

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

Mark Watts

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2018**

TITLE: Oral History of Mark Watts
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 55 pages
INTERVIEW DATE: April 15, 2018

In this oral history, field recording specialist, archivist and epigrapher Mark Watts recounts his life and narrates the life story of his father Alan, famous spiritual teacher and former Druid Heights denizen. Born in 1953, Mark grew up in Mill Valley; El Cerrito; and Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania. After high school, he attended Duquesne University in Pittsburgh where he studied psychology. Mark recounts how he moved back to California in the early 1970s, where he began helping his father do research and recording his public lectures. Throughout his oral history, Mark shares numerous stories about his father, evokes the milieu of Druid Heights, and poignantly describes his relationship with his father. Following his father's death in 1973, Mark founded the Alan Watts Organization, which houses his father's archive and promotes his teachings. Mark discusses his own family — his wife Tia and their two children Leah and Ken — and then concludes his oral history by sharing his fascination (as an *epigrapher*) with ancient pictographic languages and symbolism.

© 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 Mark Watts

Index

- Ajari...p.46-47
Alan Watts Organization...p.1, 43-45
American Academy of Asian
 Studies...p.9-11
*Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing
 Who You Are, The*...p.14
Borst, Richardf...p.23
Buddhism...p.4
Cage, John...p.8, 9, 21, 36
Campbell, Joseph...p.7, 8, 21, 35, 36, 43
childhood friends...p.20-21
collaboration with father...p.24-29, 39
Davis, Matthew...p.11
Dewitt, Dorothy (mother)...p.3, 6-7, 12-
 13
drugs...p.31-33
Druid Heights...p.22-24, 27, 52-53
Electronic University...p.44
epigraphy...p.48-50
Erdman, Jean...p.8, 9, 35
Esalen...p.22
Everett, Eleanor...p.4, 6
family background...p.2-3
Gidlow, Elsa...p.22
high school years...p.16-19
Hasegawa, Saburo...p.10, 21, 36
Hero with a Thousand Faces
 (Campbell)...p.8
Homestead School...p.20
humanistic psychology...p.27-28
Humphreys, Christmas...p.4, 36-37
In My Own Way...p.
Jacobs, Henry "Sandy"...p.11, 38, 44,
 50
Joseph Campbell Foundation...p.1, 35,
 43
Kerouac, Jack...p.21
King, Mary Jane Yates...p.12, 33
Meaning of Happiness, The...p.5
McCorkle, Locke...p.9, 10, 21
Middle Way, The (journal)...p.4
Mill Valley recollections...p.19-20
Mt. Lebanon...p.13-14
mysticism...p.41-42
Northwestern...p.5
parental divorce...p.12
Pittsburg, PA...p.15-16
Price, Dick...p.21
Seabury-Western Theological
 Seminary...p.5
siblings...p.7, 13, 20
Snyder, Gary...p.9, 21
Spiegelberg, Frederic...p.9
Spirit of Zen...p.4
S.S. Vallejo...p.22
Stiles, Ed...p.23
Summers, Roger...p.10, 19, 24, 30
Suzuki, D.T...p.4, 36
Tao, the Watercourse Way...p.24
Trident, The...p.30-31
Varda, Yanko...p.30
Watts, Alan (father)
 alcohol...p.33
 childhood...p.2-4, 36
 death...p.38-40, 45-47
 introduction to Buddhism...p.3-4
 KPFA broadcasts...p.11
 lecture circuit...p.12
 London years...p.4
 Mill Valley...p.10
 New York...p.4-5
 ordination...p.5
 parenting...p.26
 social life...p.21
 storytelling...p.34-5
 television shows...p.14, 52-53
 writing...p.4, 12, 24, 32
Watts, Ken (son)...p.51-52
Watts, Leah (daughter)...p.51
Watts, Tia (wife)...p.51
"Way Beyond the West" (KPFA)...p.11
Way of Zen, The...p.12
Wisdom of Insecurity, The...p.7
World War II...p.5

Oral History of Mark Watts
April 15, 2018

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

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is April 15th, and it's 2:30 p.m. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm with the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library. I'm sitting here today in Inverness, California — I hear the rain — and I'm in a lovely, interesting building with a very interesting man, Mark Watts. Mark, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down and share your story with Mill Valley Historical Society.

0:00:32 Mark Watts: It's a pleasure. And thank you for coming all the way out here to find us.

0:00:35 Debra Schwartz: Any excuse [chuckles] that I can have to get over here — I had hoped for a little sunnier weather, but this will do. Mark, in introducing you, I have to be very careful because there's a lot of big words with introducing you, but I'm going to give it a go. You are an archivist and field recording specialist.

0:00:57 Mark Watts: Yes.

0:00:58 Debra Schwartz: You are an epigrapher.

0:01:01 Mark Watts: Epigrapher, yes.

0:01:01 Debra Schwartz: Epigrapher, and we'll —

0:01:04 Mark Watts: The study of ancient pictographic languages.

0:01:06 Debra Schwartz: Thank you for explaining that. You were the director of development and audio producer for the Joseph Campbell Foundation.

0:01:13 Mark Watts: Yes.

0:01:14 Debra Schwartz: And very interesting to me is that you are the director of the Alan Watts Organization.

0:01:21 Mark Watts: Yes.

0:01:22 Debra Schwartz: Alan Watts the philosopher, the influential mind sparker of an era, was your father.

0:01:33 Mark Watts: Yes.

0:01:36 Debra Schwartz: Well, I imagine you have quite a story to tell about your family and your experiences and the people that you've known, the things that you've heard and seen.

0:01:44 Mark Watts: We could actually do this for a couple days, but we'll see what we can get done in a couple hours. [laughs]

0:01:49 Debra Schwartz: We'll give it a go. First of all, let's begin with just getting a little contextual information.

0:01:54 Mark Watts: Sure.

0:01:55 Debra Schwartz: Tell me a little bit about your family. If you could go back a couple of generations and just generally provide me with some information.

0:02:01 Mark Watts: So, on my father's side of the family, they lived in the UK, just outside of London, and the family branches were the Buchans, the Wattses — those were the two that I remember the best. I can't remember my grandmother's family's descent, but that was the Buchan side. And my father's father was an executive for Michelin Tyre, worked in London, and his wife worked actually for a Baptist boarding school for the children of missionaries on their way to China. So, Lawrence and Emily were a hardworking couple, and more than anything they wanted something better for their son.

0:03:04 Debra Schwartz: They had one son?

0:03:05 Mark Watts: They had one son, one child. So, they took his education very seriously. They got him into the King's School, which was the preparatory school for the church, the Church of England, right near Canterbury Cathedral, and encouraged his intellectual life. He would actually present papers to them in the evening when he was a very young age. And he became very good at writing and speaking at an unbelievably young age. There's a funny story about him going to open a bank account, and he signed his name, and the banker was going to refuse to open the account because obviously such a young man wouldn't have a signature like that.

0:03:44 Debra Schwartz: How young?

0:03:46 Mark Watts: Four, five, or six — I don't know, very young. But he had beautifully ornate signature. So, in that context, he was reading, but he was also experiencing the art that his mother brought home. The back story behind that was that she would care for the children of missionaries on their way to China and upon their return, they would give her gifts, and they would be Chinese landscape paintings, vases with beautiful paintings on them. They knew she liked that kind of stuff. So they lived in a small house, and the one room that was off limits to the young Alan was the parlor, because it was filled with this incredible collection of oriental art and much of which was fragile and breakable, but he loved to sneak in there and just spend time gazing at these

mystical magical objects. This sparked his imagination. So, that's my father's side. He was born as World War I broke out.

0:04:47 Debra Schwartz: What year was that?

0:04:47 Mark Watts: 1915. January of 1915.

0:04:53 Debra Schwartz: January what, do you remember?

0:04:54 Mark Watts: The sixth, I think, is his birthday. It has to be sixth. I'm terrible at dates. So, that's my father side. Now, my mother's side was a Dutch, DeWitts and the Clintons. Then on my grandfather's side and my grandmother's side, the Livingstons, an old D.A.R. [Daughters of the American Revolution] American family — early, early settlers. So, on my grandfather's side, we had a very, you know, the inventor of the steam engine —

0:05:25 Debra Schwartz: Wait, wait. What?

0:05:28 Mark Watts: Henry Clinton, his namesake, was early developer of the steam engine here. He was very mechanically oriented. He became an efficiency expert for Westinghouse, and he was a difficult man. He was hard to live with and they — Dorothy Livingston, my mom's mom, and he — divorced. My mom went off to school, first at a Teacher's College in New Jersey. But then she went to Northwestern where she actually studied mathematics and ended up working on the Norden bombsight during World War II. It's there that she met my father. Now, my father's journey took him from the little King's School where he first started to find eastern philosophy to a bookstore where he found books by Lafcadio Hearn and Sax Rohmer, and began to imagine that when he grew up he might become a Chinese villain like those he read about. He soon found out that there was a local Buddhist lodge and began to correspond with the Buddhist lodge.

0:06:43 Debra Schwartz: How old is he now at this point?

0:06:45 Mark Watts: Twelve.

0:06:46 Debra Schwartz: Oh, really? [laughs] I'm imagining a teenager.

0:06:49 Mark Watts: Well, I think when he finally got to the lodge after two years of correspondence he was 14.

0:06:55 Debra Schwartz: So, he was really very much attracted to the —

0:06:58 Mark Watts: Yes, very much. And they [at the Buddhist lodge] were publishing his letters, assuming that they were corresponding with a master or probably a senior master of the [Kings] school. They had no idea that it was a young kid. So, they invited him to speak, and he said —

0:07:12 Debra Schwartz: Did they know when they invited him to speak that they were being —

0:07:14 Mark Watts: They had no idea.

0:07:15 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

0:07:16 Mark Watts: So, they invited him to speak, and he went with his father, and arrived, and they thought, “Oh, sweet. He’s brought his son.” And everybody was shocked when the father sat down and the son got up to speak. [laughs] And as Christmas Humphreys, who was the barrister that ran the lodge said, “He was talking pure Zen.” They were just dumbfounded at what he said. So, he quickly became a regular feature there at the Buddhist lodge. Went to all the meetings, took the train in —

0:07:46 Debra Schwartz: And where was it located again?

0:07:47 Mark Watts: In London, and they were out in Chislehurst, which is a suburb out toward the east. So, he would go there and he soon became the editor of their journal, which was *The Middle Way*. And he began handling the correspondence — the way that he had first become in touch — he became the correspondence editor.

0:08:13 Debra Schwartz: And of course, the people that are corresponding with him have no idea that they’re corresponding with a very young man.

0:08:16 Mark Watts: None. [chuckles] Then he went to the World Congress of Faiths, where he met Suzuki, DT Suzuki, which was a big influence watching him speak. He began to rewrite, essentially, the works of Suzuki to make them more accessible. He did, at the age of 16, the *Outline of Zen Buddhism*, and his first full book *The Spirit of Zen* was inspired by Suzuki at the age of 21. During this period, a woman, Eleanor Everett began to frequent the Buddhist Lodge with her daughter, and they kindled a romance. Eleanor was her daughter, Eleanor Everett. So, his 20s were spent in London exploring a wide variety of intellectual pursuits, meeting various characters, and [you can] read all about it in his book *In My Own Way*, his autobiography. But in 1939 Eleanor decided that she was going to go to New York to study Zen with a Zen master in New York City. So, she dragged the kids along, who by then were romantically involved and got married. And so they arrived, the three of them, in New York City.

0:09:37 Debra Schwartz: And he left his parents?

0:09:39 Mark Watts: He left his parents, left his whole life behind to go to what he imagined would be a vital Zen community in New York City based on the vital community around the Buddhist lodge. What he arrived to find was a grumpy old man in a Zendo filled with chairs, because his people weren’t comfortable sitting on the floor, and teaching the Hakuin method, which is a very rigid, controlled way of approaching Zen through a prescribed series of questions and answers, and it was just the worst. It was nothing like what he imagined. There was no room for creativity. There was no room for

philosophical discourse or thought. So, he lasted about three days or four days there, and then began to wander the city looking for outlets and he found bookstores with cafes and got into conversations, and eventually began to give a series of talks at several bookstore cafes.

0:10:41 Debra Schwartz: So, he went to New York, hoping to be the student and out of necessity becomes the teacher.

0:10:46 Mark Watts: Exactly. And a woman attended one of his — and I don't know her name — attended one of his talks and said, "My, if you would write a book about this, my husband's a publisher and I could get it published." He got to work on what became *The Meaning of Happiness*. That was late '39. The manuscript was completed and submitted for publication right as World War II broke out. As you can imagine there wasn't much interest in a book called *The Meaning of Happiness* as war was breaking out in Europe. So, the book wasn't well-received; it wasn't received particularly at all. Nobody even noticed it. So he moved with his wife out of New York, to Evanston where she was from, and enrolled there at Seabury-Western [Theological Seminary], thinking that maybe he'd go back toward the church and see if he could find in Christianity the things that he had read about, and rekindle a mystical tradition or mystical awareness within Christianity. I think he started that in 1940. He received his ordination, I think it was in — I can't remember if it was '42 or '44. I've got his cross, I can check that, but I think it was '42. Then he was with the church there. He was the minister at the Northwestern chapel for those years, six or seven years as a chaplain, and he lived in ecumenical housing there at Seabury-Western.

0:12:22 Debra Schwartz: So, he becomes a Christian minister?

0:12:23 Mark Watts: Yeah, an Episcopalian priest, Church of England, Episcopalians. He gave very unusual masses, and he would tell his students that they shouldn't come unless they were there to celebrate the mass, and when he said celebrate, he meant celebrate. He wanted participation. He had people singing. He said, "Don't do this out of duty, stay home and get some sleep."

0:12:50 Debra Schwartz: So, he wanted more like a Baptist type of a —

0:12:54 Mark Watts: Let's just put it this way: he wanted participation, he wanted people to not just to sit and passively listen, but to talk about the ideas, sing the songs, do it with some sort of honest ritual. Of course, this raised eyebrows in the church. They really hadn't seen anything like this before.

0:13:13 Debra Schwartz: And he's how old at this point?

0:13:14 Mark Watts: So, he's 30-something, he's in his 30s.

0:13:18 Debra Schwartz: Describe to me if you can — and hold this in the timeline of things — so we can imagine him more fully at that time, what did he physically look like?

0:13:31 Mark Watts: Slender, very handsome, I have photos. His hair had a reddish hue during that period before it became darker, and he was just a tall, good-looking, usually bearded, mischievous smile. He was very, a good-looking guy.

0:13:53 Debra Schwartz: Did he dress according to the time, the social mores of the time? Was he conservatively dressed, and collared, short hair, such that he wasn't raising any eyebrows in that fashion?

0:14:06 Mark Watts: No, but there's a wonderful photo, two of them actually, in the ecumenical housing, sitting on the floor, around a low table. There's a missing stand from the bureau behind them, which is a big Chinese platter that's now in the middle. They're sharing Chinese food, to-go food, and drinking beers. And they're sitting around in a circle, and my sister, half-sister, Joan, is at the head of the table, a precocious 14, 15-year-old, charming everybody. His wife is there and another couple. It's just great. They were the hipsters of their time. It was obviously progressive. It was Chicago, the jazz clubs, all that stuff. So, he was going out sometimes, he was meeting people, and they had an active enough social life that they sought a babysitter. So, they met Dorothy Dewitt, my mom, who was first their math tutor and then became their babysitter. During this period — this very social, active period, 1948-49 — and she was the babysitter. Then Eleanor became pregnant with the son of the choirmaster who they lived with.

