

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
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**DOUG FERGUSON**

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

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TITLE: Oral History of Doug Ferguson  
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz  
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In this energetic oral history, attorney, activist and arch-storyteller Doug Ferguson recounts a remarkable life of political and cultural engagement. Born in Oakland in 1939, Doug attended public schools in Berkeley before attending Harvard as an undergrad and then going to Stanford Law School. Initially drawn to Marin by its rural character, he moved to Sausalito with his wife Jane in the late 1960s, and soon after to Mill Valley where they started a family. Some 55 years later, at the time this oral history was recorded, he affirms his unflagging love of the area. Doug expresses his fierce commitment to land conservation and recounts his numerous battles, predominantly victorious, against development projects such as Marincello and Slide Ranch to name just a few, waged with his trusty comrades Huey Johnson, John Olmstead, and others. Doug also describes his involvement in the arts and local cultural initiatives — including, of course, the documentary made about the land battles, *Rebels with a Cause*, as well as creating the Marin Theatre Company and working with the California Film Institute on the Rafael Film Center and the Lark and Sequoia theaters. Doug credits his father with having provided a model of ambition, creativity, and self-confidence for him growing up, and expresses his desire throughout this oral history to inspire the spirit of daring, invention, and intervention in others.

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## Oral History of Doug Ferguson

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**Oral History of Doug Ferguson**  
**May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015**

**Please note:** This transcript has been reviewed by Doug Ferguson, who made corrections, clarifications, and some additions.

**Debra Schwartz:** My name is Debra Schwartz and I'm sitting here with Doug Ferguson. It is May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Doug?

**Doug Ferguson:** Yes.

**Debra Schwartz:** Thank you very much for sitting down with me.

**Doug Ferguson:** Thank you for coming!

**Debra Schwartz:** And letting me chat with you at your beautiful home here. Let's start with some basic information. When and where were you born?

**Doug Ferguson:** I was born in what I thought was Berkeley but was Oakland. It was just across the line from Berkeley and my family told me I was born in Berkeley, but it turns out I was born in Oakland, California in 1939.

**Debra Schwartz:** And your parents, where did they come from?

**Doug Ferguson:** My mother was born in Berkeley. My father, whose parents came down from the Valley, was born in Berkeley as well. So my grandchildren are fourth- or fifth-generation Californians.

**Debra Schwartz:** So let's go back a little and just go through the original people that came to this country from Ferguson —

**Doug Ferguson:** My grandfather and my great-grandfather in this country were Scottish, and my father was born in the Bay Area, too. His father was Ferguson, John Ferguson. My father was Kenneth Ferguson, and he married Constance Pedder, who was the daughter of an Englishman. My grandfather on the other side was a Scot, so I've got English and Scottish.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you were born in Oakland —

**Doug Ferguson:** Yep.

**Debra Schwartz:** How about a little information about basic education and what brought you here to Mill Valley?

**Doug Ferguson:** Born in Oakland, lived in Berkeley, went to the Berkeley public schools: John Muir Grammar School, Willard Junior High School, and Berkeley High

School. From there I departed and went on to Harvard College. And after three years, I went to Stanford Law School. I didn't graduate from Harvard College because I was hot to get married. Not for any reason having to do with incestuous difficulties, but I was just tired of going to school. So I left early and went to Stanford Law School, and that's what got me into the law biz, to the extent that I'm in the law biz.

**Debra Schwartz:** And so your wife is Jane, correct?

**Doug Ferguson:** My wife is Jane. She comes from New England. I married her after I met her at a "mixer," a Harvard-Wellesley mixer, in 1960 or so. No, that's when we got married. Harvard '58, met her in '58 and we got married in '60 and have been married ever since.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you were hot to marry Jane when you came back —

**Doug Ferguson:** That's right. I was hot to marry.

**Debra Schwartz:** You found your East Coast lady and came to the West Coast and then went to school at Stanford.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yep.

**Debra Schwartz:** OK. And you have three children?

**Doug Ferguson:** I have three children. Three sons, they are Seth and Aaron and Joshua. And they are now in their mid-50s, and they all live here. Two of them live in Marin County and one lives in Alameda. So we're all very close to home.

**Debra Schwartz:** So, when did you come to Mill Valley? I mean, what brought you to this side of the bridge?

**Doug Ferguson:** Mill Valley — In 19 — Jane! [calls out to other room] When did we come to Mill Valley?

**Jane Ferguson:** When did we come to Mill Valley? I think it was late '68.

**Doug Ferguson:** That's what I was going to say. '67. OK, I'm good.

**Jane Ferguson:** No, not '67.

**Doug Ferguson:** OK, you're correcting me. [laughs] But anyway —

**Jane Ferguson:** No. Because Josh was born in this house and I was pregnant when we came.

**Doug Ferguson:** OK.

**Jane Ferguson:** So it was either late '68 or early '69.

**Doug Ferguson:** OK. Thank you!

**Debra Schwartz:** Fact check! [laughs]

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah, fact check!

**Debra Schwartz:** How did you end up in Mill Valley? I mean you could have ended up in Berkeley.

**Doug Ferguson:** I could have ended up in Berkeley and probably would have ended up in Berkeley. All my friends were in Berkeley. And I had spent my entire life there, from birth to when I went out one evening, with my pals. We had a few drinks, and we got lost while going across the Golden Gate Bridge, and ended up in Sausalito. It was a very foggy night. And we pulled in there — I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade or so — and I looked around this foggy, foggy place. I looked at the water and heard some seals barking and I said, “Where are we?” I was so insular, so parochial, I had never been to Marin County, in my entire life.

**Debra Schwartz:** You grew up in Oakland and you never crossed the bridge?

**Doug Ferguson:** Never crossed the bridge until that night. And I said, “Where are we? I love this place and I’m gonna — I want to find out more about this place.” So I came back and started looking into Marin County. This is a long time ago; Marin County was a very wonderful, different place. And I said, “This is it.” So when I married Jane, I said, “When we get out of law school, I want to go live in Marin County. I probably want to live in Sausalito as a matter of fact, ’cause that’s what I fell in love with.” So, we moved to Sausalito and that’s where we started our life together.

**Debra Schwartz:** That’s a good story. Your parents never took you, you never took a little side trip over here?

**Doug Ferguson:** They were from Berkeley and Berkeley people knew that that was where the sun rose and the sun set.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you said Mill Valley and this area was very different. Tell me about how very different it was.

**Doug Ferguson:** Well it wasn’t different so much in one respect. Berkeley had its fair number of hippies and laid-back characters and funny guys, which I loved. And so, to the extent that Marin had those characters, it was not that different. What made it different was its agricultural orientation and the number of people that really loved the land. In Berkeley, there were a bunch of folks who cared about the land and would go up hiking in the Sierra and helping the Sierra Club and this kind of thing, but there was no

agriculture there to speak of, when I grew up. But when I came over here and found out that stuff was actually growing right around me and that people were helping cows with milk right around me, this was fascinating to me! It just tweaked all kinds of things for me and I wanted to find out more about this place. I didn't know that I wanted to live here. I haven't moved one iota since I moved here. I've never fallen in love with any place else.

