

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**

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Historical Society and the Mill Valley  
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**JESSE BARISH**

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

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INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz  
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In this oral history musician and songwriter Jesse Barish recounts his life in music and describes Mill Valley during the 1970s. Born in 1945, Jesse grew up in Brooklyn, the Catskill Mountains, and Miami. After graduating from high school in 1963, Jesse moved out to California, originally touching down in Los Angeles before moving up to San Francisco and settling in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Jesse moved over to Marin in the 1970s, and he recalls a number of local haunts from that period, including Davood's and the Sweetwater, as well as a number of colorful personalities, such as Charlie Deal and Mickey McGowan. Jesse discusses the bands he played with during that period, his songwriting, and his longtime friendship and creative collaboration with Marty Balin of Jefferson Airplane (later Jefferson Starship). The oral history concludes with Jesse singing his hit song "Count on Me."

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## Oral History of Jesse Barish

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**Oral History of Jesse Barish**  
**November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018**

**Editor's note:** This oral history interview was conducted over the telephone. The transcript has been reviewed by Jesse Barish, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original.

**0:00:00 Debra Schwartz:** Today is November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, and my name is Debra Schwartz. On behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Public Library, I am speaking right now with musician Jesse Barish. Now, Jesse, first of all I just want to make clear that you're sitting in Venice — in California — and I'm here in Mill Valley in my house, and we're connecting by phone. So I don't get to see your face, but I'm very happy to hear your voice.

**0:00:35 Jesse Barish:** Okay, thank you.

**0:00:36 Debra Schwartz:** I'm hoping we don't have too much feedback here. Jesse, you're a musician, a composer, and a wonderful performer, still performing. Many of us have heard your songs over the years and may or may not have known that they originated with you. That's something we can talk about with this interview. In addition, you've spent a lot of time here in Mill Valley, and that's something I'd like to talk about too today.

**0:01:08 Jesse Barish:** Okay.

**0:01:09 Debra Schwartz:** But first, let's get a little context about you and your family. Can you tell me about where your ancestors came from and how it is you came to live in California? 'Cause you sound like you have a little bit of an eastern accent, from New York, I think, correct?

**0:01:27 Jesse Barish:** Right, correct. I guess the roots of my family are from Latvia, Romania, Russia, the old country, wherever that is. We ended up in Brooklyn. My mother's family and my father's family are all from Brooklyn. That's where I grew up, in Brownsville. That was in the '40s and '50s, and it was a really incredible time to grow up in Brooklyn then. Now all the hipsters are moving to Brooklyn. But back then, it was truly a magical place for a kid to be, just a melting pot of cultures. I grew up in a Jewish-Puerto Rican-black neighborhood, so I had all those influences on me. When I was about nine, we left Brooklyn and moved up to a little town in the Catskill Mountains called Liberty, which was kind of a resort — the "Jewish Alps" they called them, the Borscht Belt, where my mother had spent part of her youth in the '20s. She had always wanted to go back to live there, and my father found a job. I was nine. We moved up to Liberty where I spent a lot of my formative, what I call "*Leave It to Beaver*" years. [chuckles]

**0:02:55:** The idyllic '50s. It was really an amazing time to live in this small town. It was about an hour-and-a-half from Brooklyn. My father died suddenly when I was 15 from a cerebral hemorrhage. He wasn't sick or anything like that. Soon after that, we left

Liberty and moved to Miami Beach where my mother had a sister, and that's where I finished high school. When I got out of high school in 1963, I headed for California and that began my journey here. I drove across country with my brother-in-law. I came to the golden coast of California, and that's where my California adventure began. I lived in L.A. I got married really young, moved up to San Francisco into the Haight-Ashbury and lived there in the '60s when it was happening. When Marty [Balin] was king of the world, I was living in the Haight and doing my dance in the hippie world. Then in the early '70s, I found myself back in Los Angeles where I got signed to Shelter Records, which was Leon Russell's label.

**0:04:27:** I had a band. It was called Jesse, Wolff and Whings. We made one album for Shelter Records. And there were more clubs to play in the Bay Area, so we moved up to Marin, first to Larkspur and then I moved to San Anselmo, and in the early '70s found myself in Mill Valley, which is where this part of the interview deals with my time in Marin and Mill Valley in the '70s.

**0:05:03 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, so that's a pretty good overview Jesse. Let's unpack just a little bit of that information before we progress on to Mill Valley. You talked about your very early years in Brooklyn with your family. Can you please give me your parent's names and any siblings that you may have?

**0:05:20 Jesse Barish:** My parents' names? My father was Albert. My mother was Hilda. I have a sister, Linda, who's four years older than me and who lives in, not too far away in the [San Fernando] Valley. I live in Venice. She lives in Studio City.

**0:05:35 Debra Schwartz:** And when you described the magic of living in Brooklyn, this is something that unless you've been there, I think you can't truly understand the smells, the atmosphere, the general ambience of that time. Could you just describe an afternoon or some kind of childhood experience vividly? Take us back there. Just give us an idea of what that was like living in Brooklyn with the Jews and the Puerto Ricans and —

**0:06:03 Jesse Barish:** The Blacks.

**0:06:04 Debra Schwartz:** And the Blacks.

**0:06:05 Jesse Barish:** I can remember there was the grocery store with the pickle barrel where you'd go; and there was the candy store across the street where I would rot my teeth out with the latest candy I could find; and on summer days, outside, the fire companies would turn the hydrants on — that was a big deal; and the Good Humor truck going by, you'd get your fudgsicle, or whatever; and sitting outside on a summer night in Brooklyn, I remember gospel groups with tambourines, singing, and everyone hanging together.

**0:06:54:** This was the late 1940s, early '50s, and right around then, there was a great migration out of Brooklyn to the suburbs. Some people moved out to Long Island or to

Westchester. We moved to Liberty 'cause the streets were getting a little dangerous. There were a lot of gangs. But Brooklyn — it just was a certain melting pot. It had such a colorful vibration about it. There were trolleys. A trolley car was right outside my window. We lived in the same apartment for like nine years. The first nine years, my sister and I shared a bedroom. My mom and dad pulled out a thing in the living room, a sofa bed and that's where they slept. I don't know what we were considered. We weren't wealthy at all. We were lower middle-class Jews living in Brownsville.

**0:07:58 Debra Schwartz:** And what did your dad do for a living?

**0:08:00 Jesse Barish:** My dad actually played the violin, but he ended up being an accountant too, and then he always had two or three jobs. He worked at a racetrack in Monticello, worked for a plumbing supply, but his true love was music. He wanted to be a classical musician. Maybe that's why I was so determined to live my life, live my dreams, 'cause I saw my dad die really young and not living out his destiny of being an artist. He wasn't a happy guy. He was 45 when he had a cerebral hemorrhage. Never sick a day in his life, that I can remember; I never saw him stay home from work. He just went to work one day and dropped me off at school and that was the last I saw him.

**0:09:00 Debra Schwartz:** Wow. Could be very traumatic for a young boy to lose a father.

**0:09:01 Jesse Barish:** I was 15, 14 — and then lose your dad. my sister was already out of the house. She was living in Manhattan, working for advertising agencies. That was the big thing back then, the *Mad Men* era.

**0:09:14 Debra Schwartz:** *Mad Men*, right.

**0:09:16 Jesse Barish:** She was working for all the big advertising agencies: J. Walter Thompson, Benton and Bowles. She did all of that. She was already out of the house. So when my dad passed, it was just me and my mom.

**0:09:31 Debra Schwartz:** And then the Catskills, where you went afterwards to live in the small town, which is so different from Brooklyn, give us an idea of what that was like just as you've done so beautifully with Brooklyn.

**0:09:43 Jesse Barish:** Say that again?

**0:09:44 Debra Schwartz:** Just as you've just described so perfectly your Brooklyn experience in such a vivid way — I could almost imagine the quality of light, and the kids running around the street, and the smells and the noise.

**0:09:58 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. Liberty was a small town, maybe 5,000 people. It was kind of like the heart of the Catskills which was the Jewish resort. At one point, there were over 500 hotels and bungalow colonies. The usual drill was, if you were living in Brooklyn during the summer, you would go to a bungalow colony, you and your mom

and your siblings, and your dad would stay in the city working and he would come up on weekends. You know that was kind of the thing, the bungalow colony thing. But like I said, my mom had lived in this town in the '20s during the Depression. I don't know how she ended up there. My grandfather, her father, owned a cigar store in Liberty. So her dream was always to go back to Liberty to relive her childhood. So one day, my dad found a job in the *New York Times* in Liberty and went up and interviewed. It was for a plumbing supply company, and we moved to Liberty.