0:15:27 Debra Schwartz: And Eleanor was his [Alan's] first wife.

0:15:29 Mark Watts: My dad's first wife.

0:15:31 Debra Schwartz: With the son of the choirmaster?

0:15:33 Mark Watts: Yeah, so in other words the guy that they were living with, obviously, she got pregnant with, somehow.

0:15:39 Debra Schwartz: Were they in charge of him? I mean, he was —

0:15:43 Mark Watts: They were roommates, they were roommates in ecumenical housing. They're in this photo together all eating Chinese food together. I guess they —

0:15:51 Debra Schwartz: I guess they did more than eat Chinese food together. [chuckles]

0:15:54 Mark Watts: Obviously, this strained the relationships, and my father began to become closer to my mom, who was very practical. She was a mathematician, Dutch descent like her father, and a real contrast to my father's musings. So, he asked her one

day what she thought about his marriage, and she said, “I think your marriage is over.”
[laughs]

0:16:23 Debra Schwartz: How old was she at the time?

0:16:25 Mark Watts: She must have been in her early 30s, yeah, early 30s. Then things went from bad to worse. I’m not sure exactly what happened but there was a ruckus — there were various opinions. The church found out that his wife was pregnant by another man. He was supposed to have been looking over a study group, but he wasn’t there, and there was some sexual misconduct, so basically he resigned. He resigned, he left the church, his wife, and Evanston, all in —

0:17:01 Debra Schwartz: Your dad, this is?

0:17:02 Mark Watts: Yeah, all the same weekend.

0:17:03 Debra Schwartz: Sexual misconduct.

0:17:04 Mark Watts: Yes. Some kids in the study hall did something and he was supposed to have been there.

0:17:11 Debra Schwartz: Do you ever wonder if this was the reason they gave to try to diminish the scandal, you know?

0:17:21 Mark Watts: Who knows? I’ve read all the correspondence associated and there’s a difference of opinion as to what actually happened. But I don’t know. The end result was he left.

0:17:35 Debra Schwartz: And his daughter’s name? His first daughter?

0:17:38 Mark Watts: Well, Joan and Anne were his first two daughters. Joan was the older of the two, the one that was more seen in the photos. Anne, I think was seven or eight years younger, so she was considerably younger, I can’t remember exactly how much younger. He’d been corresponding with Joseph Campbell, and he decided that he would head to New York, and Mom was going back to New Jersey, and so he hitched a ride with her. He said, “I gotta get a ride to New York.” She said, “Of course,” and somewhere between Evanston and New York, they decided to go to upstate New York and rent a farmhouse for the summer. They ended up in Millbrook in a little farmhouse, and my dad started to write and wrote to Joseph Campbell, and told him where they were, and to John Cage who he’d also been corresponding with, and he began work on a book, appropriately enough, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*.

0:18:32 Debra Schwartz: Joseph Campbell had been — no, your dad?

0:18:33 Mark Watts: No, my dad was writing *The Wisdom of Insecurity* and so —

0:18:37 Debra Schwartz: Interesting.

0:18:38 Mark Watts: Yeah, very appropriate title — a great book.

0:18:47 Debra Schwartz: He's living with a woman out of wedlock.

0:18:49 Mark Watts: Yeah. He's living with —

0:18:50 Debra Schwartz: And this is what year?

0:18:51 Mark Watts: This is 1950, the summer of 1950. Yeah. They're living in this little cabin and — oh, they got married at some point, I'm not sure when. When did they get married? I don't know. But for Christmas Eve, Joseph Campbell, his wife Jean Erdman, Luisa Coomaraswamy and John Cage all came up to the farmhouse for dinner. They prepared quite a feast and had a wonderful time together talking. And then, they, in turn, invited my mom and dad down to John Cage's brownstone in Manhattan for New Year's Eve. I heard the accounts of that as a young kid, about John playing the prepared piano for my mom who is a musician and for Jean who is a dancer, which consists of clipping things onto the strings to change the sound — with paper clips, feathers and different objects. So, they were fascinated by that. I said, "Well, Mom, what did Joe and Alan, what were they doing?" She said, "Well, they were talking about the diffusion of ideas and people and were last seen headed to the library looking for an atlas." And I said, "What were they talking about?" "Oh, something about the 'Vikings of the Pacific'," and I'm a kid, I loved Vikings. I didn't know they were in the Pacific, but this gets me to reading.

0:20:06 Debra Schwartz: I just have to say that first of all, to have been a fly on the wall, listening to those conversations. Also, for those [listeners] who are younger, I have to ask you to explain who Joseph Campbell is and the people that you're talking about, just to help them catch up.

0:20:28 Mark Watts: Joseph Campbell was really the person who introduced the study of mythology to the West in the way that we know it now. He had Jungian influences, but also deep historic knowledge of art and religious traditions. His definition of mythology is other people's religions and his urging was that you look at your own religion as mythology as well so that you could get more rounded. My father said something similar. He said he didn't consider it to be intellectually respectable to be a partisan in matters of religion and so they had a great correspondence going. They're both interested in myth and ritual and Christianity. And Joseph Campbell, of course, was developing these ideas of the hero's journey, which led to his book, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I think that was the basis of their correspondence getting going. Joseph Campbell was just an incredible scholar and intellect.

0:21:32 Debra Schwartz: He was a professor at?

0:21:33 Mark Watts: Sarah Lawrence.

0:21:34 Debra Schwartz: Sarah Lawrence, correct. Yes.

0:21:35 Mark Watts: And his wife, Jean Erdman, was a very accomplished dancer in New York, and John Cage was in the music scene. He was an avant-garde composer, and he was the most avant-garde of composers. He even had one piece that consisted of turning pages to a score in silence. [chuckles] But mostly, they were mixed sounds and loud speaker, concerto for loud speakers, which consisted of tuning a dozen radios simultaneously. The story that tells all about him is he came to stay at our house years later and there was a squeaky little hamster kept in a squirrel cage running around and my mom said, "I'll put that out on the back porch so it doesn't bother you all night." He said, "Oh no, absolutely not. That's going to be my lullaby." [laughs] John was —

0:22:27 Debra Schwartz: Very avant-garde.

0:22:28 Mark Watts: Really cool guy. Yeah.

0:22:34 Debra Schwartz: When were you born? And when do you start to have the awareness of actually witnessing these kinds of things?

0:22:41 Mark Watts: Okay. I'll take you to the events that led up to my birth. So, in 1950, they're there and my father's also corresponding with Frederic Spiegelberg who started the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco and he offers him a job teaching Buddhism, which my father accepts. I think that actually was in October that he accepted. October of '50. Yeah, so spring of '51 my mom and dad drove to California, the southern route through Los Angeles, spent a little bit of time in LA and then came north through Big Sur along the coast and arrived in San Francisco to teach. So, he, Frederic was there, there were a couple of Indian professors there, Chadari and I can't remember the other fellow's name. So, my father began to teach there and soon he became the dean because Frederic — they lost their funding. Frederic went back to Stanford and my father took over as Dean and as an instructor and they were struggling financially. My father began to give evening lectures to get people to come in and pay \$5 to help support the school. They were very popular.

0:24:01 Debra Schwartz: The school's name again?

0:24:02 Mark Watts: American Academy of Asian Studies. And people like Gary Snyder and Joseph Brotherton and various local Beats heard about these lectures and began to show up. They in turn then invited my dad to go out to the coffeehouses where they did poetry, and so he became friends with Gary and some of the other local free thinkers.

0:24:25 Debra Schwartz: Locke McCorkle in his interview describes how he was set to go to Berkeley and, as I recall, he heard your father speak and that was it for him. He became a student.

0:24:38 Mark Watts: He had a vital little group there. Then the really interesting thing happened was that a Japanese artist, Saburo Hasegawa, came. And Saburo was amazing. He was sort of the Matisse of Japan, and he ended up leading a return to Primitivism, to the exploration of really early artistic forms in Japan in the '50s. He was also a photographer — and I'll tell you more about that — but an experimental photographer, amazing guy. He came and my father had a conversation with him, and he was just incredibly talented, but also very philosophically advanced about the arts, and my dad immediately invited him to come and teach there, which he did in the following year in 1954. So Saburo was, in sensibility, the first truly Eastern person he met. He knew others, but Saburo actually lived it. He took his office and he stapled burlap to all of the walls and took out all the furniture and put down tatami mats, and when anybody came he would serve them tea, and whenever things got crazy everybody would just go to his place and have tea and regroup, and deal with the stresses that they had trying to keep the school open. So that takes us through about 1955. My dad is still —

0:25:58 Debra Schwartz: He's living in San Francisco at the time?

0:26:00 Mark Watts: They first lived on Skylonda, which was down above Woodside. But by now, they've moved into a little house in Mill Valley due to Locke. Locke helped them —

0:26:14 Debra Schwartz: Down the street from the house that Locke lived in with Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder.

0:26:19 Mark Watts: Yeah. Right across the creek, around the corner, kind of.

0:26:22 Debra Schwartz: On Montford Avenue.

0:26:24 Mark Watts: Yeah. There were on Montford, my parents were on Laverne.

0:26:26 Debra Schwartz: How did your dad — because Locke brought him over? Is that it? I keep forgetting his interview.

0:26:32 Mark Watts: I'm not sure exactly how they ended up in Mill Valley. I don't know the full story behind that, but I knew that they knew Locke and then they got to know Roger. But what I do know is —

0:26:44 Debra Schwartz: Roger Summers.

0:26:46 Mark Watts: Roger Summers, who came and helped them fix up the little house that they got.

0:26:50 Debra Schwartz: On Laverne.

0:26:51 Mark Watts: Yeah. 310 Laverne.

0:26:52 Debra Schwartz: And he knew Matthew Davis as well?

0:26:53 Mark Watts: I don't know much about that relationship, but it was a familiar name. So, at the same time, my father met Henry Jacobs, who came by at the academy and urged my father — I think he met him at one of the jazz club poetry evenings — but he encouraged my father to come over to KPFA and become a volunteer programmer. So, my earliest memories of my father and Henry were that Henry would show up in his old Morris Minor Saturday afternoon and they would drive over to Berkeley together, and Henry would record the "Wide Weird World of Shorty Petterstein," which was his radio show. Then my dad would record his, which was "Way Beyond the West," and then they would drive back together.

0:27:42 Debra Schwartz: And you'd go along?

0:27:44 Mark Watts: No. I was riding a tricycle on the driveway when they came and went. So, this would have been '55, '56.

0:27:53 Debra Schwartz: 'Cause you were born —

0:27:54 Mark Watts: '53, yeah. And this is up on Birch Street in Mill Valley.

0:27:58 Debra Schwartz: You were on Birch?

0:28:00 Mark Watts: Birch, yeah. Before we moved down to Mill Valley we were on Birch. So that was the earliest memory —

0:28:03 Debra Schwartz: I mean, until Laverne. Then you were on —

0:28:05 Mark Watts: We were on Birch and then Laverne. Yes. So, we were still up on Birch. My father would record the radio shows, they would be broadcast live and then recorded and rebroadcast Sunday morning. And the transcript, with the originally lacquer transcripts, were then sent down to KPFA LA for broadcast. Henry was very active in helping that happen, giving my father rides, and also eventually got my father a little Uher tape recorder so that he could record his talks in the city and then send those over to the radio station. That was so successful that they did a fundraiser to get my father a better recorder, a Nagra, a Swiss film recorder. And all these people put in their \$5, and they got him this tape deck. The "Way Beyond the West" was very popular, thousands of people were tuning into it, and it spread from LA to Dallas, to Boston, to New York and the tapes were starting to be — they called it the bicycle, tapes were sent all around the country in a big circle.

0:29:12 Debra Schwartz: They did the circuit.

0:29:13 Mark Watts: Yeah, did the circuit. They came back from Portland. So, Henry was responsible for organizing this. He became my father's archivist and kept our shelves full of the reels and did the mailing. Meanwhile, the years at the academy were drawing

to a close. The academy was failing financially. My father completed his final book for the Bollingen grant, I think four years late.

0:29:37 Debra Schwartz: The what grant?

0:29:38 Mark Watts: He had a Bollingen grant to write a book. And I think he was supposed to be done in '54, '53? He finally finished it for a publication in '57. That was *The Way of Zen*. That came out and it hit — there had been a lot of interest in Zen, they called it the Zen Boom, and it hit the bestsellers list. And suddenly he was getting invitations to go speak and he was, you know —

0:30:01 Debra Schwartz: He suddenly started to become quite famous.

0:30:03 Mark Watts: Yeah, quite famous. So, around that time my father began giving his first seminars. He would go to places to speak publicly. But he gave seminars with Charlotte Selver in a loft in the Soho district. And one of the people who became a regular attendee at those seminars was a Mary Jane Yates King, who became eventually my father's third wife. But in the late '50s he began an affair with her that went on for five years. And, before my parents were divorced, I think in '64, he would travel twice a year: West Coast in the spring, East Coast in the fall, on the lecture circuit. And he did pretty well. Between that and the books, they were able to support themselves. So, that when on, and we lived at that point in Homestead on Laverne. That went on till my folks got divorced. My recollection of that is one day my mom figured out that he was seeing somebody, and chased him around the dining room table like a little tank punching him. And then he was gone.

0:31:23 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] Sorry, but it's the visual.

0:31:24 Mark Watts: Yeah, it was really funny. [laughs]

0:31:26 Debra Schwartz: And then he was gone.

0:31:27 Mark Watts: And then he was gone.

0:31:30 Debra Schwartz: And how was that for you?

0:31:31 Mark Watts: Well, I was kind of a pretty resourceful kid. My mom obviously needed help and I just kinda took over and started helping Mom.

0:31:41 Debra Schwartz: So, you became the man of the house?

0:31:42 Mark Watts: Mini dad, yeah.

0:31:43 Debra Schwartz: Are you an only child with your mom?

0:31:44 Mark Watts: Oh, no.

0:31:45 Debra Schwartz: Well how many are there?

0:31:45 Mark Watts: There were four kids at that time.

0:31:48 Debra Schwartz: Not counting the two older girls?

0:31:50 Mark Watts: Not counting. Yeah. There are four in our family.

0:31:51 Debra Schwartz: So now we've got six?

0:31:52 Mark Watts: And then after my dad left my mom gave birth to Diane. So there were seven. She was pregnant at the time.

0:32:00 Debra Schwartz: Let's hear the names of your siblings.

0:32:01 Mark Watts: Okay. So, it's Joan and Anne, by the first marriage. Then in our family Tia, my older sister, and then myself, and then my brother Rick, and then Lila and Diane. Diane, that was the baby that was born after my dad left. So, we stayed on there for a bit. And after some agonizing back and forth, gave up the house, sold the house and moved.

0:32:24 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the address of the house?

0:32:25 Mark Watts: 310 Laverne. There are four houses there now. But it was a nice acre. It was a beautiful little place. My dad called it Four Pines — beautiful, beautiful spot. So, we moved over to El Cerrito so that my mom could go to school and finish her PhD at Berkeley, because she would decide that she was gonna go back to teach.

