

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**

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

**LARRY CRAGG**

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

**© 2015 by the Mill Valley Public Library**

TITLE: Oral History of Larry Cragg  
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz  
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 15 pages  
INTERVIEW DATE: September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

In this oral history, guitar repairman and multi-instrumentalist Larry Cragg recounts a life engaged in two of the most important cultural scenes that took shape in Mill Valley during the 1970s: music and mountain biking. Born in Chicago in 1948, Larry first came out to California in 1967 for the Monterey Pop Festival. He recalls experiencing a powerful sense of belonging on that visit, prompting him to make the permanent move west later that same year. Initially landing in Oakland, Larry soon moved across the bay to Mill Valley, where he unexpectedly discovered his vocation when he started working at the newly opened Prune Music, a landmark in the musical history of Marin County. Larry recounts his earliest paid work as a guitar repairman assembling Charlie Deal's signature toilet-seat guitars; and he vividly evokes the ambience of Prune Music throughout the 1970s with its "infamous back room" and impromptu jam sessions — a space of encounter and creative ferment. Larry tells stories from his 37-year tenure as Neil Young's guitar tech and provides an insider's perspective on the origin and early development of mountain biking, or "klunking," as he and his friends originally referred to it. Throughout this oral history, Larry effectively conveys what it was like to participate in the counterculture of Mill Valley and Marin County from the 1970s on.

© All materials copyright Mill Valley Public Library. Transcript made available for research purposes only. All rights are reserved to the Mill Valley Public Library. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the:

Lucretia Little History Room  
Mill Valley Public Library  
375 Throckmorton Avenue  
Mill Valley, CA 94941

## Oral History of Larry Cragg

### Index

- 2 A.M. Club...p.5, 9  
Antique Telephony...p.4  
Argentina House...p.3  
*Bicycling* magazine...p.11  
*Black Point Cutoff*...p.14  
Bloomfield, Mike...p.5  
Breeze, Joe...p.10  
Brother's Bar...p.4, 9  
Buck Nickels and Loose Change..p.14  
Chaquico, Craig...p.12  
Chicago...p.1  
Cragg, Dorothy (mother)...p.1-2  
Cragg, Richard (father)...p.1-2, 11  
Cragg, Wende (ex-wife)...p.7-8, 10-11  
Deal, Charlie...p.3, 15  
de Lone, Austin...p.6  
Fairfax...p.9, 11  
Gravenites, Nick...p.5  
Kantner, Paul...p.4  
Kelly, Charlie...p.9-12  
Kessner, David...p.4  
Leo's Music...p.4  
Lewis, Huey...p.5  
Martha's Laundry...p.3  
Michaels, Lee...p.12  
Mountain biking (or "klunking")...p.9-10  
Old Mill (bar)...p.9  
*Outside Mariah*...p.11  
Photography...p.10-11  
Prune Music...p.3-4  
Record Plant, The...p.14  
Repack bicycle race...p.10-11  
Rose...p.3  
Santana, Carlos...p.4  
Sears, Pete...p.5  
Sister...p.1  
Smith, Randy...p.4, 6  
Squires, The...p.3  
Steele, Bill...p.4, 8  
"This Note's for You"...p.6-7  
Ukiah...p.7-8  
Vintage Instrument Rental...p.14  
Weir, Bob...p.12  
Wilmette, Illinois...p.1  
Wolf, Fred...p.9, 12  
Young, Neil...p.6-7

**Oral History of Larry Cragg**  
**September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Please note: This transcript has been reviewed by Larry Cragg, who made minor corrections and clarifications.**

**00:02 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, today is September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015. My name is Debra Schwartz. I am here on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library, and I'm sitting here with Larry Cragg, Renaissance man. Larry, thank you so much for sitting down with me and telling me your story, the many iterations of Larry Cragg. Let us start, I think, with some basic background about your family. Can you tell me about your —

**00:34 Larry Cragg:** Well, I know the family on both sides goes way back into the 1800s, they've traced that in the Chicago area for my father, and Ithaca, New York for my mom. My mom and dad were both born in Chicago, they went to the University of Chicago, and they were both born in 1917. My dad was an electrical engineer. My mom had a master's in math and music, and was a music and math teacher. She taught me piano when I was four. My mom had a dream of having a woodwind quintet in the family. She was a piano player, and a flute player, and piccolo. And my father played French horn. And so, my older sister played the bassoon and I was the designated oboe player. Anyway, we ended up with a woodwind quintet in the family, and my mom got to live out that fantasy. We would play for churches and for old folks' homes.

