

Mill Valley Oral History Program
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley
Historical Society and the Mill Valley
Public Library*

TOM KILLION

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

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In this oral history, renowned artist, writer and historian Tom Killion recounts his upbringing in Mill Valley and how it shaped his artistic development. Born in 1953, Tom recalls having had an early talent for drawing that was inspired by Mount Tam, encouraged by his parents and nurtured by the local artistic and cultural community. Tom recalls attending Tamalpais High School in the 1960s, which “felt like the center of the universe” on account of the vibrant music scene that had migrated over from San Francisco. Tom describes his long-time relationship with Mill Valley’s Fall Arts Festival, a relationship that began when he first sold some of his art there as a high school student. After graduating from Tam High, Tom attended college at U.C. Santa Cruz where he learned, among other things, print- and bookmaking, which culminated in his first handmade book, *28 Views of Mount Tamalpais*, inspired by the Japanese artist Hokusai. With money from the sales of that book Tom traveled for 15 months across Europe and Africa, which later led him to pursue graduate study in African history at Stanford. Throughout this oral history, Tom emphasizes the natural beauty of Mill Valley, Marin County and the greater region that has continued to provide him with inspiration over his long career as an artist.

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Oral History of Tom Killion
July 19th, 2016

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

0:00:02 Debra Schwartz: Today is July 19th, 2016. My name is Debra Schwartz and I'm interviewing Tom Killion today on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library. Tom, you are a historian, a writer, a printer, and a crafts person. So you've got a story — been born and raised here —

0:00:27 Tom Killion: And an artist.

0:00:27 Debra Schwartz: And an artist, oh yes.

0:00:29 Tom Killion: [laughs] Probably first. That's what most people think of me as.

0:00:33 Debra Schwartz: Well, you're many things. So, born and raised here in Mill Valley. Thank you very much for taking the time to participate with the oral interview program that we have here. Thank you so much.

0:00:46 Tom Killion: Thank you, Debra. And I've got to say that my mother was involved in the Historical Society from its early days in the 1960s, I think. I'm sure it was going before that, but it really got going then and she did some oral histories, interviews, many years ago. So, I was born in Mount Zion Hospital in San Francisco on November 28th, 1953, but the place my parents took me home to was Throckmorton Avenue, down near the corner of Eugene.

0:01:32 Debra Schwartz: Which side was it on?

0:01:33 Tom Killion: It was 500 Throckmorton, that's where they lived, up a driveway in some little houses that had been built after the war, I think, specifically to rent out to people. And then when I was 1, we moved to 81 Cornelia Avenue, between Lovell and Summit, a very nice house that I lived in 'til I was 17, and moved away to go to college. So those are the years I lived in Mill Valley, from 1953 until 1971, when I went off to college in Santa Cruz, and I never really lived in Mill Valley again. I think I stayed for a month or two at my parents' house the first summer after college, but that was about it.

0:02:28 Debra Schwartz: May I ask, what brought your parents to Mill Valley?

0:02:30 Tom Killion: My parents were long-time Californians. My mother came from an old California family from up around Eureka. Her ancestors had come to California from the Old World. They were mostly Scotch-Irish and they came from Nova Scotia, and directly from Northern Ireland and Scotland to Eureka during the gold rush period in the late 1850s, early 1860s, and got involved in logging. And her father was named

Bryans. Her mother's father was named Bryans, and her mother whose name was Pearl, Pearl Bryans, and then her married name was Jenkins. She was born in Eureka in 1869 and grew up in a very poor logging family, her big family, many kids. I don't have all the bio in front of me but I get interested in that part of the family history. My father knew everything about his family, which came from the Midwest, and my mother knew everything about her father's family, the Jenkins part who were Welsh immigrants to the mining district to Colorado, and they basically had lived in Denver before father came out here.

0:04:07: But they didn't know anything about my mother's mother's family, which was the only family I was interested in because they were Californians. They came really early to California and they were — the men were loggers and a lot of the older brothers and sisters, some of them were 25 years older than my grandmother. She was the youngest. They settled all over Northern California and strangely enough, they had no children that survived. I had no cousins of my own generation from my mother or my father, each of them. My mother and my father each had one sister who never married. And so, I had all this family in Northern California that went back to pioneer days and yet I didn't know any of them except for one old aunt that we went up to meet in a rest home in Fort Bragg once when I was a little kid. And it was like this dark area and it gave me this romantic idea of Northern California — Mendocino, Humboldt County — that somehow there was some hidden world up there, and that if I could only discover it, I'd have a key to my family and my past. But really, it was romantic and I kind of eventually reinvented it for myself. [laughs]

0:05:35: So one of the things I did when I was in college — how you look for self-identity — I went up and lived in Northern California and worked on a fishing boat out of Noyo Harbor in Fort Bragg for salmon season. Spring and summer, I took some time off from college and really felt like I was somehow getting in touch with that.

0:05:57 Debra Schwartz: You're connecting to your roots. These obscure, haunting roots.

0:06:01 Tom Killion: Yeah, these roots that never — I never could figure out. And, so right inland from Fort Bragg is Boonville, and they speak their own language there. My mother had always told me that when she was a little girl they would take her up to visit her uncle and aunt, who had no kids, and had carved a little apple orchard on 40 acres out of the redwoods in what became Hendy Redwoods State Park. In fact, they gave their land, when Aunt Elsie passed away, to Hendy Redwoods. She would go up there. She was a little girl — probably it would be in the late 1920s. She was born in 1920. And early 1930s, people were isolated up there then. It was the Depression, the logging industry had collapsed, and a lot of subsistence people lived up there. She remembered just a few things about it, that they had to pump their water out with a hand pump, one of those old pumps, and that —

0:07:06 Debra Schwartz: Out of a well?

0:07:07 Tom Killion: Yeah. And that it was a big old house with a porch that went all the way around it, that sat in this big cleared area in the middle of a huge redwood forest; and that down a ways from the house, there was the river, which would be the Navarro River; and that there was a bridge down there, where there was the road to town, which was Philo; and it's a little settlement there, near Boonville; and that down there by the river, she'd go and play with the kids, and the kids that lived there were not very nice to her, and they would speak another language she didn't understand. [chuckles]

0:07:43 Debra Schwartz: But what do you mean, another language?

0:07:44 Tom Killion: Another language, because they speak "Boont" up there. And it wasn't 'til I lived up in Fort Bragg, and we would go — 'cause I lived with this family that had a whole bunch of kids and —

0:07:56 Debra Schwartz: You rented a room?

0:07:57 Tom Killion: No, no, it was my high school girlfriend's father that had the salmon fishing boat. So I just kind of lived with them. And they would all go in to the big county fair in Boonville. And I heard all these people speaking Boont, and I heard about it all 'cause they — a couple of the younger ones had gone to high school in Fort Bragg, and they knew all about it. And I went, "Oh, my God, I remember that! My mother met these people that were speaking Boont!" [chuckles]

0:08:25 Debra Schwartz: What's an example of Boont?

0:08:27 Tom Killion: I don't know! [chuckles]

0:08:28 Debra Schwartz: Was it really hard to understand?

0:08:30 Tom Killion: They had different words for a whole bunch of stuff. Most of it was just kind of fun, pidgin, Pig Latin kind of stuff. Some of it was Indian words that the early pioneers had picked up. And some of it was, had to do with languages that they brought with them from the Old World. There were a lot of German and Irish settlers up there. Anyway, I don't want to go any further into it, but that's what I think of as my family, especially on my mother's side, as these ancestors from the logging country of Northern California.

0:09:09 Debra Schwartz: That's how you identify yourself.

0:09:10 Tom Killion: Yeah. And so I grew up in Mill Valley, in another world, another age. Mill Valley in the 1950s and '60s was sort of, suburbia, in a way, a suburb of San Francisco. It was a growing bedroom community filled with people that came from all walks of life, still a lot of working class people who were tradesmen. But they all were doing pretty well. Things were booming. So I had friends whose fathers were carpenters, and electricians, and I had friends whose fathers were doctors and lawyers and architects. Some of them, I think, were businessmen. Yeah, some were businessmen, which I never

quite understood what that was, but they all had nice houses. And so, yeah, Mill Valley in the 1950s and '60s was an unusual place, though. It wasn't like a typical American suburb. It was filled with people that were from another way of looking at the world.

0:10:28: There were people that had come to the U.S., fleeing the Nazis, a lot of Jewish people who were very thoughtful, and well-educated, and artistic — a lot of them. And there was a lot of other people from Europe, and from the East Coast, who had good educations, and were exploring different ways to be. That was a different time of the world, when people came to California, to get away from the horrors of European history and society in the 20th century. 'Cause Europe was the center of the world in the 19th century, and America still thought of itself as kind of colonial, especially the West Coast, as kind of just on the periphery of this great European world. And then that world just destroyed itself and murdered itself. It was just a horror. And people had fled as far as they could go and they ended up here on the West Coast, in the sunshine.

0:11:24: And they really wanted to turn their backs on that and have nothing to do with it. So Mill Valley was the center of this idea, “We gotta find something else,” and what were they looking for? I mean, a whole new spiritual way of living. So there were all these, what we'd today call “New Age” kind of movements. There were people doing all those things that are, today, such a big part of contemporary culture. But they were total pioneers. Mill Valley was filled with these cultural pioneers that were exploring the idea of new organic diets, and exploring new ways of building houses that blended into the environment, and of course, people have been doing this all through the 20th century. There was a lot of influence from those great currents of European alternative thinking, from the first half of the 20th century here. I was surrounded by all that stuff; and there was a lot of interest in Japanese aesthetics here, too. There were some Japanese-American families, some Chinese-American families that I grew up with, quite a few people who were old Americans, Asian-Americans from several generations at least in California. The 1950s was not a time of much new immigration to America.

0:12:49: Immigration had been pretty closed to America after the First World War, except for people that were fleeing the horrors of World War II. Yeah, so it was interesting. They were all Americans but they were people from all over the world here in Mill Valley and they all were doing their own thing kind of differently, and yet living in this mainstream American culture. Now my parents, they were not at all on the cultural left but they were very open-minded people. My mother — 'cause she was a Californian, she was born and raised in Oakland — had gone to the University of Colorado for a couple years, then her sister had gotten very sick and she'd had to come home.

