

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

DAVID AND JACKI FROMER

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Bob Hemstock in 2010**

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INTERVIEWER: Bob Hemstock

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In this oral history, David and Jacki Fromer recount their lives and active participation in Mill Valley's community for over four decades. Born in Chicago in 1942, David moved to San Francisco with his family in 1950. David recalls growing up in a musical household and starting to play soccer at age 13. In 1964 he met Jacki, a San Francisco native. That same year, David formed a folk trio with his brother and a friend that enjoyed terrific initial success. In 1967, David and Jacki married and had their first child, Reed, followed four years later by a daughter, Rachel. In 1974 the Fromer family moved to Mill Valley. David and Jacki describe how they became active in the community. In 1976, David co-founded the Mill Valley Soccer Club with Dick Swain and Hayden McAfee. For many years, David taught music and soccer in the public schools, and brought his two passions together in his youth soccer camps. Jacki administered the community soccer programs, made art, and worked in non-profits. Throughout this oral history, David and Jacki reflect movingly on family and community. They observe how big changes in the economy over the last 30 years have had a significant impact on community life in Mill Valley, but also praise Mill Valley's progressive spirit and creativity.

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Oral History of David and Jacki Fromer
June 2nd, 2010

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

0:00:00 Bob Hemstock: It is June 2nd, 2010. My name is Bob Hemstock and I'm sitting in the beautiful home of David and Jacki Fromer here in Mill Valley, and they have been very generous with their time to help me with this Oral History Project. I have known David since the early '70s — David and Jacki — and I'm looking forward to exploring their lives here in Mill Valley. Thank you for agreeing to help me with this project, David and Jacki.

0:00:49 David Fromer: Thank you very, very much.

0:00:51 Jacki Fromer: Well, thank you. It's very nice that you've thought of us.

0:00:52 David Fromer: We're very grateful to you.

0:00:57 Bob Hemstock: I'm volunteering with the Mill Valley Library History Room and working with their Oral History Project. So today's interview is going to be grounded in your life in Mill Valley, not focused too much on our common interest of coaching soccer and playing soccer, that's certainly a huge part for both of us here, but I'm very interested in how you came upon Mill Valley, how you heard about it, why you moved here, and everything. But could you both give me a little bit of information on your life before moving to Mill Valley?

0:01:48 David Fromer: I'd be very happy to. To begin with, I was born July 21st, 1942 in Chicago, Illinois. I lived there for about seven years, then our family moved to Clovis, New Mexico for a little less than a year, and in 1950 we moved to San Francisco, where we lived 'til 1974, and then we moved to Mill Valley. I was born with wonderful parents: Katherine, who was a school teacher, and a musician, and a school director; and my dad, Irving Fromer, who was an architect, and an artist — painter, graphic artist. Both of them were very active in civil rights, and in peace, and in socially conscious movements. They were both very musical, they loved folk music and so we grew up in an atmosphere with lots of folk singing.

I met Jacki in 1964. Interestingly, I was attending an adult ed class in San Francisco. Her mother was enrolled in the class and invited her to come and join the class. It was taught by a teacher who she had known, and who was very inspiring to Jacki, previously, so she came to the class and met me there. In the fall of 1964, we proceeded to have picnics, and strummed guitars, and talked about our favorite blues musicians and folk artists. During that time, I was in a folk trio which had just started and was to have two wonderful, amazing years of musical adventure. Perhaps I'm jumping ahead in my life story a little bit, but going back a little bit, I grew up in San Francisco from 1950 on. We lived in the Richmond district out in the fog and I went to Argonne, then Presidio Junior High

School, and then Washington High School. Jacki was also at Washington High School although she grew up in the Sunset district.

0:04:45 Jacki Fromer: We lived across the park from each other. I was on 20th and Judah, he was on 20th and Cabrillo.

0:04:53 Bob Hemstock: As an 11-year-old, I was on 41st Avenue, 41st and Lawton, and went to Lincoln High, eventually.

0:05:01 Jacki Fromer: My sister went to Lincoln.

0:05:04 David Fromer: I had a younger brother, Jonathan, or Jon Fromer, who has been and is now a wonderful musician and is also a producer of television programs for KQED. He was three years younger, he was a very capable soccer player who was on the United States Open Cup Champion team from San Francisco Athletic Club in 1976. And he was also an alternate on the United States Olympic Team in 1972.

0:05:45 Jacki Fromer: He lives in Mill Valley, also.

0:05:46 David Fromer: He lives in Mill Valley also, on Morning Sun. In addition to Jon, who is three years younger than me, I had a sister, Annie, who is three years older. And she married Eugene Spake, and they have lived in the Tam Valley area of Mill Valley for many years. So, getting back to my life story, I was very scholarly and studied very hard in school and loved athletics, although I had not played any organized sports until I was almost 14. But in San Francisco, soccer was a unique part of the boy's athletic picture in the middle schools or the junior high schools. Such soccer activists as Steve Negoesco and others had succeeded in getting soccer as one of the four sports that boys could play inter-scholastically in junior high school.

I wanted to try all the sports. I tried track, and basketball, and baseball, and soccer. Someone had told me that since I kicked the ball pretty far in kick ball and I was on the track team as a sprinter, that maybe soccer could be a game for me. And, of course, when I started it out in 1956 as a 13-year-old, it was like unlocking a mystery. The first season, I would run, and run, and run for miles in the midfield without touching the ball, 'cause I would chase it wherever it went. And during the off-season, I was led to Steve Negoesco who had a club team, and suddenly the light bulbs above my head started to go on and I discovered passing and the team beauty of the game. And I stayed with Steve Negoesco pretty much throughout my whole soccer career. When I went back to the Midwest to go to college in the early to mid '60s, I came back and rejoined the teams that Steve Negoesco was coaching.