**01:51 Debra Schwartz:** And were you born in Chicago?

**01:52 Larry Cragg:** I was born in Chicago.

**01:53 Debra Schwartz:** What year were you born?

**01:54 Larry Cragg:** In 1948.

**01:55 Debra Schwartz:** And your sister's younger or older?

**01:57 Larry Cragg:** She's three years older, born in Chicago as well.

**02:00 Debra Schwartz:** So, your mom created, literally, her own quartet?

**02:05 Larry Cragg:** Yeah. [chuckles]

**02:07 Larry Cragg:** In 1949, my dad built a house in Wilmette, Illinois, which is north of Chicago. Evanston is right north of Chicago, and just north of that, is Wilmette. So, this a very suburbia community, very nice and just definitely Norman Rockwell time. And so, it was a good place to live.

**02:38 Debra Schwartz:** Tell me the name of your parents, if you would, and your

sister.

**02:41 Larry Cragg:** Dorothy Cragg and Richard Cragg.

**02:44 Debra Schwartz:** And they were born in Chicago.

**02:46 Larry Cragg:** In Chicago, yeah.

**02:49 Debra Schwartz:** And their families came from — ?

**02:51 Larry Cragg:** My mom's came from Ithaca, New York. My dad's, Chicago.

**02:55 Debra Schwartz:** Before that though?

**02:56 Larry Cragg:** Yeah.

**02:57 Debra Schwartz:** Their relatives?

**02:58 Larry Cragg:** Yeah.

**02:58 Debra Schwartz:** You mean they were second-generation?

**03:00 Larry Cragg:** They've been here for a long time. They've traced it way back. The family goes way back. On my dad's side, somebody in our family was involved with the Douglas-Lincoln debates and things like that.

**03:15 Debra Schwartz:** You're longtime Americans.

**03:17 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, as I said, back in the 1800s.

**03:20 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, right, okay. Well, and so —

**03:23 Larry Cragg:** And originally from England. My mom has some Danish in her too, so I've got some Danish. She had red hair. I had red hair when I was younger, I mean reddish-blond hair, and a really red beard. And so, I've got that, some Danish.

**03:45 Debra Schwartz:** So, you came from Chicago but you live in California. What happened?

**03:50 Larry Cragg:** Well, I lived in Chicago, went to one year at Milwaukee School of Engineering. It was a miserable cold winter, and Milwaukee was miserable; I was miserable. I hated the school and all the people in it. And I didn't like Milwaukee and how cold it was there, even though every weekend I was still playing in my rock band that was back in Chicago. It was very successful. I was a bass player back then.

**04:17 Debra Schwartz:** What's the name of the band?

**04:18 Larry Cragg:** It was called the Squires.

**04:20 Debra Schwartz:** Okay.

**04:21 Larry Cragg:** And so what happened was late Spring 1967 I came out here with a friend and we went to the Monterey Pop Festival, and I saw that, and people that I could really relate to, and for the first time I had experienced *vibes*. And I went, “*Wow, this is for me.*” And so, in the fall of ’67 I moved here with my friend. We got a house in Oakland. Next thing that happened was the spring of ’68, another friend of mine who lived in the same house found a place in Mill Valley up on Edgewood — way up, almost to the end of Edgewood in Mill Valley. And we moved in there for \$90 a month; we split it three ways, ’cause we were really, really poor at that point. And at that point, I was going to the College of Marin to keep my II-S draft status going.<sup>1</sup> Well anyway, what eventually happened was the lady that owned the house died and we could have bought it for — I could have bought it for \$8,000, but it might as well of been \$1,000,000 ’cause I had no money. I was very, very poor. And at that point, I had met Charlie Deal and started refinishing toilet seats for him.

**05:54 Debra Schwartz:** So, some people may be listening to this interview and not know who Charlie Deal is.

**05:58 Larry Cragg:** Charlie Deal made toilet seat guitars, and that was his claim to fame. He was a local character in Mill Valley. Everybody knew Charlie. And I had been fixing guitars for myself and my friends for years, since I was a kid. I went to Karns Music in Evanston for my guitar and banjo lessons. In the back was a little German guy, named Auggie, that used to be a violin maker who’s now a guitar repairman, and he taught me the basics of how to straighten necks and how to adjust the intonation and stuff like that. So going way back, I started working on my own instruments and my friends’ instruments, not knowing it was gonna become my profession. So anyway, I was really poor. My friend that moved out here with me, he met up with some people that owned the store in Berkeley, called Prune Music. Actually, I’d known them from before. I’d tried out for their band, Martha’s Laundry, but in the meantime, we got into another band in Lagunitas, which was called Rose. And we moved into the Big Brother house, which was called the Argentina House that had been Teddy Roosevelt’s — it was his hunting lodge.

**07:15 Debra Schwartz:** And where was that?

**07:15 Larry Cragg:** That was in Lagunitas at the end of the road. It was a huge house. And the Levi people own it now. It was a very big house, but Big Brother and the Holding Company had just moved out, and we knew which room was Janis’. And you know, it was really cool. [laughs]

**07:34:** It was a really cool place. Anyway, my friend got hooked up with these same people, David Kessner and Randy Smith, who owned Prune Music in Berkeley, and they

---

<sup>1</sup> Student deferral.—Ed.

were gonna open up a little tiny store in Mill Valley, an extension of Prune Music. So they opened up this little store on Sunnyside. Right now I believe it's a workout studio. But it was just a tiny, tiny store.