0:13:44: She finished at Berkeley just in time to graduate at the beginning of World War II, and went off and worked in Washington D.C. during the war, and then joined the Women's Coast Guard Auxiliary and worked out of Marblehead, Massachusetts for this organization that flew submarine-chasing airplanes, all around PBYS¹. She got to fly around in some of them sometimes, but mostly she was an office worker. But she loved that experience on the East Coast.

¹ PBYS were a kind of WWII-era seaplane.—Ed.

0:14:13 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. Your mother's name is —

0:14:14 Tom Killion: Her name is Dorothy Marie Jenkins Killion. Her maiden name was Jenkins and that was her father's family from Colorado: Welsh. And then she came back and was a newspaper correspondent in San Francisco for the commercial daily news down on the waterfront. She's a very, very bright person and very good at meeting people — listens to people's stories, remembers everything about them. She still does. She's still alive, she's 96, down at the Redwoods in Mill Valley. And she really loved living in San Francisco after the war. She lived on Russian Hill in an apartment on Green Street, a "flat" with a bunch of other young unmarried women that were all good friends. People from Michigan and New York, they all came together in this American melting pot that San Francisco really was after World War II, filled with young people. And they all brought in different young men that they met, and they all got married while they lived there, and they formed this tight group that was like an important center of my social world in my childhood.

0:15:40: And that's how my father met my mother. He was friends of somebody else's friend, then came over for dinner and they fell in love, and in the late 1940s, started dating. My father had come out to California from Minnesota. He was born and raised in North Dakota and Minnesota, and went to high school in Minneapolis — from an Irish-Catholic family, a couple of generations into the United States. His ancestors, they came from Ireland during that potato famine period in the late 1840s. His name was Leo Vincent Killion. And he was a very bright guy and very charming, witty, not very tall, but very handsome, and really funny. He had some great friends from the University of Minnesota, some of whom were musicians and singers. One singing group, very famous in late '30s and '40s, was the Merry Macs, who were several brothers from some name like Macmillan or something, that were a great national singing group.

0:16:55: I mention this because he came out to California. He'd come out to visit, he had an aunt and uncle in Visalia. They had some kind of a nut orchard and then they — then he came back up out after he graduated from college in 1930. He had the misfortune to graduate from college right at the height of the Depression [chuckles]. And so he and a friend drove out and they went to L.A. first 'cause when people came to California, where did they go then? They didn't come to San Francisco, they came to L.A.; that's where it was happening. And he tried being a vacuum salesman [chuckles]. He would hide his vacuum on the driveway before he went up to the door so that the person answering the door wouldn't realize he was a vacuum salesman immediately. He kinda hid it behind this car, and in the meantime, the husband, he'd gone to the door and the wife opened it. The husband had gone out to back his car down the driveway to go to work, and ran over [laughs] —

0:18:03: So that was the end of that. But anyway he decided that since he couldn't make a living there, he ought to go to law school, and in those days people still took the steamer up to San Francisco. So he took the steamer up to San Francisco from L.A. It's like an overnight trip and went directly over to Cal Berkeley with a suitcase and went in

and said he wanted to sign up for law school at Boalt Hall and they said, “Well, you have a BA?” And he said, “Yes, from the University of Minnesota.” And they said, “Well, prove it.” And he said, “I have my diploma framed, in my suitcase,” And he brought it back, showed it to them, and he was accepted. [chuckles] So that’s how you got into Boalt Hall in 1931. [chuckles]

0:18:55 Debra Schwartz: I wonder what his tuition cost.

0:18:58 Tom Killion: Yeah, out of state tuition, right? No, I think it was probably very little, because he didn’t have any money, and his father had lost everything. His father had been a business man, gone through many different iterations; it was that period of the American history where people reinvented themselves every five years, it seems like, even more than today, people really moved from job to job and business to business, ’cause everything was going crazy. Cars had just been invented; his father had an early dealership. He had his choice of the Cadillac car dealership or some other thing, and one you’ve never heard of; and he took the one you’ve never heard of [chuckles], of course, and so he lost that business. That’s the trouble.

0:19:52 Debra Schwartz: That opportunity sounds like fruit from a tree, a ripe tree, that you could just turn one direction, fail, go another direction.

0:20:00 Tom Killion: And that’s what he did, his father was a jack of all trades, he was a newspaper publisher in a little town on the Mouse River in North Dakota and the town was brand new, they’d just built it. The railroad had just come through and they’d build a town every 20 miles along the railway. There had to be a town a market wagon’s ride from the other town — so what a world that was.

0:20:33 Debra Schwartz: What a time.

0:20:34 Tom Killion: Yeah, so he came up to California in the ’30s, went to Boalt Hall, was very smart, became a legislative council for the state legislature up in Sacramento for a few years in the late ’30s, and he got a good job in San Francisco, with some law firm around 1939, 1940, and met some other guys and along the way he’d written a song called the “Hut-sut Song” and it was — they used to play it around where he grew up in Minneapolis. He was Irish-Catholic, and the Irish were always on the bottom of the immigration totem pole, but there was these new guys in town who were Swedish, and the Irish-Catholics were now Anglicized and they didn’t speak some Gaelic stuff, and so he and his friends would in a playful way make fun of the new immigrants and their funny accents, the Swedes. And so he and his friends invented this sort of fake Swedish, “Swedish doubletalk,” he called it, and he wrote this humor song called the “Hut-sut Song.” Hut-sut Rawlson on the Rillerah — and his friends the Merry Macs got a hold of it and sang it and it went viral and it was the most popular song in America, played to death exactly at the moment that Pearl Harbor happened. And everyone of that generation from young teenagers up through their 50s and 60s remembers that song.

0:22:24 Debra Schwartz: Can you sing a little of it?

0:22:25 Tom Killion: Yeah. [begins singing] So, it was a very funny little song and it really made a big splash, so he was the toast of the town there in 1941 and he and his partner were about to open a new law firm and they had printed up and sent out invitations for everyone to come to the new offices for a little party, to celebrate it, on Sunday, December 7th, 1941.

0:23:18 Debra Schwartz: Oh my.

0:23:18 Tom Killion: And the next week the entire building was requisitioned by the navy and he went off to Washington to work in the War Shipping Administration for a while, but felt he wasn't doing enough, that he just should somehow be involved in the war itself, even though what he was doing was probably much more important work there. He helped draft the Seamen's Bill of Rights for merchant seamen, who were dying in larger numbers than combat soldiers, because all their ships were being torpedoed, especially in the Atlantic. But that never got past Congress. So Merchant Marine from World War II, all the way through the period in which they would have needed the help of government aid, did not come under the GI bill and did not get free education, did not get any of these things, 'cause they were paid, they were considered to be privately — they weren't conscripted.

0:24:24 Debra Schwartz: Wow. Interesting. And for those that may not know what December 7th means —

0:24:29 Tom Killion: Well, if they don't know they'll figure it out, I think so.

0:24:32 Debra Schwartz: Well, we can help them.

0:24:33 Tom Killion: The day Pearl Harbor was bombed. I'm not talking to people who don't know what December 7th 1941 is [chuckle] because you have to have some interest in history to be interested at all in listening to this. I can't imagine anybody ever will listen to this. I'm rambling about my family, 'cause my father was a good storyteller. He had a lot of good stories, there was always a little story as you can tell.

0:24:58 Debra Schwartz: But it does help to put in perspective the environment in which you were raised with this kind of collective thinking — wherever they're going, whatever they're doing, you're parents are paying attention to a lot of things, and the world, and they're interested in the world.

0:25:19 Tom Killion: Very interested in the world. Yeah. And they're both very bright people. That's the one thing I've gotta say, 'cause my brother and sister and I all ended up being successful at school and being good writers. Now, my mother always had a typewriter and she was always writing little articles even when she was just raising us and didn't have a job. She was working for all her little organizations writing all their newsletters. And she belonged to many organizations in Mill Valley and Marin County:

the AAUW² and the Outdoor Art Club and the Church of our Saviour, the Episcopal Church. She had decided she wanted to be an Episcopalian when she was a young girl, 'cause their church was the most — she liked the people there best. Her mother's family, I think, had been some sect of strongly evangelical Presbyterian type Scotch-Irish people. Very dour. [chuckles]

0:26:31 Debra Schwartz: The picture I'm seeing as you're painting it is that you're raised in an eclectic, intellectual environment with people from all over the world. A lot of culture being brought into your life, a lot of interest. One wonders, how is an artist born? What you bring to your own life, of course, but then what stimulates you when you are young?

0:26:57 Tom Killion: Well, what stimulated me, of course, was the things that my parents brought to me; when you're young that's your world. And the environment — not the social environment, yet, of Mill Valley, but the natural environment. So I grew up on the slopes of Mount Tamalpais, and we could go up on hiking trails once I was old enough to walk very far. Right from Cornelia there was a back way up onto Tamalpais, up Summit Ave., and to get on to the trail system, up by the Double Bow Knot. And I was also introduced to the sort of aesthetics of living in a beautiful natural environment and creating gardens and houses that fit into it, 'cause Mill Valley was full of beautiful architecture, some of it Japanese inspired, some of it modernist — and then these gardens that work their way into the landscape. My mother took those gardening classes from Herman Hein. He was a German. He had come to Mill Valley in the 1930s and was the great, sort of, innovator of this natural garden that fit into the environment. He just loved native plants and he loved California and working with the existing oak trees and other flora to build these incredible gardens.

0:29:10: Anyway, Howard Folker learned a lot of stuff from Herman Hen, and those gardens really knocked my socks off when I was a little kid.³ In fact, my parents would always take us to Marin County's wonderful county fair that was at the Art and Garden Center in Ross. And it was all about gardens and art, and it wasn't at all about animals and straw bales. There's a little remnant of it left in the county fair, now at the Civic Center, because it does have the best art exhibit of any county fair in California probably. People applied to it from all over, and also come to see it. Really. They go to the fair to see that art exhibit, a lot of people. And that was such a cool place.

0:30:08: When I was a little kid, I loved those gardens. There was this thing about building gardens then in Marin County, and people had really extraordinary little demo gardens with little curved Japanese bridges and pagodas and tea houses and little hills, and all these little Japanese maples and things, and water stuff. Of course, you weren't supposed to go in there; and when I was probably five I ran away from my parents and ran into this garden. I wanted to go over that bridge and up that hill and be there. And I do remember that these two policemen there came and got me. One had a khaki uniform,

² American Association of University Women.—Ed.