0:32:47 Debra Schwartz: Mathematics?

0:32:48 Mark Watts: Yeah, math. Math teacher. Then she got a job at the University of Pittsburg, so we moved east and went to stay with my grandfather, briefly, in Mt. Lebanon, PA. That was kind of a disaster. My grandfather wasn't —

0:33:03 Debra Schwartz: All of you?

0:33:04 Mark Watts: Yeah.

0:33:05 Debra Schwartz: That's a lot of incoming. [chuckles]

0:33:06 Mark Watts: Yeah, a lot of incoming.

0:33:09 Debra Schwartz: For a grandfather and mother. [chuckles]

0:33:10 Mark Watts: He wasn't ready for it. No grandmother, just grandfather.

0:33:13 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my. Okay.

0:33:13 Mark Watts: Yeah. And so that lasted about two months. Then we got our own place in Mt. Lebanon and eventually I reconnected with my father a few years later.

0:33:25 Debra Schwartz: You didn't see him after they split?

0:33:28 Mark Watts: When we were in El Cerrito, I saw him a couple times. But once we moved East, I didn't see him at all. So, I think when I was just turned 14 I received from him in the mail, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. I immediately dove into it and the first chapter talks about what you would tell a young man or woman when venturing out into the world. So, I read this, and I knew my dad was famous, but that told me why he was famous. I now understood what he was talking about and why it was important. So, I immediately wrote to him, thanked him for the book, and we began a correspondence and soon thereafter — I think that was in the fall — in the spring he invited me to sneak out and fly to New York to meet him and to go to the CBS studios to record two programs for *Camera Three*. He said he wanted me to come to make sure he would get some intelligent questions from the audience. I was gonna be a plant in the audience. So, I got there. He needn't have worried; he had a great group of young people. We did two programs, "Who Am I?" and "What Do I Want?", recorded back to back. He ended up meeting and sleeping with a young woman who was one of the attendees at the television thing. So, I spent that first evening with my dad, not with my dad, but in the hotel by myself.

0:34:53 Debra Schwartz: So, he's a bit of a rascal by now?

0:34:54 Mark Watts: A bit of a rascal.

0:34:57 Debra Schwartz: And this is what year again?

0:34:58 Mark Watts: This is '68.

0:35:00 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So he's now what age?

0:35:04 Mark Watts: I said it was '68. So, if he was born in 1915, then he's 53. Is that right?

0:35:10 Debra Schwartz: Okay, just to get the idea, I mean he's getting a lot of attention.

0:35:14 Mark Watts: A lot of attention.

0:35:15 Debra Schwartz: I imagine there must be groupies?

0:35:18 Mark Watts: Right.

0:35:19 Debra Schwartz: As can be with these [types], whether you call them a religious leader or philosophical influence or whatever. But he certainly garners a lot of attention.

0:35:27 Mark Watts: Attention. And this young lady was a little bit too good a student. She was a little too well read.

0:35:34 Debra Schwartz: She was stalking her prey?

0:35:35 Mark Watts: Exactly, and he was an easy one. But I'll tell you, it was the funniest thing, he called me in the morning and said, "Take the cab to this address and come get me." So, I arrive there and went up, told the cab to wait. And she was cooking breakfast in this really cool Bohemian pad. My dad said, "Come see this." We duck into the back bedroom and she's got this enormous canopy bed. And he says, "Look, there!" And we look up, and there's a convex mirror hung in the top of the bed. And my father says, "Anything you put close to that appears to be larger." [laughs] So we're laughing, and we go back in, and she says, just casually, is flipping an egg, "So you want me to take care of him too?" And my dad said, "Oh, that's okay." [laughs]

0:36:23 Debra Schwartz: What did you think?

0:36:24 Mark Watts: I didn't know what to think.

0:36:27 Debra Schwartz: I mean, all of it.

0:36:29 Mark Watts: I thought it was great. I was just so glad to see my dad. We'd had a great day together.

0:36:32 Debra Schwartz: You were completely accepting.

0:36:34 Mark Watts: Oh, yeah. It was great. I was in Pittsburgh, but I had my own alternative sort of lifestyle going there in the '60s and '70s. We smoked hash, and I was a student producer on something called "The Place," which was WQED Pittsburgh. It was actually the back of the Mr. Rogers set. We turned it into a coffee house.

0:36:55 Debra Schwartz: Did you meet Mr. Rogers?

0:36:56 Mark Watts: Oh, yeah, we hated him. He was a total pain. If we were in the studio and he came, he would just scowl at everybody. Yeah. No, he was our nemesis. [laughs]

0:37:05 Debra Schwartz: I'm shocked.

0:37:07 Mark Watts: Yeah, but we were student producers. So there was one Bolex camera that you would get it for two weeks and you'd produce a film, and then you'd

present your film. So, I actually teamed up with two Jewish girls, they called them the Hoopers — Nancy Ruttenburg and Nancy somebody else — and they had a red Chevy Impala, and we drove around Pittsburgh. We actually decided that we would make our film about black and white in Pittsburgh. So, we went up to the Hill. So, here are these three white kids in a red convertible with a movie camera, and we're gonna go film the Hill, which is a rough neighborhood.

0:37:43 Debra Schwartz: Just a bullseye, right on your —

0:37:46 Mark Watts: Exactly. Some black guy, old guy, saw us driving, and said, "What the hell are you guys doing here?" And so we told him, and he said, "Okay, you come with me." And he drove around with us for a day and a half, while we made the film. [laughs]

0:37:58 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my goodness.

0:37:58 Mark Watts: He was like the OG guy.

0:38:01 Debra Schwartz: It seems like the nut didn't fall far from the tree, because you have a bit of an adventurous spirit.

0:38:09 Mark Watts: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

0:38:10 Debra Schwartz: I can see the twinkle in your eye as you're describing this, and even when you describe the antics of your father.

0:38:16 Mark Watts: Oh, yeah. We had just a great time there, and then my father came to speak at — I went to Duquesne. I got out of high school early, that's a whole other story. I was thrown out of high school, pretty much.

0:38:31 Debra Schwartz: Which high school were you?

0:38:32 Mark Watts: I was at Mt. Lebanon High. And I'll tell you the story real quickly. I got arrested for pot, and it was a very conservative community. When I was nominated to run for student council president, I probably normally would've turned that down, being that I was one of two hippies in the whole school —

0:38:50 Debra Schwartz: Were you a hippie?

0:38:52 Mark Watts: Yeah.

0:38:52 Debra Schwartz: Did you look like a hippie?

0:38:53 Mark Watts: I had hair down to here.

0:38:54 Debra Schwartz: You're pointing to the clavicles.

0:38:56 Mark Watts: Yeah, exactly. [chuckles] I had long ringlet hair. I'd been a hippie since I got there and there was Doug, who was the president of the student council, who was a bluegrass guitar player, he was sort of the other hippie. There were other guys who —

0:39:05 Debra Schwartz: Did people know who your father was?

0:39:07 Mark Watts: Oh, yeah. They had copies of his books — it was a thing by then. We would go down to East Liberty, and the psychedelic poster shops, and we actually had a light show called “The Plastic Swamp” that we would do lights and stuff for. So anyway, I would normally not have run for student congress president.

0:39:29 Debra Schwartz: So conventional.

0:39:31 Mark Watts: Yeah, but considering that I had to go in front of a judge about pot, I accepted the nomination. Well, then my hearing got delayed.

0:39:38 Debra Schwartz: You thought it might mitigate the consequences?

0:39:39 Mark Watts: Exactly.

0:39:40 Debra Schwartz: That's a strategy.

0:39:41 Mark Watts: [laughs] Exactly! The hearing got delayed and then it turned out that the hearing was the same day as the election. So, I got up on stage with this kid Bruce Rosenstein who was my opposition, and everybody assumed, he was a very popular kid, they assumed he was gonna win. He said something incredibly stupid like, “We want the type of school where the cakes, the clan, and the hippies can all work together in peace.”

0:40:07 Debra Schwartz: The what and the?

0:40:08 Mark Watts: The cakes were the jocks, the clan were the greasers, and the hippies, I'm the only hippie except for Doug.

0:40:15 Debra Schwartz: And the hippies. The cakes, the clan and the hippies.

0:40:15 Mark Watts: And the hippies. Hippies, he said. And I just looked at him, 'cause it was just so incredibly stupid, I just turned to him and looked at him like this, and the whole place just cracked up. They just started laughing.

0:40:24 Debra Schwartz: One stink eye and they started to laugh. [laughs]

0:40:25 Mark Watts: Yeah that was it. [chuckles]

0:40:27 Mark Watts: And so I went back to the room —

0:40:29 Debra Schwartz: So, you've got sentencing and an election.

0:40:33 Mark Watts: I turned my note in to get excused to go out to the juvenile court. They put it together finally, this kid running for president is the same kid who's the pot smoker. Mt. Lebanon is a very conservative place so that's a complete —

0:40:46 Debra Schwartz: So, that was the end of your political career?

0:40:48 Mark Watts: Well, it didn't end so cleanly. What happened is they thought I'd lose, so they started the vote count and then it was obvious that I was winning 3:1, and they stopped the vote count. The next morning I was called in, I was asked to resign because of conduct unbecoming an officer, this thing of smoking pot. I insisted it was my religious practice, and it was perfectly fine in Native American communities, and I saw no problem. They were dumbfounded by that and they then pulled together a meeting, there was a board meeting, the board was telling them they were all gonna get fired if this hippie became student president. They scoured my academic record and they found out I'd withdrawn from a class. I told the teacher I was gonna withdraw right way, but technically I hadn't withdrawn in time because she hadn't filed the paperwork. I never went to the class, so I got a D and then a W. You can't do that; you have to get the W first semester. So they said, "Oh, you failed a course, you're out. You can't. You're out."

0:41:44 Debra Schwartz: Grateful for that, were they?

0:41:45 Mark Watts: Well, so they were, but student congress wasn't gonna take it that way, and they immediately introduced an amendment to change the school constitution to allow an officer to have failed a course, particularly under inadvertent circumstances, and so the whole school came for this vote and passed it. Whereupon the principal vetoed it, as he had the right to do. Whereupon we walked out and had a sit-in in the school, the riot police came, it was crazy. [chuckles]

0:42:18 Debra Schwartz: What was the sentencing though?

0:42:19 Mark Watts: I got off. [chuckles] To me the nostalgic moment is this friend of mine, Keith Nicelosh, had done a beautiful poster in the sort of pictographed, Grateful Dead, psychedelic style, and it was of a hookah but it had a light bulb in it. So, to the teachers who didn't know what a hookah was, it was a lamp.

0:42:39 Debra Schwartz: And for those that —

0:42:39 Mark Watts: Did, they knew exactly what it does.

0:42:40 Debra Schwartz: Now, we know that's a pipe, right.

0:42:40 Mark Watts: It's actually got the pipe things and it says, "Turn on with Watts." [chuckles] And it's above the cafeteria. So, after the election, I have to say, I went down to grab it and it was gone already.

0:42:55 Debra Schwartz: Was this after the tune in, turn on, or drop out?

0:43:00 Mark Watts: This was going on. This was going on.

0:43:00 Debra Schwartz: So, things were quite electric at this time.

0:43:03 Mark Watts: Oh yeah. We were taking mescaline and it was a wild scene. So, many, many years later, I got a call — I think it was our 30th or 35th high school anniversary — from a young woman, and she says, "Oh, this is Kathy so and so" — Livingston, or whatever it was — Kathy Shepard. She says, "You don't know who I am, do you?" And I said, "Kathy Taylor." I loved Kathy Taylor, but we never got together.

0:43:30 Debra Schwartz: You say that so softly like you loved Kathy Taylor.

0:43:31 Mark Watts: Kathy Taylor. But she says, "I have your poster." [chuckles] I say, "You do?" She said, "Yeah, it's in my game room. I love it." I said, "Would you give it back to me?" And she said, "No." [laughs]

0:43:45 Debra Schwartz: Turn on with Watts.

0:43:45 Mark Watts: So anyway, we had our own countercultural thing. And by the time I got to New York and this whole thing happened with my dad, it was fine.

0:43:53 Debra Schwartz: It was fine.

0:43:54 Mark Watts: It was fine.

0:43:55 Debra Schwartz: You'd done enough mischief on your own that you might have found a pal in it.

0:43:58 Mark Watts: Yeah, exactly.

0:44:02 Debra Schwartz: So, before we leave Mill Valley, 'cause I can see that we could slide right on to the next adventure, I'd love it if you could describe your life in Mill Valley as a child, what it was like for you in Mill Valley itself, the people that came to your parents' house, those kinds of things.

0:44:20 Mark Watts: Yeah. We lived right next door to the Homestead School so a lot of the activity was centered around the school, and a lot of kids came by. My dad painted faces at the bazaar, the annual bazaar, so he did the pirate faces in that. My mom and dad did faces, face painting. So, we were kind of a part of that, but my dad traveled a lot. My memories are mixed between friends coming, Roger Summers coming to work on the

house. I had a romance with a girl, Tony Brat, who lived across the canyon, starting in kindergarten. So, Tony would come over and we'd make peanut butter cookies, or I'd go to her house and —

0:45:04 Debra Schwartz: That's really sweet.

0:45:05 Mark Watts: Yeah, it was really sweet. But a lot of afternoons were just sort of spent by myself there, wind in the pines —

0:45:17 Debra Schwartz: But there's so many of you, in your family. Did you venture off on your own for privacy or?

0:45:20 Mark Watts: Yeah. My brother was a wandering Watts, my sister was doing art. I liked to be outside.

0:45:26 Debra Schwartz: You're a wandering Watts?

0:45:26 Mark Watts: My brother was. We called him the wandering Watts. Rick. He would always be off somewhere in the neighborhood. As soon as he got a bike, we hardly saw him. But I was home. I would kinda wait for the mail to come, and wait for my dad to come home, 'cause I liked hanging out with my dad, and we did archery together and stuff like that.

0:45:46 Debra Schwartz: What schools did you go to in Mill Valley?

0:45:47 Mark Watts: Just Homestead, there.

0:45:47 Debra Schwartz: Just Homestead.

0:45:49 Mark Watts: Yeah. Then when my folks got divorced that all ended. I went from there to Portola Junior High in El Cerrito, and it was a completely different world over there.

0:46:03 Debra Schwartz: Did you enjoy your time in Mill Valley?

0:46:07 Mark Watts: I did.

0:46:07 Debra Schwartz: Were there places that you remember particularly?

0:46:10 Mark Watts: Oh yeah, Jennifer's house next door, climbing through the creek in the woods, and going over to see the Radenzels. Eddie Radenzel was my good friend. His dad, Ed Radenzel, worked for the *Chronicle*. Susan was my sister Tia's age, and Eddy was my age. So they were sort of our closest playmates. There was Yvonne who lived on the corner. So we had friends all around, and we had bikes. It was great. Homestead Valley was a fantastic place to grow up. You could ride around the canyon, back through the Redwood trees and come forward.

0:46:42 Debra Schwartz: Over by Stolte Grove?

0:46:44 Mark Watts: Yeah, exactly. I think it was just beautiful. Oh, and the most fun was you could go visit the Jacobs. And Sandy, my dad's friend, was the archivist, was so much fun. He would always tease my sister and make up stories and tell us funny things. Sumi, his wife was — there's another chapter.

