

Mill Valley Oral History Program
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LOUIS FERRARIO

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Louis Ferrario
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In this oral history, artist Louis Ferrario reminisces about his long life lived in Mill Valley. Born in Point Richmond in 1925 to Italian immigrant parents, Louis's family soon moved over to Mill Valley, where his father had worked on building the railway and the Mt. Tamalpais gravity cars before going on to work for the city's maintenance department. Louis recalls the untimely deaths of his mother and sisters, and poignantly describes the special relationship he had with his father, with whom he lived until the latter's death. Louis recounts the various Mill Valley schools he attended, his experiences in the Army late in World War II, which took him to Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, and his career after the war as an artist and art teacher. Throughout this oral history, Louis nostalgically evokes the cherished Mill Valley of his childhood, a town where if you walked past a fire station around lunchtime, you might very well be invited to sit down and have a sandwich with the firemen.

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Oral History of Louis Ferrario
August 28th, 2015

00:01 Debra Schwartz: Hello. Today is August 28th, 2015. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I am sitting in a lovely home on Hillside Avenue with Louis Ferrario. Hello, Louis.

00:14 Louis Ferrario: Hi.

00:16 Debra Schwartz: Thank you very much for sitting down with me today, and talking with the Mill Valley Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society about your life here in Mill Valley. I'm going to ask you a few questions and maybe we can discuss a little bit about your time here in Mill Valley and your father who worked on the Scenic Railway. Will that be good for you?

00:40 Louis Ferrario: Sure.

00:41 Debra Schwartz: Great. Okay. So, first let's just get your full name and your birthday.

00:48 Louis Ferrario: So, you want Louis C. Ferrario. Otherwise it's Louis Cadlo Ferrario.

00:58 Debra Schwartz: And shall I call you Louis or Louie?

01:01 Louis Ferrario: Well, they call me Louie, yeah.

01:04 Debra Schwartz: Okay, Louie. And you were born in — I'm looking at your biographical information. You were born in another era, shall we say.

01:15 Louis Ferrario: Okay. [laughs]

01:18 Debra Schwartz: Anyway you've been around for a while.

01:20 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

01:21 Debra Schwartz: So, will you tell me, where were you born?

01:24 Louis Ferrario: Point Richmond.

01:25 Debra Schwartz: Point Richmond. And where were your parents living at the time that you were born?

01:30 Louis Ferrario: They were temporarily in Point Richmond. Then they went right back to Mill Valley.

01:36 Debra Schwartz: They already were living in Mill Valley while your mother was pregnant with you?

01:39 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

01:40 Debra Schwartz: And so basically, from your earliest memories you were here in Mill Valley?

01:48 Louis Ferrario: Right.

01:49 Debra Schwartz: Tell me a little bit about your parents, where they came from, what their names were.

01:57 Louis Ferrario: Okay. My father came from Northern Italy, and he worked on the railroad building it in Mill Valley, that went up the mountain¹. And then he did, from Point Richmond to Muir Beach, a gravity car. He did one of those.

02:20 Debra Schwartz: From Point Richmond to Muir Woods?

02:23 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. Muir Woods or Muir Beach. And my mother grew up in Mill Valley. She was also from Northern Italy, as a little girl.

02:37 Debra Schwartz: What was your mother's name?

02:39 Louis Ferrario: Pasqualina.

02:40 Debra Schwartz: Her first name?

02:41 Louis Ferrario: Pasqualina.

02:42 Debra Schwartz: Pasqualina. And her maiden name?

02:49 Louis Ferrario: Well, I can't think of it.

02:50 Debra Schwartz: But she grew up, she was born and raised in Mill Valley?

02:53 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

02:54 Debra Schwartz: Interesting. Do you remember what her parents did?

03:00 Louis Ferrario: No. But they were never here. Her parents were in Italy, Northern Italy.

03:05 Debra Schwartz: Oh. So, she came to Mill Valley — do you know how old she

¹ The Mill Valley and Mt. Tamalpais Scenic Railway—Ed.

was when she came?

03:11 Louis Ferrario: I think she probably was a little girl.

03:14 Debra Schwartz: And your father's name was what? His full name.

03:19 Louis Ferrario: Liberato Ferrario.

03:21 Debra Schwartz: Say the first name again.

03:23 Louis Ferrario: Liberato.