³ In his revisions, Tom Killion notes that Howard Folker was the father of his good friend Anna Folker.—Ed.

one had a blue uniform, and they took me, and they had their guns in their holsters, and they took me back to my parents, and basically scolded me pretty badly. [chuckles]

0:31:01 Debra Schwartz: And still you remember the beauty, rather than the trauma.

0:31:04 Tom Killion: Yeah. Well, see, I remembered both. But that's interesting, isn't it? The forbidden garden. Mill Valley always, from my earliest memories, and probably from when I was in a stroller down there on Throckmorton, because that little stretch of Throckmorton, right above TG Brown's house — I remember all the people that lived around there: the Rourvics, and — oh gosh, so many people — the Robinses⁴ — as it goes up that long, flat, kind of slight uphill, and then it's flat — the Gilfillans. So 500 was right across from where the Gilfillans lived. They were a big family when I was a kid. Not as far as the O'Hanlon Center; just a little bit down the hill from that. And there was a great view of Mt. Tam from there of the east peak, just standing up like a big alpine mountain. And I must have seen that as a very, very little child. So I fell in love with this place, and not just the natural beauty of Mount Tam and the trees, but how the houses and everything fitted in.

0:32:36: Something really got me about that as a child. And so I also grew up having this talent for drawing, and painting and color, but especially I was really good at drawing. I was always the class artist from as early as I can remember. I was kind of a troublemaker; I was the youngest child in my class. In those days, people didn't try to move their kids into different classes, and so my birthday was a couple days before the cut-off, which was December 1st. I always sucked my thumb until I was in third grade, and I was just the little weed that was also hyperactive and a pain in the butt to the teachers, because I know that I was put in the cloak closet a lot. That's what they would do with me. And then my mother reminded me once that when she came in to see my first grade class, all the kids had their names on their desks and she looked around for Tommy's little desk and it wasn't there. She said, "Well where's Tommy?" And the teacher said, "Oh, he's right here." And my desk was up right next to the teacher's. [chuckles]

0:33:48: Separated from everyone else, 'cause I guess I was just kind of too much. Anyway, I was that kind of kid, but I was a good artist, and I spent a lot of time drawing. I didn't learn to read 'til I was in third grade, but I spent a lot of time drawing. And I got to be a pretty darn good drawer. So I was telling you that my mother had this group of friends, and that they all married and built their families from this Green Street apartment on Russian Hill, and they called themselves the Green Street Girls. They all were part of the upper middle class, I guess you'd say. They were mostly pretty well-educated. They had gone to college, which was still a big deal for women in that period. They'd all gone to public universities — that's another important thing — and they married guys that were in the professions: lawyers and doctors and business people. And so, they all ended up going up to the Sierras every year, to this Cal alumni camp called "The Lair of the Bear" near Pine Crest.

⁴ The Newsoms, as well. They all lived near Eugene St.—Tom Killion.

0:35:16: We did that every year for a week, and we lived in one of those wooden-floored, wooden-walled canvas tent cabins, with some metal bunks in it. That was such a great place. It brought together all the good things for white people of post-war America, where there was this big melting pot. People in California had moved from everywhere in the country and they were so glad that the world was at peace and that America was prosperous, and they were just — people were really happy, and they all had been through the army in World War II.

0:35:55: I never found out, until I'd gone to the memorial services for several of those men, that they had horrific experiences in World War II. They never said a thing about it. One of them had flown like 25 bombing missions over Germany and all around him people had been shot down. Not many of those people survived and I'd never heard that 'til I went to his memorial service.

0:36:43: I'd known that guy all my life and so, they were just having a good time [chuckles] and one of the friends of my mother from Green Street, Mary Gin Mellor, and her grandmother lived right down the street from you, and I worked as a gardener for her in junior high. Her last name was Gordon. Mary Gin's grandmother lived right on West Blithedale, between Cottage and where Eldridge goes off, in that sunny flat block that you drive every day. Mary Gin was an artist, she was a good artist, and she liked to do pen and inks of Victorian houses in San Francisco. But we went out drawing around Pine Crest Lake one day, and I remember they had little art classes at this camp, and I always liked to take those; I would take the ones with the grownups. The kids could come along, too. And I'd seen her trying to draw a pine tree, and so I got out my pencil and paper and I drew this pine tree with these big granite boulders in front of it on the other side of the lake. I think we'd taken a boat across the lake and when I came back I got out oil pastels and I colored it all in.

0:37:50 Debra Schwartz: How old are you now?

0:37:51 Tom Killion: I'm eight years old because my mother had written "Age eight" on the back of it. And that is a really good picture from nature of a ponderosa pine tree; really it's a good one. It doesn't just look like a ponderosa, it's got all that tree's own unique life in it. That is something kids don't usually do. So looking back on that, I realize, I just was born with something about drawing from nature, natural world, trees, landscapes, mountains and stuff; and that is kind of unusual for kids. So there was something just in me —

0:38:34 Debra Schwartz: I think the word is "prodigy."

0:38:36 Tom Killion: Yeah, but I was nurtured by this community. I'm sure it wouldn't have developed if I — and there was no art in either of my parents' families. They couldn't figure out where this came from, this art thing. [chuckles] And they encouraged it. There was a little art empire in Mill Valley. Some of those wonderful people in Mill Valley that had come to settle there were the Dimitroffs. My father was a

lawyer and Steve Dimitroff was his client in his little business.⁵ My father joined the Lions Club when they moved to Mill Valley, that's how the men met each other and had their business network. That was networking in those days and so Steve Dimitroff was a lion. The Lions Club was full of hippy artists. [laughs]

0:39:33: That's who Steve Dimitroff really was. He was from some Yugoslavian country, his ancestors were, and he was married to this incredible artist, Lucienne Bloch. Her father was Ernst Bloch, the modernist composer, and she had grown up in a very artistic German or east European family. His parents had certainly come from the Yugoslavia area, somewhere; maybe Bulgaria actually, I'm not sure. She did incredible portraits, and she had did some woodcuts; she did all kinds of things, and they're all around Mill Valley, but she was well-known all over California. And one thing they did together was Steve knew how to apply the plaster that she used to paint frescoes with. And you know you have to paint right on, with a special kind of pigment, right onto the wet plaster and she could do that. They had these commissions to do these beautiful, real frescoes, just like in medieval Europe all around in churches, all around the Bay Area. There's some in San Rafael, I know, and other places around here.

0:41:01: So anyway, I got exposed to them 'cause my father said, "Oh, Tommy is an artist, take him to meet the Dimitroffs." They had a place up in Gualala that they were building and eventually they moved up there. But in the meantime, Steve was also kind of a good entrepreneur. So he built a little empire. He had the art store, Dimitroff's Art Store, which was on Blithedale, right next to Village Music — to John's⁶ Village Music, but John wasn't there yet, somebody else owned it, and that was the place to go when I was — by sixth grade I would go and they gave me a little charge account, my parents did, at the art store and I would go to Dimitroff's, and then I'd go over to the music store, and by junior high I was interested in the 45 RPM records and the latest rock 'n' roll hits. And we'd also go and collect the little handbills that they were giving out from the Avalon and Fillmore auditoriums, these beautiful things. And that got me really interested in poster art and lettering!

0:42:13 Debra Schwartz: So Village Music is handing out these things?

0:42:15 Tom Killion: Yeah, they were handing those out. And actually the person that owned it before John — she was a little uptight — and she said you had to buy something before you could get a handbill. She wouldn't let us just have one. And then one day we were there when the poster guy came with this guy from The Family Dog, I think, and we complained to him. I was with a couple of other kids. One of them was the younger brother of Steve Bajor, Brian Bajor, who's since passed away. But we would go and get these things. We were in the boy scouts together. And we said, "She's making us buy." The cheapest thing you could buy was a guitar pick. I must've had a hundred guitar picks. [chuckles] 25 cents was a lot of money then. It was like two or three dollars. And he got really mad at her. He said she had to give them away. That's what they were for.

⁵ In the recording, Tom mistakenly speaks of Mike Dimitroff, which he corrected in his revisions.—Ed.

⁶In 1968, John Goddard bought Village Music from its previous owner Sarah Wilcox.—Ed.

0:43:18: And so Dimitroff had the frame shop too. It was the very last storefront on Throckmorton, at the end of town, the very last thing. Where the handmade beer place is now. But that'll be gone soon. It's always gonna be Dimitroff's to me. It's been several things since then, but it was, it stayed a frame shop. Somebody else bought it. Tom Craig bought it and kept it going as Dimitroff's Frame Shop. And that's where Matthew —

0:43:54 Debra Schwartz: Davis.

0:43:55 Tom Killion: Matthew Davis worked for so long. And several other people. You interviewed him, right?

0:44:02 Debra Schwartz: He talked about you, coming in as a high-schooler with your art.

0:44:06 Tom Killion: Yeah, to get it framed 'cause I wanted to frame things. And he showed me how to frame things so that I could do it myself, 'cause it's too expensive to have it framed. I was already thinking about shows and things. Mill Valley — something was in the air there in the early '60s, and I must've felt it. There were a lot of people that were developing another way of looking at the world, people like, "Nature Man and Woman," Alan Watts, was around there. And he had an influence on a guy a little younger than him, Gary Snyder. He kind of introduced Gary Snyder to thinking about the possibility of going to study Buddhism in Japan because Alan's first wife — he was from England — his first wife was the daughter of this Zen pioneer who was an heiress of the Fuller brush company.⁷ She had gone and set up this place in Kyoto right after the war, which was an extraordinary thing to do. And she had married a Japanese Zen master who'd come to the U.S. during the war, so he wouldn't be put in prison as an alien, or whatever they were doing. And so anyway, Gary Snyder was around. Unbeknownst to me, I probably saw him at some lunch counter downtown when I was a little boy. [chuckles] And he was —

0:45:49 Debra Schwartz: Well, Matthew talked about the Dimitroff's house being sort of a salon, of sorts.

0:45:57 Tom Killion: Probably.

0:45:57 Debra Schwartz: Where Gary Snyder, Alan Watts, Jack Kerouac —

0:46:04 Tom Killion: Would all come and hang at Steve Dimitroff's and Lucienne Bloch's. Yeah, they were real cultural people, very open-minded. I don't know what the label is. There's no label for it because nobody had a label then. There were people that might've been called beatniks, by Herb Cain, but that was such a stupid word. Or you could say counterculture, but they weren't really counterculture. That's the interesting thing. Like I said, they all belonged to the Lions Club. There was a way in, which, it was very mainstream America. And then these were people that were exploring other roads; and people, at least in Mill Valley, were very open-minded about it all. And you've got to

⁷ Ruth Fuller.—Tom Killion.

remember, Marin County in the 1950s and early '60s was still Republican, I think. It hadn't done the big switch. 'Cause California was all Republican. It was lock, stock and Republican — except for the labor movement in San Francisco — up until after World War II. So anyway, there was something in the air in Mill Valley, and it must've had an effect on me.