0:47:04 Debra Schwartz: Was she a photographer?

0:47:07 Mark Watts: Sumi was an artist but she was the daughter of Sabura Hasegawa. So, back to the school events, my father was teaching at the academy and there was a KPFA banquet or something. Sabura showed up with his incredibly beautiful Eurasian daughter, and Henry took one look and said, "My God, who is that?" So my dad arranged an introduction, and he proposed, and they were married. We would go see them all the time, and then we heard that a new baby had come and we weren't allowed to go over there for a period of weeks. So finally, the day came when we got to go see the new baby and we went over and there was this little baby nursing, beautiful Sumi, and they had named the baby Tia, after my sister. It was just a beautiful scene over there.

0:47:58 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember any of the adults that would come visit your family house?

0:48:03 Mark Watts: I remember John Cage coming. I remember the Campbell's coming. I remember we went to see Jack Kerouac in Berkeley. I went with my dad, and he was rip-roaring drunk.

0:48:18 Debra Schwartz: So he'd been drinking by then 'cause Locke describes how when he lived with him over on Mumford he hadn't start drinking.

0:48:25 Mark Watts: No, this was later.

0:48:26 Debra Schwartz: This was later when he became —

0:48:26 Mark Watts: Yeah. And Locke was occasionally around. Gary was not around particularly, but my father would correspond with him. Who else was around? Roger was a big presence. Oh, Dick Price came by, one of the co-founders of Esalen. Dick and I put a roof on our garage together when I was a kid. I would hand him the shingles. Dick was a wonderful man. Wonderful. I loved Dick Price and his son David didn't fall far from the tree, wonderful guy. So, it was sort of that mix of people. By that time my dad and Gregory Bateson had been the first speakers at Esalen. Our other friends, good friends were the Morganroth family, and every summer we would drive down to Big Sur and spend two or three weeks staying in Big Sur with the Morganroths. And we were matched, a boy and a girl in each age group. Four kids and four boy girl matches. The joke was that it was gonna be a tribal wedding. None of that happened. But while we were down there we used to go to a place called Slate's Hot Springs. It was the only

restaurant nearby because they were past Esalen going south. Slate's eventually became Esalen. My dad and Gregory gave the first seminar there, I think in the '63. So, this was right around the time that my folks got divorced, they'd already separated. I think it was the summer after they separated that my dad went down and gave the first talk at Esalen.

0:50:05 Debra Schwartz: Well, there's a lot of interest in Druid Heights right now.

0:50:08 Mark Watts: Yes.

0:50:11 Debra Schwartz: Which is now on GGNRA land, Golden Gate National Recreational Area.

0:50:11 Mark Watts: Right. I was just up there.

0:50:13 Debra Schwartz: Tell me a little bit about your father's involvement with —

0:50:21 Mark Watts: Okay, so after my father and mother split, my dad lived in a cabin owned by Elsa Gidlow in Fairfax.

0:50:27 Debra Schwartz: The poet.

0:50:28 Mark Watts: The poet. And she had acquired the property at Druid Heights with Roger and was living up there and vacated her cabin, so she gave my father the cabin. I don't know how they got to know each other. But Henry, Sandy, and Roger were friends so it was probably through that connection. So, my father lived there and then he rented the Ferryboat *Vallejo* with Yanco Varda was on one end and my father rented the other end from Gordon Onslow Ford, the artist whose place is right over here, the Bishop Pine Preserve. So, by the mid '60s my father was living there and he lived there with Mary Jane until '69 exclusively. At that point he was feeling the pressure of a lot of people coming to find him and there would be constant visitors and interruptions at the door. So, they moved up the hill to so that he could write without interruptions.

0:51:29 Debra Schwartz: You mean they moved from being in Sausalito to Druid Heights.

0:51:31 Mark Watts: Yeah from the *Vallejo* to Druid Heights.

0:51:35 Debra Schwartz: Which, for those who don't know much about Druid Heights, without being specific about being where it is, if you don't know where it is, you won't necessarily be able to find it.

0:51:45 Mark Watts: Yeah. It's tucked in the hills of the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais. But it's a beautiful little place. You can't see the ocean, but you can feel the ocean from there.

0:51:55 Debra Schwartz: You can certainly feel the forest.

0:51:57 Mark Watts: Yeah. You can certainly feel the forest. And so Elsa was there. Roger was there, and Ed Stiles. And Roger had built a cabin for Thea, Elsa's sister, who lived up in Sebastopol. She arrived to move in and hit a week of pure fog and moved right back to Sebastopol leaving the cabin vacant. So, my father ended up getting the cabin and there was some misunderstanding and bad blood between Ed and Roger about the cabin.

0:52:31 Debra Schwartz: Ed Stiles and Roger Summers?

0:52:32 Mark Watts: Yeah. And I think still you'll hear about that from Ed. I think he held a grudge against my father for some period as a result of that. At a certain point though, even up there because it was a one room cabin, my father couldn't write because he was in the one room with Jano. Right about the time I arrived back in California, that would be 1971 —

0:53:00 Debra Schwartz: So, you're living in...

0:53:01 Mark Watts: Pennsylvania.

0:53:02 Debra Schwartz: Pennsylvania, and then you decide to come back.

0:53:04 Mark Watts: Yeah. I turned 18 in '53, plus 18 is what?

0:53:10 Debra Schwartz: Oh, don't ask me, I'm terrible with math.

0:53:10 Mark Watts: Yeah. '53 plus 18 would be 73? Yeah, so '71. In the summer of '71 I turned 18, and I immediately — I'd been in New York. In New York I had, through my father, met a photographer, Richard Borst, and I was studying photography with him, actually, helping him run a darkroom setup. He would send me out with a different camera and a different mission every day. It was a wonderful time. But as soon as I turned 18 I flew back to Pittsburgh. My high school girlfriend and I got on the plane with her mother and flew to San Francisco. I gotta think back to my father and his young bride and her mother flying to New York. Her mom stayed the one day it took to make sure that she was actually going to college, and flew back after seeing the ferryboat scene. So, we had moved into a little, a tatami.

0:54:04 Debra Schwartz: She didn't mind the ferry boat scene?

0:54:06 Mark Watts: She wasn't letting on one way or the other, but I actually think she did like it. She was much more progressive than her husband and she just kind of smiled and said, "They'll be fine."

0:54:18 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

0:54:19 Mark Watts: And headed out. Yeah. [chuckles]

0:54:20 Debra Schwartz: After you describe the story I'd like to mention a little bit about the ferry boats scene.

0:54:24 Mark Watts: Yeah, the ferry boats. So, one of the first things I did, though, was to go up to my dad's and help Roger build or finish the roof to a building right next door to the Mandala cabin, which is the library, the round building that's still there, built out of a water tank. It was great. My brother was already out there, he had helped stand up the staves, and by the time I got there we were working on the roof, we were finishing the roof. So, I helped Roger do that for a couple of days. So then my father finally had a sanctuary where he could write.

0:55:03 Debra Schwartz: He could live in the small cabin but write in the water tower.

0:55:06 Mark Watts: Exactly, yeah.

0:55:06 Debra Schwartz: The water tank.

0:55:08 Mark Watts: Tank. Yeah. And so he wrote several books there. All the journals were written there.

0:55:11 Debra Schwartz: 20 books. Is that what he had written?

0:55:15 Mark Watts: 25.

0:55:16 Debra Schwartz: Okay, so now he's in his early 40s?

0:55:18 Mark Watts: No. So, I'm back in California, by now my dad's in his 50s.

0:55:25 Debra Schwartz: 50s?

0:55:25 Mark Watts: Yeah, he's like 53, I guess. 54. By the time I reunite with my dad, actually, he's in his 50s. Not in his 40s. In his 50s.

0:55:35 Debra Schwartz: What's he like in his 50s?

0:55:36 Mark Watts: He's great. When I first got back together with him it appeared to me that he was not in the best of health. I learned later that he'd had a health scare that actually prompted him to get in touch with me. He felt like he didn't have, maybe, didn't have as much time as he thought he did. So, we got together, and then that passed and he was fine. When I got back to California I immediately began to work with him on a variety of projects. He knew I was interested in film and photography and we started to work on various projects. The first one was *Tao, the Water Course Way*. He gave me research to do on Chinese characters. He wanted me to find the oldest form of it, the seal style and the contemporary style for a list of characters he gave me.

0:56:36 Debra Schwartz: That was his task for you?

0:56:36 Mark Watts: Yeah.

0:56:37 Debra Schwartz: To engage you?

0:56:38 Mark Watts: To go and research these things. I think he already knew the answers, but he wanted me to go and do that voyage of discovery. The results are in the chart. Then we had a great conversation. He was talking about why he liked the Chinese language. That it was process oriented it wasn't verb objective, it didn't fracture things as a way of explaining them. He said most people think it's too complicated. And he's writing like this and I'm standing at a 90 degree angle at the end of the table and I'm watching him write English and then insert the Chinese in the manuscript and I said, "Dad, you only need to turn the page sideways and look at it from here." In other words, where you can't see, understand the English, because it's sideways, and you'll see that the Chinese is actually far less complicated. So, that ended up in the book. Then later that day we had a great idea which was, let's take all the Western symbols that we have and see if we can write with them, use them as a language. And so assembled a chart —

0:57:33 Debra Schwartz: This is just a random idea of something fun to do.

0:57:36 Mark Watts: Yeah, yeah. [chuckles] So, by the next day I had assembled a chart for him of all the Western symbols I could come up with.

0:57:43 Debra Schwartz: Like what symbols?

0:57:44 Mark Watts: Like mathematical symbols, alchemical symbols, traffic symbols, signs that we knew, obvious things like a telephone, a wine glass. So, I showed him my chart when he got down the next day and he said, "Well, let's write something." He wrote a love story about boy meets girl, calls girl —

0:58:07 Debra Schwartz: Out of the symbols?

0:58:07 Mark Watts: Yeah, all out of the symbols. It's in the *Water Course Way*, and I actually have it on a 25-foot scroll as he did it in Esalen later with a brush. So, we wrote this love story. It ends up boy meets girl, nine moons later and there's a happy little kid to see the stars, the sun and the moon, the flowers. So, this was actually the beginning of my interest in pictographic language, this assignment. My father gave me various assignments. He said, "Write down everything that you know for yourself, not things other people have told you. Take one part, sheath of paper and write down everything you know for yourself. And then on another one write down everything you've taken on faith from other people, that you know that way." It was very interesting. The things I knew for myself was a page-and-a-half, the things I had taken from other people were 12 pages. So that was an exercise. Another one was my girlfriend and I were having problems and I told my dad about it. He didn't answer. He said, "Oh come with me." And we drove down to the Tides Bookstore and they had —

0:59:17 Debra Schwartz: The Tides Bookstore was —

0:59:18 Mark Watts: In Sausalito. He would go there and sign books to help the proprietor sell the books. When we first come in he had the rare books and they were under a glass case, and the back of the glass case had a little shelf and there were all these geodes and rocks. And he goes down the row, “This one, this one.” And there’s a little fossil and a little group of ancient creatures. He says, “Everybody there died more than 5 million years ago.” [chuckles] All of the sudden my girlfriend problems were put into perspective. [laughs] So, my dad had a great way of teaching and a great way of — we know him as this showman on stage, but he sort of reminds me of Jeff Bridges. You see Jeff Bridges in character, but in real life he was more heartfelt, more resonant, and way way smarter in his relationships than you might give an actor or a philosopher credit for.

He had an extremely, like Jeff, an extremely, highly developed sense of justice. It was interesting because he tried to treat all of the kids evenly, but not equally. And I say evenly because he recognized that we were so completely different that you couldn’t do the same thing for each of us and have it be even. So, for instance, he got my brother a pick up truck ’cause that’s what he needed ’cause he wanted to go get Redwood slabs. He helped me through college and got me a cheap car ’cause he wasn’t gonna spend all the money on the pick up truck, and he tried to do this and it actually went very badly with my half sisters who didn’t understand evenly versus equally. But we sorted our way through that. Then I started to drive with my dad. I would be a chauffeur basically up and down the West Coast — Big Sur, and Bridge Mountain, and all the way up to Vancouver once on his various seminar tours.

1:01:11 Debra Schwartz: Is that when you started recording him on your own?

1:01:14 Mark Watts: Actually, I started recording him when we were still in the the East. When he came to my college to speak, I recorded him. I would meet him in New York. He would have the Nagra on one shoulder and a basket with a bowl gong on the other that must have —

1:01:27 Debra Schwartz: A what?

1:01:27 Mark Watts: The bottom of an oxygen cylinder.

1:01:30 Debra Schwartz: Okay. [addressing listener] He’s getting up and he’s grabbing something for me to see. Oh yes.

1:01:35 Mark Watts: A bowl gong.

1:01:37 Debra Schwartz: A bowl gong. Hold on. Let’s hear a little bowl gong.

[sounds gong]

1:01:48 Mark Watts: That’s a nice one.

1:01:49 Debra Schwartz: That is a nice one.

1:01:51 Mark Watts: This is one I got for Justin, our sound and media guy, for a present. But, an oxygen cylinder, he cut off with just the very bottom of the bowl. And the main part hung from the rafters of this cabin at Druid Heights and he had a log that he would swing and it would just give an enormous gong.

1:02:11 Debra Schwartz: That's how he'd make his gong?

1:02:11 Mark Watts: Yeah, enormous sound, but then the bottom, which must have weighed 20 pounds, he would carry it with him in a basket that was falling apart because he liked to have the bowl gong to lead meditations in his talks. And so, I would meet him at the airport, I'd take the bowl gong on one shoulder, the Nagra on the other, relieve him of the weight and off we'd go. It was a lot of fun.

1:02:30 Debra Schwartz: Did you have a sense that there was a purpose?

1:02:37 Mark Watts: Oh yes.

1:02:38 Debra Schwartz: With your father?

1:02:40 Mark Watts: Yeah, and it was very intentional. I think British tradition places a great importance on the oldest son. So, I think if you're brought up in that culture, you wanna find out what your oldest son is all about and see whether they can carry on the family business, whatever that is.

1:02:58 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, because no sons in the first marriage, so you are his
—

1:03:01 Mark Watts: Oldest son.

1:03:03 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:03:04 Mark Watts: So, I think that that was part of it. But I think also we just got along. I was interested in the things that he was interested in, plus he was very inclined toward visual language, and I was doing photography and studying film. So, we had a lot to talk about and a lot to do.

1:03:17 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever ask your father where it came from? Did he spontaneously erupt with the insights or how would you describe the way that he came to understand the world as he did?

1:03:31 Mark Watts: I saw through the lens of humanistic psychology because that's what I was reading. I read Hess and Laing and all of these contemporary texts about what really comes down to be, in some sense, Buddhist psychology. As I remember, my dad,

when we first got together, he said, “So what do you wanna do? I’ll help you do whatever you wanna do.” And I said, “I wanna study psychology.” He said, “That’s a terrible choice, but I’ll help you anyway.” [chuckles] It took me some years to understand why he said that was a terrible choice, but he was talking about clinical psychology, the way that it was practiced. But I ended up going to a course in humanistic psychology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Then when I got to California, I went to the humanistic psychology program at Sonoma State after a little period, and went to the San Francisco Art Institute in between.

