

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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

BETSEY CUTLER

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Joyce Kleiner in 2017**

TITLE: Oral History of Betsey Cutler
INTERVIEWER: Joyce Kleiner
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 24 pages
INTERVIEW DATE: January 24th, 2017

In this oral history, retired public servant Betsey Cutler recounts her life in Mill Valley and decades of service to the community. Born in New Jersey in 1942, Betsey moved to Mill Valley in 1969. Betsey first got started in public service when her two daughters, Karen and Susan, were growing up in the 1970s and she became President of the PTA. Betsey went on to serve for several years on the Planning Commission and then the City Council, including two terms as Mayor. She has also served on the boards of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Redwoods Community. Betsey recounts some of the major projects during her tenure on the Planning Commission and City Council — including the construction of the community center and the library renovation — and recalls many of the people she worked with in city government over the years. Betsey shares an around-the-world voyage she took with her husband John Cutler after their retirement. Throughout this oral history Betsey conveys how much she has enjoyed serving the community over the years. She concludes by sharing her reflections on some of Mill Valley's challenges going into the future and expressing her hope that as the community changes it will maintain a balance between the old and the new.

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

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

Oral History of Betsey Cutler

Index

- Aramburu, Al...p.2
Barnard, Jean...p.22
Barnes, Cathy...p.11, 22
Berman, Andy...p.4
Boessenecker, John...p.22
Brilliant, Larry...p.4
Brown, Hal...p.14
Civic roles...p.3-4
City Council...p.7, 15-16, 23
Community Center...p.9-10
Cutler, John Harvey (husband)...p.1, 3, 9
Dawson, Doug...p.16
Dickinson, John...p.6, 16
“Dog Wars”...p.11-14
Downtown commercial district...p.7-8, 21
Education and Advertising to Improve Parent-Child Relations...p.2
Fire flow initiative...p.14
Fisco, Dennis...p.9
Foot, Cathleen...p.22
Historical Society...p.17, 21
Houses...p.18
Housing challenges...p.19
Ireland...p.18, 22
Jackson Sloan, Jessica...p.19
Jessup, Dick...p.22
Karen (daughter)...p.1
Kiddo!...p.
Kraft, Crispin...p.1
League of Women Voters...p.3
Leonard, John...p.22
Levinson, Warren...p.8, 22
Library renovation and addition...p.11
Marshall, Shawn...p.4
McClure, Jim...p.14
Montgomery, Anne...p.11
Planning Commission...p.5-7
Political campaign work...p.2
Poutiatine, Ivan...p.22
PTA...p.1-2
Redwoods Community...p.4, 17
Robb, David...p.12, 22
Rudy, Allison...p.22
Solem, Anne...p.2
Solem, Don...p.2, 23
Snyder, Ruth...p.7, 8
Spotswood, Dick...p.15, 22
Susan (daughter)...p.1
Travels...p.5
Weiss, Penny...p.9

Oral History of Betsey Cutler
January 24th, 2017

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

0:00:00 Joyce Kleiner: This is January 24th, 2017. And this is an oral history interview of Betsey Cutler of Mill Valley. I'm Joyce Kleiner and I'm going to be conducting the interview. Before we go into some of the details of the interview, I just wanted to run over your basic biographical information first. Your full name is Betsey Pooley Cutler and you live at 6 Hill Street, Mill Valley. You were born on March 26th, 1942 in Morristown, New Jersey.

0:00:41 Betsey Cutler: That's correct.

0:00:42 Joyce Kleiner: Your husband's name is John Harvey Cutler. And you have served on a variety of different civic roles in Mill Valley so we'll get to that in a minute. You have two daughters, Karen, who was born in 1962, and Susan, who was born in 1964. Both of them are daughters from your first marriage which was to Crispin Kraft, also a Marin local. And you have been married to John, your current husband, for 35 years in July, this coming July. And I think those were the things I wanted to read in. So now let's go into some of the how-you-got-here stories. We're going to start with some of the personal stories first and then go on to your civic life. Let's talk about when you arrived in the Mill Valley.

0:01:45 Betsey Cutler: I arrived in Mill Valley in August or early September of 1969. My first husband had served in the Navy as a naval officer in the submarine corps and we had been stationed in San Diego and had had a trip to San Francisco, which we fell in love with. And then when he got out of the service, we were back East but he looked for a job in San Francisco and got one. We moved to California and he didn't want to commute too far and we wanted to come into Marin so we first looked in Sausalito but didn't actually see anything there. And the schools were in kind of a tumultuous situation in Sausalito at that time, and my little girls were five and three, or six and four, and I just thought we needed to get a town where the schools were more stable. And the next town up was Mill Valley, so we settled in Mill Valley fortunately.

0:02:55 Joyce Kleiner: And then can you tell me a little bit about the next years after that? I know that at some point you separated and so let's just kind of go through some of that part of the story.

0:03:06 Betsey Cutler: Well, in the early part of living in Mill Valley, I, like a lot of young mothers, got involved with the PTA. Old Mill School PTA was my home. And I served as PTA president of Old Mill starting in 1972 and '73. And again in '73 and '74. I worked to help establish an enrichment program there and we worked very hard at that time to try to get some foreign language into the schools. And then I served as president of the PTA council of Mill Valley and that was a time when the schools were — I don't

believe they're like this today — the schools were much more in competition with each other. Some were considered much better than others rather than them all being considered so excellent as they are today. And one of the things I did when I was PTA council president was to have a monthly meeting of all the PTA presidents from the various schools just so that we could get to know each other better and learn more about each other's schools and what was happening. That was quite nice. That was really fun. It was my beginning part of being involved in the community.

0:04:32 Joyce Kleiner: And then at one point you returned back to work full-time?

0:04:37 Betsey Cutler: Right. That was in 1976 or '77 when my marriage broke up and I went to work for political campaigns. I worked on Al Aramburu's supervisorial campaign, Barry Keene's state senate campaign, and a few others. I had one year where I worked as the town clerk for the town of Tiburon. And that was very enlightening. And then in 1980, I went to work for Solem & Associates in San Francisco.

0:05:23 Joyce Kleiner: How did you end up going straight into political work?

0:05:29 Betsey Cutler: Well, I was interested in government and campaigns and democracy, if you will. I had worked, volunteered a little bit in some school board campaigns in Mill Valley and maybe a City Council campaign before that and it was kind of natural for me, as it turned out. I liked the organizing part of it and the community building base part of it.

0:06:03 Joyce Kleiner: How did you find your way to Solem & Associates?

0:06:07 Betsey Cutler: Well, I knew Anne and Don Solem from Mill Valley, not well, but just as you know people in town. Don had started the company in, I believe 1976, and they were getting more and more business, and I was just invited to go there and work. And I was always glad that I did.

0:06:34 Joyce Kleiner: You were working for them, and did you stay for a year or longer?

0:06:38 Betsey Cutler: No, no. I worked for them for five years, from '80 'til '85. Though we had a statewide public education project — Education and Advertising to Improve Parent-Child Relations — especially surrounding teenagers with their parents. And I worked as the northern California director of that. I did some political campaign management, some fundraising, and at that time the firm was moving really more away from complete work in campaigns to do more marketing and advertising.