A wonderful thing happened in relation to that youth club team. I was playing with a team called Mercury Athletic Club and we were sort of in the West Coast Championship in 1960 and lost in L.A. But then in 1961, during the summer when I was just turning 19, our under-19 boys team beat L.A., three to nothing down there, beat a very powerful St.

Louis team, two to nothing in San Francisco, and then went back east to play Philadelphia on their home field in a 104 degree temperature, 98 relative humidity.

We were essentially a group of middle class, and lower middle class, and poor kids gathered together from different parts of the city, probably about two-thirds Latino. We were told we didn't have a prayer and that the championship was a foregone conclusion for the east coast team. We went back there and we won two to nothing and that was the first youth team to win any national soccer championship, boys or girls, west of the Mississippi. And to this day it's the only National Championship youth soccer team ever from San Francisco. So, we sort of put the west coast on the map, and we had a wonderful time doing it, and we made lifelong friendships, and had an amazing experience playing together under Steve. And Steve went on to win numerous National Championships at USF but this was his first coaching National Championship in summer of 1961.

And I should go back a few steps, soccer-wise, and just say that I was athletically active at Washington High School. I threw the shot-put on the track team and I was third in Northern California in my junior year in shot-put and All-City all three years at Washington High School. But most of all, I loved my classes, I loved my teachers, and I loved to be athletic. When I graduated, I went to Cal Berkeley for a year, and since the NCA rule required that all freshmen play JV, I played JV soccer at Cal for a year and we were undefeated. Then I went to San Francisco City College and we were undefeated in the same conference with Cal, Stanford, and USF. And so, with a number of Top 15 Division I teams in our conference, we were the conference champion.¹ After a year at City College, I had a hankering for adventure and wanted to see what Wisconsin was like. My parents had met there and I was attracted to the Midwest, and so went back to Wisconsin and went to school there. I helped start the intramural program, recruiting 965 signups.

0:12:09 Bob Hemstock: How long did you go to school there?

0:12:11 David Fromer: I went there for two years and then I came back. It's an interesting story. I'd never graduated from Wisconsin because when I was at Wisconsin, I took a bus down to Chicago every weekend to play for Schwaben FC, a soccer team, primarily German team, which won the US Amateur Cup and went to Germany to play. And in order to go with the team to play in Germany, I had to take incompletes because we left in late May. And so, I had this wonderful experience of playing soccer in Germany with Schwaben from Chicago, then came back and came home for the summer in '64, and was singing at a folk-sing with my brother and a friend, Elbert Robinson, who had thrown shot-put with me at Washington High School and who loved to make music. And someone heard us, and scooped us up, and made a folk trio out of us. In no time at all, we were auditioning at the Hungry Eye and offered a seven-year contract with the managers of The Kingston Trio and we turned that down. And, shortly thereafter, we were auditioning at a little club in San Francisco and someone from Mercury Records had flown out, named Jack Tracy from the Midwest, and offered us a contract with Mercury

¹ In addition, I and three of my teammates were selected first Team All-America.—David Fromer.

Records. And my college career was interrupted by this fantastic opportunity to be a performing musician.

And so, suddenly, without having performed at any club, we were in the middle of the Henry Mancini show with audiences of 16,000 to 18,000 in huge arenas. We went on a tour and went to Tulsa Civic Auditorium, Houston Civic Auditorium, Des Moines, Iowa, Chicago. And then we had engagements with Henry Mancini's orchestra in Seattle, and in Portland, and Corvallis, and Eugene. So, suddenly, my life was changed. I had to decide between going back to Wisconsin to finish up or to explore this incredible opportunity. And so, my brother Jon and my friend, Elbert and I were in a folk trio called Jonathan, David, and Elbert. We were recording an album in Hollywood. We performed with John Denver at The Troubadour in Hollywood and cut an album with Glen Campbell accompanying us as our backup guitarist. And then we were enticed to move to Chicago because we were told that a manager there, Frank Fried, was very interested in signing us to a contract. We ended up living in Chicago for a month or two in the spring of 1965. And my brother and Elbert had gone to Selma, Alabama to march in the historic civil rights march.

And they came up from that civil rights march to debut at a club called Mother Blues in Chicago. We were asked to move to Chicago after our stint at the club there. And so, I had a very pivotal question in my life: If we were going to move from San Francisco to Chicago to follow our musical dreams, should I call Jacki, whom I had fallen in love with in the fall of '64, and invite her to move out to live with us in a big, seven-room apartment near Old Town in Chicago? So, obviously, it was a Hobson's choice. I couldn't resist and I gave her a call on a Sunday morning and asked her if she could move out and join us and —

0:17:17 Bob Hemstock: Move out to Chicago?

0:17:18 David Fromer: Yes. And she did. And we had a wonderful year there in the summer of '65 and fall of '65 until the summer of '66. Joni Mitchell, on a couple of occasions, spent the weekend at our place, making music with us all night and sharing all kinds of stories and songs. We played regularly in a club. And we took part-time jobs. And we also enrolled at Roosevelt University there because the Vietnam War was on and the draft was very solicitous. We were in need of going to college and getting a student deferment so that we could continue to explore our musical fortunes.

0:18:24 Jacki Fromer: One thing, could I say —

0:18:26 David Fromer: Yeah.

0:18:26 Jacki Fromer: The reason that the manager, Frank Fried, at that exact time when they had been ready to sign with them, shifted careers and became a Bill Graham-type promoter and brought The Beatles to this country. That created a sudden dramatic shift in his career, and so I got to go and see The Beatles the first time they played in Chicago at the Comiskey Park.

0:18:55 Bob Hemstock: Wow, that's amazing.

0:18:56 Jacki Fromer: I couldn't hear a word because of the screaming and the noise. But it did impact their career because he dropped all of the people that he was managing and went full-time into promoting. So they suddenly were there in Chicago without that management and direction, and being young and inexperienced, it was like starting at the top and then starting over again. [chuckles]

0:19:25 Bob Hemstock: Yeah.