**0:11:01 Debra Schwartz:** Were your grandparents Jewish immigrants? Had they come from the old country, or were they born and raised in the United States?

**0:11:09 Jesse Barish:** My mother's parents, I think they were born here. I think my great-grandparents came from the old country. I'm not really quite sure. My sister is kind of the family historian, so I'd have to ask her. But I never got to meet my mother's father. My mother's mother always lived either with us, or near us, in Brooklyn. She lived in the same building that we lived in. And then when we moved up to Liberty, she was with us. That was my maternal grandmother.

**0:11:45 Debra Schwartz:** And her name?

**0:11:46 Jesse Barish:** Anna. Anna Weiss.

**0:11:47 Debra Schwartz:** And your sister's name?

**0:11:49 Jesse Barish:** Linda.

**0:11:50 Debra Schwartz:** You know, when you're describing this, it reminds me of the movie *Dirty Dancing*.

**0:11:56 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, well that's where it was. *Dirty Dancing* was in the Catskills and the resort hotels — the Grossinger, the Concord — those were the big hotels. Then there were smaller hotels, and then really small, tiny hotels. I spent my teenage years working in those hotels as a bus boy. I was an elevator operator. But Liberty was the quintessential little town for me anyway. It was the idyllic '50s — Elvis, the American Bandstand — the idyllic life of childhood. I went from Brooklyn to this little town that was a really sweet little place and it was still close enough to the city that we would, every weekend, we would drive to Brooklyn from Liberty to see my father's sister, my aunt Helen. We'd drive from Liberty to Brooklyn; that was our Sunday ritual. If not every week, then every other weekend, we'd drive down for the day and my aunt Helen would have this huge spread with all of my father's family there. His parents, my paternal grandparents, lived with my father's sister.

**0:13:24 Debra Schwartz:** And their names?

**0:13:27 Jesse Barish:** Their names was Sam and Becky. Those are my paternal grandparents, and my aunt Helen was my father's sister. And so, even when we lived in

Liberty, we would make weekly or bi-monthly trips to New York, to Brooklyn, for the day where we would have this big family spread of Jewish deli food and pastries.

**0:13:58 Debra Schwartz:** What's a meal for you back then — the good New York Jewish food?

**0:14:02 Jesse Barish:** Oh, you know, I would make myself a roast beef sandwich — corned beef, pastrami. I would go with my grandfather. We would go to the bakery when we got to Brooklyn and buy all the bagels and bialys, and white fish and lox. I mean, the table was spread. Every week it was like it was a bar mitzvah, you know? I had cousins and relatives and it was a beautiful thing. Then we'd get back in the car and drive back to Liberty. So Liberty was like a bedroom community of Brooklyn in many ways.

**0:14:41 Debra Schwartz:** I forgot to ask you what year you were born, Jesse.

**0:14:44 Jesse Barish:** I was born in 1945.

**0:14:48 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm, okay.

**0:14:48 Jesse Barish:** So I experienced the '40s, the '50s, the '60s — I've experienced many decades.

**0:14:56 Debra Schwartz:** So then, all of a sudden, you go from Liberty to Miami?

**0:15:00 Jesse Barish:** Right. And that was kind of a shock because I'm in Liberty and I'm with people that I had made friends with. I've been there for maybe six years, and then my father died suddenly, and I remember I got called out of class. My father had dropped me off at school. I got called out of class. Someone came with a note that I should go the office, and then I went to the principal's office — that was always kind of frightening for a kid. "What did I do now?" And they said, "Oh, there's somebody who wants to speak with you outside the school." This was in Liberty. And I walked outside. It was snowing. It was like January, middle of winter in Upstate New York, freezing cold, and I walked outside and there was some guy, never had saw him before. Apparently, he worked at my father's office, and I remember he said to me, "You have to be really brave, son. Your father just died."

**0:16:02:** And then I went with him. We drove back to my house where my mother had already gotten the news. My sister was on her way up from Manhattan. Several months after that, we moved from this old town where I had all my friends, and where I thought I was gonna graduate — I was in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. And my mom decides to move to Miami Beach, swinging Miami Beach. It was a swinging town back then, even then.

**0:16:36 Debra Schwartz:** It was a moment of punctuated equilibrium, where in one moment there was one life, and then there was another, I suppose.



**0:16:43 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. All of a sudden, I'm thrust into the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Miami Beach with all these kids that grew up together. You know how traumatic that can be for a kid to change schools.

**0:16:57 Debra Schwartz:** And when you say "Swinging Miami," describe what "Swinging Miami" means.

**0:17:01 Jesse Barish:** You know what Miami Beach is like now, South Beach?

**0:17:06 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**0:17:06 Jesse Barish:** That whole club scene. Well, when I lived in Miami Beach, it was the same thing. It was swinging hotels, people on holiday. And South Beach was, funny enough, considered the slum. South of Lincoln Road was considered where all the old Jewish people lived in retirement hotels, and those hotels now are like \$600 a night hotels. But back then, we used to call it Bagel Beach. [laughs]

**0:17:37:** That's where the old Jews lived. And Miami Beach was primarily a Jewish ghetto like all the places I lived: Brownsville, Liberty, and Miami Beach. I did the Jewish ghetto circuit. [chuckles]

**0:17:54 Debra Schwartz:** And then you end up in California. How was it for you when you went to Southern California before you came here?

**0:18:03 Jesse Barish:** Well, when I drove out here with my brother-in-law — this was 1963 — I had tried to go to college for a couple of days in Miami, went to Miami-Dade Junior College, and I just wasn't cut out for college. It wasn't my thing. Somehow we decided to go to California. So, my brother-in-law — my sister's husband — and I drove across country in a '61 Falcon with this giant console TV tied to the roof like the Beverly Hillbillies. I don't know what we were thinking. [chuckles] But we drove across the country and we ended up in L.A. And this was in '63, right before Kennedy was killed.

**0:18:50 Debra Schwartz:** And your brother-in-law's name?

**0:18:52 Jesse Barish:** Ted Lebov. They're still married. I saw him last week. It was my sister's son's wife who passed away that I came back to the funeral for.

**0:19:05 Debra Schwartz:** Those are listening to this, they won't know, but you and I met a couple of weeks ago for the first time — although we've been in communication before because of Marty Balin, and that's someone we'll talk about in a little bit because of his memorial here in San Francisco. We attended the memorial together.

**0:19:25 Jesse Barish:** Yes.

**0:19:26 Debra Schwartz:** At the temple in Emanu-El, and then you had to go home to attend another memorial, your sister's daughter-in-law who died.

**0:19:35 Jesse Barish:** Right. That was the funeral. Marty was cremated, and Jodi, my sister's daughter-in-law, was buried in a Jewish cemetery.

**0:19:53 Debra Schwartz:** That was quite a weekend.

**0:19:55 Jesse Barish:** Quite a weekend, quite a weekend. A lot of driving, a lot of thinking, a lot of leaving the past behind, you know?

**0:20:00 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. And that's something we can talk about, too, because I recall, as you arrived, you stayed at my house, and the shock when you saw Mill Valley so very changed from the Mill Valley you remember. So let's go back to the Mill Valley that you lived in. This is a great time for us to segue into the '60s now, or the '70s. How long were you in L.A. for?

**0:20:25 Jesse Barish:** I was in L.A. from, I don't know, '63 to '65 or '66. I lived in Venice then. I got married really young. I married my college sweetheart.

