

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**

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**RICK MISURACA**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Joan Murray in 2013**

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Rick Misuraca was born in Mill Valley in 1958, a descendant of the German immigrants who opened Meier's Bakery on Miller Avenue in the 1940s. He attended local schools, including Edna Maguire and Tamalpais High School, and graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a degree in Horticulture. After graduating, Rick took a job with Cagwin and Dorward, a landscaping firm in San Rafael. In 2013, Rick retired from his position as the Operations Superintendent for Public Works and Parks in Mill Valley.

In his oral history, Rick recalls growing up in Mill Valley with the freedom to explore Mount Tamalpais and the City's other open spaces. In addition to reminiscing about local personalities, he details his path to becoming Park Supervisor for the City of Mill Valley in 1983 and describes some of his favorite civic projects, including the restoration of the Old Mill, the beginning of the town's Bloomathon beautification project, Miller Avenue landscaping, and the renovation of the "Steps, Lanes and Paths" found all around Mill Valley.

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## Oral History of Rick Misuraca

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## Oral History of Rick Misuraca July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**Joan Murray:** Alright, the red indicator light is on. This is Joan Murray and Rick Misuraca on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 with Rick Misuraca's oral history. So, where I wanted to start, Rick, is how your family came to Mill Valley.

**Rick Misuraca:** Okay. That would be my mother's family. They were, my grandmother and grandfather, were German immigrants. My grandfather was a pastry chef, he was the head pastry chef for the Fairmont Hotel. In 1946 or '47, he purchased the bakery, which at the time was called the Eastland Bakery, down on Miller Avenue. He changed the name to Meier's Bakery, that was his last name, and moved in I think 1947, if I recall the family stories. So my mother at that time would have been you know, I think a freshman or sophomore in high school, so she went to Tam<sup>1</sup>. Before that they lived in San Francisco. So she came over here as the new kid and you know, but the baker's daughter. Funny, they also lived upstairs from the bakery, there was an apartment up above, I think what is now Susan Cummins' gallery, and there are offices up above, that is where they lived and where my mother spent you know, her high school years. So that is how that side of the family came to Mill Valley. My father, who is also from San Francisco, I'm not exactly sure how they met, but when they were married, they bought a house over in Strawberry in 1956 and my grandfather, my father's father retired and they moved to Corte Madera in 1957, so we were all pretty much here in Marin.

**Joan Murray:** I remember Meier's Bakery as a kid. Do you recall the year it finally closed?

**Rick Misuraca:** You know, my grandfather died in, I want to say '63 or '64. Just before he died, he was trying to lease out the business and did to you know, one of his bakers. They kept it going for a couple of years after that. The building was owned by Lockwood's Drugstore next door and they didn't renew the lease for the bakery and they expanded the drugstore to both sides there and I think that happened in '65 or '66. So that's how long the bakery was there. It wasn't just a bakery, it was also a fountain.

**Joan Murray:** I remember that, yeah.

**Rick Misuraca:** It's funny because when I was a little kid, it seemed so huge, you know. It had a fountain bar and a bunch of tables and then the bakery with all the glass cases and then behind that was into the ovens and stuff and it was just cavernous. And then I go back into Susan Cummins' gallery now and it is just a poster stand.

**Joan Murray:** It was so narrow. I mean, there really wasn't a lot of walking space between the bakery cases and the fountain chairs. You know, there really wasn't, but that's what our memories do to us.

**Rick Misuraca:** It's funny. Because my grandmother was a little bitty thing, they had these wooden crates right behind the fountain so that they could look over the counter and then behind the display cases so that they could get the change and stuff from the customers. The money used

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<sup>1</sup> Tamalpais High School

to fall in those little crates. My grandmother, the German, very clean, that was swept up every day. Well, when she'd peel them open, we got to get the change. I remember Roosevelt dimes, I mean, that's what change was then. I remember my sister and I getting the change and going up and walking, we must have been five and six or four and five, just little kids, walking hand in hand with, like 15 cents could get you into the kiddie matinee. We saw *Peter Pan*. Another nickel would get you a Nestlé's bar, so for 20 cents we'd just go off and see the movie and when it was done, we'd walk back down to the bakery. That would never happen now. But that's how it was then. We had the run of the place. We could go in the pastry cabinets, I was a fat little kid, and we could have anything. He had the ice cream, we could have whatever we wanted. In the back where he made all of his cakes and pastries and stuff, he had this big cabinet with trays and trays of the little sugar flowers or what I liked on his éclairs, he had the swirls of chocolate, he called them chocolate cigars. My earliest memory of the bakery besides the smell and my grandparents was having anything we wanted, it was just paradise, paradise.