0:07:29 Joyce Kleiner: And also, eventually they moved to more issue-oriented stuff.

0:07:35 Betsey Cutler: Yes. We did very few candidates with issue-oriented things. We did a campaign in Berkeley that helped to defeat an anti-Israel campaign — that was very interesting. And then there was a Californians for Higher Education Bond Act in

1986, and I did the statewide fundraising for that. And then in the meantime, I got more involved in Mill Valley activities and was appointed to the Planning Commission, after applying three times. [chuckles]

0:08:17 Joyce Kleiner: I'm going to back up before we go into the civic contributions. I wanted to ask about John, so when did you meet John?

0:08:27 Betsey Cutler: I met John when he was on the school board and I was involved in the PTA. And actually, I believe I did a little volunteer work for him for one of his campaigns, probably his second one.

0:08:44 Joyce Kleiner: For the school board?

0:08:45 Betsey Cutler: For the school board. And he likes to tell people that I would go to the school board meetings and sit in the front row knitting and scowling at him. [chuckles]

0:09:00 Joyce Kleiner: Did you ever volunteer for the League of Women Voters?

0:09:08 Betsey Cutler: No, I belonged to the League of Women Voters and have for many years, but I've never really worked with them, in part because I was working for political campaigns of one side or the other and the League is quite non-partisan in that regard.

0:09:27 Joyce Kleiner: You met John, and how long were you dating before you got married?

0:09:32 Betsey Cutler: Well, I knew John, and I knew his first wife, she was on the board of the Old Mill PTA when I was PTA president. And then unfortunately she died in 1980, I believe it was, and then John and I met on the bus coming home from work in San Francisco, struck up a conversation and then started to go out. And then we were married in July of '82.

0:10:08 Joyce Kleiner: And you continued working for Solem. Okay, so I think that maybe brings us up to your civic contribution state period, right?

0:10:25 Betsey Cutler: Mm-hmm.

0:10:30 Joyce Kleiner: You've had a lot of roles, let's before we go into the specifics of some of them, can you just list for me all of the civic volunteer jobs you've had in Mill Valley?

0:10:40 Betsey Cutler: Well, I was appointed to the Mill Valley Planning Commission, and I served on that for two terms, then two terms on the City Council, including two terms as mayor. I was on the Historical Society Board for five years, and

right now I'm in my fifth of sixth year serving on the Redwoods Senior Housing, or Redwoods Community of Seniors.

0:11:10 Joyce Kleiner: And you also have been involved in at least one City Council campaign as a campaign manager, do you want to talk about that? No? Okay. [chuckles]

0:11:30 Betsey Cutler: Yes, and I worked as a volunteer for the election of Shawn Marshall when she was elected to the City Council, and also as campaign manager for Andy Berman for his first campaign. Larry Brilliant and I pretty much headed up that campaign for Andy.

0:11:54 Joyce Kleiner: For City Council?

0:11:55 Betsey Cutler: For City Council.

0:11:56 Joyce Kleiner: And you recruited Andy, didn't you?

0:12:00 Betsey Cutler: Yes, I did, because I wanted Andy to be on the Planning Commission. And then when he first applied, he didn't make it but then he applied again at my urging because I reminded him that I had applied three times. And then I very much wanted him to be on the City Council and he did a great job for two terms. And now, he's on the Redwoods board.

0:12:24 Joyce Kleiner: Oh, is he?

0:12:25 Betsey Cutler: Yes.

0:12:25 Joyce Kleiner: Okay, I want to go back to personal experiences briefly because Anne Solem said to make sure to ask you about the around the world voyage you took with John. Can you talk about that a little bit?

0:12:40 Betsey Cutler: Yes. My term on the City Council was up in the end of '97, and John was thinking of retiring right about that time. We planned ahead and in March of 1998 we got on a freighter in Dunkirk, France, and for four months went around the world.

0:13:06 Joyce Kleiner: On a freighter?

0:13:07 Betsey Cutler: There were four passengers.

0:13:09 Joyce Kleiner: Sorry?

0:13:09 Betsey Cutler: There were four passengers.

0:13:10 Joyce Kleiner: Four passengers. What was that like?

0:13:13 Betsey Cutler: Oh, it was fabulous. We became fast friends with the two ladies who were on board with us. We each read 30 books, and it was the trip of a lifetime. You hear people say that but this one really was.

0:13:28 Joyce Kleiner: What were some the highlights about it? And where were some of the places that you got off in?

0:13:34 Betsey Cutler: We went across the Atlantic and through the Panama Canal, and we waited, we were very fortunate. We waited for a couple of days for our turn and the captain told us that almost exclusively, freighters go through at night, so that the cruise ships can go through during the day. But for whatever the reason, we were slotted in to go through during in the day, so that was a highlight.

0:14:02 Joyce Kleiner: On the Panama Canal?

0:14:03 Betsey Cutler: Yeah, going through the Panama Canal. And then we stopped in Papeete, Tahiti, for two nights and we got off the ship there and went to a resort for an overnight. We went to Papua New Guinea, not a place I think I ever would have gone but we went there. We stopped two or three times in various cities and it was very interesting. We crossed the Straits of Malacca, we crossed the Indian ocean, through the Suez Canal. We crossed the Mediterranean, up around the Sea of Biscay and ended up in Antwerp.

0:14:46 Joyce Kleiner: Wow.

0:14:47 Betsey Cutler: It was amazing.

0:14:48 Joyce Kleiner: And being on a freighter, besides the obvious differences that it wasn't a luxury cruise line, was it better in some ways do you think?

0:14:58 Betsey Cutler: It was better because we had kind of a suite, whereas on a cruise ship you might just have a small room. But we had a living room and a bedroom, a bathroom. It wasn't luxurious, but it was spacious. And there were just the four passengers, so we usually ate with the captain or he was in the dining room at the same time. And we had three decks all to ourselves. Every Sunday the captain would have a cocktail party for the officers, who were Russian and English. A Russian crew fixing English food wasn't great, but we looked forward to it every day. There was a library and a little gymnasium in the bottom of the ship that John went to every day. I didn't. But it was just fantastic.

0:16:02 Joyce Kleiner: That sounds wonderful. Okay. Now, I'm going to go on to your civic roles now, starting with, a lot of questions, so I'm gonna make sure I don't leave anything out. But let's just go chronologically. Well, you applied, you said, to the Planning Commission a couple of times before finally getting on. And you said you recruited Andy. Let's talk about your Planning Commission years and then going into the City Council and so on.

0:16:44 Betsey Cutler: Well, I was appointed to the Planning Commission and served on that for six years. It was a time in the early mid '80s when the price of houses took a steep upward turn, and many people came to town and really, really had to struggle to pay this enormous amount of money for a house, which at that time was \$200,000 to \$300,000. It was quite surprising and somewhat distressing to me that people who did that then did not want anything to happen around them. They thought they were sacrificing so much to get this house that they didn't want anything to happen around them and there would be some rather unfortunate and unhappy situations with neighbors.

