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RUSS KIERNAN

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Michelle Petersen in 2013**

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TITLE: Oral History of Russ Kiernan
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Tenacious and fearless runner, Dipsea Race winner, and teacher Paul Russell (“Russ”) Kiernan was born in Oakland on January 8th, 1938. Russ attended several San Francisco schools as a child, and pursued his higher education at San Francisco City College and San Francisco State University. Immediately following graduation, he began work as an elementary school teacher, ultimately spending most of his career at Francis Scott Key Elementary School in San Francisco’s Sunset District. Russ and his wife Marilyn moved to Mill Valley in 1967. Russ took up running in his late 20s, ran his first Dipsea Race in 1969 and won his first Dipsea championship in 1998. In the interview, he describes many aspects of the local running community, including early Bay to Breakers races, the Dolphin South End Runners Club, local trails and prominent local runners, as well as some surprising and audacious personal running experiences. Russ also touches on stories about his family and life as a teenager in San Francisco in the 1950s, and imparts some running wisdom.

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Oral History of Russ Kiernan
December 17th, 2013

Editor's note: This transcript differs in some ways from the audio recording. Portions of the recorded interview were moved in the transcript for narrative clarity, and other minor corrections and clarifications have been made.

Michelle Petersen: This is Michelle Petersen and I am here with Russ and we are going to start our oral history. Go ahead, Russ, state today's date, your name, and place.

Russ Kiernan: My real name is Paul Russell Kiernan but I've never gone by Paul. My brothers called me Russ and I've always gone by Russ. When I get a phone call asking for Paul, I know it's some solicitation. Today is the 17th of December, 2013, and we are in 701 Miller Avenue, Mill Valley in our condominium.

Michelle Petersen: So your parents called you Russ always from the beginning?

Russ Kiernan: Right, everybody did. I never went by Paul.

Michelle Petersen: Where are your parents from; what is your ethnic background there?

Russ Kiernan: My ethnic background is Irish. My dad was born in New York in 1898 and his family moved back to Ireland when his grandfather got sick. The grandfather got better but my dad's father died. I never knew him. They came back to New York with my grandmother and then came out to California. My grandmother died in 1928. My dad met my mother at a dance around that time. My mother was born in San Francisco in 1902 before the earthquake. I asked my brother the other day, where Gram Ella was born, Ella Hanley, and he said she was born in San Francisco, too.

Michelle Petersen: So wow, a long history of San Franciscans.

Russ Kiernan: My mother was small at the time of the earthquake. She knew some of it but didn't remember that much.

Michelle Petersen: Yeah, it would be difficult. Do you know what year your father moved to California, to San Francisco?

Russ Kiernan: I don't. Well, it must have been in the early '20s, maybe, or even a little earlier than that, I don't know.

Michelle Petersen: Is your mother's side of the family Irish as well?

Russ Kiernan: Yes.

Michelle Petersen: Full Irish, then,

Russ Kiernan: Full Irish, yeah. Hanley was her maiden name. She was the oldest of eight.

Michelle Petersen: Wow, in San Francisco?

Russ Kiernan: Yes. None of them are living now. A few of them had moved out of San Francisco. There are all of these cousins whom I don't know. My brother, Jack, knows them all or knows where they are living. Quite a few live in the San Diego area now. They grew up in Sacramento.

My Uncle Phil, the youngest of the siblings, worked for the newspapers in SF. He was in the Navy and he was on his way to Pearl Harbor when it was bombed. He married a gal from Sacramento and was an attorney, but he also wrote for the newspapers when he was in law school. Another uncle was also in the newspapers. They all lived in San Francisco when I was in my teens.

My brothers, Don and Jack, were both born in San Francisco. Then my dad got a job in Oakland loading trucks out by the airport. So I was born in Oakland on January 8th, 1938 and my sister Marie was born there on Dec. 9th, 1942. We lived in East Oakland where all the murders and everything are these days. It was a nice neighborhood back then. My parents didn't own the house. The owners wanted to sell the house. It was the middle of the school year, so my mother put off the owners until summer and that is when we moved to my grandmother's house in San Francisco. It must have been around 1945 or 1946. There were only three people living there, in a big house on 10th Avenue in the Richmond District in the city. Then a year later, my cousins were in the same boat. They were renting a flat on 7th Avenue only three blocks away, but moved in with us, so that went from three people — my grandmother, a great aunt, and my mother's youngest sister — to seventeen people.

Michelle Petersen: Do you know the address of the house on 10th Avenue?

Russ Kiernan: It was 166 10th.

Russ Kiernan: It burned down in 1966; they don't know why. It didn't go to the ground. My dad did die in the fire from smoke inhalation. He had no sense of smell and had gone back in to get something. The other ones who were in there were my mother, my sister and her young daughter and some cousins, and my Aunt Jen whose house it really was. So everybody got out except my dad.

I was married by that time, as were my brothers, so we weren't there. It turns out they didn't have insurance on the house. So my aunt ended up selling the house for \$25,000 in 1966. It was torn down and an ugly 6 unit apartment house was built on the site.

Michelle Petersen: Is this the one on 10th Avenue?

Russ Kiernan: On 10th Avenue, yeah, 166.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember the address of the house you were born in in Oakland, by chance?

Russ Kiernan: I don't. My brother would know. It is on Dowling Street which is in East Oakland between 81st and 82nd. There was a creek that went down through the back, the old park.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember the house?

Russ Kiernan: I remember the house, sure.

Michelle Petersen: Okay. So tell me about your brothers and sister.

Russ Kiernan: One of my brothers, Don, is deceased. . He was the one who got me into the Dipsea.¹ Don was more of a mentor to me. Jack was older and in the service.

Michelle Petersen: Where do you fall? Jack is older, and then —

Russ Kiernan: He is the oldest.

Michelle Petersen: And then you are next?

Russ Kiernan: Don was the next. I'm the next. Marie is the youngest. There are about four or five years difference between each one of us.

Michelle Petersen: That's a good age difference.

Russ Kiernan: When my cousins moved in, there were five of them, so there were really nine brothers, all of them in the same house.

Michelle Petersen: But your mother was one of eight? I'm sure you have plenty of cousins.

Russ Kiernan: There is one cousin who didn't live in the house, he actually also lived on 10th Avenue on the Sunset side; he is the only child of my Aunt Florence and his dad's name was Russ. I think that's why they call me Russ all the time. Tim and his wife, Janet, live in the complex here. They used to live in South City² when they were raising their boys.

Michelle Petersen: Tim is your cousin?

Russ Kiernan: Yes. They also have a place in Healdsburg so they go up there all the time.

¹ The Dipsea Race

² The City of South San Francisco

Michelle Petersen: A lot of family.

Russ Kiernan: I knew Tim the best of all the cousins all the years growing up because he always lived close by.

Michelle Petersen: So your Irish background, have you had a chance to make it back to Ireland?

Russ Kiernan: We have been to Ireland. That was in 1973, we went on a six-month sabbatical. Our daughter had her third birthday in London and we bought a VW camper and took delivery in Luxembourg. I had never been to Europe, I had never been out of the Bay Area, really, but Marilyn had taught in Europe.

Michelle Petersen: Is Marilyn your wife?

Russ Kiernan: Marilyn is my wife. I had been married before and my first wife died at 29 years old; she was pregnant. I was married to a Carcione. The green grocer who was on the radio — did you ever hear the Carcione with the really gravelly voice? He was her uncle. Her father and grandfather were also in the wholesale business. But I knew Marilyn from teaching. I was eligible to apply for a sabbatical and we drove that camper all the way from Ireland to Greece. It was wonderful.

Michelle Petersen: What did you think of Ireland?

Russ Kiernan: Well, you know, there were people we looked up.

Michelle Petersen: I was going to say, did you see family?

Russ Kiernan: There was no immediate family there. Marilyn's sister lives in Louisville, Kentucky. We took her oldest daughter with us as a nanny. We were able to visit in a home of a friend in Dublin, and met a lot of people along the way. Ireland definitely felt like home.

Michelle Petersen: What was your father's full name?

Russ Kiernan: John Joseph Kiernan.

Michelle Petersen: How about your mother?

Russ Kiernan: Gertrude Marie Hanley was her maiden name.

Michelle Petersen: How would you describe your father? What was he like?

Russ Kiernan: He was sort of a character. He, you know, did hard labor all his life.

Michelle Petersen: You mentioned he loaded trucks.

Russ Kiernan: Worked on the ferry boats, loading trucks for Fleishman; I think he worked in a brewery, I don't know what he did before in New York. He liked sports; he was a smoker. Well, I guess when he died he wasn't really smoking, but he'd smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. My mother was a smoker too. But he liked boxing. I remember him going to different boxing matches, with one of my other uncles, who was head of the International News Service for the West Coast, which is no longer around. I think it's now UPI.³ I remember going to Winterland Ballroom, which is down in the Fillmore District, to boxing matches. It was an ice skating rink down there in the Fillmore just off Geary. I don't know if the building is still there or not. Baseball — he liked that — we played somewhat. He liked to drink also but when he actually died he wasn't drinking anymore. My mother, she was the boss, though, my father was not.