**Joan Murray:** I can see why you would say that. Tell me what year you were born in.

**Rick Misuraca:** I was born in 1958, February. My sister is like 14 months older, she was born in the end of December in 1956. So my parents just bought the house over in Strawberry and then came my sister and I, and then my brother was born in 1961. So there were three of us in the little house over in Strawberry. Dad was shopping for a place and mom had to be in Mill Valley, well Strawberry was close. There were these new ones down below by what is now Strawberry Point School and you could get one of those for like \$11,000. But he wanted the one up above with a view of Mount Tam and he got that for like \$14,000 or \$15,000. We call it the family homestead. That was on 218 Meda Lane, is where I grew up.

**Joan Murray:** Does your family still own that home?

**Rick Misuraca:** You know, my step-mother died in, it would probably be 2004. And you know, when she died, as is so often the case with siblings who inherit a house in Mill Valley, no one can afford to buy out the others, so we had to put it on the market and we sold it in 2004. It was a pretty hot market for real estate. It's still there and the person that bought it bought an acre and a half of open space behind and I don't know if they are going to doze that and build houses behind or I'm not sure what they are going to do, but it's still there.

**Joan Murray:** That's great. So your maternal grandparents were bakers in town. What did your parents do?

**Rick Misuraca:** Well, mom, at the time, it was the wonder years, mom stayed at home and dad went to work and that's just the way it was. My father was a car salesman and worked in the city and a lot of it was for, well, the way it works in the auto trade is, you work one place and then move to another and move to another. So Chevrolet or Ford or Toyota, there are a whole bunch of places my father worked. He had his own businesses for a while, owned a couple of car lots, that sort of stuff. He was a working guy, that's just the way it was. It's so funny too, you know that show, *Mad Men* where all the guys have the suit and tie, starch white shirt, you know, the business man with the tumbler, if I hear a tumbler shaking ice cubes, that's my father, with the tie and the cigarette, that was him.

**Joan Murray:** A product of his times.

**Rick Misuraca:** He was, just that. It was that same, post-war, 1950s and '60s, America is the best nation in the world, prosperous, the American Dream, yeah.

**Joan Murray:** So you went to school, did you go to Strawberry Point School?

**Rick Misuraca:** I did, I went to Strawberry Point School, but I was only there I think through second grade. Then, my father, well, at the time very Catholic, we went to St. Hilary's. My sister and I went to St. Hilary's. My brother stayed at Strawberry for a couple of years, he was much younger. I was there until seventh grade and then in eighth grade I went to Edna Maguire, which I was the last eighth grade middle school graduating class from Edna Maguire before the new middle school was built. So that was where I went to school. So it's funny, in my wanderings, when I was going to St. Hilary's and a lot of my friends were over there, we were all over that half.

**Joan Murray:** On the other side of the highway.

**Rick Misuraca:** We were on the other side, all over. You know, this is an age, too, where when you got off school, you didn't come home. If you came home, your mom would say, what are you doing home? So I had a Stingray, one of those little, you know, banana seat with aissy bar, so we were gone. So I explored all over there. In eighth grade when I started coming over here and got a whole bunch of new friends, then, the best expression is, we were feral little children, we were just gone. It's so funny back then, when you are through the neighborhoods and growing up in Strawberry, you could jump any fence and play in any backyard and generally as you did that, you collected more kids along the way and you'd run in packs. You just ran in packs everywhere. So it was boundless. So when you are up into the hills in what is now open space, or whether it is private property, we didn't care, you know, we are off in the hills most of the time, or building forts and catching snakes and looking for Indian stuff, that's just what you did when you were a kid growing up here, it was a blast, it was great to grow up here.

