

The Druid Heights Oral History Collection

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Fabrice Florin on Druid Heights

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

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In this oral history, multimedia innovator and social entrepreneur Fabrice Florin discusses Druid Heights where he lived for two years in the late 1970s. Fabrice recounts how he moved to California from Switzerland in 1975, drawn by the hippie counterculture, but found that he had come too late. Working as a radio producer, Fabrice first visited the bohemian community on Mt. Tam at the suggestion of a friend and soon after moved into a small house on the property. Fabrice describes how at that time the community was known not as Druid Heights but rather as Paradise, and he evokes the beauty both of its natural setting and the utterly singular structures built by Roger Somers. Though he arrived after Alan Watts had passed away, there were a number of interesting characters still living there, such as Waldron Vorhees, whom he colorfully describes. Concluding this oral history, Fabrice reflects on the unforgettable experience of living at Druid Heights and expresses his hope that the buildings will be preserved and the community that once flourished there be commemorated.

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Fabrice Florin on Druid Heights
October 2, 2018

Editor's note: The following transcript is based on a recorded interview. It has been edited for clarity and accuracy.

00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is October 2, 2018. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm here on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and GGNRA [Golden Gate National Recreation Area] to talk with multi-media creator and social activist, Fabrice Florin about Druid Heights in particular, although I will be interviewing you in the near future about your life in general. But I'd just like to say to start, thank you very much for your time, Fabrice, and welcome to the Mill Valley Library sound room.

00:32 Fabrice Florin: My pleasure. It's good to be here.

00:34 Debra Schwartz: You know this room, don't you?

00:36 Fabrice Florin: Very well. We exhibited the Pataphysical Slot Machine in this room for an entire month, and I spent many hours preparing these art exhibits for public display.

00:48 Debra Schwartz: So this is your home. This is a moment to reminisce.

00:52 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, it's another time in my life that I remember fondly.

00:57 Debra Schwartz: Well, we're going to, in particular today, discuss another time in your life, which has a particular interest on a lot of levels for a lot of different people, and I'm excited to jump into the time traveling machine. Imagine if this really was a pod, and we're going to start lifting off and then going back into another time. We're about the same age, you and I, Fabrice, and so we can imagine the color of the sky and the smell of the world and how different things were, even in — what time did you go to Druid Heights?

01:32 Fabrice Florin: 1977, '78.

01:35 Debra Schwartz: Okay, we'll go back to '77, '78. What was not there in 1977 and '78 that we live with every single day today?

01:44 Fabrice Florin: There were no computers. We didn't have the internet.

01:49 Debra Schwartz: No answering machines.

01:52 Debra Schwartz: I think I may have had one of these audio tape machines.

01:55 Debra Schwartz: Oh, one of those kind back then.

01:56 Fabrice Florin: But back then I was a radio producer, and I had to edit all of my radio interviews with a razor blade, and a little bit of tape, and so if you needed to make a cut, you would just cut the part of the tape you didn't want, and then you'd use a little bit of tape to splice it together. So, they didn't have editing software. They had television, they had cars, but there was a lot of stuff missing.

02:22 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, a lot, a different world.

02:23 Fabrice Florin: Different world.

02:24 Debra Schwartz: Time, I think, was a little different too, a little more space between activities. Not all the constant pelting of incoming texts and emails and things like that. And it's a social time too, because people weren't really separated by technology at that time. There was a lot of communion, I think.

02:50 Fabrice Florin: That's true.

02:50 Debra Schwartz: And in particular, we're talking about a place, Druid Heights. Okay, why don't you describe first of all, what brought you to Druid Heights, and what compelled you to go there, and what Druid Heights was to you when you arrived?

03:13 Fabrice Florin: Well, initially, I was a young man looking for adventure, and I came to California to find the hippies. And I went straight to the Haight-Ashbury, but there were no hippies left there, there was just some drug dealers. And I asked around, and they said, "Well, maybe you could try Berkeley." And it was still disappointing. I was like 10 years too late in 1975. And I kept looking for a place where I might be able to connect.

03:39 Debra Schwartz: And hippies in particular. Where had you been that you started thinking of hippies as something that you wanted to meet or be?

03:48 Fabrice Florin: Well, I was a teenager in Geneva, Switzerland.

03:52 Debra Schwartz: Ah.

03:53 Fabrice Florin: Someone exposed me to the first Whole Earth Catalog that Stewart Brand had been producing here in Marin, and I saw the first catalog, and I said, "This is my cup of tea. I want to be part of this thing." He was trying to provide tools for a lot of communes, who were trying to reinvent civilization, but didn't have the tools to do it. That's how the catalog got started. So anyway, as soon as I got to California, I looked him up and I started connecting with him, and then I became a radio producer, and I interviewed all sorts of people, from Governor Jerry Brown to Jacques-Yves Cousteau and space scientists, and of course, Stewart Brand every chance I got. I was working with New Dimensions Foundation, we had programs on KQED radio and KPFA radio. In any case, I was looking for a place to stay, and someone said, "Hey, I have a friend, she lives in Muir Woods. It's a bit far, but maybe you might want to check it out and see if that's

right for you.” And so I drove my clunky Chevy ’68 down this rocky road filled with potholes, and I ended up meeting a really nice young woman by the name of Gail and her three children, Tommy, Leah and Bright, and she says, “Yeah, we have a little cabin by the side of our main house, and you can rent it, and we’d love to have you.”

05:29 Debra Schwartz: So, to be clear, you were living in Geneva, you’re how old now when you see the first catalog?