**08:04 Debra Schwartz:** By the bank there? Bank of Marin? Right there?

**08:07 Larry Cragg:** Yes, right there, exactly.

**08:09 Debra Schwartz:** By El Paseo, cross the way.

**08:10 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, yeah, right next — yeah, yeah. It was split up into two at that point. One store was called Antique Telephony. This other Mill Valley character would drive around in this old green telephone truck, and he was a hairdresser. He was an older gentleman; all the older ladies liked him. He was very handsome. Anyway, so we had the store next to that, and Leo's Music in Oakland fronted us all their trade-in guitars that were just terrible, in terrible shape. And so, anyway, my friend Bill Steele was supposed to be working at this store. Well, right when they opened, he got into a terrible motorcycle accident and was laid up in a body cast for six months, so he asked if I could watch the store until he recovered. They said, "Okay," and so I was watching the store for \$10 a day. And nobody came in. It was always empty, so I was bored. I knew how to fix guitars, so I went down the line and fixed them up one at a time, set them all up, fixed them all up, 'cause I like doing that, you know?

**09:23:** And well, Bill got better. So in the fall of '69 they opened the new store on Locust, right off of Miller, next to what was Brother's Bar. I was out of a job because my friend came back, but they said, "Well, you know, you've been fixing guitars, why don't you turn into our guitar repairman?" 'Cause they would buy guitars down in Fresno, bring them up here, and I'd fix them all up, and then they'd sell them for three times what they paid for them. These would be Stratocaster guitars from the '50s. We'd buy them for \$250 and sell them for \$650. And of course now they're worth \$55,000. But that's another story. So, I turned into the guitar repairman. I'd never thought of charging for fixing guitars, I just always enjoyed doing it. Now, all of a sudden, I was making money. So right then, right then in the fall of '69, is when literally all the San Francisco bands moved to Marin — and mainly [to] Mill Valley.

**10:33:** So now, the bands I used to go watch at the Fillmore, I'm now working for, starting with Country Joe, and then Quicksilver. And Carlos [Santana], I've been working for Carlos for 46 years now. He came in in '69 and I worked on that red guitar he played in the Woodstock Festival. So I've been his guitar repairman for 46 years now. Let's see, who else? The Grateful Dead, I worked on all their stuff. The Airplane, Jefferson Airplane; that was way cool. I would go over to Paul Kantner's house, who lived on the cliff in Pacific Heights, in the last house on the cliff, way to the west of the Golden Gate Bridge. And here is this beautiful house with like a three-story living room with windows that went from the floor to the ceiling. And you look to the right and that was the Golden Gate Bridge, and look to the left, and that's the ocean. It was just an amazing place. So I'd sit there in front of these big windows, fixing his guitars up. Once every two months,

I'd go there and work on everything. And who else? Big Brother, I worked on all their stuff. You name it, I was working — 'cause this was kind of — all the other music stores were pretty much mom-and-pop stores, and this was like a hip store, you know, and with an infamous back room that I won't go into, but —

**12:04 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, please go into it.

**12:05 Larry Cragg:** Oh, it was very smoky back there. [laughs]

**12:09 Debra Schwartz:** What we're talking about, it sort of sounds a bit to me like the old barbershop place hangout. What was Prune Music like besides just a repair shop or sales?

**12:20 Larry Cragg:** Well, it wasn't a repair — it was a guitar store, you know, and we had vintage guitars, and they were very cool guitars. But everybody hung out there. I worked for Mike Bloomfield all through the '70s 'til he died, and he would hang out there a lot. Nick Gravenites, also, he loved talking to me in my shop. And Carlos Santana jamming with Mike Bloomfield — things like that would happen and all the local — this was like the meeting place for all the local musicians. They'd be there and they'd say, "Oh yeah, I haven't seen you for months, how are you doing? What have you been doing?" And on and on. So this was, like you said, it was like the barbershop, and it was just an amazing place through the '70s.

**13:06 Debra Schwartz:** And the close proximity to the 2 AM Club, too. Yes? 'Cause I know Huey Lewis's album cover is —

**13:15 Larry Cragg:** Oh yeah, of course, sure. Huey used to come in there all the time. And, yeah, Clover — everybody used to congregate there.

**13:28 Debra Schwartz:** So, you've got kind of a hangout place with the musicians that have all now transplanted from San Francisco to Mill Valley or the Marin County area.

**13:37 Larry Cragg:** Pete Sears was in my shop yesterday. I worked for him, and he had a gig in New York today, and he had to get his bass worked on. But he was in the Quicksilver and in the Starship. Anyways, so I still work for him, too. I still work for Paul Kantner as well.