**Joan Murray:** Yeah. Tell me more about growing up and how it was special. I know how much you love Mill Valley.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, yeah. I think it was because of the time that I grew up when you were expected to go outside and not be home that I had an opportunity to explore my environment. And when you do that, you know, you find your favorite spots. That's where I had my fort, and that's where the rope swing was. So a lot of my, you know, I use this term a lot, "love of place," that I have for this town, comes from all of the fun that I had all over this place, and just boundless exploring, you know. Then when I got into seventh and eighth grade and high school years, it was the mountain<sup>2</sup>, we have the mountain. We combed that thing from top to bottom, one side to the other. That was also the era where, well, I started backpacking and all of that, the mountain bikes, the clunkers. They weren't mountain bikes, they were balloon-tired Schwinn's and we'd take those. That was at a time where you'd be on a trail on a bike and people were

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<sup>2</sup> Mount Tamalpais

going, “What?” It was so non sequitur for people to see a bicycle on a trail. Now they are everywhere, but back then — so we were all over this place. So kind of my love for this place comes from the fact that I was absolutely untethered from running all over time.

**Joan Murray:** So you went to Maguire after St. Hilary’s and then you went to Tam High.

**Rick Misuraca:** Went to Tam, yeah.

**Joan Murray:** What class were you taking?

**Rick Misuraca:** I graduated in three years. I’ll get into that, but I was there from ’72 and graduated in ’75. When I was there, well, it was the early ’70s, which was a lot of fun to be in Marin in the early ’70s and in this town in the early ’70s, but they had a couple of alternative programs there. One was community on location, and community on location is, you know, they would, you’d do backpacking trips and you’d do wilderness experience stuff and you’d do things other than traditional education. So my summers were spent backpacking in community on location and I’d get credits for it. Field biology and I think sociology a little bit. So I did that every year and that helped me graduate early. The other alternative program was called interrelated studies, IRS, and that alternative program, you could work at your own pace and do your own things. Because I’ve always been a little bit energetic and driven — have you noticed that? [Joan chuckles] — I took seven classes and you know, so I was there for early credit and late period and the extra credit things and the backpacking stuff and after three years I realized wow, I have enough credits to graduate. But it was a lot of fun. Boy, what part of high school fun do you want me to talk about? It was all fun.

**Joan Murray:** Well, it was such a time capsule, it is not something that is happening today, it happened for a really brief period of time.

**Rick Misuraca:** You know, it definitely shaped the town. Okay, so ’60s were — every father was a commuting guy and every mother stayed at home and it was that traditional starched white shirt and tie kind of town. But then the ’70s happened and it was this influx of Haight-Ashbury when that all moved over here after the Summer of Love. It was a lot of heart and a lot of music. There was also the conservative part then, I don’t want to say this whole town went hippie, because it wasn’t. You know, you had things like, the song *Mill Valley*, that kind of thing, and if you ever see the video, the floppy leather hats they are wearing and the big flowers, it was that. This was kind of like an artist enclave. There were rock stars all over the place and music happening and it was that alternative culture that got infused here like there was a different way to look at things. That kind of carried through into the ’80s with that flavor, but then that was the Reagan era when the money started coming in and that was when things changed. When that aspect of Mill Valley happened —

**Joan Murray:** Money coming from the outside, not because of Reagan.

**Rick Misuraca:** Right. I mean, it was an affluent period, and this was a desirable place. It was a desirable place because I mean, it’s gorgeous, it was a beautiful place. But also there was that bit of alternative hippy, new-age looking, it was artistic and creative. So a lot of the people that

were attracted here because they had the money to buy here, well at that time it was affordable, or more affordable. You started attracting you know, moneyed people with a different sense of you know, politics and perspective on art and ecology and the environment, a lot of things. So that started changing the flavor of the town too. So it's changed a lot. People go, when did it change? It's always been changing, you know. When did it start changing? Boy, you know.

**Joan Murray:** It's evolving.

**Rick Misuraca:** I'm sure if this was the time of my father and I was getting this and I'd been in town as long as I have, I'd say, well, I remember when the track houses came in after World War II, well, that changed. Or if I'm saying, well I remember when this was all dairy farms and the dang train came in. So it's always been changing, it's always been evolving.

**Joan Murray:** So when you left Tam in 1975, where did you go from there?

**Rick Misuraca:** Okay, so there I am, 17 years old, graduated from Tam, you know, and my father says, for whatever, god, I love my father, I mean, I was pretty academically inclined, straight As, high GPA. My father's response to me graduating this early was, we got to get you into the trades. And so I was a sheet metal worker in South San Francisco and right after I graduated, like two or three weeks after I graduated, I am down in a sheet metal plant in South San Francisco stamping out metal things on a 10,000 pound break and tapping holes and working. And I did that for about, most of the summer. And they had a work slowage and they laid me off. Imagine this job. The forklift comes in and drops a sheet metal off with you and slowly you work your way through that palette and you load it up on the palette next to you and as soon as you are done, the forklift grabs the palette of finished pieces and grabs another palette. I mean, it was hell. It was horrible. I mean, I learned a lot, but boy. So I got out of that and I took a job for Marin Hot Tubs, which was run by a guy named Peter Edminster. He was the guy who owned, or was a partner in Water Street Hardware in Sausalito. This was like 1975 and the hot tub boom of Mill Valley and I'm building tubs and decks. Oh my, that was fun. I saw some places in town that are just incredible. We would be all over southern Marin in the hot tub era.

