

Mill Valley Oral History Program
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DICK SPOTSWOOD

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Ed Addeo in 2015**

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TITLE: Oral History of Dick Spotswood
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In this oral history, former Mill Valley City Council member Dick Spotswood gives an engaging account of a life in politics. Born in 1947, Dick situates his story within a larger family history and network of relations that stretch back to colonial Virginia on his father's side and northwest Italy on his mother's side. A San Francisco native, Dick first got into politics as president of the Young Democrats at the University of San Francisco, where he invited the likes of Bobby Kennedy and Ed Muskie to speak. In 1976 Dick moved to Mill Valley with his wife Joanne, and in 1980 he was elected to City Council. Dick recounts his time in local government and the many people he worked with, as well as his career as a writer and newspaper columnist — politics by other means — after stepping down from the City Council. Throughout this oral history Dick expresses his love for Mill Valley, which he interestingly describes as “a New England college town without the college,” telling his Mill Valley story with a keen sense for the details.

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Oral History of Dick Spotswood
January 7, 2015

Please note: This transcript has been reviewed by Dick Spotswood, who made minor corrections and clarifications.

Ed Addeo: My name is Ed Addeo. I live at 123 Alta Vista and I am interviewing Dick Spotswood who lives at 200 Magee, here in Mill Valley. Dick, give me your full name and today's date.

Dick Spotswood: Richard D. Spotswood. January 7, 2015.

Ed Addeo: What does the D stand for?

Dick Spotswood: David.

Ed Addeo: Okay. How old are you? When were you born?

Dick Spotswood: I was born March 25th, 1947, that makes me 67.

Ed Addeo: 67. Let's go as far back in your ancestry as we can. How far back do you go?

Dick Spotswood: My family in the United States comes from Virginia, and the Virginians are great genealogists. So they have traced it back somewhere into the 13 or 1400s in lowland Scotland. I know we have a relative buried at Westminster Abbey because I was at the plaque. He was the Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh, which means he was part of the English invading Army. The first Spotswood came to the United States in, I believe, 1705. That was Alexander Spotswood, who my son is named after, and my grandfather is named after. And he came the right way. When he got off the boat, hit the ground, he was the governor of Virginia. British, technically the lieutenant governor, the governor never shows up, clone of governors, a lieutenant governor. There was no governor.

Ed Addeo: That is the mid-1700s.

Dick Spotswood: 1705. And so he was the colonial governor. He was kind of an autocratic guy. A group of his discovered the Shenandoah Valley. He founded Spotsylvania County, Virginia. He had an iron works in Spotsylvania and built the governor's palace in Williamsburg, which is kind of a famous building. He had been a general in the British Army — I think he was at the Battle of Blenheim — and the reward was — he was well connected — the reward was the governor of Virginia, after basically they changed the governors, removed — and he was there for a long time. He stayed in Virginia, had the iron works. I believe in the colonial era — I'm pretty sure this is true — he was the assistant postmaster general of the colonies under the postmaster general, who was Benjamin Franklin. In Virginia, they are all interrelated, all these kind of first

families of the Piedmont region; so we are distantly related to Martha Washington, not George. The Lees, they are all, all these families —

Ed Addeo: That is Robert E. Lee?

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. But there are really 100 families like that, so the marrying options were kind of limited. So they were what they call “Tidewater Virginia” people.

Ed Addeo: So after him was?

Dick Spotswood: Oh. Well, there was John Spotswood who was a major at Valley Forge in the Revolutionary Army; though I think he was more aligned with General Horatio Gates than Washington. They were on the right side of the Revolution and they fought in the Revolutionary War. Petersburg was where they lived in Virginia. They weren't Episcopalians; I don't know if they were Presbyterians or something like that, kind of upper middle class. Eventually they became typical people like that who couldn't keep their money. They all went to college, though. My last Virginia relative was Martha, or Maddie, Spotswood. I met her, stayed with her a couple of days, actually in a hotel, but she had an old house there. She was an elderly lady. I saw her a couple of times. She was the last Spotswood of my line in Virginia. There is a whole lot of other Spotswoods out there; there are black Spotswoods out there.

Ed Addeo: Oh, really.

Dick Spotswood: They had probably worked for the —

Ed Addeo: The slaves.

Dick Spotswood: The slaves. We are also relatives to, and I belong to, something called the Friends of Peter Francisco. Peter Francisco is a relative of mine. He was quite a character, very well known. There is again a whole society about him. He was, during the Revolutionary War, a privateer, a pirate commissioned by the United States government. He was an American privateer to raid British ships. Alexander Spotswood was involved in the capture of Blue Beard, because I was on the outer banks of North Carolina and there was a monument to the group that Governor Spotswood led to capture the pirates. There is a lot of stuff out there in the states. Anyway, that is the Virginia side of the family. It has always been spelled this way since they came to the United States. There are three branches to the U.S. family; apparently they came to Albany, New York; Virginia; and Key West. I was in Key West one time — past-time sheriff and very well-known figure was a Spotswood. I walked down the street and there is a law firm: Spotswood, Spotswood, Spotswood. I wrote to the guy; he was very nice and wrote back.