0:17:48 Joyce Kleiner: Can you give me an example, just in general, not names or anything?

0:17:54 Betsey Cutler: It would be a person would buy a house and spent a lot of money for it. And then a little while later someone would buy the house next door and maybe wanted to put a second story, or maybe wanted to enlarge the front lawn area and encroach a little bit into the driveway of the house next door. Without having surveys — as you know, we don't usually have surveys when we buy houses here — without having surveys it would have been better just to work it out. There was some unhappiness with that. For the way Mill Valley looks now we have, in large part, to thank John Dickinson, who was the planning director at the time. He had a keen eye for what would fit nicely onto the property and was very aware of the fact that we were not a town that was built with streets in a grid-like fashion and that we needed to be individual.

0:19:18 Joyce Kleiner: You had once mentioned to me, or pointed out to me, that one of the challenges for Mill Valley and for the Planning Commission is that it's hard to just stick to a rubric of rules because so many of the houses are on slopes and so a fence can have much — for example, a fence below a house barely gives the house privacy, but it feels like a wall to the people below them and so on. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

0:19:51 Betsey Cutler: Well, yes, and that's very true. We established at the time something called the "floor area ratio" that had to do with the size of the house that you could put on a particular size of property. That was, in part, to avoid having huge houses on smaller lots. There was talk about a slope ordinance that did not exactly happen when I was on the Planning Commission, but since then I believe there is a slope ordinance. It might have happened in Andy's time actually. There was lot of talk about trees being cut down or not cut down. Then, when I was on the City Council some years later, we established a tree ordinance, a heritage tree ordinance. But all of these things were done where you would try to have an ordinance be drafted that would encompass the likes and desires and wishes of the city and most of the residents. But it could not be in a grid-like fashion because we're not flat and we don't have streets that just criss-cross. It's difficult, and it takes a lot of time and a lot of energy for both the city staff and then the planning commissioners and most of all the public, to come to an agreement. It's hard.

0:21:30 Joyce Kleiner: You completed your full two terms on the Planning Commission?

0:21:35 Betsey Cutler: Mm-hmm.

0:21:36 Joyce Kleiner: After serving your two terms on the Planning Commission you went on to be on the City Council. That's an interesting story the way that happened. Can you talk about that a little bit?

0:21:47 Betsey Cutler: I just would back up one more minute on the Planning Commission to say that I was the planning commissioner who was the liaison to the general plan committee. That was in the '80s. That was a citizens committee to work on revitalizing our general plan at that time. That again, was very helpful to both the Planning Commission to have this citizens committee work on the general plan because it helped us focus our thoughts on how we wanted the city to look.

0:22:27 Joyce Kleiner: What year was that?

0:22:31 Betsey Cutler: It was in the '80's. It would've been, maybe '88.

0:22:37 Joyce Kleiner: And that general plan stayed in place until very recently?

0:22:41 Betsey Cutler: Yes. Until recently. Until the 2014 committee. Yes.

0:22:45 Joyce Kleiner: What were some of the big challenges in getting that general plan written?

0:22:54 Betsey Cutler: The biggest challenges at that time were the residents' desires to maintain a diversity of housing and diversity of people. That was one of the big ones. And there was the commercial element of the general plan where we tried very hard to work with the Chamber of Commerce and to work with the citizens to hopefully get more residents serving businesses so that the town would stay vibrant.

0:23:34 Joyce Kleiner: Let's go back a little bit to what Mill Valley was like when you got here and how you watched it change physically and, or any other way that you want to add to that?

0:23:48 Betsey Cutler: Well, I think we're very lucky that the downtown of Mill Valley has stayed as much the same as it has. Obviously, some of the stores have changed. There was a little department store on the corner. Mosher's was the shoe store. Anyway, this little department store on the corner where Equator is now. But in actual fact the Mill Valley Market was there and still is. Bank of America, Wells Fargo, the movie theater, we still have some of the good bones of downtown Mill Valley, granted some of the shops have changed. And I still miss Varney's and the pharmacy right downtown. Ruth Snyder owned that one little hardware store.

0:24:46 Joyce Kleiner: And also there were a couple of bars downtown.

0:24:52 Betsey Cutler: Oh, there were many bars downtown. Quinn's was where part of the Mill Valley Market deli is now. It was Quinn's. I think where Vasco was there was a bar that was just a bar. There was a bar up by maybe where Eileen Fisher is, or kind of up in that part of Throckmorton. There was also a gas station where Bungalow 44 is.

0:25:24 Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, there were a lot of gas stations.

0:25:25 Betsey Cutler: And the post office was right across the street.

0:25:28 Joyce Kleiner: It has changed a lot.

0:25:33 Betsey Cutler: It has changed a lot. There was the general store right up from the movie theater, which I would consider to be an old fashioned five-and-ten store. A lot has changed. But in terms of the look, the buildings, and so forth, I think we're lucky that it still looks as nice as it does.

0:26:00 Joyce Kleiner: Going back to the City Council then. Let's talk about how you found yourself on the City Council. [chuckles]

0:26:07 Betsey Cutler: Well, Ruth Snyder resigned from the City Council soon after she had been re-elected to her second term. She moved out of state, and the City Council had the option of either holding a special election or going through the appointment process. And they chose to go through appointment process because it was very expensive to run a campaign and the appointment was going to be for basically three and a half years because Ruth really only served a few months after her election in April and she left in July, I believe or early July. Anyway, I was the chairman of the Planning Commission, and I thought, "Well this is my chance to get onto the City Council." And like any kind of job, if you will, you feel like you do one job and then you think that maybe you'd like to move up, you'd like to be promoted so to speak.

0:27:15: I applied, as did eight other people. There were nine of us. You submitted an application answering the questions that the Council had raised, and then had an interview, and then the Council voted and chose. One of the things that was interesting to me — and I don't know if this is why I was ultimately selected, but I thought it might have something to do with it — is that the city was going through budget hearings in early mid-June. And I was the only person of the nine who'd applied to the Council who sat through all of those budget hearings and tried to educate myself on the city budget. I was very, very fortunate and appreciative of getting the appointment.

0:28:24 Joyce Kleiner: Because you hadn't run, you felt that it was important that the people know who you are, so as I recall you sent out postcards or letters to the community and invited them to come and meet you.

0:28:39 Betsey Cutler: That was really at the end of my first term before the second term because at that time it was Warren Levinson and myself who were up for re-election and we ran unopposed. And yes, at that time I did send out a postcard, which Solem &

Associates helped me design and print, to all the residents saying some things about what the City Council had been doing, and some of my thoughts and my priorities. And then there was the tear-off at the bottom asking them to send back their thoughts, and there was quite a nice response, and I was very pleased. And at that time one of the biggest concerns that people had — and this would've been in '90 about, '93 or '94 — was traffic, traffic and big houses being built.

0:29:52 Joyce Kleiner: So, some things don't change.