0:47:10: And Mill Valley's a very, it was a very nurturing place, I got to say, for people, kids, that were interested in art and things like that. There were these wonderful adults around, who were very open and very supportive. And so I, at some point, I used to do little posters for my friends in junior high. The model was Avalon Ballroom posters. And I was getting into drawing pictures of places. I thought Marin was really an interesting visual place at the time. In high school, I remember doing pictures of all the houseboats of Sausalito like that famous one that Alan Watts lived on. I didn't know it at that time.

0:48:04 Debra Schwartz: The Charles Van Damme?

0:48:05 Tom Killion: And then there was the Charles Van Damme. That's a different one that they had the rock 'n' roll shows on, and I do remember going over there but I could never get in because I was too young, I was in junior high. And then in high school, I wandered around, I hitchhiked around. By then I'd grown my hair long and I hitchhiked everywhere. We'd hitchhike over to the beach, over to Muir Beach. I'd ride my bike over to Sausalito. That was another thing in the air. Well, I was into bicycles and I knew several people who were as well.

0:48:41: My parents had some friends whose son was really into racing bikes. He went to France. He was so into bikes, married a French woman, never came back. [chuckles] But I got a nice Italian racing bike through him. I bought a Cinelli from somebody when I was later on in high school. But I had a good friend who lived down here on Bigelow, Rob Gross, whose father was an artist. He was my best friend in high school. I went to Tam High from my sophomore through senior year. My freshman year I went to this free high school where they had an entrance test and if you passed the test you got in. So the kids there were pretty smart. It was a boys' high school, it was called Lick-Wilmerding, way out by City College. I went there for one year but I really didn't like it that much.

0:49:43: There were no girls and I was getting older and more interested in girls. And it was too far a drive and so much fun stuff was happening at Tam High. It was the center of the universe. All the rock 'n' roll bands lived in Mill Valley then. They'd fled Haight-Ashbury in '68, and they'd moved over here: The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, all over the place. Quicksilver came from here. John Cipollina, the lead guitarist for Quicksilver was my camp counselor at the outdoor education camp, Camp Lokoya, when I was in sixth grade. I just remembered that he was too cool. He was so cool. Too cool to be a camp counselor. He'd go off and smoke cigarettes with some of the other counselors in the trees when we were there. But Mill Valley was such a great place. Who would wanna miss out on that? So I took a summer school class there and just stumbled into this amazing program called On Location Education. This one was the beginning of it. It was

the first prototype trip. A whole bunch of boys and girls, we all made our own stuff to take on the trip. We cast little metal pins so that we could pin our blankets together that were our clothing and each of us got a different kind of food in a gunnysack, and then we had to trade it with each other. And then we all put on blindfolds and got on a bus, and we didn't know where we were going.

0:51:06 Debra Schwartz: Holy cow!

0:51:06 Tom Killion: And we got off by some river far in up in Northern California and hiked a mile across the river and set up a big camp for a whole week. [chuckles]

0:51:19 Debra Schwartz: Who was leading this?

0:51:21 Tom Killion: This wonderful, amazing guy who grew up in Inverness, Roger Griffith. And he became kind of this guru figure, and then they started a whole program. A bunch of my friends never really did go to normal high school, they just did the On Location Education program for the rest of high school. I was one of the very few of my friends that went to college after high school. Most everybody either found a way to get out of high school early, graduate early, or they did the On Location program, and a lot of my good friends ended up spending quite a bit of time up in the woods of Northern California growing pot after school, and that was the way they made their living. There was, you know, in a big commune up by Albion, and another one in Mendocino. So, yeah, it was a different time.

0:52:15 Debra Schwartz: So when you transferred from going to this rather alternative type of an educational environment to more of a traditional school, you went to college, was that a difficult transition for you? Had you been properly prepared?

0:52:29 Tom Killion: No, it was not a hard transition. I went to UC Santa Cruz in the heyday of no grades and it was exactly the same. It was seamless. [chuckles] My parents had figured it out that that's where I would want to go, 'cause one of my mother's other good friend's older daughter had gone to UCSC, a couple years before me and they said, "That's where Tommy has to go. It's the only thing that'll get him to go to college." They wanted me to go to college. I fought with my parents a lot of course as a teenager; my whole generation did. The generation gap was pretty big, although the truth is they were very open-minded people; the parents in Mill Valley mostly were incredibly open-minded people. They really were. They were an unusual generation of people. They're wonderful people. Looking back on it, they were really extraordinary.

0:53:26: They were better people than people are today. They really were. They'd gone through this hell of World War II, this militarized society, but they'd all been in it together, they'd suffered through it together, they really weren't very materialistic. We criticize them for being materialistic, but they were the reason we weren't too materialistic. Sure, they wanted the good things of life, but people are so much more materialistic, and crass, and just grubbing after money today, much more than people were then. It was a better generation. I wanted to say about that Lair of the Bear — this

whole group of people, they're all doctors and lawyers, and they're living in these tent cabins and these funky metal bunks, but it was just like the army where they all had been. And they loved it. They didn't care at all, and the kids all loved it, we had such a good time. I've been up there recently and it's all been kinda fixed up a little bit more because people wouldn't stand for that today, those kind of people, those UC Berkley alumni people.

0:54:30: And it was a lot freer time, for white people. I can't comment about how it was for other people. At Tam, there was a big African American population from Marin City. And that was a really good experience for me, being involved with people from another culture, 'cause they really were from another culture. Their parents had come to work in the shipyards from the poorest parts of Texas and Louisiana, and they spoke a different kind of English, and they didn't have any education. And here, we're all these kids from Sausalito, Mill Valley, that were already pretty well-to-do places, and that was such a cultural contrast, I think, much more than racism, it was just this incredible cultural contrast between the life that their parents lived and the life that our parents lived, us white kids. It was really extraordinary, but I ran track, and I did get to know three or four wonderful guys from that African-American community. A couple of them ended up down in Santa Cruz, and one of them, my son took martial art classes from many, many years later. So, there were some continuities, but not much. There wasn't a lot of interaction, I wouldn't say.

0:55:55 Debra Schwartz: So you went from UC Santa Cruz, but then you continued on your education, right?

0:56:00 Tom Killion: Oh yeah. What I want to talk about is Mill Valley, though. So what I was leading to was, there's something in the air in Mill Valley, and I was into this art thing, and I appreciated Mill Valley, and I really love the aesthetics of the counterculture San Francisco renaissance that was developing in the late 1960s, 'cause I'd spent that year in the city. The year I went to high school in the city was '67-'68. What a great time to be in San Francisco!

0:56:37 Debra Schwartz: So, you're commuting back and forth from Mill Valley to the city, too?

0:56:38 Tom Killion: Yeah. We had a car pool, the various parents drove. Sometimes it was men going to work, but almost always, it was the moms of course: station wagons. [chuckles] It was 1960s. There were a bunch of kids. One reason I went there was that two of my best friends from junior high went there. But anyway, I was saying, Mill Valley had this very nurturing environment, with all these supportive people if you were a kid interested in the arts, or history, or other things. My parents loved history too, and that's how I got so interested in history. They always had history books around. And my father had gotten an Encyclopedia Britannica set — the 1952 version or something — that had incredibly scholarly articles about everything in the world with a lot of British colonial history in there. And that got me interested in the world through the lens of British and French colonialism.

0:57:49: I remember I was reading books about the French Foreign Legion, and things like that. It was a way of getting interested in other parts of the world, which led me eventually, to study African history first through the lens of colonialism. I ended up doing my dissertation at Stanford on the Ethiopian labor movement, which was all about French and Italian colonial industries that exploited African workers and all the organizations that came out that led to various nationalist movements in Africa. So you never know where something is going to take you, but I think the Encyclopedia Britannica, I can still smell the leather of that. He took it as a fee from somebody who didn't have the money to pay him for some little legal case. But, they had this beautiful set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. I used that book so much.

0:58:46 Debra Schwartz: I think that was sort of what everybody used, and you'd start to try to read one little part of it, and then your eyes would wander, and then you're off on —

0:58:55 Tom Killion: Yeah, it's like Wikipedia, but it's different. It was also a little better written [chuckles] and certainly better researched. But it had its bias; it had its built in bias. But you don't notice that as a kid. So anyway, something was in the air in Mill Valley, and I began to be entrepreneurial about my art. And right down the hill from me, in Old Mill Park, right across the street from the K-6 school, Old Mill School, that I'd gone to, was this art fair. As a kid, I think I remember it first being in Lytton Square, where they would put pictures in the windows of the shops and my mother taking me around to look at those. But I remember going down to that art fair, they had built these sort of pegboard walls.⁸

0:59:56: In those days, they had just driven two-by-fours or stakes into the ground all over and put up these sort of long running walls of pegboard and then people hung up their paintings on them, with lots of paintings. It wasn't such a crafty thing, it was more fine art, more painting than anything else. And I wonder if Lucienne Bloch even had some paintings there, at first, then some of the other great painters. There were some really great painters in Mill Valley.⁹

1:00:48: Anyway, so I was really impressed by that art fair and I wanted to be an artist and do that. I was an artist, I knew it, and I wanted to do it, too. Early in high school, maybe my first year at Tam, I got some of my pen and ink drawings together and I took them down. And I didn't know you had to be juried into the fair or anything, this is my memory of it, it could be that my mother told me: "You know you need to go talk to Rosemary McConnell or somebody." I had a good friend named Brian Dillon and his mother, Barbara Dillon, who changed her name to Allister, Allister Dillon. And her husband Richard Dillon was a very prominent California historian and very involved in the Book Club of California. I never paid attention to any of that until a few years later when I got involved in fine printing and books in California history. But later, boy I

⁸ The pegboard walls were put up on the redwood trees of Old Mill Park.—Tom Killion.