**Debra Schwartz:** So, from Sausalito, with its mists and its foghorns and its cool evenings — yet were there dairy cows over there at the time?

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah, I had a sports car, and I drove it all over Marin — up, down, and sideways — and I learned about all the places. I just read in this weekend's paper — there's a thing about all the things you can see in Marin. I saw them all the first year, 55 years ago. And I've seen them ever since. I love this place, it absolutely captivates me and when friends come from around the world and say, "You've lived your whole life in one place? Did you ever travel?" I say, "Yes, I have! It only confirms that this is a very special place." I'm not leaving here except in a box.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're a hometown boy.

**Doug Ferguson:** I am a hometown boy.

**Debra Schwartz:** And so, from Sausalito, not so far away, to Mill Valley, just a few miles — when did that happen?

**Doug Ferguson:** When Jane was just here she said we moved into this house in 1967.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you were living in the early '60s in Sausalito —

**Doug Ferguson:** Sausalito. And then we moved here in '67.

**Debra Schwartz:** And what brought you to Mill Valley from Sausalito? I mean, Sausalito is very nice.

**Doug Ferguson:** Sausalito is very nice, but unfortunately we had one child and another in the hopper and we were concerned about the school system — my wife in particular because she's a teacher — and she said, "I think we should look afield." And so we looked — because we did not believe in private schools, we thought public schools were great — and so we looked afield and looked in Mill Valley and, bingo!

**Debra Schwartz:** I mean you could have gone to Kentfield or Ross or —

**Doug Ferguson:** I love Sausalito because I love docks and I like the people who live around docks. I like people who are very down to earth. I would not be comfortable then, would not have been comfortable then, and wouldn't be comfortable now in Ross and Kentfield. They're entitled to live the life they lead. I just moved my law practice back to

Sausalito. Tomorrow is my first official day back in Sausalito. But I am going to be here until I'm put down.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're a wharf rat now.

**Doug Ferguson:** I'm a wharf rat.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Ok, so you had your law practice for some time though in San Francisco.

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yes, I did.

**Debra Schwartz:** And then to —

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh, excuse me, I should have said something else: I got married in 1960, and from '60 to '67 I practiced law in San Francisco. And '68 was when I came to Mill Valley.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh, by the way, congratulations on a long, happy marriage.

**Doug Ferguson:** Thank you! They are all interesting years, and they are all not without blemish. People we talk to about marriage say, "Well it must have been wonderful! You've been married for so long without —" And I reply: "Listen, all I can tell you is, we made it." [laughs] One article I saw said, about old people, it said, "How did you stay married so long?" They said, "Neither of us died." Ours is a much happier [laughs] relationship than that, but I love that line.

**Debra Schwartz:** OK, so let's talk a little bit about what you've done in Marin. We are getting an idea in this interview, or at least I am, of your profound appreciation for the land and the beauty of the area. And you've manifested that appreciation, you've demonstrated that appreciation in your professional life.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yes.

**Debra Schwartz:** So, we know about the movie *Rebels with a Cause*. Some people who are going to be listening to this interview may or may not know about it. But you are obviously quite well known for the Monticello —

**Doug Ferguson:** Marincello.<sup>1</sup>

**Debra Schwartz:** Marincello, excuse me. And some of the other land conservation efforts made in the Marin County area.

**Doug Ferguson:** Many battles, many battles. Many successes.

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<sup>1</sup> Known for my role in derailing the Marincello project.—Doug Ferguson.



**Debra Schwartz:** Maybe we can talk a little about that?

**Doug Ferguson:** OK.

**Debra Schwartz:** Let's hear your story.

**Doug Ferguson:** When I come out of the Rebels with a Cause movie, the movie you just mentioned, people say, "Well, how can I find something that's as exciting as what you did with Marincello?" And I say, "Well, I've done a number of things and I would say just keep your eyes open, and then do it. Then don't think about it. If something needs doing, just do it." I'm talking in the context of land conservation and people conservation. And I have, more than a handful of times, "just done it." The reason there's a China Camp State Park is in some part due to my just doing it. I was concerned that China Camp, the place, was going to go away and I found out that a Chinese or Japanese developer was going to take over China Camp and build a lot of condominiums and hotels, etc. at China Camp.

**Debra Schwartz:** And what year are we talking here?

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh gosh, don't know.

**Debra Schwartz:** Close is good, you know. A decade.

**Doug Ferguson:** Again '60s, '70s. And so I said, "Well, that can't happen." So I did a little research in my law library, and found out that there was an argument that that land had already been dedicated to the public by their free usage of it for many, many years, under the Doctrine of Ancient Rights, etc. So I filed a lawsuit. Huey Johnson, the fellow who founded the Trust for Public Land, and I often went out into the dark with our swords and sabers rattling and I filed a lawsuit and he provided some general support. That particular lawsuit did not win, but by the time it got through the court process, the State of California had become highly embarrassed about the fact that a couple of guys from Mill Valley were trying to save something the state had failed to save, and so they moved forward and acquired China Camp.

Just the other day I was down looking at a project down by Tam Junction, and that has a new bayside installation where you can look out and see that the water's gonna rise and where you can envision the water rising, and the lady there said, "Do you have much acquaintance with this area?" And I said, "Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, where we're standing would have been a shopping center but for me and Huey Johnson." He and I decided that it was a really bum idea to let development come into this waterfront area so we stepped forward and made a few friends and did a few things and Tam Junction's natural area was preserved.

**Debra Schwartz:** The marshlands over there. With Mrs. Terwilliger doing her night work.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yep, you bet. Those things happen. There have been a number of such events.

**Debra Schwartz:** You simply had the ability because of your training as an attorney to see something and then you jumped.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** You just threw yourself at it.

**Doug Ferguson:** Earlier, a developer was gonna build a hotel, a massive hotel, right in front of Sausalito. Right in the water besides where Sausalito sits. I just had graduated from Stanford Law School. My first month in Sausalito, I went down to the Sausalito Planning Commission to see what was going on. I thought I should find out about this town. And then I heard about John Lord King and his plans to build a massive hotel complex right in front of where Vina Del Mar Park is today. And I said, “That can’t be.” So I went into the law library and looked into it and came to the conclusion that the Public Trust for Navigation and Commerce<sup>2</sup> precluded this development, and that all John Lord King could do was to build a development that respected the right to navigate and fish. So I looked into it and went to the Sausalito city attorney and to the City Council and said, “Do you realize that John Lord King, nice man though he might be, simply cannot do this?” And they said, “Well, we’re going to hand this issue over to our city attorney” and the city attorney came back and said, “You know what? The kid’s right! There is a Public Trust for Navigation and Commerce, and that precludes the construction of things that prevent navigation, fishing, and water time commerce.” And I said, “That’s cool!” And John Lord King looked at me and said, “Young man, do you know who you’re talking to?” And I said to myself, “the former developer.” [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Cheeky.