0:29:53 Betsey Cutler: Some things don't change.

0:29:55 Joyce Kleiner: Were you serving on the Planning Commission or the City Council when the library and the community center were built? The library had a significant renovation or addition to it and the community center was built, were you on the City Council at that time?

0:30:15 Betsey Cutler: Yes.

0:30:16 Joyce Kleiner: And were you also on the City Council when the dog park thing came up?

0:30:20 Betsey Cutler: Yes.

0:30:21 Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

0:30:21 Betsey Cutler: Two high points and one low point.

0:30:24 Joyce Kleiner: Let's talk about them.

0:30:28 Betsey Cutler: In terms of the community center, that really got started in 1988. I was on the Planning Commission and I, along with 14 other Mill Valley citizens, were asked to investigate and consider whether we could and should and would be able to build a new community center. That committee went around the Bay Area, looking at community centers. We ultimately did a survey of citizens to see what people wanted and how we could pay for it. It took about 12 years, but finally, finally it opened.

0:31:19 Joyce Kleiner: Who were some of the stewards of that project?

0:31:25 Betsey Cutler: Well, Dennis Fisco was really one of the lead fundraisers on that. Penny Weiss had been hired by the city to be the fund developer. Any number of people worked hard on it. My husband, John, worked hard on it. Any number of people worked hard to raise the money as well as — it wasn't for all the money, but good part of the money. And then there were many, many meetings with architects to determine what we wanted and how it was to look. It was a long, long process, and it wasn't easy. There were many times when things didn't seem to be going well, and we weren't sure about

whether it was ever going to happen. I remember time after time voting “yes.” Yes, we’re going to spend this money.

0:32:27 Joyce Kleiner: And by now you’re on the City Council, right?

0:32:28 Betsey Cutler: Yeah.

0:32:29 Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

0:32:30 Betsey Cutler: By then I was on the City Council. “Yes, we’re going to spend this money.” And we just kept saying, “If we build it, they will come.” But there were many times when I would go home after a meeting and wonder if this was really going to happen.

0:32:49 Joyce Kleiner: Would you say that there were individual people who were advocating, like identified advocates for this?

0:32:58 Betsey Cutler: Well, yes. Many people. The swimming pool had a whole series of people who were advocates and really, really hoping that the swimming pool would be included, which of course it has been. And then people who wanted the exercise room, people who wanted a room for yoga and dance, people who wanted a senior center, a teen center, the lobby. At one point there was to be a little cafe in the entryway lobby, and then of course, the large room for events. It was a huge community effort.

0:33:38 Joyce Kleiner: That’s the Cascade Room, right?

0:33:40 Betsey Cutler: That’s the Cascade Room, yes.

0:33:41 Joyce Kleiner: And it was decided that instead of having a classic gymnasium layout with basketball hoops and stuff, that the Cascade Room was more of an attractive room, more of a ballroom kind of, and although you do have low-impact exercise classes and things in there —

0:34:05 Betsey Cutler: And a lot of children’s —

0:34:06 Joyce Kleiner: And children’s programs.

0:34:08 Betsey Cutler: Large groups of children.

0:34:10 Joyce Kleiner: But it is also meant to generate income?

0:34:11 Betsey Cutler: It is. It is meant to generate income and I believe it does. It’s used for weddings, bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs, birthday parties, anniversary parties, memorial services, any kind of gathering you can imagine.

0:34:28 Joyce Kleiner: Right. Then, the library, were you on the City Council when the library renovation happened?

0:34:36 Betsey Cutler: Yes, I was.

0:34:37 Joyce Kleiner: That was an addition, right?

0:34:40 Betsey Cutler: A renovation and an addition, yes. Anne Montgomery was the city librarian. Cathy Barnes, who was on the City Council with me, was very, very helpful and instrumental in that getting past the bond issue. There was a survey taken right around the same time that there was talk about fixing the library and the community center was going to be built. And the respondents, the citizens, said that they did not want to pay any extra taxes for the community center, but the library was much more favorably inclined for a bond issue. That was interesting, and we proceeded in that fashion afterwards. I can't quite remember what year the library passed. I think it might have been '98, but I just do remember that it passed with 74%. It was a huge win.

0:35:48 Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, and it's a beautiful library.

0:35:51 Betsey Cutler: It is beautiful.

0:35:52 Joyce Kleiner: Really beautiful. And Anne Montgomery was librarian then?

0:35:57 Betsey Cutler: Yes.

0:35:57 Joyce Kleiner: And she remained librarian until she was promoted to City Assistant Manager.

0:36:08 Betsey Cutler: Assistant Manager and then Manager.

0:36:10 Joyce Kleiner: City Manager?

0:36:10 Betsey Cutler: Yeah.

0:36:10 Joyce Kleiner: Now you were also on the City Council when the "Dog Wars," as they're called, happened. Let's hear about that.

0:36:24 Betsey Cutler: That was not a happy time.

0:36:30 Joyce Kleiner: By the way, can you give me essentially a date when this came before you?

0:36:35 Betsey Cutler: Well I would say it was 1996 and '97. '95, '96, and '97 maybe. We knew that we wanted to do something in terms of building the dog park because so many people have dogs, and some of the dogs were a little bit out of control in the downtown. To harken back, when I first came in 1969, there was so little traffic in Mill

Valley, mostly men working would go on a bus or drive to San Francisco during the day, or early in the morning to go to work, come back at 6 o'clock. But during the day there was very little activity in downtown Mill Valley and there would be the blonde dogs of Mill Valley, the golden retrievers, that would be sleeping in the intersection between Vasco and Equator now. And cars would just go around them and so forth. It was very charming. Anyway by 1995 or '96 there were many more dogs and we felt that we needed to do something, and wanted to have a dog park. Dog parks were becoming a little bit more well known throughout. The question was whether the dog park was going to be where one of the soccer fields is, was it going to be on the east side or the west side, in front of the Public Safety building or closer to the middle school? And people had very, very strong opinions.

0:38:21 Joyce Kleiner: Now did this go to the Park and Rec Commission first?

0:38:24 Betsey Cutler: I believe it did but in fairness I can't remember how it got up to the Council. But it came to the Council with a lot of animosity amongst a lot of people. There's still a woman in Mill Valley who won't speak to me over that. And at the end of the day we had very large meetings. David Robb was the mayor, and he did a really great job in keeping his cool and the rest of us calmed down because people were so upset. They wanted either a larger park, or in a different area. There were all kinds of reasons. Some people wanted water faucets, and washing-off facilities, and benches, and all kinds of things that we just weren't quite ready to do yet. First we had to figure out a place and the soccer fields were being used. It was very difficult to schedule the use of these fields because more and more girls were playing, and there were more and more children needing the fields. And so the soccer field just wasn't the right place for a dog park, despite the fact that an awful lot of the dog people wanted it there.

0:39:55 Joyce Kleiner: And where was the soccer field then? Because there's been a lot of changes since then.

0:40:00 Betsey Cutler: I'm talking about the soccer field that was just right at the bridge going from the middle school over to the Public Safety building.