03:24 Debra Schwartz: Liberato Ferrario.

03:27 Louis Ferrario: Right.

03:28 Debra Schwartz: That really is an Italian name. Did both of your parents speak Italian?

03:33 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

03:35 Debra Schwartz: What part of Northern Italy? Do you remember?

03:37 Louis Ferrario: Northern Italy.

03:38 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the cities, the region?

03:40 Louis Ferrario: Lonato, I think. And since most of them came down from the Swiss Alps, they settled in Northern Italy, but also sometimes if you check them out, they didn't come from Mill Valley, they came from Switzerland. So, a lot of Northern Italy were Swedish.

04:06 Debra Schwartz: Swiss.

04:07 Louis Ferrario: Swiss.

04:08 Debra Schwartz: Yes. That's true. So, your father — would you tell us a little bit — oh, wait, before we go on, do you have siblings? Do you have a sister?

04:19 Louis Ferrario: I have one sister left. My mother died early, two sisters died early, and my father and I both came down with a cold. I took him to the hospital, and he died of a heart attack. And I thought, "Oh, I just pitched up a storm." But everyone said "Louis, just think your father never —"

04:46 Debra Schwartz: Never suffered.

04:47 Louis Ferrario: Suffered like your sisters or your mother.

04:50 Debra Schwartz: Well, how old was your mother when she died?

04:53 Louis Ferrario: She was young.

04:56 Debra Schwartz: 20s, 30s?

04:57 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. She must have been.

05:00 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember how old you were when she died?

05:04 Louis Ferrario: I guess I was just pretty young.

05:07 Debra Schwartz: And your sisters, how old were they when they died?

05:12 Louis Ferrario: Well, my older sister sort of became a mother because she took care of the younger sisters and she was just an office — she used to work with Standard Oil, she had a job there. But when she came home, she took care of cooking and took care of my older sister who went to Catholic school.

05:39 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So, I'm a little confused. Maybe you could tell me which is the sibling that was born first? The name. No? Okay, so you had altogether three sisters.

05:54 Louis Ferrario: Three sisters.

05:55 Debra Schwartz: And do you recall the sisters that died, their names?

06:02 Louis Ferrario: One was Mary. Mary became like a mother to us, and even though she worked in the city, she came home and did everything. There was Mary, and — God, I can't even think of the other.

06:22 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, so they do you remember how young they were when they died? Did they die at the same time, or at different times?

06:29 Louis Ferrario: Different times, yeah.

06:31 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

06:32 Louis Ferrario: They had, I think, cancer.

06:34 Debra Schwartz: Oh, so did they reach adulthood?

06:36 Louis Ferrario: What?

06:37 Debra Schwartz: Did they reach adulthood?

06:39 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, I think they were adults.

06:43 Debra Schwartz: Okay, so your family was four children, in total. Of which there are — was it four or five children? Your three sisters and yourself. Four.

06:58 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, yeah. And my father.

07:00 Debra Schwartz: And your father. You still have one sister alive today?

07:04 Louis Ferrario: Only one.

07:05 Debra Schwartz: So there's two of you left?

07:08 Louis Ferrario: Well, yeah, you could say one sister and me.

07:11 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

07:11 Louis Ferrario: I was the only brother.

07:13 Debra Schwartz: I see.

07:14 Louis Ferrario: They were all sisters.

07:17 Debra Schwartz: So tell me a little bit about your father, and the work he did in Mill Valley, will you? And will you repeat his name again please?

07:28 Louis Ferrario: I don't know whether they called him Louie or Liberato, but he worked on the railroad building the tracks right up to Mill Valley. He was assistant for building. And then he was a gravity pack man, going down to Muir Woods. And then when that closed up, the city hired him, so he worked at the city until he was old enough to retire. So he retired from the city. But he worked for the city in maintenance work. He was very, very clever. And knew everything. His house was not like this.

08:19 Debra Schwartz: Is this the house you were raised in?

08:22 Louis Ferrario: No. I was looking for a place to keep horses, 'cause I had two, too far away, and I told the realtor I wanted a place in Sonoma with two houses, one for Papa and me, and then one for this friend of mine that used to live with us, would have a place to live. And I says, "Okay." And then he was like, "I'm going to show you a place in Mill Valley." And I thought, "I don't want to see a place in Mill Valley." He says, "Just one minute." And I said, "Oh God, alright." So we came up here, and there was a shack all fallen apart. You couldn't get in the garden or anything. And they were bidding, and he said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I don't care what you do, but let's go." He said, "I'm going to bid \$15 more." And I said, "Okay, then let's go."