1:04:25: So yeah, we were very interested in changes in consciousness, shifts of consciousness, how that impacted social values, social perception, the mechanism of the ego, what the ego’s role was, what it was trying to do, why it was failing, what it was all about. And very interested in traditional approaches to religion. By traditional, I mean really archaic, very early forms. He would talk about Tibetan methods and I was interested in what did the early Daoists do and what were they all about. And he would say, “Well, we don’t know much. Chinese, we have the language, but we don’t even really know the origins of it. It’s lost in antiquity so that’s why I’m having you look up these charts ’cause we think it came from petroglyphs, but they don’t really know.” When the first emperor assembled Chinese, the scholars were asked to research and find out, but a lot of it was based on opinion, so it was a very, very interesting area.

1:05:29 Debra Schwartz: Was your father your teacher?

1:05:33 Mark Watts: Yeah, well —

1:05:34 Debra Schwartz: Your mentor?

1:05:35 Mark Watts: He was my mentor, but he was also more than that. He was my guide. For instance, he would get in the mail, a bunch of stuff would come to him, and he would say, “Oh, I don’t have time for this. Please read this book and tell me what’s wonderful about it. I know that’s a good one. Here, and I don’t know about this, but read and tell me what you think.” So, I would actually work screening materials and helping him keep up with his correspondence by giving him essentially the cliff notes on something he hadn’t read.

1:06:00 Debra Schwartz: Even though you’re a very young man?

1:06:00 Mark Watts: Well, no, by this time I’m 19.

1:06:04 Debra Schwartz: Pretty young.

1:06:05 Mark Watts: Yeah, but I was sharp kid.

1:06:08 Debra Schwartz: He is one of the great authorities of Zen Buddhism and religion, and he’s relying on the insights of his 19-year-old son.

1:06:16 Mark Watts: His precocious 19-year-old son.

1:06:17 Debra Schwartz: But he was so very precocious, I suppose.

1:06:21 Mark Watts: Yeah, and I think it worked well. I knew what he was looking for. I had a real developed sense of the shifts in human consciousness, and because I listened to his talks I knew what he'd be looking for. I knew what was of interest to me in these was also what was of interest to him. We were very close in that way. I think that a lot of what fascinated him was really pretty ancient. For instance, the basic problems with suffering and strife and relationships and all of this stuff had been the subject of Eastern philosophy for thousands of years. And the clinging, and attachment as a root of suffering, that idea was very old, but it was still completely relevant and maybe even more so because we got more things and we got more cultural opportunities — the shift of humans from biologic tool to cultural evolution was a tremendous change. It was accelerating and to this day accelerates, so in a way those observations become more and more applicable as we go, more necessary.

1:07:33 Debra Schwartz: So, now when we think about when your father lived in Marin County and the time that his work was exploding, this is the Summer of Love, this is in a time of liberalness and freedom, that women have their birth control finally so relationships are changing. There's not the same kind of social constraints, doors are opening, ceilings are breaking. There's all this going on. I'm fourth-generation Californian and I remember those days — there was a lot of drugs.

1:08:06 Mark Watts: A lot of drugs.

1:08:06 Debra Schwartz: And a lot of abuses of alcohol, smoking —

1:08:12 Mark Watts: It's crazy. Yeah.

1:08:13 Debra Schwartz: Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

1:08:13 Mark Watts: Oh yeah. Let's take a pause here for a moment. I'm gonna light a fire and let the cat in, and then we can continue, 'cause it's getting cold in here.

[pause]

1:08:26 Debra Schwartz: Okay we are back on now. We took a little break, didn't we, Mark?

1:08:34 Mark Watts: We did, and we had a toast party and some tea.

1:08:38 Debra Schwartz: We started a fire. It was freezing in here.

1:08:38 Mark Watts: Yeah, freezing in here. And so, we're back to what? Drugs, sex, and rock 'n' roll? [chuckles] Is that where we're gonna pick up?

1:08:44 Debra Schwartz: We're gonna jump into that arena for a moment here, because this is the '70s in Marin County. There's been a lot going on in Marin County. We've already had your dad and his buddies. There were the Beats in the '50s. Then comes the '60s, and so many of the rock-'n'-rollers live in Mill Valley now who had moved from the Haight district in the late '60s. Sausalito's happening, we've got the Trident Restaurant now in full force, which is a conversation in itself. There's a certain measure of freedom going on in the county itself and your father's sitting smack dab in the middle of probably the hippest of the hip scenes right there.

1:09:37 Mark Watts: Well, I'm gonna tell you a quick story about the Trident and then we're gonna jump to the '70s.

1:09:41 Debra Schwartz: Okay, let's hear a Trident story.

1:09:41 Mark Watts: So, I got back to California for good in '71, but I also came back out in '68, I think it was. After I saw my dad on the *Camera Three*, I ran away from home. I took a church bus to New Mexico for a thing, a Greyhound to Phoenix, a plane to San Francisco, showed up at the *Vallejo*, only to find out my father was on tour, 'cause I hadn't told anybody I was coming. So, I ended up spending the Sunday that I was there before I got flown promptly back to Pennsylvania, with Yanko Varda, the artist, the Greek artist. We set forth on the *Sithra*, which was his life boat converted into a sailboat, probably could do two knots in a hurricane, and lumbered our way down off of the Trident restaurant. I didn't know this, but it was a regular thing that they did.

1:10:39 Debra Schwartz: Where they pull on up to the dock of the Trident?

1:10:41 Mark Watts: Well, they would be offshore, not at the dock, offshore. And two young women who had been dining there stood up and dropped all of their clothes, left them on the deck and dove in. So, my first duty upon returning to California was to pull naked, goose-bumped young ladies out of the drink. [laughs]

1:11:00 Debra Schwartz: It's a hard job.

1:11:01 Mark Watts: It was rough, but somebody had to do it. [laughs]

1:11:05 Debra Schwartz: If I had a buck for every beautiful woman Trident story I've heard —

1:11:09 Mark Watts: Well, it was thing. The owner didn't mind that they jumped their check because tourists would show up and sit there guessing who they thought were gonna jump overboard naked in the next hour. [laughs]

1:11:24 Debra Schwartz: And Roger Summers, who you spoke about Druid Heights
—

1:11:27 Mark Watts: He built it.

1:11:27 Debra Schwartz: He was involved with the back portion of the Trident.

1:11:31 Mark Watts: Yeah.

1:11:32 Debra Schwartz: The deck area.

1:11:34 Mark Watts: Roger was an incredible builder and very energetic, and all those swoops and curves and everything, he would knock those out at a rate that it was really hard to imagine how productive he was with a router, a shaper, and all of that. So yeah, he did a lot of the building there, a lot of the design, and I think that probably one of the best things about that was that it became a real center for musicians to meet, and a real creative hub. It was the go-to place, and you could meet your next band member, or whatever, there, 'cause it was owned by the Kingston —

1:12:15 Debra Schwartz: One of the owners was Nick Reynolds of the Kingston Trio.

1:12:18 Mark Watts: Frank Werber of the Kingston — Werber, yeah.

1:12:19 Debra Schwartz: Frank Werber, right, and his wife.

1:12:23 Mark Watts: What was her name?

1:12:26 Debra Schwartz: Gosh, I — he had a few.

1:12:30 Mark Watts: Yeah, I don't remember her name.

1:12:31 Debra Schwartz: I'll think of it in a minute.

1:12:32 Mark Watts: But it was definitely a hot spot. So anyway, that was a nice era. When I got back to California, it was still the Trident, and it was one of the nice places to meet and congregate. Sausalito, Mill Valley, Fairfax, those were the places. What was going on more than anything, there was a lot of pot being smoked. We had pot dealers moved in on the back of the *Vallejo* after Varda passed on. There were a lot of psychedelics, and there was a lot of trade in psychedelics. I remember one summer these pot guys were waiting for a load of Thai sticks to come in, and they didn't come, and they didn't come, and they didn't come. So finally, they showed up, and they had been caught in a container on Long Beach, and they were completely dried out. While the sample had tasted like sweet apricots, this was just almost dust. They didn't know what to do, so on Varda's long table they put out a long piece of wax paper, and broke it all up, and then proceeded to add to it a quart of Afghani honey oil, a quart of some pot oil that we'd made out on a little boat from Mexican pot. So, that got all massaged in, and then a baggie full of psilocybin spores. That was all mixed up, and then neatly rolled into imitation Camel cigarette packs that said Bay Area Bombers on them. [laughs]

1:14:12 Debra Schwartz: My gosh.

1:14:14 Mark Watts: And sold for \$200 a pack.

1:14:15 Debra Schwartz: So, that was in your drug manufacturing and dealing days?

1:14:20 Mark Watts: I wasn't responsible, all I did was help massage the pot. [chuckles] But it wasn't my deal. But they were living on the back of the boat, so I did get a pack for my efforts.

1:14:30 Debra Schwartz: Did your father get paid for his lectures and his talks, ever in trade?

1:14:40 Mark Watts: Not that I know of. I actually ended up smoking one of those with him and the sheriff-elect, Richard Hungesto.

1:14:48 Debra Schwartz: In Sausalito, the sheriff?

1:14:50 Mark Watts: Well, he was a San Francisco sheriff.

1:14:52 Debra Schwartz: Oh, a San Francisco sheriff.

1:14:53 Mark Watts: Yeah, San Francisco sheriff, and he was running on the pro-pot platform. My dad had a fundraising party for him on the *Vallejo*, and we were next door. After helping set up the party, he and Richard wandered over. I smoked all these joints with them. But I was waiting for the next day, "Oh, why would you let us smoke that before such a party? We ruined our night." But those guys are heavy hitters. I never heard a thing. [laughs]

1:15:13 Debra Schwartz: What did your father feel about drugs? He's a man who had been studying philosophy and religion, and looking into the old texts, and the traditional way, and then all of a sudden, there's all these hallucinogenics, and these other paths towards mind altering.

1:15:31 Mark Watts: He had no interest in any kind of drugs other than hallucinogenic, psychotropic drugs. He found pot to be extremely creative, good for, in small amounts, for writing, or for artistic and aesthetic pursuits. It is very sensual, in the right doses. However, what he would do is he would not smoke it because, as we were talking, he was sensitive about smoking by that point. He would ask us for all of our seeds and stems which he would put in a little grinder, a Moulinex grinder. And he would make this terrible, unleavened green bread out of it which was carefully marked with the tines of a fork about every three quarters of an inch, and the rule was you could never eat more than one. So, I asked him, "Dad, how did you develop that as the right amount, and why are you so careful about it?" And he says, "I lost three days of writing due to eating too much one time." [laughs]

1:16:33: So, with pot he used it creatively. But anything stronger than that — LSD, mescaline, peyote — all of those things, he viewed as something that you used for religious purposes. He was not a fan of recreational consumption of the strong psychedelics. He thought that it was a misuse, and also potentially pretty dangerous. He was famous for saying, “Once you get the message, hang up the phone.” I found that to be true, that you would receive information, there were gifts, depending on how you wanna describe it, from the ingestion of these substances and if you didn’t implement them before you took more, you would sorta be reminded, “Hey, we already told you that. And what are you doing?” It was if you had that attitude that it was a teacher or a sacrament, the relationship with it was very different. I had friends who were musicians and pot dealers, who would just take their vitamins A, B, C, D, E, and L every day. And, yeah, pretty soon it didn’t really work. In my father’s view, what their purpose was.

1:17:48 Debra Schwartz: How about alcohol?

1:17:50 Mark Watts: So, my father’s third wife was a Martini drinking, New York business world —

1:17:57 Debra Schwartz: And her name again?

1:17:58 Mark Watts: Mary Jane.

1:17:58 Debra Schwartz: Mary Jane.

1:17:58 Mark Watts: Jano for short. When my mom and dad were together, they didn’t drink particularly. I asked my mom about it. She said, “No, I think we had the same bottle of sherry in the cabinet for about two years and occasionally we’d have wine at a guest’s house, but we didn’t drink at home.” But when he got together with Mary Jane, he quickly became her drinking buddy. So, by the time I got to know my father again in the ’60s, the first time when I arrived in — no, it was actually the second time we got together in New York City, I flew in and it was a hot day, and I took a cab in from LaGuardia and met him in a hotel room. It was 100 degrees and 95% humidity and he said, “Oh, would you like something to drink?” And I said, “Oh, sure.” And he gave me a glass of clear liquid that I assumed was water, but was actually pure vodka, and I downed it like you would water. I don’t think I touched alcohol for five years after that.

1:18:58: By that time, he was drinking vodka pretty regularly. And as time went on, it was apparent to me that he found some comfort in alcohol and that the comfort was in large measure due to the problems that had developed with his third marriage, because Mary Jane was a drop dead drunk. Going to dinner with them consisted of showing up there, have her say she was in the kitchen making dinner for two and three hours, to come up, find her asleep on the floor, a bottle of vodka and a bottle of wine having been consumed and half a pack of cigarettes, whereupon we would make dinner. She was a very progressed alcoholic. Although he drank, he was composed. He would give talks drinking vodka and convinced people perfectly that the glass in front of him was water and only if you got within a couple of feet, could you tell that he was drinking strong

spirits. But he handled it very well. He did great talks and great work while consuming alcohol. So many people think that it led to his demise. We figured out that that isn't true, that it's probably was related to his lungs.

1:20:16 Debra Schwartz: And speaking of his lungs, in listening to your father's — first of all, I wanna say I'm a fan. I think your father is the most provocative, evocative — I don't know how to describe the way that he can, from chaos, create reason.

1:20:40 Mark Watts: I know. It's beautiful.

1:20:41 Debra Schwartz: He is literally a weaver. He pulls the colors out and he pulls things together and then he shows them to you clearly in the most refreshing manner. His concepts, his ideas, his illusions, everything was so evocative that I think it really does spark growth in those that hear and appreciate what he's saying. And even if you don't understand, you will, slowly. Things unfold in a wonderful story-telling manner.

1:21:10 Mark Watts: He called this spiraling.

1:21:12 Debra Schwartz: Spiraling?

1:21:13 Mark Watts: He used the story and then the concept. The story and then the concept. I actually think it's more of a helix, that he's going down and he's going around his content. What's in the center is the indescribable and then he weaves this wonderful thing around it. I think that he was extremely playful. He didn't mind letting a few tangents get out there before he weaved them back in again. Actually, in one of his talks, I counted that he'd left four out before coming back and picking them all up in the correct order and tying it all together. He was a very skilled extemporaneous speaker from an organizational standpoint, even though he didn't speak from notes.

1:22:02 Debra Schwartz: That's what I was going to ask you. Did he speak from notes, because it seems extemporaneous?

1:22:07 Mark Watts: No. I have to tell you a funny story about this. So, in 1971, I was recording him regularly at the First Unitarian Church in San Francisco. And I liked to sit in the back because I'd have run the mic cable to the front and then I could get the recorder going and if I felt like slipping out I could. But one evening I had just set up and he had started to speak and a very well-dressed couple came in and sat down a couple of seats down from me and were listening very intently. And they were curious to me because they're very different. They didn't look like San Franciscans, and they looked very handsome and intelligent. And at about 44 minutes exactly into the talk, they began an intense little discussion that lasted for about a minute and they went back to listening and so at the end of the talk, which ran about 55 minutes, I followed them up to the front to retrieve the microphone from my dad, to get it off him so he didn't walk off with the wire attached.