0:40:07 Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

0:40:08 Betsey Cutler: On the west side of the water.

0:40:12 Joyce Kleiner: Oh hang on. There was at one time a bridge that went from the middle school over the water to the Public Safety building?

0:40:20 Betsey Cutler: Just a walking bridge.

0:40:21 Joyce Kleiner: Oh, okay.

0:40:22 Betsey Cutler: Yeah. It's still there.

0:40:26 Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

0:40:29 Betsey Cutler: One of the biggest upsets amongst the dog people was they did not want the dog park located where it is now. More or less down the bike path a ways from the middle school, because there's the field and then there's the dog park. Many people did not want it down at that end.

0:40:54 Joyce Kleiner: And why was that?

0:40:56 Betsey Cutler: It was too far to walk.

0:40:57 Joyce Kleiner: So it was more the dog people didn't want it there?

0:41:00 Betsey Cutler: It was all the dog park. It was all the dog people.

0:41:03 Joyce Kleiner: And where did they want it?

0:41:05 Betsey Cutler: They either wanted it at the soccer field that's adjacent to it, some people wanted it across the water right in front of the Public Safety building. Some people did not want that because they didn't want so many cars coming around with people with their dogs, and there was more parking at the middle school. There was every argument you could imagine on both sides, and it was quite nasty. It was quite nasty. There was one time — and this is really hard for me to even repeat but none of us who were there will ever forget it. There was a man who stood up — it was in the Methodist Church in a very large meeting. He was an advocate for the dog park being on the soccer field. And he said he thought it would be a good civic lesson for the children to go and pick up all of the dog waste before they had their practice, that would be a good civic activity for the children. Well, this brought the house down.

0:42:27 Joyce Kleiner: Wow. Seriously? [laughs]

0:42:31 Betsey Cutler: Yeah. So now it's 20 years later and it seems like people are very happy. I hope.

0:42:39 Joyce Kleiner: I understand that there was just a lot of tension, particularly between the people who wanted, I guess, just to protect the soccer field — they were asking to use the land to increase the fields. It was just to protect the soccer field. And my understanding was that the biggest rifts were specifically between the parents of children playing sports and the dog owners. Was that pretty much how it was?

0:43:10 Betsey Cutler: Yes. And the dog owners were very, very outspoken. Yeah they were.

0:43:23 Joyce Kleiner: There was even attacks on children, right? Do you remember any of those?

0:43:29 Betsey Cutler: No, other than the one that I just related about how the children should do their civic duty by picking up other people's dog's waste. But I know that there were. And then, one of the things that the City Council had to deal with was the safety of the people, because that's one of our biggest concerns and charges. And we felt it was important that the police and the safety officers would have some ammunition if we had a dog park, and people were then allowing their dogs to run free and maybe knock down children, or possibly knock down older people, who might be a little bit unsteady on their feet. And if you could say, "Well, you have a dog park, and that's where you have to go. That's where you need to be with your dog. And it's not appropriate to have it running around loose on the sidewalks and in the downtown area." That was a bit of an overriding concern, in part of our thinking, part of the Council's thinking in terms of trying to get to a resolution, to get to "yes."

0:44:58 Joyce Kleiner: I also understand that one of the reasons that the Public Safety building area was vetoed was because an environmental impact study was done, and that was a more vulnerable area?

0:45:11 Betsey Cutler: Vulnerable. Yes.

0:45:12 Joyce Kleiner: For wildlife was it?

0:45:13 Betsey Cutler: Yes. As you go from the middle school, over that pedestrian bridge towards the public safety building, now to the left, there are soccer fields, but to the right, it's still pristine land, and yes, that was a high consideration.

0:45:31 Joyce Kleiner: I'm looking at my notes and —

0:45:37 Betsey Cutler: There's one other highlight I would like to mention, if I may.

0:45:40 Joyce Kleiner: Okay.

0:45:41 Betsey Cutler: And that is, the citizens of Mill Valley and beyond voted for a fire flow initiative, and that was hard fought, and it was extremely necessary.

0:46:01 Joyce Kleiner: Can you explain what that is?

0:46:05 Betsey Cutler: It was a parcel tax, I believe at \$75, might have gone up by now, but I think it was \$75. And it was to increase the pipes and the fire hydrants to be able to have higher pressure and the ability to put out a fire if necessary. And Mill Valley was I believe, the largest recipient of the funds, because we had the oldest system, and we have the 49 miles of roads. This was a very big deal of former Supervisor Hal Brown, who has since died. He was involved in that at the county level. There was a survey taken that showed that we could in fact pass this if we worked hard on it. And again, I can't quite remember the year, but I think it might've been '92. Anyway, that was a real highlight. And one of the firemen in Mill Valley, Jim McClure, was a big advocate for

this, and he was extremely convincing, because he knew every pipe and every fire hydrant in Mill Valley, and he knew what we needed.

0:47:34 Joyce Kleiner: And fire is one of the big challenges for Mill Valley, partly because a lot of people live in the hills.

0:47:41 Betsey Cutler: Right. When the Oakland fire happened, which I believe was '91, Dick Spotswood was on the Council. I was new on the Council, but he and I — and I don't know if anyone else went, some staff members — went over to Oakland well after that was over, but to look and see and have a tour and get some lessons on what had gone right, what had gone wrong, and that was the precursor of the fire flow initiative for our county.

0:48:13 Joyce Kleiner: And these are the kinds of things you don't hear about too much when people are running for City Council. Generally, they bring up things that tend to be more exciting or something. Why don't you talk a little bit about some of the things that you worked on, that City Council really spends most of their time working on or should spend most of their time working on?

0:48:37 Betsey Cutler: Well, a huge amount of time is spent on budget, in determining the budget and then following up to see that the money is being spent as the policy dictates. So that's part of it. There's the work that's not so much seen in public, having to do with public safety, with fire, with sewers, meeting after meeting on these issues, some Planning Commission appeals.

0:49:11 Joyce Kleiner: Did that increase Planning Commission appeals? Have they increased? Have you seen the increase in appeals to the City Council?

0:49:18 Betsey Cutler: I don't think that increased when I was on so much. But a lot of that has to do with who was actually on the Planning Commission and how the decisions are rendered. And then maybe rather recently we've been in a situation where the neighbors once again are unhappy if somebody near them is building something that's too big. It's not onerous to a person or an individual to appeal a Planning Commission decision up to the City Council.

0:50:01 Joyce Kleiner: And you can do that? If you decide to appeal, the City Council has to listen to the appeal?

0:50:05 Betsey Cutler: Yes.

0:50:07 Joyce Kleiner: Right. What other things did you learn about what it really takes to serve on the City Council that maybe surprised you before you started? You didn't know until you started.