09:20 Debra Schwartz: What was the bid?

09:22 Louis Ferrario: So he bid \$15.

09:24 Debra Schwartz: No, \$15 more than the asking price, or —

09:27 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, that was the price then. Well, there were prices before, you know, very small prices.

09:36 Debra Schwartz: Do you recall what the total price for this property was? The total?

09:40 Louis Ferrario: Right then when he bought it, it was \$15.

09:44 Debra Schwartz: \$15 for this property? And this is your father bought it? So we're sitting on a piece of property, 144 Hillside, I'm looking out the window across to the ridge, Throckmorton Ridge. There are vast views everywhere, and I'm in this stunning house.

10:01 Louis Ferrario: And this lot almost goes down to Oakdale. And the lot — we have a gate down at the bottom of this property. So then it was the easiest way you could go out the bottom gate, you'd almost be downtown.

10:19 Debra Schwartz: Well —

10:21 Louis Ferrario: And we redid the whole thing.

10:23 Debra Schwartz: Your father and you redid the whole thing?

10:26 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, we had people doing things.

10:29 Debra Schwartz: But your father —

10:30 Louis Ferrario: And I added rooms. I added the bathroom, the kitchen, was very, very small, and then there was just a little storeroom, and I ripped that out. I put in a sunroom, a deck. Everything's been redone.

10:49 Debra Schwartz: And so you and your father lived here and your friend?

10:53 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

10:55 Debra Schwartz: And do you recall when your father finally passed away? He had a bad cold, you said?

11:02 Louis Ferrario: God, it's been —

11:03 Debra Schwartz: And then a heart attack.

11:04 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. He was still young, too.

11:11 Debra Schwartz: How young?

11:14 Louis Ferrario: I think he's been dead for 50 years.

11:17 Debra Schwartz: Oh my. So he would've been in his early 60s, I think, huh?

11:22 Louis Ferrario: Is that it?

11:23 Debra Schwartz: Well, you're 90 now. You would've been 40 when he died?

11:29 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, could've been.

11:30 Debra Schwartz: So he probably had you when he was fairly young.

11:32 Louis Ferrario: Because my older sister was still working at Standard Oil. And she was sort of raising one of the sisters, and taking care of my father and me both.

11:55 Debra Schwartz: So your father was a handyman and very clever, and he worked with the city. And I know from our previous discussions that you just loved him very much.

12:05 Louis Ferrario: What?

12:06 Debra Schwartz: That you loved him very much.

12:07 Louis Ferrario: Oh, God, he was everything for me. I still miss him.

12:14 Debra Schwartz: So, tell me a little bit about the world in Mill Valley that you lived in with your father and your sisters, if you would. Tell me about what Mill Valley was like for you.

12:25 Louis Ferrario: Oh, Mill Valley was so nice. I'd walk downtown. Esposti's used to be just going up — when you leave downtown, and you go up —

12:43 Debra Schwartz: Throckmorton?

12:44 Louis Ferrario: Throckmorton. Esposti's used to be there.

12:48 Debra Schwartz: What is Esposti's?

12:49 Louis Ferrario: And that's where we all went for milkshakes and ice cream bars

and everything else. Right downtown there was a drug store and another place you could go in and buy stuff like ice cream. And then on the other side where you come in, there was this little divider, well on the right hand side there was this place where men and women — separate men's clothing, separate wing, ladies' clothing — and the men's is gone, but the ladies' is still there. The drug store is there, too.

13:33 Debra Schwartz: Lockwood's? Was it Lockwood's back then?

13:34 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, Lockwood's.

13:36 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember some of the other names of the stores downtown?

13:42 Louis Ferrario: God, oh hell, I don't. And the Depot was beautiful, and they tore it down and put that stupid thing. Also, the Catholic Church — I was an altar boy all the time, and my mother sang in the choir. If there was another altar boy missing, and I had already served mass, she'd call me up, and I had to go back and serve mass. And that church was like a mission. Gorgeous. Stained glass windows, beautiful wood interior, and they built that stupid thing now. I had a friend that was going to be a priest. He came over, and I said, "We'll go to church." And he went there and he says, "Louie, I'll never go to church again." I said, "I know, too. I don't like it at all. It's terrible." It's just yuck.