**Doug Ferguson:** I’ve always been irreverent. He just about had apoplexy on the spot, but that was the last time I saw him because he was history.

**Debra Schwartz:** Don’t you ponder the fact that these developments come forward without the people — the city attorneys and so on — being aware of the precedent that’s set?

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, John Lord King had done a very clever job. He had bought all the underwater lots in the water in front of Sausalito. Sausalito, back in the 1850s, had run a land scam and sold underwater lots to unsuspecting eastern investors so that they could raise money to help develop Sausalito. So a bunch of people all over the United States held deeds to lots, underwater lots —

**Debra Schwartz:** They thought they weren’t underwater or they thought they could just —

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<sup>2</sup> Which is contained in the California constitution.—Doug Ferguson.

**Doug Ferguson:** No, they didn't know. Hey, it's way out in California. They've heard about this wonderful opportunity to own lots in the San Francisco Bay. When I found out that they were underwater, I said, "Holy moly! We're gonna have a good time with this!" And so it came to pass. They couldn't be developed. And John Lord King had never had a good attorney ask him, "Have you ever heard about the Public Trust and Navigation?"

**Debra Schwartz:** How do you explain that?

**Doug Ferguson:** I was taught something very valuable by my mentor in law. In my first law job my boss was a wonderful man, Willard Johnston. He said, "Before you look up what the law *is*, think what the law *should be*. Think what the world would be like if it were a better place. What do you want to happen? Let that be your guide before you start doing your research." And that's absolutely the way that I've felt all these years. In Sausalito I said, "This can't be." So I went to find the cases that said, "This can't be." And bingo! The Public Trust for Navigation and Commerce popped right up. If I was looking for, "This *can* be," I would have been off on some other tangent.

**Debra Schwartz:** You found what you were looking for.

**Doug Ferguson:** I found what I was looking for. The right answer. And it's been a very consistent guide to results that people sometimes are surprised by.

**Debra Schwartz:** Because you take a moment to logic what the right thing would be, and then you trust that, that will have happened. And then you find it —

**Doug Ferguson:** I'm not God. But like God, I think I'm right. [laughs] So do we all.

**Debra Schwartz:** You just need corroboration.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. So I just looked to find, in the laws of the State of California, the things that will tell me that this is gonna go this way. I did this once with a client — this is not a conservation matter — but a client who said, "My landlord was my business partner and he's cheated me." And I said, "That doesn't sound right." So I went to see this very same legal mentor, and he said, "Well, what do you think the law should be about that? Let's talk about that, you and me." And I said, "Well, it seems to me that if people are partners, they can't be landlord and tenant because they're two different relationships. Landlord and tenant is a one-way street. Partnership, on the other hand, involves equality and fraternity and of high fiduciary standards." He said, "I think you're on to something. Go find out." And I did, and in the first term of the Supreme Court in California, the case of *Pio Pico vs Cuyas* established the fact that the relationship between landlord and tenant is antithetical to that of partners and therefore this whole development that these guys wanted to do — screwing the other guys, etc., was not possible if they were partners. You can't be landlord or a tenant with a partner. I went back to my mentor and I said, "You're prescient." And he said, "No, I wasn't. I just understood that you and I were both thinking and now you've learned what I'm telling

you: Think about what the law should be and just maybe it will be that way.” Holy Moly! This has been great. It’s been my guiding light all these years.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you have a specialty or are you just a general attorney — conservation attorney?

**Doug Ferguson:** I don’t even identify myself sometimes as an attorney in polite society because so many people have beliefs as to what attorneys are, what they do, how they think, what they feel. I am somebody who wants to do good in this world, and I also need to make a living. So if I can make a living doing good, or at least not doing bad, that’s what I do. So I am a business and real estate lawyer, with a lot of knowledge about estate planning and a lot of knowledge about land matters and conservation matters. But that’s not the end of things I’ve done. The lady that works with me now as my office manager still remembers when she first came in 15 years ago and said, “Well, what should I expect?” And I said, “Don’t *expect* anything. Nothing in this office is the same day to day. People who walk in the door are different. Their problems are different, their issues are different.” That’s what I like. I have a short attention span. If you like to do things in great detail, you’re in the wrong place.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you jumped into the skirmish with the developer in Sausalito and Tam Junction, you and Huey. Where else have you jumped into? What other things have you done, locally?

**Doug Ferguson:** Locally. Hmm.

**Debra Schwartz:** I mean, it could be contiguous to Mill Valley. You’ve opened spaces —

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah, well I’ve raised — sorry, I’m trying to remember the place. The former Japanese settlement at China Camp, that was going to be developed, too. And using my very complicated logic, that’s how I got the State Parks to come in there. I’ve worked out in West Marin on a number of things. We stopped a coastal development south of Mendocino because there was a whole new doctrine that had come up, that was the “Jug Handle Creek Ecological Staircase.” A guy called me on my birthday long ago, and said, “We’ve got to do something, don’t we?” This is John Olmstead, a magnificent, wonderful, free-spirited guy. Part of the Olmstead family that had been naturalists for years and years. He said, “We gotta do something, Doug.” I said, “Do I know you?” He said, “Yes, we’ve met somewhere. But Doug, we’ve gotta go do something because the bulldozers are moving as we speak and they’re going to tear up the whole beginning of the Jug Handle Creek Ecological Staircase.”

**Debra Schwartz:** And that is located where?

**Doug Ferguson:** South of Mendocino.

**Debra Schwartz:** North over by Point Arena?

**Doug Ferguson:** By Caspar.

**Debra Schwartz:** By Caspar.

**Doug Ferguson:** And I said, “Well, what are the grounds for stopping this?” And he said, “Well, you’re the lawyer!” [laughs] And I said, “Well, when do we need to do something?” John said, “I think if we don’t do it today, it’s going to be too late. The bulldozers are gonna start cratering the cliffs.” And I said, “Well, OK.” This is at six in the morning, he called me. I’m very proud of this timing. We got the injunction at four o’clock that afternoon. I found a case at seven o’clock that had just been decided by the California Supreme Court saying that there was a new law that had to do with environmental impact statements, and that had to do with projects funded by the State. And in a footnote, the Court said, “When asked whether this applied to private projects, we express no opinion.” And I said, “That’s all I need. I think it probably should apply to private projects, too. I think the California Environmental Quality Act should definitely apply to private projects just as it applies to state projects.” On that basis, I went to the court in Mendocino and then to the Supreme Court and we stopped the project, got the injunction, and went forward.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you work with Huey on that one, too?

**Doug Ferguson:** No, I worked with John Olmstead. John Olmstead and Huey are both very similar in that nobody can work with either of them. [laughs] They’re very, very unusual people. I love very unusual people. My good wife says, “I don’t see how you can get along with the people you work with.” And I said, “It’s because they’re unusual. That’s what I love about them.” So that was Jug Handle Creek. I’m sorry — I didn’t think to write down — I have a whole bunch of documents that I can give you.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, you can provide that for us later but —

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. I have worked on a great variety of environmental matters. I get a big kick out of it. I love the land, I love the people who love land, and I’ve been very successful in fussing around with land that was getting tampered with. I don’t like that.