**13:58 Debra Schwartz:** Is he still around?

**14:00 Larry Cragg:** Paul Kantner? Oh yeah.<sup>2</sup>

**14:00 Debra Schwartz:** Interesting. So, Prune Music is sort of — when you think of Mill Valley back in that era, I think a lot of people identify Prune Music as part of an era.

**14:12 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, Austin de Lone would be there — everybody was there.

---

<sup>2</sup> Larry Cragg's longtime customer Paul Kantner passed away on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016.—Ed.



It was wonderful.

**14:19 Debra Schwartz:** Do you have a particular memory, a particular moment that comes to mind when you think of that scene there?

**14:28 Larry Cragg:** Oh, just so many musicians meeting there, I suppose, would be it. One story: Neil Young came in there, and looking pretty rough. I wasn't there that day — and he was looking pretty rough. He had had vocal chord surgery, and so he couldn't talk, so he was writing cards to people. And he ended up getting kicked out of the store. They didn't know who he was. [laughs]

**14:54 Debra Schwartz:** Really?

**14:55 Larry Cragg:** Yeah. Anyway, so eventually, Randy Smith, who was one of the owners — I eventually turned into an owner also — but Randy Smith was one of the owners. He was working for Neil Young, taking care of his amplifiers in the early '70s 'cause he was our amplifier repairman. I was the guitar repairman, Randy Smith was the amplifier repairman. And he was going down to Neil's ranch down in Woodside and fixing amplifiers. Well, I guess — oh, this was a tour in 1972. He was on the road with them, and Neil's main guitar, Old Black, had a really bad problem, and wouldn't go into tune, and so Randy called me on the phone. So I fixed it with Randy's assistance, I was like the surgery by telephone. So I fixed the guitar over the telephone and told him how to do that, and next thing you know, I'm going down to Neil's ranch with Randy, and this was in '73. And so I've been fixing Neil's guitars ever since. One thing led to another and then I started going on the road with Neil Young. For 37 years I did that.

**16:07 Debra Schwartz:** So, when you say going on the road, what do you mean going on the road?

**16:10 Larry Cragg:** I was Neil Young's guitar tech. For a while I took care of everybody's instruments on both sides of the stage, and eventually just Neil's stuff. He had quite a very complex amplifier setup, and it took a lot of care and feeding every day to keep that thing going; and his guitars, too. I had to go over the guitars every day to keep them in good shape, restringing them and really work on them to make sure they'd go into tune. And I was the guy in charge of all the gear.

**16:42 Debra Schwartz:** So, you're the guitar doctor?

**16:44 Larry Cragg:** I was Neil's stage tech. I was the guy that tuned the guitars and handed them to him. And one thing led to another and I got — I play a lot of different instruments, so I was like the utility guy when Neil needed a piano player, an organ player, a pedal steel player, banjo player. Every time he played "Old Man" live, I was the banjo player. And it was wonderful. It was a great thing to do. He had this band called The Blue Notes, Neil Young and the Blue Notes, in the late '80s, "This Note's for You." I was the baritone sax player in that band and thank God I played the oboe 'cause Neil asked me, "Do you play saxophone?" Here we were in Germany somewhere and he

needed an alto sax player in the band for this one song. I said, “Oh, yeah.” I’ve never touched a saxophone in my life. This has happened a lot with him where I always say, “Yes.” And I had bitten off more than I could chew. So they rented me a saxophone, which I own now, still, very nice Selmer Mark VI.

**17:47:** Anyway, that night I was playing in the band, just this one song, but I was actually playing because I could transfer the oboe over to the saxophone, and it worked. Worked great. It really did. And the same thing happened with the baritone sax as well. So, with The Blue Notes, we had this song called “This Note’s for You,” and it was a great, great video. Hilarious video. You should look it up on YouTube if you get a chance. But it got very, very high rotation on MTV, which was huge at the time, for two weeks. And then the lawyers for MTV shut us down. They said, “You can’t play this on MTV anymore,” because what it was was putting down their advertisers. It had Eric Clapton coming out for Miller and Michael Jackson coming out for Coke. So there was these parodies, these skits, all the way through this video. So we were banned from MTV, and you never guess who won the video of the year that year for MTV.

**19:00 Debra Schwartz:** No!

**19:00 Larry Cragg:** “This Note’s for You.” [laughs]

**19:02 Larry Cragg:** Anyway, so that was another life. Anyhow, so where were we?

**19:07 Debra Schwartz:** So, we got a couple of iterations. Yeah. Prune Music. But you’re really very notorious for another kind of wave — on the mountain biking.

**19:21 Larry Cragg:** Oh, yeah. Sure. Well, what happened was I moved up to Ukiah. This is another story, but lived on the land with my now ex-wife and her brother and his girlfriend and her daughter. Eight miles in from 101, on the McNab Ranch.

