

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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LORIN ROWAN

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

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In this oral history, musician and songwriter Lorin Rowan recounts the unfolding of his musical life and the role Mill Valley and its environs has played in it. Born in Massachusetts in 1952, Lorin grew up in a suburb of Boston with two older brothers, Peter and Chris, who turned him on to playing music at the age of eight. The three brothers formed a bluegrass band together and moved out to California in 1969, pursuing fame and fortune in the music business, and touching down in Marin County. Lorin recalls living in Kentfield, Novato, and Stinson Beach before moving to Mill Valley. He expresses his enduring passion for hiking on Mt. Tamalpais, which he describes as a both a refuge and an inspiration, and recounts his participation in Gary Yost's *West Peak* trilogy. Throughout this oral history, Lorin brings to life the music scene of the 1960s and 1970s both in Marin County and beyond, and concludes by playing a number of his original songs, including several written for his wife Bernadette.

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Oral History of Lorin Rowan
November 16th, 2016

Editor's note: This transcript has been reviewed by Lorin Rowan, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original.

0:00:01 Debra Schwartz: Today is November 16th, 2016. My name is Debra Schwartz and I am here talking with Lorin Rowan, on behalf of the Mill Valley Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society.

0:00:19 Lorin Rowan: I thought it was “Hysterical Society?”

0:00:22 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] At times. But we're historically hysterical.

0:00:27 Lorin Rowan: That is a good way to put it.

0:00:29 Debra Schwartz: Lorin, I'm about to introduce you, but my notes — there are too many things here. I'd like you to help me in describing who you are in our community, what you do — all the many facets, and places, and things. How about that?

0:00:46 Lorin Rowan: Alright. Do you want the long version or the short version?

0:00:49 Debra Schwartz: Let's just jump in.

0:00:51 Lorin Rowan: Well, I'm a musician, and that includes — I'm a multi-instrumentalist. I play guitar, mandolin, bass, piano, anything I can pick up, I'll try to play — bamboo flute — at least dabble with it, sticks, pick up sticks, rhythm. Let's see, I'm a singer. I'm a writer of, not only songs, but TV music, instrumental music. I've always been interested in world music, which means music from international places: Jamaica, the Caribbean, Cuba, Europe, Italy, France, Japan. I just love all that. I've done a little bit of acting, but I love performing, and that's another form of acting, I think. That's one of my favorite things, to perform live, and I have a couple of different avenues for doing that. And I've always sort of kept in my world, of growing up with the music business, I've found that I like to have different things going on. I've got several irons in the fire always going, so if one cools down, there's another one that's heating up. It keeps me busy and fulfilled, really, in my search for being able to find an outlet for creativity.

0:02:17 Debra Schwartz: Wow. Well, around here — and as I know you as a musician primarily with your band, and know you work with Gary Yost as well in filmmaking — but obviously, you've got a lot of interests, and you've got a lot of abilities. Let's go back though, to get some context, to the beginning. I mean, you've come from somewhere, and some people, and I'd be interested to know a little bit about your family history, and those early influences that sparked all this creativity.

0:02:51 Lorin Rowan: Well, I grew up in a town called Wayland, Massachusetts, was born in Boston. My parents were both from New England and lived in this suburban town

called Wayland, which is kind of like a Mill Valley. Now that, as Mill Valley has grown into the 2000s, the 21st century, things have changed from the simplicity of what it was, which I found similar — we'll get into that, though, with Mill Valley. But Wayland was beautiful countryside, really, with a local farmer that was a friend of ours. We had some back land that he would farm and plow and till, so we grew up with this really nice 'in the country feeling.' And my parents were musically appreciative, they used to love their generation of music, which came from like Camelot. They grew up in the '20s and '30s '40s, but they had an appreciation for music. They weren't musicians, in particular, but I know my dad sang, and my mother had learned how to play piano, so there was definitely —

And I have two other brothers — I'm the youngest of three — and music was happening when I was born, from my older brother, Peter. I guess he started, because he was the oldest and he got exposed around the Elvis Presley era. When I was born, my middle brother, Chris — we had Elvis, and we had The Everly Brothers, and we had the late '50s music. I was born in '52, so I grew up with a lot of musical influence and started playing guitar, ukulele. I started with a tennis racket, imitating, that was kind of the idea, then I got a ukulele. I remember my brother, Peter, I had put the guitar on backwards, and so only a few people play the guitar backwards, like Jimi Hendrix, Paul McCartney.

0:04:47 Debra Schwartz: Are you left-handed?

0:04:48 Lorin Rowan: Well, I guess I was ambidextrous, I think. But my brother said, "Why don't you try it this way?" And he put it the other way, and I went with that, but I started playing it [chuckles] backwards. I remember that moment, he said, "Play it this way." I went "Oh, okay." And it's sort of set up to play this way, so I don't still know how these guys play left-handed, be that as it may. So I grew up, yeah, music was just an early part, I was inspired by music from a very early age, started playing mandolin.

0:05:18 Debra Schwartz: How old?

0:05:19 Lorin Rowan: I was probably eight, nine years old, when I started to actually get into picking up an instrument and playing it, and my parents were very open about letting me do that. They didn't restrict us at all. But they always thought, "Well, you're not gonna be a musician, are you?" It didn't even come to that, at that point, in our age group, maybe more for Peter, being the oldest. And I think that talking about the generation growing up in the late '50s and then in the early '60s, and you have the Beatles, and especially for my brother Chris and me, that was a turning point. The early music I was getting exposed to, well, was The Everly Brothers, that great harmony. And then there was a lot of bluegrass, country music going on, that was coming from West Virginia, and it was getting played up in Cambridge. And my brother, Pete, being the older brother, he was 10 years older, would hear that, and he'd bring home records like that. Before that it was Buddy Holly, blues, Muddy Waters. There'd be these records in the living room, and I would go put them on when I was by myself in the house, and just go, "Wow, this is so cool."

0:06:26 Debra Schwartz: You know, I have to say, it's great when you described to me the age of your brothers by the music that they were listening to.

0:06:33 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, it was a big influence. It was great that my brothers and I, we're still very close, and we just had a bond together through the music. We all played music.

0:06:46 Debra Schwartz: And your parents didn't though, you say?

0:06:48 Lorin Rowan: My dad was a singer, a glee club singer.

0:06:50 Debra Schwartz: What's your dad's name?

0:06:51 Lorin Rowan: Paul Donovan. Paul Donovan Hamilton Rowan.

0:06:56 Debra Schwartz: And your mother?

0:06:57 Lorin Rowan: Elizabeth Wallace Richards, that's her maiden name, so she's Elizabeth Wallace Richards Rowan.

0:07:03 Debra Schwartz: Irish, yes?

0:07:04 Lorin Rowan: Mom was Scottish-English and Dad was more Irish.

0:07:07 Debra Schwartz: And in the Boston area?

0:07:09 Lorin Rowan: Yeah.

0:07:10 Debra Schwartz: So had your family been there for a while?

0:07:12 Lorin Rowan: Oh, yeah. Let me think about that. My dad's father brought his father, my dad's grandfather, over from Ireland. My grandfather, my dad's father, had worked for a farmer, for a landowner in Wayland. I don't have enough family people left that can tell me more about — I wish I did dig more deeper into that, but my grandfather was a builder. He built some of the houses on the street we grew up in. My dad grew up on that street. There was some nice parcel of land there that later got bought by the town as a protected — they didn't want it to be built on.

There was one big crown jewel on top of this beautiful meadow that you walk up to. A lot of swampland. Well, I don't know if he ever built up there, but it used to be farmed. But it was great, because there's a lot of wide open spaces. And for conservation, they bought it, it's now called Rowan Hill, which is nice. For perpetuity, it'll be a place that you can just wander. It's not like a big park where lots of people go, but if you know about it, it's just beautiful. Several acres, maybe 10 acres. You can probably walk on two or three of the acres. There's some nice trails, but you're surrounded in this beautiful,

preserved swampland, and some dryer area up on top. It's beautiful. Every time I go back east, and play, tour, I always go visit and walk around out there.

0:09:02 Debra Schwartz: Go to Rowan Park?

0:09:04 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, Rowan Hill, exactly.

0:09:05 Debra Schwartz: Rowan Hill. Have you ever written a song about it?

0:09:09 Lorin Rowan: God, I was inspired by it for years. It's inspired other songs. I'd sit up there, and play, or camp out there, and it was pretty neat.

0:09:19 Debra Schwartz: So you're raised there?

0:09:22 Lorin Rowan: Dad's family grew up there, my dad grew up there, and his mother and father. I didn't get to know them when I was little. By the time I was born, they'd already passed. Peter remembers a little bit of them, being 10 years older. And let's see. We grew up on the house that my dad had actually lived in, and his father had helped build, or had built. He built several on the street, Draper Road. It was just a great small town, and we had a local farmer, that we'd go work for as we got older, and that was always a thrill. It was the classic, get up at six in the morning — if you get lucky to be asked to work with him, he'd go, "Yeah, show up at six." You'd have the Kellogg's breakfast. He'd have the cereal. He'd have the great eggs from the farm. And you go, "Oh, I am living now. This is so exciting." [laughs]

I think my first job was weeding the corn fields. Getting paid, what, a quarter maybe, I don't know. But it was like, [chuckles] "I guess that's what I'm doing, alright." "Now, you go over there." He'd have a bunch of kids, different age groups. But that was always fun, growing up on the farm. Yeah, that was inspiring. As a songwriter, I've drawn from a lot of that. And I'll play you something in a bit, that combines a friend from the group here in Mill Valley — not to jump to that. I've always been influenced from where I grew up and nature too. It's very inspiring.