14:43 Debra Schwartz: Well, you're an artist, you have an artist's eye, when you think of the Mill Valley you knew as a youth, tell me about the visuals of the town. I mean, how you —

14:56 Louis Ferrario: I thought it was very, very nice. You knew everyone. You knew everyone that had a store, and they knew you. It was just so nice. And now it's not. No one downtown knows you.

15:14 Debra Schwartz: Sounds like you had a real hometown experience.

15:17 Louis Ferrario: Yes. Yes.

15:19 Debra Schwartz: What schools did you attend, you and your sisters?

15:22 Louis Ferrario: I went to a Catholic school just temporarily in Sausalito. I had to take the train to go there. And then I went to Park School. I went to Tam Junction. I graduated from Tam Junction.

15:46 Debra Schwartz: You mean Tam High?

15:48 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, Tam High. I also went one semester up in the hill in Mill Valley. The school is no longer there. It was up on the hill.

16:13 Debra Schwartz: You mean up on Summit?

16:14 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, Summit School.

16:15 Debra Schwartz: The first schoolhouse that we had up on Summit?

16:18 Louis Ferrario: I went to school there for a year, and then we went down to Old Mill. I was 51 — was it 51? No, 21, I think. I forget. Up in my bedroom there's a thing, the dog eating out of the can.

16:45 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

16:46 Louis Ferrario: I got first prize for Marin County and first prize for Mill Valley.

16:51 Debra Schwartz: You mean for your artwork?

16:52 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

16:53 Debra Schwartz: Maybe I can take a photo of that?

16:54 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. And there was one of my photographs. I was a young kid down below the boat.

17:03 Debra Schwartz: You painted that when you were a child?

17:06 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, just a kid.

17:07 Debra Schwartz: We're sitting in your lovely living room, and I can see that there's a lot of art around this room that you —

17:13 Louis Ferrario: Oh, that's my work. All the ceramic stuff is mine. That's my lamp base over here, too.

17:19 Debra Schwartz: This?

17:19 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

17:20 Debra Schwartz: Oh my gosh. I love it. It's beautiful.

17:24 Louis Ferrario: Well I got a gorgeous studio. Everyone says, "Why aren't you working there?" I said, "No."

17:29 Debra Schwartz: For our listeners, for them to understand what you mean, on your property, by your parking platform, below the platform, is a lovely potter's studio.

17:40 Louis Ferrario: But there's so much to do now, and I haven't been doing it.

17:43 Debra Schwartz: Yes, but it's there.

17:45 Louis Ferrario: But, it needs to be worked. I've gotta get people to — I used to have gardening tours.

17:52 Debra Schwartz: We'll talk about that after the interview. [chuckles] So you're describing the schools. Do you remember what year you graduated from high school? Tam High?

18:03 Louis Ferrario: Well, when I graduated from Tam High, I had turned 18.

18:12 Debra Schwartz: So you would've been — 25, 35, 40 around '44, during World War II?

18:19 Louis Ferrario: Well, I was only 18 when I went into service.

18:23 Debra Schwartz: So you went into the service.

18:24 Louis Ferrario: Yes, and then I got into a great big — oh, I did go up to West Lake. West State. West — above Oregon.

18:44 Debra Schwartz: Oh Eugene? For college, you mean?

18:51 Louis Ferrario: No, when I went into the service, they sent me there, and then I went back down to Mill Valley because we had a boat station. And there was a regular vessel which they put me on, and we went up the bay.

19:14 Debra Schwartz: So you were in the Navy?

19:18 Louis Ferrario: No, it was Army.

19:19 Debra Schwartz: Army.

19:20 Louis Ferrario: Yes, and we went up to New Guinea. So I got out at New Guinea, and joined this group. And we went into New Guinea, and oh God, I was just lost. They were so native. Women were feeding pigs.

19:39 Debra Schwartz: You were in Papua New Guinea?

19:41 Louis Ferrario: Huh?

19:41 Debra Schwartz: Were you in Papua New Guinea?

19:43 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

19:44 Debra Schwartz: Where the women do breastfeed pigs?