Michelle Petersen: Your mother was the boss.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, of the whole family. Whatever Gert said.

Michelle Petersen: What did she do?

Russ Kiernan: She was a housewife most of her life. I recall a story of her working at the time of the crash. I guess she was married then. She was taking money and depositing it in the bank and the teller told her, "You take that back to your boss". She didn't know that banks were going down.

Michelle Petersen: Oh, when the stock market crashed.

Russ Kiernan: Yes. She volunteered and worked in one of the schools for a while, in the kitchen, and served food. But paid jobs, she really didn't have very many. That was later in life she did that.

Michelle Petersen: She was the boss of the house.

Russ Kiernan: Right.

Michelle Petersen: So you said you were born in Oakland and then you moved to San Francisco. Do you know what year you moved to San Francisco to the house on 10th Avenue?

Russ Kiernan: probably '46 or '47.

Michelle Petersen: Okay, so you were a little older. What was San Francisco like at that time?

Russ Kiernan: Oh, I knew San Francisco. I didn't really know Oakland. I remember riding my bike to school in Oakland over Macarthur Boulevard with my brothers. I was

³ United Press International

just little and they'd lead me. We'd go up through some cemeteries near Mill's College. If you know where Mill's College is, the school, St. Cyril's, was almost right across the street. I remember playing there, playing basketball, one of the things I remember from school there. They had the Adams and the Jeeps. We were in second grade and we'd go play in teams.

Michelle Petersen: Those were your team names, the Adams and the Jeeps?

Russ Kiernan: Yes. We practiced in the schoolyard and we'd play at halftime games, like USF and St. Mary's or down to Santa Clara or we'd also come over to the Oakland Auditorium or the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. They'd use that for basketball. They'd have us go out and play for about fifteen minutes.

Russ Kiernan: And then I came over to the city and the public school. My brothers and cousins all went to the Catholic School, Star of the Sea, at 8th and Geary. But there was no room in the third or fourth grade — I forget which — so I went to the public school — George Peabody, which is on 7th Avenue between Clement and California. About halfway through the year, there was room to get into Star of the Sea.

Russ Kiernan: A lot of my friends are from grammar school still. We all see each other all the time.

Michelle Petersen: Interesting. So where was the next school that you went to, what was the name of it? In San Francisco, after the public school.

Russ Kiernan: From Star of the Sea, I went to high school at Sacred Heart. My brother Don was going there. Most of the guys went to St. Ignatius [SI], which is now co-ed. These were all boys' schools. Sacred Heart was down on Ellis Street, Ellis and Franklin. It was a falling down kind of building, they had a brand new gym but that was it, no yard. We used to go down to the park that was down there — called it Communist Park, I don't know why — for lunch. There was a girl's high at Franklin where the Catholic Cathedral is, St. Vincent's, now. Now Sacred Heart is a co-ed school: Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Michelle Petersen: Did you still play basketball?

Russ Kiernan: Not so much anymore. I did all through school and college. Recreational leagues. Then I went to City College.⁴ I wasn't going to go to college and my mother had me all signed up. I thought, "Oh, I'll go be a merchant seaman" — which would have been a disaster. I'd be dead by now. My cousin Doug, who grew up in the house, was a seaman. He died very young from alcohol. Mike Lee was also a merchant seaman. He was a friend I went to grammar school with. He became a drug addict, though he lived quite a while with his addiction.

Michelle Petersen: What made you want to be a merchant seaman?

⁴ City College of San Francisco

Russ Kiernan: Well, you travel and it seemed like a pretty good thing. My cousin Doug liked to fish and abused drugs. Doug died at 40-something. He was really a character.

Michelle Petersen: Was there anything else that you wanted to be when you grew up?

Russ Kiernan: I really didn't know. So I went off to City College. I got all these classes and my brother Don said, "What are you doing with those classes?" Accounting or this, get history or science or this and that. He was there at the same time, he had been in the service and now he was coming back to school. So we were there at the same time.

Michelle Petersen: What year did you graduate high school?

Russ Kiernan: 1956. So this was now 1957 going to City College. So I went through, got an AA degree, an Associate of Arts, and went to state college. My brother was an elementary education teacher. He started teaching elementary in Noe Valley, then he ended up teaching middle school and then high school in North Beach.

Michelle Petersen: Is this your brother Jack?

Russ Kiernan: No, my brother Don. Jack worked for PG&E. He went to college at night, got a degree, worked all his life. He went to work at PG&E at 19 years old and worked nights. He would stop at the bar at 10th and Geary and got to know Pat O'Shea. I know Katie O'Shea. Her father owned it. She's been a nun for fifty years now. She is great.

Michelle Petersen: Did you go to school with her?

Russ Kiernan: Yes, elementary school.

Michelle Petersen: Who were your friends in school? Do you remember names? Any best friends?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, we all still see each other all the time. They had a dinner at one of the restaurants just last Wednesday night. I went to a luncheon that day with some of the guys and all these others who are my brother's ages. My brother Jack has been going down to this even though these are all guys who went to school in San Francisco. A couple hundred, not just SI but Poly⁵ right by Kezar⁶ which is no longer a school, and Mission and Balboa, but mainly the parochial schools. My good friend, Lou Salaber, lived at 10th and Geary; his father had a laundry across the street, World's Favorite French Laundry. Lou lives in Corte Madera.

Michelle Petersen: Was he one of your best friends?

⁵ San Francisco Polytechnic High School (1884 – 1973)

⁶ Kezar Stadium

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, and still is. Jim Fitzpatrick, too, was down at lunch the other day. He's a retired fireman, worked for PG&E and then got in the fire department. Bob Roper is a runner and swimmer. He lives in Fontana. He worked in the courts as a bailiff also.

Michelle Petersen: These were all friends from high school?

Russ Kiernan: These were friends from grammar school and through high school.

Michelle Petersen: What did you guys used to do for fun in high school?

Russ Kiernan: We'd go out to the dances, there were always dances, not that we were big dancers, but we were drinkers too. We'd go down to the Presidio in Mountain Lake Park by Park Presidio there and that was just down the street from the house, so we'd go down there. But mainly we'd play sports. We'd go to Sutro School, which is on Funston off of California, play basketball all day on weekends, or strikeouts where you'd throw a tennis ball. But there's a wall, so no catcher and you don't run bases. You hit it over the fence and Mrs. Foneseer's yard is a homerun and if you hit the screen part of the fence, it's a triple, and if it hits a wall, it's a double, and if it hits anywhere in the schoolyard, it's a single. So we'd play ball games. I played recreation leagues. On 18th Avenue there was a public playground where everybody went. All of the great basketball players from San Francisco would go around there and play around the basketball court, we'd hang out there. We'd go to the bars and go up to Russian River — my aunt had a cabin up there. My aunt lived in San Anselmo so that's how I knew Marin; we had to go there to get the key to go up to Russian River. I remember taking the car ferry, coming from Oakland, when we lived in Oakland, to go up to the river.

Michelle Petersen: What would you do at the river?

Russ Kiernan: Oh, go to the beach every day, swim, and then they always had entertainment at night. I do remember Guernewood Park and then it was always at Rio Nido. I haven't been up to the river in quite a while now. Everybody from San Francisco went to Russian River. It was cheap and fun.

Michelle Petersen: How old were you? You started going there when you were a child?

Russ Kiernan: Oh yeah, an infant.

Michelle Petersen: Did you ever get in to trouble?

Russ Kiernan: I'd never do anything bad — that was the stuff, drinking as minors. We drank more than we should have. Did jail at the Russian River.

Michelle Petersen: Uh oh, what did you do to get into jail?

Russ Kiernan: Oh, drinking.

Russ Kiernan: As minors. We were inebriated. Mike Gallagher — still a good friend — they lived around the corner from us on 11th Avenue. There were 12 kids; Mike is the second oldest. Jim, his brother, is the oldest. We were in their cabin and I guess we were terrorizing Fetters and all those places, and we started jumping in their pools and I guess they phoned the cops and figured we were Gallaghers and they hauled us all in and took us to Santa Rosa.

Michelle Petersen: Booked you into jail.

Russ Kiernan: There were a couple of us who were 17. If you were 18, you went into the jail. Our parents had to come get us.

Michelle Petersen: Could have been worse, I guess

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, driving up to Santa Rosa. But the river. A lot of people, my brother Jack met Eileen, his wife, up there. My brother Don and Kathleen, his wife, went to Russian River, though they didn't meet at the river.

Michelle Petersen: Everyone liked to go up there.

Russ Kiernan: We all went up there. Everyone from San Francisco went to Russian River.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember any traditions from growing up, family traditions?

