

Mill Valley Oral History Program
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley
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GARY YOST

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2016**

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In this oral history, filmmaker and visual storyteller Gary Yost recounts a life of openness to the opportunities that arise, devotion to Mount Tamalpais as his spiritual home and creative muse, and commitment to a place-based though temporally-extended sense of community. Born in 1959 in Bergen County, New Jersey, Gary left the East Coast at the age of 19, driven westward by an especially intense winter spent in Boston. He settled in San Francisco, where in 1978 he met his wife, Sondra. In this oral history he recalls the first time they came over together to Marin to go hiking on Mt. Tam and the paradise he felt that he had found. Gary describes how he got interested in microcomputing in the early 1980s and became a successful graphics software designer. After selling his company in 1997, he and Sondra moved over to Mill Valley, and Gary began a three-year period of heavy hiking on Mt. Tam that led to his volunteering as a fire lookout on the East Peak. Gary recounts how he got back into photography — the passion of his youth — when daughter Ruby started kindergarten at Greenwood School, and how by the late 2000s he was yearning to make a film expressing his love for Mt. Tam. He discusses in-depth the making of his first film *A Day in the Life of a Fire Lookout* as well as *Invisible Peak* and *Song of the Last Place* from his West Peak trilogy. Throughout this oral history Gary shares his wisdom on being present to life, the experiences of individual finitude and deep-time, the mystery and joy of creativity, and the value of family and community.

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Oral History of Gary Yost
May 25th, 2016

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

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Hello, hello. Okay, we are on. Today is May 25th, 2016. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm sitting here with Gary Yost, a visual storyteller. Gary, first of all, I'd like to say thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me. Today, I'm here on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library oral history program, and we are very, very pleased to have you include your story in our oral history collection.

0:00:36 Gary Yost: Thank you for inviting me to share my story.

0:00:40 Debra Schwartz: A lot of people have heard of you already, or have seen you and some of the things that you've created and you've made about Mount Tamalpais.

0:00:51 Gary Yost: That's because I have been making films about Mt. Tam for the past five years, and they've been widely seen around the county and around the world, actually. I've been obsessed with the mountain for over 30 years.

0:01:08 Debra Schwartz: Well, thank you for sharing our mountain with others to enjoy. Why don't we start with a little bit about you and your family. Can you tell me about yourself? Tell me about your people. Where do you come from?

0:01:26 Gary Yost: I come from a lineage of Polish and Latvian Jews who emigrated to the United States two generations back, and they landed in New York City, and stayed in New York City. And both my mother and father, Irving and Shirley, were born in Manhattan — my father in southern Manhattan, my mother in Hell's Kitchen — and they were the youngest of eight children. Both were from Reform families and they both rejected their Reform upbringing to become agnostic Jews, and maybe that was one of the reasons why they were attracted to each other. They married in, I think, 1947, and moved to New Jersey — Bergen County, New Jersey — in the mid-1950s, and I was born in 1959 in Bergen County. My mother's father Jacob was a bootlegger and an inventor, and during Prohibition he supplied at least the local police precincts in Manhattan to his neighborhood with hooch, and he invented a bunch of just odd little time-saving things that I don't think ever went anywhere. They were always starving. And my father's father died when my father was very young, of tuberculosis.

0:03:19 Debra Schwartz: That's East Coast, you're over here. What facilitated your migration?

0:03:29 Gary Yost: I got tired of the weather. There was a winter on the East Coast. I happened to be living in Boston the winter of 1977, 1978. I think it was January of 1978 that a nor'easter of epic proportions moved into the Massachusetts, Connecticut and New

York area, shut down Boston for a week and by the time Boston had re-opened, I vowed that I wasn't going to spend another winter on the East Coast. I was 19 years old. And one of my two older sisters was living in San Francisco, and I called her up one day and asked her if I could crash on her floor. So I took a bus from the downtown Port Authority bus terminal across the country, got sick on the bus, but managed to make it to San Francisco, where I crashed on my sister's floor and fell in love with San Francisco instantly, vowing only to return to the East Coast if I absolutely had to, but under duress.

0:04:51 Debra Schwartz: It was love at first sight.

0:04:53 Gary Yost: I never wanted to leave. This city got its arms around me very, very quickly. And then soon after that, within six months of that, I met the woman who eventually became my wife of 34 years. And when we could borrow somebody's car, we would drive up here to Marin County and she would take me up to Rock Spring, and we would go hiking on the Rock Spring trail to Cataract Falls. And that was my first exposure to Mt. Tam. I'll never forget going up Pantoll Road, around the turn at Spartan Point where it looks like you're on the edge of the world, and looking out over the ocean at the Farallones and getting that feeling that I had truly arrived in paradise.

0:06:00 Debra Schwartz: I was going to ask you, what was your first impression of San Francisco but I think I just got it, [chuckles] the first, really, moment where it really captured your complete heart and soul.

0:06:13 Gary Yost: Yeah, you did.

0:06:14 Debra Schwartz: So you're living in San Francisco. What part of San Francisco was it?

0:06:20 Gary Yost: I started out at a little place on Elizabeth Street in the Castro, and I ended up living on Willard Street near Parnassus. When I met my wife, my wife at the time was a devotee of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Sannyasin Cult, I guess you could say.

0:06:50 Debra Schwartz: Did she live in — what was the name in the Oregon — ?

0:06:55 Gary Yost: Oh, this is way before Rajneesh moved to Oregon. So this is 1978 when I met her, and I don't think he moved to Oregon 'til 1982.

0:07:04 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, so she was a Sannyasin.

0:07:06 Gary Yost: So she was a Sannyasin, and I had been taking a photography course at the University of California Berkeley Extension about photo journalism and one of the assignments in the course was to create a coffee table book about a subject. And cults were big in San Francisco in the late '70s, the Jonestown people were happening and the Moonies and the —

0:07:41 Debra Schwartz: The ESTies, I call them.

0:07:42 Gary Yost: Certainly, yeah, EST was big, and the 3HO people and —

0:07:48 Debra Schwartz: Even the Moonies.

0:07:49 Gary Yost: Krishna.

0:07:50 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, Krishnas.

0:07:51 Gary Yost: Krishnas.

0:07:52 Debra Schwartz: Reverend Moon.

0:07:53 Gary Yost: Yeah, the Moonies were big. So that was a big thing, and I asked my brother-in-law, I said, “Who are the most flamboyant cult members in San Francisco because I want to take some pictures?” And he said, “Oh, definitely the Rajneesh Sannyasins.”

0:08:09 Debra Schwartz: Certainly the most beautiful. Their colors.

0:08:11 Gary Yost: Yeah, their ochre robes and things. And so, I found out where their meditation center was, which was on the corner of 24th Street and Douglas in Noe Valley, and I made an appointment to visit on a celebration day that they were having. And I went over there and photographed a number of them, just very interesting people. And I met the woman who eventually, after four or five years, became my wife and we’ve been married all these years. So I kind of never really left. And we went to India together and I ended up being the lighting designer for an offshoot of the Royal Shakespeare Company that had all become Sannyasins under the guidance of Terence Stamp and —

0:09:09 Debra Schwartz: Terence Stamp, the actor?

0:09:11 Gary Yost: The actor, yeah. He was part of the RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company] and then he brought over his friends. They formed a company at the ashram and they traveled around India and their lighting designer became pregnant. And when you joined the ashram you filled out a form about what your talents were and I said, “I can take pictures and I can do lighting design.” And so, they tapped me on the shoulder at the end of a Vipassana group and said, “Come with us,” and “Our lighting designer is pregnant. She can’t do *Twelfth Night*.” They’d just finished doing *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and I got enlisted to light an RSC spin-off production of *Twelfth Night* and traveled around that part of India, which was one of the wonderful experiences of my life, really. I wanted to stay with them, but my wife and her daughter, who was seven at the time, were not well after six months in India. It took a toll on them and we came back, and that’s when I started to study what became microcomputers and ways of making images with small, affordable, just available computer systems. So at that time we came back to San Francisco. I started doing IT-related things at law firms to make money, and I

had some health problems which led me to take — I had to take a bunch of time off. And during that period of time off I felt like I wanted to use that recuperative period to increase my skills about micro-computers. So this is —

0:11:11 Debra Schwartz: And this is what year now?

0:11:12 Gary Yost: 1982, by this time. And so, I thought, “Okay, who’s making microcomputers that are interesting?” And I did some research and of course the Apple II was shipping at that time, but also Atari had just begun shipping something called the Atari 800, which was a Motorola processor-based microcomputer similar to the Apple II, but they had dedicated graphics chips in them and they had more graphics potential than the Apple II, so I called up 411 Information.

0:11:54 Debra Schwartz: Oh, some people may not even know what 411 Information is.

0:11:57 Gary Yost: Yeah, right. Actually if you’re in a different area code, it was 555-1212. So, it was 408, because it was down in Sunnyvale, 555-1212, and you’d get an operator who asked you what information you wanted and I said, “I need the number for Atari.” They gave me the corporate number, I called up and I asked the receptionist what the name of the CEO was. At the time it was Raymond Kassar, and I asked her what the address was and I wrote him a letter with paper — it was pre-email — and I told him that I had this recuperative period — I gave him some of my experience playing around with microcomputer software. And I mentioned that I would be happy to test things for Atari and just provide feedback from an end user’s perspective.

0:12:54: And then, three or four weeks later, I got a little envelope in the mail with the Atari logo embossed on it. I never expected really to get anything back, but I opened it up and he told me that I had just become a grantee with the Atari Institute for Educational Action Research, which was an arm, a non-profit arm of Atari that was dedicated to finding ways that their microcomputers could be used to extend educational capabilities. And in this case, they were working with Control Data Corporation on a way of emulating a very expensive graphics terminal called the Cyber PLATO terminal, so people could use mainframe computers remotely, and in this case, on very inexpensive Atari computers. And I’ve worked with the Atari Institute — they basically gave me all of the computers and peripherals that they make, and I tested this Cyber PLATO Terminal Software Emulator package for them and gave feedback on various aspects of the design of the emulation.

0:14:09 Debra Schwartz: Were you surprised when you get this letter in the mail that says, “Here is a bunch of technology and some money, go to it.” Were you surprised?