**Debra Schwartz:** Don’t mess with Ferguson. Don’t mess with the land. How about Slide Ranch?

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, Slide Ranch was a separate situation. That was a very interesting one; and dear to my heart. When my father died, I was driving up the coast shortly thereafter, just from San Francisco going up the coast. I don’t know why, but I pulled off the road and looked down and said, “Holy Moly! What is this? This is the most beautiful place I’ve seen” — notwithstanding the fact that I had lived here a while. I was born in Berkeley, and I didn’t know of every nook and cranny of Marin County. I didn’t know about Slide Ranch. It’s a lovely, lovely place. The one right [gestures to picture]

here in the other room. That's where I was standing when I had this, "Aha! What is this place?" It's Slide Ranch. So I went to the County — drove directly to the county offices, went to the assessor's office, and I said, "Who owns this thing?" And the guy there said, "Oh yeah, that's Slide Ranch. It's owned by, let's see, there's this guy, he's a resident of Los Angeles." I said, "What? What's he doing up here?" He said, "I don't know how he got here, but it's there. It was in farming and ranching and mostly dairy farm use from the 1860s. I don't know what this guy in Los Angeles is doing with it." So I looked into it and found out that the Portuguese family that had owned the place had run out of money and this guy from Los Angeles, a Hollywood scriptwriter, had bought the property with the hopes of building hotels on it. There it would be — he'd have the greatest hotels in the world right on the ocean looking out to Hawaii. And I said, "Well, that can't be. That doesn't make any sense at all." For one thing, I'd done a little research and found out that Slide Ranch was called Slide Ranch because it was sliding into the ocean and was eventually going to end up in China or someplace. And I thought, "This is a bad place to build hotels, and that should affect the value of the place." So I contacted the Hollywood scriptwriter. I was, at this point, only one year out of law school. He had paid, I don't know what, not a whole lot of money, he would never tell me, for the property —

**Debra Schwartz:** How many acres is Slide Ranch?

**Doug Ferguson:** 150 acres. And he thought that it was worth a lot, a lot, a lot of money. Many, many, many millions of dollars because it was so beautiful. And it was beautiful, and is still beautiful. And I said, "But sir, do you realize that it is unstable?" And he said, "That's not for me to worry about. I'm worried about what I can get for it. Let somebody else worry about whether it goes into the ocean." This was not a nice man. The people who lived on the ranch were his tenants. He had put them there simply to keep people from getting onto the land and they were definitely not nice people. It turned out they were running the cocaine dealing for Marin County at the time.

**Debra Schwartz:** This is what year?

**Doug Ferguson:** What?

**Debra Schwartz:** What year is this?

**Doug Ferguson:** This is 196 — 3?<sup>3</sup>

**Debra Schwartz:** God, they had cocaine in '63?

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah, this is early stuff. That was their major drug and they were dealing and they were a very strange, scruffy bunch of people. They lived out there as tenants of this scriptwriter, and they had some horses and they would go riding with their horses and wire cutters with them so they could just cut the fences. They didn't like to stop and try to open gates or ask permission, they just cut — they were really bad people. And they used a lot of their own products, so they were not people that were easy to talk

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<sup>3</sup> Early '60s.—Doug Ferguson.

to. So I did some research and found out this Hollywood scriptwriter, thinking he was really bright, had sold one quarter of an acre of the 150 acres to PG&E so that they could create a salt-water testing station to put products on there and see how quickly they corroded. And the screenwriter charged PG&E \$25,000 for that quarter acre. Well the assessor can do the math. And he did the math with my assistance and said, “We’ve got to bump up the taxes on this. The entire property was being taxed at a value of \$13,000. The taxes went up something like 30 times. A huge, huge bump.

I called the Hollywood scriptwriter. I said, “How’s everything going?” He says, “Oh, it’s fine.” I said, “I just bumped into some information about the assessor’s —” He said, “Oh, that’s all wrong. They can’t do that to me.” I said, “I’d still like to resume our discussion about the value of this property.” And slowly but surely, it took three and a half years, this negotiation. My wife, after about two years said, “Doug, he’s never gonna consent to you. You’re just a kid. He’s thinking big numbers. Just give it up.” And I said, “No. I’m making progress. It’s incremental. Baby steps. But I’m making progress.” And low and behold, after about three and a half years, I think it was that tax adjustment [that] did it to him. He said, “You know, I might be willing to think about it.” I said, “Well, let me tell you something. You’ve never been open-minded enough to let me tell you about bargain sales. Bargain sales is when you think this property is worth — I think you told me \$10 million. I don’t have to agree with you, but that’s for you and the assessor, and the Lord Almighty, to decide. If you want to give this property to a charity and say it’s worth \$10 million, you might have a \$10 million tax deduction. You might also go to jail. I think I would be much more conservative in that, in saying what it was worth. But anyway, you’re not limited to the amount that you get.” He says, “What do you mean, the amount that I get?” I said, “I’m prepared to make you an offer for Slide Ranch. I have lined up the Nature Conservancy to be the charitable recipient of this property.” And I’d also separately lined up — I didn’t tell him, but it was family money, our father having died, he had left me and my brother and sister some money and I persuaded them that we should put \$150,000 into an anonymous memorial for my father. It’s not known as a memorial ’cause we didn’t want to do it that way. It was private. But \$150,000 went to the Hollywood scriptwriter who then, having sold it through me to the Nature Conservancy — what he told the Internal Revenue Service that land was worth, I’ll never know. I think I know. I think it was somewhere around \$10 million, something like that, but it was only \$150,000 that we actually paid for 150 acres.

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh.

**Doug Ferguson:** And it was a good deal. It was a good deal. In today’s world, you wouldn’t have to worry about development. I could sell that for \$100 million dollars or \$200 million dollars, it’s such a beautiful place.

**Debra Schwartz:** It’s spectacular property.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. But anyway, so we bought it and then suddenly it was in the hands of the Nature Conservancy, and they said, “What are we going to do with this?” And so once again, my contact was Huey Johnson — we’re old pals — and he said,

“Who could run this place?” I said, “I don’t know.” He said, “Well, let me look around.” And he came up with a group that sounded wonderful. They’re called the Frontier Arts Institute. They were a group of do-gooders that were going to take care of it and help kids learn about nature. It sounded great. I went out and talked to them a few times. And I said, “Huey, this group, I like them, but they’re a little scruffy. And they don’t seem to know anything about nature.” He said, “Yeah, I was kind of impressed with that, too. But you know, they say the right thing, so I’m sure it’ll all work out.” I did more research and found out it was the road crew for the Grateful Dead, who, when they weren’t on the road, would go out and relax at Slide Ranch, and who told Huey that they were the Frontier Arts Institute [laughs] and that, “Oh, nature? We can do nature.”