0:50:22 Betsey Cutler: Well, certainly all of the intricacies of the budget and the priorities, having to establish the priorities and learning how to answer when a constituent

would say, “Well why don’t you do this and why don’t you do that?” Or, “Why don’t you have more plantings?” Or, “Why don’t you have more streetlights?” Or why don’t you do whatever their little pet thing is. It’s a matter of priorities. It’s obviously very important to have a great staff, and we had Doug Dawson. I had Doug Dawson as a city manager the whole time I was on and he was an excellent teacher and an excellent city manager. And then, again, as I mentioned earlier, John Dickinson was the planning director and I felt he did an excellent job in a difficult, oftentimes difficult, situation. The City Council establishes the policies and that’s where you try to take these divergent views that come in from the populace and develop a policy that will be for the benefit of the majority. And then it’s up to the staff to do the work, to manage the city adhering to the policies.

0:52:02 Betsey Cutler: It takes time, it takes commitment to listen to everyone and I think a commitment to try to always make sure that people are having a fair hearing so that when they leave, even if you’ve turned them down, they can say, “Well, they listened. They listened to all the facts and they treated us fairly. I’m sorry I didn’t win, but I was treated well.”

0:52:40 Joyce Kleiner: I have a note here that someone suggested I ask you about communication. Maybe not. I thought somebody had said to ask you about communication. Let me just ask you myself. How do you think that communication with the public from city hall has changed over the years?

0:53:11 Betsey Cutler: Well, it’s amazing to me because when I was on — I can’t even remember if we had cell phones. I think Doug Dawson had a phone in his car and I had, towards the end of my term, I had something that was like a brick. [chuckles] But there was no such thing as email and certainly, social media, and so forth. It’s quite amazing to me today that they have the city website, they have the videotaping, or videos of the City Council meetings. We didn’t have that. You can look at the website, the city manager puts notices on to the public every couple of weeks or every week. There’s an immense amount of communication that’s coming from the city. I still hear people say, “Oh, I didn’t know that” or “I didn’t know that.” It’s a two-way street. My own personal opinion now is that the city is doing an excellent job in communicating, but it’s now up to the public to pay attention. But a lot of times it’s not particularly sexy, or particularly scintillating. It’s just business.

0:54:36 Joyce Kleiner: Since the newspaper doesn’t really report much about the City Council and so on any more, what’s your recommendation to just the average resident of Mill Valley for how to remain informed? If someone said, “How do I remain informed?” what would you tell them to do?

0:54:57 Betsey Cutler: Well I guess initially it would be to get involved with the neighborhood association if you have one and hope that the head of that, president of that, or whatever, would try to keep their individual association informed. And we have that neighborhood, whatever that neighborhood thing is called, Neighborhood Watch or something. Oh, I think it’s called Next Door.

0:55:29 Joyce Kleiner: Yeah. Next Door.

0:55:31 Betsey Cutler: Other than that, I would just encourage everybody to sign-up for the city website and to sign-up to get the reports and the newsletters. They put something out every week or every other week about what's happening on Miller Avenue, so that you can really keep up. Of course, going to City Council meetings —

0:56:00 Joyce Kleiner: Or watching.

0:56:02 Betsey Cutler: Or watching them through the video. The Planning Department now posts notices. I think it's 200 feet, a radius of 200 feet from a project that's coming before the Planning Commission. There's an opportunity if it's in your very immediate neighborhood to find out.

0:56:26 Joyce Kleiner: But there is a lot of information on the website, including the archived video recordings of the meetings. The City Council, the Planning Commission, all of the commission meetings are taped, right?

0:56:40 Betsey Cutler: Mm-hmm. I don't know about Parks and Rec to tell you the truth.

0:56:43 Joyce Kleiner: After you left the City Council, what was your civic volunteer experience after that?

0:57:04 Betsey Cutler: Well I was on a vacation for a while, and then I joined the Historical Society board, and I was on that for five years and worked on, most particularly with the History Walk.

[brief pause in interview]

0:57:38 Joyce Kleiner: I'm sorry. You were saying that, what you did after you left the City Council?

0:57:43 Betsey Cutler: I joined the Mill Valley Historical Society board.

0:57:47 Joyce Kleiner: And you did the History Walk, I have that now, okay.

0:57:49 Betsey Cutler: Yeah. And then five years ago, so that would be 2012, I was invited to join the board of The Redwoods which I have done and I've served two years as president of the board.

0:58:08 Joyce Kleiner: I thought you're currently the president?

0:58:09 Betsey Cutler: No. This is my last year, and I am not the president. And this is not about community service, but in 2005 John and I bought a small farmhouse in Ireland and we usually are over there two, three, four months a year.

0:58:34 Joyce Kleiner: How did you choose Ireland?

0:58:36 Betsey Cutler: We had been to Ireland twice on bicycle trips, and then we went in 2004. We went to go walking, and we just happened to settle in this area of southwest Cork that we fell in love with, and then we went back the next year and bought a little farmhouse.

0:58:58 Joyce Kleiner: That's nice. You're there, and what time of year are you usually there?

0:59:01 Betsey Cutler: We're usually there for the summer, and then maybe go once in the winter — well, it depends on the winter and what we're doing and whether we're skiing, and so forth — for three or four weeks.

0:59:18 Joyce Kleiner: That reminded me of something else I wanted to ask you about your personal life. You've owned a number of different houses in Mill Valley, haven't you?

0:59:32 Betsey Cutler: Yes. When I first moved to Mill Valley, I lived at 251 Molino Avenue. Then when I was divorced, I bought a condominium at Park Terrace. Then when John and I were married, I moved into his house, which was the large five- or six-bedroom house, and we had six children between us so that seemed far more reasonable than him moving into my two-bedroom condo. And then when the children were gone, and out of college and married or on their own, and I had had enough of Redwood Trees and darkness on Corte Madera Avenue, we moved up to Birch Street on a flat piece of property with no trees and lots of sun, and remodeled a house, 29 Birch Street. We lived there for 21 years and then we decided we wanted to be downtown in a one-story house, close to town so we could walk. And so we sold our Birch Street house and we are now renting a house on Hill Street. It's lovely and we can walk to the restaurants, we can walk to the movie, to the market, to the library, to the banks. We often walk downtown, twice a day, sometimes three times a day. It's really, it's wonderful.

1:01:19 Joyce Kleiner: What would you say are the challenges Mill Valley faces and how are they different from the ones that you saw 20 years ago?

1:01:30 Betsey Cutler: I think they're the same challenges but with higher intensity, because of instant communications and people knowing so much and the stress of life. It's just more than it was 20 years ago. But the challenges are the same. There's traffic, there's of course people who are very interested in schools and the great quality of schools and maintaining that. Housing. It's becoming ever increasingly more difficult to have a diversity of housing in Mill Valley because of the high value of the land and expensive houses. So that's a big challenge.

1:02:25 Joyce Kleiner: Now you had actually mentioned when you first applied, I think it was to the City Council, that you felt that a diversity of housing and being able to

house our seniors and people on different economic strata — do you feel that there's been any positive steps? I mean the Redwoods continues to grow and expand and serve more people but it's limited by its real estate boundaries. We do have some low-income properties that actually serve, we have a couple of apartment complexes that are entirely committed to low-income, but there's only so much land to put on new low-income housing or affordable housing. Is there any hope that this diversity of economic levels can stay and why would it be important to keep it?