0:10:53 Debra Schwartz: When did you —

0:10:54 Lorin Rowan: And Mom, Mom's family was English. She came from a little bit more sophisticated — aristocratic, so to speak — a little more privileged than my dad, the country gentlemen kind of thing. I think he was playing polo when he met her. And they hit it off, and the rest is history. But my mother had some great uncle — an uncle that was our great uncle, it was her uncle, her mother's brother — and he used to throw a family party every September, the beginning of September. And he travelled the world. He had inherited the business of running the Fitchburg Paper Company in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, back when it was really happening more. I don't think it's still running the same way. But the textile business that my dad worked in, it was very happening back then. And I think it's changed with the times, of course.

George Wallace, you can read about him, if you look up Fitchburg. He was a philanthropist. He inherited the Fitchburg Paper Company from his dad, carried it on. But also, he was a musician, so he took to us. He thought we were the greatest. He wanted us always to bring our instruments. He always called them banjos. He played banjo. Because we had guitars. He would go, “Boys, did you bring your banjos?” We would always laugh along, “He thinks we’re playing banjos.” [laughs]

But he was great. He had magic tricks from FAO Schwarz, like really high-end magic tricks for the time, and he would put on little shows. He would bring the whole of my mother’s side of the family, her aunts and her cousins. we’d get to a lobster-clam bake at this beautiful — he had this Frank Lloyd Wright kind of designed modern house, which was really cool. When you’d walk in, you’re like, “Oh, this is so different.” But he would have the family party and he’d always say, [assuming an accent] “And now, the Rowan boys are gonna sing for you.”

0:13:10 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] Say it in the accent again.

0:13:12 Lorin Rowan: Uncle George goes, “Boys, did you bring your banjos? And now, the Rowan boys are gonna play for us.” [laughs] He looked like, maybe, a cousin of Colonel Sanders. But he was like the good looking Colonel. He had the white mustache, he was very debonair, and he was just a very giving and loving person.

0:13:37 Debra Schwartz: Do you think you may have received some of that DNA that inspired him to perform and put on events?

0:13:42 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, I do. I think it runs in — my mother’s grandmother was an opera singer in New York City. I read that about 15 years ago. And my mother kept a beautiful family album, and we still have it. It’s like the Akashic records of our life. It’s pretty neat. There’s an obituary. I went, “Oh, my god, I never realized that.” I’d probably read it before, but didn’t retain it. But as I go back and listen again, I went, “Wow.” Yeah, it came through us, and we’re like the total expert version of it, meaning that music is our main driving thing that we do, as brothers, and on my own too.

0:14:25 Debra Schwartz: Did you start a band with your brothers when you were young?

0:14:27 Lorin Rowan: Oh yeah. Peter, Chris, and I had a little bluegrass band. Chris is in the middle, so I’m just saying the age difference gives you a little different — when you’re younger, you’re not hanging out with the seniors, when you’re a freshman. Well, maybe. By then you are in high school, but it’s a big difference, until you get into your, I guess, 20s or 30s. By then, what’s five — and now it’s like 15 years difference. I have friends 15 years older and 15 years younger. You know what I mean? Times have changed that way, I think, with our generation.

0:14:58 Debra Schwartz: It all evens out later.

0:15:00 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, well, I think growing up in the '60s was an amazing time to experience the tail end of — before things got so technologically advanced, with the internet and all, which is great progress, sure. But back then, it was a whole different scene, and it was such a social thing going on, that we grew up with. You won't see that again, in our lifetime, I don't think. I think it was a great time, 'cause the music was just incredible and the transformation of social gatherings of people. Music has become such a big thing, especially for the older generations, the baby boomers. There's a world out there of music appreciation that's going on. The Grateful Dead have a huge following. Groups that are lasting longer — The Rolling Stones — it's so cool to see. It's not like, "Oh, that was just a little teenybopper thing and that's over." Even for myself, that I'm still playing music. I may not be at the height of a huge superstar act, but music is my career and I'm really excited about it.

0:16:22 Debra Schwartz: When did you leave Boston or Massachusetts?

0:16:24 Lorin Rowan: The story goes, Chris and I were playing separately, but this particular guy, David Grisman, he was in Massachusetts. He had played with Peter in the group called Earth Opera, and they had split up. But David was starting his own production company, which meant he wanted to produce some talent. And my brother, Chris, thought, "Oh, I'll go check out David."

0:16:53 Debra Schwartz: Well, for those that are listening and don't know, David Grisman is a very famous musician.

0:16:58 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. Well, he was our producer. I went to him with my own piano player friend, Bill Elliott, that we grew up with and said, "We wanna play for you," We were all looking to get a record deal. Of course, I was like 16 and Chris was 20. David had put him on a little salary, so there was this little, "Well, maybe this guy can help us get there." When I went to play for David, he said, after he heard me and my piano player, he said, "Have you ever thought of playing with your brother?" And I was like, "Well, yeah, we grew up together. We played on and off." But as I said, the difference in age group. When I was 16, I was still in school, Chris was going off to England to go try to meet The Beatles for their Apple Records. And he did get close, but he didn't get a record deal with them, which doesn't matter, 'cause we got one later. So David said, "Why don't you guys, you ever thought of playing together?" We said, "Sure." He said, "We think if you guys went together —"

0:17:57 Debra Schwartz: David said this?

0:17:58 Lorin Rowan: David, yeah. He said, "You might get a better chance at getting into the music business if you join forces as an act." And we were like, "Alright, let's try it." So that's how we started, and then we decided we were either gonna go to England, 'cause that was a happening thing — groups like Jimi Hendrix, America. You would be hearing about people going over to England and getting discovered, 'cause England was really at the top of the happening scene with the Beatles, and then just so many groups coming out of it. Eric Clapton —

0:18:30 Debra Schwartz: Eric Burdon and The Animals.

0:18:31 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, Animals. You just name it, that whole British invasion, so that in Carnaby Street, it was like there was a, “Ooh, maybe we should go there.” But then David had several years before already played with a guy named Jerry Garcia in a bluegrass context, and they’d remained friends over the years. And somehow I guess it came up for David to play on their record *American Beauty* on a song called “Friend of the Devil.” So he did get in some session work. He got flown out to California, and he came back, and he said, “I know where we should go. We should go to the West Coast. We should go to Marin County. My friend Jerry Garcia lives out there and there’s a really cool scene of nurturing music.”

0:19:20 Debra Schwartz: And this is what year?

0:19:21 Lorin Rowan: ’70. This was ’69. And so, by 1970, the fall of 1970, we did the “Beverly Hillbillies” thing. Well, we didn’t have the oil. We were going to look for the oil. We left and drove across country with our —

0:19:36 Debra Schwartz: You and your brothers?

0:19:37 Lorin Rowan: Said goodbye to Mom. Dad had already passed away just a few months before that, actually. And we went out to seek our fame and fortune on the West Coast, as we got written up in *The Town Crier* back in Wayland. It’s a local paper. They interviewed us after we had gotten a record deal when we came out here, after about a year. Well, we went back and the town was like, “Oh, we gotta interview you guys.” ’Cause we got a lot of good press. We got signed by a huge music mogul, Clive Davis, to Columbia Records, but [chuckles] *The Town Crier* wrote, “The Rowan Brothers go to the weird, wacky world of California, the weird, rootless world of California.” That was sort of the image you had from the East Coast. And really growing up on the East Coast, the Eastern Seaboard, it was a different lifestyle. I had no idea. When I heard about the West Coast music at the time, it wasn’t really appealing to me. The Jefferson Airplane came through town. I remember sitting in this club, Paul’s Mall in Boston, and the Airplane was playing. They were more pop than the Grateful Dead. Again, I didn’t really think they had a sound that was appealing to me, like the Beatles.

We were so influenced by the British invasion, of the pop songs, that was that kind of thing we were writing. They weren’t as polished. Not to say they aren’t now, of course, but it’s totally different. Times changed and they’ve evolved into this, which is nice to see things happen. But we were playing more like the Beatles music. We thought, “Okay, let’s go out. We’re going to California.” So we came out here, and we did meet Jerry Garcia on a personal level, and he was really enthusiastic about what we were doing, and he offered to play on some demos for us. We had a bunch of recordings with Marty Balin from the Jefferson Airplane, was a big fan. He ended up recording a couple of my songs — and we’re still friends to this day — and we got a record deal. We went down and met with David Grisman’s agent. They had that production team, and he was our manager,

Richard Loren. He knew David Geffen down in LA, which is another mogul, who was starting a company called Asylum Records. But Richard and David had worked in New York at the William Morris Talent Agency, in the mail room or something like that. And that's when David Geffen started, and then he went on to like, "You get in the door, and if you got aspirations, and you got drive, it looks like you can climb your way up."

0:22:25 Debra Schwartz: Now, you're how old, again here?

0:22:26 Lorin Rowan: 64. Oh, when I was doing that?

0:22:28 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:22:28 Lorin Rowan: Oh, I was 18, just turned 19.

0:22:29 Debra Schwartz: You're 18 years old.

0:22:30 Lorin Rowan: 19.

0:22:30 Debra Schwartz: And you're getting a major record deal?

0:22:32 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. Well, I got offered one when I was 15, while my brother Peter was recording with David Grisman. Just to fill you in on this funny part of the story, David Grisman and Peter were in Earth Opera. I had my own little band with a good friend from high school and her sister. She played cello and my friend, Maddie McNeil, at the time, she was a singer, and then her boyfriend, Carl, was a friend of mine, he played guitar. I started a little band around my original music and I made a little cassette. Back then, it was a cassette, or it wasn't even a cassette, it was a tape. That's right, we didn't have cassettes yet. I played it for Peter while he was working in his band, Earth Opera, and he and David shared a place. And Peter was like, "That sounds great." So he played it for his producer, and then all of a sudden one thing led to another and I got called, and they wanted to sign me to a record deal.

0:23:20 Debra Schwartz: Get out of here!