Ed Addeo: Distant relatives?

Dick Spotswood: Very distant. The Petersburg, Virginia, ones were the real relatives.

Ed Addeo: Well, let's come all the way up to your grandfather and father.

Dick Spotswood: My grandfather on my father's side, who I never met, was a — he passed the bar, didn't like it, went back to school. He went to Hampden-Sydney College, and then he went back to law school and then became a lawyer. No, excuse me, started as a lawyer from Hampden-Sydney, became a mining engineer in the west. That's why he came to the west. Married a woman in California from an old Spanish family. I just got a letter from one of the Malaghs tracing it all back.

Ed Addeo: Where did he live?

Dick Spotswood: An old line, pre-statehood, Mexican side of the family. That's where the Catholics come in, on that side of the family. They were in San Luis Obispo County. They are still. Malaghs is there; the county clerk used to be Malagh; it was a big family. They were related to Carrillos, who are another early California family.

Ed Addeo: How do you spell that?

Dick Spotswood: C-a-r-r-i-l-l-o. Leo Carrillo¹ was part of that family, yeah. So that is that side. They came to California. My grandfather and grandmother met in San Francisco, got married, had two kids in San Francisco, my father and his sister, who passed away when she was 50.

Ed Addeo: Your father's name was?

Dick Spotswood: Robert Spotswood. He was a San Francisco police lieutenant, previously in the Navy twice, enlisted man, was in the Merchant Marine before the war, liked the Merchant Marine, liked going to sea. After the war, because he was a child of the Depression, he looked for a good civil service job; that's how I think he approached the police job; and he didn't want to be in an office. So he spent his whole career as a policeman.

Ed Addeo: And his sister?

Dick Spotswood: Virginia. I knew her very well. She died of open heart surgery. She had rheumatic fever as a child, died young. She worked for the military air/sea —MSTS — transport service at Fort Mason, as a civilian employee, but mostly working for MSTS.²

Ed Addeo: So now back to your mother's side of the family.

Dick Spotswood: Well, that is the typical Italian peasants coming from two places, both of which oddly spoke the same dialect.

¹ The actor.—Dick Spotswood.

² Military Sea Transportation Service.—Ed.

Ed Addeo: Her name was?

Dick Spotswood: My mother's name is Angelina Mary Centenaro Spotswood. C-e-n-t-e-n-a-r-o. Centenaro, as in centuries: they all tended to live a long time, which was true, except for my mother, who was a smoker. But my grandfather lived to be in his 90s; my grandmother lived to be in her 90s. They were from — he was from Rapallo on the coast. They spoke Genovese. They were Genovese. Liguria is another word to describe that part of the coast.

Ed Addeo: That is where Columbus was born.

Dick Spotswood: My grandmother actually was from the area inland, a city called Piacenza. It is about 30 miles, 40 miles, southwest of Milan. It is where Giorgio Armani is from. It is now a high-tech center of medical technology. I still have a cousin who is a priest there. I was just sent a YouTube video of him, the monsignor at the local cathedral. They spoke Genovese; they both did. They came to San Francisco. My grandmother was born in San Francisco, and went back to Italy when she was, like, 5, because for a lot of Italians it didn't work out, and [they] went back. She came back when she was 15 again. In between was the earthquake. She had to have her midwives swear that she was born here because all the records were gone.³

My grandfather came here in 1902 when he was, I believe, 17. He came because, in Italy, the older son got everything, and the other ones either worked for the older son or went in the military. If it didn't work out, they all had an option: go to America. It didn't work out. So all the brothers went to America except for the older brother, and they all moved to the Bay Area and got jobs. My grandfather was sitting waiting for a streetcar at the corner of Noe and Market Street on an April day in 1906 when the earth shook. The story is: He goes to work, because again, the jobs they get are with relatives, so his uncle hires him. You know how it works. His uncle hires him to work in the restaurant. So he is waiting for the streetcar to work the breakfast trade in the morning. The streetcar comes after the earthquake; it still comes. Probably a cable car. And he gets to the restaurant and it is chaos, but the fire was the bad thing.

By the next day, the fire was approaching the restaurant, and the uncle told my grandfather and his friend, "There is a big cigar case." These big glass cases of cigars where you buy cigars from. He says, "This place is going up in flames. Boys, it is worth a lot of money; take it, it is yours." So they get a horse and wagon, get all the cigars, all the stuff, load it in the wagon, take it to where they think is a safe place. So what happened? Well, the restaurant burnt down. Then what happened? A day later, the place where they brought the cigars burned down. The fire just followed it.