05:34 Fabrice Florin: I’m probably, oh gosh, 17 or 18. Don’t quote me on the exact age.

05:41 Debra Schwartz: Okay, 17 or 18.

05:42 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

05:43 Debra Schwartz: And you see this catalog, and you’re all the way over in Switzerland, and yet you see this catalog and say, “Oh.”

05:53 Fabrice Florin: Well, I had heard that there were hippies in California, even before I saw the catalog. I saw Woodstock, and I played the record incessantly, and I played rock music in my little room in Geneva incessantly, and I wanted to be part of that scene. So, I headed over there as soon as I could. I tried to collect some money. I ended up coming to America with \$11 in my pocket. All I could afford was the ticket. [chuckles] I arrived with \$11, the guy at the customs says, “This all the money you have?” I say, “Yeah. But I know people.”

[laughter]

06:32 Fabrice Florin: So he let me through.

06:33 Debra Schwartz: What about your parents? I have to ask.

06:35 Fabrice Florin: Well, my parents, they’d just given up on me because they had over-schooled me, taking me to boarding school with the Oratorian priest and all that. So, I got overeducated, and I couldn’t wait to just get out.

06:50 Debra Schwartz: And live.

06:50 Fabrice Florin: And that means abandon everything that was part of it, and discover this new life and meet these mythical hippies [chuckles] which I was sure I was going to be. [laughs]

07:01 Debra Schwartz: So you arrive and you’re like, “What? The party left without me.”

07:04 Fabrice Florin: Well, everything is oversized. It's America: big cars, big vegetables, big whatever. So anyway, I hitch-hiked my way down to Miami, sailed around the Bahamas for awhile with a French guy that I met, and we rebuilt a boat, and then eventually I said, "Okay, I've got to make it to California." California was not my ultimate destination. I was just gonna stop over, check out the hippies, and make my way to India to get enlightened. [chuckles]

07:31 Debra Schwartz: Oh, yeah. That was going on then too.

07:32 Fabrice Florin: Exactly. So, I arrived in California. At first it was a bit of a grim experience, but then eventually I made friend, and I became a radio producer, and eventually a TV producer.

07:44 Debra Schwartz: So, you were trained to do that kind of work?

07:46 Fabrice Florin: Not at all.

07:47 Fabrice Florin: You just jumped in.

07:47 Fabrice Florin: I just showed up, and I worked in the mailroom and worked my way up.

07:51 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

07:51 Fabrice Florin: And despite my relatively thick, French accent at the time, they actually gave me a radio show. There I was on KPFA, and saying, "Hello, you're on the air, what is your question?"

[laughter]

08:04 Debra Schwartz: So now you're in Druid Heights, you go down that pot-hole filled road with your car and you show up and they say, "Sure."

08:11 Fabrice Florin: These charming people, this beautiful place in the middle of the eucalyptus grove, and everything smells good and wilderness everywhere. I didn't need much room. There's enough room for a bed, and a little desk, and a chair. And then right off my window, this beautiful wilderness, and I could see the distant hill with the Dipsea Trail. And it was all so quiet, and the birds chirping and the Alan Watts Library right behind me. I loved it. I had a wonderful time. And on the weekends, we could see the tourists start descending the mountains. You'd see little dots on the hills, and what are those dots? They are tourists coming in on the weekend to go down the trail and visit the place. But the rest of the week was perfect. And so we'd do my radio editing there. It was kind of where I would come back to, so I would go out and interview people in the big world, running around like a mad man, and then I would come back to the sanctuary of Druid Heights and edit my shows, and live my life, and meet people. And there were also some wild people there.

09:18 Debra Schwartz: So, you were living in Druid Heights from approximately what year to what year?

09:26 Fabrice Florin: 1977 to late 1978.

09:31 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So, who were those wild people?

09:34 Fabrice Florin: Well, besides Gail and her lovely children...

09:37 Debra Schwartz: Gail, what's her last name? Maybe last names don't apply in this.

09:42 Fabrice Florin: Maybe Winston comes to mind. But better fact-check that.

09:45 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

09:48 Fabrice Florin: But she had an interesting boyfriend, his name was Waldron Voorhees. His claim to fame was that he was one of the major manufacturers of LSD in the '60s. And he looked the part. He kind of looked like the mad scientist, had that kind of look. He served time in the penitentiary, he was caught and then he was released. So he was actually on parole, living with Gail and her three children. And for some reason, he had a dozen used cars all over the lot. It turns out that he believed with a high degree of certainty, that the UFOs and the aliens were about to land, and that we better be there to greet them so we could be on their good side. So it's possible he may have thought that having extra cars or fleet of cars, maybe he could cart them around. I'm not exactly sure what his motivation was.

10:50 Debra Schwartz: Were they going to land in Druid Heights?

10:52 Fabrice Florin: Well, they're going to land in the area. He was prepared for anything. He just wanted to make sure when they came, that he'd get the chance to connect with them and perhaps represent them with the other humans.

11:06 Debra Schwartz: Well, I was in Fresno at the time, and I recall a collection of people who felt the very same way. There seemed to be a movement about where people were expecting imminent arrival.

11:22 Fabrice Florin: Yeah. I met many of these folks and they were charming.

11:26 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. Successful.

11:28 Fabrice Florin: Really sweet, successful, not necessarily what you would expect: very well-read. One of them, his name is Silver. Actually, I have a photo of Walt Voorhees, Silver, and myself. Silver had long, flowing blonde hair. He was really well-

read, very knowledgeable about all the latest science and everything else. He just had on top of that scientific background, this strong belief that the aliens were coming.