**0:20:46 Debra Schwartz:** Her name?

**0:20:47 Jesse Barish:** Debra. Debra Abbott. I did end up going to college for a little while in L.A. in the Valley at L.A. Valley College. I didn't know what else to do with myself. I wasn't really writing songs yet. I was more of a jazz kinda guy. I played the flute — and I still play the flute, by the way. I originally wanted to be a jazz musician. That was my real love, my musical place where I felt comfortable. But I met a girl at this cafeteria in Valley College, and we smoked a lot of dope together and took LSD and got married. [laughs]

**0:21:30 Debra Schwartz:** When you were in Venice Beach at that time, Jim Morrison, The Doors —

**0:21:35 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. That was the time. I lived in Venice Beach in 1965. I had a little apartment right in the heart of Venice, \$65 a month, believe it or not, for a one bedroom apartment, which is probably now \$3,000 a month or more. Venice was transitioning from the Beat Generation into the hippy thing, which I always thought was an interesting segue. I always thought of myself as a beatnik. I was more of a Beat poet kind of jazz guy. I was smoking pot, and then the LSD thing kind of turned it into the hippy thing. It was like beatniks on acid. [chuckles] There was no name for this group of people when I was living in Venice. There were maybe 10 people like me and my wife at the time. We were kind of colorful, taking LSD, smoking weed, listening to all kinds of music. It was freedom — an amazing time. The boardwalk was, again, mostly old Jewish people living in retirement places. Wherever I went, there were those old Jewish people. [chuckles] And now I'm one of them. [chuckles] How did this happen? [chuckles] They've been following me.

**0:23:10 Debra Schwartz:** I really can't imagine two more diverse scenes than Brooklyn and Venice Beach with the weightlifters and the California dreaming.

**0:23:23 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, it's funny because Venice is the place most like Brooklyn in L.A. even now, 'cause it's the only place in LA where there's a vibrant street scene, which is what I gravitate towards. I'm a people person. So I live a half a block from the boardwalk. I live a half a block from the craziest circus you'd ever wanna see. But when I'm home, it's quiet. I'm home now. I'm half a block away where like hundreds of thousands of people searching for God knows what. [chuckles]

**0:23:55 Debra Schwartz:** So, let's get back on the road trip that brings you to the Bay Area.

**0:24:00 Jesse Barish:** Okay. So I end up in San Francisco in the '60s —

**0:24:07 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, before — wait. I'm going to interrupt you for a second, 'cause we haven't really talked about your musical ability, which is amazing. Before we progress into your life as a musician here in the Bay Area, tell me when did your interest in music begin?

**0:24:24 Jesse Barish:** My earliest thing was a musical thing in Brooklyn. I really wanted to play the trumpet, and I actually tried to build a trumpet out of an Erector Set, [chuckles] which was virtually impossible. My father came home one day with a rented trumpet for me. I must have been about maybe five or six, and I started taking trumpet lessons. I even have a piece of music that my mother saved from when I transcribed a song off the radio. I don't know if you remember the song "Oh, My Papa" by Eddie Fisher. Remember that song?

**0:25:03 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. Maybe you could sing a couple of words.

**0:25:07 Jesse Barish:** "Oh, my pa-pa, to me he was so wonderful." Anyway, it was like a Jewish song. I don't know what it was.

**0:25:15 Debra Schwartz:** A tearjerker for sure.

**0:25:17 Jesse Barish:** What's that?

**0:25:17 Debra Schwartz:** It's a tearjerker.

**0:25:18 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. I figured out the notes and I wrote them down. It wasn't like I was Beethoven or anything. [chuckles] I just had an ear for music. And then, all through grade school I was playing the clarinet. I was in the band. Then I hated it. I just thought it was something I was supposed to do, but I didn't like reading music. I wasn't good at reading music. I played in the drum and bugle corps. Music was always a part of my life. I got interested in jazz when I was a young teenager, which was pretty unusual

for white kids back then, but it kinda captured me. And then I wanted to be a jazz musician. Then, when I was about 17, I bought a flute and taught myself to play the flute.

**0:26:16:** And somewhere along the line, I got it in my head that I could write songs. This was when Dylan came out, and the Beatles' *Rubber Soul*. Somehow I was captivated by the idea of playing the guitar and writing songs. I'd been like a jazz guy, a purist, and then all of a sudden I wanted to be a folk singer. I felt like I've got this thing inside of me to write songs, which apparently I did. And so, I started fooling around with the guitar pretty late. I was maybe 19 or 20 when I actually got a guitar and started working on the process of learning how to write songs.

**0:27:04 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. So you bring this — what appears to me in listening to you — natural gift. You had an interest, and you had an ability that flourished with time. So maybe you weren't Beethoven, but you obviously had some natural abilities.

**0:27:21 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, I had a deep feeling for music, but it took me a long time. I must have written a hundred really, really bad songs before I wrote one song that I thought was okay: "Here's a melody; here's a real song." It took me a long time to master the craft of writing a song.

**0:27:42 Debra Schwartz:** So you bring what you have musically with you as you come to the Bay Area. Tell me about that.

**0:27:50 Jesse Barish:** Well, I ended up in like I said, I was in the Haight in the mid-'60s, during the golden time of the Haight-Ashbury. I was in a band called the Orkustra, which spawned some interesting people. There was David LaFlamme, the violin player in that band, who went on to have "It's a Beautiful Day." Jaime Leopold was the bass player who went on to play with Dan Hicks. I didn't stay that long with the band, but I stayed for a few months and rehearsed with them, and then left the Haight and moved up to the Russian River. That's when all the hippies went to the country, when they left the Haight because it became too commercial, and the buses were driving down Haight Street looking at the freaks. So all the hippies and the first generation people left and moved to Marin or Sonoma. I went up to the Russian River and that was where I started writing songs.

**0:29:32:** And my wife became pregnant in '68. My son was born in 1968. We lived in Oakland for a while, and then back in Venice, back and forth, and we ended up in Hollywood in the early '70s where I got signed by this label. I'd only been writing songs literally for a couple of years. It was kind of a shock. I wasn't even looking for a record deal. I got signed by Shelter Records, and that's what brought me up to Marin, because there were more gigs up in Marin. There was the Lion's Share. There was the Keystone Berkeley. There were more venues for us to play. So the band and myself, we ended up in Marin. That's right about when I ended up in Mill Valley.

**0:30:25 Debra Schwartz:** When did you begin your collaboration with Marty Balin of Jefferson Airplane?

**0:30:32 Jesse Barish:** We began probably in '73, '74. I had a mutual friend who said, "You ought to meet Marty." He was moving to L.A., and right before he left he took me to Marty's house, and that was the beginning of it. Back then Marty had a little house on Blithedale Avenue, and that was an amazing scene. You never know who you were gonna run into when you went over to Marty's house. It could have been Grace [Slick]. It could have been Paul Kantner. It could have been anybody in the world. Marty was like a magnet, and [his house] was like a salon from the '20s. It was a fascinating scene and we just, we didn't write that many songs together, but I would come over and sing him songs that I wrote. And then he got me a deal with RCA<sup>1</sup> as a solo artist in the mid-'70s, late '70s. He produced a couple of my records for RCA, and that was an amazing, amazing time. I had a great band that included Audie — Austin de Lone — of the Mill Valley Austin de Lones.

**0:31:56 Debra Schwartz:** We have his interview. Very nice man.

**0:31:58 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. Wonderful man.

**0:32:00 Debra Schwartz:** Amazing musician.

**0:32:01 Jesse Barish:** Amazing musician. One of the best musicians I've ever played with. That was a very heady time for me. I wrote this song "Count on Me," and we demoed it. We recorded it the next day at Wally Heider's in San Francisco where we were recording. Actually, I was making a demo, which got me the deal with RCA. And then after I got the deal with RCA, Marty told me that Starship wanted to do the song, wanted to do "Count on Me." I had already had a really great version of it, which myself and the band thought was our hit single. And now, here I am with the decision of, "Do I give this song to the Starship, or do I hold onto it for myself as the artist?"

**0:33:00 Debra Schwartz:** For those who are listening, and may not understand, Marty Balin was the founder of Jefferson Airplane, and in time that name would change to Jefferson Starship.

**0:33:08 Jesse Barish:** Correct.

**0:33:11 Debra Schwartz:** And this song that you are describing, "Count on Me," is one of their big hits.

**0:33:17 Jesse Barish:** Right, and so I was faced with: "Do I hold onto it for myself or do I let — " The Starship was a natural. They were gonna get the big push. I didn't know if my version was gonna get radio airplay or put me on the map, but I instinctively felt that if the Starship did it, that they would get the big promotion and the big push.