0:14:17 Gary Yost: Surprised is a big understatement. I think I let out a series of whoops and then ran into the other room to show Sondra and sat down dumbfounded for a while, not really being able to grasp how lucky I was that this man, Ray Kassar, turned my life around. And so during this period where I wasn’t working, I was just

recuperating, I got very familiar with that kind of technology and eventually asked some of the people at Atari if they'd introduce me to anyone in San Francisco, because I was still living in San Francisco. And they introduced me to a man named Jim Capparell, who was publishing an Atari-related magazine out of Potrero Hill, his apartment in Potrero Hill. The magazine was called *Antic*. And I started going down there, and it was great to talk to somebody else who really was enthusiastic about the technology. Eventually, he offered me a job, which turned into being the marketing director of this small publishing company, and they moved into an office on Second and Bryant Streets at South Park in San Francisco, and that was probably late 1983 when they moved into those offices. And by early 1984, I was working out of this office on Second Street.

0:15:51 Debra Schwartz: So you're now how old? You were born in —

0:15:55 Gary Yost: I was born in '59, so I was 25.

0:15:58 Debra Schwartz: You're young.

0:16:00 Gary Yost: Yeah, I was. Computers —

0:16:00 Debra Schwartz: Computers and technology — they didn't really teach anything about computers back then in school. Had you gone to college?

0:16:07 Gary Yost: No, actually. I kind of skipped that.

0:16:12 Debra Schwartz: Did you skip high school, too?

0:16:13 Gary Yost: Most of it. I did go to high school for two-and-a-half years.

0:16:18 Debra Schwartz: Did you graduate?

0:16:18 Gary Yost: I did graduate. In my high school, we had what was called a modular system of credits. And if you took one summer of English and one summer of History, you could get out of school at the end of your junior year. But since your junior year was considered your senior year at that point, you're also eligible for a work-study program for the last semester of senior year, which I took advantage of by being an intern assistant to the assistant editor at a video editing facility in New York City, which was just across the river from where I lived, a place called Harvey's Place on 5th Avenue and 57th Street. So, I started working as an assistant to the assistant video editor when I was essentially a junior in high school, and I did that job for six months, because I wanted to be a filmmaker back then. I had taken film production courses in high school, and my dad had given me an old 8mm Bell & Howell movie camera when I was maybe 10, and I discovered that if you pressed the shutter button up, you would be able to just take a frame, you'd expose a frame. And so, you could do stop motion animation that way and of course I was a big fan of Ray Harryhausen and all those crazy stop motion animations he had done.

0:17:55: And I just did a bunch of claymation and little object animation when I was a kid. And actually time-lapsed footage in kind of a crude way when I was 10, 11, 12 years old and my dad was — he was happy that I was so interested in it. He had a Leica Rangefinder that he bought in the 1940s. And he bought me an inexpensive SLR Petri FTEE when I was, I think, a seventh grader, when I was in seventh grade. He built a darkroom in the bathtub of one of the two bathrooms in our house when I was in seventh grade with me. I started bulk loading Tri-X film and my parents were very liberal with me and they allowed me to take the bus into Manhattan every weekend when the weather was nice. I would go there with my buddy, Tony Carlson, and we would just wander around different neighborhoods of Manhattan and shoot rolls of film and then come home and develop them and print them.

0:19:09: And one day, this is when I was in seventh grade or eighth grade, maybe it was eighth grade, on Good Friday, which must have been a holiday, we were in midtown and there was a church being destroyed on 42nd Street between 8th and 9th Avenue — it's kind of on the west side of 42nd Street — and I took a bunch of pictures of it. There was interesting light being cast on the mural of Jesus on the back wall but it was all rubble on the foreground. And I entered that picture in our local newspaper snapshot competition. It ended up winning third place in the Kodak International Newspaper Snapshot Competition, which had maybe 80,000 entries in it. I was an eighth grader and my photograph was blown up and shown at the Kodak Gallery on Park Avenue in Manhattan, and it toured around the world in a show, and it was on TV. I remember one day I was home sick, watching some talk show from New York, and they were talking about this show and there was my picture on TV and I was in eighth grade.

0:20:24 Debra Schwartz: Oh, wow! So, obviously you've been rather engaged.

0:20:32 Gary Yost: So I was pretty heavily committed. I had a teacher of photography, a teacher named Joel Krauser at my high school, Northern Valley Regional High School in Demarest, New Jersey. Joel had a darkroom there and he was a huge influence on me. Actually, many years later in 2010, when I was teaching middle school students photography myself here in Mill Valley, I looked Joel up and I managed to talk with him just two weeks before he passed away. And I told him how grateful I was for what he taught me and how I felt like, now that I was teaching middle school kids myself, that I was carrying on that lineage. One of the great moments in my life was sharing that with him and not realizing he was about to die, but it was just on the cusp of his making that transition. So he was a huge teacher of mine, and I had these great positive feedback experiences when I was in middle school and high school and I really wanted to go into photography and filmmaking at that time, that's what I wanted to do. But I had a cousin who worked for a rock 'n' roll management company called Leber Krebs out of New York City. It was one of the largest management companies. They were representing the Rolling Stones and The Who and Aerosmith and all those bands. This is 1976 now and, so it's before I moved to San Francisco, a couple of years before —

0:22:28 Debra Schwartz: This is, I presume this is after the Sannyasins?

0:22:31 Gary Yost: No, this is before. The Sannyasins thing was 1978. So we are doing this a little non-linearly.

0:22:37 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, that's okay.

0:22:37 Gary Yost: But we're doing it to talk about my creative —

0:22:40 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, your impulses and your directions, yeah.

0:22:43 Gary Yost: So I asked my cousin if he could get me a gig working with some — like as an intern assistant to some remote filmmaking crew that was working with any of these bands. I was also very interested in lighting. I had done a lot of work with stage lighting at summer stock theaters when I was growing up. Unfortunately, he found me a job with a sound company, which wasn't really my passion at the time but I needed a job. I had just left high school, my junior year. And I had been accepted to Emerson College for their theatrical lighting program in Boston, and I was on wait list at Northwestern University for their theatrical program, and also Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. And I was gravitating towards Emerson College and then my cousin called that summer. I was supposed to go to Emerson in September, and he said there's this really great job working for this sound company that brought a PA system over for the Deep Purple tour in 1976, and it was so big, they decided to start an American sound company and —

0:24:03 Debra Schwartz: What was their famous song?

0:24:05 Gary Yost: Smoke on the Water.

0:24:06 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, Smoke on the Water.

0:24:09 Gary Yost: So this company in England, which was Marshall Equipment Hire, which made Marshall amplifiers, when they brought the system over, they called this company TASCOS for The American Sound Company — although a lot of people would say TASCOS stood for “Try Another Sound Company” [chuckles] because they were so unsophisticated in their lack of ability to equalize the PA system to a room. But regardless, I ended up being an intern to the sound engineering company and I went out on the road with Patti Smith and Blue Oyster Cult, Todd Rundgren, who I eventually went into business with later when I was in my 20s.

0:24:53 Debra Schwartz: Great performer. One of my favorites. [chuckles]

0:24:56 Gary Yost: Quite a character. And also worked with Kiss and Aerosmith and Ted Nugent and Jethro Tull and other bands for —

0:25:08 Debra Schwartz: Gee whiz, and you're just a puppy.

0:25:09 Gary Yost: I was a teenager and I was a jazz fan, so I wasn't really that interested in rock and roll. But I kind of fell into this *uber* level of the rock 'n' roll

business. It was very unhealthy, and I wasn't the healthiest teenager in the world, and so —

0:25:31 Debra Schwartz: I mean apart from the environment, let's make it clear, because it might be inferred that you made yourself unhealthy with the lifestyle that comes with rock 'n' roll, but you had your own issues of heart, so it was not a good marriage.

0:25:40 Gary Yost: I had health issues, yes. The combination of my health issues underlying and the environment being just really like, "Oh, who could snort the line of cocaine on the map of the United States that's laminated on the tray table of the tour bus from Florida to Washington? Or from Baja to Maine?" They would lay out lines on this map and to see who could snort the longest line of coke.

0:26:11 Debra Schwartz: Snort their way across the country.

0:26:13 Gary Yost: Snort their way — yeah, and the girls who would get on the bus in one city and not get off 'til the next city. It was a very, very unhealthy environment. And so after a year-and-a-half of that I quit, kind of. I also made some mistakes with the power distribution system on the Kiss tour in 1977.

0:26:35 Debra Schwartz: Did anybody blow up?

0:26:37 Gary Yost: Not quite, but they had to delay a show because something that I made did blow up during sound check. And so it was time for me to leave. That actually precipitated my moving to Boston, and then that preceded the awful winter, which resulted in the move to San Francisco.

0:27:04 Debra Schwartz: Always good to get the backstory.

0:27:06 Gary Yost: Yeah. So the backstory is I was very involved with filmmaking and photography from when I was in middle school into high school, and then quite involved in sound and kind of related aspects to the things that I wanted to do, slightly tangential, but having that experience in sound reinforcement certainly informed my ability to understand sound in a more sophisticated way as I got older.

0:27:35 Debra Schwartz: I have to ask, though, as I see you're going along your way here, you've gone from the decadent rock and roll scene into the spiritualism of the Sannyasin worlds of Rajneesh.

0:27:50 Gary Yost: Yeah, pretty quickly, within a year.

0:27:52 Debra Schwartz: And so for you, how was that? From one extreme to another?

0:28:00 Gary Yost: Well, you must not have really known the Sannyasins in 1978 or

'79.

0:28:03 Debra Schwartz: Oh, I did, actually.

0:28:04 Gary Yost: Because it wasn't — it was quite decadent.

0:28:06 Debra Schwartz: Yes. I remember some of the alternative therapy. But there was an earnestness about that.

0:28:12 Gary Yost: Yeah.

0:28:13 Debra Schwartz: So talk about the —

0:28:14 Gary Yost: Well, the Rajneesh Center on the corner of 24th and Douglass, I was 19 and I went there on that celebration day, and they were very hedonistic. One of their meditations was essentially take off all your clothes, put on a blindfold and dance for an hour, and that was cool. Then the meditation center had a hot tub that had been a gigantic old wine cask, and you could, no exaggeration, fit 20 people in this hot tub that was in the garage of that building. So when I met the woman there who became my wife, I moved into that meditation center. And that community embodied the sex, drugs and rock and roll ethos as much as any community did.

0:29:07 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my gosh. [chuckles]

0:29:08 Gary Yost: And remember it was pre-AIDS, so anything went —

0:29:13 Debra Schwartz: Yes, and pre-really bad coke too, even it was —

0:29:17 Gary Yost: The drugs in that community were mostly pot and psychedelics, so they were pretty safe. But Rajneesh was a huge proponent of the tantric side of meditation, so that was a really big part of that community. And for a 19-year-old boy to be thrown into this world of *tantricas* and hot tubs and fusion music, which was the kind of music that they played for meditations — I started playing in a fusion band, playing drums in a fusion band for these meditations, so I got to play drums and watch roomfuls of naked people writhing around. For a 19, 20 year-old, it was pretty great.