Russ Kiernan: We always had Christmas. Usually it was at 166 10th Avenue and all the relatives, all the cousins would come. They were all small and my grandmother played the piano. My aunt, too, when they moved in —

Michelle Petersen: How old were you when the cousins moved in?

Russ Kiernan: Just a year later from when we moved in.

Michelle Petersen: Oh, okay.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, we were all there at the same time. Their mother Eileen had polio as a child and ended up with crutches all her life, but she was a beautiful pianist and very vibrant. My grandmother played the piano well, and I guess there were a few others of the relatives who played the piano, which was in the hall. The big Richmond district houses had the living room, and the entry hall was a great big hall and then sliding glass to close off the living room and dining room, and a great big dining room, so we'd have tables set up everywhere. We'd have twenty people or so. Then there was a kitchen, too, that could be used. So it seemed like Christmas was always there, with a big tree.

Michelle Petersen: Sounds like a full house. What year did you say your father passed away?

Russ Kiernan: In '66 when the house burned.

Russ Kiernan: And my mother grew up south of Market and in the Mission district.

Michelle Petersen: Do you have any classic family stories, anything you guys would always laugh about, get together at family parties and laugh about?

Russ Kiernan: Well, a lot with Doug, these are later years coming in, drunker than a skunk and weaving his car and driving when he shouldn't be driving, oh god. It was quite a household. There were all these people living in this house. My brother Don and I shared a bed, a double bed. This was into college. I didn't think anything of it. My cousins were in two single beds on both sides. You had to go through that to a sun porch outside where my sister and my cousins Barbara and Doug lived out there and Stuart, the youngest then, he has since died. But most stories were about Doug and the great aunt who never married, Molly. I remember one time Doug came in; he was working at the airport at night as a janitor. Some priest friend got him a job out there. He'd go and work nights and then he'd go into the bars on the way home which was at 8 in the morning. You'd say, "C'mon Doug" and he'd say, "It's my nighttime. You go out after teaching or working or whatever." He'd come in and he was always broke and would say, "Molly, can you lend me a few bucks? I need to get a haircut." She'd say, "Douglas, you're going to buy beer with that. I'm not going to." She says, "I say a rosary for you every day." He says, "I think you have been skipping a few beads." He was an all-time character.

Michelle Petersen: Did you enjoy school?

Russ Kiernan: I did.

Michelle Petersen: Did you have any favorite subjects?

Russ Kiernan: Not really. I was not a great student. I didn't misbehave where some of my friends did.

Michelle Petersen: You weren't causing trouble like Doug.

Russ Kiernan: Oh god, the nuns were always phoning about Doug. He was what, two years older than me or so.

Michelle Petersen: He went to the same school?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, we all went to the grammar school there, all the cousins. They'd be phoning for Doug — the principal — he was always raising hell.

Michelle Petersen: So you went to San Francisco City College and then State.

Russ Kiernan: San Francisco State. It wasn't a college experience. My brother Don and I were in some of the same classes then and people would say, "Oh yeah, do you have your paper to be signed for the GI Bill." I'd say, "I wasn't in the service." We all worked at the post office driving mail trucks. I worked carrying mail during summers and Christmas and all that and then we got steady jobs part time at the post office. Two of my cousins Bob and Bill, and also Stuart, who is dead, and myself, we all drove mail trucks. We were different ages, but all in school at the same time. I would take the streetcar from State; it went all the way down to the ferry building. We had to go over where the fancy condos are now over by PacBell⁷ to get the truck. A lot of times we could get a ride with one of the regular workers who worked full-time. They were heading back to take the trucks to the garage and they are supposed to gas them up before. A lot of times we had to check to make sure we had gas, but the pumps were right in the warehouse, so that was great.

Michelle Petersen: Was that your first job?

Russ Kiernan: No, I worked at Bank Market, which was at 7th and Clement Street. I cleaned up in the butcher department and waited on some customers. I was paid 75 cents an hour.

Michelle Petersen: How old were you when you did that?

Russ Kiernan: I was probably sixteen and seventeen and in high school and did that for a few years. That's why I didn't play any ball in high school or college. I played basketball in recreational leagues because the games were at night. But I worked there and then my brother had a job driving a truck for a liquor store and I remember doing that, filling in for him once in a while. I didn't work permanently, but I guess mainly the post office was what I did. Even as a little kid I remember doing gardening for 35 cents an hour with neighbors, and washing the steps because all the houses in those days had big marble steps that needed to be washed.

Michelle Petersen: So you didn't have a car.

Russ Kiernan: Never had a car till I was teaching.

Michelle Petersen: How was public transportation back then, was it easy?

Russ Kiernan: It was fine. We took the B Street car, went down Geary Street, got off at Sacred Heart. The C Street car — I remember when I'd come visit my grandmother before we lived there, we'd come along California street, went along to Lincoln Park where the golf course is. I think the B Street car went right into Sutro Baths. We'd go out there as kids and go swimming and there was an ice skating rink. I don't remember doing that. I remember ice skating down in Winterland. There was another ice skating rink out around 48th Avenue that was operating until 20 years ago or so.

⁷ Pacific Bell Park, renamed AT&T Park in 2006

Michelle Petersen: When you call these the B Street car and the C Street cars, are these trolley cars?

Russ Kiernan: Streetcars, yeah, they went on trolleys.

Michelle Petersen: Similar to the ones that are out on the Embarcadero now?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, exactly, that kind of a streetcar.

Michelle Petersen: So they went all over the city.

Russ Kiernan: Balboa — I don't remember the streetcar on Balboa Street, but all the streets in the Richmond district and the Mission, they were all streetcars, pretty much. My uncle, my cousin too, worked on repairing those. He worked over where I met Marilyn at the school, San Miguel,⁸ way over by Geneva and Alemany and Mission, Ocean Avenue.

Michelle Petersen: So when you graduated from college, what were you doing for work? Were you still with the post office?

Russ Kiernan: I was, yeah. Then I got a job teaching.

Michelle Petersen: You immediately started teaching?

Russ Kiernan: I immediately started teaching.

Michelle Petersen: What school did you first teach at?

Russ Kiernan: San Miguel, which was over by the Cow Palace. I taught there and then I taught at Francis Scott Key⁹ out on 43rd Avenue and that's where I taught most of my time. So I was only in two schools regular teaching, but I was in a few schools for summer school. I taught summer school. I was principal one summer of summer school at Jefferson¹⁰ at 19th and Irving. It's all been redone. A friend — she's still alive — she was principal there for a long time but I was just over the summer.

Michelle Petersen: Did you teach a specific subject or a specific grade?

Russ Kiernan: I taught everything in elementary, you teach everything.

Russ Kiernan: I taught in Chinatown and Commodore Stockton¹¹ one summer — that was an experience. Taught on Golden Gate Avenue when the Golden Gate projects were

⁸ San Miguel Elementary School

⁹ Francis Scott Key Elementary School

¹⁰ Jefferson Elementary School

¹¹ Commodore Stockton Early Education School

there. When I moved to Francis Scott Key they changed the configuration of schools for integration, so we were getting children from the inner city and also from the Richmond district — a lot of Asians and black kids came. I had taught them over at San Miguel in the Oceanview area.

Michelle Petersen: So when did you meet your first wife?

Russ Kiernan: I met her up at Tahoe in probably about '60 — I think it was about the time of the Olympics at Squaw Valley. We were up there of course carousing and drinking and somebody said there was a party somewhere at some motel or something. And we went and there were a bunch of people there in a motel room.

Russ Kiernan: Somebody mentioned Anita Carcione and she lived over in the Sunset. So I looked her up and we started dating. She went to Lincoln High. There are still friends of hers that I see, but her parents I think are both dead. They weren't too happy when I remarried.

Michelle Petersen: How old were you when you married Anita, what year did you guys get married?

Russ Kiernan: We got married in '63, she died in '66. She was pregnant and she didn't feel well and we got her a family doctor and he said, "You have to go to the hospital." We lived in her grandfather's apartment house; he had a lot of property in the city, down at 44th and Balboa. Playland at the Beach was out there, which was like an amusement park. She went in the hospital and her parents went down, so I went straight home. I was tempted to stop at the bar and then I figured I better not. It was 8 o'clock. I got a call at midnight — cardiac arrest. I went back and they couldn't revive her.

Michelle Petersen: How far along was she?

Russ Kiernan: I'm not even sure. She was showing. She was probably, you know, five months, maybe six, four to six.

Michelle Petersen: Okay. Was it the pregnancy that caused the cardiac arrest?