**0:33:45 Debra Schwartz:** And so what happened?

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<sup>1</sup> RCA Records

**0:33:46 Jesse Barish:** So I let them do it.

**0:33:47 Debra Schwartz:** So that's exactly what happened.

**0:33:50 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, and so that song became a hit. It was an amazing, amazing time. My album came out on RCA. It didn't do much, and I did another record, a second album for RCA, and that didn't do much. And then I didn't get a chance for a third record with RCA. Soon after that, I finished my time in Mill Valley. It was probably around 1980 when I left Mill Valley. I had bought a house in Mill Valley with my girlfriend at the time, and I remember packing up and leaving Mill Valley. That was the end. I never went back.

**0:34:37 Debra Schwartz:** And that's the house we drove past on Lovell.

**0:34:39 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, that's the house. I bought that with my girlfriend at the time.

**0:34:42 Debra Schwartz:** And her name?

**0:34:43 Jesse Barish:** Helen Cleland.

**0:34:47 Debra Schwartz:** And how did it feel for you? I always wonder about — it's such a glamorous-appearing profession being a musician. Back then it was about as cool and hip as any young person growing up in California could imagine — rock, the life of a rock 'n' roll star. Here is your music on the airwaves. And "Count on Me" went far and wide. It's your song. How does that feel?

**0:35:25 Jesse Barish:** Oh, it's a pretty incomparable feeling for any songwriter. I mean I have a lot of friends who are really great songwriters, and they just never had a hit. I was really lucky. I've had a couple of hits. And to hear your song on the radio, a song that you wrote in your bedroom — your private thoughts, your private feelings — all of a sudden, it's — imagine how The Beatles must feel, or Stevie Wonder.

**0:36:00 Debra Schwartz:** Or Marty Balin [chuckles]

**0:36:01 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, Marty Balin. Marty has 10 hits. To be friends with Marty was amazing because I remember, like in the summer of '67, when I left the Haight and I moved up to the Russian River, I remember that album *Surrealistic Pillow*. I mean I played that so many times, and I didn't know Marty, but I always thought he had an amazing voice. There was no one in rock and roll that sounded like Marty. I mean he just had a distinctive sound. And *Surrealistic Pillow* was a phenomenal record. I just remember listening to that record so many times. And so when I finally got to meet Marty, he was like, you know what I mean — I was starstruck in many ways because he was a star and he was a larger than life presence in so many ways. But we became really close and really good friends and we were just people then. When I met Marty, he wasn't in the Airplane or the Starship. He was kind of taking a break from the rock 'n' roll

circus. So I met Marty in a very neutral zone. He wasn't really playing in a band and I met him at the right time. He had a lot of time, and we cultivated a really unique friendship and collaboration. And the fact that I would write songs that he would sing —

**0:37:44 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I think Sue Balin, Marty's wife, described Marty as your biggest fan.

**0:37:52 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, I don't think I'll ever have a bigger fan. And he used to say things like, "Jess, you're the Picasso of rock." I mean, "Really? Come on." [chuckles] I'm not saying that in an ego-way, I'm just saying what Marty would say to me, you know.

**0:38:07 Debra Schwartz:** I think that's what he saw in you.

**0:38:09 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, and I've never had anyone believe in me and encourage me and endorse me more than Marty did. And for a guy like I was — you know, I wasn't a star in the '60s. Marty was the king of the world in the '60s. The Airplane was — you couldn't get much bigger than that. And I was just a guy learning to write songs and going through life trying to scrape together enough money to pay the bills and to survive. That's what "Days of Wonder," the song I wrote before Marty passed, was about. 'Cause Marty always used to say, "You know, I had the best seat in the house for the '60s." I mean, my God, he was the house band at the Fillmore at Winterland, played the major, major moments of that culture: Woodstock, Altamont, the Monterey Pop Festival. Amazing things that he saw, and he was the most humble guy. Marty just didn't have that superstar ego. He was just a guy that happened to have a beautiful voice.

**0:39:29 Debra Schwartz:** At his memorial, there were a handful of people, that was it. And you were one of them. So obviously, he had great regard for you. As it was described to me, you were his best friend.

**0:39:40 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, what an honor. We had amazing conversations. You'd go to a book store with Marty, whether it was in New York or down here in Hollywood, and Marty would leave with like 10 books. He was a voracious reader with the most incredible curiosity about people and biographies of stars from the '30s and '40s. Marty and I both shared a great love for old films. We knew a lot of the old character actors and the great casts and the great directors. Marty was really enamored with Hollywood in the '30s and '40s — the Golden Age — and the Jean Harlows and the Clark Gables and the stories behind their lives. Marty was such an interested person in knowledge, and he had such a curiosity about life. He was fascinating. I've never met anyone like the guy. I'm sure the people that got to know him would say the same thing. He was really unique.

**0:40:57 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I just want to say at this moment how sorry I am for the loss that you've experienced with your life-long friend. I think it qualifies as "lifelong friend." It's been a lot of years.

**0:41:10 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, 45 years. That's close enough, right?

**0:41:12 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, right. And so, it was a sadness that he died. I nominated him for a Milley after interviewing him a couple of years ago, after his medical fiasco. He was going to come to Mill Valley, and you were going to come to see him receive the Milley Award, but that was not to be. He passed away a couple of weeks before, and what was to be an award ceremony became, in fact, a memorial for him. It's sad to say goodbye to your friend.

**0:41:51 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. I mean, death is hard to wrap your head around sometimes. I guess I'll never see that person again and you think about, "When was the last time I talked to Marty? When was the last time I saw Marty?" He was such a life-force. It's hard to believe he's not on the planet. I mean, he was just such a vortex of energy. He was just the most alive person I have ever known. He was an actor, a dancer, a singer, a poet, a reader, a scholar, a yogi. He was all these things and he's irreplaceable.

**0:42:34 Debra Schwartz:** And he was working on an album with your songs, wasn't he?

**0:42:37 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. In fact — Joe Vertino, do you know him?

**0:42:42 Debra Schwartz:** No.

**0:42:42 Jesse Barish:** He was Marty's producer and website guy in Florida, an old friend of Marty's. And he just sent me a list of 14 songs that Marty had recorded for the upcoming "Marty Balin Sings Jesse Barish" record, which we had been talking about for 30 years. The irony is that he would start this record at this part of his life and then not be here anymore. He recorded a bunch of these tracks, but I don't know what state they're in. I don't know how completed they are, and I don't know if Sue wants to continue on and finish them. All that is up in the air. I think that's the least of her thoughts right now, you know? She's just trying to heal from this loss.

**0:43:41 Debra Schwartz:** Well, when your song "Days of Wonder" was played at the memorial — it's a beautiful song, and I hope we can get a recording to include with your interview. Who knows, maybe you'll even perform it or something else at the end of this interview. Let's just step away for a moment from your friend, although it's always hard to do so, especially since you really must step away from him. But let's go back to the Mill Valley that you lived in while he was here, living in his house on Blithedale and you were on Lovell.

**0:44:18 Jesse Barish:** Well, I was on Marion for a while. I lived in several places in Mill Valley. I lived in a couple of different houses on — do you know Marion Avenue?

**0:44:26 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**0:44:27 Jesse Barish:** I lived in the bottom of Marion Avenue. Then I lived a little further up on Marion Avenue. This is when I was married. My son was going to Old Mill



School. We'd walk down the steps to Old Mill Park and we'd hang out. He was three, four years old, five years old. I ended up getting a divorce and then a few years later getting with this other woman, Helen, and we bought this house on Lovell. I've been lucky to be in so many places when they were at the height of their charisma and their magic: Hollywood in the '60s, the Haight-Ashbury and Berkeley in the '60s, and then Mill Valley and Marin in the '70s. You couldn't have asked for a more special place to be.

**0:45:32 Debra Schwartz:** Well, describe your world then and the places you went to and the people you saw.

**0:45:37 Jesse Barish:** Well, Marty's little house on Blithedale was the focus of a lot of my travels. But I would hang out at Davood's, which was the local coffee place. There was a place above the physical therapy center, I don't know if you remember that place.

**0:46:00 Debra Schwartz:** You mean on the corner of —

**0:46:01 Jesse Barish:** It used to be the Moody Blues and then above that.

**0:46:04 Debra Schwartz:** Right, okay. So if we were to put that in present time, it is still a spa area and it's above the Equator Coffees & Teas, and then Davood's was where D'Angelo's is.