1:23:04: I found out that I was following up Joseph Campbell and Jean Erdman. And he said, “Alan, lovely speech, lovely speech.” I didn’t think anything more of it, but many years later when I was working for the Joseph Campbell Foundation, I picked up Jean at the airport to attend the regular Campbell week at Esalen. At that point she had fairly advanced short-term memory loss. She couldn’t remember if she’d paid the window washer or not and he would take advantage of that. But I quickly realized in the course of our conversation that anything 20 years or older she had complete recall, impeccable memory. I asked her about the evening with Joseph Campbell and John Cage and got a lot of details on that and then I said, “San Francisco 1971, you came and listened to my dad talk.” And she said “Oh, yes. What an incredible evening, it was wonderful.” I said, “Do you happen to remember what you and Joe spoke about? About 45 minutes, you stopped that little conversation then went back to listening.” She said, “I would never forget it. He said, “That’s it. He hasn’t looked at a note yet. I’m throwing away my notes.” [laughs]

1:24:12: So knowing that date, because I had it on the back of my recording box and getting this comment, and I was in the middle of working on Joseph Campbell’s recordings at the time, and I was experiencing a bit of frustration because I was doing it chronologically, and I was trying to present these chronological lecture series. But the problem was that Joe would go out and he would give the same lecture 10 times in the season with slightly different names and maybe a different lecture. So, it was very hard to go in chronologically to mix it up, and I was having this conversation with the board members at the Joseph Campbell Foundation that I really needed to mix it up a bit to cover the subject adequately. So now, armed with this information, I went to the Campbell tapes before ’71 and after ’71, and it was beautiful to see as soon as he stopped speaking from his notes how his speaking style changed and developed, and he became the warm, incredibly enthusiastic speaker that we know Campbell as being.

1:25:07 Debra Schwartz: In order to do that, you have to have confidence in the vast amount of learned wisdom and education that you can draw from, which your father obviously does. He has such a massive, inner library.

1:25:28 Mark Watts: An inner library, as did Campbell, and it was just getting the confidence to go out and wing it.

1:25:32 Debra Schwartz: And trust yourself.

1:25:33 Mark Watts: To work associatively and be free to spiral.

1:25:37 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever wonder if your father was some kind of channeler?

1:25:45 Mark Watts: No, I could see that. I could see the threads that he was playing with. They were pretty well developed, and I would hear him often talk about the same things, and it was really a challenge when I went to organize and present the 400 hours, 400 reels, of recordings that I had. I had to pick because there were lots of places where

he would say the same thing, and I wanted to represent all of his ideas. So, I found ones where he developed different strains from the same introductions, but it's interesting because now I'm in the process of going back through the other 200 hours and realizing that in doing that, I left out some of his great performances. So, we're actually in the midst now of gearing up for the archival project, which is to present to the world the other 200 hours.

1:26:30 Debra Schwartz: Before we go on to the work that you've been doing, because we've talked an awful lot about your father, in the beginning of our discussion about your father we talked about how as a young boy he went to the bank and he wanted to open an account.

1:26:42 Mark Watts: Open a bank account.

1:26:44 Debra Schwartz: What did your father say or do, besides the fact that he was self-possessed for a little fellow?

1:26:51 Mark Watts: Right.

1:26:52 Debra Schwartz: Did he say something in particular, because we never quite finished that story?

1:26:56 Mark Watts: No, just his father assured him that it was his signature and had him sign for the banker, in front of the banker.

1:27:01 Debra Schwartz: I wondered if your father had spoken on his own behalf to this man.

1:27:06 Mark Watts: I don't know. I don't remember. It's fun. His autobiography is well-indexed, so if I have a question like this, I'll go to the index and see if I can see banker signature, anything like that, or try and track it down. It's a long book. But there's a great talk, it's called "Spectrum of Love," and he talks about how some people just seem to exude love and we would like to be like that. And he talks about an instructor, a teacher who he emulated and did everything that he did because he wanted to be like him. So, it gives a little clue to how he was learning things and how he modeled his own heroes. It's a beautiful talk.

1:27:53: I think that he was very influenced by people like Christmas Humphreys, D.T. Suzuki, Saburo Hasegawa, Joseph Campbell, probably to some extent, John Cage, although John was not verbally intellectual in the same zone that he was. But I think that he did have a lot of people that inspired him to become the speaker that he was, and in particular, I think Christmas Humphreys, from the very beginning. Christmas was a barrister. He was famous prosecuting attorney at the Old Bailey, and a great baritone voice, and an incredible speaker, and he would speak at the lodge, and then my father would speak. And I think my father gained confidence from speaking with Christmas,

and the way that he presented himself is like, such a master of oratory. I think that my father just felt carried along in those winds.

1:28:47 Debra Schwartz: He certainly has a relaxed, warm, familiar communication with his audience, your dad does. And what is interesting, I noticed, as he gets older, you do hear his voice change.

1:29:05 Mark Watts: Yep.

1:29:06 Debra Schwartz: And you've mentioned about your dad that his lungs weren't great, and you talked about health scare earlier.

1:29:11 Mark Watts: So yeah, in 1968, when I met him for — I think it's '68, it could've been '69, but I think it was '68 — *Camera Three*, yes it was apparent from that and subsequent conversations that he'd had a health scare that had led him to get in touch with me and then that blew over.

1:29:33 Debra Schwartz: And do you know what that was?

1:29:34 Mark Watts: I don't know, but I will tell you a clue, which is that we're on a set of a TV show, and my introduction to it when I use it in my doc film is — the two things we forgot most quickly about '60s is how much rapping was going on, talking, not rapping like the music.

1:29:54 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, I remember the term. [laughs]

1:29:56 Mark Watts: Rapping, and how much smoking went along with it. Including myself there at 15 and a half, everybody up there smokes except for my father, and he was a smoker. He's abstaining from smoking even though he's surrounded with smokers on this set. So, I think that it was lungs. I think that something had happened, and he looks pale. Now by the second session he's come to life and his color's better. Then I didn't see him for another year after that, and then he looked a lot better. But in that particular thing, I'd say he looks like David Bowie after a three-day bender.

1:30:39 Debra Schwartz: And he's Welsh, so that's white-white. [laughs]

1:30:42 Mark Watts: That's white-white, yeah. [laughs] Day-glow white. By the time I got back to California in '71, he was doing great.

1:30:53 Debra Schwartz: How much was he smoking?

1:30:54 Mark Watts: What he did is he stopped smoking any kind of cigarette, and instead he used to smoke Balkan Sobranies, and really horrible European cigarettes. He would smoke a pipe, and occasionally puff on a Balkan Sobranie, but not inhale, just like a little cigar. So, he stopped inhaling tobacco products. As I say, he was doing well, but

then I think toward two years later, by the time '73 rolled around, he looked tired. So, I think that then it was probably a comeback that was kicking in.

1:31:38 Debra Schwartz: It's hard for people that are young now to imagine what a tool, what a device, what an accoutrement, cigarettes were to your being. I mean in a lot of television in that time, you pour yourself a drink and you have a cigarette. It set a tone. It was a ceremony.

1:31:56 Mark Watts: It was. And if you look at the hand gestures around smoking, it's a hold, it's almost to the level of mudra, people where they hold the cigarette, the way they express themselves. If you look at that *Camera Three* footage, we were a bunch of hipsters smoking. Hipsters hold their cigarettes differently and it was a thing. I mean I fortunately, at the age of around 30, took some great LSD one day and forgot about smoking, but everybody smoked. More people smoked than drank. Everybody smoked and it was just pervasive. At a certain point though, people did begin to wake up.

1:32:41 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. They did wake up and died.

1:32:42 Mark Watts: Yeah, well, people were dying all around them. But also they became aware. Henry Sandy, my father-in-law, we'll talk about a little bit, he actually did a film called *Breaking the Habit*, one of the first anti-tobacco films, and he was very advanced, he was an anti-smoking activist. I'll never forget being at La Veranda in Mill Valley, and we had just ordered our scampi, and it just came to the table, and the woman in the table next to us was just having wine, lit her second cigarette. We thought she'd done with the first cigarette, we're gonna be okay. So, he went over to her and he put his hand on her and he says, "Excuse me, would you mind not smoking? I have skin cancer." And she put her cigarette out in her wine glass and she just chugged it in the wine. [laughs] It was great!

1:33:34 Debra Schwartz: It was smokier world back then.

1:33:35 Mark Watts: It was a terribly smoky world, yeah.

1:33:39 Debra Schwartz: So your father started —

1:33:43 Mark Watts: I have pictures of him with a cigarette in his hand at age 21, so 40-something years later, I think it caught up with him.

1:33:52 Debra Schwartz: He died a young man.

1:33:54 Mark Watts: Yeah, 58, at the age of 58.

1:33:56 Debra Schwartz: Well, not so young, but younger —

1:33:56 Mark Watts: By today's standards, very young, yeah.

1:34:01 Debra Schwartz: And you're how old now?

1:34:02 Mark Watts: I'm 64. I'll be 65 this year.

1:34:04 Debra Schwartz: How was it for you the day that you turned 59?

1:34:08 Mark Watts: I don't even remember. No, it was fine. [chuckles] I'm not attached to these things. One of the nice things about having a son on your own birthday, I said, "Well, I guess I don't have a birthday anymore." [laughs]

1:34:17 Debra Schwartz: "It's okay, you can have it."

1:34:18 Mark Watts: Yeah. [laughs]

1:34:20 Debra Schwartz: So, tell me a little bit about your father's death and how it impacted you. You were how old?

1:34:28 Mark Watts: I was 20.

1:34:30 Debra Schwartz: 20. That's young to lose a father.

1:34:33 Mark Watts: I'd been working with him. We had spent two summers organizing the recordings, 'cause I was going to school, when I got the call. I was up at my house in Cotati, 'cause I was going to Sonoma State, and I got in the car to drive down, and my mind was thinking, "Oh, how's my brother gonna be doing? Oh, Jano's gonna be a wreck."

1:34:55 Debra Schwartz: You got the message that he had died?

1:34:56 Mark Watts: Yeah, I got a phone call that he died at 10 in the morning. I got the call. He died in the early morning hours. So, I'm driving down, and I get to the hill past San Rafael down into the flats by the Larkspur there, and all of a sudden I realized that I've been thinking about this, but that I never knew anybody who died before. I'd seen a kid get hit on his motorcycle, but I didn't know him. So, I start to ask myself, "What is it that you're actually feeling about this? What do you know for yourself about this experience?", as my father taught me to do. So, now I'm driving up the hill toward the crest toward Mill Valley, and the hair on the back of my neck just starts to stand up because I can feel my father sitting in the seat behind me, and like visceral that he's there, and I can just feel him just getting stronger and stronger right behind me. I break the top of the hill, and over where he lived at Druid Heights off to the right there, there were unusual clouds.

1:36:06: We don't usually get cumulus clouds here, real puffy clouds, but there were six puffy clouds and, audio hallucination, call it what you like, but he laughed a bellowing laugh for each of those six clouds from the back seat, and I was consumed with the mixture of fear, pure terror and fear, because I knew he was gone, what was he doing

in the back seat? [chuckles] Then he disembodied from my perspective and came out around me and went out through the windshield and out through the side windows and became what I can only describe as part of the ever present everywhere, his being mixed with the air. And ever since then, it was almost like he slowly began to mix in, but for the first five, 10 years, he was always readily available. So, in other words, if I'd be working on a project, he was there as a consultant.

1:37:06: I remember one time I was trying to send a book off to a publisher, and I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It was the third day, now I had it in the envelope, and I just had this terrible feeling of hesitation. I said, "Dad, what is it? Why can't I send off this book?" And I just felt him tell me to open it up. So, I opened up the package again, took the tape off and I pulled it out and I look at it, and it hit me. We've already published the first chapter. It's in the Weatherhill book. We can't send it to this publisher, it would be a nightmare, 'cause they're adverse, these two publishers. So, I then walk into this room and I go, "We don't have a book. We need this 'Relevance of Oriental Philosophy' introductory talk. This is a book called the *Philosophies of Asia*. What are we gonna do?"

1:37:55: So, I look at the shelf of recordings and there's two shelves that I haven't archived yet, and I look over those 'cause I know there's no talk that can replace this one in the first four shelves. I look at a couple of seminars, and I go to grab the first talk from one of them. I put it on and it is, essentially the same talk, organized differently, not as charismatically presented, but better from a transcription point of view, more complete. So, I type it up, two days later, it's off to the publisher. Thanks, Dad. [chuckles] Later, I archived those two shelves completely, there was not another talk on there that would have worked or even come close to have worked.

1:38:37 Debra Schwartz: So, you feel like he was right there pointing your eyes in the direction?

1:38:40 Mark Watts: Somehow I just pulled the right tape off the shelf and it's synchronicity. It's a million things. But I do feel that he was enough of a force in the world that he was able to continue as a force in the world after leaving his body. Now that he's always as it were reawakened by the playing of his media a million times a month of whatever it is by people all over the world, it seems like it has taken on an energy of its own. Recently, we did a little audit and 150 million people have watched him on YouTube. I have to think about that: What is the sort of gravitas, the energy of all of that? My dad was fascinated with reproduction and recording, he loved it, and this was something we had in common. He hated film, but he loved videotape 'cause you could erase it and redo it. We recorded him on magnetic tape all the time. He liked that better than having to cut a phonograph record where everything was so precise and if you didn't do it right —

1:39:44: So, he was very aware of this idea of reproduction, and fascinated with what does that really mean? Are we some kind of a reproduction? Many years later, I got the answer to that in an odd way. There's a funny show on TV called *History Hogs*. It's a story about two guys that ride their motorcycles around the country, going to historic

sites. There's the producer guy who has got his BMW, and then there's the big heartfelt American guy on his Harley. So, they were going to check out the Battle of Little Big Horn. And on the way there they stopped at a ranch where there was a petroglyph about the battle. And he said, "The reason we've gotta go here first is the drawing of the battle was made before the battle. We have to go see this." So, they go up there, and the rancher has become an interpreter of this battle, and they say, "Well we see it, we can see how the troop movements, everything's described in this petroglyph. How could he possibly have known in advance" — this was Sitting Bull — "to make the petroglyph?"

1:40:44 Debra Schwartz: He had the vision in advance.

1:40:45 Mark Watts: Yeah. So he said, "Well, the way that I understand it is that when this comes to somebody in a vision, that is the real event. Thereafter, if it happens in the real world, that's a re-enactment. The big American guy just was stunned and he didn't say much, which he's usually fairly talkative, and then later when they're looking at the battlefield and seeing how they were able to out maneuver because of this vision, he just started crying. It was beautiful 'cause he got it, that there is this other layer that is working.

1:41:23 Debra Schwartz: And that it is ubiquitous into our experience in life, yet not always visible.