⁹ Like Millicent Tompkins, Emmy Lou Packard, Lucienne Bloch, even Ray Strong.—Tom Killion.

appreciated that I'd grown up with the son of that guy. [laughs]

1:02:00: He was really, Richard Dillon — he's a wonderful guy. He is still alive down at the Redwoods, but he's not very with it anymore. Allister died a few years ago, but she and Rosemary McConnell, they were kind of big figures in the art festival by the 1970s. But maybe in the '60s — I don't know how I did it, but I took some of my pictures down there and people came by and bought them, some of my friends' parents, you know. And one of the first ones that I sold — and I must've been around 16 when this happened, 15 or 16 — was this really great quail I had done, with, in the background, Elephant Mountain — which is the view from my house where I bought this land in 1988, out in Point Reyes, with some Mill Valley friends, and we subdivided it up and eventually in 2002 I had enough money to build a house and a studio there, and right out my kitchen window, that I stand at doing the dishes, is this incredible view of Elephant Mountain and I had loved that mountain since the first time I saw it. Black Mountain is its real name, that's what people call it out there.

1:03:20: I've always thought it should be Elephant Mountain or Knuckle Mountain would be even better, "The Hand of God." It's got such a beautiful form. Oh, and that brings up Ray Strong. Some paintings that I really responded to as a kid were the paintings of this phenomenal California landscape artist, Ray Strong, who had gotten started as an understudy of Maynard Dixon back in the 1930s when he was a young man. And he could paint those grassy hills like nobody else. In fact he's influenced how everybody else paints those grassy hills. Golden grassy hills of Northern California. He lived in Mill Valley for a few years and he had some beautiful things he donated. The Community Church had one, and still does in its foyer, in its lobby or whatever. And there was another one at the Outdoor Art Club that's really great of Mount Tam. And I saw some at that Art and Garden shows. That in fact, those were the paintings I always went to look at, and I was so disappointed when he stopped bringing them to that show. I was a kid then, I was really a kid, but I really took to his work. And he had some beautiful paintings of Black Mountain. And really knew how to do it. So I remember in high school I went out to Point Reyes with my friends a few times.

1:04:47: We rode our bikes out there, we hitchhiked out there, one time we camped on top of Mount Wittenberg and watched the sun rise over all the fog in Olema Valley, and I did this pen and ink watercolor wash study of that. That was really cool, kinda abstracted. And I think it was from that trip when I decided to do that quail too. So I did a great big California quail, male, you know with a top knot. In a very detailed grassy field with all the little heads of the seeds on the grass and then in the background is Elephant Mountain. And Mr. Robbins, the father of Annie Robbins — they lived on Eugene — came and bought it, and I went home. I think he paid \$25 for it, and that was a lot of money in 1969, or whenever that was. He bought it and my father, when I told him I'd sold it, he went ballistic, he said, "That was an incredible piece, you only sold it for \$25? He has to give it back. I'll give him back the money!" He called up Mr. Robbins [laughs], he said, "You gotta give Tommy back that picture, I'll give you back the money." And he said, "Nope, I bought it. It's mine." [laughs]

1:06:11: So to placate my father I did another pen and ink for his office, and then I thought, “Well, you know, it’s a lot of work to do this.” And I’d already been carving some linoleum; I’d been introduced to linoleum blocks by my junior high art teacher, Mrs. Mueller. She had us do a project with linoleum, and I really liked it so I got a couple more blocks at Dimitroff’s. And I found a little Japanese carving tool, a V-Gouge, I think from Cost Plus, in the days when they actually sold carving tools that you could sharpen and were actually tools — ’cause now they sell these absurd, plausible facsimiles of tools, where they’ve painted silver on the end on some kind of pressed metal. It’s just ridiculous. [chuckles] So anyway, I had carved some little linoleum blocks, at first for my parents’ Christmas cards, ’cause I’d seen people doing that. And so I did that and then I did some little ones of Mount Tam, and I thought that they would be nice Christmas card things, but they were so nice that I took them down to the art fair to sell those too. I would sell those too. And then I said, “I’m just gonna carve this quail.” It’s no more work than drawing it, ’cause drawing pen-and-ink is very time consuming. I had really gotten into pen and ink by then. I was a really good pen and ink and wash artist.

1:07:42: Looking back on it, some of those pictures — I sold almost all of them by the way, I have very few of them. But I’ve seen some of them come back, ’cause they went to parents, and then the kids got them, and they showed them to me; or I did them for girlfriends and some of them were kind of romantic and stuff. Pictures of boys and girls sitting on a cliff, looking at the sunset and stuff. I think I was creating my fantasy world through art. I spent a lot of time at my desk, just drawing. I hated TV, it seemed like except for, there was one show I really liked, it was called *Combat*, and it was about World War II. I watched all the seasons of it. My parents were having a very bad relationship by this time, my father had a big drinking problem. My mother was kind of tearing her hair out and felt completely trapped in this marriage, three kids, she didn’t work, and so they would turn on the TV all the time at dinner. Just as a way of [chuckles]

1:08:57 Debra Schwartz: Filling the silence.

1:09:00 Tom Killion: Yeah, and they had this TV — we didn’t get a TV until the 1960 election, when Kennedy was elected. They got it so they could watch Kennedy and Nixon debate. And it was a black and white TV, it was kind of yellow colored, and it was on one these TV rolling little carriage things.

1:09:17 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, the little cart, yeah.

1:09:19 Tom Killion: Cheap little cart, with the plastic wheels and the kind of metal rods. The living room was around the corner through an open doorway that had no door with the dining room kitchen. So they’d just wheel it from one place to the other, around that corner all the time. And it was on all the time. I really hated it. I’d already developed this sort of aesthetic dis-appreciation of TV. So I’d go way back to my room; it was way in the back. My brother and I shared a room, we had bunks. But poor Paul, he was the middle child, that’s my brother. My sister was the youngest, Ann. There was two bedrooms in the back, and then my parents had a bigger bedroom. The two bedrooms in

the back, at first — I can't remember how it went — I think my father used that back bedroom when we were little kids, and then my brother and I were in the middle bedroom a lot. Anyway it ended up that they put a long desk in the middle bedroom. That was my sister's bedroom, it got all fixed up for a girl, but that was my brother's desk. [chuckles] In our bedroom, which we shared, we played on the floor there, it had a bigger floor, so we played blocks and army soldiers and trains and all this stuff.

1:10:56: They had built this little addition thing, where there were two glass windows and a desk that made kind of an "L" shape. Both parts of it were under the window, but there was only one place to sit and the other part had cabinets so you couldn't stick your legs under it. And so I sat there and looked out over a steep hillside by a pine tree, and that's where I did all my work. I'd go back there and draw, after I was done with my after school stuff, whatever it was, I'd go and draw there, avoid the family. I did a lot of great drawing there. There was black India ink stained everywhere around there 'cause I got it from Dimitroff's, the black India ink. So I took these little things down there, to the Mill Valley Art Fair¹⁰, and sold them, and then I realized that I should enter the art fair, pay some money, and get juried in. But I actually started selling things, probably at 15. And that quail; I carved that block. It has 1970 — I carved the date into it.

1:12:13 Debra Schwartz: So, you made the other quail for your dad?

1:12:15 Tom Killion: Yeah. So I made this linoleum block, and it came out really good. People loved that. I had a little second block that I would ink up by hand. I inked them by hand, and rubbed them by hand. I had one of the yellow mountain, Black Mountain, all yellow. But I made another one I thought was cooler. It was just most of a round disc of a sun, but the very bottom part of it was cut off flat, so it could go right above the grass. And I'd just stick it on top, and press it, and I inked it red. So I had this red sun, and the black print of the quail and the grass. And the quail's feather pattern sort of went into the patterns of the grass. It was a very successful little art piece. I lost the block somewhere along the way through my life. It's the only one, I think, I ever lost. Well, yeah, I still had some of those old Christmas cards, but somehow I lost that block. Maybe someone borrowed it, or something. Who knows? Because it lived with me in various college rooms and houses and things. But I just redid it as a giclee print, a little addition to celebrate how long I've had the Quail Press. It's been a long, long time now.

1:13:40 Debra Schwartz: That's the name of your printing press?

1:13:41 Tom Killion: Yeah. So my best friend, Rob Gross, whose father was an artist, and my best friend in high school, he wanted to make, at one point, an apple press, to make apple cider. And he got one of his father's book binding screw things. He had me paint it all up, because I was the artist. And I painted a quail on it; I don't know why, maybe 'cause it was the California state bird. I was just into quails. It was right at the time I was doing that, I was just into this whole quail thing. I don't know what it was all about. Other people were, too. They made these little lawn things made of rusted metal,

¹⁰ When it began in 1957, the fair was known as "The Arts Festival". Its name changed in 1962 to the "Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival".--Ed.

with quails on them. So, I remember there was this thing about quails. There was this little place over in Tiburon, a little gallery called Shore Birds, for many, many, many years on the Boardwalk in Tiburon that sold that '60s kind of mid-century, modern art stuff that was kind of cutesy, but it wasn't too cutesy.

1:14:57: It had a nice aesthetic to it. And they had all these shore birds: sandpipers and stuff and they had little quails there. I took that print over there with some of my prints of Mt. Tamalpais when I was probably still at the end of high school, and they started selling those for me there. And there was a little gallery in Mill Valley, Eugenia Enevoldsen had a gallery right there on Blithedale next to Dimitroff's Art Store and Village Music, right in there. And she sold some of my early prints, too. But the art festival was a really cool place. So, the next year, I sat with a friend of mine who made god's eyes, and he was selling god's eyes, out of yarn.

1:15:37 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, I heard of it.

1:15:38 Tom Killion: And I was selling my little prints. Pretty soon, I had one of those peg boards to put my stuff up on, and I was paying the jury fee. And then the environmentalists got upset with the park being used for the art fair, 'cause they were tying things to trees, nailing into trees. And so they moved the whole thing to Boyle Park one year. And I remember doing it there, and that must have been when I was in college, that was the early '70s. I really got into making a little extra money from art, and I would produce these prints, because there were multiples. I also would have my drawings and my paintings, but I got better and better at the prints. So, people started to like them. But they were still just hand-rubbed, speedball ink. They were kind of funky. I mean, the colors were very pale because it wasn't good ink. I didn't have a good way of printing them. And that led later to my figuring out how to learn how to print at UC Santa Cruz, just by chance. Just total, incredible good luck. I've been a lucky guy all my life. I gotta say that. I don't know how I could be so lucky. I've avoided some extreme tragedies, just by total good luck. And I've fallen into some really great things, by really good luck. I've had some lucky star over me, and I can say it now, 'cause I'm so old that eventually, something's gonna catch up with you. So, I'm not worried. I would never want to say it, when I was younger.