**0:46:15 Jesse Barish:** Right. Back then, my daily ritual was I would take a sauna every morning to wash away all the drugs and alcohol that I was filling myself with. [chuckles]

**0:46:29 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, we hadn't talked about that.

**0:46:32 Jesse Barish:** I think that's what saved my life in a lot of ways, that I would take saunas every day. There was a great sauna place above the bookstore — whatever it is now — the coffee shop in La Ginestra. I'd take saunas and then just go have a latte at Davood's and just hang out, and then I'd just go to Marty's house to work on songs. I had a band. I put a band together. I had a band for several years. Audie was the keyboard player and Jack O'Hara was the original guitar player. So basically, I had Eggs Over Easy as my band. You know Eggs Over Easy, right?

**0:47:26 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, that was with Austin de Lone, too.

**0:47:29 Jesse Barish:** Right. So Austin de Lone and Jack O'Hara were like the foundation of Eggs Over Easy. When I started my band, both those guys were in it, and so I had an amazing band, and I had a great shot. Unfortunately, it didn't take me to the heights of where I dreamed I could go, but it was such a great time to be in Mill Valley in those days. I couldn't have imagined anything more magical than living in that little town and hanging out and walking those streets of Mill Valley, which I did religiously.

**0:48:16 Debra Schwartz:** You talked about drugs and alcohol. And at that time in the '70s, and up into the '80s, there was a lot of drugs in Mill Valley.

**0:48:27 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, there were a lot of drugs. People got into freebasing, which I never did. My downfall happened to be Quaaludes. For some crazy reason, I got into those really heavy, and just messed up my life in a lot of ways. Some people bottomed out on alcohol or freebase or coke or —

**0:48:49 Debra Schwartz:** There was coke everywhere in Mill Valley. Do you remember? It was just snowing in this town in the late '70s and early '80s, as I recall.

**0:48:58 Jesse Barish:** Oh yeah. Well, when I left Mill Valley in 1980, it was just the beginning of the freebase thing. So I never really got into that. I was never into cocaine that much. I did my share of it, believe me, but it wasn't my drug of choice. Now, I haven't touched anything for, oh God, 20 years. I don't drink. I don't smoke pot. I just don't do anything. I played that one out.

**0:49:34 Debra Schwartz:** And how about the rock 'n' roll lifestyle? I mean, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll?

**0:49:41 Jesse Barish:** What about it?

**0:49:44 Debra Schwartz:** Well, what about it?

**0:49:45 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. [chuckles] Well, it was every boy's dream, wasn't it? I mean, to be able to play music — I still consider, "Oh my God, I get to do this." I mean, every day still, I get up and the first thing I do every day is I sing for an hour. I play guitar. I work on old songs. I wrote a new song today. They just come out. I don't really try to write them. I just have this thing that I can do. I consider somebody who can fix a car — that's way more impressive to me in a way than writing songs. Writing songs, I guess, to the guy who can fix a car — that's just in his nature to be able to do that, or a dentist who can do the things that they do is amazing. Writing songs to me is just second nature. It's just something that I now do, and I do that every day. I sing for an hour. I work on songs and I never take it for granted. I always think, "Wow, I am really lucky."

**0:51:05 Debra Schwartz:** But you know, there were a lot of casualties back in the '70s and '80s, I recall. There're a few musicians, I won't say names, that I personally have known and who, you know, they fell down a well of drug and alcohol abuse.

**0:51:20 Jesse Barish:** Yeah.

**0:51:21 Debra Schwartz:** And beautifully —

**0:51:21 Jesse Barish:** You can make a list of people that lived in Mill Valley that — and even the great ones, the Hendrixes and the Jim Morrisons and the Janis Joplins, they just succumbed to — they had access to unlimited amounts of drugs and alcohol.

**0:51:45 Debra Schwartz:** Do you think their fame was the undoing of them? Or do you think they were just the ones of notoriety that succumbed to the temptations that —

**0:51:54 Jesse Barish:** I think people that became really famous like Janis and Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, just to name a few—I think they were basically very solitary, lonely people, and the fame and fortune just accentuated their isolation. Janis, after singing for thousands of people, would always go back to her hotel room alone. I think that was an interesting conundrum for people that became famous.

**0:52:36 Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever find that your degree of fame affected your life one way or another?

**0:52:42 Jesse Barish:** Not really, 'cause I never was famous-famous, you know? It never was like I couldn't walk down the street. Even now, if I tell people I wrote "Count on Me," half of the people don't know what I'm talking about. They think I wrote "Down on Me" by Janis. [chuckles] But if I say I wrote "Hearts" they say, "Oh, you mean that band with the two sisters?" No. "Hearts." [chuckles] You know they think I'd said Heart, the band.

**0:53:10 Debra Schwartz:** Right, exactly.

**0:53:13 Jesse Barish:** So I've never had that problem with being too famous, really. That's, I guess, one of the perks of being a songwriter. You're in the background and you don't have to deal with that kind of thing.

**0:53:25 Debra Schwartz:** And as far as your time living in Mill Valley during that wild drug-infused time, what finally possessed you to stop, not have to take saunas, but actually decide that this is not the lifestyle for me?

**0:53:44 Jesse Barish:** It took me a long time to come to that conclusion. I mean, I smoked pot for years, and I didn't really enjoy it that much after a while. I just did it in a habitual way. It just became a way to stay numb, and I didn't like that feeling anymore. I tried to stop for many years. By this time, I had worked through my Quaalude thing. I wasn't really drinking that much. I would drink sometimes, sometimes when I'd go out at night, but I wasn't an alcoholic by any stretch of the imagination. But I did struggle with pot for a long time. When you keep doing something that's not making you feel really good and you keep doing it, it's like, "Well, why am I doing this?" You know?

**0:54:40:** So I finally stopped smoking pot about 20 years ago. I had stopped many times, but I would always start again thinking I could control it. I mean, some people — look, there's people that drink alcohol and they're social drinkers. They can have a glass of wine at night, a martini, a couple of martinis, and they're fine. They're not alcoholics. And then there's the alcoholic who has a negative connection to alcohol. I had the same thing with marijuana. I had an addictive connection with it. It wasn't like I could smoke a

little at night and I was okay. It was an addiction, you know? And people say, “Oh, it’s not really addicting.” It is addicting. Trust me.

**0:55:30 Debra Schwartz:** I remember my grandfather who lived in Chicago way back in the ’20s and ’30s and ’40s, and he used to say that the jazz musicians did a lot of coke and pot, marijuana, way back when.

**0:55:44 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, that was the jazz musician drug of choice. And then it became heroin in the ’50s. All those great players all went through a heroin — Coltrane and Miles Davis, all went through a heroin period.

**0:56:01 Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever lose any friends during the ’70s with those drug-infused years here in Mill Valley? Were there people where you just said, “That’s it. I can’t be with them anymore.”

**0:56:13 Jesse Barish:** I was one of those people.

**0:56:17 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. [chuckles]

**0:56:17 Jesse Barish:** A bunch of people said that about me. But yeah, there were a lot of casualties along the way. There were, I can’t remember names, and you probably don’t wanna hear them.

**0:56:29 Debra Schwartz:** We can say names if they’re dead, I guess. I mean, when we sat down finally to have just a friendly conversation, it became clear that we had some friends in common.

**0:56:40 Jesse Barish:** Right.

**0:56:41 Debra Schwartz:** Characters like Don Lewis.

**0:56:43 Jesse Barish:** There were a lot of people. I’ve lost lots of people along on this journey, on my 73 years on this planet. A lot of people have gone not just from drugs, but from just sickness and disease and cancer and heart attacks. But yeah, there’ve been many, many drug overdoses of people, especially in those days in Mill Valley. It was such a wild, wild time with all the dealers and The Trident and you know involved.

**0:57:29 Debra Schwartz:** In your pre-interview chat, you described the smuggler scene here. How did you describe where they lived?

**0:57:38 Jesse Barish:** The houses, the Maseratis, the oriental rugs and the gold Buddhas. [laughs]

**0:57:46 Debra Schwartz:** It’s so true. [laughs]

**0:57:49 Jesse Barish:** There were a whole group of those people. I was kind of the token songwriter guy. It was kind of like, “Hey, sing a song, Jesse. Here’s some Thai sticks.” [laughs]

**0:58:04 Debra Schwartz:** Will perform for pot.

**0:58:07 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, exactly. I was like the trained songwriter on a chain. “Here. [chuckles] Here’s some Thai sticks. Sing.” [laughs] “Yes, master. Whatever you want.”