**19:45 Debra Schwartz:** What year is this?

**19:46 Larry Cragg:** This would be the fall of ’71, I believe. And here I’m still working at Prune Music, which I’ll tell you how that worked. But anyway, we had an army 6x6.<sup>3</sup> We loaded all our stuff to it. I’d never been there before. We loaded everything we had, drove up on top of this hill where my brother-in-law at this point had bought 20 acres — but it might as well have been thousands because there was nobody to the west of us at all and our closest neighbor towards 101 was five miles in. So we were out there all by ourselves in the middle of nowhere. And so we built a dome because the winter was coming and —

**20:33 Debra Schwartz:** No house?

**20:34 Larry Cragg:** There was nothing. There was no outhouse. There was no water. There was no nothing. Luckily, you could buy the redwood sapwood for \$40 a thousand

---

<sup>3</sup> A six-wheel army cargo truck.—Ed.

board-feet, the reject wood. 'Cause up in Ukiah, at that point, the atmosphere was always smoky because there were these lumber mills, and they would smolder their chips, and it was just terrible up there in the valley. Not where we were but in the valley of Ukiah. Anyway, they had all this extra wood that they didn't know what to do with so we loaded up the big six-by-six, which is an army vehicle from World War II, and we built ourselves a dome and then another building next to it. And that's where we were for a few years.

**21:32:** But I had a Volkswagen that I would drive in the middle of the winter. It was supposed to be year-round roads but it got so muddy up there, and the roads weren't any good. So, I had a Volkswagen and put snow tires on it, and if I got it going fast enough, I could make it by the muddy parts, I could make it all the way back and go down to Prune Music, and I would commute for a while. It was a two-hour each direction commute. Then sometimes I'd spend a few days with my friend, Bill Steele, who lived in San Anselmo, who also worked at Prune Music. He was an owner at Prune Music as well.

**22:09 Debra Schwartz:** In a VW? Like a little bug?

**22:10 Larry Cragg:** In the Volkswagen, yeah.

**22:11 Debra Schwartz:** So you were in one of those little bugs?

**22:13 Larry Cragg:** Yeah. The engine would blow up and I learned how to — here I was up in Ukiah and I was able to pull the motor myself by — I had a stump and I had a 2x8, and I would sit on the 2x8 and undo the four bolts, pull on the exhaust pipes and the engine would come down. I'd already rebuilt a couple of Volkswagen engines already. So, in the mud was not the best of circumstances, but I was so poor, I had to either rebuild it, or I wouldn't have any vehicle, and so —

**22:48 Debra Schwartz:** But why did you go to Ukiah, though? You were working. You've got jobs.

**22:52 Larry Cragg:** I had nowhere to live. Oh, here comes my —

**22:56 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. Let's take a pause here. Hang on a second.

[pause]

**23:01 Larry Cragg:** So why would I go to Ukiah? It was a way cool thing to do. You get up there and it takes a while to come down from the big city, meaning Mill Valley, which at that point was a pretty big city compared to having nobody there. The closest neighbor five miles or the other direction, 20 miles. I couldn't hear anything. And no lights at night. You couldn't see any lights anywhere 'cause we were up on a hill; and you could see that this whole valley, nobody was there. It's changed now but —

**23:36 Debra Schwartz:** What was Mill Valley like at that time when you left it? Can

you describe the ambience in Mill Valley?

**23:43 Larry Cragg:** Yeah. At eight o'clock, they rolled up the sidewalks.

**23:46 Debra Schwartz:** 8:00 PM?

**23:48 Larry Cragg:** Yep. That was the end of it. Of course the Old Mill and the Brothers and the 2 AM Club were open. And you couldn't buy gas. That was a problem. All the gas stations closed. And of course there were no open supermarkets or anything like that. So you could buy a beer at the bar but you couldn't buy gas, and eight o'clock that was it. The town shut down, long before that, but by eight o'clock, nothing was open. It was a different place. Of course, I knew all the musicians and everybody knew everybody. It was a much smaller town then; it's what I felt.

**24:32 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. So you're commuting back and forth from Ukiah, but at some point you started getting involved with the mountain biking?

**24:43 Larry Cragg:** Yes, I did. I ended up buying a cottage for very little money on top of a hill in Fairfax. And my next door neighbor, his name was Fred Wolf, and he was one of the original mountain bikers. He was good friends with Charlie Kelly.

**25:00 Debra Schwartz:** Charlie Kelly?

**25:00 Larry Cragg:** Yeah. So, he got into modifying these old Schwinn bicycles and taught me how to do it, and so I started doing it. I actually had the guy at Mill Valley Cyclery — John was his name, and Cesar who's his helper — he would build up these bicycles, they were old Schwinn bicycles, and I'd put special cranks and front derailleurs and a rear derailleur. I was the first guy to have a smaller front gear than my largest back gear. So I had lower than 1:1 ratio. They didn't make a front sprocket very small at that point. So this was one I took off of a 20-inch BMX bicycle and it was too fat for a derailleur chain, so I ground it down on a belt sander and used that. And so I could spin up the hills easily, and I have very, very low gears. Of course, some of my friends were still riding one-speeds and they just gave me all kinds of — they thought I was a wimp for having such a low gear. Of course now, mountain bikes have those little gears.