0:19:28 Jacki Fromer: Okay. And I was born in San Francisco in 1942, October, so I'm a little bit younger, a few months. My parents were both born in San Francisco. My paternal grandfather had come to San Francisco in 1908 after the earthquake and fire because there was work there and he was a builder. He was the contractor on some of the apartment buildings that are still standing in the Marina District. So that's how my parents ended up there. I was born there, went all through school there. I also went to Washington High School, and David and I kind of knew each other from a distance, but not really personally. And then after we graduated, I got interested in folk music, but he was off at Wisconsin so I didn't meet him. I met his brother through the San Francisco Folk Music Club. And I knew of David 'cause he'd been very involved in high school as a class officer, an athlete, and so I asked about him, and his brother Jon and I became friends through the Folk Music Club.

And so then, I had persuaded my mother to take this class at San Francisco State extension from a professor that I had just loved and who was very influential in my life. And I went with her to visit, as David said, and he was the person that she had been telling me about, that she become friends with in the class. So I said, "Oh." But she had his name wrong, so I didn't recognize it. We had a friendship for quite a while first before we fell in love. And, let's see, then I went to City College and then I guess when we started going out, you were already involved in the music group. And so it was a big step for me to move to Chicago, but I eagerly did. It was quite an experience living there in the early '60s.

0:21:45 David Fromer: Mid-'60s.

0:21:46 Jacki Fromer: Mid-'60s.

0:21:46 David Fromer: Yeah.

0:21:47 Bob Hemstock: Did you work there?

0:21:49 Jacki Fromer: Yeah. We worked at little shops... Wells Street in Chicago at that time was a very, kinda up-and-coming, sort of touristy folk music center. And there were a lot of little shops and I got a job at a place called The Caravan, which had all kinds of imported clothes, and jewelry, and just all different kinds of imports. And David

worked two doors down at The Cook's Cupboard, which was a cookware store. And we lived in a house full of young people. Even though we were just barely 20, I guess, we were the grown-ups in the house, who felt a responsibility to pay the rent and take care of things, [chuckles] whereas for the rest of them, it was kind of the beginning of the whole folk, hippies, psychedelic era.

0:22:47 Bob Hemstock: So you two started it all. [laughter]

0:22:52 Jacki Fromer: It was a very, very interesting time to be there and living in that environment. It was very eye-opening, too. For me, one of the most dramatic experiences was I had grown up in San Francisco and really never lived anywhere else. And in Chicago, there was very, very open kind of government —

0:23:24 David Fromer: Corruption?

0:23:25 Jacki Fromer: Corruption. And it was so shocking to me, because it was so extreme and blatant. People paid off the cops when they got stopped for traffic tickets and people got harassed. I just saw a part of life that I hadn't seen before.

0:23:44 Bob Hemstock: My family has a farm in southern Illinois and we have a little corporation. And we're dealing with the city since they need a portion of our land for roads, so they're taking it through eminent domain. I could see some of the same things going on in southern Illinois. I'm really curious on how you found yourselves here in Mill Valley. Were you married here or married before you moved here? What is that story?

0:24:14 David Fromer: Okay. When the momentum of our folk music trio, Jonathan, David, and Elbert, seemed to change and we weren't progressing on a national level, we decided to come —

0:24:31 Jacki Fromer: Well, partly 'cause of the draft, having to be in school and worry about being drafted —

0:24:37 David Fromer: Right, we were sort of anchored by having to go to school, and have part-time jobs, and so forth. So we came back in summer of '66 to San Francisco and I went back to Wisconsin and was expecting to complete my studies there.

0:25:00 Jacki Fromer: And I went to California College of Arts and Crafts, in Oakland at that time.

0:25:04 David Fromer: But in the fall, I had to come back to San Francisco to go to court, because I had filed for conscientious objector and I wasn't accepted as a conscientious objector. And so I went to court to try to get the proper consideration of my application for C.O. And so in coming back to San Francisco in the fall, I reunited with Jacki, which was wonderful, and then we decided to get married in January of '67 and we did. And then she came back to Wisconsin so that we could be there while I tried to

complete my studies there. After a short time there, we decided to come back to San Francisco, but in the meantime, Reed, our first child was born in the late summer of '67. We came back to San Francisco and moved into a house in the Cole Valley area on Clayton Street.

And our years there, from '67 or '68 until '74, when we moved to Mill Valley, our years there were very exciting for us. We had friends over all the time, we had lots of musical gatherings. I was teaching school, preschool and also first grade, kindergarten, first grade. I was teaching music, and I was teaching guitar, and I was also teaching PE in schools. But it was a very social time for us. The neighborhood was full of wonderful people. We lived on Clayton between Carl and Parnassus in a beautiful, big Victorian and we always had a friend or two living in the basement or in the attic, including, at one point, my brother, and his girlfriend, and their pet rabbit. And lots of wonderful gatherings at our house and I continued to play soccer. I sort of resumed my soccer career which had been dormant and played for Steve Negoesco's teams in the men's league at Balboa Stadium. But we moved in Mill Valley in 1974 —

0:28:18 Jacki Fromer: 'Cause the house we were living in was sold, so we needed to move.

0:28:22 Bob Hemstock: In San Francisco?

0:28:23 Jacki Fromer: Right. And by that time David's parents had moved to Mill Valley, and then after that, his sister and her family moved to Mill Valley, so that's how we got to know about Mill Valley. And we really liked it, we came over here, and spent time with his family here, and just grew to love Mill Valley. So when we started looking for a place to live, it was natural to just begin in Mill Valley. Although I think we looked all around Marin at first.

0:28:57 Bob Hemstock: Did you move to this home? Is this the first place you moved?