Russ Kiernan: I don't know, I don't know. And that's when I started running. My brother Don was running. He'd run at the polo fields. I was very close to the polo fields and so I thought, "I'll go down and run." I couldn't run once around the polo field, which was about a mile, so I thought if I'm going to do this, I better practice a little more. And then I knew Marilyn from teaching and seeing her at different faculty connection parties, so we started dating. It was only like a year and a half later that I remarried, so the Carciones didn't like that, the mother, anyway. She has a brother, and I saw her brother one day. I was hitchhiking home after running the Dipsea, which I do all the time. I was waiting at the end of Panoramic Highway and Highway 1 — that's where I go up to hitchhike — and somebody said, "Hey, Russ!" I said, "Rich Carcione! Rich, how are you?" Somebody had said he had a place out there. I said, "Oh, where do you have a

place? Out on the patios?” The first streets that go to the beach houses are called patio, this patio and that patio, and then a gated community. Oh, it’s out in Seadrift. I knew others that had places out there and have been out there. One time Marilyn and I rented a place out there for a weekend and had an anniversary party. We’ve been married 46 years.

Michelle Petersen: 46 years! What year did you marry Marilyn?

Russ Kiernan: In ’67.

Michelle Petersen: You mentioned a daughter. Do you just have one daughter?

Russ Kiernan: We have our daughter, our natural daughter, and we have a son who is a foster son. Marilyn taught him in kindergarten in the Haight-Ashbury in the wild times. Haywood is black and was hell on wheels — drove her crazy. When we got married — we got married in ’67 and she was still teaching over there and I was at Francis Scott Key. Marilyn was living in Sausalito so I’d come over here and then we got married and moved over here. So we bought a house up behind Tam High and I paid \$7,000, I think.

Michelle Petersen: Is how much you paid for your first house in Mill Valley?

Russ Kiernan: Well, it was a down payment.

Michelle Petersen: Oh, okay.

Russ Kiernan: It was \$35,000. My mother said, “Are you crazy? \$35,000 for a house — that’s insane.” We still own it.

Russ Kiernan: Then Haywood ended up going to St. Vincent’s up in Marin. Kids live there who are wards of the state. They have five houses, 60 kids, 12 kids to a house, I think. So we’d go up and visit and we’d take him out and go for lunch or something. Then he got into foster care. So Haywood is our one and only foster child. He lives right over in Valley Circle. So we have two granddaughters, Haywood’s children. Ruby is in middle school and Emma is at Edna Maguire. Emma will be going to middle school and Ruby will be going to Tam. Our daughter lives in the city and she is not married. She works at Urban High School.

Michelle Petersen: What year was she born?

Russ Kiernan: She was born in 1970.

Michelle Petersen: What was her name?

Russ Kiernan: Kari is her name. She is 43.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember when she was born how it made you feel when you had your first baby?

Russ Kiernan: Oh yeah, she was born at Marin General and going up there, taking Marilyn up to the hospital and all that — but other than that, it's a fog.

Michelle Petersen: Yeah, there's so much excitement and energy. Do you have any favorite stories from your marriage to Marilyn — did you guys travel? You went to Ireland.

Russ Kiernan: Well, traveling the first time, yeah. Not having been to Europe and going off in this VW camper and camping the whole time pretty much until it got to be winter. Well, Marilyn can speak French fairly well and she had taught school for the Air Force in Germany so she had been there and been down to Greece, had been to a lot of places, so she was like the tour guide.

Michelle Petersen: And you had your daughter with you on that trip?

Russ Kiernan: She had her third birthday, and our 18-year-old niece Kathleen, who is one of the eight daughters of Marilyn's sister.

Michelle Petersen: A babysitter.

Russ Kiernan: Yes. She grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. One of the girls, Beth, lives in Sausalito, she is the only one not married. We were just back in Louisville for Marilyn's sister's 80th birthday; she looks like she is 60. Her husband is a bigger than life kind of guy, so we have a great time there. Been back for the Kentucky Derby and for different functions. His 80th birthday party — born and raised in Louisville, went to Notre Dame, class president of Notre Dame, goes to Notre Dame football games, all that.

Michelle Petersen: So you said you started running after your first wife passed away. You said you could barely run one lap.

Russ Kiernan: I could barely run and then Marilyn and I got married and we lived in the house.

Michelle Petersen: Do you know the address of the first house you bought?

Russ Kiernan: Yes, it's 9 Carolyn Lane, where Morning Sun goes around the hill. There's actually a path that goes up from the back of Tam High Theater that goes up to Morning Sun and then you go a little to the left and Carolyn Lane goes up. I run up it all the time, I am always going up there. I do the gardening all the time. I mean, I am not going to the house all the time; it's a little dead end street with only six or seven houses.

Michelle Petersen: How many bedrooms is it?

Russ Kiernan: Three bedrooms.

Michelle Petersen: Okay, \$35,000, not bad.

Russ Kiernan: They are small, it's a teardown now. But we've had the same tenants for a long time and they are a husband and wife and do computer stuff from the house. He actually grew up in San Francisco and didn't speak English when he went to school, he only spoke Italian.

Russ Kiernan: He grew up over by City College.

Michelle Petersen: How long did you live in this house?

Russ Kiernan: We moved here to 701 Miller in '80. I said we should buy one of these condos, have equity on the house. We bought it, it hadn't even closed escrow. It was Easter time and we had a brunch for the family, my brothers. My mother I think had died already. So were having this brunch and we went off to church because we thought we are going to have drinks and brunch and everything, and they aren't coming over until noon. I run early in the morning so we went to Mt. Carmel.

So coming back from church, we stopped for breakfast. [We] said "Oh, we should eat something, because we are going to have drinks and everything." Kari and Haywood were with us. We went to Kim's, which was where Joe's Taco Lounge is, and a bunch of runners were in there, had been up on the mountain running. So we were chatting with them and then we went out and were standing on the sidewalk outside and these fire engines are going by. "Oh, what a terrible day to have a fire," we said, you know, standing there talking.

So we all say goodbye and went up the hill and come up Gomez and up onto Morning Sun, going down the street when our neighbor, Mickey Walsh, stopped us. He was driving by with his wife, and they can see all the smoke up there. He says, "That looks like mom's house." [We] went up there and it was not. So he said, "Russ, are you okay?" He said, "I have some bad news." I thought Jesus, did his mother die? He said, "You had a fire at your house. It's a bad fire; the fire department is still there."

We get up there and there are all these hoses around. The oven had shorted out. We put a ham in the oven and it shorted out. It didn't burn to the ground. This condo [701 Miller] hadn't closed escrow and we were borrowing on the house. They never knew it. So we ended up moving in here when escrow closed, so we stayed here from Easter until Christmas and then we went back to the house.

Michelle Petersen: You were able to rebuild it?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, it took that long, but we made changes. So we went back up to the house. Then five nights later Marilyn said from our bedroom — we could look down here and she said, "There's a fire down the hill." I said "Oh no, don't tell me." But it wasn't here; it was on Morning Sun, right at the bottom of Carolyn Lane. The Kerler's house went to the ground. They got out and it was the mother and two daughters. The dad rebuilt, I guess. They were divorced but still friends. They ended up renting the condo

here because they needed a place to stay. So my friends — these are all from grammar school — said, “Oh yeah, you torched your own house to get a new kitchen, and then you torch your neighbor’s house to get tenants for your condo.”

Michelle Petersen: Convenient.

Russ Kiernan: So then we rented this out for quite a while and then Marilyn finally said, “Well, Kari [is] out of the house and Haywood [is] out and we’re living up at the house. Let’s move into the condo and rent out the house.”

Michelle Petersen: When you moved to Mill Valley, were you still working in the city as a teacher?

Russ Kiernan: Oh yeah, I worked all the time in the city.

Michelle Petersen: How did you commute to the city?

Russ Kiernan: I used to drive and then I started bicycling, so I bicycled before it was really popular. I was actually bicycle commuter of the year and that was the first year I won the Dipsea — now I have been second a lot. There weren’t that many doing it and the bike path had been built. I used to run along the bike path out there when the railroad tracks were there. Then I thought, “Well, I’ll ride the bike.” On the rainy days and when it was really cold, I’d drive in. Marilyn was teaching in the city when we were first married and I’d drive in and drop her off in the Haight Ashbury and then pick her up after school.

Michelle Petersen: I’m sorry, what year did you say you moved to Mill Valley?

Russ Kiernan: In ’67.

Michelle Petersen: ’67. What was Mill Valley like in the ’60s and ’70s?

Russ Kiernan: This was an empty lot right here. I had just started running really then.

Michelle Petersen: Okay, so where these condos are, it was just an empty lot.

Russ Kiernan: It was just kind of marsh. Tam High was just the old building.

Michelle Petersen: What was downtown like?

Russ Kiernan: Downtown wasn’t as moochie as it is now with all the restaurants. Lodge — was about the main place. Where Di Angelo’s is, it was a five and dime and from different pictures, you know, it wasn’t much. I forget if Jimmy Quinn’s was there — which is now part of the Mill Valley Market. Jimmy Quinn’s was a bar that was there. I think Jimmy Quinn’s may have still been there. Jimmy Quinn was a character.