11:57 Debra Schwartz: And did they have a reason to believe that? I mean, was there anything in particular? That's just not a random, impulsive feeling. There must have been something that precipitated it.

12:13 Fabrice Florin: I can't really speak for them, but they kept citing different evidence. There were certain sightings. There were indications that to them proved that the aliens were there. I didn't probe too much on that front. Although, I later on produced a radio program about the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

12:35 Debra Schwartz: I wonder, was there more than usual sightings of alien aircraft in the area?

12:45 Fabrice Florin: It could be. There had been a number of sightings. I didn't research it very far. I kind of accepted them. I think that they were just companions, and they were friendly. I had my other things to do, and I didn't really want to confront their beliefs. I didn't see the point.

13:03 Debra Schwartz: Did you believe it?

13:04 Fabrice Florin: No, not at all. If they did land, great. Yeah, I'd certainly be there to document it. I'd try to have a crew, and I'd try to be one of the first ones to do the interviews. [laughs] But I reserve judgement as to whether or not that would really happen. I was just prepared for anything. Everything was interesting.

13:27 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

13:27 Fabrice Florin: It was at that time in your life when you're young and everything excites you. I loved being there. Alan Watts had passed away but his presence could still be felt in his library. And they were wonderful neighbors, Roger and Faye. Roger was an amazing carpenter, and he created this kind of a little fantasy world made out of carved wood with beautiful curves and a hot tub on a huge deck overlooking the valley. And they would have parties in the hot tub, they would invite the neighbors over, and somebody would play a flute or a guitar. It was just idyllic. Actually, we called the place "Paradise."

14:19 Fabrice Florin: That's what you call Druid Heights?

14:20 Fabrice Florin: "Welcome to Paradise," is what Waldron told me when I first came through the door.

14:24 Debra Schwartz: Waldron. Do you remember the name of the acid he made? Because I know there was different acid back then. There was Clearlight, there was Window Pane. Who was that guy with "Keep on Trucking"? Mr. Natural.

14:38 Fabrice Florin: Oh.

14:39 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember that?

14:42 Fabrice Florin: I'd have to dig through my notes. He never gave me LSD because he was on parole, and so he had to stay out of it. Although between you, me, and the lamppost, he did give me Ketamine, which was even more than acid.

14:54 Debra Schwartz: Wow. So, way long ago.

14:55 Fabrice Florin: Ketamine is for animal.

14:58 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, it's a tranquilizer.

15:00 Fabrice Florin: It combined the effects of LSD with the effects of opioids. It was quite a trip. I remember the entire universe squishing down to the size of a pinhead, but they were still there. I could hear their voices, while everything was just flying all over me.

15:16 Debra Schwartz: So you did a combo of LSD with Ketamine?

15:19 Fabrice Florin: Well, Ketamine has certain properties that are similar.

15:21 Debra Schwartz: Oh, so just Ketamine. Because I knew people that did Ketamine, and that was no lightweight [drug].

15:28 Fabrice Florin: It was pretty intense, but I was well-cared for. They were both there, they were holding my hand. I felt very safe, and it was just amazing. It was bigger than anything I had experienced with LSD. But those days I was less interested in drugs; I was more interested in going out in the world and seeking the truth and sharing information with others. I was producing radio programs madly and interviewing people I thought were interesting. I started in radio, and then eventually I moved on to television and started my own company, Video West, and we ended up producing 90 percent of the news for MTV during their first few years. But that was a few years later.

16:15 Debra Schwartz: Yes, that was the '80s by then.

16:17 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, 1981.

16:19 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

16:20 Fabrice Florin: But all these during the radio years, that was a chance to hone my skills as an interviewer, as an editor, as a producer, engaged in communities. That to me was the most exciting thing in the world. And so drugs were really peripheral.

16:35 Debra Schwartz: It's funny because it was such a drug-infused culture at that time in California.

16:41 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

16:41 Debra Schwartz: I grew up in California, and pot was everywhere.

16:46 Fabrice Florin: Well, of course, we smoked pot, but for me it was like end of the day after a long day's work.

16:51 Debra Schwartz: And also very mild the pot was, unless it was something else, like PCP, right?

16:55 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

16:56 Debra Schwartz: But it was like the cocktail hour.

17:00 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

17:02 Debra Schwartz: So, Druid Heights — you're talking about the parties, like the hot tub and that kind of thing: Paradise. Take me back to a typical evening where there might be a sudden gathering of people in the hot tub. Choose any night that you can recall as well as you can recall, and just take us there.

17:27 Fabrice Florin: Well, with Roger and Faye that was typically more in the afternoon than at night. It might be foggy, because we get a lot of fog from the ocean, and you could smell the eucalyptus all around us. And the hot tub was bubbly and warm and comfortable. Everybody was friendly. I was a little shy, having to take my clothes off in front of them.

17:56 Debra Schwartz: Was it naked? Naked land?

17:57 Fabrice Florin: Yeah. But it was alright. I didn't feel at all that there was anything strange going on.

18:05 Debra Schwartz: Not sexually charged.

18:07 Fabrice Florin: No, not at all.

18:08 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, that tribal kind of —

18:09 Fabrice Florin: It was more New Age-y, and I was very much into that at the time. I love crystals, and I wore an Indian silk scarf, and so we were all into this influence of the East.

18:26 Debra Schwartz: Did the children come into the hot tub, too?