And so, they maintained that facade and Huey helped to persuade the Park Service that the Frontier Arts Institute would be an excellent steward for the land. And so the Park Service acquired the land from the Nature Conservancy and leased it back to the Frontier Arts Institute. This is very incestuous stuff. And the net result of it was that the Slide Ranch, aka the Frontier Arts Institute at the time, had a permanent home. Mr. Ferguson had found them a home. The money had all gone to wherever the money goes, and that’s why Slide Ranch is there today.

**Debra Schwartz:** And they, of course, the local schools — I remember my own son — they would have their field trips with their sleepovers.

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** So they became special —

**Doug Ferguson:** They became legit. It’s legit!

**Debra Schwartz:** Build it and they will come. Interesting story. And how about further along the coast, any other projects in West Marin?

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, I’m only talking about the things that I’ve done purely on my own. I have been, since its foundation — ’cause Huey was the founder of the Trust for Public Land, and I was on the founding board. I’m still on the board 47 years later. And I was, as Huey was, very creative in thinking of things that the Trust for Public Land could do. It was not, then, the august organization that it is today. It was a scruffy band of do-gooders who were going to save the world. And we did. We did more projects up and down California — begging, borrowing — doing whatever we could to make these things happen. So our very first project, I think, was in Marin County. The next one was in Los Angeles. Then we went on up and down the coast. We’ve saved more coastline in California than any other organization or any group of organizations. A chunk of California coastline all comes from the efforts of this same little group of people: the Trust for Public Land.

From there we went on to national stuff. I mean, the organization today is truly legendary in its accomplishments. The number of acres we’ve saved are in the countless, countless,



countless thousands. The land that we saved public agencies, because we buy and sell to them cheaper than they have to pay, is in the multiple billions. Two years ago, three years ago, we raised \$30 billion in one year by doing conservation easements and conservation transactions, and bonds and such, that raise money for public benefit, for public land acquisition. It's become a very, very huge and sophisticated, and very successful organization. So while it's fun talking about my little podunk things in the backyard, what I really get excited about is what we did with the Trust for Public Land.

**Debra Schwartz:** So it seems that you weren't inhibited by convention. Your intense and rather fresh-sounding curiosity about things that are here and what are they doing here — you seem to have an inquiring mind.

**Doug Ferguson:** I would like to call it, as my Zen friends say, "Beginner's mind."

**Debra Schwartz:** Beginner's mind.

**Doug Ferguson:** In the conservation world, I have a beginner's mind.

**Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. You know in talking to you I can see you don't accept other assumptions. You start fresh.

**Doug Ferguson:** Fresh, fresh.

**Debra Schwartz:** And then you go along in your collision course [laughs], wherever it leads you.

**Doug Ferguson:** [laughs] You bet.

**Debra Schwartz:** That's a wonderful way to be pushed and thrashed, and examining all things, actually. And it's been highly successful for you. And gratifying as well.

**Doug Ferguson:** Gratifying, successful, and I've been very fortunate in working with people — Huey's just one of many who have been unbent and unbowed by tradition or by practical constraints. And I am a cheerleader for, "Let's do it! Let's just get it done!"

**Debra Schwartz:** Just jump. So the community of people you've been involved with, you've found each other in this area, Huey and others, and reinforced each other in all ways. Talk to me about your community in this, the Mill Valley area and Marin County. Maybe you could talk a little bit about the people that you've been moved by or inspired by or affected by in some way. Your cohorts.

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, what we've been talking about so far is almost entirely having to do with land transactions and such. That's just a small part of the life that my exuberance has led me to. A good chunk of my time here in Marin has been spent with filmmakers and musicians and artists and others who needed assistance or, somehow, needed *my* assistance. And that was thrilling for me. So I have worked a lot with, for

instance, filmmakers. I worked with George Lucas for almost 40 years. Jon Kerty, the same. Francis Coppola for 15 to 20 years. I eventually found him a law firm so that I didn't have to do that anymore.

But I love creative people. Filmmakers are no different than any others. The film that you know about, the *Rebels with a Cause* film, I've worked with those good filmmakers, Nancy Kelly and Kenji Yamamoto. I really am fascinated by good movies. *Good* movies, not bad movies. And I've helped to fund and produce and promote some really good movies. And that's been a real excitement. Again, they tend to be focused here in Marin County, or the people making them do. Even though George Lucas went on to outer space, he started in Marin County. I love that relationship and that close relationship. I've also worked with musicians — not so closely, though I am myself, a musician. I had a band and —

**Debra Schwartz:** What's your instrument? Oh piano, I see a nice grand right there.

**Doug Ferguson:** That's my Steinway behind us, yeah. I've played piano since I was 12 years old or so. Loved playing and loved musicians and worked closely with them and support music here in the county. And I also am a big supporter of theater, live theater here in the county. Ivan Poutiatine, a Mill Valley neighbor, and I created the Marin Theatre Company.

**Debra Schwartz:** You created the Marin Theatre Company?

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. We found the building, we found the money. It was formerly a little theater run out of the golf clubhouse here in Mill Valley. And we knew it had to be better than that so we went out and found the money. Ivan and I created this thing which today is the Marin Theatre Company.

**Debra Schwartz:** Located on Miller Avenue.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yep. I've worked with, I've helped find the money for — let's see, if I put them in sequential order — the Sequoia Theater is now owned by the California Film Institute. The California Film Institute, I helped do that deal. The California Film Institute I helped buy the Rafael Theater. I've also helped the group that bought the Lark Theater; and helped find the money for them because I came up with a very interesting and creative way to raise money for theaters, which is to have the people who are supportive of the theater not put money into a bank and say, "I hope you do it." They actually buy the theater. We form an LLC, a limited liability company. The limited liability company purchases the theater for it to be leased to the operating company, for the Lark Theater or whatever may be the operating company. And if the operating company falls flat on its face, then the investors own the theater. If the operator doesn't fall on its face, then it pays a very low rent and continues to operate the theater forever. And doing that, we've done, let's see, the Rafael Theater, the Lark Theater, the Sequoia Theater, Marin Theatre Company — each was a little different. Each deal is a little bit different. But I just love making theater and going to live theater.

**Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever act?

**Doug Ferguson:** Yes, of course. Can't you tell? I'm a ham. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] You are a ham. You really are. With a lot of energy, too.

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah, I've acted in college, and I've acted, even now, in Sausalito; I've been on stage down there a few times. So it's a big thrill for me. I love theater. And I love to see people succeed in theater. So that's what I do.

**Debra Schwartz:** No cameos in any of the movies? C'mon, you must have done a little something?

**Doug Ferguson:** No, I think that was my first big on-the-screen opportunity, *Rebels with a Cause*.

**Debra Schwartz:** Ah! In *Rebels* you say, as I recall, "You don't understand." That's the line from the movie when Chewy's talking —

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah! When we went to the folks who were the developers, Gulf Western, no, that's a different deal.<sup>4</sup> Anyway, when we went to the developer, they said, "We've got attorneys. We're not worried about you punks out in California with your teeny weenie little lawsuit telling us we can't develop Marincello." And my friend Huey said, "But you don't understand."