Michelle Petersen: He was the bar owner?

Russ Kiernan: He was the bar owner, yeah. So there were some bars around there. The old Sweetwater.

Michelle Petersen: Did you go there? Did you used to go there to listen to music?

Russ Kiernan: Not that much. But I knew people who would be playing there sometimes. This is later on, it wasn't in the early days. Actually, I knew Tom Steer who owned the Sweetwater at one time, he and his wife — the old one that is not where it is now. There were more family friendly things in Mill Valley; it wasn't designer clothes and such.

Michelle Petersen: Did you guys go to restaurants? Did you like to go out and eat?

Russ Kiernan: Usually went out to Ginestra's¹² a lot.

Michelle Petersen: That was your favorite?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, that was where we'd go.

Michelle Petersen: Where did you like to run back then?

Russ Kiernan: Well, when I first started I used to drive down to the track at Tam High and then drive back up the hill. Then I thought, "This is silly, I should run down." I couldn't run back up Stadium which I run up all time now, so I [tried] to vary it and run up over where the condos are on Shelter Ridge — there was nothing up there. I found out — I was going to run the Bay to Breakers in the city and I thought for my training, I'd run down across the railroad tracks here and cross over. There was no bridge crossing over, I don't think. I remember running the hill behind the police station; I thought that was like the Hayes Street hill in the Bay to Breakers. I couldn't run up. I could run half way and then have to walk and run and walk and run. But I still force myself to run to the top. It used to be a lot easier.

Michelle Petersen: Was the Bay to Breakers, was that your first race?

Russ Kiernan: The first race I ever ran.

Michelle Petersen: What year did you do that, do you remember?

Russ Kiernan: It was in the, well, yeah, I guess it was probably more in the '60s, late '60s. [Break in original recording.]

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, in probably '67 in May. I remember I had people over for a party in the apartment on Balboa Street. That was in '67 that I ran the Bay to Breakers. I ran up

¹² La Ginestra Restaurant

Market Street and up Turk Street through the Tenderloin where all the homeless are and then up Golden Gate where the projects were and then over Divisadero to the Pan Handle. Now it is a little different, they still go on Divisadero a little bit. I forget how long — it took a long time — and finished the run at the beach. I don't know if my brother was running it then too — he was probably running it. We were getting a ride to the start from people who would drive down — the fire department always had a bunch. They would be parking cars out at the beach. The Beach Chalet was out there; the restaurant, it is on the beach, and there was a hall upstairs that people could rent. But there was also downstairs. There was a bar, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I remember going in there, underage, and buying beer at twenty cents for a tap beer.

Michelle Petersen: Wow, not bad.

Russ Kiernan: That's five bucks now. But I ran it most years after that for a while.

Michelle Petersen: How was the first one? Was it hard, was it easy, did you have to stop and walk?

Russ Kiernan: There wasn't a huge crowd. No, I had to walk. I don't know what my time was. Later on, I improved time, and then it just got to be too crazy.

Russ Kiernan: I wanted a front number, like an invitational number. I get this number in the mail, 42,000 or something. It was like, "What is this?" So I phone them up. I said, "I asked for a front number." They said, "What's your name? — Okay, Russ Kiernan. — Oh, no, you should have number 67," or something. Sure enough — they couldn't have done it that fast, but, like, the next day, I had it. It was in the mail and they couldn't have mailed it. The 49ers were out there and they had all these people that were in costumes and all that. So it was crazy if you were back behind; when you start off, there are probably 2 or 3,000 ahead of you in those later years. That first year we started at Market and just ran up Market, when it was about 300 people.

Michelle Petersen: Was it just runners?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, just runners. And I remember a friend, who is still a friend — I don't see him that often because he lives in Sutter Creek — Giles Turner. We grew up, all went to grammar school and everything together and college together at the same time. He ran it one year. We said, "Oh, you are so weird, Giles. You are so weird, running cross country for SI." He ran the Bay to Breakers when — I think there were 28 people running it, or maybe 100 — I forget — in '53, maybe, or '54, Then it got to be just so crazy after. But I ran it for quite a few years, several when we were living here in Mill Valley. I ran with Susan Trot, the author, Claudia Shenenfeld, Anne Neeley, and Barbara Magid. The redheads. They also ran the Dipsea, and were all good runners. They were sort of the older runners in those days, 40s and into the 50s ages. I probably ran the Bay to Breakers ten times or more.

Michelle Petersen: Were there any running clubs when you first started running?

Russ Kiernan: My brother was in DSE, Dolphin South End Runners, and South End Running Club is in the aquatic park, and the Dolphin Club is in there. My brother belonged to the Dolphin Club. These were not both clubs merging but runners from both clubs who said, “Oh, we should start a club.” I actually ended up belonging to the South End Runners. This was after DSE had been started. Walt Stack was one of the founders. Walt was a legend; he used to run across the bridge every day, bare-chested, big barrel-chested. He was a hod carrier, like cement that you put on the outside of buildings. They don’t do it that way anymore. Someone would have to carry it up with this big v-shaped carrier, so it’s hard manual work. He lived over in the Potrero, so he would ride his bike to the Dolphin Club, run to Sausalito to his office, which was a bathroom in later years, and then run back and go to work as a hod carrier. He was on Johnny Carson’s — they had to bleep everything he said — had a foul mouth.

Michelle Petersen: And he started that club you were a member of.

Russ Kiernan: He started it along with probably the Canons — Todd Canon [who] I saw the other day. My brother Don was a member in the beginning of it. Then there was another club that they started — they weren’t fielding teams and they really still don’t, but they have a race every Sunday in San Francisco and they get 2 or 300, 400, maybe. Then you just show up race day and fill out a paper and go.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember what year you joined that club?

Russ Kiernan: I was trying to remember that, because I’m probably one of the members being the longest in the club except for a few people. My brother was in and then I joined it. The first race I ran was from the Marina Green. There used to be a gate at the Presidio because the army was still there, but you could go through on foot and it was a Presidio gate right by the Palace of Fine Arts across there. I went from there down to Fort Point, touched the fort, and came back. There were maybe 50 people including my brother. I didn’t have running shoes — I had tennis shoes or something.

Michelle Petersen: What did you wear, just regular tennis shoes?

Russ Kiernan: Tennis shoes. And then I continued. I probably ran a few other races and then my brother said, “Well you ought to join, it’s cheap to join.” It’s \$25 a year now — it probably wasn’t then. But I’ve been a member ever since and I hardly ever run a race. Once in a while, I run a DSE run. And then the Pomma Kids started. I never did run with them. They actually are a club and they are getting pretty good now. They are getting a lot of women and men too. They have a couple of 70-year-olds. We all know one another, because they run so many races, and they allow all the people to run the Dispea, of course.

Michelle Petersen: So when did you hear about the Dipsea?

Russ Kiernan: I heard about it because my brother Don was running it. This was, I guess, before Marilyn and I were married and he was running for the Olympic Club in San Francisco. He actually was a member of the Olympic Club at one time, as a student — it was very cheap, and then he just stayed a student. He was into his 20s and maybe even 30s and finally they cracked down on him and it was too expensive to join. I know my cousin Tim belongs. But they always field the teams, so Don was running. I guess — oh, it was 1966 when my brother Jack and I came over. It was after Anita died, I think the 8th of August in '66, I'm not positive, and I think we were married in August, maybe the 10th of August, so it was right around an anniversary date. But we came over to watch my brother Don run the Dipsea. Pax Beale was one of the runners I remember — a bigger than life kind of character, kind of crazy — swam Alcatraz on his 50th birthday. Elaine Peterson was one of the first women to run the Dipsea. He was dating her and living with her or whatever. He even hired a helicopter one year and they filmed the Dipsea from the helicopter. He was running it but they paid someone to film it. We went over, and Pax always had a big party in the cottages that are down there up from the Parkside Café. And they had watermelon and beer and all this stuff.

Michelle Petersen: This is on the Stinson Beach side?

Russ Kiernan: On the beach side as you go down to the Parkside Cafe, up on that street. He'd rent some places in there and have this party, Pax Beale and his crowd.

Michelle Petersen: For the runners and their friends.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, my brother Jack and I went down there. Oh yeah, Don's brother — they knew everybody and we met them. I know them all now. And then Jack and I came back. Eileen, his wife — who has since passed away — wasn't with us so we went into Zach's. I don't know if you know, Zack's was in downtown Sausalito. It's Salitos now. It is a bocce ball place with bocce in the back, that big coffee shop and the restaurant that is there. It was a popular, popular place for the young crowd. So we went in there to get a drink or eat something. The place was mobbed on Sunday afternoons, just jammed.