1:03:35 Betsey Cutler: Well, it's important to keep it so that we keep the heart and soul of Mill Valley and not be any more homogenous than we already are. The idea of being able to have people from all walks of life and all income and all everything makes us richer at the end of the day. One thing I'd have to correct: the Redwoods actually has not grown. There's plan, a dream of building possibly 40 more units at some point, but it is a far off dream. Second units or junior units as they're called, but second units — when I was on the Planning Commission and the City Council we worked very hard to legalize the second units that were already in existence and to a certain degree encourage people to have them if they could provide the parking and some of the other restrictions. But that is a way to maintain some diversity of income.

1:04:48: Interestingly enough, one-third of the housing units in Mill Valley are apartments. It's a hard figure to remember. But one of the big challenges is some of these apartment buildings are maybe coming to the end of their useful life, and ways to encourage the owners to either refurbish them or somehow maintain them as apartments, rental apartments, rather than tear down and build expensive condos or mega mansions — that's a big challenge for the City Council and for the people. I think we just have to keep working on it and we have to keep chipping away at it. We don't have the land to have a big massive project of low income housing, and maybe we don't want that anyway. We'd like to have units scattered amongst us all. That is a challenge and I think we're very fortunate now that Jessica Jackson Sloan is the mayor, and it's her highest priority to work on affordable housing. I think we may hear and see more efforts on behalf of that.

1:06:07 Joyce Kleiner: I hear talk sometimes about creating some kind of a trust fund for raising money to buy some of the infill and convert it. Is that still being talked about and is there any hope that anything like that could happen?

1:06:23 Betsey Cutler: I really don't know. I had heard about that a few years ago actually, but I haven't heard anything about it recently. And I don't know, I think some communities do that, and I think some communities do things like either buy a house or enable for instance the Police Chief, maybe even the city manager to live in town, which is not exactly the same, but it's a little bit akin. But I don't know whether it's possible in today's world with things being so terribly expensive. When you think that, just around the corner from where we live now, a house on Presidio, fronting Miller Avenue, two bedrooms, one bath, 1000 square feet, and it just sold for a million two. This is a very steep challenge.

1:07:20 Joyce Kleiner: I want to return to some of your personal life again. You've now lived in Mill Valley how many years?

1:07:29 Betsey Cutler: 48.

1:07:30 Joyce Kleiner: 48. And so you have a very rich pool of friends here in Mill Valley. You know a lot of people and they are personal friends of yours. In the Bay Area you don't see as much of this kind of long term residence in one place. At least I don't see it as much down in the peninsula where I grew up. Can you just talk a little bit about what it's been like to live in a place where your children started as little kids and the friends that you made then and now you're adults and what it's meant to you to have this continuity of friendships?

1:08:21 Betsey Cutler: Well, it means everything. I lived here for a few years maybe a number of years before I actually thought of, "This is where I'm from." You kind of think of where you're from as where you were raised. I could say, "I'm from New Jersey." But now that I am older, and my husband's a little older than I am, and we see people, we see friends of ours moving away for a variety of reasons, and we too thought about, "Well, maybe we should move from Mill Valley," for whatever the reason. And then you look around, and in our little town we have a movie theater, and nice restaurants, and a couple of banks, and so forth. Where else are you going to find this? And it's so nice just to walk downtown, and be in the market, and see people that you've seen for years and years, maybe you know them only slightly but enough to say hello to and care about.

1:09:25: And then, of course, our own friends, many of whom live in Mill Valley, or San Francisco, or Larkspur, close by. At the end of the day, for me, there's just no substitute for that familiarity, and we take it for granted. The beauty of where we live, we take it for granted. But every time we come back and you land at San Francisco Airport, and you come out and air is clean, and it looks so nice and it feels so good and you're on the bus, on the Marin Airporter coming across the Golden Gate Bridge, and you think, "Wow, this is fantastic." I've always appreciated, always appreciated, the fact that the friends that we made now, close to 50 years ago, it had nothing to do with how rich people were, or how anything they were, just nice people that you had some things in common with and you could stay friends. Yeah, it's nice. It's very nice. I imagine people from little towns, or small cities all over the country, feel the same way. And it isn't as if this is the only place to live. But it happens to be where I live and so, it's what I like.

1:10:53 Joyce Kleiner: You served on the Historical Society Board, and can you give me a sort of pros-and-cons about how Mill Valley is pretty proud of its history. We have a very active historical society, and Mill Valley's History is often brought up to defend a position in the City Council or Planning Commission or even the Park and Rec. Can you give me a little pros-and-cons about valuing our history? Things that it's good for, but also does it provide challenges for the future?

1:11:38 Betsey Cutler: It certainly does provide challenges. Well, I will err, in my thinking, to the historical part of it because I think it's just so important not to plough

things down and to keep as much as we can or at least to keep the facade of some buildings, even if you are going to renovate and modernize inside. And I think, very close to us, the Presidio is a wonderful example of how they have been able to do that. That is for me a good example. Yes, California is not that old and Mill Valley is not that old in the scheme of things. And when you go to London or Rome or any place, you realize that. But it's important for me to feel that we're keeping as much as we can. And to keep the great old houses and the buildings downtown, yeah, I think it's important.

1:12:38 Joyce Kleiner: And what challenges do you think holding on to Mill Valley's history can bring up? Do you think that people get locked into a particular period that they remember well and want things — it doesn't have to be way back in the beginning, you know, 1900.

1:12:57 Betsey Cutler: No. And of course, as time goes on, nowadays if you go to an antique store, you see a lot of furniture there from the '40s and the '50s. It's very familiar-looking to me. [chuckles] I think we have to try to maintain some balance between the old and the new, and maybe begin to think about keeping things from the '40s and the '50s, which is kind of funny to think of, but it's just a good marker for people. And if there's a way that a building can be saved and maintained and the owner wants to do that, then I think it's very important. And if there's not, then you just realize that maybe we're just chipping away and you don't want to be in a position where you're looking back for 20 years ago and say, "Gee, it's too bad we let that happen."

1:14:02 Joyce Kleiner: What are some of the businesses that you miss the most that aren't here anymore?

1:14:09 Betsey Cutler: Well, I guess I would say the Tamalpais General Store when it was — I don't think that was the name of it then. I don't know. Anyway, it was a five-and-ten.

1:14:21 Joyce Kleiner: It was originally a five-and-ten?

1:14:22 Betsey Cutler: Where you could buy a thread and needles. And there was a hardware store right downtown. Now having said that, we have some new businesses that are really fun and great. The coffee shops are great. The little restaurant on Sunnyside that used to be called Toast, it has a new name now, it's wonderful to go for breakfast. Sweetwater has great food. It's not always just what you miss, it's some new things come in, and that are really good. For me, and maybe it's because I'm old, but it's ever increasingly more difficult to buy things in Mill Valley because it's clear that the market demands these shops where the prices are higher and \$200 for a t-shirt or \$350 for a white blouse. It's more than I want to spend.