0:23:20 Lorin Rowan: And it was like, at 15, and because I had these friends, I was feeling — this is a classic example of your loyalty, right? And they didn't wanna sign the whole band, they just wanted to sign me, and have a producer come in. And I thought, at the time, "Wow, I don't know if I should do that." My brother Peter said, "Well, you still got plenty of time. It'll change your life. You might wanna just keep going with what you're doing. You'll probably get there anyway." So that was my best advice. My dad and mom flew down with me and they were like, "Oh, they wanna sign you." [chuckles] We get picked up in a limousine and taken to a great lunch. Here's the president, Jack Holzman, of Elektra Records. They had signed The Doors. They already had The Doors.

0:24:09 Debra Schwartz: This is when you're 15 years old?

0:24:10 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. And I was like, “Wow! I’m getting a record deal.” We went in and cut 20 songs, of which I have preserved on CD, in the last year. My friend, Maddie, had recorded it. These demos, I still have those, they’re probably the kind of demos you’d make — they’re acetates, which means you can only play them a few times. They’re just for quick listening, they’re not the final record. They’re like a heavy-looking version of a record. But, oh, my God, so I have it on tape, her playing it off of her Victrola, or back when we called it a Victrola, a high fidelity record player, which she recorded with a pretty good tape recorder with a microphone, so it’s actually coming from the speakers. It actually retains the integrity of the performance. But I have it, and my voice hasn’t even changed. [chuckles]

And I’ve got like 20 songs. I was writing songs that I listen to and I go, “I gotta rework that one.” Some of them I have. But it used to come to you and I think this happens a lot, when you see these young kids today — it doesn’t surprise me at all, because I think when you’re young, and if you get inspired, by the time you’re 10, 11, 12, or even younger, you’re on fire with inspiration. If that’s what you love to do, it’ll come through you, because you’re open. I think it’s probably because you’re open and you haven’t had any doors shut on you, creative. It’s not even about the doors shutting on you, but you’re kind of free. I was lucky to have a nice upbringing of family. I wasn’t poor. I wasn’t rich, but I wasn’t poor. I think that nurtured it too. But anyway, yeah, I was writing songs, my older brothers were writing songs. So to me, it was — maybe I was trying to catch up.

0:26:03 Debra Schwartz: What was it like when you came here, to be working —

0:26:05 Lorin Rowan: Well, that was the difference. We totally fell in love with — I’ve lived in Marin County my whole life, I mean, my whole second life [chuckles] since I moved out. I’ve never lived in the city. I never had to or wanted to more than live out here. The nature — okay, when we first got out here, our minds were blown. We were like, “Oh, my God, this is a totally different vibe.” We had come out to visit Peter. He’d been in a band, Seatrain, after Earth Opera. Seatrain was a California band. So I had visited the year before. He lived in Sausalito. I just remember, it was just such a different air, and the plants were different from the East Coast, and the seasons are different.

So when we came out in February here, it was like, spring was starting already and I remember the acacia trees. I’m like, “God, what are these?” And the smells. I didn’t know Mill Valley, at that point, so when I came out the next time, we first lived in a place called Kentfield. I had my dog with me, that I had grown up with, and my brother had his dog that he’d gotten — oh no, he’d got his dog out here. Anyway, it was my dog, Boswell, he lived to be 28 years old, or 18 years old, or something incredible. He basically came with me and he lived till I was 28, so that was 17 years. I got him when I was 11. So we started in Kentfield, and we started meeting people, and it was really exciting. I was so young too, at 17. I hadn’t seen much of the world.

0:27:38 Debra Schwartz: But what about school?

0:27:39 Lorin Rowan: Well, I got out of school. I graduated.

0:27:41 Debra Schwartz: You graduated early?

0:27:42 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. I did really well in public school. Both of my brothers went to private schools because my parents thought they needed that. I wanted to go too. There was this thing about private schools. It seemed so cool to achieve that, but I'm glad I didn't do it. What did I say?

0:28:04 Debra Schwartz: So you graduated at age 17?

0:28:07 Lorin Rowan: I was doing really great in high school. I tried to get in on those SATs. I did terrible on those. So the private school went, "I don't really think Lorin's —" And I went, "God, I do so great at the other schools." Those tests, I hate those tests. You go to the school, Belmont Hill, to go try to get into this thing. And so, eventually, it was like, "You know, you oughta just stay at the high school. You're doing so great there." I said, "You know what? I will." My last year in school, when I was a senior, I said, "I just wanna take the basic courses, because I'm gonna go play music. I'm not gonna go to college."

0:28:46 Debra Schwartz: So you always knew?

0:28:47 Lorin Rowan: I had to go to school for three hours a day. I didn't have to take extra courses, and the principal loved me. He endorsed what I was doing. He was like, "Lorin, that's fantastic. Your grades are great, you keep doing this." So I was like, "Wow." I felt like I had support.

0:29:09 Debra Schwartz: So at 17, you were over here and were —

0:29:12 Lorin Rowan: No, I had just turned 18, by the time I came here. Chris and I got together when I was still 17. But I was 18 when I came out here in the fall. Our dad had passed away in April of that year.

0:29:28 Debra Schwartz: Kinda young.

0:29:29 Lorin Rowan: Oh, yeah. Well, ready to go look for the fame and fortune.

0:29:32 Debra Schwartz: No, but your dad was young, wasn't he?

0:29:34 Lorin Rowan: Oh, he was 62.

0:29:36 Debra Schwartz: That's younger than you are now.

0:29:37 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. I think he had a little bit, well, when he was younger he'd had some polio in his arm. He and his sister-in-law, my father's brother's wife, they were at a cocktail party. This is what the story was. They don't know what happened, but they said, the next day she was paralyzed and he had it in his arm. It ended up in his

finger. Eventually, he got it to work, but the muscle tone, he had to keep working on that. He could still play tennis with this arm, but this [other] arm was a little, not gimpy.

0:30:09 Debra Schwartz: His left arm was a little weaker.

0:30:10 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, the muscular effect from having the polio. But my aunt was crippled for the rest of her life, paralyzed. I think it was from a cocktail party that maybe they got the virus. So it's wild. Yeah, we all got the virus vaccinations growing up. But what was I gonna say?

0:30:32 Debra Schwartz: Your dad just died.

0:30:33 Lorin Rowan: Oh, Dad died. Yeah, he died. I think he had high blood pressure and I think the diet — he definitely was more athletic when we were younger. I remember running with him 20 years before that or 15 years before that. He loved sports and stuff, but I think he had a hard time with his diet a bit. He wasn't super overweight, but they had a more of a meat and potatoes diet while we were growing up.

0:31:06 Debra Schwartz: That must have been a little rough losing your dad.

0:31:08 Lorin Rowan: Oh, it was. That was the first big death. Other people had died, a neighbor, a friend of theirs had died, that we knew. Oh, scary, right? You get scared by the thought of death. And then when he died it was a huge. But six months later we were moving out here 'cause we had an opportunity. And our mother was like, "Go for it, guys. I'll come out and visit." And she loved it too. She'd come out and visit over the years. It was great.

But we moved out here and we started meeting these great musicians like Jerry Garcia. And all of a sudden, my feelings about the Grateful Dead — it had opened my mind up, to like, "Well, this guy is so cool!" And then we started to go check out the Dead. They still weren't the kind of music that I was trying to achieve with David Grisman producing us. 'Cause we really wanted to make a *Sgt. Pepper* — we wanted to make a Beatles-quality record with George Martin's kind of integrity. That was the bar that was set by the Beatles. And we were like, "Oh, we gotta try to do something on that level." Everybody that got inspired by the Beatles, all these kids, so many people grew up going, "Well, there are the Beatles." I knew that's what I wanted to do. I was already doing it, but I definitely went, "Oh, this is it!" [chuckles] What a cool band! My God, I've never heard anything quite so much fun, and the songwriting level — it was just really cool.

0:32:31 Debra Schwartz: What's your favorite Beatles song?

0:32:34 Lorin Rowan: Jeez, I do them all, to tell you the truth. I've had three, four different Beatle bands over the years. And if anybody ever wants one, I always go, "Oh, yeah, I got one!" Oh, jeez, one of my favorites. Oh, I loved John Lennon's stuff, "In My Life." I love Paul McCartney's. I know they wrote 'em together, but you can tell that one guy wrote more of it. But Paul, I think, God, well, there are so many good ones. Oh, I

think “Eleanor Rigby” is killer. “Eleanor Rigby,” I play that with one of my bands. We call it “Eleanor Rigby Returns,” ’cause we made it an instrumental. I had pedal steel guitar in that. Rattlebox is that band. Cello, and pedal steel, and me on guitar. We do a lot of instrumental — do you call them mash ups? — which is we take the song and we put our own interludes into them. But you’ll still go, “Oh, that’s the — ” And then we’ll play the main theme of like” Eleanor Rigby” and people like it.

0:33:37 Debra Schwartz: A song with a few walkabouts, eh?

0:33:39 Lorin Rowan: What’s that?

0:33:40 Debra Schwartz: You play the main theme, but with walkabouts.

0:33:42 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, with walkabouts, right.

0:33:44 Debra Schwartz: So you’re living here, you’re working with David Grisman

—

0:33:48 Lorin Rowan: And we go down and meet Clive Davis. And then David Geffen heard it. We went first to meet David Geffen, and he wanted to sign us, and then we get this call — this is a classic music business. Clive Davis is in town and he and Geffen were —

0:34:01 Debra Schwartz: Clive Davis, for those who don’t know who Clive Davis is

—

0:34:02 Lorin Rowan: Whoa, well, he’s got — Whitney Houston was huge, but he did Janis Joplin. He was president of Columbia Records at the time. Now he’s still out there as a huge mogul, and I occasionally will send him stuff, and get a reply of: “Great to hear from you. Don’t hear the hit.” [laughs] I have a few of those saved. Now I don’t know how to reach him exactly, but he really liked us. Anyway, he heard David Geffen wanted to sign us and they were competitive in the largest sense of the word. I think David Geffen represented Laura Nyro, He got her off of Columbia Records, and Clive was like, “Wait a minute. I’m gonna — ” So Clive heard about us, and he had us come to the Beverly Hills Hotel, and we were like, “Wow.” We walk in, and there’s Georgie Jessel, and there’s a guy, like in the “Call for Philip Morris,” the bell boy dressed like —

0:35:03 Debra Schwartz: You know the uniform.