Russ Kiernan: There's a little ramp that goes down for people to put their boats in there. I remember my brother Jack saying he went to the bathroom and he said, "I think I just danced with three women going across the dance floor to get to the bathroom. Don't tell Eileen." That was '66, because it was probably like three or four weeks after Anita died. Jack ran the race too, after I started. I thought my first one was '68, but I think they have it down in the book as '69 — I'm not sure if I ran it first in '68 or '69. And the rest is history. My brother Don would say "I've created a monster with this." Jack's wife said, "You shouldn't be doing this. You are too old, you have five kids."

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember the first time you ran it? Do you remember how your felt — what was that experience like?

Russ Kiernan: Oh, it was a struggle. I remember struggling over — oh, my god, I saw it was like 79 minutes. I'm getting up to that again, almost. It's a little longer now too. In those days you could take shortcuts. There were stiles on the course. There were cattle still out there, so you had to go over these stiles or get through them. There were shortcuts and those are all sort of nonexistent now.

Michelle Petersen: Had you been on the trail before? Had you hiked it or walked it or even run it?

Russ Kiernan: My brother Jack and I were going to go over it and we went over one night and we were getting lost and everything and I think Marilyn came over and picked us up. He had never been over the course. We ran it.

Michelle Petersen: Did Jack run it with you that first year as well?

Russ Kiernan: I don't think he did that first year. Well, maybe he did — I don't think so. But Don had been running it and he ran it for quite a few more years.

Michelle Petersen: Did you run it again the next year?

Russ Kiernan: Oh yeah.

Russ Kiernan: It used to be in the end of August and then school was about to start. We started school right after Labor Day and it was the last Sunday in August, I think. So that's how it was.

Michelle Petersen: Did you run it every year?

Russ Kiernan: Pretty much.

Michelle Petersen: Wow. Have there been years you have taken off?

Russ Kiernan: When we went on sabbatical that time for a year I missed, and I was injured or I had something. I have it written down why I didn't run some years.

Michelle Petersen: Do you remember when you got your first black t-shirt? And actually, why don't you describe — what is the black t-shirt?

Russ Kiernan: The first 35 runners to cross the finish line get a black Dipsea shirt with [their] finish number on the back. They are very coveted. No one wants to be 36th in the race. I put one on for you.

Michelle Petersen: Yeah, you are wearing one now.

Russ Kiernan: This was from the first win — this shirt was from 1998 when I first won.

Michelle Petersen: So you are wearing the 88th Annual Dipsea black t-shirt.

Russ Kiernan: Exactly.

Russ Kiernan: I'm not sure when they started giving shirts. I did get a blue shirt one time. They had yellow shirts I never got; that was for the first ten. I got a blue shirt that said "Dipsea" or something on it and I think I was seventh or eighth. I forget what year they started giving the black shirts. I was getting them pretty much every year.

Michelle Petersen: I bet you have a lot of black t-shirts. Do you know how many you have?

Russ Kiernan: I have 29.

Michelle Petersen: 29 black t-shirts.

Russ Kiernan: Well, I ran it in '69 for the first time. I was 537th. I didn't run it in '73 because we went to Europe, and then I came back and ran it in '74 and '75. I didn't run it in '76 because I had a ruptured appendix and it was right before the race. That's a crazy story. We went up to Tahoe to run a relay race around the lake; there were seven people on a team. We went up and our daughter Kari was about five then, and we had a condo over by Northstar. I was complaining that my stomach sort of bothered me, but we went anyway. Marilyn said "Go to the doctor," and I said, "Oh, I don't need to go to the doctor," so we went up. So it was still bothering me and I thought, "I'll go out and run one day." Maybe the day before I went out and ran out in the woods like five miles. Oh — I had gone to the doctor. Marilyn said, "You've got to go to the doctor." "I don't want to go." "Go to the doctor." "No, no." "Go over to Reno." So I found a doctor and told him what was wrong and he said, "Well, you're probably okay." So then maybe the next day or that night I went out and ran five miles or maybe ten out into the woods, nobody out there.

I came back and Marilyn didn't feel well the next day. We were down to the beach — they had this special area down at the beach from the condos we were staying in. So she didn't go down and Kari and I went down. And she found a friend and she was playing there in the water and I just wasn't feeling up to it — I didn't go in the water. The day before, though, I went in the lake and that felt good. I got in the hot tub and that didn't feel so good — before going over to Reno to the hospital and all that. So then that day, I thought, "Well I'll go get something to drink." I had a lemonade and got about half way through and then, *oh god*, it was just indescribable pain. So I got Kari and said, "We have to go." I should have asked somebody for help. Got our stuff, it was like a mile to go up to the condo where we were staying. I got up there moaning and groaning, which I never do. Marilyn still talks about that because I came in and she called the office — "Is there a doctor around by the office?" Somebody said, "I'm a doctor." She said, "My husband is having some sort of attack" — so he came over.

She said I sat up and said, "Doctor, I hate to bother you, but — " and he said, "I think you better go back, go to the hospital." I started to feel a little better, maybe

Marilyn had some drugs of some sort, so we packed up to go and I said, “I don’t want to go to Truckee. We can go to Auburn, or we’ll see how it is.” We ended up driving all the way back down to San Rafael and it was midnight or so when we got in there. They said, “You are pretty sick. Your appendix is ruptured and we have to get a surgery crew in.” It was like 3 in the morning. They did the surgery, so I was in the hospital for three days or so.

Michelle Petersen: You were lucky.

Russ Kiernan: So of course I didn’t run the Dipsea. But we went out to the Dipsea .

Michelle Petersen: You were able to cheer everyone on.

Russ Kiernan: Then it was a long streak of not missing any. The next one I missed after ’76 was in ’89, and that was again another crazy thing. I had adhesions, which is growth of scar tissue, and my intestines had gotten caught in this. They had been bothering me, so I was in the hospital for a couple weeks and had to have surgery. Maybe that is the time I went out when it was so cold. Marilyn didn’t want me to go, so we didn’t stay long. In fact, the Dipsea committee sent me a sympathy card in the hospital. They came and visited.

Michelle Petersen: What year was that?

Russ Kiernan: That was in ’89. So then I guess I’ve run almost every one of them. I didn’t have a good race in ’94. I crashed my bike on the end of Morning Sun. I hit a car. The driver was coming around to pick up a friend of hers, who was also a friend of ours, to go to work for Macy’s in the city and I was cutting the corner and she was coming a little wide and it was head on. So I ended up carrying the bike home and I was all banged up. But I ran the race. So yeah, I’ve run I guess pretty much all — I don’t know which ones I’ve missed. But I’ve completed 42 of them.

Michelle Petersen: 42 races?

Russ Kiernan: Yes.

Michelle Petersen: Completed. Your first win was in ’98. What did that feel like? Do you remember?

Russ Kiernan: It was like a monkey off my back because I had been second so many times.

Michelle Petersen: When did you know you were going to win it — at what point in the race did you know that you were going to take first?

Russ Kiernan: I’m not sure when. I don’t think I knew it until I crossed the finish line. I had missed winning it in — oh god, what year — with Don Chafe, a friend — we were

back and forth the whole time. He could go up better than I could, and I could go down better than he could. We'd pass each other. There's one place — they call it Kiernan's Crossing, Barry Spitz named it — and he went one way, or I went one way and I was ahead of him because I thought this was the way. The old trail used to go down there and somebody cut this out and it would be a little short, and Chafe thought, "What does Kiernan know?" And he went the other way. I had to go down through some brush and there was a fence — as Barry said in part of his book — and I had to leap across the creek to get on the other side. Chafe was coming down the other side and he was ahead of me and he was faster on the track and I just couldn't catch him, so he beat me by three seconds.

Michelle Petersen: Oh no! Is that one of your most memorable races?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, that might have been in '79. I ran 51:43. Then I was second maybe the next year. I was second a lot. Donna Andrews lived in Mill Valley — she is a realtor — and I was second to Donna one time. And I thought I had won, but she started quite a bit ahead of me and she was a good runner. I have five seconds, seven thirds, three fourths, two fifths, no sixths, two sevenths, two eighths, one ninth, one tenth, and above ten, I have three. I don't think I'll get anymore.

Michelle Petersen: Is there a part of the race that is your favorite part of the race?

Russ Kiernan: Any of the down hills. I am a little more tentative now, not as fast going down and even last year's race, I took a good fall in Steep Ravine and banged up my ribs.

Michelle Petersen: Uh oh. What do you do at that point — do you just get up and keep going?

Russ Kiernan: I jumped up, somebody said, "Russ, how are you?" "I'm okay!" I could feel it. But I didn't hit my head — I got my side. Later — I don't know if I said anything to Marilyn — it wasn't obvious. Later in the day, I finally said, "Okay, I banged up my ribs." We went to a party. Roger always has a party. I went to a graduation party for my cousin's grandkids who is on my father's side, the only cousin who lives in San Anselmo. Their party was going to be in this huge house. Their daughter married this guy Thompson who redid Tam High — his family was in painting — but I guess they did really well, because they are selling this house for seven million dollars. It is a big house on Laurel right across from Dominican.