**Debra Schwartz:** That's what Huey said.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah, he said, "You don't understand. These guys don't get paid, we're not going to run out of money 'cause they don't get paid. And they're crazy."

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Yeah, right.

**Doug Ferguson:** "And they're good."

**Debra Schwartz:** I remember it, the other day at the History Walk<sup>5</sup> — I hope you had a good time — that you mentioned about *Rebels with a Cause* the way that you felt — you talked a little bit about the movie and the audience and how it was to reach people.

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Will you mention that again, for the interview?

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<sup>4</sup> It was Gulf Oil.—Doug Ferguson.

<sup>5</sup> An annual event of the Mill Valley Historical Society.—Ed.

**Doug Ferguson:** Sure, yeah. Kenji Yamamoto and Nancy Kelly, husband and wife; he is the screen guy, she is the writer and developer. They work beautifully together and I've worked with them before on a number of films, not closely, but I got to know them pretty well, and when they approached me and said, "We're thinking of doing a film about the making of the Golden Gate Recreation Area and we know you have a huge commitment to that and involvement, can you help us do that?" And I said, "Well, I know what you mean when you say that because you know how to make movies and I don't. I know how to find money and you don't. You've never made any money on your documentaries and I want you to make money on this documentary to make up for the good films you've made. You're not going to get poor on this one. I want to help you make this film, and make some money." And they said, "How are we going to do that?" I said, "That's why you're talking to me. That's why you haven't made any money on your films 'til now. Your film has to have what in the film business we call a 'hook.' That's what brings people in from the street. They pay money to go see the movie and they buy the movie and they tell their friends about the movie. And the movies that you've made are wonderful, warm, lovely films but they don't have a hook."

And they said, "Well, what's the hook?" And I said, "The hook is so simple. You've already said it 16 different ways, but you haven't thought of it as a hook. The hook is, 'This film is going to tell people to save the stuff they love.' And how to do it. Most people would say, 'I don't know how to do it.' You don't have to know how to do it, just do it. Just go out and save it. You'll find a way. You'll make the way. So this film is about people who do that, and that's what this whole thing about the Golden Gate National Recreation Area is: a bunch of people, I was only one of them, but there's a bunch of them who care so much. They can't be stopped. And they don't worry about the money. They don't worry about politics. They just say, 'We're going to make this happen,' and so it happens. At least in my limited lifetime, it has happened so many times that I'm still enthusiastic. And I think this film should tell that story. Not about me, but about the concept."

So that's what, when you mentioned that you heard the other day, I was saying to people, and what I said to Nancy and Kenji, which is, if the hook works, when the lights come up at the end of the show, there's going to be two reactions: there are going to be people laughing, screaming and clapping, and there are going to be people sitting quietly with tears in their eyes. The ones that are clapping are thinking, "Well, we did it, didn't we?" Or "We can do it." The ones that are crying are the ones who lost it, let the opportunities slip by because they didn't act. They didn't act. And I said, "What do you think?" And they said, "OK, well, help us. Help us." I didn't have to say anything; they already knew what the hook was, they just hadn't made it into the hook. So when the film was made — and you've seen the film, it's a magnificent film —

**Debra Schwartz:** So many times, I have to say.

**Doug Ferguson:** I have been to now, probably 10 to 15 Q&A sessions following that film. And when the lights come up, people are laughing, people are clapping, and a few are crying.

**Debra Schwartz:** One of the best descriptions I heard about a person's experience watching that film, he said, "I was terrified and yet, I knew the ending. And yet I was still so afraid watching it because you know it's a hair breadth's away from another scenario."

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh, yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** But you're really just saying, "Jump, and the net will come." And I think that people need to be reminded. You know, that movie really does give you that hope that you can just jump.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah, we were very fortunate. The times were ripe, the opportunities were immense, I mean, it was there for us to do. It was ours to lose. And unfortunately, it was everybody's to lose. There were so many opportunities in the '60s and '70s that are very, very difficult to find today. Not to say that people aren't finding them in different ways, but they're 10 times more complicated, 10 times more expensive, 10 times more time-consuming. We were there when it was almost like stealing candy from a baby. We were out there to save the world. And we had the tools, which included our hubris.

**Debra Schwartz:** Hubris, in a good way.

**Doug Ferguson:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Because things are so much more complicated, I think more than ever, now —

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** A gentle reminder is a helpful impetus to continuing.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yes, it is. And in the Q&A sessions that I've been in, I tell people, "Don't be put off by the complications. There are ways around the complications. You can do it." When people say, "It's just too complicated," turn your back, say, "Thank you very much," walk across the street, and find somebody who says, "Well, how are we going to do it?" And then you're ready to go.

**Debra Schwartz:** How many times in your career have you felt, in whatever your endeavor is, what you're pursuing, that the shadow that follows you is, "This isn't going to work out," and yet it does? What percentage of the time would you say that you have that sense, like —

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, I've had the sense it wasn't going to happen. But fortunately, almost every one of those times, it has happened. You know, you have to be a little realistic and say, "Is there a way?" Somebody told me once, "The successful entrepreneur is one who knows he's in a dead-end alley and gets out while the getting is good." But you've got early on to know if it's a dead end or not. And I have been pretty good about

that. And also a bulldog. Jane, my good wife, told me to get rid of Slide Ranch. “Doug, you’re beating your head against a wall. It’s not going to happen.” And I said, “It *is* going to happen. It’s gotta happen. Should happen.”

**Debra Schwartz:** Where does this come from in you, this boundlessness?

**Doug Ferguson:** I would credit, in large part, to my father who was an incredibly inspirational guy. He was born to a very serious Scottish engineer and he — I don’t know, I think they must have switched babies in the hospital. My father was so far from a Scottish engineer. He loved life. He did wild and crazy things. I remember him telling me that he did this at Stanford — all this fuss recently about inflated balls?<sup>6</sup> My father discovered by reading the rules — the then rules for college football — that there was nothing that told you how or when you inflate the football. So he had a football with him when he played football, and he would blow it up and run down the field with the football. And they’d say, “Well that’s not the football” and he’d say, “Let’s define our terms. It’s a football. I’ve got it. I’m on the field. Prove that this isn’t the football!” An early Tom whatchamacallit<sup>7</sup>, the guy that’s in the news these days —

My dad was a wild and crazy person. He wrote stories, he wrote poems, he wrote this and that, and he also then started writing plays, musicals. He started producing first in the neighborhood, and then he joined the Bohemian Club, and that’s when he wrote more — he wrote the plays, he wrote the music, he conducted the orchestras, and directed the chorus for six or seven huge productions. I’ve never heard of anybody who did all those things. And I said, “How can you do all that stuff?” He said, “Well, you know you sit down and start writing a song and you think, ‘Boy, that’d be good. There’s a show here.’” And then I’d say, “Well, why didn’t you get somebody else involved?” He said, “Well, I always intended to. I always intended to.” But you know, he wanted it to be just right before he brought somebody in. He’d end up doing the whole thing himself. And they were great shows. Great shows. I have all the music in the basement. I’ve played the music. Pretty ribald stuff, but OK.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Are you a member of the Bohemian Club?