0:35:04 Lorin Rowan: “Call for Philip Morris!”¹ [laughs] And it’s Georgie Jessel. I’m like, “That’s just Georgie Jessel!” How did I know that? I’d seen it on the *Ed Sullivan Show* or something, or some comedy show. “The Beverly Hills Hotel. Clive wants to meet you in the Polo Lounge.” We’re saying, “What?” So we sat in a room with a grand piano, not like that, but a grand piano, and just played him acoustically for about a half an hour And then, “I’m signing you guys. We wanna sign you.” We were like, “Well, David

¹ Lorin refers Johnny Roventini who appeared in advertisements for Philip Morris cigarettes.—Editor.

Geffen's already offered us \$25,000." He said, "I'll give you 50." This wasn't us talking, this was our managers, our manager and David Grisman, our team. We said, "Well, we wanna use our guys." And, usually, Columbia, at the time, you had to use their engineers. It was stricter. So we had such a great opportunity there, we got to do it all ourselves.

0:35:52 Debra Schwartz: And what was your band called then?

0:35:54 Lorin Rowan: We were The Rowan Brothers by then.

0:35:57 Debra Schwartz: The Rowan Brothers.

0:35:57 Lorin Rowan: But before that, while we were working on it, we thought we'd call ourselves Holy Smoke. And then we had these two other brothers that played bass and drums. I think what it was is that our manager, David Grisman — this is good and I might as well tell you this. Walter Reuther's daughter, Linda Reuther — do you know who Walter Reuther was?

0:36:22 Debra Schwartz: No.

0:36:24 Lorin Rowan: Associated Press, Walter Reuther was huge. Total high-end business person. Not a Steve Jobs, but somebody up there. Walter, if you look up Walter Reuther, huge business success. He had died, I think, in a plane crash or something, and his daughter somehow — yeah, this is funny. David knew Linda Reuther's brother over in Berkeley or something and somehow she became the investor. These guys were investing.

0:37:03 Debra Schwartz: She was your benefactor.

0:37:04 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, but we didn't know. We met her on one occasion. But David and Richard Loren — David Grisman, they were our management — they made that deal. So they were paying us a little bit of money, and we had enough to support our trip. We had a commune going out in Stinson Beach, basically. We've had several properties we rented, converted one into a fantastic studio.

0:37:30 Debra Schwartz: So you've gone from Kentfield, now you're living in Stinson Beach.

0:37:33 Lorin Rowan: First, I went to Kentfield, then moved to a beautiful country old time house out in Novato, near where the school is now, the college. It was great, it was a beautiful area. And then from there, we moved to Stinson Beach.

0:37:46 Debra Schwartz: To your compound.

0:37:47 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. We got an incredible house right next to Ralph Gleason's house, Sacramento Patio, in Stinson. It's still out there, beautiful house. I think it was going for \$80,000 at one point, after we'd lived there a couple of years and —

“We’re gonna sell it.” If we’d had our brains, we would have bought it. But then again, we had a lot of people. It didn’t matter, but we had a lot of group people, a compound. [chuckles] We’re looking at it like, “Uh oh. How do we divide that?”

0:38:12 Debra Schwartz: Compound/commune.

0:38:14 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, we weren’t really a commune, but it was communal in a lot of ways, and we were all for one and one for all, probably naively doing that, probably could have used a little more advice. As I was thinking about, when I was younger at 15, my parents weren’t like, “Look, we should do this. You could be — ” I didn’t have a business father, music business father, that had any sense of — I mean, he was a textile salesman, and being a manager, and stuff, but he ended up having a hard time with his business.

0:38:48 Debra Schwartz: So you were sort of rudderless. You’re young and in the business and musicians, but not businessmen.

0:38:54 Lorin Rowan: Totally. And we were like, “Yeah, we’ll go.” These guys are ten years older than us. We figured they knew what they were doing.

0:39:03 Debra Schwartz: It sounds like a ride. You’re on a ride.

0:39:05 Lorin Rowan: Oh, totally a ride. Yeah. Our whole thing was, huge advance, we took our time in the studio. Our agent or producer David, “Oh, don’t let them come and hear the music ’til it’s done.” Eventually, Clive Davis did come on in: “I gotta hear something.” It’d been probably six, seven months. We were doing our *Sgt Pepper*. We were taking a year to make a record, which was silly, really, but it was perfection. We were going for this perfection. We just had such a ball doing it. David had always said, “You guys just do the music, we’ll take care of the business.”

0:39:39 Debra Schwartz: So you were in the playground?

0:39:41 Lorin Rowan: We were in the playground and we were writing songs left and right, and having a blast with it. Garcia would come and play pedal steel in the studio. It was very exciting.

0:39:51 Debra Schwartz: How were your egos doing at that time?

0:39:54 Lorin Rowan: Well, we thought we were on our way to huge success.

0:39:58 Debra Schwartz: Was there a lot of celebration?

0:40:02 Lorin Rowan: We lived a great lifestyle. It was almost like, before we finished the record, we were living this great lifestyle, living in Stinson Beach, creating any time of day and working on it every day. It was fantastic and we were really planning on how we were gonna get a hit record, which is — well, we didn’t get the hit record.

0:40:23 Debra Schwartz: Do you have a song that you love from that record, and how did it do?

0:40:26 Lorin Rowan: I like a lot of 'em. I still have the records now. They're on CD now. Over the years, people have put 'em out and I've collected them, so I have a bunch of those.

0:40:35 Debra Schwartz: Do I know any of the songs?

0:40:36 Lorin Rowan: I don't think so, no. Unless you knew us from back then. But it was very pop, a mixture of ballads and pop-rock, really cool production on it.

0:40:48 Debra Schwartz: So you're the Rowan Brothers now. Let's move along. You're living in Stinson, and you're living in Marin.

0:40:55 Lorin Rowan: Living in Marin.

0:40:55 Debra Schwartz: And you've got a society of friends. Who are the people you're hanging with, besides David?

0:41:00 Lorin Rowan: Mainly our group or people and other musicians we'd meet, like Marty Balin or somebody like that.

0:41:08 Debra Schwartz: He was in Mill Valley, right?

0:41:09 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, you can walk by his old house anytime. I forgot to tell you, that was when the Airplane had played back in Boston. I was just going backwards.

0:41:23 Debra Schwartz: We'll just rewind a little and go there.

0:41:25 Lorin Rowan: See, I liked the English groups, and the Americans, the Beach Boys, and stuff. But the West Coast music, I was skeptical about it at 16. And so the Airplane came through, and played Paul's Mall, which was classic jazz club, but it was really every kind of music club. It was like 200 people, and they had just had their hit.

0:41:45 Debra Schwartz: "White Rabbit?"

0:41:46 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, and they were making their tour. My friend Bill Elliott and I, we said, "Let's go hear them." So went in. They had a little more of a pop sound than the Dead at the time. The Dead were going on a different thing, the jam band world, which is a great other thing. But I remember Grace Slick looking out at me and I was looking skeptical at them like —

0:42:17 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] You look like you're scowling.

0:42:17 Lorin Rowan: And she goes, “Don’t you ever smile?” [chuckles] I was like, “Whoa.” She didn’t really laugh —

0:42:27 Debra Schwartz: She points —

0:42:28 Lorin Rowan: She had checked me out. I was in the front row. “What is this shit?” [laughs]

0:42:33 Debra Schwartz: But the people can’t see, ’cause this is an audio recording, that you’ve got a pinched look on your face.

0:42:38 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, I was like —

0:42:38 Debra Schwartz: There’s a scowl. A skeptical scowl.

0:42:39 Lorin Rowan: I was like, “I don’t know if I like this.” [laughs]

0:42:43 Debra Schwartz: It’s so pronounced, that it stood out from all the other faces in the room.

0:42:45 Lorin Rowan: And she finally looked at me like, “Don’t you ever smile?” [laughs] She was like over there, at the end of the couch, over there. It was a small club.

0:42:54 Debra Schwartz: She’s 20 feet away or less. 15.

0:42:57 Lorin Rowan: And that was what blew my mind. I saw her years later out here and I told her that story. She laughed and I said, “You know, I heard you and you looked at me.” And she went, “I did?” and I said, “Yeah.”

So we got in some great doors. We ended up without having a hit single. Our agent/manager — I think they made a poor decision on that. I guess I did, too, ’cause I didn’t stand up and say, “Why don’t we do that?” We were all caught up in, “We’re gonna have a hit record. We’ve got Clive Davis, Columbia Records behind us.” And we had some pretty esoteric lyrics, at the time, on some of the songs. It’s a great production. It has a great sound to it. It didn’t hit. And this was a time when “Listen to the Music,” the Doobie Brothers, was out. Yeah, I don’t know. I guess our thing just didn’t attract a bunch of teeny-boppers. Well, our manager, to Richard Loren, said, “Let’s get Gloria —” What’s her name? Not Gloria Steinem, but she ran “Seventeen” magazine.² She was like, “We gotta market the Rowan Brothers.”

0:44:08 Debra Schwartz: Oh, so they wanted you to appeal to the teeny-boppers?

0:44:11 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. Well, we were still —

0:44:12 Debra Schwartz: Because that’s where the money is.

² Gloria Stavers was the editor of *16 Magazine*.—Lorin Rowan.

0:44:13 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, in business sense, sure. That's the market that's buying the records today. That's just the way it works. The good thing we have now is, there is an audience for baby boomers. It carries on from when we grew up.

0:44:42 Debra Schwartz: So your big record flopped.