18:28 Fabrice Florin: I think they were a little uneasy with it. The older son, Tommy, really did not connect with this whole hippie thing at all. He despised it, and he would beg me every evening, he said, “Please take me to Mill Valley. Please, please, please. I wanna hang out with my friends.” And so, I became his chauffeur [chuckles] for almost an entire year. I would always take him, because the poor kid, he was alone. He didn’t feel like he belonged there, and he just wanted to hang out with his pals. So I did a lot of carting him back and forth.

19:05 Debra Schwartz: Who else was living there at Druid Heights at the time?

19:10 Fabrice Florin: There were a number of other folks. I don’t remember the names, and I’m not sure if people would know the names. A little bit before my time. Margo St. James used to live there. She did the Hookers Ball.

19:26 Debra Schwartz: The what ball?

19:27 Fabrice Florin: I think it was called, the Hookers Ball.

19:29 Debra Schwartz: As in like prostitutes?

19:31 Fabrice Florin: Yeah. But what she did is represent the interest of prostitutes and try to encourage a public attitude that would be more respectful of their profession and laws that would guarantee their safety. She was a long-time champion of women.

19:52 Debra Schwartz: Was she Roger Somers’ girlfriend?

19:53 Fabrice Florin: Not to my knowledge. I don’t know about extra-marital affairs. Roger was married to Faye, whom I believe is either still in Mexico or may have passed away as well. No, I don’t think she’s passed away. He passed away a few years ago, and then she moved to Mexico. That’s what I was told. But I didn’t really stay in touch after I left in ’78.

20:20 Debra Schwartz: So, the Hookers Ball. What was the Hookers Ball like?

20:22 Fabrice Florin: I went once, and it was just wild San Francisco party scene. My understanding is that it raised funds for helping protect prostitutes. Loud music, everybody in costumes. It was in San Francisco. She just lived there, and then she did her work in San Francisco, as far as I can remember.

20:49 Debra Schwartz: So, the Hookers Ball was in San Francisco, but she was working like you, commuting?

20:55 Fabrice Florin: We were commuters, commuters of the fifth dimension. [chuckles]

21:02 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever feel like that actually, that you'd go into the world, maybe it's the real world, or you'd go back to Paradise, let's not call it Druid Heights, because back then that's not the name you knew it by, back to Paradise, and that was going back to the real world?

21:16 Fabrice Florin: Totally.

21:16 Debra Schwartz: Which one was for you?

21:18 Fabrice Florin: Well, the world was where I did my dharma [chuckles] and take action and do good deeds for the world. And then Druid Heights, or Paradise as we knew it, was the place where we went back and relaxed and reflected on all this, and in my case, edited everything. I would just sit at my desk with my little reel-to-reel deck or cassette deck, and I would have an audio recording of my latest interview, just like this interview. And I would proceed to edit it for the radio.

21:56 Debra Schwartz: Gee, that's a lot of work.

21:58 Fabrice Florin: A lot of work, but it was a quiet surround to do it in, and there were no sound interferences, except the birds and maybe a dog barking. It was just perfectly fine. And this is the kind of work that you have to give a lot of tender loving care to and give yourself time to keep the good parts and let go of the parts that don't matter. And so, I was there with my little razor blade for hours on end with the nature all around me, and many programs were cut there. I edited books, I authored a book called *Worlds Beyond*, again, about life in outer space, but not just alien life, also humans going through outer space, and things like that. It was based on all the interviews that I'd done with scientists, including proponents of space colonies. And Stewart Brand was getting into space colonies. He was saying, "Okay, if we destroy the Earth, what's our best bet? Well, we could set up some space colonies right between the moon and the Earth. There're some gravitational zones where we can actually put a whole bunch of worlds. What would that be like?"

[laughter]

23:11: It turned out that it wouldn't be fun. It didn't take off, although it was a really interesting idea, but basically it would have been like living inside an oil tanker, and then some. I was actually not looking forward to living there, but I felt fascinated by that as being a last resort, solution, for mankind.

23:30 Debra Schwartz: I've seen you around town before, we've interacted on and off, and you definitely have a very spirited persona. And this is you older. So I can only imagine what you must have been like as a youth.

23:46 Fabrice Florin: I was a wild man.

[laughter]

23:50 Debra Schwartz: Tell me this, how long was your hair?

23:52 Fabrice Florin: It wasn't too bad, actually, it was just like down to my shoulders.

23:55 Debra Schwartz: Just to your shoulders?

23:56 Fabrice Florin: Yeah. And so right now I'm growing it out again.

24:00 Debra Schwartz: Turn around, let's see. Oh, you've still got the long hair.

24:02 Fabrice Florin: It's coming down. I'm not going to take it out because I don't want to scare you. [chuckles] But I decided, I would grow it back out — except if Donald Trump, if we get to remove him from office — I have promised that I won't cut my hair.

24:16 Debra Schwartz: Really?

24:18 Fabrice Florin: [chuckles] I don't know. It wasn't intended to protect us from the conservative side, but —

24:26 Debra Schwartz: Hair can have a lot of power.

24:27 Fabrice Florin: It can, yeah.

24:28 Debra Schwartz: If it makes a difference, you should definitely keep it long.

24:31 Fabrice Florin: I'm holding on to it, it's an anchor.