0:30:08 Debra Schwartz: It was pretty great. [chuckles]

0:30:09 Gary Yost: It was pretty incredible. And then we went to India, and I did that whole thing with the Shakespeare Company, and came back. So now we're kind of caught up to the Atari days.

0:30:22 Debra Schwartz: Now I get a little understanding of how you had the technical capabilities to go into the whole —

0:30:33 Gary Yost: Yes. Although I never went to college, I had always been doing

very technical things, and I was extremely good at reading manuals and inferring the way things worked from using them. I just have kind of a sympathetic way of communicating with machines, and I understand intuitively how software works. So while I was at this company, Antic, as the marketing director, this is when Warner Brothers sold Atari to the man who had started the Commodore 64 business, a guy name Jack Tramiel. And they released a lot of programmers from Atari that I signed to a small publishing operation at Antic. So I became a little software publisher, and I eventually met a programmer named Tom Hudson, who was interested in writing graphic software, and I had always been interested in graphic software from the beginning and how computers can be used to make interesting pictures, especially, moving pictures.

0:31:56: And this guy, Tom Hudson, and I embarked on the development of a 3D animation system for the Atari computers, and we called it CAD 3D, and came out with the first version in 1985, and then iterated that over a course of a couple years, where we created a whole eco-system of little utilities and tools around CAD 3D. We had this thing called the Cyber Studio which had a little application programming interface, so you could write plugins. I think we were the first people to create a 3D system that you could write a plugin for, and we worked with Tektronix Corporation of Oregon, which is a huge, multi-billion dollar corporation, at the time anyway, that made test equipment for everything. And one of their engineers had developed a set of stereoscopic liquid crystal shuttered glasses that worked through our application programming interface to CAD 3D.

0:33:03: So we had a truly three-dimensional stereoscopic viewing system, and that started to get the attention of Autodesk. We were in San Francisco, Autodesk had just come out with AutoCAD release nine, and it was 1986, and we used to show at Comdex, the Computer Dealers Expo, in Las Vegas every year. And in the end of '86, Autodesk was sniffing around us, and taking a look. And they offered Tom a job, but Tom declined. And at the end of '87, they were sniffing around again, and they offered all of us jobs, and we all declined, and I went back to them and said, "Although we don't want to be employees, we could license software to you. If you want to pay us advances against royalties, we can do something like this for the IBM computer platform, which is much more ubiquitous than the Atari."

0:34:02: We had known that IBM was about to announce a new kind of graphics subsystem for the PCs in 1988 called the VGA system, which was 256 colors, low resolution, but still 256 colors and much more powerful than the Atari ST platform that we were developing for. And we knew that the IBM platform was going to be iterating much more quickly, being made more powerful, you know, Moore's Law, where everything's going to be twice as powerful every 18 months.

0:34:39: So we did sign a licensing agreement with Autodesk in May of 1988, and we were tasked to build essentially the AutoCAD of 2D and 3D animation. And on the 2D side, I had an engineer named Jim Kent, who went on to work with the University of California at Santa Cruz to map the human genome in the public domain, just days before it would've gotten privatized. So he became famous in bioinformatics, but at that point in 1988, '89 he was writing a program called Autodesk Animator for me, which kind of was

the first entry level, low cost but profession quality 2D animation system. And then Tom Hudson and I brought in a number of other people, Dan Silva, and Don Brittain and Rolf Berteig. We ended up producing a number of different versions of this Autodesk 3D Studio system between 1989 and 1993. And then we moved from the Microsoft MS-DOS platform up to the Windows platform in 1994/1995, and produced this thing for them called 3ds Max.

0:36:09: And during this period, from 1988, eventually to when we sold the company to Autodesk in 1997, really not getting out until 1998, we were making tools for film makers and visual effects artists. So I was a lot closer to my dream of making films, but I was still just a tool maker, and was pretty unfulfilled creatively after a while, although financially it worked out well enough that me, someone who had never gone to college and barely graduated high school, was able to sock away enough of a nest egg to move to Mill Valley, which was the home of Mt. Tamalpais, that I had been coming to since 1978 for the restoration of my own soul when I needed it. When things were really rough, I would come up here, hike around on the mountain, and even Tennessee Valley was a huge treat for me coming from San Francisco, let alone going to the top of Tam and wandering around.

0:37:25: So, finally in 1997 we had enough money and the market had dipped, the real estate market had dipped at that time, to make it possible for us to buy a little house in Cascade Canyon and start fixing it up. And that's when, what I call the best part of my life occurred, because I was living right here on the toes of the mountain, and I could spend a couple days a week hiking. So soon after we moved here I bought Barry Spitz's book and pretty much devoted myself over the next few years to hiking every trail on this side of the mountain. And I soon discovered that there weren't enough trails on this side of the mountain, and I had to start bush whacking and following deer trails. So once I did all the trails, then I did all the deer trails that I could find, and once I pretty much mapped out the entire south side, I kind of moved over more to the east side by King Mountain, and started to explore parts of the north side, like the Kent Trail, and the area down by Alpine Lake, like the Helen Markt trail, and the parts that are more accessible from Ridgecrest, and the south side.

0:38:56: So I had never really spent a lot of time in the area of the Azalea Hill Trail or Pine Mountain, and that was always really mysterious to me, but boy, I was out there, I pretty much worked up to every other day, all day on the mountain from 1998 through 2001. And so it was about three years of heavy, heavy hiking where the mountain really became my backyard, because I could just walk out of my house and go up onto the Myrtle Trail, which led me up to the Double Bow Knot, and from there it was just like, "Whatever." I mean, you could go anywhere, and since I had sold my company to Autodesk and I was taking some time off, and I was again recuperating from another illness, it just was the perfect thing for me to be doing. Eventually in 2000, my wife came to me and said, "Hey, it's time to adopt a child. We've always wanted to adopt a child, it's time to do that." Her biological daughter had grown and was gone, and we were surrounded by all this beauty, and there were all these families. We lived near Cascade Park and it just seemed like — we weren't that old, I was in my late 40s, mid to late 40s,

and I said, “Sure.”

0:40:31 Gary Yost: And so we went through a process in 2001 of applying for and adopting our daughter Ruby from China. And then I had a baby that I could go out with in my backpack. And I was more limited in terms of my scope, but then I got to see the mountain through the eyes of a baby. So I used to spend a lot of time out of Rock Spring and up by East Peak. I used to park on Ridgecrest, and go down to Laurel Dell with her a lot, and do the Laurel Dell, Barths Retreat area. So 2001, 2002, 2003, I still wasn't really doing any work, we were just with our daughter and playing around at home and enjoying the mountain. And then once she started kindergarten, when we applied to her school, which was the Greenwood School, they asked me how I could contribute to the school, and I said, “Oh, I can take pictures. And maybe you want some things documented.” And I had recently gotten back into photography, I bought a nice digital camera and was playing around with it and learning how to use Photoshop and so when she started going to kindergarten, I kind of had access to these beautiful young children in kindergarten, and there's really no more amazing subject than small children.

0:42:16: So the school invited me in, and I would document little school events like going to the kindergarten, and just document life in the kindergarten. I spent the next 10 years with her at Greenwood School being the school documentarian. If you go to my archive website, which is not my portfolio website, but it's the www.yostopia.com website, there are 25,000 pictures from the Greenwood School in there. And I consider that my formal photography education. I learned how to disappear behind the camera, so the students didn't see me, and how to use the camera as a meditative way of opening my vision.

0:43:11: A great photographer, Dorothea Lange, once said — she has a really great quote, she said, “A camera is an instrument that allows you to see without a camera.” So I took that to heart, and I became very experienced in opening a conduit between a part of myself that allowed myself to be truly present with these children who were truly present. I used them as teachers, and I became invisible, and documented their lives. And you can go to that site and see, it's quite a remarkable document of these beautiful children with absolutely no self-consciousness of there being a camera. You won't see any pictures of anyone looking at the camera, smiling for the camera. There's no mugging for the camera. They learned very early on that if they smiled for me, that I wouldn't take their picture. And like I said, there's 25,000 amazingly beautiful images of children up there.

0:44:25: And so of course I wanted to get back into filmmaking because I was being very active with the camera, but filmmaking technology in the early 2000s was still very expensive. And it wasn't until DSLRs started being able to shoot video in the late 2000s, 2009, 2010 that it became accessible to people on a budget. Unfortunately, I'd chosen the Nikon ecosystem instead of the Canon ecosystem because Canon was the first DSLR company that produced hardware that allowed you to make films. So I had to wait until Nikon finally made the first filmmaking tools. I kind of had to wait. I did buy a Canon camcorder in 2011, just because I was itching so badly to make films, I just had to get started. And I started by creating little time lapse films of what it was like for me to be at

the top of East Peak as a fire lookout. When did I become a fire lookout? So that's a really good story.

0:45:50 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's just take a moment here to help organize this information. We now segued with your technology world, where you were probably inside a lot, and now, you've had a child. You already were going out as kind of — I can see that with your decision to get Barry's book, and get the map, and get to know the mountain, you've now put your interests into the outer world.

0:46:19 Gary Yost: Very much so.

0:46:20 Debra Schwartz: Then you have a child. And now, that's a blend of inner and outer worlds because just as we all know children take you some place that will open your heart. And now I have to ask you about the one comment you made about learning to see through using the camera to see. I hope you'll repeat that again, because I think it's a very interesting comment as to how you can find yourself, how to see while looking through something that you see with and record with. Maybe you can explain that.

0:47:02 Gary Yost: Yeah, it's a good question. The quote is, "A camera is an instrument that allows you to see without a camera." Well, so whenever you point a camera at something, and you capture a specific moment, you are capturing both the moment that's happening outside of yourself, and what is going on internally with yourself, because you're deciding where to point the camera, and what settings to use. So you're kind of controlling the direction of the camera, and you're waiting for a specific moment to capture with the camera. And so it's kind of a synergistic partnership that you have with the world outside of you, where you're making an agreement that you show up, and then you'll be given something, and then that combines to produce a captured moment.

0:48:04: And the lessons that I learned were that, in that relationship between what I brought to the picture and what my subject brought to the picture, it wasn't interesting for me to see in that captured moment something that I had already known about myself. It was not interesting for me to see a reflection of myself in that image. I found that boring, because I was looking to learn about life in its more multi-variate mysterious ways. I wanted to open myself up to what was available to learn. So I learned how to, by looking through the lens, connect with the subject, and disappear as much as I possibly could, so that that the energy of the subject would drive the moment at which I snapped the shutter. So, the subject would create the image more than I would. So I would get my ego out of the way, and I learned how to just sit and allow what was going on in front of the camera to drive the experience. And that's what you'll — if you go onto that Yostopia site, into that Greenwood library, you'll see that the kids are driving those images. They're creating those images.