1:17:29 Debra Schwartz: You have the trust of your history.

1:17:30 Tom Killion: I was superstitious.

1:17:32 Debra Schwartz: Right. You have to trust the facts, now.

1:17:34 Tom Killion: Yeah. But I somehow have survived, and prospered, being an artist, which is just crazy.

1:17:42 Debra Schwartz: It almost does seem that you've been ushered along. Even the point in your own family home, where whatever the circumstances are, they shuffled you right into that back room, and secured that space for you.

1:17:54 Tom Killion: Well, yeah. I think that that's not good luck. I was blessed with really wonderful parents. They may not have had the greatest relationship themselves, but they were great parents. My father may have had a drinking problem, but he was a wonderful father, and really loved his children so much. He always told us how much he loved us. He wasn't afraid of being emotional or being himself. He was by no means a modern kind of new age person at all, but he was —

1:18:31 Debra Schwartz: He had an open heart.

1:18:32 Tom Killion: He had a very open heart. He was a sweet man, very sweet.

1:18:36 Debra Schwartz: When you were talking about the art fair, though, do you remember the very first time you attended the art fair? Was it just as a participant or do you have moments when you think about that art fair?

1:18:49 Tom Killion: What I really remember about the Mill Valley Art Fair though, was a couple years after I started doing it. Round the time I was in college, early 1970s, maybe — not quite sure what year. I wish there was some film of it but it was one of those art fair years. The art fair was always best, of course, if the weather was really hot, because down in the redwoods it was nice and cool and it was so hot out. And September — it's almost always the second or third weekend of September — it can get really hot. And every few years it's really hot. And this year it was the absolute — it must have been earlier, but maybe it was when I was in high school. It seems like it was just that moment of time, which lasted a few years of — all the young people in the world had come to San Francisco for the flower revolution or whatever it was, the flower children, and they'd all come over to Mill Valley with the rock 'n' roll bands, and everybody was dressed in this incredible, hippy finery. And particularly there were these girls — 'cause I was in my teen years — that were dressed in these kind of very skimpy, fringed, buckskin things with long hair and flowers in their hair, and they're all tan and they were so beautiful. And I just had this memory of the art fair as being, these guys in the sort of Edwardian finery, of hippy finery, and the girls in their fringed, buckskin vests, probably with nothing underneath. [chuckles]

1:20:53 Debra Schwartz: Crochet tops?

1:20:54 Tom Killion: Yeah, and they were just promenading. The art fair was to see and be seen; I mean to see people and be seen. And it was just like the cultural event. Everybody came there to do it. And they would stop — and these icons of rock 'n' roll, I wouldn't know who they were, but I could tell they were, and their girlfriends, would come and stop and look at things, and talk to you. They were all older people to me.

1:21:29 Debra Schwartz: They were probably in their 20s.

1:21:30 Tom Killion: They were probably two or three years older than me. Two, five, or six years older than me, so I must have been in high school. I could only have had that

view in high school. Yeah, by college I was really a serious art fair guy. So I think I started that art fair way before 1970. I must have started going there maybe in '68, 'cause this would have — I think that memory is probably '68. People would still all go up to Cascade Dam, and there would be an immense party going on up there. We would go over there. And I remember I was young enough, I was just with a gang of little boys and we would jump off the rope swing and stuff. And there were all these hippy folks from the city that were older than me, that were swimming naked. It was quite a scene there.

1:22:23 Debra Schwartz: Sounds like a sexy fair.

1:22:25 Tom Killion: Yeah. Everything was sexy, of course, I was a teenager. [laughs] So everything was sexy.

1:22:30 Debra Schwartz: I remember the clothes back then.

1:22:32 Tom Killion: But it was different than it had been, things hadn't been like that. Girls suddenly were wearing bikinis at the beach. The girls that I remembered from grammar school that would play horse and run around, and the boys would chase them, and the boys and the girls really didn't quite interact, were suddenly these incredible sexy girls with bikinis. I remember going out one day in high school to Stinson, which I always went to. I hitchhiked over there, and we'd just hang out there all summer long, bodysurfing that whole little gang of friends that just — we would hitchhike, and hangout at Stinson Beach. If the fog came in and got too cold, we'd hitchhike up to the top of Mount Tam and get warmed up, then we'd go back down and bodysurf some more. We were really into bodysurfing. Stinson Beach, of course, is better for bodysurfing than board surfing, I think. But I didn't learn to board surf 'til I went to Santa Cruz. It's really funny.

1:23:33: I just remembered this. Somebody had some red wine, and we really didn't drink much. It's interesting, we really didn't think drinking was cool. I never drank beer. I love beer now. But as a teenager, I had no taste for beer at all. And red wine was okay 'cause that's what the beatniks drank, but we didn't really like it. What we wanted to do was smoke pot, and take psychedelic drugs. That was considered cool and hard liquor was absolutely not; that's what the old people did. That was Frank Sinatra's drink, and we hated Frank Sinatra. He was such a Republican. We really hated Nixon and we hated that whole idea of — by the way, my mother's best friend in high school in Oakland was Peggy McNamara and her older brother was Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War. She knew that that would have rubbed me the wrong way, so I didn't get to really know about that 'til after, 'til a little later.

1:24:37 Debra Schwartz: Now he has a movie, *Fog of War*.

1:24:40 Tom Killion: Hmm?

1:24:40 Debra Schwartz: Now you can see his documentary *Fog of War*.

1:24:42 Tom Killion: Yeah, I did see that. I saw that with my mother. That was a long time ago. We saw that at the Sequoia Theater when it was aired. She had a lot to say about that.

1:24:52 Debra Schwartz: So you were living a new kind of way?

1:24:54 Tom Killion: Yeah. But I just remember this one incident in a Volkswagen bug. So somebody had a Volkswagen bug. He was a little older. He had a car and he could drive. I was young then, 'cause I don't think I could drive, and there was this girl Barbie Tice. She was the most beautiful girl, always, in grammar school and she was a very beautiful woman. There wasn't a lot of room in the backseat. There were eight of us in the Volkswagen, or maybe six or seven. She was kind of laying across three or four boys in her bikini and she was so cute and that was a very cool thing.

1:25:42 Debra Schwartz: A highlight.

1:25:42 Tom Killion: No, but then Eric — I won't say his last name [chuckles] — had drank too much red wine and you know what Panoramic Highway is like. [laughs]

1:25:55 Debra Schwartz: I remember. What it looked like going down. In and then out. [chuckles]

1:25:58 Tom Killion: Oh my God! Poor Barbie Tice. Oh my God. Chunky.

1:26:04 Debra Schwartz: Oh yes.

1:26:06 Tom Killion: So anyway, Mill Valley, it was like anywhere else. All that stuff's just normal, but there was this element to it because the people that were walking around that art fair, were like inventing this new world of psychedelic rock culture. They really were inventing it, right there. And you could see it just taking form and it had this — there was something going on there. It wasn't just the girls with the buckskin, fringe dresses that I remember. It was something about that whole atmosphere. It was just full of energy. Probably a lot of psychedelic drugs too.

1:26:55 Debra Schwartz: And there was new — anything new has something to it.

1:27:00 Tom Killion: So that's my real magical memory of the Mill Valley Art Fair, in the redwood trees with the kind of the dust in the air that you could see the golden beams of sunlight coming through the trees and all these people dressed in these really fun costumes. What a great place. And I held on to that memory of how it should be for a long time. Of course, some years it rained like hell and then that changed everything. And that's when I first built a little structure to put my art under. That evolved into this sort of organically patched together booth that I've used ever since. I still use something that evolved over many years of being made better to be that booth.

1:28:02: I never got one of those pop-up tents. I hated the way those looked. I have a

booth that looks a little better. [chuckles] And the only place I ever take it in the last 15 years — I've made my living at this though for a while — but in the last 15 or 20 years, I've slowly reduced to doing no outdoor festivals that you have to provide your own booth for except the Palo Alto street fair, which is worth doing 'cause it's in Palo Alto, and the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, and I use this old booth that started out as a kind of a frame to hold some clear plastic one year when it rained. The art fair is of course very determined by the weather and when you have a nice hot weekend it is a great thing. And when it's raining of course, it's always surprising that people still come. And I have this clear plastic that comes out and people can come under and look inside.

1:29:15 Debra Schwartz: Do you have a booth this year?

1:29:18 Tom Killion: I'm going to this year. I haven't for a couple of years. This is probably the last year I'll do it, I think. I'm trying to put a lot of energy into it. I did the poster this year for them and I put a lot of energy into it, 'cause we're trying to get it to a new level so that people will appreciate it and then we'll get some community support for it.

1:29:40 Debra Schwartz: There's a whole new group of people that live here that don't understand necessarily —

1:29:45 Tom Killion: Yeah, they don't remember any of what I'm talking about. They didn't live here then, they didn't grow up here, so they don't remember the charm of the art fair from the '60s and '70s [chuckles]. And it continued to have a charm for decades after. It had a lot of really great wooden furniture. It became kind of one of the places to display hand-built wooden furniture in the 1980s, so that was a big thing. And it looked really good in the redwoods. A friend of my parents was a guy named Art Carpenter, and his wife was a friend of my mother's — I can't remember her name now — but they lived over in Bolinas, and he had a place called Espenet where he built hand-made, wonderful wooden furniture. He turned bowls, and very mid-century modern, kind of rounded, sculptural stuff. And he did all the furniture for the new Mill Valley Public Library that was built when I was a kid in the '60s. I worked there, when it was still new, as a page, putting away the books all through high school. That was my after-school job. And I felt like I read every book that people would check out in those days. So I thought I'd read everything by Gore Vidal, and some of those Saul Bellow novels, and the kinds of writers that people in Mill Valley liked to read. I actually never read any of their books, but I put them away so many times, I just assumed [laughs] —

1:31:17 Debra Schwartz: Read by association.