0:44:44 Lorin Rowan: The big record, yeah, flopped.

0:44:46 Debra Schwartz: Flopped.

0:44:46 Lorin Rowan: And then we went on tour with the Grateful Dead. Why? Because that was the connection we had through our management.

0:44:53 Debra Schwartz: So you opened for the Dead?

0:44:53 Lorin Rowan: We passed on working with a pop agency. This sounds like "Confessions of a — " What? A sour — [chuckles]

0:45:01 Debra Schwartz: Sour grapes confessions?

0:45:02 Lorin Rowan: Sour grapes confessions! [laughs] Maybe that's part of my book.

0:45:08 Lorin Rowan: I wanna tap my foot right now. "Sour grapes confessions." That's a great name.

0:45:11 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] It's yours.

0:45:11 Lorin Rowan: I'm gonna write the book, 'cause everyone says, "You should write your story."

0:45:14 Debra Schwartz: *Sour Grape Confessions.*

0:45:15 Lorin Rowan: *Sour Grape Confessions*, that's actually pretty good. [laughs]

0:45:19 Lorin Rowan: I'm gonna remember that.

0:45:22 Debra Schwartz: You've got to live a life though.

0:45:24 Lorin Rowan: We had to go to a different — and then Clive Davis said, "If you wanna make another record with me, I want you to be produced by Mickie Most, who did Donovan."

0:45:33 Debra Schwartz: Oh, wonderful.

0:45:34 Lorin Rowan: “And we want you to go to England.” And we were like, “Okay, we’ll do it.” And then the weirdest thing happens. He gets fired. He had said we had to let go of David Grisman as our producer. So our commune kind of started —

0:45:46 Debra Schwartz: So Clive stays, Dave goes.

0:45:48 Lorin Rowan: What?

0:45:49 Debra Schwartz: Clive Davis stays, but Dave Grisman goes.

0:45:52 Lorin Rowan: Clive Davis at Columbia Records, he said, “You can’t use him again,” ’cause we had spent so much money and didn’t have the big hit. He said, “Okay, you got to do it your way. If you wanna do another record, I’m offering it to you, you go to England and work with this producer.” And it would have been so good for us, ’cause we would have gotten out of this hippie lifestyle thing, and we would have worked with somebody — we were so malleable.

0:46:18 Debra Schwartz: I hear the binging of loyalty.

0:46:21 Lorin Rowan: Yeah.

0:46:22 Debra Schwartz: Ding. Ding.

0:46:23 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, we were so loyal, even any money we got, well, we just shared it. We got huge advances for the time for publishing and stuff. And no sour grapes on that. That’s more of the bittersweet. [laughs]

0:46:39 Debra Schwartz: “Sour Grapes and Bittersweet Confessions.”

0:46:41 Lorin Rowan: Oh, that’s even better. [chuckles] That’s actually pretty cool. All the things that went wrong, but somehow, through it all, here I am.

0:46:50 Debra Schwartz: So you didn’t go? You didn’t go?

0:46:52 Lorin Rowan: Oh, he gets fired! Columbia Records fires Clive Davis.

0:46:56 Debra Schwartz: Oh.

0:46:57 Lorin Rowan: Because of misappropriated funds. He used some funds for his son’s bar mitzvah. I don’t know. All we knew was our attorney, lawyer, music lawyer in LA goes, “Well, he’s sorry to tell you — ” He always talked like that, Stuart Gordon. He was a big guy, he went, “Lorin and Chris, I’m sorry to tell you, but Clive’s been fired.” We were like, “Oh, my God.” “Well, we’ll sue them.” I went, “What?” ’Cause we had a contract for two records. That whole company changed and it was like we didn’t know anybody in the company anymore.

0:47:39 Debra Schwartz: All this happening and you never even got your big launch.

0:47:40 Lorin Rowan: They didn't know who we were. They were like, "You were Clive's babies. We're gonna make — " They were dropping lots of groups. They dropped the New Riders from on there too. They dropped a ton of groups that had anything to do with Clive, that weren't selling.

0:47:53 Debra Schwartz: New Riders of the Purple Sage for those that don't know. Very popular group at the time.

0:47:58 Lorin Rowan: And we were friends with them too, not by making records, but we got to know them. To this day, I still know David Nelson really well. He's the guitar player, one of the original members. So when that happened, our other manager at the time said, "You know, I think I'm gonna bow out, but I wanna turn you on to a guy I worked with that I think could help you better than I can." 'Cause see, we'd started to see the cracks in the foundation. It was like, "Uh Oh." And we didn't have any more money coming in, income, so it was more like Chris and I needed to find some other avenues. So our manager, his best effort was to turn us on to Kenny Loggins's, Loggins and Messina's manager.

0:48:45 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my gosh.

0:48:46 Lorin Rowan: So we worked with them, Schiffman and Larson, which we used to call "Shifty and Larceny." [laughs] "In the Music Business: Confessions of Sour Grapes." [chuckles] They managed us for a while, and then, at the same time, I always wanted Peter — and Chris too, but me more — I was saying, "Why don't we get Peter in the band?" Pete, 'cause he was free.

0:49:06 Debra Schwartz: Your older brother.

0:49:07 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, he had come out to California, going, "What are you guys doing?" He was watching our thing and he was free from being with Seatrain, who had moved. Seatrain had moved back to New England, while we had moved here, so we weren't on the same coast.

0:49:18 Debra Schwartz: That's his band, Seatrain?

0:49:20 Lorin Rowan: Well, it was, he was part of it, and it was a California band. You can look them up. They were local too. Marin County. Peter was living in Mill Valley, before he moved back East. Anyway, what was I just saying about that?

0:49:35 Debra Schwartz: You were saying that you are, now renegotiating the way things —

0:49:38 Lorin Rowan: Oh, yeah. We got Peter to play. We said "Pete, will you join us?" And he was like, "Yeah, this'll be great." So the three of us started playing together,

and then we eventually did get signed to David Geffen. We went back to David Geffen, couldn't get signed by anybody, and then we said, "Why don't we call David Geffen? He already wanted to sign us before." So we called David Geffen, he said, "Yeah, I'll meet with you guys." And Loggins & Messina, at that time, were like, "Well, I don't think we can do anything for you guys, much more for you guys." So we were like, "Let's go on our own to talk to David Geffen." This is four or five years later, I mean, since when I was 17, so having gained a little bit of business sense of how to take control of yourself, we knew we had to do that. We met with David Geffen and he didn't even wanna hear the music. He just said, "The three of you?" I said, "Yeah, you wanna hear some sound?" He goes, "No, but you wanna make hit records?" We were like, "Yeah!" So we ended up making three albums with Asylum. Moderate success with that. No huge hit records. But that was the three of us. That lasted until about '78, '79, I'm still living in Mill Valley. We recorded down in LA.

0:50:45 Debra Schwartz: You were in Stinson, now, you're in Mill Valley?

0:50:47 Lorin Rowan: Well, no, but still at Stinson at the time, and I started a band with Jimmy Dillon and Mark Stein. Mark and I knew each other, 'cause we lived on the same street, one of the *Calles*, and we loved reggae.³ So Mark and I started playing together, and Jimmy heard us play in a gig at the surf shop one night, and he came in, and wanted to sit in. He was living in Hawaii, I think, at the time, but he also had a place down in Stinson with his brother, and, oh, we just had a great time jamming together. And then he came over to my house, and we jammed. We had hit it off great. And we still play great together like that.

0:51:23 Debra Schwartz: You played the other night at Gary Yost's presentation.

0:51:24 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, we've got a backlog of material. We started a band that we called the Average Beach Band. It was totally out of Stinson Beach, and it was — the Over the Hill Bar and Grill had just opened. It was before, I think, the Blue Whale or the White Whale. It was one of these funky little Stinson Beach bar things. And now they've redone in a way, you've got your big restaurants. But back then it was this cool new restaurant. And, yeah, we had music there, and so we started our band.

0:51:54 Debra Schwartz: Well, what are the people that came to these shows? What's the ambience?

0:51:56 Lorin Rowan: 20-year-olds. Our age at the time. That's who it was, that's what the whole deal was. And immediately, within a year or so, we changed the name to The Edge. We were a reggae rock band, we were playing at Uncle Charlie's over here in Corte Madera.

0:52:15 Debra Schwartz: He was Clover then?

³ *Calle* is the Spanish word for "street." — Lorin Rowan. Stinson Beach has a series of streets that begin with "*Calle*." — Editor.

0:52:16 Lorin Rowan: No, that was after Clover. We were great friends with him too, and a couple of the guys, Ozzie Ahlers and the band, and Huey from college in Syracuse. Yeah, so anyways, it was a very cool. Uncle Charlie's was packed every night. It was a little icon of, microcosm of, the moment. Still today I run into people that remember my band, or see me, and go, "Aren't you — we used to go to Uncle Charlie's." It was a high point, 'cause it was packed on a Wednesday night. It was just a really cool, local Marin County scene. It was really nice.

I still lived at Stinson and used to love, well, living in Stinson. I used to hike the mountain all the time, kept exploring different trails. To this day, I still like that — mountain biking on it, that's a whole other story — but Mount Tam with Gary Yost, it's like, yeah, a spiritual place. I used to go up early in the morning at sunrise, and sometimes just to see the sun rise. That was part of the fun of living in Stinson. It was just like outdoors and Marin County was just so beautiful. You'd go to the city and you couldn't wait to get back to Marin County. Get over the Golden Gate Bridge and like, "Where is this place?" The hills, you don't see that back East. It's a different geography.

0:53:28 Debra Schwartz: So you're playing there now —

0:53:30 Lorin Rowan: We had a huge following. This guy named Rick James, the black soul singer, you know, he came out. He was recording a record down at the Record Plant, here in Sausalito. That club was happening, Uncle Charlie's. He came and heard us, he was like, "I can help you guys." He turned us on to Jerry Weintraub's company, which managed his company, but there was an underling, the guy's named Paul Gongaware — I think of it as Paul Underwear — Paul Gongaware. [laughs] "Confessions of a Soap Opera." Anyway, Rick James and I became friends, and I have a good picture of him too.