0:49:57 Debra Schwartz: I think this is an interesting process you're talking about, because you become a filmmaker for Mt. Tam, as we're going to talk about soon. You've made beautiful films in Mt. Tam. And Mt. Tam has its energy as well.

0:50:12 Gary Yost: Yeah, well, that's just a bigger subject than a kid, but it's the same kind of a thing. Any photographer worth their salt understands this process. What I'm talking about is nothing mysterious, or it's nothing unusual. It's mysterious, absolutely, but it's something that every photographer is trying to achieve. Just as an example, the guy's a classic, Henri Cartier-Bresson, he is the person who invented that concept of this defining moment that you would capture, and that's totally driven by the subject. It's a subject-driven moment. And yeah, you have to show up and you have to point it in the right direction and use the right settings, but the moment is what causes you to engage the shutter.

0:51:05 Debra Schwartz: It's kind of like a wildlife sighting or something where you —

0:51:08 Gary Yost: Oh, yeah, any wildlife photographer is doing the same thing. You just go into this deeply meditative place, and you open yourself up, and then what you're seeing determines what you capture. You're not doing it, you get out of the way and then your subject is just driving the whole experience.

0:51:27 Debra Schwartz: So as we go forward to talking about Mt. Tam, and I can tell by what you're describing about the time you've spent on the mountain, the interest that you've dedicated towards learning about the trails in the mountain. So —

0:51:44 Gary Yost: It's interesting that you bring it up that way, because I never really thought about it that way, that I put all this energy into learning about who the mountain was, and then I put all this energy into learning about how to disappear and let my subject drive the image-making, and then how I kind of ended up putting those two things together. It was like training. I knew I was training for something during that period documenting the Greenwood School kids, but I really had no idea what it really was. And at some point in 2009, I started having this — it was like a dream. I don't remember if it came out of my real dream state or it just came out of that time when you're waking up and you're lying around in bed. And the dream was, there was a walk that I had never taken. I had done all sorts of hikes but I had never walked from my bedroom up to the fire lookout on East Peak. And I woke up one day and realized like, "This is crazy." I had done — I would always drive to places or —

0:52:55 Debra Schwartz: But you'd never walked from your house all the way up to Fern Canyon and then up Temelpa or anything?

0:53:01 Gary Yost: I had never done that specific walk. I had walked from my house up to the West Point Inn, and then even up to the East Peak, and then down the — not the Telegraph Trail —

0:53:19 Debra Schwartz: You mean the Fire Road?

0:53:20 Gary Yost: No, it's that little trail by the Sitting Bull monument.

0:53:22 Debra Schwartz: Oh, that's Temelpa.

0:53:24 Gary Yost: Down the Temelpa, but I had never gone to the fire lookout, like, in one walk from my —

0:53:30 Debra Schwartz: From your house.

0:53:30 Gary Yost: From my house. And I just said, "That was one thing I've never done." I was kind of astonished that I had never done that. But in the dream specifically, I had to take a rock from my — right next to where I slept, the closest rock to my bed, and I had to carry that rock to the top at the fire lookout, and then I had to leave it there, and then pick up a rock from the fire lookout, and bring it back home, and put it down next to where I slept. I had no idea where this came from, but I woke up that day and went, "Oh, I've gotta do that," and so that's what I did that day. I had this dream and then it was like, this is easy enough. I was kind of —

0:54:11 Debra Schwartz: It's a beautiful trail.

0:54:12 Gary Yost: Astonished that I had never done that walk before. It was a great day and I walked up there and it was December, a beautiful sunny day in December. And I got up there and these two guys were in the fire lookout and I called up to them and I said, "Hey, hi, how are you doing? Can I come in and take a look?"

0:54:33 Debra Schwartz: "Can I come in?" [chuckles] What every hiker hopes to have happen.

0:54:38 Gary Yost: Exactly. That was 2009, December 2009.

0:54:43 Debra Schwartz: Who was in the lookout?

0:54:44 Gary Yost: It was Don Keylon, who ended up being my supervisor in the fire lookout program and he's a fire engineer out of the Throckmorton Ridge Fire Station. And I actually forget who was with him. They were winterizing the fire lookout, because the season had ended and they winterize it every autumn before the freeze sets in, they drain the pipes and they turn off the power and they just kind of lock it down until the season starts up next June.

0:55:16 Debra Schwartz: Not too much of a worry of fires when it's raining and hopefully it is.

0:55:19 Gary Yost: No. So he said, "Yeah, sure, come on up." And I went inside and went up, and as soon as I got up there, I realized what a special experience that was and why I had walked up there that day, because it's a full 360-degree view. I'm sure you've been in the fire lookout.

0:55:43 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, I've done just what you've done before. "Can I come in?" And there's a moment there where you just realize it's like —

0:55:49 Gary Yost: Like, "What?"

0:55:51 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, it's like, "Whoa."

0:55:52 Gary Yost: And you can go out on that catwalk and walk around and you really — there's something that happens that is ineffable and hard to explain but — especially coming back from my experience of having such a personal relationship with the mountain for so long and then all of a sudden to have a completely unique relationship to the mountain, essentially floating on top of the East Peak in this fire lookout, because you're 15 feet above the peak and you have 360 degrees of glass, and all of a sudden it was a new perspective.

0:56:26 Debra Schwartz: And that sudden, jarring understanding of how very precious every single degree is all around.

0:56:36 Gary Yost: That's a good way to put it, yeah. And how that's impossible to capture that feeling anywhere else on the mountain. Well, we'll get to that, because West Peak has a similar quality to it. But the first thing I asked him when I got up there was, "How can I be a fire lookout?" And he said, "Oh, just do the training and you're in. We're actually under-subscribed. We have so many shifts that go untaken every summer. You only have to do three or four shifts a summer and we don't have that many people. We're all kind of retiring out. There's a bunch of old people and the program's not really going very well."

0:57:21 Debra Schwartz: You're like, "Yahoo!"

0:57:23 Gary Yost: I said, "Great."

0:57:23 Debra Schwartz: Well, "I have just found my powers!" [laughs]

0:57:25 Gary Yost: "When is the training? When is the training?" And he said, "That happens in May. The season starts in June." So I did the training in May of 2010 and started in June of 2010. I brought up my camera with me when I do a shift up there and I would take some pictures because at sunrise and sunset, it's kind of an unusual time, most people aren't up there. And what I noticed in those first few shifts would be that if the moon was in its New Moon state and if the fog had come in to the Bay Area, that by midnight things were dark enough where you would see the Milky Way, and I had never seen the Milky Way in the Bay Area before. I'd only seen it when I was away from civilization.

0:58:29: And so I started to book shifts during New Moons and around the New Moon, and I started to spend a lot of time up at night and not really go to sleep. I would do these two-day shifts and I'd sleep a little bit from like 4:00 to 7:00 in the morning. Sometimes

my shifts would be half-day shifts where I could leave at 3:00 the next day, because I'd be pretty wiped out. But I couldn't capture those things. I would take long time exposures and I'd get stills. But I bought a little point and shoot, a little Canon point and shoot camera that allowed me to do time lapse and I started to capture that summer of 2010 just the motion of the fog moving around the East Peak, because I wanted to share it with my family and my friends. It's just so beautiful, at sunrise, particularly, the way it burns off around the mountain. I just wanted to show people like, "This is really cool" because I couldn't really bring people up there at that time and —

0:59:37 Debra Schwartz: That elegant ebb and flow.

0:59:39 Gary Yost: Oh, yeah. The things happen in dawn, because as the sun comes up over the East Bay and it hits the fog as it's curling around that east side of the mountain, the way that heat starts to rise creates patterns in the way the fog dissipates that are extremely interesting when you're looking at it from above. And I just kind of totally fell in love with this. When the 2011 shift came, I started to do more time-lapse, and started to try to tell the story of what it was like to spend a day and a night up there. And the tools I had weren't sufficient; I didn't have the ability to really to do good astronomical time-lapse and the video capability. Nikon still hadn't really shipped a camera that could do video. I did a bunch of tests in 2011 that I felt got closer to describing this feeling. It was exciting to me, because, oh wow, I was like, "I'm making a film for the first time."

1:00:51 Debra Schwartz: Well, you were in love.

1:00:53 Gary Yost: I was in love with the mountain. I was in love with the feeling of the mountain when I was there alone at night, and surrounded by seven million people, but totally alone. Then, in the spring of 2012, I started to prepare for that year's fire season. I talked to Don Keylon about, saying like, "Hey, you know, if I can do a decent film this year, maybe we can use it as a recruitment piece and build a more substantial base of fire lookouts, so we can have better coverage of our shifts." And he was thrilled about that. So I bought a motion-controlled slider so I could move the camera and get parallax effects, which are more immersive when you're looking at it, and I brought up a camera that could do video. I invested some money in what I thought would be needed to make a better film. And then in July and August of that year, I shot the footage that became this *A Day in the Life of a Fire Lookout* piece that I finished in September.

1:02:12 Gary Yost: I just felt like the mountain was really inspiring me to do better, to capture the beauty. I had to become more present and more available to what was there, in order to really share that with the rest of the world. It was something that I really wanted to share. And even though people couldn't be there at that time of night, I just felt, again, obsessed and compelled to share this feeling. I got close enough with the *A Day in the Life of a Fire Lookout* piece, where we really did capture that feeling. It's kind of very meditative and almost a little trippy. There's a scene where I go to sleep and then I'm having this dream, and the dream is the way things look up there at night, happening around me. It's very accurate to what it feels like when you're out there.

1:03:17 Gary Yost: The film went viral and hundreds of thousands of people started to watch it and comment on it, and it sparked an interview by the *IJ* [*Marin Independent Journal*]. Nels Johnson of the *IJ* did a piece about it, and at the end of the piece he asked me what I wanted to do next. I didn't really consider myself a filmmaker at that time, but I was so stoked on capturing these things which were unseen and mysterious and in my own backyard, that he got me thinking about what were other things like that, what was talking to me in that way. And it just turned out that lots of times when I'd go up to the lookout, I'd stop at the West Peak, at the old air force station, and have a sandwich or something before I went on shift. I had discovered that, probably around 2005, one day walking up the Arturo trail and stumbling on the old pool house and wondering, "What is this?" and then seeing all the ruins of the air force station. So I'd been fascinated by why all these ruins and junk were up there in the middle of this national park, state park, watershed and "What the hell was going on out there?" And I could find —

1:04:45 Debra Schwartz: Yep. When you're done I have a question.