**26:17 Debra Schwartz:** What year are we talking here?

**26:19 Larry Cragg:** '74, '75.

**26:22 Debra Schwartz:** So you went from Ukiah back over here?

**26:25 Larry Cragg:** To Fairfax.

**26:26 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, yeah.

**26:28 Larry Cragg:** And of course, up on top of this hill, I was just about four minutes

away from Camp Tamarancho, which was the big Boy Scout camp, on the Marin watershed area. So, that's where I'd go bicycling. We called it "klunking" at the time, the word "mountain bike" hadn't been coined yet, so we went klunking.

**26:49 Debra Schwartz:** Who coined klunking?

**26:51 Larry Cragg:** I don't know 'cause there were klunkers and so, "Do you wanna go on a klunk?" is what Fred Wolf would tell me, and so we'd go on a klunk. There were no mountain bikes then. Anyway, Joe Breeze — a couple of versions of the story — but anyway, he was gonna make some mountain bikes, and so I fronted him a lot of money so he could buy the tubing. I know Charlie also did that, so we both did that. And so out of that, I got two of the original mountain bikes out of it. I think he made 10.

**27:28 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, didn't Charlie give money to Joe for a bike and then you also —

**27:33 Larry Cragg:** I did it also, yeah, for two. So I gave him a lot of money at that point, which, you know —

**27:38 Debra Schwartz:** How much was it then?

**27:39 Larry Cragg:** I can't remember, but it was pennies on the dollar 'cause that bicycle, one of those is in the Smithsonian now. My ex-wife, Wende, had one and I had one.

**27:52 Debra Schwartz:** And so, she was a rider, too?

**27:54 Larry Cragg:** Eventually, she got into it. She wasn't into bikes at all at the beginning, but eventually, I made her a klunker. It was a black one, I think. A Murray. Anyway, so she got into it, too, and she would go on these rides with everybody. And yeah.

**28:16 Debra Schwartz:** So you were an athlete?

**28:19 Larry Cragg:** I don't know if I was an athlete but we had this race called Repack, which ended up in the Cascades, in Fairfax. And we'd go up to the top of the hill over the Meadow Club at the tiptop of the hill there, and go ride up this fire trail. And we had timed races where you'd synchronize the clocks and send riders off one at a time. I was at the first one, and at this one corner, eventually called Camera Corner, there was a branch sticking off to the right and it hooked my right arm and turned my handle bars quickly, and I went flying over the handle bars, and it just rung my bell. I think I got a concussion. But for the rest of the week I was trying to fix guitars and I was kinda dingy. So that was my last Repack race where I rode.

**29:16:** After then, I was a photographer. 'Cause I'd been a photographer for my whole life. My dad had a darkroom in the basement so he taught me about photography. So I've

always been a photographer and so I decided — I had this Nikon camera I got in Japan when I was there with Neil in '76. So, I had this camera, a really good camera, and I started taking pictures at this one corner, which eventually was called Camera Corner 'cause I was there. And the reason I was there is because there's a sharp left-hand corner, and the bikes would kick up a lot of dust and a lot of gravel and make a good picture. Otherwise, my camera would freeze them and you couldn't tell that they are moving at all, so this was the one corner that you could really tell. And I would go over the edge of the corner a little bit, so I was in a very good position for good photography. So, most of the pictures you see about the early days of klunking and Repack are mine.

**30:19 Debra Schwartz:** In Charlie Kelly's book?

**30:21 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, most of those are mine, too. Yeah, I get credit for a few of them. Unfortunately, my ex-wife usurped a lot of my photos and we're working that out, to try to put the proper name on the photos. She used to call it, "Courtesy Wende Cragg," and now, the photos are "By Wende Cragg" and she wasn't even there for a few of the years, but that's another story. But most of them really were taken by me on Repack, I will say that, on Repack photos, I took most of them. I took some other photos of Wende up in the Sierra and they made it into *Bicycling* magazine and some posters for *Bicycling* magazine, so that was some of the first mountain biking photos. The first ones were in *Outside*. It was called *Outside Mariah*, it was a combination of two magazines, *Mariah* and *Outside*. And they made it into that in the very early '80s, I believe. And also, *Bicycling* magazine.

**31:25 Debra Schwartz:** Wow, so you just keep coming up and do things here. And so, have you been to the new bike museum?<sup>4</sup>

**31:37 Larry Cragg:** Yes, I have. And I saw a couple of photos I took. Unfortunately, my name's not under them; my ex-wife's name is. So I'm working this out. Oh gosh. But yeah, I think, "Good for Joe" is what I say, because someone had to do it — used to be in Colorado and so, I guess Crested Butte, and now is here.