**Joan Murray:** So what you didn't already know about Mill Valley, you probably were able to see then.

**Rick Misuraca:** Well also being a local boy, I knew my way all over town, so when I'd have a call up on Mirabel, I'd know where it was. Building a tub and a deck up on Cascade Canyon, it was familiar to me. That's kind of where I learned, well, I knew carpentry before, but I learned a lot about building stuff. Back then the tubs were all redwood, so I was a cooper. I did that for a while, but I was always the academic, I wanted to go back to school.

So I went to College of Marin, I must have started there in '76. I was an engineering major because that's what I thought I wanted to be. I mean, when you are 18, you don't know what you want to be. You know, I was mathematical and science, that sort of thing. After a couple of years of that, I figured out that that's the most boring way to make a living. So I wound up with a degree out of there in physics and chemistry, a two-year degree. All my applied classes, I was going to go on to be an engineering major somewhere else. So I had also this science and math.



And then I decided I wanted to get into something else, something more connected to the earth. So I decided to become an agricultural science major down at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. And that was a culture shock for me because I'm not an aggie, I didn't grow up on a farm, and a lot of the people in ag science<sup>3</sup> there did. It was kind of geared towards corporate production agriculture and becoming a teacher, an ag teacher. It didn't really appeal to me. So I figured that out pretty quick. It was funny, at the time I was living in the dorms. Now when I was here in Marin, in Mill Valley, going to College of Marin, I had built a little cabin behind my folks' place with a view of Mount Tam and there I was off in the woods, all to myself and it was wonderful. And then I graduated and I'm stuck in a dormitory with a roommate and I'm there brushing my teeth and looking over and there's a line of sinks and 10 other guys brushing their teeth. And they were all like 18 years old right out of momma's purse strings and it was not the place for me.

So a buddy of mine says, "I got a room upstairs, you can have a whole attic for only eighty bucks" — he was going to Humboldt State — "so why don't you come up here." So I did an inter-department transfer and I went to Humboldt State for a little while as a botany major. That's where I took, it was a — Humboldt, the weather was horrible, you know, the women were hairier than I was, it was just — what am I doing here? But I learned, I took like forest pathology and dendrology and I took a lot of great classes that they offered up there. I was only there for a little bit but I got to go back to San Luis Obispo.

I should say this, one big part missing, during my whole time in high school, during actually from when I was in eighth grade, I had a little mow route in the neighborhood where I'd mow yards. When I was a freshman in high school, we had an ad in the *Mill Valley Record* where I would do landscaping and gardening, you know, and weeding and clearing and that sort of stuff. And then I built up a client basis, so when I was in College of Marin, through high school and College of Marin, I made all of my money working in landscaping. So there I am working in landscaping, loving it and going to school to learn engineering and bored to death, right. So then I wanted to choose my profession and I go in ag science because I am so good at landscaping and growing things, and that didn't work out. It didn't happen until I was a botany major up at Humboldt that it was like wait a minute, I am doing all of this academic crap that I hate and in the meantime making a living in something I love, why don't I go to school and get a degree in horticulture that I love, and from that point on, I went there and just dove in and was absolutely, because of all my years working, the classes were just easy for me. Plant material classes, I knew all these plants, I'd been working with them for years. Construction detail, building the hot tubs, decks, and fences, I have that down.

So it was just, that was a wonderful time in San Luis Obispo. Now college total took like six and a half years, but it's a lifestyle, not just an education. Plus I was putting myself through school, no help from the folks, working for landscape contractors and nurseries and whatever. So that was my academic career and finally after a while I figured out horticulture was my true passion, and still is. So that's how that happened.