1:04:47 Gary Yost: Because I could find little information about it, and so when Nels asked me that question, "What do you want to do next?" I said, "I kind of have this burning desire to expose the history of the West Peak and to shed light on what I consider to be a black hole, right on top of the mountain." He printed that in the article and I asked, "If there's anyone who knew about West Peak, give me a shout," and there was my email address. That led to Wayne Erwin, who was stationed there in the early 1960s, sending me an email and we started talking. And then that was the little spark that turned into pretty much what I've devoted my life to for the last four years.

1:05:40 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So before we go on to the next iteration and your adoration of a beautiful mountain, I just wanted to say regarding your film about the East Peak lookout station, that I've watched it, I don't know, I couldn't tell you how many times, because it evokes something in you. There are waves and waves that come over the watcher, because it also has a beautiful soundtrack. And what I noticed in what you managed to do is that you take this place that is really very solitary, and I would say *settled* in a sense; it's at the peak, it's there, it's not moving, and yet there's so much movement that goes on in your time-lapse, as you can see the world's — you know, whether it's the clouds, it's the sky, everything. There's this beautiful dance of nature and inspiration, and you somehow manage to capture that, it's sort of like being in the eye of a beautiful storm.

1:06:50 Gary Yost: Thank you, and I agree that I captured it. I really don't know how I did that, it's pretty ineffable, and it happened because I was just open, the way I learned to be open with these kids. I just opened myself up in the exact same way, but to the mountain, and my biggest feelings, strongest feelings I have when I am on the mountain are usually about deep time, and they reflect — these feelings are reflective of my only being here for a very, very short period of time, and that ratio or relationship between my little blip of an existence, and the deep, deep, deep timespan of the mountain and geology, and of course, the universe, and so usually when I'm on the mountain, I'm feeling this relationship, and that's the common theme for me.

1:08:00 Debra Schwartz: That ratio between —

1:08:01 Gary Yost: That I am just like a little blade of grass that's just going to be blown away almost instantly, like I appear and disappear, as just this tiny spark, and yet the mountain kind of abides, and it's part of everything in a way that's in a whole other scale. And so the time-lapse work for me represents a way of getting in touch with that kind of distortion of the time-space continuum.

1:08:33 Debra Schwartz: So I would like to go back, at some point as we progress in this interview, about this, what you've just said, the effect of the time-blip, and the —

1:08:45 Gary Yost: Okay, well, there's a point in that film, that explains it really, really well. There's a shot that I made in that film that makes me cry every time I see it, and it's a shot where I'm in the fire lookout but there are three of me. There's one of me sitting in the chair, and there's one of me standing up looking with binoculars, and there's one of me at the radio and I kind of — I appear and then I disappear, and I appear and I disappear, it was done with the camera moving on a slider, three times. It's called a "match move effect," and what that shot means to me, when I see myself disappear, appear and disappear, that is a metaphor for my life. Every time I appear and disappear in that shot, I viscerally feel that is a reflection of what my life is like to the mountain and to the universe. I just appear and then I disappear, it's literally just like a tiny, little blip in a moment.

1:09:51: And so what I created in that shot for me, is a short little visual poem that encapsulates everything that's meaningful to me about my life. I'm up there in service to the community, and in service to the mountain, and I'm up there and then I'm not there. It's like I'm there and then I'm not there so quickly. And so I just cry for the beauty of the place and also the fact that I can only enjoy it for a very, very short period, you know, that I'm only here for a very short period and then I'm gone. So that's the feeling that informs so much of my experience on the mountain, and it's why I spend so much time obsessing about it is because it allows me to feel myself on the earth in a way that I feel is much more objective than my own subjective experience. It's the real way that I'm here, is that I'm here infinitesimally a short period of time, and so I need to make that time count by having a deep relationship with the people and the environment that I am with while I'm here.

1:11:16 Debra Schwartz: With that in mind, something that's been inferred, but not really discussed in too much detail, is the fact that you have had to deal with on and off most of your life with some chronic health issues.

1:11:30 Gary Yost: Yes.

1:11:31 Debra Schwartz: And without going into details of it, obviously having that sense of —

1:11:39 Gary Yost: I think that the mortality side of —

1:11:41 Debra Schwartz: The mortality of it. I'm trying to look at you as to what — you're fueled by your love of the mountain, you're fueled by many things, your interests in the world, but you have a deep desire, from what I can tell, to represent your experience. And so I'm going to ask you has the effect of having a chronic condition, that is at times rather daunting, fueled your perspective as a filmmaker?

1:12:17 Gary Yost: Well, as someone, I had health issues from when I was a child up until my 30s, and I've actually been healthy without having to deal with those issues for the last 20 years. So I have a unique perspective on being very aware and in touch with my mortality. And yet, in this period of my life, now in my 40s and 50s, not being at the effect of those chronic conditions. So I kind of have the best of both worlds where I know what it's like to be imminently not here and mortal, and yet I have the energy to enjoy life in my 40s and 50s, and hopefully in my 60s and 70s. So it's kind of a unique perspective, where that feeling of mortality is a very special gift that one can be given in the way it drives a sense of urgency to express oneself, if that's kind of the — if expressing yourself is what you want to do. Certain people just like to express themselves at some sort of creative desire, and when you're driven by those feelings of mortality, you have a sense of urgency, which makes it maybe more important to get some things done, instead of waiting around for things to happen.

1:14:03: And so that's kind of an engine that drives things, and then being healthy enough to do things like hiking, and being a fire lookout and being active on the mountain, kind of is this recipe in me for really feeling like I have to express these feelings in the way that I am best equipped to express them, which is as visual style. I'm not a writer or a painter, I'm a photographer, and I tell stories that way, and so it just — I never really intended to do it deliberately, but that sense of urgency, combined with feeling like there's something that you could share, just kind of combines to create things all by themselves. You don't really have to do much, except follow instructions, like to show up and be seen. You don't have to think about much to do. There's always a lot of direction out there in the universe. There's a lot of stories that want to be told, and I just fell into these very specific little stories about this one little mountain.

1:15:32: There are so many incredible storytellers in the world, and I just found my little niche that this is the thing that I am captured by, and so I pay attention, and I show up, and I kind of don't have any real choice in it, the way most people who do creative things don't feel they have a lot of choice in it, musicians and poets, and painters. You're kind of directed to do things and you just do them or you resist doing them, and then you're miserable. So you have a choice, and — so does that answer your — ?

1:16:13 Debra Schwartz: Yes. It does. It helps us to understand where your film comes from. The various effects of the situations of your life.

1:16:26 Gary Yost: Sure. Like any of us.

1:16:27 Debra Schwartz: Like the trajectory that you're on, that you're put on, and the way that it just — it's good to get it in context. So now let's go back to your mountain here, we need a —

1:16:38 Gary Yost: So it's a great story.

1:16:39 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:16:39 Gary Yost: So I'll pick up with that article in the *IJ* and Wayne Erwin calls me. I got another call that week that Wayne Erwin called me, because so many people were interested in that article, and the call was from a representative of California State Parks, who shall remain nameless, and he told me that I did not have a permit to make the film that I made.

1:17:05 Debra Schwartz: On the — ?

1:17:06 Gary Yost: About the fire lookout, and that that was State Park land, and that they were getting a lot of calls from people asking why they couldn't go up to the top of the East Peak at night, and do stuff like Yost was doing? And it was kind of bugging them that all these people were calling them, and then I didn't have a permit, and that I needed to retroactively pay thousands of dollars. They called me a professional filmmaker because my work was of the quality of a professional filmmaker, but I wasn't really a professional at that time, I wasn't doing any commercial projects, but they had even gone back onto my archive website for the Greenwood School and found places where I had taken bunches of pictures of kids like at Malakoff Diggins, and other State Park areas, and so that because I was taking pictures of school kids in those places I was a professional, and I was exploiting the State Parks without a permit, and they sent me these forms and told me to pay thousands of dollars. And I just told them, I said, "I was a volunteer with the Marin County fire department and I was doing a recruitment video," and I didn't even know at that time that the State Parks didn't own East Peak. It wasn't State Park land, the reality is they lease that land, it's a joint operations agreement with Marin Municipal Water District. The water district owns the land, State Parks owns the trail around the East Peak.

1:18:38 Debra Schwartz: The Verna Dunshee?

1:18:39 Gary Yost: The Verna Dunshee trail and the parking lot, and the road, Ridge Crest. They do not own East Peak, but I didn't know of that, they told me they did. The guy was not nice to me, and I certainly didn't have the thousands of dollars. I hadn't made any money off the video, and I pretty much just kind of ignored him and thought they would go away. And one day I was visiting Don and some of my buddies in the fire department up at Throckmorton Ridge, and a water district ranger who I'd never met, John McConeloug, introduced himself, told me he was a fan of the *Fire Lookout* film.

1:19:24 Debra Schwartz: The young fellow?

1:19:25 Gary Yost: John?

1:19:26 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm.

1:19:28 Gary Yost: Well. He's in his 30s. Sounds right.

1:19:31 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. I've seen him on the trail.

1:19:33 Gary Yost: Yeah. He's totally great. And he said, "You gotta talk to my boss, Mike Swezy." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, couple of reasons. One is, I read that piece in the *IJ* about you being interested in West Peak and I know Mike is interested in West Peak. The other one is, the superintendent of the State Parks, kind of has it in for you, and they're planning some sort of legal action against you and you really need to talk to him." And so, I got in my car and I drove to the Pantoll Ranger Station to look for him, just so I could sit down and talk to him, and he wasn't there. I went home and I sent him an email saying, "Hey, what's up?" I'm just like a fire lookout volunteer.

1:20:27 Debra Schwartz: Just a guy. I just love it.

1:20:27 Gary Yost: "I didn't make any money. Why are you bothering me like this? Let's sit down and talk about it." And I did not sleep well at all that night, I was very upset, and the next day I got an email from him saying, "We don't like what you did. And we are going to let slide the permit for the *Fire Lookout* piece, but if we ever catch you taking another photograph on State Park land again without a permit, we're going to remand you to the Marin County District Attorney's office."

1:21:08 Debra Schwartz: Gulp.

1:21:09 Gary Yost: And this is the State Park. I take pictures in the State Park all the time. Steep Ravine, that's one of my favorite trails on the State Park land. So I was still very upset, and then I remembered what John told me about Mike Swezy wanting to talk to me. And I called Mike up out of the blue, similar to the way I wrote Ray Kassar at Atari that letter out of the blue. I called Mike up and I said, "Hi, Mike, this is Gary Yost." He goes, "Oh, Gary Yost, just the guy I wanted to talk to." And I go, "Really?" And he says, "Yeah. I hear you're interested in West Peak?" And I said, "Yeah, actually." He said, "Well, tell me what you're interested in doing." And I told him that I wanted to make a film about the history of West Peak that kind of explored this very dark area on top of the mountain, it seemed to have been cursed by something, and I wanted to kind of shine a light on it, and after I explained my little idea, he said, "If you could see me now, I'm levitating four feet above my chair. I'm so happy to hear what you want to do, because West Peak has been my pet project, and the restoration of that area is so important to me, but we have no funds at all and there's some exciting possibilities for the future, but we really need someone to make a little film about it like that and hearing that you want to do that is so great."