24:34 Debra Schwartz: So, we've talked about the things that you've done with your work when you were at Druid Heights. Obviously, this was a place that you didn't just live, but where you created and you produced, and it was part of your process as somebody who's a creative person anyway, and your production. Druid Heights was your office. You mentioned Alan Watts and the library, and that you could feel his presence. This is an off-the-wall question, but since we're already talking about aliens landing on the Earth, I guess, the door has been opened. Did you ever see spirits or ghosts or anything like that at Druid Heights, any strange phenomenon that you care to share?

25:19 Fabrice Florin: I wish I could say yes, because it'd be so romantic if I did, but no, sadly, it was just human beings mostly with the plants all around. [chuckles] Certainly, I was exposed to some experiences that heightened my consciousness, but I can't say that I met ghosts.

25:41 Debra Schwartz: When you said you could feel the presence of Alan Watts, who was quite a character, what did you mean by that?

25:47 Fabrice Florin: Well, his library was still there, and sometimes we were allowed to go there, and then everything that Roger built also had that same aesthetic.

25:58 Debra Schwartz: Roger Somers.

26:00 Fabrice Florin: Roger Somers, yeah. He was just such an artist as a carpenter, it's just amazing. Everything was beautiful. I never met Alan Watts. I never connected deeply with him, but I sensed that presence when I was in that area, that this was not just some random little spot in the middle of the woods; this was a place where important people had lived, who had an impact on the world.

26:34 Debra Schwartz: How about your association with Roger Somers?

26:36 Fabrice Florin: He was very friendly. He always treated you well. He often invited us into his home. We didn't have a deep connection. We had different interests and different occupations, but I always felt safe in his presence. And he was a gentleman.

26:56 Debra Schwartz: Because he's described in so many ways.

26:58 Fabrice Florin: Oh, really?

27:00 Debra Schwartz: As manic, high energy, creative, spontaneous.

27:06 Fabrice Florin: I saw the creativity, but I mostly saw a kindness, a nice man. I didn't see the hecticness or the intensity that I'm hearing in your references. Mostly, he was a friendly neighbor who would welcome you into his scene. The scene was pretty wild. I always felt at home when I was visiting him.

27:33 Debra Schwartz: Wild?

27:34 Fabrice Florin: Well, wild in the sense that, who lives in a place like that? It's so rich, so ornate, and so beautiful, and the fact that they would so freely share their hot tub. Sometimes you could come in even if they were not in the hot tub and borrow it. I remember bringing some girlfriends over and benefiting from this and from the entire area. Also, often we would go down the hill, closer to sea level, and there was a really nice meadow where we had wonderful picnics and had really nice times. It was a really special place. And then Gail loved to go horseback riding, and she had several friends who would also bring their horses, and the Amazon ladies would go off, and sometimes they would invite us to join them for the picnic.

28:28 Debra Schwartz: The Amazon ladies?

28:29 Fabrice Florin: Well, I thought of them as Amazons.

28:32 Debra Schwartz: Let's talk about the Amazon ladies.

28:34 Fabrice Florin: Oh, well, they were both nice women, and they really liked their horses.

28:41 Debra Schwartz: Did they live in Paradise?

28:43 Fabrice Florin: Well, Gail was my landlady.

28:45 Debra Schwartz: Yes, right, with the children.

28:47 Fabrice Florin: And then the other person, I think she was the wife of the sales manager at KSAN maybe, or one of the radio stations, and I almost forgot his name. Actually, I did forget his name.

28:58 Debra Schwartz: So you just had a name for these two women, which was the Amazon women?

29:03 Fabrice Florin: Well, it just came now, actually. [chuckles]

29:05 Debra Schwartz: Oh, I see.

29:05 Fabrice Florin: Because I wanted to give you a descriptive term. I don't think that I called them the Amazon ladies then, but this is who I would think of. But without a close association to the Amazon; they had both breasts. Didn't have to cut one off, so they can do archery.

29:22 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, for more precision.

29:24 Fabrice Florin: But they were very friendly, and I really enjoyed them a lot. And then, as I've mentioned, I also brought girlfriends there who stayed with me, and we had a wonderful time. There was big, huge deck overlooking the entire valley and spent many wonderful afternoons there.

29:44 Debra Schwartz: Did you ever think you had like an ace in the hole, the ultimate babe lair, that if you just brought your girlfriends over —

[laughter]

29:51 Debra Schwartz: That you were pretty sure that they would be impressed enough to want to hang around for a couple days?

29:55 Fabrice Florin: People were impressed, there's no question. Yeah, and one of my girlfriends stayed there for quite a while.

30:03 Debra Schwartz: What was her name?

30:04 Fabrice Florin: Joan, Joan Waltemath. She had a really nice project. She wanted to facilitate inter-species communications. I don't wanna describe the project in detail, because I don't remember the details, but basically it was about playing music to dolphins and seeing if they would respond back, and then perhaps we could start talking with them.

30:35 Debra Schwartz: Well, this is around the time of Lilly's book?

30:38 Fabrice Florin: That's right, John Lilly.

30:39 Debra Schwartz: Yes, John Lilly, and his fantastical ideas, that wonderful book in which a scientist communicates with the dolphins.

30:48 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

30:48 Debra Schwartz: What was the name of that book?¹

30:52 Fabrice Florin: Long time ago.

30:54 Debra Schwartz: That was a good book though.

30:55 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, it was good. She was really doing interesting work, so I helped her as much as I could. And then later on I hooked up with a musician in Bolinas. His name was Jim Nolan, and he would go out into the freezing Pacific Ocean in a wet suit, on a surfboard, with a big drum, and he would play drums until the grey whale stopped on their way north or south.

31:21 Debra Schwartz: In their migration, they would stop to listen?