**Joan Murray:** So you graduate from Cal Poly and what comes after?

**Rick Misuraca:** I always thought that I would get my own contractor's license and go into business for myself. But they had on-campus interviews for seniors, right. In my profession, in my area, there were all these landscape maintenance firms, big ones, that were having these

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<sup>3</sup> Agricultural Science

interview sessions. I signed up just because. Out of that I got three job offers. One in San Jose, I forget what the company was, one in Denver working for True Green, and one for Cagwin and Dorward here in San Rafael. So it's like, "Hmm, San Jose, Denver, Marin, gee, I think I'll move back to Marin." And that was like — I had one week from when I graduated from college, I did a little river trip on the Colorado and then boom, I started working. When Cagwin and Dorward had me initially, this is June of '82, I was their supervisor trainee. They had me running their East Bay operation and for a couple of months I was down in Daly City and they were bouncing around the different Marin contracts. Well they had a contract for the maintenance on the city of Mill Valley. That was at a time where the city thought they would save money by going out and contracting their services. So that's when I came here. They had lost their supervisor for the Mill Valley contract and it's like well, I know Mill Valley. So I came here in, I think it was September or October of '82 is when I started working essentially as the park supervisor but on a contract. Right at that time, the city wasn't particularly happy with a lot of aspects of contract services, it's very narrow what you can do and there are always special needs that you want that aren't always in the contract. Oh, you gotta prepare for the Dipsea Race, that's not in the contract. Or, it just wasn't as flexible as the city needed. So they decided to go back with an in-house crew. I was a shoe-in. So I started with the city in November of 1983 is when I started actually working for the city, but I was doing that job for over a year before that.

**Joan Murray:** You know, I'm going to back up a little bit so I don't miss anything.

**Rick Misuraca:** Yeah, I'm just rambling.

**Joan Murray:** No, you're doing just fine. I'm curious, all this time you have grown up in Mill Valley and having been downtown and walking to the Sequoia Theater from Meier's Bakery, you would have seen and known Mill Valley characters. So tell me some of the people you remember.

**Rick Misuraca:** Well, I remember when we'd go shopping, and of course mom shopped at Mill Valley Market because when you buy your groceries, you go to Mill Valley Market. Behind the counter was John Cain and then the butcher department, everyone knew my mom, she was like the local girl, everybody knew Mom. And so I remember that they'd roll up little pieces of baloney or salami and give it to me from behind the counter. Like that happens today! And I remember my grandfather's friend that ran — it must have been Brown, that's where you would buy your appliances. I remember my grandfather saying, you know, well you have to buy from your neighbors, the shop local concept. Back then, it was not just a matter of respect for your neighbors but it was also just how things were done here. If you wanted your shoes, you went to Mosher's Shoes. If you wanted an appliance, you went to Brown's<sup>4</sup>. If you needed anything, it was either Tam Hardware or Varney's, but you didn't go anywhere else. I am trying to think of the people, I mean, I knew all of my mom and dad's friends around here, but the local characters meaning the movers and shakers and something like that, I don't remember.

**Joan Murray:** Do you remember people who would be around town, for instance?

**Rick Misuraca:** Well, there were a couple that I know. All the names come rattling back.

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<sup>4</sup> Brown's Furniture

There was a sweet lady that was my grandfather's friend, Minna, I don't know Minna's last name, but she lived up there on Lovell Avenue and we always used to go up and see Minna. Then my mom's best friend was Carol Wilson and I think her maiden name was Cavalli.

**Joan Murray:** Carol was on the Mill Valley Historical Society board for some years and she helped with the oral history project.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, there you go. She's old Mill Valley. She told me one time that some family wedding document has John Reed's signature on it. Now that's old Mill Valley.

**Joan Murray:** Her father built their home on Grove Street in Mill Valley so yeah, she's been around.

**Rick Misuraca:** Yeah, she was my mom's best friend.

**Joan Murray:** How lovely to know.

**Rick Misuraca:** Yeah. Which another thing, my mom died in '69 of cancer and she was I think 37 years old or something, just unconceivable at the time, now to think back, but you know. Then my father remarried and I have another half-sister Mia, who now lives in Brooklyn, a Mill Valley girl in Brooklyn, but she's happy, so whatever. Got a little off track there.