0:29:01 Jacki Fromer: Yes, yes, yes. And we were shown a number of other places that the realtors considered might be the most appropriate choices for a young couple. But when we walked in the front door of this place, and looked through the windows in the back, and saw flowers everywhere and beautiful garden and trees, we were magnetically drawn to this house at 147 Elm Avenue.

0:29:31 Bob Hemstock: And Reed was seven-years-old and went to school across the road at Park School?

0:29:37 David Fromer: Right.

0:29:38 Jacki Fromer: Across the street.

0:29:38 Bob Hemstock: What could be better?

0:29:39 David Fromer: Right.

0:29:41 Jacki Fromer: And Rachel was three and we took her to the Sausalito co-op Nursery School, so she started school there.

0:29:54 David Fromer: And we were here for a couple of years prior to my role as a co-founder in starting the Mill Valley Soccer Club. There was some soccer activity for youth here in Marin, but it wasn't highly organized. There were a few people — Eddie Arnold, and Jim Whiteside, and Rocky Welchick, and my brother, Jon Fromer, who coached, and one or two other people, who were coaching locally — and there was a league called the Junior Soccer League of Marin, I believe. I started coaching a team in that league when Reed was seven, and it was a team that had a number of players that went on to play very well for Tam High School and on the higher levels in the Bay Area. But at that time, things were somewhat random. Coaches who had children that were playing, very often were inspired to take a team, but there wasn't a systematic kind of organization at all the age levels.

And so Dick Swain, who had been active, particularly at Tam High, and the boosters, soccer boosters, promoting the high school soccer program — Dick Swain, and I, and another fellow named Hayden McAfee met in early March at the Mill Valley Bakery, which was just down the street from the 7-11 and from the Mill Valley Coffee Shop. We met in the bakery and confirmed our desire to start a Mill Valley Soccer Club, and we said that it was time for us to get a program for our town. And so, the three of us put out notices, and circulated them at schools. And Dick Swain, especially, was active in inviting certain community people to be on the board, the very first board of the soccer club.

0:32:41 Bob Hemstock: What year was this in?

0:32:42 David Fromer: 1976.

0:32:43 Bob Hemstock: Okay.

0:32:45 David Fromer: The Mill Valley Soccer Club started in March of 1976 and the first season for the kids was in the fall of 1976.

0:32:57 Bob Hemstock: I would have guessed the Mill Valley Soccer Club, which always seemed, during my years involved with the Tiburon Peninsula Soccer League, I always thought that Mill Valley came first and was always a few steps in generations ahead of Tiburon. But I moved to Mill Valley in 1982, after eight years of being on the Tiburon board, so that means the Tiburon League was started in 1974. And when did you say Mill Valley was started?

0:33:36 David Fromer: 1976.

0:33:37 Bob Hemstock: Boy.

0:33:38 David Fromer: But there were teams that were coached in Mill Valley by different coaches, and they were teams that were affiliated, for the most part, with teams in the other parts of the county. And the Mayflower League, which was the adult league, consisted of a number of people who coached youth teams from San Rafael, or Novato, or other communities, including Mill Valley. There were also some options for local kids to play in San Francisco with a league there, I think perhaps the PAL League. But we were somewhat separate from the other communities, and what united us, was that one youth league, in particular.

I wasn't aware of the development in Tiburon, but I would agree with you, that once the Mill Valley Soccer Club got going, for a number of years, we would think of ourselves as being somewhat exemplary, and solid, and there were times when we perceived Tiburon to be similarly well organized, and there were other times when we were a little out of touch, out of sync with Tiburon. There might be an issue with one community or the other, which separated us briefly for a year or two.

0:35:30 Bob Hemstock: Were you called the Mill Valley Soccer Club from day one?

0:35:40 David Fromer: Mm-hmm.

0:35:40 Bob Hemstock: And that was because you were looking to having adult teams be involved in the club as well as youth teams?

0:35:50 David Fromer: I'm very glad you asked that question, because I had forgotten to mention that, but that really sort of brings up one of the things that we felt was unique about our Mill Valley Soccer Club, and that is that when we started we had a vision of providing soccer for all levels of the community, from the youngest kids, some of whom enrolled in my pee wee soccer classes which started at age three, to seniors, to adults. We had a women's team that grew out of a Tuesday morning class, which I was one of the coaches for along with Conny Alm, and some others, and later Ada Greenwood, many years later.

But there was a women's team that developed and a men's team. And the men's team was very often supervised and cared for by Dick Swain and friends of his, colleagues of his, and his sons, Dick's sons, John, and Paul, and Phil Swain and Matt Godino, and some other local youth grew to become strong members of that men's team. And the men's team progressed from perhaps the Fourth Division — I'm not positive about that — from the Third Division, to the Second Division, to the First Division, to the Majors. And in six seasons, it progressed four leagues up to reach the highest level. So we had a men's team eventually that was one of the best five or six teams in Northern California, and we had a women's team which was very capable.

They won a National Tournament in their second year of existence. And years later they left the Mill Valley Soccer Club, the women's team, because they felt that they weren't getting the kind of support or the collaboration that they had hoped for because the Mill

Valley Soccer Club was so focused on the youth program and somewhat oblivious of the men's and women's teams which were founded to be an integral part of this whole community soccer program. The women's team shifted to San Francisco after many years of being under the banner of Mill Valley, and in their first year with the Vikings that same team won the United States Over 30 National Championships.

So, both the men's and women's teams accomplished wonderful things, but were always on the back burner so far as the focus of the Mill Valley Soccer Club. Many of the parents who are on the board were so concerned with the league, which was then primarily from September to early November, without a lot of other activities around the calendar year. The board members were so engaged with the kids program, that they didn't realize how special it was to have adult teams, and I think that the Mill Valley Soccer Club's uniqueness in that area is a wonderful quality.