He got a job immediately working to rebuild San Francisco. They worked on building streetcar lines and, like lots of Italians, in the produce business. And then, like a lot of Genovese, they became scavengers, garbage collectors, which was a co-op. Nobody could own more than one share. If you had a share, you were a partner. Lots of guys were

³ They were lost in the earthquake and fire.—Dick Spotswood.

partners and you had to be a Genovese to be in that, no Luccheses, that kind of stuff, you know. Most of the people who were scavengers were pretty practical. They were all Genovese — not a slam on Genoveses, the Italian frugal people, shall we say? Their rule was that you worked hard, didn't spend your money, put what you earned in the Bank of America, bought a piece of property, paid off the property, and then repeat. If you do that in the City and County of San Francisco starting in about 1920, you are making a good decision. And that is what they all did. They didn't really even sell any of their properties. So my grandfather — he wasn't by any means a rich guy; he was a garbage man. But he owned a flat in the Marina, had an apartment house, a place in Sonoma. My cousin [and he], they had a 24-unit apartment house in Pacific Heights.

Ed Addeo: Wow.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. So that was typical.

Ed Addeo: So your mother and father inherited all that?

Dick Spotswood: Well, he had sold the apartment house. Fundamentally, I inherited it. Because I was old enough to write the papers. It always would go through the mother's side. So my parents lived at the house, you know, life estate, basically. I inherited it, and I actually, some years ago, traded it away for a commercial building in Arizona.

Ed Addeo: Wow. How did your mother and father meet?

Dick Spotswood: At a YLI dance.

Ed Addeo: YLI?

Dick Spotswood: Do you know what a YLI is? There is the YMI and the YLI. The YMI is the "Young Men's Institute" and the YLI is the "Young Ladies' Institute." They had a building on Oak Street. The YMI and YLI were Catholic youth organizations, and it was well known that this was the place to meet similar people. So they had dances and excursions, all that kind of stuff. So he met her at a YLI dance. She is from the Marina — our house is in the Marina — so she is there with all her Marina District friends.

And they get married in 1937 at St. Vincent de Paul Church in San Francisco. At first, my mother said she liked him because he was exotic. He had been in the Merchant Marine so he had been out of California. He used to sail back and forth on the old Matson Line Boat *Lurline* to Honolulu. He was a waiter. Then he did a round-the-world trip. Well, those days, just to go to Honolulu was a big deal; around the world, holy moly! The first date he took her to, to show he is a big shot, was to the St. Francis Hotel to hear the big bands in those days. The band was — a name that will ring a bell to you — Harry Owens and the Royal Hawaiians.

Ed Addeo: Oh, yeah. There is a Drake hotel?

Dick Spotswood: This is the St. Francis, on Union Square, so a big-time band in those days. They got married; he was working at, I think — might have been when he was first at U.S. Steel down in south city.

Ed Addeo: U.S. Steel?

Dick Spotswood: United States Steel Corporation.

Ed Addeo: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Dick Spotswood: Remember that? He worked there for a while. They didn't think they could have kids; the doctor said, "You can't have kids."

Ed Addeo: Oh, no kidding?

Dick Spotswood: So what happens next to him is, he is going up to Funston playground to play tennis on a Sunday, and he comes home to my mother and she says, "Is this a big deal? The Japanese attacked a place called Pearl Harbor." Well, he knew Pearl Harbor because he had been to Honolulu 15 times, 20 times. It is a big deal. And he enlists in the Navy, right away. A lot of guys did that in those days. He went to sea. He was on a destroyer, and he was a shorekeeper, and on transport ships, mostly destroyers, all in the South Pacific, which he liked. I mean, there were, you know, real stuff. It is a big war and a big navy. After the war, he came home, which of course made my mother happy and his dog, Julius, happy — he was hysterical! Then one day she doesn't feel well, and she goes to the doctor and says, "What's up?" And he says, "Well, we make mistakes. You are pregnant." So that was a couple of years after he got back, but it was the classic "baby boom" situation.

Ed Addeo: So was that you, the first baby?

Dick Spotswood: I'm the only one, yeah.

Ed Addeo: You have a sister, don't you?

Dick Spotswood: No.

Ed Addeo: Oh, your father had a sister.

Dick Spotswood: My father had a sister. I am an only child.

Ed Addeo: So you are a post-war baby.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, 1947.

Ed Addeo: Living in what neighborhood?

Dick Spotswood: The Marina, in a building owned by my grandparents. By this time, they lived in Sonoma. They bought a place before the war. My grandfather retired early, so he bought a place up there and had his garden. For most of my life until I was 15, there were two sisters — my mother had a sister — and every other weekend we'd go to Sonoma; the other weekend, her family would go to Sonoma. It was typical Italians, they were very close and on Sundays people would come over. The food was fabulous. I got along very well with my grandparents, who I knew very well. My father's father, I never met him. My father's mother, I met but she died in 1952. I was probably 5. She lived on Carl Street by Kezar Stadium.

Ed Addeo: So, what schools did you go to?

Dick Spotswood: St. Vincent de Paul for kindergarten, grammar school. Then I took the hardest test I ever had to worry about, including the bar exam. Could I get into SI?⁴ All my friends had applied. And I can remember like it was yesterday — it was a Saturday. I knew the letters were out. I opened the letter, a big thick envelope, which was a good sign, and it said I got in. I said to myself, "You know, it is going to work out from here on out." It did! I said to myself, "You got into SI; you are going to get into college; you are going to get a job. It is just going to work." And I never really worried about a test as much as I worried about that test. I think that was right.

Ed Addeo: Wow. So, after SI?