**Joan Murray:** That's okay. I had asked you about characters.

**Rick Misuraca:** Yeah, let me think.

**Joan Murray:** Not just the ones growing up. There are people who you appreciate or who you, even from last year, I mean, there are —

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, yeah. From the time I started working here, because of what I do and who I am, yeah. I couldn't, if I started dropping names of all of the people I have worked with and dealt with in town, every mayor and councilperson who has ever, and commissions and that, and all the local color and the movers and shakers and the coach and sports team affiliates and anybody that had a tree in front of their house has talked to me at one time or other. So I know most, I won't say everybody in town, but —

**Joan Murray:** Pretty close. Well, you know, what we didn't say, and what future readers and listeners will want to know is that you recently retired in February of 2013 as the Operations Superintendent for Public Works and Parks in Mill Valley and so you told me recently that you worked under six different city managers.

**Rick Misuraca:** Six, yes. Vern Hazen, Doug Dawson, Don Hunter, Anne Montgomery, Wayne Bush for a little bit, and then Jim McCann. So yeah, that was, and I didn't know Vern Hazen very well, met him. My big interaction with him was change the mow schedule, don't mow outside his office. But then Doug Dawson, he was a pretty amazing guy. He was probably one of the best city managers. I don't know if you had any interaction with him, but he had this

presence and this authority and he was very contemplative but his calls were always irrefutably right, you know. Amazing. And at the time when Doug was city manager, Don Hunter was the director, he was my boss, the director of Parks and Recreation. Don's a local boy, you should get his oral history too.

**Joan Murray:** I remember him saying he grew up on Ryan Avenue.

**Rick Misuraca:** He grew up on Ryan at a time where they used to play ball on Blithedale. What does that tell you, they used to be able to play ball on Blithedale. It was a different time. But you know, Don was — if Dawson was the best, Hunter was the most successful. Boy I'll tell you, local boy charm, he got the center built, he got parks back from a contract to an in-house crew, built the community center, built the relationship with Friends of Fields that got all our athletics fields built, all of the recreation programs. Not only as director of Parks and Rec but then director/assistant city manager and then as city manager, I mean, his focus on and loves of park and recreation carried through his entire tenure here and did some amazing stuff. So I call him coach.

**Joan Murray:** That's great. You said you started working for the city of Mill Valley officially in '83. I'm curious, do you have any idea what the budget was, maybe you remember the number?

**Rick Misuraca:** Boy. When I first came in-house, the contract included two old union employees, Danny Duarte and Al Peze. Danny and Al were city employees before the contract, they were retained during the contract, and rehired back after the contract. So when I first started as the city's park supervisor, I had Danny and Al. It was me and two other guys and that was it. We were also responsible not only for mowing but dumping all the trash cans. So I would dump all the downtown garbage cans and then mow lawns. And also I should — at that time we had the field at the middle school, not Friends Field, it was funky and built on the dump and all settling, it was awful. We had Hauke Park, there was no Bayfront<sup>5</sup>, no dog run, there was none of that. That got built when I got here but there was none of that. There was Boyle Park and a couple of the neighborhood things and that sort of thing. We'd just mow it and move on. The amount of facilities we had and the quality of the facilities we had was pretty low, pretty minor, you know. Then it became apparent that we still couldn't keep up with three guys, like that's a surprise, so we got a fourth guy and at the time it was Vince Chula, who still works for the city, by the way. In fact, you go through the city and most of the people that work in the operations crew worked for me at one time or another. Anyway, then I had four and then we got the Bayfront, I hired another half a guy. And then the Bayfront and there were some improvements, the dog run started getting up and then I got five guys, you know. And now I think the crew is up to six parks workers and a supervisor.

**Joan Murray:** It's interesting because there is more than just that to take care of compared to some years ago. For instance, the large part of the median on Miller Avenue from Camino Alto all the way back to Valley Circle, all of that at one point was bus parking and it was not planted with trees and lawn.

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<sup>5</sup> Bayfront Park

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh yeah. I remember, we're going back, but when they ripped up the train tracks, remember, it was dirt. With a drainage ditch running in the middle of it with a bunch of horse tails. Oh yeah, I remember that early, early on, driving down Miller Avenue. They had done that median in front of Tam, the grass median with the poplar trees. You know you are old when the trees are at the end of their lifespan, you know. Anyway, that dirt area, that got landscaped. Oh, a whole bunch of things have been improved.