19:46 Louis Ferrario: Yes. And they're banging on things and everything else, and I think, "Oh, God." This was awful. But we went all through New Guinea, and I was doing records, I kept records, that's what I did. And then we were gonna go up to Manila, and the guy said that, "We're going to check everyone that comes up from the land below." I can't think of the name of — because a lot of people, he said, will probably go AWOL to come up to here. So Charles and I went in.

20:34 Debra Schwartz: Charles?

20:35 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

20:35 Debra Schwartz: Who is Charles?

20:37 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, he was just someone that was in the service. So both he and I went up to New Guinea. I mean, yeah, to Manila.

20:46 Debra Schwartz: Manila.

20:46 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, and we got stopped by the patrol people. And of course we had just [unintelligible] — we didn't bring anything with us. And we got thrown in prison.

21:02 Debra Schwartz: So were you going AWOL?

21:04 Louis Ferrario: They thought we — no, no. It's just that when we got there, we all — we just wanted to see.

21:10 Debra Schwartz: Oh, you went sightseeing.

21:12 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, up to see Manila. But it was just so wonderful, but we got thrown in prison. That was the beginning of my prison life.

21:34 Debra Schwartz: You surprise me. This story, so how long was your prison life?

21:40 Louis Ferrario: Well, I wasn't there too long, and I was — went up to Japan, and they did a biopsy on me, then they sent me home. And then they sent me up to Washington again, and Washington sent me back down to Marin — not Marin General.

22:16 Debra Schwartz: Were you sick? Were you ill when you were in prison?

22:19 Louis Ferrario: Oh, I was, yeah. Terrible.

22:24 Debra Schwartz: While you were?

22:25 Louis Ferrario: Well I had never, remember, I had never been away from home before. And then to be in prison, which was just wooden floors, wooden walls, that's all. No toilet paper, no nothing. And I went up to Washington, and they said, "We can't do anything with him." So they sent me down to Marin General. Not to Marin General — the VA hospital in the city.

23:00 Debra Schwartz: Were you a prisoner of war? Who imprisoned you?

23:04 Louis Ferrario: It was a mistake. Just a mistake.

23:08 Debra Schwartz: So the U.S. Army imprisoned you.

23:10 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, by mistake.

23:13 Debra Schwartz: And you became very ill while you were imprisoned. Were you there a year? Less? More?

23:19 Louis Ferrario: I was there for a while. Yeah, I can't remember offhand now.

23:24 Debra Schwartz: And your friend Charles that was with you?

23:27 Louis Ferrario: I think he went back to China.

23:31 Debra Schwartz: Okay, so basically I'm understanding that you, as a small town boy, being raised in a rather idyllic environment, suddenly thrust out into the world, into the craziness, became very ill, and eventually made your way home. And at what point were you discharged from the Army?

23:56 Louis Ferrario: I wasn't in there very long.

23:58 Debra Schwartz: Anyway, you made your way back home and here you still are now. And I imagine you are very happy to be home, yes?

24:06 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. Well, like going out, I couldn't even go up to my gate.

24:10 Debra Schwartz: You were so ill from the —

24:12 Louis Ferrario: I just wanted to stay where it was safe.

24:15 Debra Schwartz: I see. You stayed home while you recovered from the trauma of your experience.

24:20 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

24:21 Debra Schwartz: All this a mistake?

24:23 Louis Ferrario: Yes. And I've always been not very good in confined areas. I get a little antsy, still. [chuckles]

24:37 Debra Schwartz: So your father was alive when you came back?

24:40 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

24:41 Debra Schwartz: Good.

24:42 Louis Ferrario: 'Cause he and I were here and we — I did most of the ideas of decorating, but he was great at plumbing, electricity, and stuff like that. And in the garden, we couldn't even get through for all the crap. And we got rid of all the crap, made all the paths, and we started doing all of the paths. All my camellias are about eight feet tall, when they're in bloom, it's gorgeous, and my azaleas, too.

25:15 Debra Schwartz: So at what point did you begin teaching? You taught in many places art, correct? You were an art teacher.

25:24 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, mostly San Rafael High School. Did you ever see that big wooden building? There's a street and there's San Rafael High.

25:36 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm.