31:22 Fabrice Florin: And hang out a little bit. I remember trying to film this, and my poor cameraman, who was looking in through the viewfinder, got so sick, we had to just take a break. [chuckles]

31:31 Debra Schwartz: You're on the boat, the guy's in the water?

31:33 Fabrice Florin: We're on the boat, the boat goes up and down, and you're looking in through a view finder, it's a risky proposition. Also, the whales never came while we were shooting.

[laughter]

31:44 Debra Schwartz: No puke on the lens.

31:47 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, he had some successful experiences. I did a whole program about that, about the whales and the species communication.

¹ *Man and Dolphin: Adventures of a New Scientific Frontier* (1961).—Editor.

31:55 Debra Schwartz: How about peripheral communities? There was, as I understand it, a few commune-type places in Mill Valley. Were there other places that you would go and visit nearby? Was there something similar to where you were living or was Paradise singular?

32:15 Fabrice Florin: Paradise was exceptional as far as I was concerned, but certainly I did make it to Big Sur and Esalen. I did make it to Bolinas. I connected with a variety of different groups, and I certainly spent a lot of time in a lot of hot tubs, because in those days it was kind of *de rigueur*.

32:37: But Paradise was my home, and it wasn't really what you would call a commune, it was basically a bunch of people living in that part of the land and being neighborly and friendly and helping each other out. But it was not a commune by any means, which in some ways may have been better, because most of the communes that I heard of didn't pan out. They thought they would just make it happen and they would very soon be confronted with the reality of that back-to-the-land movement. It's not easy to grow food on the land, and often, this free-for-all spirit would not last because you have to have some form of governance, you can't just say, "Oh, we're all going to make all decisions, everybody will be happy." So, most of the communes that I heard about, ended up self-destructing. They couldn't grow the food, they couldn't get along, the women would leave, and then the men would leave, and it was all over. Right? [chuckles]

33:40 Debra Schwartz: Women left first, huh?

33:42 Fabrice Florin: That's what I'm told. That's never a good sign. When the women leave, you could tell civilization's about to diminish. [chuckles] But so yes, I had some friends, and I connected with other groups, but I was so consumed by my own work, I didn't have time to dilly-dally, I was on a mission to get the information out so that people could do good things with it.

34:12 Debra Schwartz: Do you ever remember the sound of music wafting through the trees?

34:16 Fabrice Florin: Sing it for me?

34:17 Debra Schwartz: No, not the song of "Sound of Music," but any music coming out of people's houses?

34:22 Fabrice Florin: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were referring to the *Sound of Music*.

34:26 Debra Schwartz: No.

34:27 Fabrice Florin: Okay. Well, first, Waldron loved space music. He couldn't have enough space music. And by space music, I refer to these long, ambient pieces with an

organ that goes on forever, and twinkling little stars. He was constantly playing that music.

34:48 Debra Schwartz: Was he trying to attract the aliens?

34:51 Fabrice Florin: [chuckles] Who knows? But he loved it. And his favorite musician was a man by the name of Iasos, and Iasos lived north of San Rafael, a really friendly man, and he would compose it, just crank out the music day and night non-stop, and Waldron had the complete collection, every single album by Iasos. And I use quite a bit of Iasos's music, and some of that space music was appropriate for all of my space-related programs, of course. So that was one form of music you heard a lot. You could sometimes hear a guitar or a flute wafting through the trees, as you say, around Roger's house. Certainly, the '60s music was prevalent as well, but by then we're in the '70s, actually the late '70s.

35:41 Debra Schwartz: '60s music was still alive in the '70s.

35:44 Fabrice Florin: I know, I know, but the influence of disco — I just remember Bee Gees playing in the car. I was on my way to Los Angeles to interview who knows what, and the Bee Gees were just constantly playing, and disco music. So, it was a strange mix of, the modern world was playing a certain kind of music, but when we retreated back, it became a little bit more New Age-y.

36:13 Debra Schwartz: What was your diet like back then? I mean, were there gardens in Paradise?

36:18 Fabrice Florin: Well, there was a vegetable garden, and we certainly had some salads and some vegetables, but I can't say that we were self-sufficient. We still went to the store. And so, for me, it was just like for anybody else. I would go get a burrito at El Faro in the Mission District in San Francisco and bring it home or something like that. So the diet wasn't special, although there were some people there who planted different types of vegetables.

[laughter]

36:53 Debra Schwartz: Gotcha.

36:53 Fabrice Florin: And so we were never short.

[laughter]

37:00 Fabrice Florin: I'll leave it at that.

37:01 Debra Schwartz: Oh, yeah. Okay. I am sure anybody listening can hear the winks.

37:06 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, exactly.

37:08 Debra Schwartz: If you were to choose a moment in time that somehow encapsulates the ambiance that you felt there, what would it be? Give me a moment. Take me back.

37:26 Fabrice Florin: Well, a typical quiet moment would be sitting on the deck, getting nice infusion of sun overlooking the valley, reading a book, maybe doing a little bit of work, but enjoying just being there. That would be a quiet moment.

37:57: Okay, maybe those were not the hippies I dreamed of, but close enough. I knew nobody in San Francisco when I arrived, not a single person. And the first night I spent sleeping in a sleeping bag in Golden Gate Park. And I was lucky that when I was hitchhiking, the guy who picked me up said, “Oh, it’s summer in San Francisco. You’re gonna freeze your butt. Here’s some long pants, and here’s a long shirt.” But for a lot of time, I just slept above UC Parnassus, and I didn’t have any money, so I worked as a guinea pig. I would go down to UC Parnassus, and they always had a study going on.