1:22:42: I said, "Wow." I said, "This is such great news. And by the way, could you

get this guy off my back, please?” And he said, “Absolutely. I will take care of it.” because the water district is in control of 22,000 acres of the mountain, way more than the State Park. They trump everybody on the mountain. And so he made the State Park problem go away for me.

1:23:08 Debra Schwartz: Oh, thank you.

1:23:10 Gary Yost: So great.

1:23:11 Debra Schwartz: You’re sleeping again?

1:23:13 Gary Yost: Yeah.

1:23:13 Debra Schwartz: Except that you get too excited thinking about what you’re going to do.

1:23:16 Gary Yost: How do you know me so well to say that? I don’t know how you could say that. [laughs] That’s my terminal problem, is being too excited to be able to sleep. So Mike asked me to come up to the Sky Oaks Ranger Station and make a presentation about what I wanted to do. So I’m sure within a day or two I was up there and I made my presentation and I walked out of there with a key to the lock of the gate and a permit.

1:23:44 Debra Schwartz: My God, this is a thrilling story.

1:23:46 Gary Yost: Especially a 24-hour permit.

1:23:48 Debra Schwartz: You went from the depths to the heights.

1:23:51 Gary Yost: I got a key. That’s the water district master key they gave me.

1:23:54 Debra Schwartz: Yes, yes. Oh, my.

1:23:58 Gary Yost: And, actually, that’s —

1:24:00 Debra Schwartz: Where is it? Let’s see it.

1:24:01 Gary Yost: That’s this key right here.

1:24:02 Debra Schwartz: I’m going to include this with your photo. Okay.

1:24:05 Gary Yost: That’s the key.

1:24:05 Debra Schwartz: I want to hold the key. [chuckles]

1:24:08 Gary Yost: Duplication prohibited.

1:24:09 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Right on it.

1:24:11 Gary Yost: Number 694, yes, and a permit which allowed me to be up there even at night. And I embarked on making a serious documentary, historical documentary, about a place, not really knowing how to make a documentary. And so of course I watched all the Ken Burns documentaries again.

1:24:41 Debra Schwartz: I like how you just jump. Again, this was what you're saying —

1:24:44 Gary Yost: I have no choice.

1:24:45 Debra Schwartz: You have no choice.

1:24:46 Gary Yost: Yeah, it's just like: What? Are you going to say no?

1:24:49 Debra Schwartz: No. It's not really — we can't really talk about it, you just jump.

1:24:50 Gary Yost: That wouldn't make a lot of sense.

1:24:53 Debra Schwartz: Jump and the net will come.

1:24:54 Gary Yost: You can say no, and then you'd be miserable. So I watched all the Ken Burns documentaries and kind of analyzed his style — and all the while knowing that one of Ken Burns' favorite narrators lives in Mill Valley, and that, of course, is Peter Coyote. And in December of 2012 I started thinking like, "You know, if I could get Peter Coyote involved in this project —"

1:25:28 Debra Schwartz: So you wrote him a letter just like you wrote to everybody else.

1:25:31 Gary Yost: I did. I called up his production company.

1:25:34 Debra Schwartz: How could I know this? [chuckles]

1:25:35 Gary Yost: And I talked to Lizzy, his assistant, and I told her what I want to do. I said I wanted to write Peter a letter, and "Can I have his email address?" Which she did. She thought it sounded like a really interesting project, which she did. I wrote him a letter in January of 2013, and I showed him a link to the *Fire Lookout* piece and some tests I had done, time-lapse tests I had done, at West Peak. A very similar letter to all of my other letters, and I got a call from him like the next day, right before I was going to go to sleep, and he just told me how excited he was about the project, how he lived on the west side of the mountain in Olema with the Diggers for a long time, and that he used to poach deer on the mountain. The mountain was such an important place to him. And he

had a view of it from his house over there on that area in Tennessee Valley, I forgot the name of that, it's like —

1:26:45 Debra Schwartz: Slide Ranch? No.

1:26:46 Gary Yost: His house at that time was up near the Miwok Trail on top of that ridge, Coyote Ridge. He had a view of the mountain. And the mountain is really important to him, of course, he was a priest with the Zen Center. He's really deeply entrenched, and his roots are in this county.

1:27:09 Debra Schwartz: His kid plays baseball here. That'll get you when you — day after day after day after day, sitting outside.

1:27:19 Gary Yost: Yeah.

1:27:20 Debra Schwartz: Enjoying the views while the kid's games go on and on and on.

1:27:24 Gary Yost: Yeah. So he said, "Let's go up there together." And in the beginning of February, we went up and wandered around West Peak together, and I gave him the history as I knew it at that time, and I expressed my concern that I had no experience being a filmmaker, but I was learning as I went, and kind of analyzing the Ken Burns films. And he looked at me and said, "Gary, I want to make this film with you. I don't want to just be your narrator. I want to work on the script and the structure." He said, "One thing Ken Burns has never asked me to do, nor any of the people that I've ever narrated for have ever asked me to do is participate in the creation of the script and the narrative. So let's do this together."

1:28:16 Debra Schwartz: And he's a writer?

1:28:17 Gary Yost: Yeah, he's a really good writer. So you can imagine how I felt when he offered to do that. So we just started meeting regularly. And his perspective was immense and beyond valuable, and gave me the confidence that I could tell this story in a way that made some sense. So I continued shooting and then needed some music, original music. A friend of mine was a music producer, George Daly, lives here in Mill Valley, and I asked him to work with me on music. It turned out that George is a very intelligent person and also always wanted to do more with filmmaking. So he asked me if he could co-direct with me, and co-write with me and Peter. I am so into collaboration. Again: what? Are you going to say, "no" when somebody offers to do that? George has a wall of platinum albums on his studio, and he's the real thing. So George, Peter and I, in a very short period of time, really, in just about six months, we wrote the script and did all the post-production on it.

1:29:46: And during that period Mike Swezy revealed to me that the water district had been working on plans to develop a non-profit to support fund-raising activities on the mountain that they couldn't afford, because they're a public agency, they had no extra

budget. So they were going to produce a thing called Friends of the Watershed, and they were going to raise money. But during the course of the creation of the foundation of that non-profit, they also began talking to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, which had been doing a lot of work supporting the state parks and the national parks on the mountain, like the Bootjack Trail, and they were starting to do some preliminary work on the Muir Beach area. And they thought, “Wow, we could all join forces and collaborate on these restoration and maintenance projects on the mountain. And we’d be much more efficient, because the conservancy has a history of raising funds.” They’ve raised \$350 million over the last 20 years for the parks in the Bay Area, and I think like \$50 million for Marin County parks.

1:31:09: So as we were doing the post-production on the film, they were starting to have their discussions about how to make this collaboration happen. And as you can imagine, when you put four agencies, including Marin County Open Space, together, four governmental public agencies together that have territory, you would expect a lot of complications. And the Parks Conservancy people are so good at communication that they were able to really make this thing happen. So by February, when *The Invisible Peak* was done, we launched an event at the Throckmorton Theater announcing the creation of this collaboration, even though their memorandum —

1:31:57 Debra Schwartz: The One Tam?

1:31:58 Gary Yost: It was Tamalpais Lands Collaborative at that time; it was before One Tam was spun out as the publicly facing part of the Collaborative. They hadn’t signed their memorandum of understanding yet, and essentially we were the cart before the horse pushing this. Their estimates were that it could take another year or two before all these agencies could agree on something. But because we had this event scheduled for Valentine’s Day 2014, and we were going to announce that this was going on one way or the other, they pushed extremely quickly, and ended up signing the Memorandum of Understanding in March 21, 2014. So *The Invisible Peak*, and that event at the Throckmorton was the thing that cemented the collaborations formally coming together at that time.

1:32:56 Debra Schwartz: Honestly, it must be baffling for you to think about how, as you’re going forward, with your natural impulse being to do what you have no choice but to do, which is to express yourself and your appreciation and your deep respect for the area; and not even a professional filmmaker per se, or really knowing how it’s going to happen, to have the projects to choose, you initiate, and then all these collaborations that come right to you, and as the trajectory’s picking up, to have such a movement of sorts, and to be a part of it. What does that feel like for you?

1:33:40 Gary Yost: Essentially, I feel I am an open channel to what the mountain wants to do. The mountain needed to do this stuff; and you sleep on top of East Peak long enough, enough nights, or you just spend enough time up there, and you start to tune into those frequencies. I don’t have to tell you because you spend so much time on the mountain. But for me, it wasn’t really until I started sleeping and dreaming up there that

the channel opened up in a way that was pretty unimpeded. So yeah, of course, it feels great, but I don't really feel like I did it.

1:34:20 Debra Schwartz: But you must be. You didn't do it, but you're in it.

1:34:25 Gary Yost: It feels great to be in it, to be part of it. There's so many people who are in love with the mountain. Peter wanted to call *The Invisible Peak* — the first working title was *Children of the Mountain*, because there's just so many people, from the Miwoks through William Kent, and all of the people who've been part of protecting the mountain over eons, but especially in Western civilization the last 130 years.

1:34:53 Debra Schwartz: But you have —

1:34:54 Gary Yost: I'm just one of those people. So I happen to have a certain skill set that allows me to make images and things that convey certain information in a certain way, but it's really no different than any of the other hundreds or thousands of people, in terms of like I'm not putting any more work into it than Matt Davis did when he worked on the mountain, or Dad O'Rourke, or any of those people. Energetically, it's essentially the same thing. It's just that I have a certain skill set that allows me to represent things a certain way. It just kind of serendipitously all works out that way.

1:35:42 Debra Schwartz: Follow the trail.

1:35:44 Gary Yost: Exactly.

1:35:44 Debra Schwartz: I did appreciate that you included Sky Road Webb and his beautiful singing.

1:35:50 Gary Yost: Oh, that's a great story. So even before I wrote that email to Peter, and I want to mention that it took me weeks to get the courage to write that email to Peter, because I knew I had one shot at it and I just didn't want to deal with rejection. So I really had to like steel myself, or open myself in a certain way that I felt like I just had to do it, but it wasn't something that I just that day thought of and did, I had to really think about it and how to write that. Similarly, in December of 2012, when I was starting the project, I really knew that the most important thing to me was to get the Miwok perspective on the mountain, because those were the people who took care of the mountain for the longest.