**0:58:20 Debra Schwartz:** When you sing the song “Count On Me” — I didn’t ask you, but now that I have the opportunity — that’s a lovely song. Maybe you’d sing a few stanzas of it. How did that song come to be? Is it a story behind that song?

**0:58:39 Jesse Barish:** You know, I was living up on Marion Avenue. My 11-year marriage had tanked, and my wife moved out and left me with my son to take care of, which was difficult ’cause I was trying to put this band together, and a career was sort of happening. And “Count On Me” just — I just wrote it. It was kind of like a goodbye song to my wife in a way. “I’ll always be there for you. We’ll always be friends.” And we still are. That’s how true love and real love should be. You shouldn’t hate your partner if they don’t wanna be with you anymore. Just let ’em go. “Hey, go.” [chuckles] You know what I mean? But a lot of people use their kids as weapons and stay bitter for the rest of their lives about other people. I wrote “Count On Me” kind of to my ex-wife-to-be, I guess.

**0:59:57:** And I knew it was like a special song. I was doing a demo and I went in the studio the next day and we recorded it live and Marty was singing on it. It was one of the songs that got me the deal with RCA. I did a little three-song demo and that was the song, one of the songs of the three, that got me the deal. It was the song that me and the band always thought was our hit. My version still is very magical. It just had a magic about it. I had just written it the night before, went in the studio and we recorded it. It just had a vibe. Maybe it wasn’t as polished and as sonically correct as the Starship’s version, but my version had something really unique about it. It was my song, I wrote it, and it meant something to me personally.

**1:01:00 Debra Schwartz:** How about “Hearts?” What’s the story behind that song?

**1:01:05 Jesse Barish:** “Hearts?” I was living in Mill Valley in the late ’70s and it was at the height of my Quaalude addiction. I had a really bad Quaalude habit, and my girlfriend at the time — we were living in that house on Lovell that you saw — she said, “You need to clean up your act. You need to go to L.A. and clean up your act, ’cause I can’t deal with you anymore.” I was really quite a mess at the time. And so I went to a L.A. I drove to L.A. and stayed with my mom. This is how screwed up I was. I was going to clean up my act, but I took a hundred Quaaludes with me. A typical Marin County musician, right? [chuckles]

**1:02:08:** Anyway, I ended up in L.A. and I guess I hit one of many bottoms that I hit in my life. I was at my mom's and I remember waking up in the middle of a night. I flushed all the Quaaludes down the toilet. I had really long hair like I have now and I cut it all off by myself in the middle of the night. I gave myself like the worst haircut you could ever imagine. [chuckles] And I stayed in L.A. for another month. I was visiting a friend before I went back to Mill Valley with my new look, 'cause people knew me as the long-haired guy, right?

**1:02:50 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:02:50 Jesse Barish:** Now, I was gonna come back with this like, I don't know — it was like a bad Mia Farrow-do or something. [laughs]

**1:03:02 Debra Schwartz:** And you have a long narrow face.

**1:03:04 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. And people knew me as this — that's the look I had cultivated. I was kinda like the John Cipollina look-alike. [chuckles]

**1:03:16 Debra Schwartz:** Tall, thin, long hair.

**1:03:17 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. Tall, thin, long-haired guy. So I stayed in L.A. another three or four weeks before I went up. I was really depressed 'cause I'm coming off all these Quaaludes that I had been taking and I was staying at my mom's in the Valley. And I was visiting an old friend of mine, who I had played with many years before, a drummer who had passed away a few years later, whose name was Kevin Kelley. He actually was in The Byrds and his cousin was Chris Hillman. He was in the "Sweetheart of the Rodeo" version of The Byrds, which was a seminal album in folk rock, you know, what started the whole Eagles kind of vibe. Country rock was like the first of that kind of album. I was visiting him and I remember, for some reason, I had a little parking stub from a parking lot, and I started writing, "Is everything alright? I just called to say —" I started writing "Hearts," and I never really write the lyrics first. I always write the music first. I still have that piece of — I found it years later and I framed it and I have it on my wall. I went back to my mom's house that night with the little fragment of a lyric and I wrote "Hearts."

**1:04:46 Debra Schwartz:** Which Marty Balin put out onto the airwaves.

**1:04:50 Jesse Barish:** Right. That was his first big hit of his solo career, his first big hit on the EMI album, Marty Balin. When I wrote "Count On Me," I thought it was really commercial. I thought it could be hit song. When I wrote "Hearts," I didn't necessarily think it was a hit, but I thought it was really unique, something about the way the melody played off the chords. And I played it. I can remember being excited to play it for Marty, and he went, "I don't know, Jess. I don't know if that's one of your better songs." [chuckles] You were wrong, Marty. [chuckles] But anyway, see, not everybody knows everything, right?

**1:05:36 Debra Schwartz:** No, it's hard to know everything, but you can pretend you do.

**1:05:41 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, but I gave him the song, and then he ended up recording it and they did a magical version of it. It became one of his signature songs, and people to this day love that song, you know?

**1:05:52 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. It's kind of one of those iconic songs. When we were talking before, you talked about Davood's being your office.

**1:06:01 Jesse Barish:** Davood's, yes.

**1:06:02 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, the restaurant, Davood's, which was really quite a place, you could get a very good cup of coffee and excellent croissant there, and great Mediterranean food.

**1:06:13 Jesse Barish:** They had like an amazing seafood salad.

**1:06:16 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**1:06:17 Jesse Barish:** With crab or shrimp.

**1:06:19 Debra Schwartz:** Was that your office, Jesse?

**1:06:21 Jesse Barish:** What's that?

**1:06:22 Debra Schwartz:** Was that really your office?

**1:06:23 Jesse Barish:** Yes, it was my office. That was where I spent a lot of time. I'd just go there in the morning. I'd come back smoking Shermans and drinking coffee. That's when you could smoke in restaurants, you know?

**1:06:36 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm. Right. Who would have been in there with you in the restaurant? Who would have been sitting next to you?

**1:06:44 Jesse Barish:** Some of those smugglers. [laughs]

**1:06:46 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. Can we say names or not?

**1:06:49 Jesse Barish:** No, we better not. [laughs] I'll draw the line right there. No, there would be carpenters from David Crosby's house; there would be other musicians; there'd be the waitresses that we all had big crushes on; there'd be Davood, running around like a lunatic doing whatever Davood did, keeping the place in order. I don't know, you know?

**1:07:18 Debra Schwartz:** Do you remember how early the town shut down back then?

**1:07:23 Jesse Barish:** Do I remember what?

**1:07:24 Debra Schwartz:** How early things became quiet in the evening.

**1:07:28 Jesse Barish:** Oh my God, it was so depressing, except for like — for me, I would go from the Old Mill to Sweetwater. That was my route. I wasn't really a 2:00 A.M. club guy or a Brothers guy. I stayed in town at night and drank at Sweetwater, and then stumbled down to the Old Mill, then stumbled back to Sweetwater, and then somehow stumbled home. [chuckles] Oh, and now that I think about it, how did I survive? [laughs]

**1:08:01 Debra Schwartz:** Jesse, if you and I were walking together back in time and into Davood's restaurant, and you sat there at the counter — remember they had the counter?

**1:08:11 Jesse Barish:** They had a counter. I would usually sit at a table off to the right. I'd grab a table and order one of their famous lattes in the mug.

**1:08:21 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm, big mug.

**1:08:22 Jesse Barish:** Big mug of a coffee latte, and I'd smoke a few cigarettes and wait to see who would come in.

**1:08:33 Debra Schwartz:** So you and I are walking in. We're friends now, and I was there at that time, too. I very likely saw you in Davood's, 'cause it was a favorite place of mine as well. We walked in there and there you're sitting, your young self, with either the Mia Farrow haircut or the long-haired look you had before, and you saddle up right next to your younger self and you decide to tell him a thing or two. What would you say?