Dick Spotswood: I wanted to be an architect. I liked to draw. I always had a drawing board in my room. My parents encouraged it. But I could only draw buildings; I couldn't draw people. I was told as a kid, "You are going to be an architect someday." So when you do that, you apply to architecture school, and I got into Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. My father loved that because he loved San Luis Obispo. And Cal Poly was a good school. It turns out I wasn't really meant to be an architect. It is not just drawing. You know the building has to stay up; and that is math; that is strength in materials. It really was very difficult. It made law school look like nothing. Maybe I wasn't suited for it. And, anyway, I got out of it.

Ed Addeo: How far did you go?

Dick Spotswood: Oh, I didn't — six, no, four months. I remember the day came when — this is a good thing, this was a good story — there was an announcement in the Cal Poly Daily Bulletin they used to post up: "Today is the last day to withdraw, drop, or transfer without penalty." I read it to my roommate and he read it and then shot out of the room. Shot out of the room. Fremont Hall. And he gets back and I say, "What's that about?" And he says, "I got to get out. This is horrible; I hate this, and I didn't know I could do it. It's the last day." I said, "You got out like that?" "Yeah." So I called my parents and said, 'I want to get out.' They said, 'Do whatever you think is right.'"

Ed Addeo: Oh, good for them.

⁴ Saint Ignatius High School

Dick Spotswood: I went to the dean, Dean Haslo, a fabulous guy, and told him. He said, “That’s fine. I’ll sign the papers, but before I do, let me urge you to think about one thing first if you want to get out of architecture. There is a new field called city planning. We have a major in that. You might want to be a city planner. Think about it, I mean, you got to decide today, but it is something you could just segue into. It sounds like something that kind of fits your interests.” I said, “Thanks, but I want out.” I went over to what they called the social science department, which was political science. They were happy to take me and that was that. I had a girlfriend down there, which kept me down there for an extra year.

Ed Addeo: So you switched from architecture to political science at Cal Poly.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. And I had been involved in politics anyway. When I was at SI — good story, I got all these great stories — when I was at SI, Father Tom Reed was the principal — you didn’t go to a Jesuit high school, did you?

Ed Addeo: No.

Dick Spotswood: It is a fairly strict operation, but it is a mutual thing; everybody got it; they were happy to be there. Nobody ever left in their life, SI, voluntarily. They might have asked you to leave, something else might have happened, but you never wanted to leave. Anyway, one day, he announces we are going to have a speaker in the gym. The speaker was going to be a USF [University of San Francisco] grad — as far as he was concerned, that set that up — named Pierre Salinger, in the gym. Salinger was running for the United States Senate and it was the primary, and he spoke. Reed said, “You can’t do this everywhere; you can at a Jesuit school, you can at any Catholic school.” But at a Jesuit school particularly because they don’t answer to anybody but their own guys. “Everybody is going to be involved in this election,” he said. “You are going to learn how the political system works, the whole school. Now there are two Democrats running and there are two Republicans running. I don’t care who you volunteer for. You will volunteer for one of them.” That was pretty clear. They were not jesting when they say these things, which I thought was a great idea.

So Salinger seemed okay to me, so I volunteered for Salinger. Max Rafferty was running, was it Max Rafferty? Kuchal? I can’t remember the Republicans, but there were two Republicans.⁵ When I volunteered, they said, “A man is going to come out and bring you your walking kit to walk the precincts.” The doorbell rings. Who is the volunteer to bring me the walking kit? Father Tom Reed! He was with Salinger. San Francisco is different today. After I graduated in the early ’70s, Reed kind of retired — not completely — he is still a Jesuit, but he is not the principal anymore. He runs for the San Francisco Board of Education as a priest. Father Tom Reed S.J. running for Board of Education. He wins!

Ed Addeo: Wow, there you go!

⁵ Thomas Kuchal and Max Rafferty.—Ed.

Dick Spotswood: There you go. So I, from there, went to Cal Poly, decided Cal Poly — I got a 4.0 average one quarter at Cal Poly. I am not a 4.0 student; there is something wrong here; this is ridiculous. So I said, “I want to go to law school.” I figured I probably was going to go to USF. I had a lot of friends at USF. I transferred to USF. I spent the last two years at USF getting my degree in political science, but doing two other things which were very formative to me. One, I was very active in the Young Democrats at Cal Poly, and I was the president of the Young Democrats at USF. I was very active with the school radio station, which was a big deal at the time, KUSF, which is an activity, really. I had a show and did all sorts of stuff, so those were multiple social groups. I was interested in politics and San Francisco is a good place to do it. So the way I did it was I invited speakers to come to USF and got to know them: George Moscone, Leo McCarthy, you name it, we invited them and they usually came. We even invited — which was a tremendous opportunity in college — we invited Bobby Kennedy in 1968, and he came. April of '68. And it was an incredible experience. He was controversial at the time. Oh, no, excuse me, that was April of '68, he was kind of controversial running against Eugene McCarthy for president.

Ed Addeo: Wasn't '68 the year he was killed?

