, I met Janis. I didn't really know her, but I met her. And Cold Blood was opening for her. I'm not sure where that gig was, but it was in some big grange hall or something, I forget. But anyway I remember opening for her and she was all freaked out about Lydia, 'cause Lydia was a really good singer, and she was like, "She is blowing me off the stage." Little did she know that her charisma and who she was was gonna make her so big. So, it wasn't necessarily about who had the best voice or something, or the best whatever — it was more about her as a person, which I think is really what the whole thing is about usually anyway. And when I look back on it now I go — it was the people like John Cipollina who were real individualists. They had a style and a thing all of their own. They weren't necessarily the best players. They might have been or might not have been, but that wasn't really as important as who that person was as a personality. 'Cause whenever you'd see John play, he was unique. You'd know he

was —

36:32 Debra Schwartz: In what way?

36:34 Rob Moitoza: Just his whole look. The way he played, he didn't really play like anyone else I can think of. I mean he borrowed from all the great blues players but his style was pretty unique, what he came up with. 'Cause I think early on I was looking to play with the best players around, but now as an old man I look back and I think, "You know what, when you use that term 'best', you've gotta be very careful [chuckle] because somebody might have a lot of technique and chops but they may not have the style and personality of the little guy that just learned by playing in bands on the street or whatever." And those are the people you remember, I think. Those are the people that go on to have a lot of success sometimes. There is very few people that just make it like Celine Dion on their voice, or what was her name? Whitney Houston. There's very few of those people. Most of the people are like Mick Jagger who if he went on *American Idol*, they would have said, "Keep your day gig. You don't have a good enough voice to be a singer." You know what I mean?

38:03 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. [laughs]

38:05 Rob Moitoza: So looking back now, I find it all real interesting. The quirky people are the ones who — and that's what I remember about Mill Valley again. There was a guy, a little guy that used to walk down the way, and I remember as kids we were kind of scared of him. His name was George. I forget his last name, but he was mentally ill. I'm not sure what his mental illness was, but he always would want to say hello to you. And so he would make it a point to cross the street — if we were walking down the street, he would walk across and he would shake your hand and he would say, "It's a nice day," and he would hold on to your hand and wouldn't let go. As kids we were kind of afraid of him, and then we got to realize that he was a sweetheart of a guy. He was just a little mentally ill guy that wanted to say hello to you. And now I wonder whatever happened to him. As an old man I guess that's where things change. You start wondering, "What was that guy really about?" As a kid, you're kind of protective and a little fearful. Now I'm going, "What was his illness? Where did he live? How did he take care of himself?" Somebody in Mill Valley may know the answers to that, I would love to know. But those are the kinds of the people that I remember, kind of unusual people that were in Mill Valley at the time.

39:46 Debra Schwartz: Who else?

39:46 Rob Moitoza: Huh?

39:47 Debra Schwartz: Who else do you remember?

39:48 Rob Moitoza: Well of course Charlie, as I had already mentioned. Being up on the hill here, as I say, we're fairly secluded, so probably the people I remember after that would have been more of my high school friends, 'cause I went to high school with

George Duke who was in my orchestra class, and he of course became a very famous producer and musician. He passed away a couple of years ago, but lots of memories of George and some of my high school friends.

40:33 Debra Schwartz: And I saw you at Charlie Kelly's — the bike guy — at his place.

40:38 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

40:39 Debra Schwartz: Did you know Charlie in school too?

40:42 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, and Charlie was the road manager for Sons of Champlin, so that's how I really got to know Charlie pretty well. And his story was real interesting because he, in high school, he and I were kind of the — my dad was very athletic and stuff, I was the opposite. I was not good at sports. And Charlie Kelly wasn't either, he was kinda klutzy. Then he went on and formed that motor — I mean that —

41:27 Debra Schwartz: Fat Tires.

41:27 Rob Moitoza: Mountain bike, I think, and became one of the leading mountain bikers. It's almost like he took that early thing to heart and went on to become a great athlete, isn't that interesting?

41:45 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. [laughs]

41:49 Rob Moitoza: That's really interesting what people have done with their lives, where they went.

41:56 Debra Schwartz: We bought his book, *Fat Tires*. And he writes inside, to my husband, "Ride it like you stole it."

42:07 Rob Moitoza: Oh, wow. [laughs] That's funny.