1:31:17 Tom Killion: I just assumed I'd read them.¹¹ A lot of academics, they act like they've read — you can never say, "Well, have you read such and such?" If it's in their field they always say they've read it, even if they haven't. And so, I became really good at that by working in the library. I knew the names of all the authors and what their — I'd read the dust jacket blurb. [laughs] But anyway, that library had all of Art Carpenter's

¹¹ I became one of those apparently well-read people.—Tom Killion.

furniture in it. And his son Tripp, who's around my age — really good surfer 'cause he grew up in Bolinas, he became a really good wood-turner — and he's a very quiet guy like his father was. And he's carrying on the tradition. Art died recently. Tripp actually published a beautiful book of all of Art's furniture, and Art Carpenter's furniture is now famous. It's exemplar, mid-century modern furniture, and it auctions for high prices, the hand-made things. Well, the tables are really beautiful, but the chairs and things, he designed but I don't think he made them in his own shop, 'cause they were like captain's chairs. But anyway, Tripp came and showed his furniture recently at the fair and reminded me of those good old days because it was so beautiful and it was all under the redwoods with no booth or anything, just out under the redwoods. That's how people used to do it. They took advantage of that gorgeous setting at Old Mill Park. And then along came the "E-Z UP" tent, that metal frame that expands and then the tent pops over, and that ruined art fairs, because before that everybody had their sort of purpose-built original booths that were all different and were kind of fun. It was like you're in a medieval fair or something. And for a while, the Mill Valley Art Fair, unlike any other art fair, made it illegal to [laughs] use those. They decided they didn't like the aesthetic, but finally they had to give in because everybody that they were wanting to jury-in, to do the art fair, had become dependent on using those booths, 'cause they would travel around and do many fairs. So that's an interesting thing about the art fair.

1:33:50: So the art fair in the '60s was a very local event. There was no culture of people traveling around and doing art fairs. That started in the '70s. I was part of the generation that started doing that. And a lot of the people doing the art fairs were just a little older than me. I was kind of a little younger than the hippie generation. I was just a couple years younger. So now, I've watched everybody age-out and I'm one of the last to leave. And it's hard work, it's a hard life. I really did it for a while. I never got to the point where I traveled outside the Bay Area, probably 'cause my work was so regional that it didn't translate well to Southern California and certainly not beyond California, but I knew many people that went all over the country or all over the western United States. They'd get a whole setup. They had a big van and they —

1:34:50 Debra Schwartz: Gypsy artists.

1:34:51 Tom Killion: It was a gypsy life, yeah. And some very good friends of mine actually used to do the Renaissance Fair always. They'd go from Southern California to Northern California, back and forth. They'd do the Dickens Fair in the winter, and they sold hand-made books and hand-made paper and they'd have a little display of how you make paper and bind books. It was a fun life. And they had a gypsy caravan that they built on the back of a truck with a rounded top just like out of *Wind in the Willows* or something.

1:35:24 Debra Schwartz: You talk about the art but there's music there too.

1:35:27 Tom Killion: Well, the music was actually added later. The music's never been a big part of the Mill Valley Art Festival. It's getting to be, luckily, now. But for a while, it was these sort of humorous bands. There was this kind of "Oom-pah" band

where people would dress up in old German military uniforms from the first World War with the spiked helmets and stuff, and they'd have big battered brass instruments, horns and tubas and accordions, and played this kind of "Oom-pah" music, and just make fun of everything. I think there were probably some of those German-Jewish refugees from World War II that started this thing, I don't know how it got started, but it was very funny. And then there was some other kind of humorous music, and there was always a great puppet show, that was another thing, the Mill Valley Art Fair had great puppets. And, it was a friend of my mother — well she knew everybody, I can never tell who really were friends of hers, but she knew them, she talked about them, she knew everything about them — the woman that did the puppets. I'm not remembering their names, but Steve told you all about that stuff, because, that whole interview he did for the historical bulletin —

1:36:51 Debra Schwartz: That wasn't with me.

1:36:53 Tom Killion: Lettie Schubert, that was her name, Lettie Schubert. During the art fair, that round grove down in the middle of the lower part of the park, that's perfectly round is where they have the kids stuff, and they've named it the Lettie Schubert Grove. So, during the art fair it's the Lettie Schubert Grove.

1:37:22: She passed away a few years ago. She was a real mainstay, of the art fair. There were these people, that were Mill Valley people that got into making this art fair really great, and it didn't really get founded and really going until right around the late '60s, that time I was talking about, and from there on it just steamed along for 20 years with this wonderful group of people, who when they started out, were all in their 30s and 40s with kind of young families. They were in their late 40s probably, with kids that were starting to go to high school and stuff, and kids my age or a little younger. And then they kept it going, a few people that were a little younger added on to it, but I always felt like I was way too young to be part of the organization. Plus I didn't live in Mill Valley anymore, 'cause I'd moved to Santa Cruz. I never came back, I came back to visit, but I never moved back to Mill Valley.¹²

1:38:15: So that organization turned out to be kind of archaic. The idea that the artists would put on the fair, and it would be totally non-profit, there was no incentive for it except to have this one event. 'Cause all the other art fairs started to be organized by a Chamber of Commerce, and then they would hire a promoter that went around and did art fairs, and they would go all around the state putting on these art fairs. And art fairs, outdoor art fairs, it was something that came out of the '60s, really became a thing, and you go to other parts of the United States and they're not so many, because it rains everywhere else in the summer.

1:39:09: But in California it doesn't rain, and so you can have these outdoor art festivals. It took a long time before it was "art and wine." At first it was really art festivals, and it really was soon crafts because the hippy thing was: "Let's go back to making things by hand." And so there was all these potters, and leather workers, and

¹² I left for UC Santa Cruz in 1971, when I was 17.—Tom Killion.

woodworkers, that started to make amazing things and bring them to these art festivals. And that festival that I remembered as a kid, that was all paintings, by the mid-'70s it switched to being more crafts than wall art, than two-dimensional painting and drawing. And of course, I got into it because I was a crafts person too, because I was always interested in art, but what I really wanted to do was make things that look like Japanese woodcut prints.

1:40:29: I had this incredible sort of relationship to Asia and landscape arts since I was a little kid. I don't know why it struck me so much; and it's so interesting that my friend Gary Snyder, that I've done all these projects with, had the same kind of thing. He just fell in love with East Asian landscape art also at a young age, and we really shared that in common. It's kind of a way of looking at the natural world, maybe. My first memory of seeing East Asian landscape art was my mother taking me to a show at the old de Young museum, a show of those big screen Chinese landscape paintings of what Gary calls, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, 'cause that was the name of this one 12th century big, long wall scroll. In it there are these canyons full of mist, and these little trails you see winding through them, and trees hanging off cliffs, and it's all done with black ink diluted with water so it's different colors of grey, and dark greys, light greys, and mountains towering up out of the mists and these gorges with rivers going through them. And that still haunts me. I can never find that picture that I saw.

1:41:52: 'Cause to little kids that kind of stuff just, you get so into it, seeing where the little trail goes and everything. At least I did and then, like I say, all the Mill Valley sort of trails and the mountain had that same aesthetic as those paintings, and then somebody bought me — and I think it was again my mother, or maybe one of her friends — a little teeny book of Hokusai, *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, which is the finest of all the collections of Japanese landscape prints. Really the two greats are Hiroshige and Hokusai. And so that immediately pushed my artistic button, and I wanted to do the same thing 'cause this is what kids do. When they see something they like they want to imitate it, right? So it's a great creative moment in somebody's life because you're naïve, you don't know what you can do, and anyway you're just imitating it, you're not trying to do anything else. You love it, and you want to do it too.

1:43:07: And so I wanted to do pictures of Mount Tamalpais that looked like Hokusai's pictures of Mount Fuji, but I was into drawing them from nature, so I didn't just sit there and say, "Do something that looks like Hokusai and say this is Mount Tam." I looked at Hokusai's prints, and took the memory of them and then I went out and drew pictures from nature about Tam, and I went all over Mill Valley and Marin County drawing pictures of Mount Tamalpais, and collecting these pictures while I was in high school and selling some at the art fair. Of course, I sold some of them probably the better ones at the art fair as pen and inks, but I made some little linoleum blocks, and then when I got to college I kept doing that. I was going to the art fair up here.

1:43:58: I started doing an art fair down in Santa Cruz in the Swanton Valley that was really fun too, it had that same wonderful feeling as the Mill Valley Fair in the early '70s. That's a valley that's still very natural up north of Davenport that runs parallel to

Highway 1, but inland just one ridge over from the ocean, and it had quite a countercultural artistic community in the '60s and '70s. Anyway, I started collecting these,¹³ and I took a creative writing class from a wonderful lecturer — he wasn't a professor — Jim Houston at UCSC. He let me do an independent study — after I did one year writing stories — he let me do an independent study for my little project which was that I was gonna write Haiku poetry that went with these pictures of Mount Tam. And then I met — well I took a celestial navigation class, this is towards the end of college as sort of, what do you call it, an extramural thing, it wasn't for credit or anything 'cause I wanted to get on a sail boat and sail across the Pacific after college, that was my idea. This was an idea that was going around a lot of people, and I thought well if I knew how to navigate that would help. [chuckles]

1:45:31: So in that class I met a guy name Richard Bigus who was a year older than me, a very good surfer, Southern California guy, and he said, "You know Tom" — we hit it off right away, and I told him about this project at some point — and he said, "You'd really like this class that I just started taking, and you could learn how to print your prints, and make a book out of this. You could do it on a printing press and take this class that I'm taking about how to do letterpress printing, fine printing." And down under the dining hall of the college I went to at UCSC — by the way, I went to UC Santa Cruz from 1971 through 1975, Cowell College, you know how its divided into colleges? — and so under the dining hall there was this printing press and this wonderful man name Jack Stauffacher.¹⁴

1:46:44: Jack worked in the city. He worked in North Beach and his son had gone to Tam High where I went to high school. So anyway Jack was teaching this class. He was an incredibly fine printer, and typographer, and into all the finest elements of type design, and everything, a whole 'nother world, and he taught this wonderful class. And there was another guy named William Everson, who had been a great San Francisco poet since the '40s — but in those days he had been a Dominican lay brother and was called Brother Antoninus, and that was his beat nickname, a well-known literary figure — and he was teaching how to print on a hand press, a Gutenberg style, that you pull the lever on. He was doing an incredible project of Robinson Jeffers' poetry called *Granite and Cypress*, all hand printed in this great big folio volume. So in this one year when I was really taking all my senior classes — specialized in third world history and writing a thesis on a comparison between the Vietnam War and the Algerian Revolution, which is what sent me off getting more and more interested in African history and eventually going back to grad school in African history.¹⁵

1:48:13: Anyway, this is 1974, I think. To get this little project done on Mount Tam, I was meeting these two wonderful, amazing men that were teaching the two different ways of printing: modern letterpress printing on a cylinder proof press, which is the direction I went, and the other one teaching a class called "Birth of a Poet" that

¹³ That is, these lino-block prints of Mount Tam while I was in college at UCSC in the early 1970s.—Tom Killion.