1:36:49 Debra Schwartz: The mountain took care of them. [chuckles]

1:36:51 Gary Yost: By like 5,000 years, at least. And I had been introduced to Lanny Pinola years back at an event up at Kule Loklo up at Point Reyes, and I knew that he was the leader of the Miwok people in this area. But Lanny had passed away a few years prior to this, and so I started putting feelers out about what people would be there that could help me understand the real relationship of the people here to the mountain, and it was very, very, very difficult because a lot of the Miwok tribes are really represented by the

Graton Rancheria, and the Graton Rancheria was very northern facing, because they were working towards the casino at the time. And there was very little interest in what was going on in the mountain. I found a couple of Pomo people who were not as interested in the casino, but I couldn't find any Miwok people. And finally a mutual friend told me about a man named John Leonard, who you probably know, who runs the Kule Loklo program, he is one of the founders of the Kule Loklo program, and I think he was one of the founders of Marin Horizon School.

1:38:30 Debra Schwartz: John Littleton?

1:38:31 Gary Yost: Oh, sorry. Yeah, John Leonard is our ex-mayor.

1:38:34 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. John Littleton.

1:38:35 Gary Yost: John Littleton, sorry. I correct myself, thank you. So I called John, and I said, "John, I'm doing this thing. I really need help, I have to find some guidance from a Miwok who cares about the mountain." And he gave me Sky Road Webb's phone number, and I called up Sky Road, and John advised me that, "You don't just ask a Native American to do something for you, because that's not how it works. You embark on a relationship and open up the space for whatever's going to happen to happen, and whatever right thing is going to happen will happen." And of course I was totally comfortable with that, I mean, that's the way I do things. So I asked Sky Road in early January of 2013 to come up to the peak with me, to West Peak with me, and it happened to be on his birthday in 2013. We met downtown and drove up there together and he brought up sage and artemisia and his clapper stick.

1:39:48: And we walked around to various parts of the Air Force Station, essentially the four cardinal directions, and he did prayers up there, and sang. And I got to hear the sound of his voice, and the clapper stick ringing out and echoing off the rocks and features in that area. Especially the clapper stick, of course, it's that sharp sound and it really echoes. And it's hard to describe the feeling of being up there on top of the mountain. We had to do a lot of prayers just to enter that area, because the Miwoks never went up there unless it was a very important ceremonial occasion, and then to hear those sounds, and that language ringing out raised the hair on the back of my neck, and really connected me with the project in a way that I hadn't been connected prior to that. And it was actually soon after that that I wrote Peter that letter.

1:40:58 Debra Schwartz: Oh, interesting.

1:41:00 Gary Yost: So that ceremony that we did up there and that feeling that I had kind of gave me —

1:41:07 Debra Schwartz: It leveled you.

1:41:08 Gary Yost: Yeah. It gave me the ability to ask Peter. And then I didn't ask Sky Road for anything. I just said we're going up there and I just wanted him to experience

the feeling up there. And of course, my hope was that he would want to be involved in the project, but I said, “Let’s touch bases in April.” It was January, I said, “Let’s just touch bases. I’ll keep you posted.” I sent him rushes of the film and he knew that Peter was attached by February, and I just totally left it up to him. Then in April we talked and he said, “I’d like to speak in the film, and I would like to write music for the film.” Which of course, was the ultimate thing that could happen.

1:42:01 Debra Schwartz: He’s a beautiful performer.

1:42:03 Gary Yost: He was the MC of our show at the Throckmorton Theater last month, or earlier this month, and I can send you links to that, actually, you can watch his contribution to that. Of course, we became very close —

1:42:20 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Okay, good.

1:42:23 Gary Yost: And I consider him a real brother now and very important person in my life. So there’s Sky Road Webb, Peter Coyote, George Daly and then my buddy, Jamie Clay, who I’ve worked with on animation projects and things for over 20 years. And he was able to visualize the mountain before it was decapitated, and what the Air Force Station looked like historically. We did 3D animation that used the tools that I had made to illustrate these concepts, because I had tried to get footage and photographs of the demolition of the mountain from the Army Corps of Engineer and I filed three different Freedom of Information Act requests for documentation about the demolition. They essentially said, “There’s nothing on the West Coast, if you want to go back to Maryland and look, you’re welcome to go to the archives, which are very time intensive things to do.” And I said, “You know what? We can just do this stuff in 3D Studio and visualize it much more clearly. We don’t need that stuff.” And we did a great job of showing what the mountain looked like, and the extent of devastation when they took off the 106 acres of the peak.

1:43:52: So, I had this incredible team and we came out with the film, and the Tamalpais Lands Collaborative was formed. But the Collaborative moved very slowly, kind of geologically slowly, because of these multiple public organizations. And there were a lot of projects to do on the mountain, just because the West Peak was where my heart was, it doesn’t mean that there aren’t big areas in the mountain that need a lot of attention and the Collaborative had to ease into it. I felt like things are going a little slowly in the beginning of 2015, and so I wanted to make another little film to raise awareness in the mind of the county about what was going on up there. And so the Italian Street Painting Festival people came to me, Sue and Joe Carlomagno came to me, and asked if I would do a film about the street painting festival. I said, “Sure, if we can do it up in West Peak, where there is plenty of street.” And they said, “Well, that’s a fantastic idea.”

1:45:03: And they found Genna Panzarella, who’s a brilliant chalk artist, who also lives in Tam Junction and can see the mountain every day from her house. We made a little eight-minute film essentially about how one person, Genna, can make an offering to the

mountain, in her way, in her creative way, and her offering was to paint a picture of the mountain as it was before it was decapitated, on the floor of the mess hall, which was inside the area that was blown up to remove the peak. Essentially, she was drawing the mountain as a whole inside of the invisible peak, the peak that wasn't there, and that feeling of being — when you're really up there, that feeling of being inside what used to be the peak of the mountain —

1:45:51 Debra Schwartz: The highest peak of the mountain.

1:45:53 Gary Yost: Yeah. When you get in touch with, you deeply get in touch with the feeling that you are standing in what was inside solid rock, and you sit and meditate with that when you're up there, it's a pretty powerful feeling. Then to do an offering like that where she essentially was healing the mountain by drawing it as it was before it was decapitated — and then we planned it, so it's the day before a rain came and the chalk would get washed back into the mountain, so that heart energy that she put into that painting kind of went back into the mountain, even in a physical way. That was a very powerful project for me, and I thought, "Okay, so I'm going to do one of these films every year until the money is released to start the restoration."

1:46:48: And so that was the 2015 project, and there were lots of things that happened over 2015 that continued to delay the start of the restoration up there. There were other more important things to do, there were just more difficult issues about how the agencies were going to work together and to make sure the agencies still had control over their territory. I was very frustrated over the summer of 2015 and started to think about what the next film would be, because it was obvious I had to do another one. And I thought, "Okay, well, maybe it's only going to be a trilogy. Maybe the third time's the charm and then the money's going to come and then I can start documenting the actual restoration."

1:47:37 Debra Schwartz: The one thing I wanted to ask you about the West Peak film — there are people that don't understand. Very quickly, could you describe for us, what it is that actually happened that West Peak has been decapitated. Just very briefly, West Peak was mutilated by who and when? Just to give a little context.

1:48:01 Gary Yost: Yeah. Well, in World War II, it was obvious that there was a potential for an attack by the Japanese, and so the Army brought some temporary radar up there on Ridgecrest Boulevard and at West Peak to check for the possibility of an incoming Japanese attack. And after World War II ended and the Cold War kicked off the military, in general, saw the potential for that West Peak area to be a great place to put a radar installation to warn of the possibility of incoming Russian attack. They had Hamilton Field already, but they needed something that could look out 200, 250 miles over the horizon. So they decided in the late 1940s to build a big Air Force station, kind of the prototype of what became many of these radar installations around the perimeter of the country.

1:49:11: And in 1950, they blew the top off the mountain to create this big flat area for both the barracks and the operational center of the Mill Valley Air Force Station, which

became operational in late 1951. And so the water district, which owned the land, was happy to give them that land at the time because the Cold War was a big deal. They thought, “Okay, this is something that’s really important. We’re right there with you.” Unfortunately, in the agreement that the water district had with the military in 1949, there was a clause that the military wasn’t happy with, and that was if and when the military ever cleared out and shut down the Air Force station that they would be responsible for restoring it back to its natural condition.

1:50:15: So in 1955, the government came back to the water district and said, “You know what, we’re not happy with this clause, we want to remove it,” and the water district — the president of the water district at that time was Thomas Kent, William Kent’s son — and they were essentially bullied into signing the amendment because the military essentially told them that they would just condemn the land and the water district would never see it again unless they signed that amendment. And it must have just been very heartbreaking for Thomas Kent to sign that.

1:50:58: So that’s how when 1980, ’82, when they shut down and moved out, the military just left it in that condition. There were plenty of people in the county who were astonished at that — the Tamalpais Conservation Club — and they lobbied heavily for money to start restoring the mountain and the TCC members actually started to take down pieces of the barracks themselves. We talk about that in *The Invisible Peak*. And eventually Barbara Boxer managed to hold mostly the FAA who was using that space for the radome, for air traffic control, but also to some extent the military, and they got between \$1.2 million and \$1.4 million, and they thought that would be enough to do all the restoration, but there was just so much asbestos up there and the asbestos abatement was so expensive that they only were able to really get rid of the wooden structures and the asbestos and then all the infrastructure was left and of course the cost has gone up astronomically since the early ’90s, and now it’s a lot more expensive to remove. So that’s the history.

1:52:10 Debra Schwartz: So ergo the reason why you decided to make this movie, because there’s all this debris and it’s sort of post-apocalyptic up there right now and it completely is incongruent with the rest of every single thing that you see around you.

1:52:24 Gary Yost: Yeah. As I mentioned earlier, the first time I walked up there I was in a state of cognitive dissonance as to how this junkyard of old concrete and rebar and asphalt could be sitting at the apex of this national park, state park, watershed and how the county could allow this to happen.

1:52:47 Debra Schwartz: What I really appreciated about this movie is that you saw something that created this dissonance in you and you felt that it was inappropriate and wrong and you actually decided to do something, although you didn’t exactly know how it was going to come about, but you utilized what you had, what you could and you went forward.

1:53:06 Gary Yost: Yeah, it just seemed like a fun next project.