1:41:30 Mark Watts: Visible, exactly. I mean part of this fascination to me in this was understanding what it is that these people were tapping into. By the time you get Hinduism, with its incredible forms, colors and gods and stories and seeing that being channeled into something more purposeful in Buddhism, there's a very profound thing that you see going on here which is rituals of reciprocity. Is it basically, as we would say, lacking science to understand how it actually works. They believe that you received things, and things grew because you gave back to the gods. There was always this idea of retribution, of reciprocity, and the early people believed that if you didn't return the spirit of the animal to its ancestors properly, there would be no fawns in the spring. And we can now say, causally, that's not true or whatever, but if you look at it from an ecological perspective, their cadence and the way that they did that and all of that, and what we know about interspecies energetics, there's a lot to be said for the way that they were conducting themselves compared to the way that we conduct ourselves and achieve our livelihood now.

1:42:54 Debra Schwartz: A more indigenous type of —

1:42:56 Mark Watts: An archaic world, yeah.

1:42:57 Debra Schwartz: Yes, the archaic world versus the more modern technological world.

1:43:00 Mark Watts: Yeah, the technological world, where we consider ourselves to be the masters of the world. This is a very recurrent theme of my father's talks that our

confusion of our identity due to the ego-based consciousness, the idea that we are somehow the masters, which is very highly illusory. As he said, the ego is a good tool but a poor master. I can see it as basically a sharpening of a very highly tuned and focused sensory apparatus. We have the type of eyes that we have because we need to avoid the corners of tables, but when we'd go even one step beyond this type of sensory apparatus and develop an ego, it's a troubleshooter. It's looking for the problems in the environment. It's looking to how to explain this, get around that, doing all of the things that we are able to do because of the development of the ego. We can develop crazy things like submarines, conducting warfare from submarines, things that no other species would even begin to dream of doing, we do regularly. So, it's run them up to a large extent, but it all happens — my father called this the spotlight, floodlight, which is our less focused but broader awareness and consciousness.

1:44:24: So, when we talk about psychedelics and we talk about cosmic consciousness, essentially, a large part of this is to take the focus off the egoic eye reflective principle and to give full awareness to the floodlight, to the whole ground of being, of which it is not limited to us but is something that is interconnected, is trans-personal, and a very real vibratory physical reality. One of my favorite examples of this is we talk about broadcasts, we all know that we can hear radios because of broadcast signals, but if you were somebody who had appeared from a different culture and didn't know of a radio and you first heard them, you would be convinced that little people lived inside those boxes. And after studying them for a while, you would think, "Well, these are kinda noisy AM types and the more sophisticated FM types, and they seem to get their sustenance through this cord or these batteries we put in, and they sleep at night when you shut it off." And one day you would catch the cord on one and pull it off the kitchen counter and it would smash on the tile and you would be in mourning, because you would think that you would never hear that song again.

1:45:38: So, this lack of knowledge of the broadcast airwaves that that person would have I compare directly to the lack of knowledge that we have about the interpersonal web, the universal web that life emanates from, and we think that at the end of this life there will be no more "I," but what was "I" to begin with? Well, it was one of those songs that was being broadcast. So, it's I think a very different perspective that these people had of a web of life, or an interconnected web of life, where the actual rituals and the actual observance of that connectivity were essential.

1:46:20 Debra Schwartz: We're talking about this now, after speaking about your father and the way of communication and the various realms and the true sense you have of him being there with you even though he's gone.

1:46:33 Mark Watts: Right. Yeah. It was eerie. [chuckles]

1:46:36 Debra Schwartz: Eerie, yes.

1:46:37 Mark Watts: Frightening actually, at the time. [laughs]

1:46:38 Debra Schwartz: It can be that way. So, he's physically not with you, yet I can't help but notice that you — and correct me if I'm wrong in making this assumption — but you carry with you, I think, a moral obligation to continue to send his message out. I mean, you make his lectures available for free.

1:47:03 Mark Watts: Yeah, but we do it both ways.

1:47:04 Debra Schwartz: Both ways.

1:47:04 Mark Watts: If you want them in an organized way, you can pay for them, but we let them be broadcast all over the world. They're everywhere, and we don't stop it.

1:47:12 Debra Schwartz: They're on YouTube and you can get snippets, and this and that.

1:47:14 Mark Watts: Yeah, they're everywhere.

1:47:14 Debra Schwartz: I mean, you could've secured them, made them only available —

1:47:16 Mark Watts: Well, if you look at that, for instance, that's what the Joseph Campbell Foundation did with Joseph Campbell's works, and Campbell's almost unknown now. We don't know who he is. So, I had the benefit of the knowledge of a very smart young woman who I presented with this "problem" when it first started coming up. We were getting robbed blind by YouTube. She said, "Well, tell me what's wrong with that." I explained to her and she says, "Well, by any measure of what you're describing is success, you just need a different model for monetization." She was absolutely right, and this is what we're trying to do. It's really interesting because certain people will come to us and ask permission and license things. And so, my theory now is all the best people with the integrity are the only ones that come to find us, and all the rest of them don't bother us. [laughs] It's working very well.

1:48:11 Debra Schwartz: We don't have lots more time —

1:48:13 Mark Watts: What would you like to talk about?

1:48:13 Debra Schwartz: But in the time that we have I would like you to describe just a little bit about your life and what you do as a director and archivist, your responsibility. We're in a place right now, I'm sitting with you, it's empty right now, but it's not often empty.

1:48:31 Mark Watts: No.

1:48:32 Debra Schwartz: You've got interns living here.

1:48:35 Mark Watts: Right.

1:48:35 Debra Schwartz: You've got business that you're attending to here.

1:48:38 Mark Watts: Yeah. So, my father and I started a company called Electronic University in 1973, and we began to offer courses. The background to this was, when I first came out, I spent the fall of '71 and the summer of '72 organizing — he said, "Find me the essential lectures. Go through the lectures and find that core."

1:49:04: So we created first a little recording called *Essential Recordings*, and then there were hundreds of hours left and he says, "So what do we do with everything else?" I said, "Let me study." So, I spent the next summer listening to them all, and I had started creating piles in this little tatami-covered pilot house on top of the *Vallejo*. And when my dad got back from his lecture tour, I said, "Dad, what we've got is college courses. We've got one on psychology, we got one on Buddhism, we've got one on Hinduism, we've got one on the Dao." And he said, "Fantastic. Well let's do this." Then he said, "What are we gonna call it?" and I said, "I don't know. The Electronic University. We're gonna do courses on tape." So, we launched this, and the year that he died, we started the Electronic University. Our first course was on Buddhism, "Essence of Buddhism," and we did "Psychology of Religion." Within two years of his passing, by 1975, we were offering a dozen courses. They were eight lectures each.

1:49:58 Debra Schwartz: And "we" being?

1:50:00 Mark Watts: Myself and and Henry Jacobs, whom I talked about earlier, my father's archivist. We did this in unison. So that company continues to this day. We still offer the material in organized form in courses. It's available at alanwatts.org or alanwatts.com, either one will get you to it. But there's also what I call the "whole derivative works world." This material goes out into the world and it becomes a part of other people's creative process. It just spontaneously answers questions for them, becomes a part of a recorded work of music composition or a film or something, and so then it comes back to us in a repurposed form. So, to me that's the most interesting part now, is seeing how this is being embraced and re-becoming a part of the culture.

1:50:55 Debra Schwartz: The reciprocity?

1:50:58 Mark Watts: Yeah, that's right. It's being up-cycled, recycled. I find that fascinating, and I really find fascinating the people who are doing it and how it's impacting their lives. And their stories — I'm really a bit of an anthropologist now, and I love to hear these stories. Everybody that's working with us now, I didn't seek out any of them, they all came to me, and I realized, as the ones that work with us now came, that they each offered something that we needed that was very profound and they were highly skilled. We have four or five people that we work with all the time, and then another half a dozen that we work with remotely part-time and it's working very well. We just did a 10-hour video course that's about to be released. That day in New York, we recorded the big questions: "Who am I?" and "What do I want?" So now we've done a 10-hour video

course, “Who am I? What do I want? What do I know? Where do I fit in?” And then my module is, “How do I sustain this?”

1:52:00 Debra Schwartz: This is the project that’s kept me from interviewing you for the last six months. [laughs]

1:52:02 Mark Watts: Yes, exactly. This is it. The first four sections are each done by one of our people, our young people, just as my father spoke with the group of young people on that *Camera Three* show, and then I do the anchor. I’m sort of the last word. I just speed watched the whole thing to review it a week ago, and it came out very well. And what’s to me the most inspiring thing is how incredible the performances of the young people are. I don’t even know what to say.

1:52:31 Debra Schwartz: Do you have names for any of the people you’re working with?

1:52:34 Mark Watts: Okay, so Nora is our lead person, Nora Lewis, she’s from Southern California. She’s just brilliant, very business savvy and such a thoughtful person. Mariah is our number two, she does “What do you desire?”, which is the second part, and “What do you want?” She’s one of the pair of creative couples that came to us from Missouri. She’s an artist, designer, photographer, and not an actual performer. It was very hard for her to do this. She killed it. She did great — a perfectionist. Then Justin, her husband, did “What do I know?” And then a kid, and he’s a really good performer, he’s also the MC of the thing. He’s very comfortable. As uncomfortable as she was, he’s as comfortable in front of the camera. Then Kai, who’s a young guy that we got to know who’s of German descent, who gives us sort of the counterpoint, the Western philosophical look at things, just great. Kai is really good. And then I sort of pull it all together in the fifth day. So, it’s four weeks, and so it’s Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday through Friday. Justin does a wrap, a summary on Saturdays, and Sunday’s our movie day. My dad did nature footage including some that he made with Elda Hartley back in the day, these original, vintage 16-millimeter films with him talking, and then we do our own versions with drone flight and all of that.

1:54:02: I think it came out very well. We’re just finishing final touches now. Then we’ll go on next, we’re actually gonna do a dramatic film about my dad. It’s funny, it’s actually become a story about me as a documentary filmmaker trying to solve a puzzle about my father’s passing. That’s the sort of contemporary story. And then there are three scenes, might call them flashbacks, but they’re dramatic elements from the past: one in black and white of the ’50s; one of me recording on the ferry boat in 1967 played by a younger person; and then his final interview in 1973 up on the mountains. So, the three dramatic scenes set into this sort of mystery. A dramatic film about a guy making a documentary film.

1:54:47 Debra Schwartz: Is there a mystery around your father’s death?

1:54:51 Mark Watts: There is, and there were a lot of theories after it happened. I mean, first of all my father died suddenly. What was unconventional was that he was very quickly cremated and the authorities were not at all sure that he had just died a natural death. And I was blissfully unaware of this at the time. I only became aware of it when people had said odd things to me, and then one of the people who helped cremate him, from this Buddhist sect, came up to me in a bookstore and said, “It really bothered me and I’ve always been wanting to tell you this but the wood that was used to cremate your father was loaded into the truck the day before he died, and not after he died, before he died.” So, that got me on it.

1:55:49 Debra Schwartz: The wood to — don’t you get usually cremated at a —

1:55:52 Mark Watts: He was cremated on Muir Beach at 8:30 in the morning after being discovered deceased at 6:00 a.m.

1:56:01 Debra Schwartz: Who cremated him?

1:56:02 Mark Watts: Ajari and a group of Yamabushi Buddhists, a self-styled Buddhist sect. They used to wander the Haight in a Dodge power wagon ambulance painted purple as an ambulance, and they would do this sort of rescue Buddhist thing. They went to all the festivals, like they were at Altamonte and places like that. It’s funny because then there was then a cover up that that wasn’t what happened, “Oh no, that never happened.” It was crazy. And so, I think there were two suspects. One was that my stepmother had taken his life, fearing divorce, and particularly because of his final interview, a young woman that showed up from France to interview him. Then, the other one was that Ajari was vying for his position. In other words, that maybe the government had got involved, but I never gave that one much credence. But in the end, I think I figured it out, and I’m not gonna tell you because you’ll have to watch the movie.

1:57:01 Debra Schwartz: Well, we’ll turn off the recorder. [chuckle]

1:57:03 Mark Watts: You can turn off the recorder, I’ll tell you afterwards, I’ll tell you. [chuckles]

1:57:04 Debra Schwartz: After.

1:57:06 Mark Watts: But yeah, it was a very curious situation. And the gong, the big gong, when he passed on, it sounded once. That seemed like it was the signal for all the monks to swoop in and clean up. Mary Jane says that it’s what woke her. Alan sounding the gong as he left his body.

1:57:28 Debra Schwartz: You mean, after his death the gong went?

1:57:31 Mark Watts: Yeah, right. And it was heard throughout the neighborhood. Three gongs was an emergency, but it was a single gong. So, it was curious because it

was documented and the only person who was supposed to be there other than him says that it woke her up and he was deceased at the time. So, who sounded the gong?

1:57:52 Debra Schwartz: Was he alone? Was he not alone?

1:57:54 Mark Watts: Theoretically it was just the two of them in the cabin. However, Ajari was nearby. He and his people showed up 20 minutes later.

1:58:05 Debra Schwartz: Is that even legal to take a body?

1:58:06 Mark Watts: No. And that's the other thing that was really weird is that he was never ticketed or prosecuted for that. Then later, very, very recently it came out a completely different story that, "Oh no, that never happened." Although that was, you know, just everybody knew that's what happened for years. There's an official version now that, "Oh no, he was cremated down at the local funeral parlor like everybody else." So, it was very curious odd cover-up.

1:58:34 Debra Schwartz: Try as you might to get accuracy in history it's not always so easy.

1:58:39 Mark Watts: Yeah, well it isn't, and so actually we're gonna do some more research for this film, but we're gonna tell the story of how that all came about and we're also going to take the time to tell the story of my exploration of that. And although, for the purposes of the film, it'll be all condensed into a short period, it actually covered quite a few years, quite a few years of exploration into that, and after you turn off the recorder I'll tell you how I found out. A very brilliant man.

1:59:14 Debra Schwartz: Well, you know, your father had such a distinctive voice.

1:59:17 Mark Watts: Yeah.

1:59:18 Debra Schwartz: With that very beautiful British accent.

1:59:20 Mark Watts: Yes.

1:59:21 Debra Schwartz: I mean, that really just helped.

1:59:22 Mark Watts: We love British accents.

1:59:24 Debra Schwartz: Can you do a British accent?

1:59:25 Mark Watts: No, I'm not good at voices, but you know because he went to King's School he developed his English accent there among people who were candidates for the clergy. He developed a great speaking voice. It's almost inimitable.

1:59:44 Debra Schwartz: Yes, it really was distinctive. So, any films you do about your father, anybody that may act as him, is gonna have to get that accent down.

1:59:52 Mark Watts: They're gonna have to get it down. You know who could do it very well is — what's his name? Hugh Laurie. I never knew that he was a Brit, and then I saw him speaking at an award show. Oh God, he could kill it. [laughs]

2:00:09 Debra Schwartz: You, so very young, really, you lost your father and you're a vivacious spirit, it's obvious to me now, interviewing you and spending this time together. You've gone on to have life and love and family, creation. In our pre-interview chat, you talked about your adventures. Really, this interview needs to be longer than it's going to be able to be.

2:00:37 Mark Watts: Like I said, we could take two days, if you want the whole story. [laughs]

2:00:40 Debra Schwartz: The biking, with the early mountain biking —

2:00:44 Mark Watts: The whole thing on visual language, what, is a whole other day.

2:00:48 Debra Schwartz: Oh, that's a whole other day.