38:38 Debra Schwartz: I know, I was there.

38:40 Fabrice Florin: Oh.

38:40 Debra Schwartz: I may not have seen you there, but —

38:42 Fabrice Florin: Were you there as a —

38:43 Debra Schwartz: Guinea pig, yes.

38:44 Fabrice Florin: Oh my God.

38:46 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. They paid you. Not great, but they fed you, and you could spend the night.

38:50 Fabrice Florin: They paid, well, pretty good, and also they gave me a bed, so I didn’t have to —

38:53 Debra Schwartz: Yes, they did. They just opened up your veins.

38:54 Fabrice Florin: I would just take a one-week study if I could. I’d bring all my books, I’d bring my guitar. Then quinidine, which is like a heart regulator for old people, nothing dangerous. They just needed to study on a human being. Although, I also did the THC study, and I did some related to morphine. So, I tried all sorts of things, but it was gainful employment.

39:18 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

39:18 Fabrice Florin: Initially, I would go back and forth between the blood bank in Berkeley and the blood bank in the Haight Ashbury. One in the morning, one in the afternoon, and that was my food.

39:29 Debra Schwartz: Gee whiz.

39:29 Fabrice Florin: After a while they said, “You can’t keep doing this.” [laughs]

39:31 Debra Schwartz: You’re awfully thin to be giving away all that blood.

39:35 Fabrice Florin: So anyway, what I’m saying is, it was lonely for a while. Sleeping in a bed in homes, not knowing anybody. So for me to finally have a home with a family, even if they were a little bit strange, it felt great. I felt like I was at home, and I was at home in Paradise. What luck! So it was worth the extra half hour commute, and it was worth any side effects. But I have mostly good memories from it.

40:06: Okay, another memory, which is not quiet — Waldron could be at times a little unpredictable. Sometimes his judgment might not have been the same one as I’d have made. One day, a skunk got inside the house. And he was a little bit of, not macho, but he wanted to show —

40:29 Debra Schwartz: Waldron was.

40:30 Fabrice Florin: Yeah. He wanted to show who the man in the —

40:33 Debra Schwartz: “Step aside. I shall get this beast out the door.” He had a gun?

40:38 Fabrice Florin: He had a gun, and he shot the skunk in the middle of the living room. For an entire month, we couldn’t go to the living room. We did everything we could to wash it out under the couch. [laughs]

40:48 Debra Schwartz: Oh my goodness. What an incredibly stupid thing to do.

40:52 Fabrice Florin: Waldron. So that’s another memory that’s completely different.

41:00 Debra Schwartz: You were just there for less than two years.

41:02 Fabrice Florin: Just a couple of years, yeah.

41:04 Debra Schwartz: Why did you go? Why did you leave?

41:06 Fabrice Florin: Well, I started a television production company, Video West, and that was a huge job. I had to produce a half hour TV show almost single-handedly every week. That means shooting it, editing it, researching it, producing it, trying to find also a sponsor. So, it was non-stop work, and Paradise was just not the right setting for

that. So, I found a little studio in Sausalito, and then I met my wife, and the rest is history. It was love at first sight.

41:45 Debra Schwartz: Your wife's name is?

41:45 Fabrice Florin: Phyllis, Phyllis Florin. Love at first sight. This beautiful blonde out there. She liked the same music as I did. We went to her home that evening, and we've basically been together ever since. So that was lucky. And that, of course, changed everything, because she proceeded to civilize me [chuckles] and I was in much need of civilizing. So, the wild, wiry, crazy dude started getting a little bit mellower. I started being more respectful of the laws. She was a wonderful influence, and she taught me the power of love, and a lot of things I had not learned back in cold Switzerland.

42:36 Debra Schwartz: Cold Switzerland.

42:38 Fabrice Florin: That's right.

42:40 Debra Schwartz: Do you have any regrets about living in Paradise? Anything you wish you'd done differently?

42:46 Fabrice Florin: Well, in retrospect, I wish we had tried to encourage more of a communal life than just being neighbors. Maybe I should have spent more time learning about Allan Watts. Maybe I could have taken photographs of the damn building. [laughs] Nobody seems to have any. It would have been easier. Maybe I did take the photographs, but then I didn't store them well. But other than that, no. It was just a mostly positive experience. And I'll remember it as long as I live.

43:24 Debra Schwartz: What would you like to see happen with Druid Heights? Now that it's called Druid Heights. In fact, do you know when it went from Paradise to Druid Heights?

43:33 Fabrice Florin: I have no clue.

43:35 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

43:35 Fabrice Florin: I don't know who came up with it. I learned about it late in the game, just a few years ago. Because there's a young girl called Natalie who's a friend of ours, and when she was 12 years old, she became fascinated with that place, and after middle school she'd just walk all the way over there, every chance she got. She would go over there, and that's how I found it was called Druid Heights. She was fascinated by these old buildings. She imagined all sorts of things, and that actually put it back on my radar. I had almost completely forgotten about it.

44:11 Debra Schwartz: You know, I didn't ask you about the Stiles family, do you remember them?

44:15 Fabrice Florin: I didn't have any particular connection with the Stiles family. We were on the other side, and we had enough excitement in our little part of the world. So I can't really give you any info about them.