1:53:10 Debra Schwartz: Fun. Perhaps a little more than that too. Okay. So now you've made the project, it's gone better than anybody could really hope for when you're sitting on your deck looking at the mountain thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if —"

1:53:25 Gary Yost: We got into 16 film festivals around the West. I entered into a bunch of film festivals on the West Coast and 16 film festivals picked it up. We won awards at four or five of them. We had our own program at the Mill Valley Film Festival where Peter and I spoke, and it got picked up by KRCB's Natural Heroes program, which ended up getting picked up by PBS nationally, and it's now been shown in 60 markets around the country. So millions of people have seen the film and our little mountain that has gotten around. So, that is way beyond anything that I ever, ever could have expected.

1:54:13: We've now caught up to 2015, when I thought, "Okay. I gotta do another one of these consciousness-raising films." And I had always in my mind heard the sound of a cello up there. When I was making *The Invisible Peak* I kept feeling like, "Oh, it would be so great to have a cellist up here." And one day, I was invited to sing at the Sunday Salon in December for the O'Hanlon Arts Center. Daniel Patrick and Erma Murphy invited me, and I sang a little thing, and Katie Boyd, the cellist, was playing cello that day, and Jimmy Dillon, the guitarist, was playing guitar. And I came up to Katie afterwards and said, "You know, I've had this thing, I've always heard the sound of the cello in my mind up at the West Peak." She knew my work, and I said, "Would you be interested in maybe doing something with me with some cello music?" and Jimmy was standing right there.

1:55:16 Debra Schwartz: Did you know Jimmy then?

1:55:18 Debra Schwartz: I did not. But I knew who he — I'd seen *Ascension of the Blues*.

1:55:20 Debra Schwartz: Maybe, for those that are listening, you can hear his interview, too, with our oral history.

1:55:24 Gary Yost: I'd been a big fan of his for years since I saw *Ascension of the Blues* at the Throckmorton Theater. And he was standing right there, and then George Daly, my buddy and co-director of *The Invisible Peak*, was there, and George turned to me and said, "You know, Jimmy's right here. Why don't we ask Jimmy if he'd like to do this thing with Katie and we could get the male and female perspective up there?" George is great that way. And so I grabbed both of them and said, "I have this idea to do something with music up there, because I haven't really explored music in that space, but I hear it in my mind all the time when I'm up there. Are you into it?" And they said, "Yes, absolutely." We met on Christmas Eve, actually, last year at the Depot, and then I asked them to think about what music would be appropriate, and Katie came up with the "Sarabande" from Bach's Fifth Cello Suite, which is a very unusual piece of music. It's nice and short, which is important. But it has no chords in it, it's all implied chords, and it was a fertility piece, which I thought was really appropriate, but it's also incredibly

intense and both very sad and hopeful at the same time.

1:56:43: So, she came up with that, and we thought, “Well, how could Jimmy build a guitar into that?” I asked him to use his resonator guitar, because I like the tone of these metal guitars, and I thought it would go well with the cello. And he wrote an incredibly beautiful, basically call and response, to the Bach piece. So over January, February, and early March, we got together a bunch of times and rehearsed this, and in early March, we asked Lorin Rowan, who’s another local Mill Valley musician, if he would record us in his home studio. And so, we recorded the music there, and then I had the basic track, and then I asked my buddy Jamie Clay and another friend, Terry VerHaar, if they’d be interested in helping me shoot the thing. I came up with a very aggressive six-page shot list for a five-hour period when the light was going to be correct to make this film of two musicians who essentially are not together in the same place, but they are playing together musically, even though they’re not present with each other, which is something that’s not easy to do. The camera is moving and you see the two of them dissolving in and out. There’s some very advanced match move techniques that I’d never actually seen before done with music that way.

1:58:16: And we shot that in the end of March, and at that time, the Lands Collaborative, which had been working very diligently behind the scenes with the water district to come up with the initial funding to start the planning to do the restoration, they told me that things are looking really good with funding with the water district’s board meeting in the first week of June, looking like it was a lock, that they were going to release some funds, and the Parks Conservancy was going to match those funds, and if my film was going to be ready, we could have another event at the Throckmorton where we launched the film and the actual restoration effort. So now I had an event that was scheduled before I even had finished the film. So the pressure was on in April to create something. And what I wanted to create was a film that captured the feeling that I have of being up there when I’m alone and I’m in touch with the spirits that are up there. So that’s very much a lightning in a bottle problem, similar to the *Day in the Life of the Fire Lookout* piece, which is capturing the feeling.

1:59:32: So, I was trying to do something that was more ambitious in a lot of ways than the other films I had done, where it was all be about feeling, to place the viewer up there with me in that state. And we had an event on May 4th or 5th, where we also asked the poet Jane Hirshfield, who was in Mill Valley, to work with us on collaborating on images and poetry about the mountain and things like the mountain, that mountain energy, like lichens and insects. And we asked Sky Road Webb to host it, and then Armando Quintero, one of the board members of the water district, came up and talked about how work had begun and money was going to be released, and that this was all really happening. So that was the most satisfying part of all of this; and the issue is that the first seed money is the most important money, because the Conservancy can raise whatever money they need to raise, but without that first seed money happening, nothing’s going to happen, so we expect the study will take about a year, year-and-a-half, and there’ll be about a year’s worth of fundraising before the real work begins.

2:01:00: So we're thinking like three years from now we should be able to break ground on the restoration, and maybe conservatively four years. But certainly within five years there'll be a lot of that stuff removed and then there has to be a lot of botanical work to make sure indigenous plants have a really good start, and that the invasives don't come back and destroy, because that freshly disturbed ground is ripe for — so there's a big, big job for botanists and a lot of the local school kids and nurseries and things can get really involved.

2:01:32 Debra Schwartz: Big job and a wonderful opportunity.

2:01:36 Gary Yost: Fabulous opportunity. It'll be a lot of fun, it's just so incredible to be up there. So certainly, that's going to take a few years just for the plantings to take hold; and so 10 years from now, which is not a long period of time, we should see that area looking and feeling very natural; and then, certainly, 20 years from now, I would expect a really nice memorial to be up there, to the people who served and a couple wayside signs. But in general, it's just going to be very close to how it was, we're not adding that height of the mountain back on, but it'll be recreated to look natural.

2:02:17 Debra Schwartz: I feel like I've actually been on a long walk with you, [chuckles] going through all of this — which, you know, I love to take a walk.

2:02:23 Gary Yost: Up through history.

2:02:24 Debra Schwartz: Yes, through history, through time, I like the way that you include the long views. I'm going to ask you a couple personal questions.

2:02:32 Gary Yost: Shoot.

2:02:36 Debra Schwartz: I know that we come to Mt. Tam and a lot of us are very attracted to it, and you could say that people make a town. People come here and what they do, and how they live makes an area, but an area makes a person as well. And so how do you see the person you've become as a result of living here in this area in Mill Valley, or near Mt. Tam, or the Bay area? How do you see that it's formed you as an adult, as a human being, morally, personally?

2:03:18 Gary Yost: Well, until this phase of my life, I never really felt like I was giving back to the community and where I lived. I was always working and I had a lot, like I said earlier, there were some chronic health issues that I had. So I had to do a lot of focusing on myself in order to stay healthy and I had to focus on work in order to feed my family, and so I felt unfulfilled in the part of my life that was giving to the wider community. In a nutshell, the answer to your question is, I now feel like I am in a better relationship with my community because I am contributing, using my creative skills to something that resonates with the people and the environment in the community. So it's giving me that opportunity to be more in balance.

2:04:33 Debra Schwartz: That must feel like a life more in balance and well lived,

yes?

2:04:38 Gary Yost: Yeah, yeah. [chuckles] I feel like once this project is complete, then that is my life's work. You know what I mean? It's my children, and the fact that I've been in a loving relationship. Those are really important things to me, but again, the deep-time issue is really important to me, and feeling like I had some positive influence on my environment, the larger environment as a whole, is important to me in another way.

2:05:14 Debra Schwartz: If young people are listening to this conversation and they're trying to define their space in what they want to do with their life, is there anything that you would say that you've learned, that you would pass on to anybody interested?

2:05:28 Gary Yost: Well, the most important thing is not to say no to opportunities that come up, that feel like they are true opportunities for you to express yourself. Even if they're very, very difficult things that you don't know how to do or haven't done before, I think the most important thing is to stay open to the things that present themselves, that feel like evolutionary steps in your personal growth, and not to say no to those things. And that's the only way that you can ever achieve your potential. You don't know what your potential is, but the only way to achieve it is to be open and say yes to the opportunities that come up that you know inside are right. When you do enough deep listening to when an opportunity comes up, you can feel it when it's the right thing to do, and not to be afraid of starting because you don't know how to do it, or you have no experience doing it. If that comes up and you feel like it's truly coming up as something that is speaking to you on a truth-level, like, "This is happening for a reason," then do not say no to that.

2:07:08 Debra Schwartz: What would you say about facing the challenges? How have you coped with the challenges when you have that internal imperative, you have said yes, and yet there are challenges?

2:07:20 Gary Yost: I always just reach out to other people and collaborate. For me it's very easy to acknowledge that I don't know how to do everything but there are people out there who know how to do the things I don't know how to do. And I always reach out to them and one of my great skills in life is being able to put together teams of people that can synergistically come together and produce something that's greater than the sum of its parts. I'm just really good at that, and it's the thing that I enjoy the most because it's like a force multiplier. You only know so much, but when you combine your creative skills with other super creative people, you can just do the most amazing things with very, very little; you don't need a lot of stuff because creativity, when it multiplies that way — it's like in sound, there's this thing called beat frequencies and resonant frequencies, and when you couple resonant frequencies together you get a result which is greater than the sum of its parts. You take two three dB signals and mix them together at a resonant frequency, you're going to get something that's louder than the two of them just added together.

2:08:46: And it's just like that with people, when you feel like you're at a wall, you just bring someone in who can also resonate in that way, even if they don't know it before you offer them the opportunity. And if you're going down a path of right relationship to your community in whatever way it is — it could be guys that make skateboarding films or whatever — it's just going to work out.

2:09:18 Debra Schwartz: Well, on that note, I say let us conclude this interview. Gary, I want to thank you so much for sharing your story, for sharing your talents, for making the films that so many of us watch again, and again, and again, and each time we cry, because it matters so much to love the land you're at, that you stand on and you live in, and the people that help collaborate in it, and it takes community to continue to do that. So thank you so much on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library for all that you do for our beautiful Mt. Tam, our space we live in and for the community.

2:10:01 Gary Yost: You're very welcome, and I also am so grateful for the Historical Society and how the Society has managed to keep all this history alive, so I'm honored to be part of the Oral History Project, and I look forward to seeing how history unfolds over the next period of time, however long that is. [chuckles]

2:10:21 Debra Schwartz: Me too. Okay. That's it.