0:54:08 Debra Schwartz: What's one of his songs? Do you remember?

0:54:10 Lorin Rowan: "Super Freak! Super Freak!"

0:54:12 Debra Schwartz: Oh, right. [chuckles]

0:54:13 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, he was totally the African-American hip, dread lock, half dread lock kinda funk, super funk — but he loved our thing. He's like, "You guys got the sound. This is the sound."

0:54:24 Debra Schwartz: Can you give me a little —

0:54:25 Lorin Rowan: "You're gonna be bigger than Huey Lewis," he said. We were like, "Yeah!" Didn't happen.

0:54:28 Debra Schwartz: Well, could you give me a little of your sound? What's your sound?

0:54:31 Lorin Rowan: Let me lead onto that. After The Edge, we played for several years. We kept playing until even five years ago. Once in a while, someone will hire us for a gig.

0:54:41 Debra Schwartz: As The Edge and you all come back together again?

0:54:43 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, and we come back together. I always keep my ears open, if somebody says, “You guys still together?” “Yeah.” That hasn’t happened in a while. I’m so busy doing other things and so are the other guys too. Everybody has a life, and as you’ve grown up, we’re not like 20 years old riding around in a van.

0:55:00 Debra Schwartz: Like you were then?

0:55:00 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. Although, I jokingly think I could do that, if I wasn’t married. If I wasn’t married, in such a happy marriage to Bernadette, my wife, you know, I would be out there doing more. Having a family life, even if it’s two of us, it’s just a different — it’s nice. That’s the success. That’s nice. And owning my own house, that’s a success. And it’s a life together. That’s a whole other thing, beyond whatever you think your career means, which means a lot. But having someone in your life is a really nice thing. We’ve been married 32 years now. Right, Bernadette? 32. We’ve known each other 34.

After that, I started working on my own as a songwriter. I just kept writing and I met up with Alex Call, who grew up here in town. He was in that band, Clover, which played with Huey Lewis. And he and I hit it off, just chemistry-wise, and we started writing a bunch of songs together. And I could play you one right now. I had this song, the title is called “Circle of Friends.” And he’s a very inspired songwriter. He’s got his own records out too. He and I got together on this. I had all the music and the title, but he started giving the ideas for the lyrics. We were thinking about how, when you’re kids, and you meet your friends, and some of your best friends, when you’re growing up, and then how as the years go by, those friends, some of them that you stick with, or stick with you, they’re there for life, and it’s a great feeling of true friendship that goes back a long time. It doesn’t necessarily end, it keeps going. Maybe you’re lucky — I still have some really good friends from growing up, that I’ll see back East, when we do a tour or something, my brother and I. I think it resonates with anybody that knows what friendship’s about.

[begins tuning the guitar]

Somewhere along the line, you got friends. Everyone’s got some kind of friends. And if you don’t, you’re missing something.

[begins playing and singing “Circle of Friends”]

“Now, whether your old car’s are left to rust, where the swallows dip over the river at dusk. Me and my buddies throwing stones, bragging to each other how we’re never going home. My circle of friends.

“Trouble had a way of tracking us down, it sometimes found us on the wrong side of town. We survived only because we stood by each other, that’s the way it was. In a circle of friends.

“In a circle of friends, there’s a ring of trust, that’ll never break, it can never rust. It’s made of the dreams, we shared back when. All we had was a circle of friends.

“We burned down the night in our wilder days, Tequila Sunrise and Purple Haze. We toasted hard and drained our cups, ’cause somehow or other we still grew up. My circle of friends.

“Now, memories forever, that’s a fact, ’cause days are behind us and they’re never coming back. I see my old buddies while they drive through town, I put my foot on the brake and roll my window down. My circle of friends.

“In the circle of friends, there’s a ring of trust, it’ll never break and never rust. It’s made up of dreams, and shared back when all we have is a circle of friends. A ring of trust, never break, never rust. Made of dreams, shared back when, all we have is a circle of friends. All we have is a circle of friends.

“Now, whether your old car’s are left to rust, like a swallows dip over the river at dusk.”

1:00:52 Debra Schwartz: Beautiful. Very beautiful.

1:00:55 Lorin Rowan: That started my own solo career, really. That song and this one that I wrote. This one, I actually wrote before “Circle of Friends.” But my brother Peter and I, and Chris, we’ve all written together, on and off. We weren’t in the same group, at the time, playing together as the Rowan Brothers, particularly, although we would we always get together once or twice a year. But I was writing this song about our dad. This is a flashback of when we were growing up. We’d start a song that our Aunt Barbie used to say. We’d go, “How do you remember our dad?” ’Cause he died in 1970, when I was pretty young, 17. And she goes, “Oh, your father was a dreamer.” And we went, “Whoa, daddy was a dreamer. Daddy was a dreamer.” So we’d sit around and [sings] “Daddy was a dreamer.” And we had to write a song about that. We never quite got to it. But I started writing the song and I started thinking. I came up with the first verse.

[begins to play and sing “You Are Your Father’s Son”]

“Daddy was a dreamer, how he loved to sing and dance. The life of the party, any time he’d get the chance. The working days in the textile mills, selling American thread. Always talking about the great, big things he was gonna be doin’ instead. And me and my brothers, raising hell just like he done. I guess we inherited Daddy’s gift for having too much fun. He said, “Boys, I can’t blame you. Heaven knows I can’t tame you. But don’t ever be ashamed to say you are your father’s son.”

[ends song]

I had everything except for, “You never be ashamed to say — ” And Peter went, “You are your father’s son.” I went, “Oh, my God, that’s the title, duh!” [chuckles] So that’s cool. That’s the great thing about writing with your brother — he just went, “Lorin, you’re your father’s son.” I go “Oh, my God,” ’cause I had everything, but didn’t have that line. I knew I had, “Daddy was a dreamer,” then he and I thought again. We wrote that together. The last chorus goes —

[resumes singing and playing guitar]

“But daddy I can’t blame you. And I know I can’t tame you. But I’ll never be ashamed to say, ‘I am my father’s son.’”

[ends song]

And, well, the thing was, see Daddy — it was like “The Death of a Salesman.” He had a really tough business time. And I don’t know if it added to his demise, but we seemed to be so much more — and when I speak ‘we,’ I meant, if we were lucky enough to be growing up the way we had in California, especially too, the innovation of cuisine, and getting back to the Earth was so cool, and growing vegetables. We were always into the health foods and stuff. I guess I was on the East Coast, too. I remember getting turned on to the concept of eating really well. Brown rice, Miso soup, and stuff. And out here, I remember, we did eat well. [laughs]

But trying avocados. We never saw those back East. “What the heck’s an avocado?” We were like, “Oh, my God. These are fantastic.” But fruit and the produce out here is always so — you don’t have the cold winters, right? So that was always a thrill about living in Marin. It still is. You wanna have a great time, you just get out and go walk that mountain. My wife and I walked up Mt. Tam from here, six hours for a day, if we really wanna do it right. Start here and you walk all the way down West Blithedale, way up to Wheeler’s Trail, and you’re up at the top. Take a picnic with you. Whew.

1:05:26 Debra Schwartz: How has Mt. Tam influenced your music? Has it?

1:05:29 Lorin Rowan: Spiritual vibrations. I still go up there, my wife and I, Bernadette, go up there and sit on the ridge there, overlooking Stinson Beach, especially when the warm weather hits in June. It gets hot out, sometimes. The mountain will have that thermal thing going on.

1:05:46 Debra Schwartz: Thermal, yes.

1:05:47 Lorin Rowan: I love the heat. If anything about Northern California, give me the heat more often. When those heat waves come in, like we get ’em — oh, I just love that! They come in these blurs that last — and of course, the dreaded fog, I hate the fog. Although I like it at times. It shifts. Mill Valley will be fine, but if you go to Sausalito —

it'll be cloudy at the beach. I remember living in Stinson Beach, and there will be maybe 14 days in a row, one year. It was like, "I gotta get out of here!" [chuckles] It's fogged, and cold, and it's summer time. But you go on top of the mountain, above the clouds it's 90 degrees up on the mountain, they close it off. The mountain was always, and it still is, it's a refuge for inspiration. Everything I write, I always relate to rivers, rivers are like love. Mountains are like places you're trying to achieve. The metaphorical things you get from nature are so important. It's all up there on Mt. Tam. It's a great place to take a hike up there. There's so many hikes and you just — an amazing place to ponder the universe.

1:06:55 Debra Schwartz: You sang that beautiful song about the circle of friends and you've been here for a good long while now, since 1970. And you obviously have a community of musical friends, and other people that you've been collaborating with, and sharing your life with. How do you see yourself in Mill Valley? What has Mill Valley and this area given to you, as not just a musician, but for your life?

1:07:27 Lorin Rowan: Oh boy, an incredible lifestyle, a peaceful place to live. There's part of Mill Valley called Me Valley now, and I'm not talking about that, 'cause I've lived here now 25 years in Mill Valley — well, even longer, probably 32 years in Mill Valley, lived at the old grocery store.

1:07:50 Debra Schwartz: Where Whole Foods is now?

1:07:51 Lorin Rowan: There's a deer, they come here all the time.⁴ He's over at the neighbors, but —

1:07:56 Debra Schwartz: You see this —

1:07:57 Lorin Rowan: This is a nature preserve, really.

1:08:00 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, beautiful property, here at your house.

1:08:00 Lorin Rowan: Isn't it sweet? We lived at the old grocery store in Homestead Valley, in a compound there. My wife Bernadette, one of her older friend/boyfriend/past-boyfriend, he kinda managed this property. It's just an old, beautiful — eventually, it got sold, but, boy, it was —

1:08:20 Debra Schwartz: Where is it?