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, yeah. There was very little security. We had a couple of cops block off Golden Gate Avenue, which was a mob of people, and he had his own personal security, Rafer Johnson, but there was no real security. He was killed — I remember when he was shot I was at the Kennedy headquarters at the old California Hall on Larkin Street. I was watching the television. Most people — they were running credits — they thought the election night was over.

That fall, we were on a roll. We had Ed Muskie — was vice presidential nominee with Humphrey, running against Nixon at USF. We invited Muskie to come to USF — Catholic school, urban area, might be good. Well, he came, and I was asked to introduce him because I was the president of Young Democrats. “You are the guy; we want a student; you'll be good; he'll like it.” “Great, I'll do it.” And the way they arranged it was I would meet Muskie at the Fairmont Hotel, ride in the car with him to USF to brief him, and we had a reception really for the faculty, as they wanted, and then he would go out and speak and I'd introduce him for the speaking engagement, and then he'd leave. The place was packed, a mad house. It was a tremendous experience.

I went to the Fairmont Hotel and the next thing I know I am sitting alone in the lobby. The room is empty. By this time, the security is tight because Kennedy has been assassinated. Muskie and the security team sweeps out; a guy motions to me; I get in the car. We drive down California Street; all of California Street is closed off. Cops everywhere; they are doing the thing like that. For a guy who is 21 years old, riding down in a limo with the vice presidential nominee, briefing him with the street closed and the sirens — all this shit, it didn't get better than that! In fact, I'm not sure it ever got better than that. We pull up and there are thousands of people. I remember getting out of the car and all the cameras are going off. “This is great. I love this shit!” That kind of sucked you into this stuff. It was just a great experience. It was a great opportunity. I was very lucky.

I was in the right place at the right time and I kind of made the opportunity, but I, you, had to be in the right place at the right time.

Ed Addeo: Right. So by this time, you are interested in politics, but you are also going to law school, right?

Dick Spotswood: No, this was undergraduate.

Ed Addeo: Oh, this was USF undergraduate.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. Then I took a break for a year to go in the Army because I was going to get drafted if I didn't. So I joined the fightin' 91st division at Fort Cronkhite, California.

Ed Addeo: What year was that?

Dick Spotswood: That was 1969. I graduated in '69, took a year off. I was fortunate; I didn't have a job, but in the middle of that year, since I was now already getting involved in politics, knowing people, I was invited to be a staffer for a member of the Board of Supervisors' campaign, a man named Roger Boas, who was incumbent supervisor and who was challenged.⁶ So I worked for Roger, doing the rounds, doing all that stuff with him, meeting a lot of people. And he managed to pull it off. Just before the election, I get a phone call from my mother. I am at the Sailors' Union of the Pacific down on Fremont Street, and somebody said, "Dick, your mother is trying to reach you." Okay, I get home. "What is it?" She says, "There is a letter here. It is from the Army. Should I open it?" "Yeah." "You got to be in Fort Knox, Kentucky, on this day," right after the election. And I said, "Oh shit. I guess I got to do it." Okay. I knew it was coming; I just didn't know when. I walked out and the first guy I saw was Bert Feinstein, Diane's late husband, and he said, "Spotswood, you don't look too good." I said, "I just got told I'm going into the Army." He said, "Oh, my God!"

So after the election, Roger won and I went to Fort Knox, served six months at Fort Knox, just basic training, you know; spent six years in the reserves, Ft. Cronkhite, Ft. Ord. Came back — that was out of the way — started law school at USF; played politics at the same time. I think I had been appointed to the Democratic Central Committee somewhere — oh, I had a summer job. Once again, I started meeting people. I was out there. "You want to work for the Central Committee, run the voter registration drive?" "Sure, it is a paid job." And after that they said, "You want to be on the Central Committee?" It wasn't a big deal in those days. "Sure, I'll do it." I ran, got reelected. So I did that for a few years; got out of law school.

Ed Addeo: Okay, so now you are back from the Army, you go to law school.

⁶ In the recording, Dick misidentified the politician he worked for as Dorothy von Beroldingen. While reviewing the transcript he recalled that it was in fact Roger Boas who he worked. The transcript reflects Dick's correction.—Ed.

Dick Spotswood: Got out of law school; need to pass the bar. Good advice from George Moscone. I was having dinner with him because we were volunteering. He says, “Bar exam, do this: Take the bar exam review course, study.” We had a group. “The night before the exam, set yourself a goal, six o’clock, then stop, have a good dinner, don’t have much to drink, go to bed early, don’t ever study again. Don’t cram through the night. Relax. Do it, come home, repeat, relax. You have to look something up? Keep it to 15 or 20 minutes. Just be relaxed or otherwise too much pressure and you can snap.” It was good advice. I passed. Needed a job, thought I had a job planned, promised from a politician but it did not work out. Long story, but it didn’t work out. So I said, “I got to find a job.” The only thing I didn’t want to do was look for a job. So I go to the phonebook; most people start with A, some people start with Z. I opened the book at the middle and started with J. Who starts with J? So I wrote 10 resumes, did them individually those days, and within three or four days, I got a couple calls. One from a guy wasn’t much of an offer, and the other was from a guy named Milt Jacobs, who said, “Come on down and I’ll interview you.” It didn’t pay a lot, but if I did certain kind of stuff I got bonuses, which is now, in retrospect, an extremely generous formula because it worked out very well. I took the job from Milt Jacobs and I had only been looking for a week. And I didn’t want to look. He was a nice guy.