42:14 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. So, how about we talk a little bit about how you see the area changing as — from the town you lived in to —

42:26 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. I have a lot of kind of negative feelings about that, and that's why I'm really glad I came up here today 'cause now I'm seeing the positive. And that's good for me. I needed to see that 'cause I guess my regret is as big money moved into this area all of the original residents pretty much have moved out and there's very few left. And almost all of them have moved out because they couldn't afford to be here anymore. So that's the sad part of it, I guess. But —

43:14 Debra Schwartz: Including yourself?

43:16 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. But I'm not any less happy. I'm probably happier now than

I was when I was here. So it's not necessarily where you live that's gonna bring you any happiness in your life. It's all been good, I guess, when I look back on it now. I've lived in a lot of different places. I think the thing is — I think about, like Mill Valley used to have just a little hardware store there, Varney's Hardware, and the bus depot was a bus depot, and now it's a book place. And the little stores are now boutiques and coffee shops or something like that. Maybe I shouldn't be putting in positive or negative connotation on that. She's changed; she's changed that's all. But I guess in a way — see, I started thinking about the Walmarts and the big corporations that have taken everything over and I get kind of sad about that because I wish it was the mom-and-pop stores again or something. All of our jobs have gone overseas and blah, blah, blah. I guess the little hometown feeling is gone pretty much. But then people like you are keeping it alive because you still have a heart. [chuckles]

45:08 Debra Schwartz: Thank you. But you provided us with some of your writing here, and you write a little bit about your father's land or your grandparents' land. Maybe you could talk about what happened? I haven't read the article but —

45:27 Rob Moitoza: Well, as I say, when my grandfather moved to Marin, he bought this property in Tiburon up by the church there, and built his little house. That was the only house on that hillside and he owned the entire hillside. Well then when my grandfather died, my grandmother and my aunt didn't keep up the property taxes on the house, and by the time my dad heard about it, it was kind of too late. They had to sell off some of that property to pay the taxes.

46:17: So they sold the entire piece of property up there, that whole hillside for something like \$500,000. And the guy who bought it, subdivided into eight parcels, and sold each parcel for \$1,000,000. [laughs] And it was, I guess, the talk of the town, of the real estate community. Somehow my aunt managed to keep the life estate, so she had her little piece of property left, but that was all. So it was all these million dollar mansions around this old ramshackle house that was falling apart.

47:08 Debra Schwartz: Did she have electricity?

47:10 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

47:10 Debra Schwartz: She did.

47:11 Rob Moitoza: But see here again are the pros and cons of the thing. She had her own spring water. There's a spring there that gave her fresh water year round. The city made her hook up to the city water, and now that spring is just running down the hillside. It's just wasted. Now, to me, that was a travesty. It never should have happened but that's — things like that —

47:44 Debra Schwartz: So she passed away probably in the '90s, 1990s or —

47:49 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

47:50 Debra Schwartz: So do you have the land still?

47:52 Rob Moitoza: A what?

47:53 Debra Schwartz: Do you still have — do you occupy the land?

47:56 Rob Moitoza: We finally had to move her into a rest home because her health was getting so bad. She kept telling us her whole life she wanted us to inherit her property, but she had never signed any wills or anything, that we finally said, “Well, if you really want us to have this, then you need to put it in a trust to us or something.” “Oh yeah, I’ll do that.” And then she wouldn’t; the time would go by. And we finally said, “Look, Vera, we don’t care, you don’t have to give it to us. There’s nothing saying you need to give us your property, but if that indeed is your wish, then you need to —” And we finally managed to get the trusts and everything, and then when she was in ill health we couldn’t afford to take care of her so we decided to try to find an income property so that we could pay all the bills.

49:12 Debra Schwartz: Rents aren’t high enough on a ramshackle place, huh?

49:15 Rob Moitoza: No. And I went down and looked at it ’cause I did carpentry most of my life, and I realized to fix that place up, it just didn’t make sense. It would have been more money than it was worth. So we finally decided we had to sell it and then we looked around Marin and you couldn’t find a dog house for the amount of money we had. [laughs] You know what I mean? So we finally ended up finding this old resort up in Napa, where we’re living now, that had cabins on it that we could rent out, and that’s why we bought that place, so we could take care of my aunt. And then when she finally passed away, we inherited the Napa resort.

49:57 Debra Schwartz: So that’s where you and your two sisters live?

50:00 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

50:01 Debra Schwartz: It’s kinda nice you’re together.