1:15:33 Joyce Kleiner: And where do you go for a needle and thread now?

1:15:37 Betsey Cutler: You have to get in the car, and this is one of the problems. I'll just tell you a little story of where we live in Ireland. It's very close to a town called

Bantry, which is small, but it has everything. Now, it doesn't have a huge amount of choice. If you need a greeting card, there's one, maybe two places. There's a grocery store, a couple of pharmacies, a bank, maybe two banks, naturally a lot of pubs, some butcher shops. But you can live there and never go anywhere else, and you have everything you need. You park once and you walk around. And here, we're very tempted. If you want a greeting card and you can't quite find it, exactly what you want, you think "Oh, I'll go up to the town center," or "I'll go here" or "I'll go there." And it's the same way with buying a t-shirt. "Well, I'll go to the Gap and then I'll go someplace else," and so forth. And all of that contributes to the traffic and the congestion and the stress of your life.

1:16:47 Joyce Kleiner: What's your personal opinion about the small chain stores that serve those more prosaic needs being downtown? There's been a lot of debate about what is acceptable and what isn't and so on.

1:17:07 Betsey Cutler: Well, that doesn't upset me. It doesn't upset me too much, really. Years ago, as I mentioned earlier, I spent one year working as town clerk for the town of Tiburon, and there was a great debate going on in Tiburon at that time about the banks, because there were quite a number of banks. And the City Council got mired in it: "Are three banks too many, or four not enough? Or two would be just right. But then we already got four, so what are we going to do?" And it just couldn't work. It just had to go for market forces. That was 1979 and I've thought about that so many times. If a place comes into town and it doesn't do well, whether it's a chain or whether it's not, doesn't really matter. And if it does well, that's fine too. There was a huge argument about one of the grocery stores over by where CVS is now. Was that Purity Market? I don't know. No, Red Cart. Red Cart. That was a major fight many years ago. There was talk about how terrible it was to have some chain in downtown Mill Valley, and then people forget that Whole Foods is a chain or that Safeway is a chain. Or Eileen Fisher is a chain. Lovely, lovely little store. And there are several Equators now, but it started in Mill Valley.

1:19:02 Joyce Kleiner: Peet's.

1:19:02 Betsey Cutler: Peet's. It's not anything that I get terribly upset about.

1:19:14 Joyce Kleiner: You've known a lot of people who had various civic roles in Mill Valley. Who are some of those people that you admired the most and feel like deserve to be remembered in particular?

1:19:32 Betsey Cutler: Well, going way back from when I first came to town, Ivan Poutiatine and Dick Jessup stand out in my mind. I knew Jean Barnard, but I think she was off the council then. And then coming forward, certainly Dick Spotswood and Cathleen Foot. Allison Rudy, before she died. She was a wonderful council person. John Boessenecker. Everybody thinks that they served on the best council. [chuckles] I love David Robb and Cathy Barnes, John Leonard, Warren Levinson.

1:20:27 Joyce Kleiner: And what would you say are two or three of the most important traits for serving on the City Council effectively?

1:20:41 Betsey Cutler: Patience. The ability to really see all sides. Not just give lip service. And commitment to the whole. Commitment to the community.

1:21:04 Joyce Kleiner: And you have served the community basically the entire time you've been living in Mill Valley. And you continue to serve it. What motivates you to continue to serve so consistently?

1:21:23 Betsey Cutler: Well, a sense of doing what's really fun for me. I get out of it for myself more than I put in. It's a great community that has served me well. I was raised in a family where my mother and father were both very active in community service. My father was on the school board. That was in New Jersey. When he retired and moved to Florida, he went on the city council in his little town. My mother was a girl scout leader involved in the church. It just was something that happened in our family.

1:22:13 Joyce Kleiner: So a sense of service is what you're describing?

1:22:15 Betsey Cutler: Yeah.

1:22:17 Joyce Kleiner: To feel that you give back.

1:22:18 Betsey Cutler: And I actually think that being an elected official is very honorable. It's an honorable profession. I think that of the locals, of the county, of the state and the Congress. Some are better than others, but it's an honorable profession.

1:22:40 Joyce Kleiner: I wanted to take a couple of minutes to just mention that very recently we lost an important community member Don Solem, the husband of Anne Solem. And so I wanted you to take this opportunity to say a couple of things about Don, since we never had a chance to interview him?

1:23:01 Betsey Cutler: Well, I hope you will get a chance to interview Anne.

1:23:03 Joyce Kleiner: She has been interviewed.

1:23:05 Betsey Cutler: Oh, good. Good, great. Well, Don was fantastic. And when I went to work for him, for Solem & Associates, although I had worked for the California Democratic Party and worked on some campaigns, he really taught me, I would easily say everything I know about campaigns and how to bring people together and how to community organize. Let's say he just had such a sharp mind and such an ability to bring people together, and to advocate for a position — primarily propositions or occasionally a candidate. Plus, he was just great fun. He loved baseball, and I think he loved football, but I didn't care about that. But we would, occasionally would have the pleasure of going to baseball games with him.

1:24:03: He was an avid reader. We often had dinner with Anne and Don, and in the last couple of years meet over at Saylor's Restaurant in Sausalito. And you would get there and Don's sitting there reading a book, puts it down and between conversations he reads a page. He was always having three, four, five books going at a time, belonged to several book clubs. He just was a voracious reader, and a wonderful, just a wonderful person to know in town. And I was particularly honored to know him as well as I did and work for him and, yeah, it was great. No, I really miss him already.

1:24:50 Joyce Kleiner: Yeah, everyone's been saying the same thing. You're a voracious reader, too. What kind of books do you like to read? You have a particular type of book you read a lot?

1:25:02 Betsey Cutler: Well I guess I would like to say quality fiction, although having said that I just finished reading *Hillbilly Elegy*, which is a memoir, and which I thought was very important, really important book for this time. But yes, I'm in a book club and we read mostly fiction, but some nonfiction, and some good nonfiction is appealing to me. It's hard for me to stick with something that's too dry. But I read the *New York Times* every day, and usually read 20, 25 books a year.

1:25:48 Joyce Kleiner: Well, I think we're almost done and really the last question I have is: What do you wish for Mill Valley going forward?

1:26:07 Betsey Cutler: Well I wish that we would have continued public, civic commitment by our residents in participation. I mean, I have faith that the decisions would be good if we had more and more people participating. It's so encouraging to me to see how many people move to town and immediately get involved with Kiddo!, because oftentimes people move for the schools and Kiddo! is so vibrant and has so much participation. And then hopefully, much as in my case, it transfers from your involvement with your children and then the enjoyment of that and then you can switch it over to involvement in civic —

1:27:03 Joyce Kleiner: And you'd like to see that continue?

1:27:06 Betsey Cutler: Yeah, I'd like to see that continue and for things to stay the same as much as possible, but also to embrace change as it comes, the good change as it comes.

1:27:21 Joyce Kleiner: Okay, thanks Betsey.

1:27:24 Betsey Cutler: Thank you.