25:37 Louis Ferrario: Okay. I was teaching there, and I think at Terra Linda, and that was a book room, which they were gonna get rid of, and I said, "If you let me, I'll go to the book room and I'll turn that into a ceramic room, which would be great." And they said, "We'll check." And they said, "Okay. We'll let you do that." So I turned the book room into a ceramic room. And I think I only taught two periods, two sessions there, and then I had an offer in San Francisco at the university.

26:14 Debra Schwartz: University of San Francisco?

26:16 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. I went there.

26:19 Debra Schwartz: So you taught ceramics and you were also a painter? Is that your carving up there too? Is that all ceramics?

26:31 Louis Ferrario: Most of the top layer, yeah, the top.

26:37 Debra Schwartz: So let's get back to Mill Valley, if you would. Tell me about some of the people you remember in town.

26:44 Louis Ferrario: Well, everyone that had stores were so nice, and the people in the drugstore right downtown were real nice. And the train house used to have a nice little restaurant, it was very nice.

27:03 Debra Schwartz: The train house?

27:05 Louis Ferrario: Well, now they built a new place.

27:08 Debra Schwartz: You mean the Depot?

27:09 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, the Depot.

27:10 Debra Schwartz: Uh-huh.

27:12 Louis Ferrario: I knew everyone that had a store, they were just all so nice.

27:19 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the Canepa family?

27:21 Louis Ferrario: Who?

27:21 Debra Schwartz: The Canepa family, Mill Valley Market.

27:24 Louis Ferrario: That sounds familiar.

27:27 Debra Schwartz: And do you remember the names of any of the bars? Or the restaurants, the names? No? How about this: Is there any — a couple of people in particular that stand out in your mind that lived in Mill Valley? Chief of police maybe? Do you remember him?

27:49 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. Oh, and McGowan, she was a teacher, and she was a wonderful teacher.

27:58 Debra Schwartz: Where did she teach?

28:02 Louis Ferrario: In Mill Valley. That might have been Park School. She was just super-super.

28:12 Debra Schwartz: And tell me about, do you remember the firemen, or the mayor, or any — ?

28:19 Louis Ferrario: Well, the firemen all were very nice, and they were just — once in a while, go by and we got offered a sandwich so we had a sandwich with the fire people.

28:36 Debra Schwartz: At the fire station, if you were walking past, they might invite you to join them for lunch?

28:42 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

28:44 Debra Schwartz: And you were a kid then?

28:45 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. They were very, very nice.

28:52 Debra Schwartz: That's sweet. And I heard the bell rang throughout the day.

28:57 Louis Ferrario: What?

28:58 Debra Schwartz: I heard that — is this true? — that the firehouse bell would ring at five to tell the children to go home. Do you remember if that happened?

29:11 Louis Ferrario: It was sometimes, just to let you know what time it was.

29:19 Debra Schwartz: They would ring it to let you know the time?

29:21 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, I think it was for the time.

29:23 Debra Schwartz: Did you hike or ride bikes around? Were you an outdoorsy person?

29:28 Louis Ferrario: We used to all hike, we'd hike up to the mountain where the telephone pole was. That's a quick way to go up the top of the mountain.

29:39 Debra Schwartz: I think they call that Tamalpa Trail now.

29:42 Louis Ferrario: Okay, and we could go down in a half hour.

29:48 Debra Schwartz: That one's closed. I think the one you're talking about no longer is open. So you would hike with your friends up to the mountain?

29:58 Louis Ferrario: Oh yeah.

30:00 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the tavern² at the top of the mountain?

30:05 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

30:07 Louis Ferrario: That was a restaurant too. Point Reyes had a restaurant also.

30:12 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the fire in 1929?

30:15 Louis Ferrario: Oh yeah, I remember the fire engines where they are now too.

30:20 Debra Schwartz: No. The fire on the mountain where Mill Valley burned, so many homes, over 100 homes in —

30:25 Louis Ferrario: Oh, they burned homes?

² The Tavern of Tamalpais—Ed.

30:26 Debra Schwartz: Yes, in 1929.

30:28 Louis Ferrario: I didn't read that. The only thing I could remember as a little kid, my mother was leaving the house on Blithedale and I can remember looking and seeing flames. But then I don't remember anything else because I was just a young kid, and we went down to someone's house and they put me up.

30:53 Debra Schwartz: So they took care of you while the fight was going on in Mill Valley?