0:40:05 Bob Hemstock: I seem to remember that the Tiburon league looked towards the Mill Valley league when we were having so many girls sign up. And in the early days the girls played with the boys on co-ed teams. There were so many girls signing up for soccer that there was a need for girl's teams and neither of our leagues had enough girls to fill, enough girl's teams to have a league. So, I think we sent or we cooperated in starting up the first girl's divisions. Do you remember that?

0:40:46 David Fromer: Yeah, I do remember it because I was the most active person in advocating for the starting of a girl's league. And what happened in Mill Valley was that as the boys who played in the Mill Valley Soccer League were getting more and more years of experience, it became increasingly more challenging for girls to start out, particularly if they were starting out soccer at the age of nine, or 10, or 11, or 12. A number of them were hesitant to jump into a co-ed league with boys who had been playing since they were five or six. So as the co-ed league progressed from 1976 on, I started in the late '70s and early '80s suggesting very dramatically that we needed a girls league. And for a few years it was postponed. It was sort of on the back burner, but in 1982, during the sixth year of the Mill Valley Soccer Club, we did get a girls league started, finally.

And Julie Purcell, who is now Julie Althoff and who is a school teacher at Old Mill School, she agreed to be the director of the girls league in the first year. She and I organized that. And then for a number of years after that, the girls league grew, and I remember we did some very special things to try to build the popularity of soccer for the girls league. One of the things I remember most vividly was going to Mill Valley Middle School with a couple of the women from the women's team and doing a demonstration of skills for the different PE classes, the girls PE classes. And in our very first year of having the girls league, we had seven — well, actually, we only went up to Under-12 the first year in the girls league. But when we did form an Under-14 a year later and went to middle school to demonstrate the sport, we had 70 plus girls sign up.

0:43:31 Bob Hemstock: Just from Mill Valley?

0:43:32 David Fromer: Just from Mill Valley Middle School in the Under-14 age group. And I have a list of the players who signed up on that.

0:43:42 Bob Hemstock: That's amazing.

0:43:43 David Fromer: And so it was a tremendous, a tremendous response, partly because of our zeal and our excitement, our enthusiasm.

0:43:53 Jacki Fromer: And because we had a daughter who was playing, too. I think she started, I forget what age she was, but —

0:43:58 David Fromer: She was in the Under-12.

0:44:00 Jacki Fromer: I saw such a shift in all of her friends who hadn't played any kind of organized sports, and then all of a sudden were involved in this league. You could just see their confidence growing and what an impact it had on them. It was very, very apparent.

0:44:13 Bob Hemstock: Before the girls had their own league and their own teams, a girl would have to decide whether to play with the boys or not play at all. And this opened up the opportunity to play soccer to so many girls who did not want to play with the boys. But I seem to remember that those girls who did play with the boys for years and years became very successful in high school and college on all-girls teams. Did you see that in Mill Valley as well?

0:44:47 David Fromer: Yeah, I did see that as well. And when people asked me in sort of a pivotal moment whether I would recommend the girls league for their daughter or the co-ed league, I wasn't really opinionated one way or the other. I thought that there were things to be gained for each. And, of course, competing with the boys might have been the best choice for some of the most athletic or scrappier of the feistier of the gals. But I thought that the benefits of having girls as teammates, the support, and the enthusiasm, and all the kindred feelings of having a girls team, was a tremendous psychological and emotional, a boost for so many of the girls as well.

0:45:51 Bob Hemstock: Now let's jump ahead to the year 2010, and after all these decades of you being involved in soccer in Mill Valley and Marin County with your successful soccer camps and your wonderful program for the little kids at Hauke Park. Can you talk a little bit about the differences in soccer in 2010 compared to the early days?

0:46:22 David Fromer: Yeah. And some of it is more a matter of impressions than factual information. I have much more of a feeling of institutionalization now, of formality, of commitments projected upon the kids from the parents, and less of a spontaneous, less of an informal, or less of a casual atmosphere. There have always been soccer players who have been very ambitious, and very dedicated, and aspiring, but the systematizing of programs, and the degree of categorization, and the emphasis on

competitive levels has expanded so much lately, that sometimes I wonder where are all the informal opportunities for kids to just get together and play for fun, I wonder where those opportunities are in the bigger picture. And so I both applaud the growth of soccer and hold out a hope that there can be lots of programs where kids don't feel pressure from ambitious parents and so forth.

0:48:10 Jacki Fromer: Or ambitious coaches. [chuckles]

0:48:12 Bob Hemstock: Jacki, what's your viewpoint on this?

0:48:16 Jacki Fromer: Well, I would say the same as David. I am judging it from somewhat of a distance, although we have three grandchildren who have gone through playing. Our oldest grandchild is 16-and-a-half and she played on the varsity team this year at San Rafael High School. Our grandchildren all live in San Rafael. And her younger brother is 12 and he was played soccer in Mill Valley up until a couple of years ago, and he shifted to the Dixie League and he's a really, really strong —

0:49:00 David Fromer: That's Isaiah.

0:49:00 Jacki Fromer: Isaiah. He did play in the Under-Nine academy here in Mill Valley, and he had a good experience, but by the time he did that he already was at the age of wanting to be with his school friends, and so that's why they ended up shifting more towards San Rafael, so that they could be with friends. This was something that I think in a way reflects what David is saying when our granddaughter who really loves soccer and isn't as skilled player in some ways — not a strong, competitive player, but a very competent, knowledgeable player — played for San Rafael High in the JV team her first year as a freshman there. I noticed that their school was never considered one of the strong schools soccer-wise.