Ed Addeo: How old were you now?

Dick Spotswood: 27. Oh, and right after I passed the bar, well, I studied for the bar in ’73, and I got married in ’73. So when I got married, I was not a member of the bar. I had graduated from law school, the election took place, got married the 10th, and we go to Europe on our honeymoon.

Ed Addeo: Okay, this is a good place to talk about Joanne, then, Joanne Peterson.

Dick Spotswood: Joanne Peterson. She is introduced to me on a New Year’s Eve date by friends of ours, Dori and Greg Ryken — just went away with them last weekend. And she is living on Clay Street. And you know, that was New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, January 1, 1973. And we were engaged like four, five months later, and planning to get married November 10th. That’s what we did. I worked for Supervisor Dorothy von Beroldingen through Election Day, the 2nd or 3rd, got married on the 10th, and a couple of days later we go on our honeymoon to see my relatives in Italy, and go to other places, England, France.

And we were in Paris at the little Family Hotel, bathroom down the hall. So Sunday morning, I get up to go to the bathroom and there are two telegrams under the door. Hmm. First one I open is from my friend, Tom Gille, which says, “Congratulations, counselor.” The second one is from my parents saying, “You passed the bar exam!” We went to Notre Dame for mass that Sunday, and I said, “Now we can use the credit card,” because I thought I would have a job. We get back, turned out the job had failed, so that’s when I looked — the politician let me down — so that’s when I looked for a job, and got one with Jacobs. I have been associated with him for 42 years.

Ed Addeo: So your first job went for 42 years.

Dick Spotswood: My last, yeah. A good lead!

Ed Addeo: You became a partner.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, yeah. It was a small operation, you know, me and Milt. His father-in-law had worked with him before and he retired. And then we had another guy that worked with us, and we moved and we grew and had other people work for us, you know. Greg Ryken joined us and Rich Winnie and Don Casper and we just had a big operation, by our standards, a big operation.

Ed Addeo: Are you living in San Francisco?

Dick Spotswood: Until 1976. When I was in the Army, a couple of us discovered that the Army rules required the Army to let us off on Sunday morning if we wanted to go to church because they didn't have a church on post — its in the regs. So we said, "Great!" So we actually went to church and then went to breakfast, certainly made it a better deal. So often we went to church in Mill Valley, because we were at Fort Cronkhite. So we would drive around after, get our coffee and donuts, look at this town. We were San Franciscans, but it was pretty exotic for a San Francisco guy. The same with Sausalito. So that looked pretty good.

So Joanne and I had decided we wanted to buy a house. We had been married a couple years and wanted to buy a house. I checked Mill Valley and she liked it, so we finally decided we had enough money to kind of just buy a place in those days. And it was between two places, a place on Magellan Avenue in San Francisco, which would have been a pretty good buy too, and this place in Mill Valley. And we decided Mill Valley; let's try something new. The first house we looked at was too expensive and we made a bid but it fell through, and it was crazily expensive; it was \$110,000. It is now — God knows what it is worth — it is on Coronet. So the place we got came up and we either got it for \$88,000 or \$92,000.

Ed Addeo: What was that address?

Dick Spotswood: 200 Magee Avenue.

Ed Addeo: Oh, 200 Magee is your first house in Mill Valley?

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, the first one we bought. The only one we ever bought.

Ed Addeo: And the one you live in now.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. So moved in there, got it in '76. And Alex — Beth came along in '78.

Ed Addeo: Your son, Alex.

Dick Spotswood: In '83.

Ed Addeo: And Beth.

Dick Spotswood: Was born in '78. I had been involved in San Francisco politics, and I had been on some minor things — I was on the Central Committee, was very active — and it kind of looked like I would be getting involved in San Francisco politics. When I moved I said, “That is the end of that.” I know five people in Mill Valley, one of which was Kathleen Foote, and her then-husband Don Rubenstein. You know, I immediately joined the neighborhood association because I am a joiner, and I am in this association for a year and the president takes a leave; there's nobody else wants to be the president, so I am the president for a year; and I start to meet people. I knew Foote and Rubenstein; they introduced me to people. You know — hard to believe — I moved in '76 at a time when it was really much more fixed here, and in '80 I was elected.

Ed Addeo: To the City Council.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah.

Ed Addeo: This is when you and I first met. I worked on your campaign.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, yeah.

Ed Addeo: That was in 1980, first elected to City Council.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah, April. I knew John Jaeger, who was running too. I had been introduced to him, and our kids had gone to the zoo a couple times together. I knew him real well, but he had encouraged me to run, he had encouraged me.

Ed Addeo: Now you were the last person to serve more than two terms in Mill Valley.

Dick Spotswood: I was, I was.

Ed Addeo: Three terms.