1:08:20 Lorin Rowan: It was a cottage. It's on Homestead Valley, right when you go up from the 2 A.M. Club, that little stretch, right on Linden Lane, a little stretch, opposite now of those, I think, retirement, low income —

1:08:31 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, low income.

⁴ Lorin sees a deer through the window.—Editor.

1:08:32 Lorin Rowan: But they've been there for 20, 30 years. They were probably one of the first ones when those developed. But we had this fantastic yard that was fenced in, a beautiful property. A French couple bought it, rightfully so, and they kind of preserved the whole thing. I don't really know them. They kept the whole outside; I don't know what they did inside. It was an old grocery store, my buddy, our buddy at the time, lived in that part, we lived in the other half of the house — fire pit outside.

But what was I saying? That's what an indoor-outdoor thing you get here. That's what I love about Mill Valley too. I mean, we walk every day. What has it has given me? A place of peace, tranquility, really, a refuge when you stay here. I've written tons of music that gets recorded right in my home studio. Got me that from "My Father's Son." It's been an artistic inspiration. My studio is upstairs. I'm lucky to have that.

1:09:36 Debra Schwartz: If you think about what it is you contribute, 'cause it's nice to live in a place that feeds you, but what do you give back?

1:09:43 Lorin Rowan: I hope that I bring some joy, and laughter, and positiveness through what I like to do, which is make music and perform music. I'm certainly hoping to keep helping out things that need support.

1:10:07 Debra Schwartz: Like the Gary Yost in the *West Peak*?

1:10:09 Lorin Rowan: Well, yeah. Through Gary, I've discovered another person that is really inspired by Mt. Tam in particular, but he's very aware of creativity in other people. That's how we met. He called me after we met at the O'Hanlon through really good friends Daniel, Patrick, and Erma, who are great endorsers of promoting musical events and stuff to bring community together. And I met Gary there about a year ago, and he followed up with me about a project. I guess creative people will pick up on each to a degree. Anyway, we had a chemistry together, and yes, in fact, I did help him work on — first, it was the proposal for a permanent farmer's market there, up in San Rafael. They need another couple of million. [chuckles]

But he did this whole video about it. He needed music and I guess somebody had hired him to do it, so he hired me, and he said, "Would you be able to come up with — " So I shared with him a bunch of stuff I had and, "Oh, this is great." So that worked out really cool. From that he said, "You know, I have something I need help on. I'm doing Mt. Tam — the last of his trilogy, or his four-piece — I need someone to record the cello and guitar." I said, "Well, Jimmy Dillon." I said, "Jimmy, yeah, we're best friends." He goes, "Oh, okay, great." I said, "Yeah, come over here." I recorded them easily in my studio. I can't put a whole band up there. I have a digital band, but not drum stuff. But, yeah, cello and guitar. So I did that and he said, "If you could do that, I'll give you some free time then, if you wanna do a video." I said, "Well, I do. I have this band," which is my current band, Deep Blue Jam, which is Americana. I play a lot of mandolin. That's my current 'now' thing that I'm doing. Tonight, we're playing on KPFA, live radio, 10 o'clock.

1:12:19 Debra Schwartz: Who's in the band?

1:12:21 Lorin Rowan: Okay, two guys that have been in the Edge Band, in this different incarnation than the original, but eventually became — so I'm talking 25 years now. I've been playing with Eric McCann on bass, and Matt Willis on drums, and a really great friend I met through doing a Marin County Visitor Bureau video they made, promotion video to bring people to come to Marin, to visit Marin. I got invited by one of the gals there. She said, "You know, you'd be perfect in this. We're doing a couple, they come to Marin, and we wanna do a video, a little short thing, hit all of these highlights of Mill Valley and Marin: Mill Valley, and the Sweetwater, San Rafael, restaurants, art works." If you go to the Visitor Bureau, I think they still have it there, I'll bet.

So I had my date, which was not my wife at the time. [laughs] No, she was not my wife ever. But she and I were acting as a couple and it was a blast. Kirk Casey did the music for this thing, and I met him when they finally had the thing done, and we were like, "Oh, well, I do TV stuff, too." "Oh," he said, "I'd love your song." And he did this cute little jingle music, kind of quirky little thing. He said before he had this more sophisticated thing, and then he said, "Well, can you give us something more quirky?" Anyway, he and I hit it off, and we started doing some TV stuff as a starter. And then he said, "Why don't we do something around your mandolin and your voice?" So we've been working together three years or so, going on four, and we said, "Let's do a band out of this." So we started a two man band really. And we recorded a lot of stuff. And then we added my guys from the Edge Band: Jimmy, Eric McCann, and Matt Willis. Eric has played with Clarence Clemons's band. Jimmy had played in Clarence Clemons' band too, and Eric was the bass player in that. Eric goes out, he just plays with everybody.

1:14:17 Debra Schwartz: Once I saw him at the Arts Festival gala. He played with The Session, the band that was —

1:14:23 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, so quite a few. Everybody knows everybody on that level.

1:14:30 Debra Schwartz: Do you think of this as being a circle of friends of musicians here in Mill Valley? Do you see yourself —

1:14:37 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, there's a camaraderie and a certain — I've called some people I don't know that well and said, "Can I get you for a session?" And they'll say, "Yeah. Don't tell. I'll give you the brother deal." I'm just saying it's nice that you can call some friends like that, that you don't even know that well. You're making a demo. You need to make a living, you know? It's nice. There's a friendship on that and some stuff is just gratuitously shared. Or if there's an event, I'm all for that. There's a revolution coming? Let's go. And if it's about the election and stuff. I hear there's one in San Rafael. I might have to check that out.

1:15:26 Debra Schwartz: When you think about going back in your life and starting so young, by the way, as a musician, your mother must have had a lot of trust in the universe to let those three boys go out into a wild world of music.

1:15:36 Lorin Rowan: I know. And she had to sign for me, my record deal with Columbia Records, because I was only 19 when I got signed by Clive Davis. We flew to New York to do that, and she had to fly down. She was like, “Oh.” Then she would take the record, and she’d play it, and record herself, ’cause our Uncle George had given her this fantastic two track recording, something you didn’t get back then. I think it was cassette. It was on cassette, with a microphone. It was like, he had all the new stuff. He gave it to my mother, and my mother would play the record, and sing along. [chuckles] I have these saved on disc. I copied everything. I’m quite the keeper of the flame. I have everything. My wife said, “We gotta clean out that closet.”

1:16:22 Debra Schwartz: Yes. If you ever need to, I suppose there’s the musical — there should be some kind of musical museum here, with so much music in Mill Valley.

1:16:32 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, well I think they tried to start a rock ‘n’ roll one. Just didn’t have enough I don’t know what. But yeah, it’ll come around, I think.

1:16:40 Debra Schwartz: There are going to be young people that are going to listen to this interview, and when you think about lessons learned, or what matters most to you, what would be those thoughts?

1:16:55 Lorin Rowan: I’d say be smart about what you’re doing. Be smart and try to look for the people that you can trust, that they genuinely might have an interest in what you do, and they maybe can help you. I’m talking about the music business. I know there’s young guys out there doing it all the time. You have to be persistent, and you gotta really wanna love to do it. You can’t expect it to happen overnight. And if it doesn’t happen, just keep going for what you really love to do. If I think, if I couldn’t have made music, find different irons in the fire to keep going, some way that’s like, “Well, you’re all over the map.” “Well, I guess I can do that.” It’s like a split personality, multiple personality. Can you just do one thing really great? Maybe that’s the way to do it. For me, it has turned out I needed to have different things to survive in the music world. But I push myself too. I look for stuff. I’m not afraid to hustle, and I think that you got to do that. You gotta be on it. You gotta stay on it. And just keep knocking on down doors, and showing people what you got.

1:18:13 Debra Schwartz: Any regrets?

1:18:15 Lorin Rowan: Regrets? I wish I’d been a little smarter when I was younger. I think smarter. Not a regret. But if you look at it, what’s a regret? Something you regret. I wish I’d had a little more sense of what really should be going down. I guess being caught up in a whirlwind with a bunch of other people that makes a group and you’re doing it all for one and one for all. We came from nothing and we built into this thing. You gotta have a love there, a friendship. And that’s really tough when that falls apart, if it didn’t work out the way you thought. So that was a big eye opener of like, “Oh, jeez, too bad. We had so much faith in it.” You gotta have thick skin too, to keep going from

that. And we were young enough to be able to do that. I don't know, the years have gone by.

1:19:11 Debra Schwartz: Are you still close to your brothers?

1:19:12 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, very close.

1:19:13 Debra Schwartz: Are they living here?

1:19:14 Lorin Rowan: Chris and I play a lot together as a duo.

1:19:15 Debra Schwartz: They both live here?

1:19:16 Lorin Rowan: Yep. Well, Chris lives in Cotati at the moment. But we've all lived here together through the years. Peter lives in Tam Junction now. Peter's on his own trip. Chris does his own thing, too. And I do my own thing. But he and I do play a lot. At least once or twice a month we're playing. And we toured back East and stuff. We keep our brother duets going a lot. We got signed by an independent label about 10 years ago. They wanted to put out a record, so we called it "Now and Then." The 'now' is all new stuff and the old stuff is archived stuff that never was released, or might have been released but different versions of it. That's gave us a new life, really.

1:20:00 Debra Schwartz: How about if you think of a moment during all this time, since you've come here, in your career as a musician, and just in your life as a musical person, or creative person, is there any moment that stands apart? Nothing special, maybe something special, but just captures the essence of what drives you? What inspires you?