¹⁴ Jack Stauffacher was teaching students how to print on a cylinder proof press.—Tom Killion.

¹⁵ I was simultaneously working on my art and poetry book. I was very productive.—Tom Killion.

everybody loved 'cause you didn't have to do any work to get credit in it. And you kept a dream journal. He was teaching this other class on fine printing on a hand press, "medieval style," and he's acknowledged to be one of the two or three greatest hand press printers that the U.S. has ever produced, Bill Everson.

1:49:14: And Everson was doing this incredible project on Robinson Jeffers, which just knocked my socks off. It was a revelation. It made me get totally into book printing, this *Granite and Cypress* book. It's still the most beautiful book he ever produced, I think. And it's a total monument of American fine printing. And all these kids my age were working in these classes and I met them all and they were working on these books. I learned, of course, much more from the kids than from Jack or Bill. They kind of showed you what to do, but they were off in their own worlds. Bill wanted to talk about poetry and dream analysis, and Stauffacher wanted to talk about German mid-twentieth century typography and type design; but along the way we learned how to use these machines which was what was important to me so I could do my project. And I learned about how to use machines and where to find the cool papers and everything from all these wonderful students that I was in school with. But I'm getting away from Mill Valley here.

1:50:23 Debra Schwartz: It does pertain to Mill Valley in that you have these beautiful published books with all your beautiful art that highlights a lot of places, but quite a bit in this area.

1:50:36 Tom Killion: Yeah, and actually, just to wrap it up, this last project that I was talking about, all my Mill Valley lino-cuts and my already developed understanding of how to market art by selling it at the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, ended up culminating the summer after I graduated from UC Santa Cruz.¹⁶ I decided it was now or never, there was nobody using the printing press for the summer except one of my fellow students and we traded off, Felicia Rice and I. She's still a fine printer in Santa Cruz. And we traded off on the press. But I probably would still have never finished the book if I had not been riding my bike down from the campus, down that steep hill, right at the beginning of the summer, and a car turned left into me without signaling, as it was coming up the hill, and I went flying over the windshield, it hit me right in the left leg and I broke the leg in three places and I was in a full cast for the rest of the summer.

1:51:47: That slowed me down enough that I actually did the project. Otherwise I think I would've just been having too much fun. I had too many things I was doing. I actually did that project and I printed this book with my little Haiku poetry and 28 — I never got to 36 — 28 views of Mount Tamalpais, on this handmade Japanese hosho paper that I'd learned about from another fellow student of mine, Sydney Beth Masters. And I got it bound over in the city by Hans Schubert, at the Schubert Bookbindery, and brought it over to the Mill Valley Public Library. And in the fall, right around the time of the art fair, I also brought it to the Mill Valley Art Fair and showed the book. It got so dusty, the one copy I brought to the fair, that it just ruined that book. And then I kept it and brought it to all the art fairs after that.

¹⁶ I printed my first handmade book, *28 Views of Mount Tamalpais*.—Tom Killion.

1:52:48: People spilled some of that Tam Swim Club chow mein on it too. I remember there was that chow mein at the art festival for years. The Tamalpais Swim Club had the greatest chow mein. Everybody still talks about it, every single year, we have this discussion on the committee of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, of food. We're in charge of getting all the food. I never finished my story about the organization of the art fair. It was run by the artists, it still is. It's the only one. It's never been run by a promoter. That's its great point, but also its weak spot, because it just barely survives. It just barely makes enough money from the tickets at the gate and the fees the artists pay for the booths to put it on. We had a few good years in the past, 10 or 15 or 20 years in the past, when we built up a little rainy day fund so that we have enough to survive one year if it gets completely rained out; because that "gate" is very important. What they call the gate, the tickets.

1:53:53: So anyway, it's still run by this committee of artists, but people have gotten old and the artists are no longer the main body and luckily community people have stepped up that like the idea of this fair continuing so now we've got this whole new thing starting to happen where hopefully — we finally got a 401c3, so we can get contributions, like donations, that are tax deductible. Before that we had a nonprofit status but the donations weren't tax deductible. So we made that all work. And so, the art fair was the place that I got my start being an entrepreneur of art, and then I learned how to print. I made this book. I brought it to the Mill Valley Public Library where several of the librarians they kinda had taken me under their wing as one of their ex-pages that was doing something in the world of books, and they were so kind. And I was allowed to have a little reception in the downstairs room.

1:55:01 Debra Schwartz: The Creekside.

1:55:01 Tom Killion: An old rendition of what the Creekside Room was. I don't think it was the same then; it was nicer than that room is. It had more windows and I think they added something in there, they pushed everything out further into the park and did some things. But anyway, it was the Creekside Room, it was probably still called the Creekside Room. So, it was in the fall I think of 1975, and I had a book party. I had made about 90 of those books and they were all signed and numbered and everything, and people loved them and they bought them for \$100 each, which was still quite a bit of money then. They were almost all gone by Christmas of 1975 and on the 1st of January — no I mean the 6th of January or something — I got my big backpack and my snow shoes flopping on top of it and I took the train up to Centralia, Washington and hitchhiked on up to, stayed with friends at Evergreen College, and then set off on a trip hitchhiking across the U.S. and then all around Europe, and then eventually across the Sahara Desert to West Africa. And I didn't come back until the summer of 1977, so I was gone for like a year and a half.

1:56:30: And when I came back I went back to Santa Cruz. I was living with some friends, and I didn't know what to do with myself really. I think it was my friend Richard again. He had gotten a press and he said, "Let's go up to San Francisco, they're throwing

out everything from the old book printing industry.” The whole industry had changed. Computerized typesetting had come in, and they were just throwing old equipment away or giving it away. And San Francisco was the biggest center of typography on the West Coast and there were buildings that went back to the Gold Rush filled with printing equipment and they were just clearing it out in a frenzy almost. A lot of stuff just being thrown into dumpsters. And we got all these cases of type and all the stuff you needed to do letterpress typography and I found a gorgeous little cylinder proof press just like a Vandercook which I’d used before, a little Asbern German cylinder proof press, just like the Vandercook that I’d used down in Santa Cruz.

1:57:52: I had been steam-cleaning carpets to make some money and I was just sick of that, and I said, “I’m going to take this press and I’m going to try to print another book and see if I can make some money at that.” And I decided I would do this project that I’d been thinking of since high school on the coast artillery fortifications of the Marin Coast, which I’d done a little history of in California History class at Tam High, and I called it, *Fortress Marin*. [chuckles] Like *Fortress Europe*, all these concrete bunkers and everything. But they were really cool because they were so modern, concrete, all these flat lines and surfaces, purposely embedded in that gorgeous landscape of the Marin Headlands. And so, I thought it was a really cool kind of art project and I spent a lot of time on that, I did that and I made a little money at that. And the money I used for a 14-, 15-month trip around Europe and Africa was all from my *28 Views of Mount Tamalpais* book.

1:59:05 Debra Schwartz: Wow!

1:59:06 Tom Killion: So I really got off into this world of thinking about art as what I wanted to do, and these projects I wanted to do, and kind of self-funding them entirely; and at the same time, making some money off them so I could do the other things I wanted to do, like go traveling. And then I went to grad school at Stanford in African Studies in the fall of 1978, I think it was. Gosh, I had a lot of energy then. And I got into the African history program and, of course, you get a stipend, which I could live on. So between my graduate studies stipend and the money I’d get from going around to these art fairs I was an independent adult. I hadn’t compromised except for that one job steam cleaning carpets. And I never did. I never did another horrible job again. [laughs]

2:00:14 Debra Schwartz: What’s interesting I think in your books is that you include so much history. It seems to me that you see the world not as visually but temporally as well, in the way you perceive I suppose.

2:00:29 Tom Killion: Yeah. I have some kind of interest in *time*. I think landscape art itself is also about *time*. There’s that famous book by Simon Schama, the English art critic called *Landscape and Memory*, I think it is. It’s all about the relationship between landscape art and the passage of time and memory. But, yeah, landscape, you’re kind of looking at sort of a map of things, in a way, you know? And it does hold a lot of clues about change over time. So I think they’re related actually, the interest in landscape art and in history. Like I said, my parents were interested in history. They both were history

or politics majors I think in college and they had a lot of history books around and encouraged me to read history. My mother read me when I was a little kid, five or six year old, *The Child's History of the World*, which was a very thick book. It was not a picture book, it was a reading book, the kind of thing that people wrote for kids back in the —

2:01:57 Debra Schwartz: When they wanted them to go to sleep really fast. [chuckles]

2:02:00 Tom Killion: Yeah. Back in the 1940s.

2:02:02 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

2:02:03 Tom Killion: And '50s. Before there was TV.

2:02:05 Debra Schwartz: Right.

2:02:06 Tom Killion: Nobody would think of writing a book like that for kids today. Now things are tailored to a short attention span. Well, people don't even write books for kids anymore. They're really just pictures. I mean, it's amazing how little content there is to children's books today.

2:02:24 Debra Schwartz: Something to think about. Well, Tom, I feel like I've just taken a journey with you. You're so interesting, the way you communicate because there's so many elements. There's a lot of visuals and there's a lot of personal imagination that one goes through, and then, of course, your story, which I feel like I've sort of been on the side car of through this interview. Really interesting.

2:02:46 Tom Killion: Well, that's about it. [laughs]

2:02:49 Debra Schwartz: I thank you so much for sharing your life, your experiences, the world through — Tom's world. I've conducted a lot of interviews and this is a unique one. You know the world that you may see as common to you under your ordinary is actually really extraordinary when listening to it. So I'm really grateful that you've been so kind as to contribute to our oral history program and bring us, awaken me and others, to the time that you've experienced here in Mill Valley, and the treasures as you saw them, just from the very earliest years: how you were able to savor and appreciate this area. So thank you so much for your time and for your story. On behalf of the Mill Valley Library and the Historical Society, I thank you.

2:03:48 Tom Killion: Thank you, Debra. Thank you for patiently listening. [laughs]

2:03:53 Debra Schwartz: No hardship at all.

2:03:54 Tom Killion: You're good at bringing out all these stories.

2:04:00 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. Well, they're good ones. So thanks.