**32:02 Debra Schwartz:** Well, there was a race in Crested Butte, were you there?

**32:04 Larry Cragg:** No, I was not. So, it's appropriate for it to be in Fairfax, I believe, 'cause I think back then, there was various groups of klunkers, there were some in Corte Madera, and there were some in Mill Valley, and some in Fairfax. I think most of us were in Fairfax, but you pretty much knew everybody that had a klunker. There was not very many of us, I'd say 20 total, riding our built-up Schwinns, or not built-up Schwinns, one-speed ones. Most of the guys in, I think, Corte Madera, they stuck to their one-speeds. The reason Repack was called Repack, the race, is because on the one-speed bikes, they had the coaster brake and you back pedaled to brake. Well, by the time you got to the bottom, you'd have to repack the hub, which had the brake in it, because all the grease had been exhausted on the way down because you were braking so hard. That's why it was called Repack.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Marin Museum of Bicycling

**33:15 Debra Schwartz:** Interesting.

**33:15 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, that's the word.

**33:16 Debra Schwartz:** So, can you give me some names of your friends that you were riding with just to help us to imagine who —

**33:22 Larry Cragg:** Well, you've talked to most of the people, Charlie of course, and Fred Wolf, he shouldn't be forgotten, he was certainly one of the main people that would go on klunks with you.

**33:38 Debra Schwartz:** More names? Can you think of any other?

**33:43 Larry Cragg:** Oh, I can't right now.<sup>5</sup> It's all the same guys, though, that you'll see on that klunking movie. Lee Michaels, I got him involved. Who else? Craig Chaquico from The Starship, I got him involved, and Lee Michaels, who ended up buying Prune Music from me, who was a pretty famous organ player, musician, at that time. I got him into it as well.

**34:18 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, I remember Bobby Weir on his mountain bike, when we lived down on the street. I think you've got some other musicians.

**34:27 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, him too. Sure, absolutely. He used to come and hang out in my guitar repair shop. He would spend a lot of time back there, actually. He's a great guy. But I haven't had any contact with him lately.

**34:43 Debra Schwartz:** So after the Repack era, then you continued to be working on your guitars, that's been a steady theme in your —

**34:53 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, Prune Music closed in 1985 and I built a shop here on my property in 1985.

**35:00 Debra Schwartz:** Here in San Anselmo?

**35:01 Larry Cragg:** Here in San Anselmo, right, on Center and Madrone. And it's been working out very well 'cause now I have no overhead. Before, my overhead — either I owned the store or I would fix the store's guitars for free, and they would take in the guitars for me in the front counter. And that took care of my overhead for my rent, too. So that's how it worked back then after I sold the store. But it worked out much better having my own place and then I didn't have to keep hours or anything like that.

**35:37 Debra Schwartz:** And you —

**35:39 Larry Cragg:** So, I still fix guitars.

---

<sup>5</sup> Joe Breeze, Gary Fisher, Otis Guy.—Larry Cragg

**35:40 Debra Schwartz:** You still fix guitars. So, when you look back at your time here in Marin County, can you describe what this area has given to you, what you've experienced, how it's formed you?

**36:01 Larry Cragg:** Well, I would say, learning that most of Marin is not built up. So when you go on these, well, mountain bike rides is what you'd call it now, but you get back in the woods and you realize that most of Marin is just watershed, and it's just down in the valley [where] it looks so built up, and the traffic's terrible and there's so many houses, but it's not like that. If you go to the top of Mount Tam and look out, most of Marin is not built up, and it's just — down in the valleys you see all the houses, but when you're on a mountain bike, cruising in the back on the hills and the ridges, you realize most of it's pristine. And I love it. I love nature.

**36:52 Debra Schwartz:** And do you think that when you compare it to your early childhood in Chicago, could you have imagined that you would have been heading in a — Wilmette's a lovely, suburban, beautiful place, but do you see the difference? Can you describe to me —

**37:13 Larry Cragg:** As soon as I got out here I never looked back. I thought it was so much nicer here I never wanted to go back. I don't miss the winters at all, I don't miss the muggy, hot summers — by the time I left that area my family had moved to Winnetka, which was a — and we lived on Sheridan Road in Winnetka, which was the number one street right by the lake there, and nothing but mansions. And to leave that area, very highly stuck up, very straight area, and to come out here and have the people so completely different and so much easier to get along with, I never looked back. I sure never wanted to go back.

**38:03 Debra Schwartz:** When you talk about the people of this area, how would you describe in your time, in your experiences, what the people have been like for you?

**38:15 Larry Cragg:** Well, back then I would have been described as a hippie, a dope-smoking hippie, I suppose. And so when I was up in Ukiah, they didn't like hippies up there at all, and so the police would harass us. We bought chickens, little tiny chicks, and they thought they'd play a joke on us. They were all sexed, but it turns out we got 25 roosters, not 25 chickens, ha ha ha. [chuckles]

**38:44 Debra Schwartz:** Oh my gosh. [laughs]

**38:46 Larry Cragg:** And we didn't know that and pretty soon they'd make these funny sounds as they're growing up, and then finally they're turning into roosters. We're finally realizing they're all roosters, so they're fighting and, oh, my God.