And yet, the kids seemed to be having so much fun. They just loved it and even though they lost probably most of their games, they had such a great season. And what I found interesting — because we run an indoor league, and we've done that for 23, 24 years, however long — I still saw a lot of the parents who participated in our indoor league who had girls that same age as our granddaughter, who were playing in Mill Valley or at other schools around Marin. I'd ask them if they were playing for their school, and I was very surprised at how many of those parents who had girls who played soccer all the way growing up and who I knew were good soccer players, and the parents said, "Oh, well, no, they didn't get chosen for the team," or "I didn't want them to try out because it's too competitive."

Kids I knew who were fairly good players spent the whole time on the bench. At many of the schools there seemed to be a more competitive attitude, and so I just found the value in seeing our granddaughter's experience, which I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been involved firsthand. They had such a great time; everybody participated. Nobody sat on the bench. Everybody was a part of it and they really felt like a team. And so, I just thought that was a really valuable experience, and I felt kind of sad that it doesn't seem to

be that way everywhere. I know when David coached at Tam High, one of the things he decided from the very beginning was to never cut anyone who tried out for the team, because he felt like —

0:51:47 Bob Hemstock: Yeah, I remember his teams of 25 players. [laughs]

0:51:50 Jacki Fromer: Yeah, because even if he made two groups, he felt like that was an age where kids deserve to play if they want to play. And I share that philosophy. I think it has kind of moved away from that in the community, in the greater community.

0:52:05 Bob Hemstock: Yeah, I don't think it's that way anymore. Back to the community, what changes have you seen in Mill Valley from the time when you moved here compared to today? The good changes, bad changes, how has the community changed?

0:52:28 Jacki Fromer: Well, you know [chuckles] we're at the age of our lives where we're looking back sentimentally at all of the wonderful things that we remember from the past, so, of course, that skews your picture. I think it's become a much, much more affluent community than it was when we first moved here. It seemed like when our kids were growing up, people had a lot more free time. And now we're just busy, and rushing, and over-extended. We had a lot of community and, of course, part of that is our place in life when our kids were younger. We were always very involved in the schools, and the sports, and the community activities, and initiated a lot of community activities as well as participated in ongoing things. For many years, we put on this Mill Valley Variety Show that was inter-generational. It was at the Mt. Carmel Auditorium.

So, we were much, much more involved in feeling like a part of the community, and that there were a lot of community things. I think partly because of the changes in the economy and how much people work, and just our stage of life, that it feels like there's a lot less of that. And I hear it from other people, yearning for more community. Life has changed for everybody, I think. Just busier, all of our friends who thought we'd be retired by this time are not. [chuckles]

0:54:14 David Fromer: I could echo what she's just said, and just add that it does seem now that people are so aware of their financial pressures, and their job pressures, and their career condition that they don't have time to just relax, and slow down, and take time to socialize freely. Very often people schedule things, but they have to check their calendars and they are still concerned, have a lot of pressures and are stressed in different ways which I don't remember being part of the ambiance of Mill Valley in the late '70s and in the '80s. People seemed to be able, at that time, to just be more free-flowing and get together with their friends without conflicts and without any concerns about time.

0:55:31 Bob Hemstock: And they could actually afford to buy their homes.

0:55:33 David Fromer: Yes.

0:55:35 Jacki Fromer: Yeah. And another thing I'm thinking about, the Variety Show that we did, which was really a wonderful event and grew to be a three-night event with 400 people each night. It was a very, very exciting time. We started that out as volunteers and we all just — a whole group of friends and family — got together as volunteers, and we'd put on skits about Mill Valley, and Rita Abrams was always a part of that (who had written the "Mill Valley" song) and was a very, very creative and talented person. We did that completely voluntarily for so many years and I remember so many people had time to do things like that just for fun. The reason we stopped doing it was because all of us became busier, and busier, and busier in our personal lives, just trying to make a living and just dealing with all of the responsibilities, that we all eventually felt we couldn't manage the time anymore.

0:56:31 Bob Hemstock: What about a reunion performance, mainly at the theater on Throckmorton?

0:56:37 Jacki Fromer: Well, actually when David found out about the Throckmorton [Theatre] opening, he went and talked to Lucy and Danny about the idea of continuing to do that. And they actually, for a couple of years —

0:56:54 David Fromer: Assumed directorship of it.

0:56:56 Jacki Fromer: He kind of instigated the initial part. He ran into some people downtown, and he talked about it, and it did actually happen. The host of the very first one was Mark Pitta. That evolved into him doing the comedy night there and so I don't know if he really even knows that connection, but I really feel like behind the scenes David initiated a lot of that.

0:57:23 David Fromer: I bumped into Chuck Eisler at the depot in the spring and talked to him about missing the old Mill Valley Variety Show, sometimes it was called the Talent Show.

0:57:36 Jacki Fromer: We have videos of the whole thing that probably should be in the library. We have videos, and photographs, and newspaper articles of that entire —

0:57:44 Bob Hemstock: The History Room would be interested in that.

0:57:47 Jacki Fromer: We should have copies made of all those videos.

0:57:51 David Fromer: And so, Chuck got together with Danny Slomoff and they agreed to assume the leadership of reviving the talent show and it was a tremendous exertion. They did a wonderful job, got fantastic performing talent for Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday shows, and did that for two years. So it was revived with a great flourish.

0:58:23 Jacki Fromer: And it had always been a benefit for various organizations related to children.

0:58:32 David Fromer: But, I guess, one way of summing up the talent show was that when we did it in the earlier years in Mill Valley — I think '76 was the year when we first started it out — it was a wonderful Mecca or gathering place for people to come and try to capture through skits, and music, and different kinds of performance styles, try to capture what the nature of Marin and Mill Valley life was like, and it was supposed to kind of represent all the different aspects of living here. It was a celebration, really, and we all loved doing it. But we became, as Jacki said, too busy, and it became too demanding to repeat it continually year after year.