2:00:51 Mark Watts: I got to give you a real brief one on that. So, we worked on the *Tao, the Watercourse* book, and I later found the works of this gentleman who had been researching a connection between Chinese Kanji — Kanji is the Japanese word for a certain type of Chinese character — and so I was able to get the benefit of 25 years of his research. But from my perspective, because he was raised in a Native American tradition, I was able to look at it from a more Western perspective. So that it would be more understandable, useful to somebody who was not a Native American speaker. And so, we have actually now been able to decode a system that enables us to potentially read histories back 50,000 years.

2:01:48 Debra Schwartz: And this is your work as a — I'm gonna try to say it again, epigog —

2:01:52 Mark Watts: Epigrapher.

2:01:54 Debra Schwartz: Epigrapher.

2:01:55 Mark Watts: I did one thing called “The Shaman's Cross,” a little article that explored the use of the cross to depict a shaman. It particularly traces an extra line in that cross which I call The Heart Horizon Line. But the figures often show it rising in relationship to this line and you find the same line as the ground line in Chinese: you see it in tree, you see it in all kinds of plants. One of the most interesting ones to me is that they use a cross standing on the horizon for scholar and star. I can't remember what the other one was at the moment, but anyway, it's the symbol for scholar. And in Native

American it would be the ground being a boundary and the cross being to cross over that which crosses over a boundary. A scholar or a court astronomer is somebody who would know when a certain star crosses the boundary, so the helical rise of a star, which is how the calendars worked. I was able to, in this very brief article, at least open the door to that whole exploration. So, I've looked at rock writing, rock art worldwide, and it appears that the tradition probably came out of Central Asia somewhere between 50,000 and 65,000 years ago.

2:03:22: The original, oldest forms of this and are everywhere. It is a language that is based on this idea of reciprocity. The most widespread are the flight of the shaman who becomes the animal and is the person responsible for returning the spirit of the animal to the ancestor world. That whole motif is something that I've studied extensively from various cultures and then there's a lot of symbols that are more social or navigational that are also very universal. So, it's fascinating. Another really fascinating thing about it is that the core meanings of them correspond very closely to the trigram structures and meanings in the *I Ching*. So, there's obviously some connection there and I was actually able to discover through my research of symbols that there was a connection before I could possibly explain how it could have been made, and it was only through the works of this gentleman that I saw that it could have come from Asia, had its own spread and diffusion over there and then come here and lived on in a more preserved form.

2:04:40 Debra Schwartz: Do you know much about the petroglyphs in this area?

2:04:43 Mark Watts: No, I don't. As I said, I've studied the big Great Basin. Most of the petroglyphs that I've studied for this project — because they were the ones that my teacher was familiar with — are in Utah and Nevada, and then up into Wyoming and to Montana a little bit.

2:05:04 Debra Schwartz: Would you consider looking into our local petroglyphs.

2:05:06 Mark Watts: I would love to, yeah.

2:05:08 Debra Schwartz: That is something —

2:05:09 Mark Watts: The only ones I've seen are on Ring Mountain. I walked up to those.

2:05:12 Debra Schwartz: Well, that's something we'll have to talk about after the interview.

2:05:13 Mark Watts: Yeah, well, I would love to. I would love to see to what extent the things that I recognized from the groups from the Great Basin are here. That would be very interesting to me, and there's a lot of stuff having to do with — I was showing you the beat one — the Hopi-Navajo world, all of that, it's very conventionalized, and it's very easy to see the patterns in the blankets. One of the great breakthroughs for me was reading a book on the Arapaho where those were symbols that were documented. Here's

the pattern, this is what the user believes it to be at an early date. So, I knew that it wasn't gonna be prejudiced by something that came after that date. That gave me a field of symbols in which I could test my hypothesis against. 'Cause I knew that the person who collected those had no information based on the later research. And it was one of the most enjoyable two weeks of my life, that discovery.

2:06:07 Debra Schwartz: I'm smiling right now. People listening can't hear this, but I'm smiling because I'm watching you light up at the thought of understanding communication and what it means, the mystery behind it, and the lives behind it, and really, the nut doesn't fall far from the tree. [laughs]

2:06:28 Mark Watts: My father was fascinated with — because he got so close to intuiting this. He was intuiting the existence of another universal visual language, and at the same time, he's collecting Navajo blankets. [laughs] It was very funny because one time he came, there's a guy that would bring him, Frank, this guy that would bring him blankets every year, and he'd bring a bunch and see if he wanted to buy one. Frank came by when my dad was on tour and I said, "Oh, Frank I'm gonna buy a blanket, just come on in, let me pick one for my dad. And I'll pick one for myself." And so he rolled out his blankets and I picked two, and he looked at me and he rolled them up and he looked at me again. I paid him the money. And he said, "That's interesting because you picked the only two blankets that weren't women's blankets." I said, "Oh, so what are these?" He said, "Well, the one that you picked for yourself, I almost never get those because they don't sell. That's a shaman's blanket," and it had these crosses on it. "The other one's a horse blanket, and they are the most beautiful because they equate the horse to thunder, the thundering of the hooves to the thunder, so it's got the cloud patterns. I love those blankets. They're my favorites." [chuckles]

2:07:40 Debra Schwartz: Well, I think there's a couple of final things I'd like to ask you. First of all, just a little bit more about, do you have a family? Let's talk about your family just a little more.

2:07:51 Mark Watts: Okay. So yes, my father introduced Sabra's daughter, Sumireh, to Henry, his archivist and friend, and they had a family and their children are Tia named after my sister, Tad, and Aya, all of who live here in Marin. In the early '80s when I moved out here, actually in 1982, I'd started a house here in 1980, the original house before the fire, and then I moved out here.

2:08:30 Debra Schwartz: So, we're sitting in your house now, which is —

2:08:33 Mark Watts: A rebuilt house.

2:08:35 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

2:08:36 Mark Watts: So, when I moved out here, I ended up hanging out with the oldest of his kids, Tia, who's named after my sister, and we had immediate attraction and spent the whole summer together. In the fall decided that we would get married. And so,

we went off to Carson City and got married. Her dad drove, and it was just great, but we didn't tell anybody. So, when I got back, I decided I'd call my family and tell them. And so I called my sister, Tia, and I had to explain her that there are now two Tia Watts. She was always very serious, so she was always the butt of a lot of practical jokes, and 20 minutes into the conversation she was saying, "I know as soon as I say I believe you, you're gonna start laughing." [laughs] She wouldn't believe me. [laughs] So my sister's namesake, Tia, is my wife, and we've been married for 34 years, this will be 35 coming up. And we have a 32-year-old, actually she's turning 33, and a 25-year-old son.

2:09:38 Debra Schwartz: Their names?

2:09:40 Mark Watts: Ken and Leah. Leah is here in the county. She is an artist, does catering, weddings, builds really cool, decorative pieces, works with small businesses, does fitness training. And my son does all fitness training. He got into athletics in high school and college, a beautiful guy. He's a trainer and runs a 45,000 square-foot gym now in Southern California.

2:10:13 Debra Schwartz: When you think back to your father, is there any advice in particular, fatherly advice that he gave to you, that sticks with you?

2:10:23 Mark Watts: I think it was actually not so much advice as just what he exuded, which is an enthusiasm and a curiosity and a love of life. Just the way he would go through the mail, "Oh you take this book and I'll take this one." You know, my father never stopped learning, he never stopped being curious, he never shied away from that conversation. He just loved life and philosophy and was tremendously curious about people and their stories. And years and years later somebody said something to me that had never occurred to me which is, "Your father, he was so amazing, for all he knew he never talked down to anybody." And I said, "You know, you're right, he never did." So, I think it's just to be in that middle place, you know, and to be open. The Buddhists call it the "diamond way," or the emptiness, but it isn't emptiness without content. It's emptiness which is a place from which all things can be received.

2:11:32 Debra Schwartz: What advice would you give to your children as a father?

2:11:36 Mark Watts: I've told them a couple things. One is, first of all, honor your grandfather. Recognize that he's a passport to the best thing in many people's lives and look into that. But for yourselves, you know everything that you know, who you're standing or sitting next to until you've had that conversation, because you have no idea who you'll rub up against. There's some pretty amazing people, some pretty amazing stories out there.

2:12:06 Debra Schwartz: Well, that's a really good defense for oral history. [laughs]

2:12:10 Mark Watts: It is. It really is. You just have no idea. I take the time. I'll tell you a funny story. I was at a gas station one day and I end up talking to a guy, who was actually an appraiser and into real estate and stuff, and so my son kidded me when I got

back in the car, he said, “Oh, your new best friend, Dad.” And I said, “Yeah, but that guy just told us how to get our loan modified so that we can get a way cheaper interest rate than we have now.” He said, “That guy?” I said, “Oh yeah. He’s actually really smart. He’s an appraiser, but he told me the exact percentages that I have to report in order to qualify with our lender.” I did it, and Chase knocked three percentage points off our loan. Later I told him how our payment had gone down, and he was just so impressed and he learned. He does, he takes the time. He’s great. He’s very social, he’s very conversational. Then with him, the beautiful thing is he’s got a great sense of humor. It’s really brought out his humor, that desire to communicate more. And so, there’s nothing I’d rather do than go out, hang out with him and his buddies down in Southern California, ’cause they are absolutely loving life and loving each other and they’re a great band, very unified and very, very good communicators.

2:13:32 Debra Schwartz: That communication?

2:13:35 Mark Watts: It is. Yeah.

2:13:37 Debra Schwartz: Is there anything we haven’t talked about today that you’d like to add into this?

2:13:41 Mark Watts: Oh boy. I’ll just think a minute. What did we skip that was notable? You know I think we covered a lot of stuff. I think we did pretty well. We can go off in other directions, but I think for the material that we tried to cover we did really well, and thank you for guiding it so well.

2:14:07 Debra Schwartz: The word *interview*, entering into another person’s perspective, is a wonderful journey. [chuckles] I’ve had a great time today.

2:14:18 Mark Watts: I’ve had a great time with you and meeting you.

2:14:21 Debra Schwartz: Thank you so much for sharing your story, for sharing your family, for sharing your family and your father with the world. It’s wonderful to see that your father’s wisdom, his mind, his spark, continues. Perhaps it even reaches further than he could ever have imagined.

2:14:42 Mark Watts: It’s interesting, in 1972 — this is something I’ll add quickly. So, my father did a national TV series in ’59 and ’60 and then proposed another one in the early ’70s, and we actually did a shoot at Druid Heights. “Conversation with Myself,” also known as “Man in Nature,” were shot from the deck of the Mandala. You can find it online and you’ll see the gong, ’cause he sounds the gong in the beginning of it.

2:15:13 Debra Schwartz: The 20-pound one.

2:15:13 Mark Watts: No, this is this 80-pound rest of it that’s hanging — not the part he carried around. This is the main thing, probably 120 pounds, if not 200, who knows. Those things are heavy. But so that was the pilot. They drove in a van with a two-inch

video recorder for that. It got stuck on the way out because that one sharp bend, they couldn't make it on the way in, but the angle was all wrong. It took two tow trucks, one wrapped around a tree and the other pulling forward to get the KQED van back out of there. But they didn't get funding for that because NET was in the middle of becoming PBS. So, he and I decided that we would do that video series ourselves. We borrowed a one-inch video tape deck from Children's Hospital, Henry and I, and we shot it two days on the *Vallejo* and one day up at Druid Heights. The shows in the *Vallejo* were basic philosophy: nothingness, death, time, God, the more it changes, work is play. But the ones up on the mountain were more esoteric. There was "Do You Smell?" which was all about our most repressed sense. And the other one is probably my favorite, it's called "The More It Changes." The more it changes, the more things stay the same, and in it he talked about three fantasies.

2:16:33: One was one star's way of becoming another star, where he talked about what could be a creative outcome of us discovering nuclear power. He talks about having an argument with Margaret Mead about this who said that he had no love for future generations. But his idea was that intelligent life eventually discovers atomic power as a way of one star's way of becoming another star. [chuckles] That we were gonna turn ourselves into a star, which was funny. But the one that fascinated me was one on reproduction, and he talked about the whole history of reproduction from the earliest representations all the way up through the silent movies, then we got the talkies and then we got this. And then he projected forward and began to talk about things that we now know as virtual reality and holography, but it was really funny. He gets to the end of it and he says, "But what you really want is the surprise. Now in 3D, full interactive reality, you've created a rapport with a beautiful woman that you're sitting next to, but that isn't what you want, what you wanna know is if you kiss her will she kiss you back." [laughs] It's one of the great shows, but he's right. This is true. For all of the technology and all of the methodology that we've gained, have we really gained anything as people?

2:17:57: I think that in that sense nothing's changed. It's still the core. The big human issues of love, companionship, friendship, exploration, all of these things are still the things that are most vital to human beings. He was smart enough to recognize that in his life. And I feel like in a way that he with his three — as he says, serial monogamy — with his three marriages. I have been more fortunate than he in those respects, a 35-year marriage with a wonderful woman. But I think that that was just part of the times. And we talked about smoking and drinking. These were very, very adventurous times. People lived life very fully and with a lot passion. And they were pioneers. My dad was a pioneer, but many of the people around him were also pioneers. So, it's a time when people were really willing to push the limits and experiment. We talked about the '60s. I mentioned my friend Allison who started the Sausalito Film Festival up the hill.

2:19:09 Debra Schwartz: Before the interview?

2:19:10 Mark Watts: Yeah. I describe her as a spitfire. She has the heart and soul of a '60s woman. You do, too. It's different. You can see. It's having that great curiosity.

2:19:19 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

2:19:20 Mark Watts: That was the hallmark of my dad, was just the caring about it.

2:19:23 Debra Schwartz: Well, I suppose that's your gift at birth.

2:19:26 Mark Watts: Exactly.

2:19:27 Debra Schwartz: Your curiosity.

2:19:28 Mark Watts: Exactly. Exactly.

2:19:29 Debra Schwartz: That's a beautiful gift.

2:19:31 Mark Watts: Thank you.

2:19:32 Debra Schwartz: Mine too. [chuckles]

2:19:34 Mark Watts: I can tell.

2:19:36 Debra Schwartz: Thank you so, so much for your time today.

2:19:38 Mark Watts: Yeah. Someday we've gotta interview you. You've got a fascinating career.

2:19:42 Debra Schwartz: Well, one day. Perhaps it should be you. [chuckles]

2:19:47 Mark Watts: Because what an interesting enterprise you've taken on.

2:19:53 Debra Schwartz: Kinda like a sea anemone who just takes in, metabolizes, and moves along.

2:20:00 Mark Watts: And moves along. [laughs]

2:20:01 Debra Schwartz: That is my place right now.

2:20:02 Mark Watts: You do it a little more kindly than the sea anemone. [laughs]

2:20:06 Debra Schwartz: But it is my privilege, really, truly to hear your stories and to hear the stories of others. I really do believe in the power of the oral traditions, as you understand quite well. I really do thank you for sharing your private story and the story that your father gave to the world and is part of it as well.

2:20:29 Mark Watts: Well, thank you for coming and collecting it.

2:20:31 Debra Schwartz: I just wish it had been a sunny day.

2:20:33 Mark Watts: Well, you'll have to come back.

2:20:34 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So, this concludes this oral history. Thank you on behalf of Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library. I think that's a wrap.

2:20:43 Mark Watts: You're very welcome. That's a wrap.