**1:08:58 Jesse Barish:** I would say, "Enjoy the ride, dude. It don't last forever." [laughs]

**1:09:04 Debra Schwartz:** And what would your young self say to you, your old self?

**1:09:07 Jesse Barish:** I'd say, "Hey, hey old man. What are you talking about?" [laughs] No, I would say to my young self, "Hey, enjoy the ride. Be here now. Don't worry. Be happy." All the platitudes we grew up with, they really mean something, you know? But back then, I lived in my head and in a world of drugged-out bliss. [laughs] I was loaded all the time on something, like smoking weed or Quaaludes or coffee or booze. I mean, I was constantly medicating myself which is interesting, 'cause now I've been living the sober life for — I don't know if that's what you wanna call it — but for the last 20 or so years. And I'm around people that smoke and I have no desire to get high anymore.



**1:10:11 Debra Schwartz:** Well, you look like the healthiest guy on the planet. Clear eyes —

**1:10:13 Jesse Barish:** I feel healthy. Amazing that I've done the things that I've done to myself drug-wise, the lifestyle choices, and that I still look like a reasonable facsimile of that younger guy.

**1:10:30 Debra Schwartz:** So before we end this interview, let's just remember some of the people of the town of that time. When you were walking around town in '79 there would have been a few people of note that you would see again and again. Can you remember some of the people you were with?

**1:10:47 Jesse Barish:** Well, let's see. There was Charlie Deal, the toilet seat guitar maker. He was always like the town character, sweetest guy you'd ever meet. There were the musicians like Austin de Lone and Jack O'Hara, Johnny DeCaro who later became Marty's guitar player, who I introduced to Marty, and who was in my band. Dougie Killmer, who passed away, my bass player. There was Mickey from The Unknown Museum. Do you remember him?

**1:11:20 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm, and the museum.

**1:11:22 Jesse Barish:** And the what?

**1:11:23 Debra Schwartz:** And the museum.

**1:11:24 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, Mickey, the Unknown Museum guy.

**1:11:28 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm, yep. Wonderful museum.

**1:11:30 Jesse Barish:** Wonderful, and he was a great character.

**1:11:33 Debra Schwartz:** He's still around, not dead yet.

**1:11:36 Jesse Barish:** He is still around. He's in San Rafael. I read some articles about him. He was one of the local characters. David Peterson — with his vintage cars and all of his girlfriends — he was running around in those days. Joel Kornoelje, one of the carpenters who actually was the house sitter up at Crosby's, lived up there.

**1:12:08 Debra Schwartz:** Greenwood Way.

**1:12:10 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. He was kinda like the caretaker, when Crosby was out of town or on the road, of that whole crew of carpenters. I remember a character named Nino who used to play backgammon in the front window of Davood's. [chuckles] You know, characters, all characters.

**1:12:35 Debra Schwartz:** And no women, no? I haven't heard a woman's name mentioned yet.

**1:12:38 Jesse Barish:** Well, you know, there were plenty of them. [laughs]

**1:12:41 Jesse Barish:** I was married for a lot of that time, so I wasn't really available to date. And I would never stay single for long back then. I would find the next person that was gonna share in my neurotic vision, you know? [chuckles] But they were all the people that you knew at Davood's, the women, the waitresses, Julie and Cathy. I don't remember their last names.

**1:13:19 Debra Schwartz:** You mean, we're talking about the people I know, Julie Barriol and Cathy Civile.

**1:13:23 Jesse Barish:** Yeah.

**1:13:24 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:13:24 Jesse Barish:** And Marty's — the woman that he was with at the time, Trish, you met her at the memorial.

**1:13:33 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:13:33 Jesse Barish:** That was who Marty was with when I met him. I mean, there weren't the influx of new women like there are in L.A. In Venice and Santa Monica, every day I go out, there's a whole new crop of people: men, women. In Mill Valley in the '70s, it was kind of static. There weren't that many new people showing up.

**1:14:04 Debra Schwartz:** I guess it was early recycling, always an efficient community. [chuckles]

**1:14:14 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, in the '70s not that many new people showed up, men or women. It was kind of like a little tightly-knit crew of people. There were women musicians. There was a woman named Tucky. There was Anna Rizzo. There was Rahnie Raines. I don't know if you know those people.

**1:14:39 Debra Schwartz:** Uh-uh. No.

**1:14:39 Jesse Barish:** There was Jules Broussard who played at the Sweetwater every Sunday afternoon. It was a whole different thing. It wasn't like you could walk down the streets in Mill Valley and see new people. You would see the same people.

**1:15:00 Debra Schwartz:** It sounds like there was a pretty strong community.

**1:15:02 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. It was a strong community, and there wasn't that many transitory people. It was like you'd see the people that lived in Mill Valley.

**1:15:16 Debra Schwartz:** When you came here for Marty's memorial, you seemed a little shell-shocked by the Mill Valley that you came back to.

**1:15:27 Jesse Barish:** Well yeah, it was pretty shocking alright. I mean, the last time I was in Mill Valley was maybe 20 years ago at another memorial for my bass player, Doug Killmer, who passed away, and they had his memorial at the original Sweetwater. Back then it was starting to change, but not as much and as drastically as it felt to me this time, you know. I mean this time, every place that I remembered was gone. Back when I came back here for Doug Killmer's memorial, Village Music was still there, and John was there, and that was kind of a familiar anchor for me. But this time everything was changed. The only thing that was the same was the Mill Valley Market and the movie theater. But everything — Sonapa Farms, the little antique shop next to the movie theater, and Accurate TV on the corner right across from Village Music — all the things that made it a quaint little funky town were gone, and now it was all like it was someone's version of what they thought a cute little town should look like.

**1:17:00 Debra Schwartz:** Do you think you'll come back and visit?

**1:17:01 Jesse Barish:** Oh, I'm sure in my life — I never say never. I mean it's a beautiful area, but I have too many ghosts there, too many memories that make me sad in a way. If you're there, and you live there like you and Willie have been there, then you see it change gradually. But for me, it was all the people in those moments, they're all gone. There's no Davood's. There's no physical therapy center. There's no Golden Valley Market. All the touchstones for me were gone. So made me feel kind of blue to be honest with you.

**1:17:49 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I do hope that you will give Mill Valley another chance.

**1:17:51 Jesse Barish:** I will. I love Mill Valley. I loved it then and there's something that will always remain magical about it. It's a beautiful place. It's just the Mill Valley that I knew, the people — I have to let go of that, you know, and accept it for what it is. I mean, Marty had that ability. He could go to Mill Valley. Even now, he would still love it. He had that ability to go with the changes and accept the inevitable transitory nature of life. For some reason, I held on. You know Marty didn't hang out that much in town. I don't think I ever saw Marty in Sweetwater or the Old Mill or Davood's. Marty stayed pretty much to himself in that little house on Blithedale and he'd take walks with John, his dog. But he wasn't a townie. You know what I mean?

**1:18:52 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:18:53 Jesse Barish:** I was a townie. I was on the streets of Mill Valley looking for whatever I was looking for in those days.

**1:19:01 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. [chuckles]

**1:19:01 Jesse Barish:** Marty had already found what he wanted and was trying to get away from it. He was trying to stay still. He had created a beautiful little space there on Blithedale. And people came to him.

**1:19:15 Debra Schwartz:** Right. That's how he described it in his interview. People would show up.

**1:19:19 Jesse Barish:** It was just like I said, you didn't know who was gonna show up there. His house was like a magnet. So it was always an adventure going over there.

**1:19:28 Debra Schwartz:** Well, we have a Throckmorton Theater and we have the Sweetwater in the new location. I can only hope that you will come and share your music with the people that live here now because I know that they would appreciate that.

**1:19:50 Jesse Barish:** Well, you know, I leave myself open to whatever this life — wherever it takes me. I loved Mill Valley then, and the beauty of that area will never be changed. Geographically, you can't imagine a more beautiful spot, you know?

**1:20:14 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:20:15 Jesse Barish:** The trees, the ambience of Mt. Tamalpais — there's a magic there — the Bay Area, the city. It's special. I'm just in another place right now, and so I just accept everything for where it is and what it is now.

**1:20:40 Debra Schwartz:** I have one final question for you before concluding this interview and hoping that you'll conclude with a song, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about? Have we missed anything in this interview?