Russ Kiernan: And then the following Sunday I ran a race in the Oakland Hills like the Dipsea race, and that was a big mistake because after that I ended up with a urinary infection. I don't know if that had to do with the fall — they said no — and I could barely get out of bed. So I finally went to the doctor. He said, "I don't think your ribs are broken, because I am pushing on them and you wouldn't be able to stand it." So it was like six weeks. And the infection lasted like a month.

Michelle Petersen: So I notice that you have won the Single Dipsea and the Double Dipsea. Almost every time you have won the single, you have won the double as well.

Russ Kiernan: Right. I've won that 12 times or something, I think.

Michelle Petersen: 12 times!

Russ Kiernan: The first time I ran it, it started at the clock in Mill Valley. Ran up and went all the way to the Parkside and turned around and came back. After that, the race started at the beach and finished there. The first time I won it, Marilyn and our daughter, Kari, quickly set up a couple of cones for a finish line just before I came in.

Russ Kiernan: The other thing I do is the Ride and Tie. It's two people and one horse. You keep switching riding and running.

Michelle Petersen: Where do they do that?

Russ Kiernan: Well, it's been all over.

Michelle Petersen: Do you run the Double Dipsea every year as well?

Russ Kiernan: There are a lot of years I've skipped. Last year I was banged up from Dipsea so then I didn't run it. But I planned to. I don't pay to run it. The guy says, "You are a comped runner — you are free forever and ever." But he is not going to be the race director next year. That is put on by the Dolphin South End Runners at DSE.

Michelle Petersen: So the Double Dipsea is just a week or so after the Single Dipsea, right?

Russ Kiernan: It is.

Michelle Petersen: Do you find that difficult to run two big races back to back like that?

Russ Kiernan: No, it hasn't been. The double is much more low-key, but there is a lot more running in it. I guess I won it eleven times. Most times I've run it, I've won it.

Michelle Petersen: Well, you have mentioned missing the Dipsea for injuries. Do you ever get any running injuries?

Russ Kiernan: I really have not had a lot of running injuries, almost none. I have been very lucky. I run in beat-up old shoes. People laugh at the shoes I wear for the Dipsea. They are old Nike elites and they are hand me downs from other people that gave me them, and they were worn out when people gave them to me. I still use them in the Dipsea. People go, "Oh those shoes, are you crazy." I don't think there are any pictures.

They are just very light and I am still able to wear them. That is Jack Kirk [points to a photograph]. He died at 100. He last ran when he was 96 years old. He was an all-time character. He wrote me all these letters — beautiful handwriting — on how to win the Dipsea. I have saved them all.

Michelle Petersen: Would you say he was your mentor, him and your brother?

Russ Kiernan: Yeah. That's right. Don and Jack Kirk, yeah. I mean, it was amazing.

Michelle Petersen: Who else would you run with a lot?

Russ Kiernan: A lot of them are all still running. Saturday morning, there was a run up on the mountain that started at Mountain Home Inn at 9 o'clock. There was Hans Roenau, who died not too long ago. They are all older than me. Don Picket is a past Dipsea winner. Joe Ryan is an attorney over in Berkley. He is probably my age or older now. He was a great runner. He was a cycle cross guy. It was before mountain bikes — they would cycle and they had trails they would run and carry their bikes. He was great at that. He was down to win the Dipsea one year. He collapsed at the finish and they had to take him to Marin General by helicopter. There were a lot of doctors who ran. Bill Dickerson was up there every Saturday — a psychiatrist. He died in the tsunami in Thailand years ago, he and his wife. His kids are still around. Paul Hoey is still around — he was an ob/gyn. He lives down in Cambria. Somebody said, "Oh yeah, Paul was asking — ." He is my age or might be a few older. I'll be 76 in three weeks. But then there are still the younger ones. Roy Rivers now and Jamie Burns, they are married. Roy has won the Dipsea; Jamie has won the Dipsea. And the Tamalpa Runners. We in fact had a race yesterday, a relay race around Lake Merced in the city, four people in a team. Hans Schmid is the one who won the Dipsea a few years ago. He is new — well, he is maybe ten years on the scene or so.

Michelle Petersen: New to you.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah. We are friends. We've been to a lot of races together now for the team. We won the 70s team. There is a series of ten races; yesterday was the last one. Then there are cross country races that are not as difficult as the Dipsea trail, or not as far.

Michelle Petersen: Do you run every day?

Russ Kiernan: Pretty much. I ran thirteen and a half miles this morning.

Russ Kiernan: I ran from here over to Muir Woods, so almost to Mountain Home and then down to Muir Woods. So that was long. It's usually more like six to nine miles.

Michelle Petersen: A day.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah. Not every day. And I don't have any set program. If I feel like it, I run. Tomorrow, I won't run, we are going over to the De Young Museum for the

Hockney exhibit, we have tickets. That's almost my neighborhood growing up. We would go up to Golden Gate Park sometimes and raise hell up there.

Michelle Petersen: How often do you run with the Tamalpa Runners?

Russ Kiernan: Pardon me?

Michelle Petersen: How often do you run with your club, the Tamalpa Runners?

Russ Kiernan: Just the races. We have monthly races, just club friends, they are very low-key. You show up on race day. They are in different places. I was in charge of them for years and years. I had the craziest courses — never asked for permission from anybody. Marilyn would do all the work; she'd be there and have to take the flack when the rangers came and all that. So I did that for years and I put on the Couples Relay race that is coming up. That was at Larkspur Landing and now we do it up at Vintage Oaks. But I do run — the TCRS we call it now, Tamalpa Club Run Series. Kees Tuinzing, who started Tamalpa, used to have a timing system. It was a total race systems timing system, TRS. It could have been "Tamalpa Race Services." But we put the R in, "Tamalpa Club Run Series." So people run those, but it's a very low-key thing. So people know me from putting those on all the time.

Michelle Petersen: Yeah. How long have you been running with them?

Russ Kiernan: Since they started Tamalpa which was — I'm not sure when we first started. Tamalpa is usually the winning team — that's the other thing I have downstairs, I can show you — they are mint julep cups, down in the living room.

Michelle Petersen: They are the winning team for the Dipsea race?

Russ Kiernan: Yes. The winning team — the top five — each one gets a cup. They have had some different ones. Then they started giving the same kind, which was great, because they are just like a julep cup, exactly the same. We have a niece who lives in Sausalito. She had a Kentucky Derby party once. She used the team trophy cups. I have fifteen or twenty, I've been on the winning team so many times.

Michelle Petersen: Oh wow. I noticed you've also run the — called the Quad Dipsea.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah, I've run the Quad I think twice.

Michelle Petersen: Was that difficult?

Russ Kiernan: It was, yeah. Three of them were not too bad. The fourth was difficult. They just had that Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Michelle Petersen: When was the last time you ran that?

Russ Kiernan: Oh, I only did it twice, I forget. It was quite a while ago.

Michelle Petersen: Do you run marathons — do you enjoy running marathons?

Russ Kiernan: I haven't run one in a while. They had one just two weeks ago up in Sacramento, but I didn't run it. It was I think 24 degrees when they started. It starts in Folsom and ends up in the capitol. I have run that six or seven times. I have run New York. I've never run Boston. I guess there used to be the Paul Mason which was a winery down San Jose way, down the Peninsula, and I ran that one.

The first one I ran was one that started here at Paradise Park and it went into Tiburon, back all the way down Blithedale into downtown Mill Valley, came out Miller, and as I got to Tam High, that was like halfway or so. When I got to the Dipsea Café, the Boitanos came by. Mary Etta Boitano was about five years old and she was running with her mother and Mike Boitano, who had already come by. I knew them from the DSE, Dolphin South End run, and Mike and Mary Etta both ended up winning their age groups. They are Dipsea winners also. But they went by me — the Two Turtles bar was in downtown Sausalito. I went in there and I had water — I don't think I had a beer or anything. It was Memorial Day weekend and I told Marilyn I was going to run a marathon, [and to] meet me at the Marina Greens. So she thought, "I'd better drive through Sausalito rather than going over Waldo."¹³ Going out of Sausalito up the hill, I had to run one, walk one, and then I got on the bridge and the same thing, and then ran around [the] Presidio. But it was four hours and five minutes or something. Which I thought was terrible. I don't have to do that again. Marilyn reminds me I said that.

The next one I ran was probably five or six years later when I had really been running. I went to the Avenue of the Giants up in the redwoods. I ran, you know, 2:39 or something like that. No, it was like 2:50. I sort of lost it at the end of that. But I have run the Avenue of the Giants a couple times after that and now I run a half marathon up there in October. I have run it the last five or six years. Marilyn keeps saying, "Why are you running this?" Well, the race is on the circuit and we need to have a team.