44:30 Debra Schwartz: So what would you like to see happen with Druid Heights? Now that there's some question about its future. It's no longer privately owned. The park service has to decide what to do with the buildings. Do you have any feelings about —

44:42 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, I think that there should be some way to remember the times, and at the very least, there should be a little bench and if some picnic tables, maybe right in front of where Roger's house was overlooking the valley in that little area. But my hope is we can do more than that, that maybe we could keep one set of buildings, a little compound, maybe it's Roger's or maybe it's a place next door. Our place was demolished. There's nothing left of that beautiful house that Peter built. Peter was Gil's husband, who was estranged by the time I joined them, but he built an amazing house, and then they destroyed it because they had a short lease.

45:38 Debra Schwartz: You mean, the park service destroyed it?

45:38 Fabrice Florin: Yeah, the park service destroyed it. That's a shame. It was a beautiful house. It was indicative of an era when people built their own houses, and people lived a little bit on the outskirts of society. And why would they demolish such a building? I think it's deranged. I'm sure there's good practical reasons. Maybe they didn't have the funds to maintain it. But it's sad. You don't destroy something that has so much character. And that house did, it was very special.

46:06 Debra Schwartz: Well, I think part of the reason why we're collecting these stories is that not everybody is aware of the history of that time and what it meant to live in a place like that. In discussing Druid Heights and the people that lived there, perhaps that's a way to —

46:28 Fabrice Florin: Well, I really hope that maybe through a combination of government and citizen and maybe some businesses joining forces that we can preserve some of the buildings. In an ideal world they would be available so you could maybe hold a retreat there, and maybe you'd pay a price that would help pay for the maintenance for renting it for the afternoon. To just have a public bench is sad. It deserves more than that. Those buildings are too beautiful not to be preserved, and there's certainly enough money in Marin that if someone put their mind to it, we should be able to attract the necessary funds. I understand the park service is strained, and it's hard for them to carry that burden, but if people got involved, I think we could and should find a way to have one of these buildings be available to the public, maybe put a little museum in it, maybe don't even bother renting it out, just have a small, little museum.

47:40: It was a very special place, a very special time. There is no other spot that I could point to in Marin County that represent that bohemian lifestyle. We've almost pretty much gentrified Gate 5 Road, which is the other one that I would point to when

you actually asked me about communities. Gate 5, the houseboat community. That is probably one of the most interesting communities. My very first documentary was about the houseboat wars, and sadly, the hippies lost the war. The developers won, and now it's completely gentrified. There's hardly anything left of a place that really had soul, really had soul, and so, when a place has that quality, it's incumbent on society to try to preserve it, because it doesn't happen often that you get that kind of magic in a particular place, where you get something that's outside of the conventions and the norms that bind us, and people go a little bit further out and then something happens that blossoms. Society really ought to preserve that because that's a little moment of creativity, a moment of kindness, that quickly dissipates. And then sometimes we fail to recognize the importance of these places, but they really can have a strong impact on your life.

49:03 Debra Schwartz: So, what's interesting to me about your particular story is that you came from, as you described it, "cold Switzerland."

49:09 Fabrice Florin: Yeah.

49:11 Debra Schwartz: Whether you were sucked or you ran to it or whatever happened, you were compelled to come over here and you landed in Paradise. Imagine as that young man that you were sending a correspondence back to Switzerland, because you've left, you've flown the coop and now you're in this other place. Let's just close with this: what are you going to say to the people that you left about where you are and how it's affecting you?

49:44 Fabrice Florin: Dear parents — and actually I wrote letters to that extent — I have found a beautiful place where I am happy and creative and I'm living with people who are interesting and gentle. I hope you will come and visit me. It's really beautiful out here, the future is wide open, anything is possible. I love you dearly, and I'm glad that I was able to find this place. [chuckles] That's what I told them in my letters, and that's what I told my friends as well. And unfortunately, when my mother came to visit in San Francisco, she broke her ankle, and I think she was a little scared of the hippies anyway. It was a convenient excuse to not come and visit, so she never did get to experience my blissful abode.

50:45: But she got a pretty good idea, [chuckles] and I think she was happy that I was happy. And so it was very lucky for me to have that moment where I could have a little respite from the crazy world and build my confidence in the company of people who were gentle. I think that if I hadn't had that, I might have grown maybe a little bit more cynical or maybe a little less friendly. Now, it's easier for me to conjure up those forces of kindness because they were bestowed on me, and it's easy for me to bring them back and pass them on to others. I think everybody needs these little moments in their lives where you can have this sit in a semi-sacred space, or at least in a space where you have license to create and license to be yourself.

51:47 Debra Schwartz: Well, thank you so much, Fabrice, for sharing your sparkle, every day, today.

51:52 Fabrice Florin: [chuckles] Thank you.

51:52 Debra Schwartz: If that's what did gel way back when, when you were staying in Paradise, if that's where you found your spirit, which seems to self-perpetuate, I'm glad for it, because you are very active in our community today. You're out there doing so much that I appreciate, socially and otherwise. I just will close with this, your last thought. Thank you very much for sharing your experiences.

52:19 Fabrice Florin: Thank you for inviting me. It was a fun interview, a great conversation. You brought back a flood of memories. Thank you for that.

52:26 Debra Schwartz: I look forward to our next interview when we'll talk more about you and your family and your history and your life and all the other projects and experiences that you've had here. And I have a feeling that you, at this point, can make a Paradise wherever you are.

52:44 Fabrice Florin: Ohhhh, [chuckles] now I have to do it. Thank you for that.

52:48 Debra Schwartz: Good, do it. Okay, that concludes our interview.

52:52 Fabrice Florin: Thank you. That was fun.