**Joan Murray:** And then the relatively new landscaping from Miller over to Almonte, which is just gorgeous.

**Rick Misuraca:** Thank you, I did that.

**Joan Murray:** I know you did, I'm really impressed. I saw the guys working on that the other day. So there is just so much more to do than when you started.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, absolutely. It's funny, because one success builds on another builds on another. When you are passionate about what you do, it makes the job really easy. So it was apparent that you know, my department had the capacity to do a lot more and do it well, so there was no hesitation about developing more, building more fields, building more medians, improving parks and playgrounds, all of that. So we kind of — in my tenure here, rode a wave of park improvements. When I think of Old Mill Park or Freeman Park, it was that Eisenhower administration galvanized monkey bar stuff.

**Joan Murray:** That's all there was at Old Mill Park.

**Rick Misuraca:** That's all there was.

**Joan Murray:** There was a slide and a swing.

**Rick Misuraca:** Actually, that is the swing mom pushed me on, so I kept the swing, but I rebuilt the Old Mill, I took the old pieces of the mill and made a little sandbox around it. That swing, right, was just mounted in dirt. So if you fell off the swing, you didn't even hit sand. So that's what I started with here and definitely not what I left with.

**Joan Murray:** You know, I wanted to ask you about the Old Mill project. I think that is probably one of your favorites and it's also something that I think a lot of people know you for, for having redone Old Mill. Talk a little bit about that and how that came about.

**Rick Misuraca:** You know, so there I am, I was like 24, and now I am the park supervisor for Mill Valley, oh boy, you know.

**Joan Murray:** This would have been what year?

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, '82, '83.

**Joan Murray:** Okay.

**Rick Misuraca:** Where you know, all this stuff is my responsibility. It's funny, the Old Mill for everybody is just something you drive by and you know. Maybe you came by and you looked at it. But then when it became my job to look at it, it was all rotting. The beams that they put in to replace the beams that were damaged before were funky old fir beams that obviously came off of like a boat pier or something somewhere and they were falling apart and it was obviously not long for this world. So I brought it up to Don and said, "Hey, we got to do something about the Old Mill." And you know, his response, which was kind of indicative of how he was with me was, "Great! Run with it, Rick!" So I did. And I did a bunch of research and found out that a tree fell on it in the '60s and they redid all this stuff. And you look at the old historical photographs that I dug out of the History Room and you could see sort of a progression of these goofy fixes, chunk of concrete for one of the rotting piers, these metal straps to hold the old mortis and tendons together. So from there, I started applying for grants, didn't get it. Then I started seeking some professional advice from not only the state historical society but from you know — there is one guy that I got, a timber framer, taught me a lot of stuff, and then we hired an architect, Dan Peterson, who had some work and experience in historic restorations. He did Fort Ross, 1830s vintage redwood, he was versed in it. So I worked up a proposal and floated it to the city council as a capital improvement project and at the time it was like \$80,000.

**Joan Murray:** That was a lot of money.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, back then it was a lot of money, but don't do anything and the Old Mill falls. In the meantime, while this was going on and I knew I was going to rebuild it, I started taking every redwood log that came down in a storm and I started stockpiling those for the project. It was apparent you are not going to get one foot by one foot beams 20 feet long from the lumberyard. So when the project went underway, we milled at the wood for the thing. You know, that's where I learned how to ax timbers.

**Joan Murray:** That had to have saved thousands of dollars, just thousands and thousands.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, yeah. For the main beams — and the main beams of the Old Mill are one foot by one foot, 48 feet long, so we had to buy the trees and mill the wood for that, so it was very exciting. It was very exciting. And it took, boy, I started when I first got there and I think we didn't get it done — I was working for six or eight years on that project before it finally got finished. It needs a new roof, by the way. You know you've been here a long time when the roof that you put on — you know, you put a 25-year roof on something and then suddenly it is 30 years later.

**Joan Murray:** I know that was mentioned to me fairly recently that that needed to go on the list.

**Rick Misuraca:** Yeah, it does. It's a funny thing too. If you look at the historic photos, the original is this really coarse split shake roof. You can't get that. What we put on there, the only thing we could find when we rebuilt it were called barn shakes that were really thin. But that's not historically accurate. So I started stockpiling wood to split shingles. Now that would be a labor of love. But yes, it does need a new roof; throw that on your list.

**Joan Murray:** What other projects, I know there is this wonderful bench at the golf course.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh gosh yes, my projects. I'd like to do about one construction project with the guys per year is what I used to do. At the time, that was like, there are little steps. Here is another thing, you've been here too long when you got to redo the things you did originally. But there's a little stairway up to the golf clubhouse one year that we did, and the bench at Cascade Falls one year I did, and then worked on some of the other SLPs that have since been replaced.