0:59:32 Jacki Fromer: I also remember how it used to be second nature to me to organize social gatherings and we always had something going on here: folk-sings, and music parties, and just people here all the time. And through the years it's just become more and more difficult because everybody has such competing schedules and to find the time that works for everybody and that's just so hard.

0:59:57 Bob Hemstock: So, spontaneous events here aren't happening.

1:00:02 Jacki Fromer: I find that much less, yes.

1:00:03 David Fromer: Not as frequently.

1:00:04 Bob Hemstock: And with the children gone, too.

1:00:07 Jacki Fromer: That's a big part of it, too because then it's figuring all of their schedules and everybody's got to do these schedules.

1:00:12 David Fromer: But I do sense a tremendous dynamism, and an energy, and enthusiasm among parents who are active in the community with their kids in the schools and for them, perhaps, there's the same amount of —

1:00:33 Bob Hemstock: Synergy.

1:00:34 David Fromer: Yeah, synergy, and coming together, and sharing, and learning from each other, and enthusiasm of collaboration, and so forth.

1:00:46 Jacki Fromer: It's hard to tell which parts are just our stage of life and which parts are society and culture.

1:00:55 David Fromer: But it does seem, getting back to your comment, Bob, about the affordability or lack of affordability of housing, it does seem that in the late '70s and the '80s it was possible for families to survive without chasing the dollar quite so much. People could piece together part-time work in a couple of different areas and survive nicely.

1:01:29 Jacki Fromer: When we first lived here, David was, as he said, commuting to San Francisco at the school where he had been teaching, Live Oak School. And then after that, we started doing family daycare so we could both be home with our kids. And so we got to have a license for 12 kids, and we had to count our own two as part of that 12. And we took care of kids here for many years. Many came from after-school, from Park School, or in summer we'd have a pre-school program, or daycare. So we did that for a number of years and somehow survived, charging a dollar an hour per child, and just managed to live that way. And then, eventually, I got a job working for a non-profit organization, which at that time was called Project Care for Children. Eventually, it was changed to Marin Child Care Council. So I worked there for 12 years doing support services, and education, and training for parents and child care providers.

1:02:41 David Fromer: I should say also that Jacki is a marvelous artist, an amazing artist, and is an author who has written a couple of books, and is very, very creative in addition to being a very caring mom and a very caring grandma, and very helpful with all of our friends whenever they're in need as well. She's very talented and also has a very giving and caring spirit.

I wanted to describe a little bit about my life in Mill Valley, professionally, in the '80s. I would have sort of a very mixed kind of a schedule where I might get up in the morning, go across the street and teach a guitar class at 8:00 a.m. at Park School, and then teach a couple of guitar lessons, and then do a soccer enrichment class at 2 o'clock for kindergarten and first graders at the different elementary schools. For a number of years, I was one of the music teachers for the Mill Valley Schools. So in the '80s, I would go to the different elementary schools and teach music. And then after the enrichment class experience with soccer, I would go to the high school and coach at Tam High School. And I coached varsity girls and also frosh/soph girls and also the frosh/soph boy's team for about 14 years — approximately from about 1979 or '80 to 1992. Some pain from my knee, from cartilage injuries with my right knee, caused me to have to stop coaching at Tam High School. I would've coached there forever, otherwise. But my lifestyle was a mix of guitar lessons, music classes in the elementary schools, enrichment soccer classes, high school coaching. And then very often after the high school team, if there was enough daylight left, I would coach one or two youth teams in the soccer league. So it was rich with a lot of variety and we could piece together a livelihood with lots of part-time work, and have lots of wonderful social experiences in the process.

1:05:24 Bob Hemstock: And Mill Valley had a lot to do with it, the type of community it was.

1:05:27 David Fromer: Yes.

1:05:29 Bob Hemstock: Let's wrap this up with you describing a little bit when you work with your youngest kids, at least you used to, you, out on the soccer field, somehow incorporated music into that, as well, which was a very unique approach. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

1:05:50 David Fromer: Oh thank you for asking. I never approached the mix of music and soccer as a tactical or a strategic kind of process. I have always played guitar and sang for kids and I have always loved to kick a ball around and teach soccer. And so it just seemed natural to try to create a class which was fun for kids to start out and learn the game. And with the youngest kids, we hoped to convey a lot of special skills and basic technique in an atmosphere where kids are just moving a ball constantly, and changing direction, and trapping, and passing, and moving punctuated by a funny song or some sort of goofy, silly story. I just try to have as much fun as I can with the kids and, in the process, they're moving constantly with a ball and learning a lot.

1:07:21 Jacki Fromer: And then in that class, I think, creates a lot of community, because for a lot of families it's the very first time they've been out in a group with a lot of other parents and other children. And so I think singing together creates a lot of community feeling and it's a very friendly, warm atmosphere where the parents all participate with their children, so they're not put in a competitive situation at all.

1:07:44 Bob Hemstock: Of course, the youngest kids, the parents, they're hanging out. One of my strengths in coaching was getting rid of the parents.

1:07:55 David Fromer: Right. [chuckles]

1:07:57 Bob Hemstock: But no, I could see where that would relax the child.

1:08:02 Jacki Fromer: Yeah, children don't play in games, competitive games with each other. They do skill development in activities with the parent with each child.

1:08:12 Bob Hemstock: Did you use to help out with that, too, on the field?

1:08:14 Jacki Fromer: Well, not on the field so much as — although I did have a short period of time where I was playing with the women's soccer groups — but, no, more with registration. I've been the kind of behind-the-scenes administrative person for a long, long time.

1:08:29 Bob Hemstock: So you held everything together and kept David behaving correctly.