**1:20:54 Jesse Barish:** Let's see here. I think we've covered everything except the state of my teeth.

**1:21:03 Debra Schwartz:** The state of your what?

**1:21:04 Jesse Barish:** My teeth. [laughs]

**1:21:07 Debra Schwartz:** You have a lovely smile. They look good.

**1:21:10 Jesse Barish:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I have a lot of money invested in those. [laughs] I think we have covered everything other than the fact that I take extremely good care of myself now for someone who has abused themselves religiously. Now I've been a raw foodist for over 20 years. I don't eat any animals. I love the little critters and refuse to eat them. And I'm just trying to be here as long as I can, 'cause I'm still having fun. [chuckles]

**1:21:45 Debra Schwartz:** Jesse, will you sing a song for us?

**1:21:47 Jesse Barish:** Okay, hold on. Let me move myself over to a place where I can do this, okay?

**1:21:54 Debra Schwartz:** Okay.

**1:21:54 Jesse Barish:** Hold on one second.

**1:22:10 Jesse Barish:** How about, Debra, if I sing a little bit of “Count on Me” for you?

**1:22:15 Debra Schwartz:** That would be wonderful.

**1:22:17 Jesse Barish:** That would be the song that the song that Starship made a hit out of in 1978 and was a pivotal seminal song for me. So here it goes. I’m gonna sit here and I’ll play it for you and I hope you can hear it, okay?

**1:22:31 Debra Schwartz:** Okay.

**1:22:33 Debra Schwartz:** Here it comes. Okay.

[Jesse begins to sing and play the guitar.]

**1:22:47 Jesse Barish:** “Precious love, I’ll give to you, blue as the sky, deep in the eyes of a love so true. Beautiful face, you make me feel, light on the stairs, lost in the air of a love so real. And you can count on me. You can count on my love, darling. You can count on me, woman. You can count on my love, to see you through. Emerald eyes and China perfume, caught on the wheel, lost in the feel of a love so true. Ruby lips, well you make my song, into the night saved by the light, of a love so strong. You can count on me. You can count on my love, darling. You can count on me, woman. You can count on my love, to see you through. You can count on me, girl. Count on my love. Count on my love. Precious love, I’ll give to you, blue as the sky, deep in the eyes of a love so true. You can count on me. Count on my love. You can count on me. Count on me.

**1:25:29:** How was that?

**1:25:29 Debra Schwartz:** So beautiful.

**1:25:30 Jesse Barish:** Could you hear it okay?

**1:25:32 Debra Schwartz:** Not perfectly, but good enough.

**1:25:35 Jesse Barish:** Okay.

**1:25:36 Debra Schwartz:** Just beautiful. And I have to agree with you. There is something about your rendition. Just beautiful.

**1:25:43 Jesse Barish:** Thank you, thank you thank you. Well, you know it's funny — hold on. You know my sister has two sons, right? One of the sons lost his wife two weeks ago. The other son, Matt, he's a publicist. He works for comedians, he's pretty successful. Anyway, he was in New York several years ago, having dinner with a woman that he had met in New York. He was on business and she was on business. She was also living in L.A. and they were on a date. My nephew is probably — he's the same age as my son — he's about 50 and this girl was in her 30s. Back then he was probably in his mid-40s and she was in her late 20s. They were having dinner, and she always said the date wasn't going very well. And then out of nowhere, she said to him, "You know, my favorite song of all time is 'Count On Me.'" And my nephew said "My uncle wrote that." [chuckles] And she said the date went from a C- to an A+. They got married, and a few years ago, they asked me to sing that song at their wedding, which I did. I sang it kind of the way I sang it just now. That's pretty interesting, right?

**1:27:13 Debra Schwartz:** That's about as cool as cool can be for a song —

**1:27:17 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, I mean this is a woman who didn't even grow up in that era. And every time I see her, even last time at the funeral of her sister-in-law, she said, "You know, I was obsessed with that song. I don't know why. I was just obsessed with it, and when I went out with Matt, the date wasn't going good and I just said, 'You know, my — ' and he goes, 'My uncle wrote that.'" [chuckles]

**1:27:43 Debra Schwartz:** But that's the thing, isn't it, about music. It can be magic. It can change your life. It can get you through difficult times. It can inspire you.

**1:27:53 Jesse Barish:** The tale I just told you — I don't know how long I've been talking, but I've pretty much covered my life, you know, from Brooklyn to the whole deal, right?

**1:28:06 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**1:28:07 Jesse Barish:** But music has been the only thing I could ever really count on. I mean yeah, I could count on my mom. But that's what Jewish mothers are there for. You could always count on your mom. You could commit murder and your mom would forgive you and would say, "Oh he was having a bad day." [chuckles]

**1:28:28 Debra Schwartz:** It is beautiful that you have this relationship with music and that it affects so many people on so many levels, and that it also, you know, helped seal the deal with your nephew and his wife.

**1:28:41 Jesse Barish:** Yeah, and they're married and they have a wonderful life together. And so, through it all, through all the relationships and broken hearts and sadness and stuff that I've been through with women —and just disappointments in life

and dreams that didn't come true, and all of that — I could always count on music. I can always sit down with a guitar and sing. I can always write one more song even if it sounds like a bunch of my other songs, I don't care. And I just think, "Wow! I'm luckier than a Sultan in Arabia."

**1:29:26 Debra Schwartz:** As my father, my Jewish father, would say, "It's a mitzvah."

**1:29:32 Jesse Barish:** One of my dearest friends is a Rabbi here in L.A. He's also a musician and a songwriter, and he has worked at record companies; and now he's a Rabbi, Rabbi Jay. And he called me a few days ago and said, "You know, I was driving with my son — " He has a son, Asher, who's in his 20s, and is an amazing musician. They said they heard "Hearts" on the radio and they were just blown away. They didn't remember how beautiful it was. And he's taking the melody of "Hearts" and making it into a Jewish prayer for the people that were killed in Pittsburgh.

**1:30:16 Debra Schwartz:** Wow.

**1:30:16 Jesse Barish:** They took that melody, and he put — [starts singing in Hebrew] I don't know; I don't speak Hebrew. And they were gonna sing it at the service with a choir. Wow! You know?

**1:30:33 Debra Schwartz:** Sometimes a beautiful song comes out of a person's heart or their thoughts and then it takes on a life of its own, and obviously that's happened. They're like your children, I suppose.

**1:30:46 Jesse Barish:** Yeah. Like I said, I've written lots and lots of songs and only a couple of them have become hits. It's not easy to do that. It's not easy to launch a song out into the atmosphere and have it touch so many people. I have a lot of friends who are really good songwriters, but they haven't had that lucky moment, you know?

**1:31:11 Debra Schwartz:** Well, don't stop writing, Jesse. The song for Marty, that seems like a more complicated song. I don't know if you can sing it now or not but I'll certainly like to include that with this interview.

**1:31:28 Jesse Barish:** Include the version that I gave you. If you need me, I could send you an MP3 of it or something.

**1:31:33 Debra Schwartz:** We'll do that.

**1:31:35 Jesse Barish:** It's just a little harder for me to play that one right now.

**1:31:40 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. Well Jesse, I want to thank you for sharing your life story with us. It was interesting and beautiful and you certainly have caught the waves of so many different scenes, so many different times.

**1:31:57 Jesse Barish:** Hey, thank you for asking me those cool questions. You were a great interviewer. I mean, you were really curious about that journey that I've been on, from Brownsville to the Catskills, the whole journey through all those places. Really, it was kind of emotional going through that again.

**1:32:24 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, you've had a remarkable life.

**1:32:29 Jesse Barish:** Who do I thank? Thank the universe, *hashem*, whoever is up there pulling the strings, I don't know.

**1:32:36 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I thank you for sharing your story and for making a time in Mill Valley's past alive again, and I do hope that we'll see you.

**1:32:47 Jesse Barish:** You will. I had a great time, and hanging out with you and Willie was the high point. I loved my little room and whatever changes I went through, about Mill Valley not being the same as I remember it. It's all part of the acceptance of life. It's how it is. You can't hold on to the past and change is just inevitable.

**1:33:14 Debra Schwartz:** Well, if you decide to come back, you can count on us. [chuckles]

**1:33:19 Jesse Barish:** Can I get that in writing?

**1:33:21 Debra Schwartz:** You've got it, brother. Okay, well this concludes the interview on behalf of the Mill Valley Public Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society. I thank you so much for this time. And keep on playing.

**1:33:34 Jesse Barish:** Thank you, Debra. Give my love to Willie, and we'll catch up with you somewhere along the trail.

**1:33:43 Debra Schwartz:** Somewhere along the trail. We'll see where the day and the trail leads us.

**1:33:47 Jesse Barish:** I love it.