**Joan Murray:** SLPs being?

**Rick Misuraca:** Steps, lanes, and paths. Yeah, you know. We could get into a chat about those, that has been a big, not only focus and responsibility for me, but I've had a lot of fun with steps, lanes, and paths.

**Joan Murray:** And a really important part of restoring our heritage and in terms of making shortcuts and safe routes to schools and evacuation routes.

**Rick Misuraca:** Which everyone in Mill Valley identifies with, values and loves, except when it goes behind your house. You know. I mean, we just ran into that the other day.

**Joan Murray:** We did. But as we are sitting here in my living room at 97 Locust Avenue, we are right next to a path. We love it. Occasionally someone will come from the 2am Club in the middle of the night and come by, but other than that, it's really been a pleasure to be able to use it.

**Rick Misuraca:** Oh, absolutely. It's funny, because for years as I am developing these, people have these preconceived ideas engrained into their lives and then after I build them, consistently they come back and tell me how wonderful it is. I've got a lot of anecdotes on that one. It's funny that what is originally viewed as this horrible intrusion into their lives is now not only a community asset but something that they absolutely love. To walk out your door and be able to get from street to street to street without ever getting in your car, which is the way this place was laid out.

**Joan Murray:** Right. Now that you've retired —

**Rick Misuraca:** Is that what this is?

**Joan Murray:** I think so. I know that you are still involved in the construction of two SLPs.

**Rick Misuraca:** Three of them.

**Joan Murray:** Well, there is one between Greenwood and Hillside.

**Rick Misuraca:** And then Greenwood and Woodbine, and then I'm also working with Eagle Scouts, in fact, I'm going to be there next week and the weekend after with another phase up on

the Blithedale Park, Marsh Drive to Ralston stretch. And Victoria Talkington and I are meeting with a group of boy scouts in Larkspur who are looking for Eagle Scout projects and we are going to inspire them to do some more steps, lanes, and paths development here in town.

**Joan Murray:** Great.

**Rick Misuraca:** So you know, there's that. Then there's my involvement with the Friends of Fields. I'm going to help them, the school district, when they expanded out on Edna Maguire and they rebuilt that campus, they had to put all their portables on the Alto Field, which we just redid two or three years ago. I've offered the school district, they don't really have the skill set to restore that back once they get all their portables out, they have to restore that field, so I'll work on that. Then there's the Bloomathon and I'm trying to figure out how they can keep moving forward.

**Joan Murray:** The Bloomathon is a local organization that works on beautification, mostly through planting and some litter cleanup.

**Rick Misuraca:** It's funny, that's one of the things when you go back in the *Mill Valley Record*, in 1985, there I am out there planting on a median with the original two Bloomathon ladies, Karen Foss and Katherine Robinson, oh my gosh, names. Anyway, there has been a whole series of things that people don't even know that Bloomathon did. There is a line of maple trees along Presidio. There is a rod iron railing around those planters in the plaza, Bloomathon did that. Benches, the marsh, everybody thinks they just do daffodils, but there has been a lot more than that that they have been involved with. God love them, we are all getting older and need some new blood and I'm not sure how I can help but I'll try. But there are a bunch of things in town that I get roped into.

**Joan Murray:** I know. And that's pretty unusual for someone who is retired from a position to come back as a volunteer and that certainly demonstrates your love and passion for this town and I know that I'm not the only one who is really appreciative. So thank you for that. If there is anything about your time here, whether it was growing up here, going to school here, working here, what would you like to be remembered for?

**Rick Misuraca:** Boy, you know, if I pull this off right, if I can pull it off, is all set in place all the mechanisms, the baseline, if you are trying to culture this in a petri dish, the right mix in an agar so that we can grow a new me and all that I did and I can be forgotten, that's what. If they ever put a plaque with my name on it, I want to be installed face down. I'm not really interested in legacies and that sort of stuff. It's kind of, because everything that I did and I do, I did in the moment when I did it and for the joy of doing it. It's not really what I want to be remembered by. When you are liberated from *what's my legacy going to be?*, you get to do a heck of a lot more. So that's what I'm doing. So what do I want to be remembered for, I just don't care.

**Joan Murray:** Well, I want to thank you for that and for the time that you have taken to talk to me today and it'll be fun to read your oral history and to listen to it.

**Rick Misuraca:** Okay. Thanks.