50:02 Rob Moitoza: So it actually worked out fine, although you could say, well, we lost a piece of property overlooking the San Francisco Bay, up in the beautiful hills of Tiburon. But then again, see, I look at that and I go, “Yeah, but they haven’t improved the road, the two-lane road coming into that place in a hundred years,” or whatever it’s been. And now that it’s wall to wall Mercedes, inching their way in and out of that place in commuter traffic every day, and then go up to — yeah it’s a big mansion, but it’s wall to wall mansions around you. I go, “Well, would I really wanna live there?” “No, not really.” [chuckles] I don’t think so, I think we had the best of it, you know what I mean? So that’s where you have to weigh the good and the bad or progress and —

51:00 Debra Schwartz: And change and progress and all these concepts that are

rolling around.

51:03 Rob Moitoza: Yeah. So I'm not sure that it was — as I say, it's a beautiful area, but man, it's so populated and hard to get into, I don't know. I guess if I had tons of money, maybe I would, but I don't know. Would I be any happier? Probably not. [chuckle] I'm happy where I am.

51:27 Debra Schwartz: How about, if you were to think about what it is that — the fact of living in Mill Valley — what it gave to you as part of your personal growth and experience?

51:45 Rob Moitoza: Well, I don't know if we knew how good we had it up here for one thing. As kids I think we took everything pretty much for granted. And one of the things I remember — this is my kind of drifting off a little bit — but when we were playing music, we used to listen to a black station in Oakland called KDIA and that was kind of our guru music teacher.

52:31: And years later I remember, because I'd — let me back track a little bit. I had told you I grew up knowing George Duke, and we used to back up a couple of different black singers. There are quite a few different people that I remember that we backed up as the Opposite Six that were local, but I don't think I knew really how segregated this area was because George Duke lived down in Marin City, which was a whole black community that I guess had been built there as a shipyard.

53:23 Debra Schwartz: They built Marin City in, I believe, three months when they installed the shipyard during World War II to house the workers who were coming from the South to work building the ships.

53:36 Rob Moitoza: Yeah, and then that became a black community, and when I think back on it, I never was in George Duke's house and he was never in mine, and I regret that. Now, as an old man I go, "How did that ever happen?" when we were great friends, you know? But I guess it was just an unwritten word. I don't think I knew how segregated we really were, 'cause we were pretty lucky to live up here in a house on the hill, and I don't think I had any concept of that as a kid. So one day in my later years before KDIA finally went off the air, I was visiting down in the area. I had already moved to Seattle and I was visiting down here, and the first thing I would do whenever I came to the area is turn on KDIA. [laughs] And so I hear — the guy says, "The KDIA welcome wagon" or some kind of truck, their wagon, was coming around giving out albums, and they were going to be in Corte Madera.

54:54: I went, "Oh, my gosh." So I go running down there in my car. It took me all of 10 minutes maybe to get there, or 15. But by the time I'd got there, they'd already gone, because nobody was there. And that's where it hit me of how segregated we really were. There were no soul music fans in Marin. They were in Oakland then, you know what I mean? [laughs] So that hit me like a ton of bricks. It made me realize how naive we really were growing up in Mill Valley. Because in a way, my family was far from rich. We

weren't rich at all, but we lived like we were rich, I guess, and at that time you could afford to be up here on not that much money. Now, as you're finding out, you have to have quite a bit of money now just to survive around here.

55:57 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, finding alternative ways to survive.

56:02 Rob Moitoza: But I guess again, for me to put a judgment on that and say that that's good or bad, I guess you can't really do that.

56:12 Debra Schwartz: Hindsight will show us.

56:13 Rob Moitoza: Yeah.

56:15 Debra Schwartz: Well, this has been so interesting, and I hope we've covered enough of your experience, but I always close with this one question. Is there one question I haven't asked that you wish I had?

56:36 Rob Moitoza: Let me think about that a minute.

56:38 Debra Schwartz: Something we haven't talked about that you'd like to close with.

56:53 Rob Moitoza: I think, in a way, you're carrying on already what I would've wanted. [pauses for tears]

57:17 Debra Schwartz: Here you go.

57:18 Rob Moitoza: And that's just that people will take care of the area and the people in the area. I think you're doing a better job of that than maybe I would've done. So much appreciated, much appreciated.

57:36 Debra Schwartz: Thank you Rob for your time, and for your interview. I really, really enjoyed it.