1:20:24 Lorin Rowan: I think meeting my wife was one of the biggest inspirations. It was like finding somebody that I really wanted to — I actually told her, I said, "When we get married — " and she was like, "What?." She was like meeting somebody that you just felt there was such a newness, but also a familiarity of personality or something that you can't really put your finger on. And we have so much fun together. Of course, it's ups and downs, but they're definitely ups and downs. We've been married for 32 years and we got a good thing going. We've got to a place where we can really do a lot. We have a lot of freedom, so that's a magical thing. And I know my friends, that were in my bands, when I was growing up. [chuckles]

1:21:14 Debra Schwartz: I think maybe you're still growing up. [chuckles]

1:21:14 Lorin Rowan: "You are lucky." They always would say to me, "I want what you have." 'Cause you know, rock 'n' roll hero, lot of chicks."

1:21:22 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, what about that?

1:21:24 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, there's that element to it, but when I found my wife it was like, "Oh, I don't want that other thing. I want this." And that's what you really want, is somebody you can really get close to.

1:21:37 Debra Schwartz: Have you ever written her a song?

1:21:39 Lorin Rowan: Oh, God, yeah.

1:21:41 Debra Schwartz: On the mandolin?

1:21:41 Lorin Rowan: You wanna hear one?

1:21:42 Debra Schwartz: I wanna hear on the mandolin, too.

1:21:44 Lorin Rowan: Oh, I'll do that.

[pause in the recording]

1:21:53 Debra Schwartz: Okay. We took a little break there and now we're back. And you're going to sing a song.

1:22:00 Lorin Rowan: Well, here's the thing. You asked me about if I'd written a song about my wife, and since I've been married to her every song that's a love song is about my wife. She always asks me too, "Is that about me?" [laughs] Now, that there's one that's angry, she's always, "Is that about me?" [laughs] As a writer, you may be writing from, thinking about somebody else's point of view, so it's not fair, really, to blame the songwriter, like every song is about your wife. But there is a lot of good love that comes from it and there's a couple I can just give you little snippets of. This one —

[begins to sing and play song]

"She don't play up to anyone, raised as honest as they come, never hesitates to speak her mind. She won't be anybody's fool, but she'll give herself to you, let you know that she's the jealous kind. And when you feel the world around you closing in, she'll hold you in her arms and it's alright. No matter what you're going through, she will still believe in you, in her heart of hearts, she understands, that's the way a woman loves a man.

"She can wrap you around her finger, but with a tear or with a kiss. So no matter what you're going through, she will still believe in you, in her heart of hearts, she understands, that's the way a woman loves a man. Now when you think you've learned a thing or two, she'll go changing all the rules, that's the way it's been since time began. That's the way a woman loves a man.

[ends song]

My wife always like that line: “When you think you’ve learned a thing or two, she’ll go changing all the rules.” [chuckles] “That’s the way it’s been since time began. That’s the way a woman loves a man.” So she always likes that one. And then I got one that goes —

[begins to sing and play song]

“Love is a river flowing free, carries you in it, carries me, keeps us afloat when the tides get rough, takes just a little and that’s more than enough. Help the wind come up, fill our empty sails, and set us back on course, after all else fails. Love brings me back to you, when we drift apart, knows the in’s and out’s on the pathways of my heart. Love brings me back to you.”

[ends song]

1:25:42 Lorin Rowan: And then one more example.

1:25:46 Debra Schwartz: I like this, you want to show the examples of the songs for your wife.

1:25:49 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, there’s two more little snippets.

[begins to sing and play song]

“A twilight sky above turns midnight blue, nowhere else I’d rather be than here with you. The heaven in your smile, heaven in your eyes, every kiss and warm embrace is paradise. ‘Cause you’re the only one for me, like a dream come true, searching for so long, ‘til the moment I found you. Without a shadow of a doubt, like it was always meant to be, I love you just for who you are, the one and only one for me. Only one, you’re my one and only one. You’re the only one for me.”

[ends song]

So then you got this one, which I always like to say, “When the going gets tough, my wife, she goes shopping!”

[begins to sing and play song]

“I can’t stop her shopping feet, moving up and down the street, she is special, she is sweet, wherever ain’t nobody can compete with my babe. Don’t cry, babe. She loves to spend my money, she loves to call me honey. Honey this, honey that, heaven help me, I’m broke flat. Ooh, she keeps me awaitin’, anticipatin’. Well, a little powder on her face, lips so red and hair that shines, everybody’s got that place, oh I’m so glad she is mine. Well, she push my button, pull my strings. She knows I’ll give her anything. ‘Cause she got the look, she got style, well, the way she wears it, Lord, it drives me wild. I can’t stop them shopping feet, moving up and down the street, she is special, she is sweet, there ain’t nobody can compete.”

[ends song]

So it goes on and on.

1:28:49 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] She really is your inspiration.

1:28:52 Lorin Rowan: So that's the fun stuff.

1:28:54 Debra Schwartz: Well, before we close up, you've played a lot of guitar, but I'm going to ask you, as a personal favor, if you can play a little something on the mandolin.

1:29:01 Lorin Rowan: Ah, the mandolin, this is one of my favorite instruments. I started playing when I was 12 years old, and I played bluegrass.

[starts playing mandolin]

1:29:14 Debra Schwartz: David Grisman is bluegrass.

1:29:16 Lorin Rowan: Yeah, I learned that run right there from David Grisman. I was being produced by him. We shared a lot of musical stuff together. He showed me a few licks, and it took me even further into the mandolin, which I play today with my band Deep Blue Jam.

[picks mandolin]

When I was a kid though, I wrote this piece after listening to — when I was almost signed to Elektra Records, when I was 15, they had this other company called Nonesuch Records, which was always world music. And I'm at the office there in New York City, and the president said, "Why don't you go in and pick out some records?" I'm like, "Oh, great!" I had a dozen records. I got music from Burundi, some harp music, I found some lute music, but all kinds of cool, indigenous music. This was a great and we'd go home and play it. It was like I'm in another country. So I listened to lute music, and I somehow picked up a mandolin, and transferred some ideas that I was hearing into a piece that I wrote. I call it "Mandolina."

[begins playing song]

I don't know. I wrote that when I was a kid, like lute music.

1:32:02 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

1:32:03 Lorin Rowan: And I kept playing it over the years, so I wouldn't forget. I play it every once in a while, 'cause it goes back like 50 years.

1:32:12 Debra Schwartz: Wow. Obviously, the music is in you, man. [chuckles]

1:32:15 Lorin Rowan: Oh, quite fun.

1:32:17 Debra Schwartz: Now, before we go, I'm going to ask you one question I usually ask people. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention before we close?

1:32:25 Lorin Rowan: I think my wife and I have lived here now 25 years, and we just almost have it paid off. So that part of it is like, "Wow!" We are older, but I guess getting older is like, "Oh, jeez." You see the years ticking away. But when you get to the point you've lived in a place long enough, and you almost have it paid off, it's like, "Wow, that's fantastic." We really think of our home here in Mill Valley as a gold mine of an opportunity. We think about, maybe we would keep this always, and maybe go rent a place. Rent this out and rent some other place, if we wanna check something out, but we definitely wouldn't just sell this place and move out, just on a whim. We're really like, "Oh, boy, let's stay." We always loved the location. And as the world gets smaller, God, you can't be closer to the airports. Either one, Oakland or San Francisco. And the city, you're so close. Bike riding around here is incredible, hiking. We love to go to the city, love to visit. If I visit somebody that lives there, it's like, "Wow, what a cool place." I've never lived in the city. I just got spoiled by living in Marin County. I always had a chance to live out here. Once you buy, you're able to buy, lucky enough to be able to buy a property, you're not gonna just jump up and go. But I've definitely been more of a country guy, living style, lifestyle, and I've been able to just do that. I guess that's where I have never had to live in the city, although, I love it. I love museums and I love the accessibility to it. That's, I think, is great about Mill Valley.

1:34:10 Debra Schwartz: Do you love Mill Valley?

1:34:11 Lorin Rowan: Oh, yeah. It's a unique place and I love the mountain in town. It's like Switzerland. Like a mini Switzerland, no snow. Once in a while, there's snow. But I believe in the spirituality of nature. I think that's part of what is its own religion. Nature is a religion in itself. Well, where you're from. It's kinda nice. It's universal.

1:34:39 Debra Schwartz: Well, that's a good note to end on.

1:34:46 Lorin Rowan: I like to be part of anything that goes on in Mill Valley. I know there's music things in the park and the fall festival, art festival. And sometimes, the Redwoods people have something to do there. I used to go to my aunt back East, 'cause — well, again, a family member that's living in assisted living, it's a tough thing to do. You go and play for people. It brings a lot of joy to people, if you can share it on that level, besides just doing it as your career in front of a young audience or your peers.

1:35:26 Debra Schwartz: Well, it seems like —

1:35:27 Lorin Rowan: Bread and Roses is a good example of a nice thing that was started by Mimi Farina in Mill Valley. I've been able to help on that sometimes, which is nice. I'm glad to be able to do that.

1:35:38 Debra Schwartz: I admire and appreciate that this river music runs through you.

1:35:43 Lorin Rowan: Oh, thank you.

1:35:44 Debra Schwartz: And that this is something that you can share with everyone, and our town.

1:35:50 Lorin Rowan: Yeah. God.

1:35:51 Debra Schwartz: And I thank you so much. I'm sure there's so many people that are going to listen to this, that you are part of their history here, that you know how music punctuates moments, and that music will take you right back to that time.

1:36:10 Lorin Rowan: That's nice, yeah.

1:36:10 Debra Schwartz: So I think you're probably in the collective memory of many people that live here.

1:36:14 Lorin Rowan: Oh, that's nice.

1:36:14 Debra Schwartz: I thank you for that, and I thank you for all the wonderful music, and the good things you do, on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library. I now thank you for sharing your story with us for others to hear.

1:36:28 Lorin Rowan: Pleasure.

1:36:31 Debra Schwartz: And I guess, we'll see you around town.

1:36:34 Lorin Rowan: See you around town.