**38:55 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, aggressive.

**38:57 Larry Cragg:** Anyway, but even down here, though, the police did not like



hippies and they would really harass you. But there were also a lot of hip people down here, and this is a really good area for them and we all knew each other and smoking pot was like the sacrament. We all got together and smoked a joint, and a lot of that went on here.

**39:24 Debra Schwartz:** What's interesting is when you were talking about the music too, you've really been a witness and a participant in an era of music that is —

**39:35 Larry Cragg:** Well, yeah, to have been working on all the instruments of all these famous bands at the time, I loved it. And to tour with Neil Young for so many years, and with Nils Lofgren as well.<sup>6</sup> It was really quite an experience for me.

**39:52 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. Well, in closing I'm going to ask you a couple questions. Well actually, just one question. Is there anything that we haven't talked about today that you would like to say, anything at all?

**40:07 Larry Cragg:** Well, there's Vintage Instrument Rental, that's a company I own. And we have literally hundreds of vintage guitars and almost that many amplifiers. I don't rent them nearly as much as I used to 'cause the studio scene is pretty much dead. But I used to go down to The Plant at least twice a week, sometimes three times a week.

**40:29 Debra Schwartz:** In Sausalito.

**40:31 Larry Cragg:** In Sausalito, the Record Plant, and deliver instruments and amplifiers to various bands, and it worked out very well for me. Of course, I rented Neil Young many — like most of the back-line gear on some of the tours. And I toured with his wife Pegi Young for many years, and I, same deal, I rented almost — except for the drums, I rented all the back-line gear to them for the whole tour, so it worked out really well for me.

**41:00 Debra Schwartz:** And you're still doing that?

**41:01 Larry Cragg:** I still am doing that, yeah. And also I'm playing in a band now that I'm not touring with Neil anymore. It's called Buck Nickels and Loose Change and I'm a pedal steel player now. We have a CD out now — as of today, our second CD is being made right now. I play pedal steel, and then I play a lot of organ on it, and piano, and three saxophones, and trumpet, and dobro, and few other things on this. It's wonderful, it's a great album, great CD. Buck Nickels & Loose Change. *Black Point Cutoff* is the name of the album.

**41:46 Debra Schwartz:** Great, I look forward to hearing it. Well, I just want to say, Larry, thank you so much for sharing your many iterations, your many lives, your many mes, and all your adventures that you have so wonderfully described. Thank you for bringing to us Mill Valley of an era that many missed or maybe have been born too late to imagine. But it is a part of Mill Valley that I think is an important part to remember, so

---

<sup>6</sup> Lofgren was the guitarist of the E Street Band.—Larry Cragg.

thank you for sharing that.

**42:20 Larry Cragg:** Oh, you're welcome.

**42:20 Debra Schwartz:** And all your klunking stories and everything. Thanks for so much sharing your life.

**42:26 Larry Cragg:** Okay.

**42:28 Debra Schwartz:** All right, that's it.

[pause]

**42:31 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, so now back here with Larry Cragg, and we're gonna add on a little bit more about Charlie.

**42:36 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, back in 1969 when I was minding the store in downtown Mill Valley on Sunnyside, Charlie Deal of course would come in. And he was making these toilet seat guitars. He's famous for it; that was his claim to fame, that he made the toilet seat guitars. And you could see one on the cover of *Sports* that's hanging on the wall of the 2 AM Club, the Huey Lewis album. In the early days I was very poor, so Charlie was very into finding genuine wood toilet seats to make his guitars out of it. And so, that in a way was my first paid guitar repair gig, was refinishing toilet seats for Charlie. And I can't believe it, but that's how it was. He would find all the parts and sort of put 'em together but I would put the pickups on 'em and put the bridge on 'em and make 'em a playable guitar. So I would actually make it into a guitar you could play because he didn't quite understand where the bridge goes or how it goes or certainly how to put the pickup on and wire it up, so I did all that. So I kind of turned it into an actual guitar.

**43:56 Debra Schwartz:** So may I ask, 'cause Charlie's not here unfortunately to speak for himself, but where does his inspiration come from to make the toilet seats?

**44:04 Larry Cragg:** I don't know. He was way into it, he was into it before we had Prune Music, he'd been doing this. Of course, he had also, besides the guitar, he had a bass, and he would call it the "four flusher," he would love saying that. Charlie would say the same jokes over and over again but that was one of his favorite things to say, everybody knew Charlie.

**44:37 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, I'm sorry we didn't get an interview with him.

**44:39 Larry Cragg:** Yeah, that's it.

**44:41 Debra Schwartz:** Great.