**Doug Ferguson:** Was I a member?

**Debra Schwartz:** Are you?

**Doug Ferguson:** No. My dad gave his life to that club. He loved this stuff. It was so crazy and interesting to him. And my mother was not a particularly interested fan of the Bohemian Club, so he spent more and more time at the Club. Also, she couldn’t cook and they had great food and drink over there. So he spent a lot of time at the Club. I was encouraged by the Club to become a member because they knew that I wrote musicals, too, which I have. And they wanted me to be a member of the Club. And I said, “No, I’m

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<sup>6</sup> Doug is referring to the professional football scandal known as “Deflategate” that occurred during the 2015 AFC Championship game between the New England Patriots and the Indianapolis Colts.—Ed.

<sup>7</sup> Football player Tom Brady.—Ed.

not going to do that because I have three little kids and I want to take much more time and much better care of them than my father did with me.” He was a great guy, I loved him. Huge mentor, at times, but I didn’t see much of him. I wanted to be a more hands-on dad. So, that was how that happened. But anyway, in terms of one of my great inspirations, he was just over the top.

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, you seem like a pretty fun guy yourself, you know. Do you think that sense of joy, that enthusiasm, has affected the people around you in your dealings? Has galvanized —

**Doug Ferguson:** Yes. It’s what gets me up in the morning. I tried to communicate to others the excitement of doing cool stuff. My first office manager was with me for 12 years and when she left me — she’s an artist, and she did a wonderful picture of a coat rack with all kinds of things hanging off of it, artistic stuff, musical stuff. She had made a pastiche of all the things that I was involved with, and that excited me. She said, “Being with you was fascinating because you absolutely have no boundaries at all.” She stayed with me for 12 years and finally went down to Santa Fe, where she is an artist. She was replaced by the lady who’s with me now, who’s been with me for 16 years. And when she came in the door, she said, “Well, what goes on in this office?” I said, “Beats me.”

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Doug Ferguson:** “Beats me. People call, phone rings, people walk in the door.” She says, “But you make money doing this.” I said, “Some of the time. But some people need help and they just haven’t got a penny. And that’s just — ”

**Debra Schwartz:** So you do pro bono work as well?

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh, lots. [laughs] Huge. I would say 50 percent of what I’ve done all my life, if you average it out, has been pro bono. I’ve robbed from the rich and given to the poor. I’ve represented a whole bunch of very wealthy, very successful corporations and developers and all that stuff. I’ve taken that money and I’ve turned right around and supported my activities for other things. And it’s all worked out. I’m not broke.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you’ve managed to steal from the rich, as you say, and bring to the poor. But you’ve funneled money into your home town, you’ve managed to —

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** Tell me about what it means for you to be in Mill Valley, in Marin County. Tell me if you can, what that means to you, to be the hometown boy.

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, Marin County is an incredible place, just an incredible place. There are many wonderful places. I’ve been around the world enough to know; I’ve seen some of them. But this, as far as I’m concerned — I got all that I ever need here, and I also have the opportunity here that I wouldn’t if I were in Zanzibar. I have made some

things happen here and I really know a lot of people as a result of that. I can help other people who are trying to do things here. That's huge. Just huge. Every time I walk into the Rafael Theater, I think, "Well we did it, didn't we?" I'm not the only guy who did the Rafael Theater. Anne Brebner and many others have worked with it. I only know that if it hadn't have been for me, it wouldn't have worked. If it hadn't have been for *her*, it wouldn't have worked. But I'm one of the key three or four people on the Rafael, one of the three or four people on the Lark, I'm one of the three or four people on the Sequoia Theater. I'm one of the three or four people on the Marin Theatre Company. I'm one of the three or four people on a whole bunch of things. I love getting a pat on the back, that's fine. But I'm not in it for that. I'm in it so that when I walk in there I can quietly say to myself, "Well, we did it, didn't we? We did it!"

**Debra Schwartz:** 'Cause you love it.

**Doug Ferguson:** I love it. Sure.

**Debra Schwartz:** You love it and so, take care of the things you love.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. It's a good scam, this nonprofit stuff.

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] You're a wise professional, you've done remarkable things. You've had the rare privilege of being able to have success and support, community support. You've caught that wave where you were able to really make changes. You know, you've had a very privileged life in many ways to be able to take on the challenges and persevere and live in a place where you can savor the successes. So what do you say to young people now coming in? How do you see the area changing? How can people maneuver with these changes?

**Doug Ferguson:** That is a tricky one. I have tried to help; I love dealing with young people. My door is always open to people who want to know something about, "Well, how do I do something like you did here or what this group did? How do I do that?" And I'll say, "Come on in, let's talk." But when I talk to them, I realize that the vital ingredient to being able to do what I did is who I am.

One of my sons works for Tesla, he's a senior guy at Tesla, there from the dawning. And we talk about what makes Tesla work. And I realize that I wouldn't want to go camping with Elon Musk, but I know what he has, I really resonate with that. He has this feeling of, "We're going to do it. I'll do it and if I need to get it done somehow, I'm just going to make this thing happen." He gets consumed by wanting things to happen.

And when people come to ask me, "Well, how can I do what you've done?" I say, "How are you about getting consumed with matters so that you don't sleep? How are you with putting aside a couple of weekends or maybe a month and just concentrating on something? Are you OK with all that?" Because I think that still is important, even in this complicated, bureaucratic, busy world. I think it still takes, as somebody once said to me about what it took to succeed at Harvard, he said, "Well, how did you succeed at



Harvard? You came from Berkeley High School and you didn't know anything. You got back here, and you did really quite handsomely." I said, "I don't know. I just went in there and did it." He said, "Well, you have the vital ingredient, my son: brass balls and the self-confidence of Attila the Hun. That's all you need to succeed at Harvard and it seems to me you've applied that elsewhere." It's probably true.

**Debra Schwartz:** What forges brass? You know, there's something before those balls come.

**Doug Ferguson:** It's so idiosyncratic. If my father had been a Scottish engineer instead of a Scottish engineer's son, this might be a very different story.

**Debra Schwartz:** So you're basically saying that, whatever the passion behind, you know, your interest and your concern, that that passion — how consumed you can become, allow yourself to become, invest yourself in — can be the impetus or the beginning?

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah, going back again to my father. He knew no boundaries. Just like Elon Musk. "Space? We can do space!" "Electric cars?" My father knew no boundaries. It wasn't as dramatic as Elon Musk, but it was quite dramatic for him to go from being a Depression-born baby to a Scottish engineer who had no concept of doing anything other than putting food on the table, to himself becoming a very successful entrepreneur's lawyer. He was known as *the* entrepreneur's lawyer in San Francisco because he saw the world changing and he saw it coming and he knew how to say to people, "We can do it! Let's just do it." Raising money and helping people do things. When I was a kid, I remember once I was sick in bed and he came home that day. I said, "What have you got there?" He said, "Well, I knew you were sick, so I thought I'd bring home something to amuse you." I said, "Well, what did you find?" He said, "I was walking by a strange music shop and they had all kinds of strange, archaic instruments. I bought this thing for you." He unwraps this thing, and it's an Indian horn that's about six feet long, a wooden thing. I said, "What is it, Dad?" He says, "Beats me."