So I had a good run up there and then two weeks later, it was in Clarksburg, which is down the river from Sacramento and they have now a half marathon that is part of the series. So I ran that two weeks after the one in Humboldt. I ran a little faster, I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to be able to break three hours," but I ran 2:49 at Clarkburg and 2:51 at Avenue of the Giants, so pretty close.

Michelle Petersen: Do you have a favorite race?

Russ Kiernan: The Dipsea.

Michelle Petersen: The Dipsea is your favorite.

Russ Kiernan: The only one I really used to get sort of a little nervous about. The others you just go out and do them. Sometimes you get to the start line and you get a little antsy, but the Dipsea is certainly the favorite race.

¹³ The Waldo Grade, part of U.S. Route 101 between Marin City and the Golden Gate Bridge

Michelle Petersen: Do you have any advice for runners that are starting to run the Dipsea?

Russ Kiernan: I think you have to run on it. You have to run ups and downs, running hills — you have to do that, but you don't have to do it on the Dipsea, you know, you can do it anywhere. On the mountain there or even up the railway.

Michelle Petersen: That's your advice, to practice doing stairs and hills.

Russ Kiernan: Yeah. I don't go up the stairs very often. I avoided the stairs today. I went up the third flight of stairs but I ran through some back roads. I know all the streets.

Michelle Petersen: So the uphill is still your least favorite part.

Russ Kiernan: Yes. The downhill is still the best, but even today I was a little cautious going down.

Michelle Petersen: Do you run the Dipsea when it is not the annual race?

Russ Kiernan: Oh yeah.

Michelle Petersen: How often do you do that?

Russ Kiernan: I run the whole course about three or four times a year, but I run parts of it many times. In the spring, I'll do a practice run and then hitchhike back.

Michelle Petersen: You wait until spring to practice there? And you still hitchhike to this day, huh.

Russ Kiernan: I have all kinds of stories about hitchhiking, getting rides with people.

Michelle Petersen: Have you had any bad stories?

Russ Kiernan: No bad stories.

Michelle Petersen: Good.

Russ Kiernan: I ran with some guy from Boulder, Colorado — a big malpractice attorney. I didn't know him — somebody gave him my name. He was going to be running a race down by San Diego on the road. And he wanted to run the Dipsea and he wanted to come up and practice it, so he was going to fly up and meet me. He was staying at the Aqua Hotel. So he and his daughter and I ran it. His daughter is an adult — she lives in Washington or Georgetown or somewhere. She was a good runner. We were sort of not pushing it, we were showing him places and he wanted to know this and that. So we got to the finish. We went to the Parkside Cafe for breakfast. There is a bus that goes now — this wasn't that long ago — but I said, "Well, why don't we just hitchhike?"

And we'll go up by the bus stop here and hitchhike." I usually go up to where Panoramic meets, but we were right where the bus would stop, not where they meet. Not many cars are going by and finally this big town car stops. It was a man with his grandson. They are from Atlanta and this is a rental car. He wanted to go to Yosemite but he didn't want to go back across the Golden Gate Bridge and through the city. And so he asked if we knew how to go and he said, "I'll give you a ride." I said sure, "We can tell you how to get there." He said he knew when he got to Highway 140 or whatever — he had maps. But he drove us. So I was in the back with this guy's daughter and I said, "I guess you haven't hitchhiked in a long time." She said, "I've never hitchhiked in my life." They grew up in Houston — this guy is living in Houston now. He ran the Dipsea this year. He said he is doing a big huge malpractice thing for the state of Texas on some dental procedures or something.

Russ Kiernan: I've taken him over a couple of times and we go to breakfast and he picks up the tab — I don't think he is hurting.

Russ Kiernan: So yeah, I've taken others over. I ran with this kid [points to a photograph] and he ran the Dipsea.

Michelle Petersen: Who is this?

Russ Kiernan: It's Al Bartel.

Michelle Petersen: How old was he when he ran the Dipsea?

Russ Kiernan: Well —

Michelle Petersen: He looks young. 8-ish?

Russ Kiernan: He was in fifth grade. No, he was probably 10 or 11. He was a tough little kid — could drive me crazy. He lived not too far from school, 42nd, or 41st Avenue — my brother is on 40th, so just around the corner from my brother. But a year or so ago, he got married — I think he has a child, I read about this. On Geary Street, right where we hung out all the time, there is a Jack in the Box, which was a gas station when we were kids. He was in there and it sounded like it was in the morning or so and there were some guys — I don't know if they said stuff to them or there were words back and forth. Well he ended up getting in a fight with them and then I guess he left and he went down to 9th — a gas station maybe — and they followed him down there and they beat him unconscious. He ended up in the hospital. I went by the house one time and nobody answered and I don't think his parents live there now. I heard the mother lives on 7th Avenue. But they lived at that house and that's where he grew up. Well, I don't know what the status is, but it was like the guy that got beaten down at Dodger's Stadium — I think he sort of lost it mentally, too. But I liked Al — he was a pain in the ass in class, but he was a good kid.

Back then I told his parents, "He can just spend the night and run the Dipsea." They used to practice Dipseas on a Thursday night and the first time he did it, they came

over and went over to the beach, and then he did it again. I said, “I can just take him home from school and he can sleep at our place.” I brought him down here — we have a hot tub, so we ran the Dipsea and then came down and used the hot tub and went up to the house. And [I] got him up in the morning and back to school — maybe I dropped him at his house before.

Michelle Petersen: What year did you retire from teaching?

Russ Kiernan: The same year as I first won the Dipsea, 1998.

Michelle Petersen: Oh, interesting, okay.

Russ Kiernan: There was an incentive program to retirees. Marilyn was still teaching at Maguire. She had quit the city when our daughter was young. Kari was probably six or seven —

Michelle Petersen: Marilyn taught at Edna Maguire?

Russ Kiernan: She substituted at a lot of schools in Mill Valley. Then she was hired to teach a new Phase I kindergarten for the district. When that program ended, she taught kindergarten at Edna Maguire until she retired.

Michelle Petersen: Do you find yourself running with the same people every year, the Dipsea race? I notice that there is a woman that has taken your title every year, the following year — I can’t remember her name.

Russ Kiernan: Melody.

Michelle Petersen: Possibly.

Russ Kiernan: Melody Schultz. I am good friends with her.

Michelle Petersen: No hard feelings then that she stole your title.

Russ Kiernan: No, no, no. All the winners, we all know one another. And Shirley Matson won it five times. Incredible time, but she kept getting injuries. She was a world class runner and set many records. She is 75 or 76 now — we are all the same age. Melody is 73. Melody ran yesterday — she ran a good marathon. I think she ran the marathon up in Sacramento too and she ran the half marathon. She’s from South Africa and travels quite a bit. She has a home in Larkspur where she spends time with her grandchildren. We are all friends. Shirley got into dancing with the same energy she put into her running. She put a dance floor in her garage.

Michelle Petersen: Do any of your kids run?

Russ Kiernan: No. One of Marilyn's nieces came out from Denver to run once. A couple of my nephews did run the Dipsea — my brother Don's kids — Christopher, who died suddenly a couple of years ago, probably at 43 or so. He was married and had kids, but he ran as a little kid and was really tough. And I think Jeff, Don's oldest one, ran it. They have three boys and an adopted Korean daughter, Sue. We were at her wedding in Vegas years ago. Kathleen, Don's wife, tells the photographer, "I want a picture with the family." The groom is black, the bride is Korean, and everybody else is white. Who is the family? I think Marilyn finally told Kathleen, we have to tell him who the family is.

Michelle Petersen: Looking around, couldn't figure it out.

Russ Kiernan: That's right.

Michelle Petersen: Alright. Well you said with the race, your advice with running the Dipsea is to practice hills.

Russ Kiernan: Practice, yes. You don't have to run the Dipsea all the time —

Michelle Petersen: You said you like the downhill. What's your trick to going downhill really fast without crashing?

Russ Kiernan: Um, just go balls out.

Michelle Petersen: Okay, balls out, sounds like a good trip.

Russ Kiernan: Especially Steep Ravine and some of those places. I did go down — there is a shortcut you are still able to take — it was very narrow.

Russ Kiernan: And the fast runners are coming by. I remember passing people there that were ahead of me. Usually I know them all, we all know everybody, but now I am far enough back that some don't know me. You have to be able to run downhill if you want to do well. You can grind out the ups — you have to be able to run the whole course, pretty much. I have to walk now, some, but it's still fun. Diana Fitzpatrick won this year — that was great. I run with Diana and her husband.

Russ Kiernan: Next on the calendar is a trip to Puerto Vallarta.

Michelle Petersen: That'll be fun.

Russ Kiernan: Then we are going to France in May, and will be home in time for the Dipsea.

Michelle Petersen: Coming back to run the Dipsea again. Twenty more years of running the Dipsea, right?

Russ Kiernan: That's right.

Michelle Petersen: Balls out, why not.

Russ Kiernan: Run like hell from start to finish.