Dick Spotswood: Three terms. When I was on the City Council, I had — after two years, a long Mill Valley story — I was elected as a director of the Golden Gate Bridge. I represented all of the 11 cities of Marin County on the Bridge District, which is a big appointment. That was a time when the council was me, Jaeger, Flora Praszker, Joan Boessenecker, and Doug Binderup. So I announced, “I am going to run for the seat on the Bridge board.” At the mayor's and council meeting, only Jaeger showed up to support me. Praszker may have; she was just flaky, and didn't show up to these meetings. But Boessenecker and Binderup, they were not happy; but to vote against me would have

been, basically, would have started a war in Mill Valley. They couldn't do that, so they just kind of had no comment. Fortunately I had extremely good relationships with the council members in most of the other cities.

And so I run against a guy from Corte Madera, Jim Dunn — he later became very helpful to me. They called the roll. There had been an error, in those days, at the mayor's and councilmen meetings, typical. They print the letterhead up, and they forget one town. There are 10 town names in the letterhead. It is always the same town they forget, and they are so paranoid; it's crazy. Novato is not on the letterhead! So that night, the big vote comes up; we have been working it for a month, trying to get all the towns. You vote by delegation. If one guy shows up, you cast a vote. If all five show up, you got to take a vote among yourselves, you know. So they call the roll and I have five votes, Dunn has four votes, one town is tied; Fairfax, two-two. So it is a pass. But you got to get six votes to win. I had five, Dunn has four, one ties, and for a second they say, "That's it, we are going to need a runoff."

And for a moment there is a buzz in the room and somebody else, "We forgot Novato." Oh shit, they got to call Novato. They are just sitting there, one guy sitting there by himself,⁷ and he sits next to a friend of mine, who is a councilman from Belvedere, chairman of the Republican Central Committee, named Dick Boesel; and he turns to Boesel and says, "I don't know either of these people, what should I do?" Boesel says, "Vote for Spotswood." And Turner says, "Novato votes for Spotswood." That is six votes. And that was a big deal. I wasn't so much worried about getting off City Council; but I didn't want to leave the Bridge District. The two-term tradition, there was a tradition; it probably wasn't as hard as it was now, but there was a tradition. What I did basically was call everybody I knew in Mill Valley that I thought could object and I said, "What do you think?" starting with Jean Barnard. And they said, "Go for it, we will support you." So I said, "Well, I am going to do it," and I did. There was no opposition; nobody raised an issue, because I talked to everybody who could have. And so I did, but they made it clear, three is the limit! And so that is what happened.

Ed Addeo: Now in 1980 when you were first elected, Mill Valley was kind of a different town then. What was the big issue?

Dick Spotswood: Development.

Ed Addeo: Development?

Dick Spotswood: Sure. God, I'm trying to remember her name, the planning commissioner, she was down there by Camino Alto, you will know her, Helen — she was close to Boessenecker. I am trying to remember her name now; it will come to me. And she and Weiss were on the planning commission, John Weiss, the architect — a little bit of the Bob Burton days — they were very much open to much more development around here in Mill Valley. I was not, and I think it is fair to say that the folks supporting me were not. The feeling was that city manager Vern Hazen was supportive of more

⁷ Hugh Turner.—Dick Spotswood.

development. That whole bridge over Sycamore Avenue — you talk about a lot of issues in the campaign, but if there was a division in the community, that was probably the last gasp until Plan Miller Avenue — Precise Plan — the last gasp when there were any real pro-development feelings in Mill Valley. When I won, and then Kathleen Foote won, and the other guys were kind of in retreat, that stopped. And it became not acceptable. Doug Dawson became the city manager. He understood that the majority was opposed to it; and even Hazen, when he was city manager, I remember I came in and talked to him one time when I was first elected and he said, “We got to work together to stop this thing.” And I said, “Vern, I thought you were for that.” He says, “I am for whatever the majority of the council wants, that is the city manager’s job.” I said, “Wow, damn!”

Ed Addeo: That’s good.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. We had a very good group. There was a little strain there for a while with Boessenecker and Binderup. I will say that when I ran for the third term, and I’m sure you remember this, Boessenecker — I was trying to show [that] everybody could get along. As you may recall, you and Joan weren’t that close, and I had asked you and her to be my co-chairmen. And everybody says, “I don’t know if they’re speaking to each other.” I said, “That’s the last thing I am worried about; it was symbolic that this could happen.” And she said yes. I am not sure she did much, but it was a good sign that the divisions were going away. I think that there was certainly a period when Dawson was city manager that there really was a feeling of cohesion in the town. There was not a divergence of opinions as to the directions of the community. We did have excellent city management. The council brings the city management.

Ed Addeo: Yeah, Vern Hazen was good, and Dawson was good.

Dick Spotswood: No. Vern Hazen was good, Dawson was excellent. We are back to good again.

Ed Addeo: Yeah. Good, good. Okay, well that brings us to the present day.

Dick Spotswood: It does. I was very blessed. When I left the City Council I wanted to stay active and one way I did it was joining Rotary. I thought that would bring me into town because I was still commuting to work in the city. The other thing was I was very blessed that I had been on the advisory board for KRBC television. I suggested to them that they start doing election night programming, and they said, “Let’s do it.” We made that happen; this will be our 22nd year, we just finished, I guess.