30:57 Louis Ferrario: I guess, yeah.

31:00 Debra Schwartz: You know the clock that is in the center of town was a gift by the fire department to the city of Mill Valley after that fire, did you know?

31:08 Louis Ferrario: I didn't know that. I was just a young kid then.

31:11 Debra Schwartz: You were a young kid. Do you think the weather was different back then or is it the same as it is now?

31:19 Louis Ferrario: Well, right now I think we had more rain than we're getting now.

31:24 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember taking the train to Sausalito and to San —

31:30 Louis Ferrario: The ferry boat to the city with my mother? Yes. And when they opened the ferry, Mary was going across with some girls and they would not take me.

31:42 Debra Schwartz: Oh, you remember your sister's not taking you on the ferry boat?

31:46 Louis Ferrario: No, on the bridge.

31:47 Debra Schwartz: On the bridge.

31:48 Louis Ferrario: When the Golden Gate Bridge opened.

31:49 Debra Schwartz: Oh, you mean when the bridge opened in '37, I believe that was. Your sisters went to go see the opening and they wouldn't take you?

31:58 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, well, they were with other girls.

32:01 Debra Schwartz: That sounds pretty typical.

32:05 Louis Ferrario: Well, Mary was just like a mother also. She was just, couldn't

have been sweeter.

32:11 Debra Schwartz: Well, she's still alive. Right?

32:12 Louis Ferrario: No. Mary died.

32:13 Debra Schwartz: Mary did die.

32:15 Louis Ferrario: Yeah, and she raised Francis, the youngest one, and she worked for Standard Oil, and she'd come home and fix up dinners and take care of everything.

32:33 Debra Schwartz: So, you've lived your whole life here in Mill Valley?

32:36 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

32:38 Debra Schwartz: What would you say is the best part about being raised here?

32:44 Louis Ferrario: I think years ago it was much better than it is now. Now it's nothing compared to what it was. Then it was so friendly, and you knew everyone that had a store, and you could go sometimes by, and they'd give you a taste of cookie or whatever. They were just all so nice downtown. And the fire people were very nice, and the police department, they were all nice.

33:17 Debra Schwartz: You miss that?

33:20 Louis Ferrario: Yes.

33:23 Debra Schwartz: What would you say to people that are living here now about the world that is in Mill Valley? What are your feelings?

33:31 Louis Ferrario: Well, they are all different and they are more since — self, you know. Because I always have people coming here. I had people from the Mill Valley Rec Center where I went and belonged and I swam, and I had four tables set up for bridge here, and they were always coming over. And they were always going through the garden.

33:58 Debra Schwartz: You had an open house with a lot of social exchange.

34:01 Louis Ferrario: Right. Nice people. Really nice.

34:05 Debra Schwartz: So you miss that?

34:07 Louis Ferrario: Yes. Not the same.

34:08 Debra Schwartz: What would you say to the people living here? I mean, what will you say in this interview about the kind of town that you could have here or that

you've known?

34:17 Louis Ferrario: Well, everyone seems to be different. And they are more — not as sociable like they were. But they were very — people were just so friendly. No more.

34:32 Debra Schwartz: Was it a smaller town? Were there less people when you were growing up there?

34:36 Louis Ferrario: Well, I think it was less. Oh, yes. Because I know my father had a beautiful vegetable garden. And he raised chickens. And that's right on Blithedale.

34:49 Debra Schwartz: Your first house was on Blithedale?

34:51 Louis Ferrario: That's the only one I can remember.

34:53 Debra Schwartz: Where was it on Blithedale?

34:55 Louis Ferrario: 102 East Blithedale.

34:57 Debra Schwartz: Aha.

34:59 Louis Ferrario: And now we sold it, and we divvied up with whoever was left. And it's an office. Then two doors down there was 106, and that was a rental, and that got sold.

35:22 Debra Schwartz: That was your property, too.

35:24 Louis Ferrario: Yeah. And Mary died, when Mary left, she left the house to me. Just to me. Which was great because I could use money. I needed money badly for this.

35:41 Debra Schwartz: Well, Louie, you certainly do describe a bucolic, wonderful hometown.

35:47 Louis Ferrario: Oh, it was. Couldn't have been nicer. It was nice, very nice.