1:08:35 Jacki Fromer: I did my best. [laughs]

1:08:38 David Fromer: Mentioning women's soccer, I want to digress just for a second, to say that I taught a women's class through the Corte Madera Rec Department for a number of years. And in 1995, the class was taught with an effort to start a women's league and the class grew from 12, to 15, to 20, to 30, to 40, to 50, to 60, to 70, to almost 80 participants who would come over to Corte Madera Town Park and have a game with their friends.

1:09:17 Jacki Fromer: They would divide up in groups and there were people from 18 to mid-70s.

1:09:22 David Fromer: And this class at the Corte Madera Town Park blossomed into the Women's Soccer League of Marin. The women that were in it got so inspired, that they met and organized the women's league. When Jacki talked about her soccer experience with women, that was during that time. But I should also say that I do the soccer camps in the summer for kids from age five to 14, and I do the indoor league. And Jacki and I, and our son Reed, and daughter Rachel, are very active.

1:10:08 Jacki Fromer: And our kids, both are very key people. Yeah, our son Reed, who's a musician and a math teacher, he's really kind of a math genius and he manages to organize — we have about 1,800 kids, 1,600 to 1,800 kids in that league every year. And he organizes the entire schedule and he organizes it taking into account everybody's individual needs.

1:10:42 Bob Hemstock: That's a mission impossible.

1:10:43 Jacki Fromer: It is a mission impossible. I don't know that anybody could do it. I don't know that anybody else could do it. And he has a photographic memory, so he remembers every team from every previous year.

1:10:54 Bob Hemstock: Oh, wow!

1:10:55 Jacki Fromer: So he's able to really, really do a great job of creating equitable playing situations. And the league is very focused on being recreational; we don't keep standings at all. It's a really, really fun experience. People love it. I love it. I love going to as many games as I can. So, Reed does all of the scheduling and juggling things around if he sees after the first couple of weeks there's inequity, he'll shift teams around and try to keep a balance. And then, our daughter Rachel does all of the team placements of any of the kids who sign up. Kids can sign up either as a part of the team or individually, and we'll either create teams or place people on teams that don't have complete teams. She works for us year-round and during that time of the year she does a lot of administrative work on that league. And also she's played a big role in involving the Canal community and a lot of the Spanish speaking people because she can speak Spanish, so she's able to really help. She's really helped grow that inclusion of people from other communities.

A lot of the Marin City kids are given some help with scholarships, as well, to enable anyone who wants to play in the program, whether they can afford it or not, enable them to participate. But one thing I wanted to say was that sometimes, because I have coached kids when they start out at the age of three or four, parents remember that beginning, and I'm very determined to let the community know that the camps and the other programs are meant to be really the best quality we can offer for older kids as well, so that parents can relate to the programs which I'm offering as appropriate and developmental for the older kids, too. I want to help the older kids, as well. It's a lot of fun and you have done a wonderful job with the teams you've coached through the years, Bob.

1:13:38 Bob Hemstock: It's been a lot of fun, too, and in a way, it keeps us young. We'll probably be both still out on the field in our '90s. [laughs]

1:13:49 Jacki Fromer: Yeah. I think it's amazing. I'm always in awe of how much energy and enthusiasm David has and that it just goes on and on. Sometimes I call him the Energizer Bunny because he just [laughs] — he can still, with his aching knees, get out there and coach for hours, and hours, and hours with all the different ages and combining the music, which he just loves. I think he would volunteer, and go around to schools, and sing. And he just has so much enthusiasm and after all these years he can still come home after teaching some of those pee-wee classes and tell me about every little, cute child, [chuckles] and I have to come see this one, and that one. And he's been doing a lot of things for Bread and Roses more recently.

1:14:46 David Fromer: Voluntary concerts.

1:14:48 Jacki Fromer: Volunteering to go into pre-schools and hospitals.

1:14:51 Bob Hemstock: Well, that brings us back to our great community we live in.

1:14:56 David Fromer: So, it's hard, as Jacki said, when you are getting older, it's hard to be able to look at your community knowing that you don't have kids in the schools and you're not drawn into the school communities, as you were, or the league communities if you're somewhat independent from those. It's hard to look and see how similar or how different it is from Mill Valley in the late '70s, or the '80s, or early '90s. But to some degree, just the anxiousness and the stress which are manifest throughout the whole of society, including worry about the economy and so forth, these are all sort of contextual — they're all influencing our moods and our attitudes about life in Mill Valley. But to me, on the positive side there's so many wonderful people in Mill Valley and so many people with a progressive, social conscience, people that care about the under-privileged, or minorities, or —

1:16:19 Jacki Fromer: Or the world outside themselves.

1:16:20 David Fromer: Or the world beyond themselves, and so much, also, creative richness here. It's a Mecca for artists, and writers, and painters, and musicians. And we have the beauty of the mountain and all the wonderful environmental conditions of being in this beautiful place, which is near the Bay, and near the ocean, and not too far from the Sierras, and amidst so many wonderful people, that I still feel, even though I'm tempted at times to move into a place, an area which is a little more rural, a little more laid back, I still am amazed at Mill Valley, and I get up every morning around 5:30 or 6:00, very often go down to get a cappuccino or a cup a coffee and just appreciate how beautiful this place is.

1:17:36 Jacki Fromer: He's a regular downtown. [laughs] Every morning, every single morning.

1:17:40 Bob Hemstock: Good. Well, thank you so much for giving me your time to record your history in Mill Valley. I appreciate it very much.

1:17:52 Jacki Fromer: Thank you, thank you, it's really a nice experience.

1:17:54 David Fromer: Well, thank you so much.

1:17:55 Jacki Fromer: We're at the age where we like to reminisce. [laughs]

1:18:00 David Fromer: And thank you, Bob, for all the wonderful, wonderful things that you've done with all the teams you've coached and all the individual players who you've helped discover, whether it's been in soccer or lacrosse, whatever your sport is, you're a leader with the kids.

1:18:20 Bob Hemstock: Thank you very much. Bye-bye.