Ed Addeo: You have kept your finger in Marin politics with your column.

Dick Spotswood: Well, I was blessed. Paul Anderson, as you know, owned the *Scope*⁸. His daughter Jill Anderson was in the same class as my daughter at St. Patrick’s and they knew each other very well. So I was having dinner with him one night at the Chamber of Commerce and I said, “You know, you ought to have me write a column.” He said, “Send

⁸ Marinscope Community Newspapers.—Ed.

me four column samples.” I sent him four. He said, “I like three of the four; let’s do it.” I said, “What’s the one you didn’t like?” He said, “It was on big time politics. We can buy those easily, any newspaper can. What I want is local. And the other three were all local, so I would like you to do a local column.” I said, “It has to be in all the *Scope* papers; I don’t want to just write for the *Mill Valley Herald*.” He said that will be the deal, every *Scope* paper.

Then for various reasons I started writing for the *Novato Advance*, which was a separate column. J.J. Jansen was the editor there and he said, “I want to convince them Novato is in Marin County.” Then a guy, somebody, after JJ left, went to the *IJ*, and after a couple of months, I went up to him and said, are you interested in restarting there? I just got a scoop on them and they said yes. So that was, that has been —

Ed Addeo: That was when I joined the *Scope* as the executive editor.

Dick Spotswood: Yeah. I have now written 535 Sundays for the *IJ*, because they are numbered. Then a year and a half ago, I started going twice a week.

Ed Addeo: Yeah, that’s right, Wednesdays.

Dick Spotswood: So people always say to me, “Do you miss politics?” I think to myself, “What are they talking about?”

Ed Addeo: You are not out of it.

Dick Spotswood: I know. But people say that all the time.

Ed Addeo: Yeah. And now your best fans are the bicycle coalition.

Dick Spotswood: They love me; they love me. I had lunch with the editor of the *IJ* over Christmas.

Ed Addeo: For the record, we are saying this with our tongue in our cheek.

Dick Spotswood: Yes. I had lunch with the editor of the *IJ*, I said, “Is there anything you want me to do different?” He said, “Nothing. Do what you are doing, perfect. You are getting more hits on the website than anybody else.” You know, as you know, all they care about is readership; they want people to read it and if people read it, you can say whatever you want. I have never been censored.

Ed Addeo: That’s good.

Dick Spotswood: And I can say I was never censored in *Scope*, I was never censored at the *IJ*. And there was one controversial column I wrote before an election day in Novato, which for some reason due to a glitch didn’t make that in the paper, and I regard that as questionable.

Ed Addeo: Yeah. Okay, anything else you think we missed?

Dick Spotswood: I still love Mill Valley.

Ed Addeo: Absolutely.

Dick Spotswood: When I write about something in the paper, I fundamentally ask myself two questions. “How is this going to impact Mill Valley?” And second, “What would I have done, when I criticize somebody, if I was the elected official in their place?” I think that is fair, because you ought to have your own answer. “It’s bad” isn’t good enough. “It’s bad, and here is what we should do instead,” is necessary.

Ed Addeo: Right. How is Mill Valley different than when you first came here?

Dick Spotswood: I went to the police department two weeks ago, talked to a man who had been there a long time — I’m doing a thing on cameras, police body cameras. He was talking about the old days. He says, “Well, it has changed a lot.” Basically what he was saying was that you have a new group of people in town who feel very entitled. They are wealthier people, better educated, not very grounded in local organizations, sometimes younger, and very demanding. They don’t see it as a two-way street where you give back to the community; they are just demanding. They spend a lot of money for a house and they want everything done their way. That is a difficult situation. We didn’t have that. I think we had more of a communal feeling and it was more of a mixed, broader town with — I don’t want to say poor — but working-class people, middle-class people, wealthy people who felt a commitment to the community. People like Dick Jessup who didn’t flaunt money — went to Princeton, was an Olympian, but you didn’t know it, [he] drove a kind of battered-up car. And that’s missed. As you become more wealthy, you lose that. It is a very attractive place, it is understandable from supply and demand; it is just a factor of change.

Ed Addeo: Yeah. Jean Barnard used to say that the biggest enemy that Mill Valley has is the automobile.

Dick Spotswood: Well, that’s true, but what are you going to do? I always thought Mill Valley — the best description that I used to understand the politics of Mill Valley: It’s a New England college town without the college. You get a lot of professors and people who think that way, who are very open. It is New England because they tend to be frugal. They don’t mind spending public money but they want to spend properly. They don’t want to spend foolishly. “So we are willing to help the library, but you better be tough when you are doing your budgeting. We want to have good parks, but let’s not get crazy.” So they want the service, but they are not like San Francisco. A lot of places, no government, we are against government. San Francisco, spend all you can spend, the more money, the better. Mill Valley guys are in between, they want the service but they are pretty frugal when it comes to the money.

Ed Addeo: Okay, well, thank you Dick.

Dick Spotswood: A pleasure.