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs]

**Doug Ferguson:** "Beats me. But you know, I used to play a lot of saxophone." He was in a road band. The saxophone players used to have six saxophones and they knew how to play each one. And he played in these road houses and he learned a lot of instruments, he played great piano and wrote a lot of music. So he breaks out this wooden thing with a great big player horn at the bottom, and starts playing it! I said, "Dad, how do you know to play that?" He says, "I don't know. I've never played one before!"

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Knows no bounds. What makes a piper? You know, you wonder about that. What makes a person that becomes that force — I guess it's just having that sense of knowing no bounds.

**Doug Ferguson:** He was remarkable. Writing all those plays, which he did, he was always on the cruise for humor, Bohemian Club big and bawdy humor, that kind of stuff. And my mother didn't care for his humor. My brother kind of missed it. My sister didn't like it. My father found in me, an audience. He needed an audience. So he would come home, he would say, "Hey! Listen. Two Irishmen go into a bar, OK?" And he'd start telling me a story. He'd get three-quarters of the way through the story and he'd say, "Now, you got the story?" I'd say, "Yeah, I got the story." Then he would say, "Here's the first ending," and he'd go back. "And then here's the second ending." And then, "Here's the third ending." And he would try these endings on me to see which ones I liked. I said, "Well, where did you get those endings?" He said, "Well, I heard the joke and I started thinking of different endings on the way home." [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Do you do that? Do you need an audience to think through things in your work?

**Doug Ferguson:** No, it all comes out of the air. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** I mean, do you ever wonder where it comes from?

**Doug Ferguson:** My father, I think. He was a huge influence. And I've known some other crazy, incredible people. But in terms of just — when I was a kid, he had — you just saw my shop downstairs. That's a pretty good shop for a little guy who does stuff. I can build anything down there, and I have. This whole house is full of stuff I've built. And he said, "I love that place." And my sister didn't use the shop and my brother didn't use the shop. My father wanted me to learn how to use the shop. I said, "Well, OK. I'd really like to build stuff." He said, "OK, well, let me tell you something about these tools. They really are dangerous. They can cut your hand off, these things. These are big saws and big drills and big all kinds of stuff." He said, "I'm going to teach you how to use them, but I'm not going to coddle you. Once I get you sure that you're started, you're on your own, Doug." And I remember the first day he left me, the band saw. Oh God! It could have cut my finger off in a nanosecond [snaps fingers]. I worked on it for about two minutes before he said, "You got it now? Remember the two things: What you're doing is alright but if you don't pay attention, you're going to lose your finger, and I'm not going to coddle you. Give me a call if you need any help. I'm going to go to the Club."

**Debra Schwartz:** Wow.

**Doug Ferguson:** I tell ya. Amazing. Amazing.

**Debra Schwartz:** So it's nice to hear about, you know when you have somebody like that in your life, that's a privilege. Somebody that inspires you and nurtures you.

**Doug Ferguson:** Oh yeah.

**Debra Schwartz:** You're very lucky. What is it now, in the present time — you've had this wonderful career and you've done these awesome things — what matters to you right here and now? You know, we're in 2015. Where are your interests, as far as your involvement with the area?

**Doug Ferguson:** Well, one concern, thinking of my father and how he neglected my mother because of the Club. I've neglected, to some extent, my wife because of my busy life. I really think I owe her some time. We've had some discussions about — she's talked about retirement, and I've said, "Don't kid yourself." But I can cut back and we can spend some time together. I think that I owe her that. We've spent a very good life together, but I spent a lot of time in my office and away, dealing — so I'm going to cut back on that. That's important. That's a huge thing.

Also, as I mentioned, I really like to talk to young people and get new groups inspired. I don't flatter myself. I am now an old codger. People look and say, "Isn't that nice? I had a nice discussion with Doug Ferguson." "He's still alive?"

**Debra Schwartz:** You're not that old!

**Doug Ferguson:** "He's sort of peppy." And that doesn't bother me. I have the same self-confidence that I had when I was 15. I'm not worried about that. If I set my mind to something, I'll make it happen. But when I see people look, and they do, they say, "Boy, that's amazing! He's still out and about!"

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] Honestly, I'm sitting here, I've been interviewing you for a while and you are so bright you almost vibrate. [Doug laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** [laughs] You've got a lot of energy there, I can see that.

**Doug Ferguson:** Anyway, I have been doing for a long time what I'd like to do most, which is to inspire others, to inspire myself, to do cool things.

**Debra Schwartz:** The community. You mentioned earlier about the community, continuing to work with community stuff.

**Doug Ferguson:** Yeah. Definitely!

**Debra Schwartz:** Well, let's see, we've been talking for a while. I think we can start to close up here. Let me just take a quick look if — I want to ask you one more question, OK?

**Doug Ferguson:** OK.

**Debra Schwartz:** Is there anything we haven't talked about today that you wish we'd talk about? What's missing? Anything in our interview?

**Doug Ferguson:** There's many things we haven't talked about. Some of them, classified. But nothing that I feel like I need to talk about, no. I think you have here a good handle of what it is that makes me tick. If you've got the secret of eternal life, I'm not interested. I'm 76 now, and I hope I have a number of good years left, but my age group is getting older and they're dying and they're getting sick and they're getting palsy and other stuff, and I don't want to go there. I just want to go out like a rocket.

**Debra Schwartz:** You want to go out like a rocket.

**Doug Ferguson:** [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** What would be the best way?

**Doug Ferguson:** What would be the best way? Well, I have one, not a rocket, but it was a lovely thing. We had a friend who was a Supreme Court Justice, and he was a member of the Audubon Canyon Ranch, and he was also an avid birder and an avid naturalist. He was out in West Marin one day and he said, "Oh my god! Can you imagine that?" And he reached down to see a flower he'd never seen before and [Doug snaps his fingers].

When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was in a chorus at Berkeley High School and we would combine choruses, and something like 13 choruses from all over Berkeley came to sing. They put us all on the stage; Berkeley High School has a huge auditorium. So we had 13 choruses on the stage, with an orchestra and the conductor did the finale, which was "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Well, he conducted it, we sang our hearts out, the curtain came down, and we waited for the applause. Big thick curtain. We couldn't hear anything. We just stood there. And stood there. And stood there. And finally, they came back and said, "Your conductor died. On the last note." [chokes up]

**Debra Schwartz:** Wow.

**Doug Ferguson:** Now *that* was going out like a rocket! I don't need anything that fancy, but that showed me some stuff. [laughs]

**Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh. Well, I think that's as good a place to close as anywhere. Thank you so much for your time.

**Doug Ferguson:** Thank you, thank you. It's fun thinking about this stuff.

**Debra Schwartz:** A beautiful life you've been leading. Very inspirational. Thank you so much for sharing.