35:54 Debra Schwartz: Yes, and I do hope that the people that live here strive to find that kind of community in our relations, I have to say. I know that you and I first met some years ago when I was walking past, and I looked into the window of your beautiful home here, and there was a lovely Christmas tree. Do you remember? Beautiful Christmas tree.

36:19 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

36:21 Debra Schwartz: You filled the whole room with it. And, do you remember you invited me in, and gave me the Christmas tour?

36:27 Louis Ferrario: No, I don't remember that. I don't think so.

36:30 Debra Schwartz: I remember it. You brought me into this lovely room, which was decorated everywhere with Christmas decorations, and I believe it was well into January, and —

36:40 Louis Ferrario: Everything was still up. [chuckles]

36:42 Debra Schwartz: Yes, everything was still up, and you showed me around, you were so very gracious. And you showed me your pottery studio. You know, I don't live too far from here. And when we spoke, before our interview, you mentioned that you were worried that you wouldn't have your Christmas tree this year. But I've talked to some neighbors, and we're gonna be coming over this Christmas to help you with your tree. So we have something to look forward to, don't we?

37:12 Louis Ferrario: Yes, yes.

37:13 Debra Schwartz: It may not be the same town, but you know I think there's a lot of us that yearn to have what you had naturally growing up.

37:21 Louis Ferrario: Now they got the group, not Medicare — oh, it's a group that does things for people.

37:38 Debra Schwartz: You mean in Mill Valley here? The Village?

37:40 Louis Ferrario: The Village, yeah.

37:41 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

37:45 Louis Ferrario: Craig and Amy, they took me to the dentist. In fact, what happened is just recently, they checked and found out I had an appointment, and they made — they were going to pick me up and take me.

38:06 Debra Schwartz: The Village is a wonderful organization that helps elderly people in town. And there's social events, and there's collaboration. It's not quite like what you had, but there's still a little of that old small town here.

38:19 Louis Ferrario: Steven took down all the decorations for me.

38:25 Debra Schwartz: Well, I tell you what. We're gonna be coming over this Christmas. We'll help you put 'em up and we'll help you put 'em down. And let's have a nice Christmas. How about it?

38:33 Louis Ferrario: That would be nice.

38:35 Louis Ferrario: Louis, thank you so much for telling me about your beautiful

life growing up in Mill Valley.

38:41 Louis Ferrario: Oh, it was so nice.

38:42 Debra Schwartz: And sharing your experiences, and that amazing prison story — gee whiz, that was rough.

38:51 Louis Ferrario: Oh, and I got national ribbons for showing the horse.

38:54 Debra Schwartz: Oh, right, your horses.

38:56 Louis Ferrario: Yes. Saddlebreds.

38:58 Debra Schwartz: Saddlebreds. And do you also drew — didn't you tell me you would draw women in gowns?

39:07 Louis Ferrario: What?

39:09 Debra Schwartz: Didn't you tell me once that you would draw — someone would stand and model a gown, and you would draw it?

39:16 Louis Ferrario: Yes, yes. Oh, you heard that?

39:18 Debra Schwartz: You told me, yes.

39:20 Louis Ferrario: Because someone just mentioned that, they said, "Louie, don't you have any pictures?" And I said, "I don't think so." But I did. I used to draw the gowns, and they were, my God, beautiful, and the women would go and take it afterward to a tailor or something, and get it formalled.

39:42 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Do you remember when we made our appointment to have this interview, and we talked about the meaning of the word "interview?"

39:50 Louis Ferrario: Yeah.

39:51 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember, I looked it up? And it is "to see into?"

39:55 Louis Ferrario: What?

39:56 Debra Schwartz: The word "interview"? The actual meaning is "to enter in, to see in another person's — and to sharing the view." It's been wonderful talking with you today because I feel I have entered into your view of things. And I can imagine a Mill Valley that you're describing so well.

40:18 Louis Ferrario: It was a wonderful town. It's no longer the same.

40:24 Debra Schwartz: But thank you for sharing with me what it once was and, who knows, maybe in the future could be again, if we try.

40:33 Louis Ferrario: Well, I want to try and get the garden back up.

40:39 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Well, to that then. To your garden and to growing things. And, with that, we'll conclude our interview. Thank you so much for talking with me today. And, on behalf of the Mill Valley Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society Oral History Program, thank you for your time and your memories and the sharing of your life.