

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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Jacquie Phelan

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2019**

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In this oral history, road racer and mountain bike pioneer Jacquie Phelan recounts her life on two wheels. Born in San Francisco in 1955, Jacquie grew up in Rhode Island, Kansas, and finally Los Angeles, where she first developed her love of bicycles and her loathing of cars. Jacquie attended college at Middlebury in Vermont, and then moved to the Bay Area in the late 1970s, settling in San Francisco. She recounts her introduction to the Marin County cycling community on the occasion of the Appetite Seminar ride in 1980, and reminisces about the many races she won over the years, as well as a few of her legendary provocations. She exposes the sexism and misogyny of bike culture, which prompted her to found the Women's Mountain Bike & Tea Society (WOMBATS). Finally, Jacquie discusses her more than 35-year-long relationship with her husband Charlie Cunningham, and her care of him since a tragic accident left him with a life-changing brain injury.

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Oral History of Jacquie Phelan
March 29, 2019

Editor's note: The following transcript is based on a recorded interview. It has been reviewed by Jacquie Phelan, who made corrections and clarifications to the original.

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is March 29th, 2019, and my name is Debra Schwartz. I'm sitting here in the Mill Valley Library sound room, on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Public Library, with the most amazing woman, Jackie Phelan, co-pioneer, bike champion, and founder of Women's Mountain Bike And Tea Society, also known as WOMBATS. Jackie, thank you so much for taking the time to come sit with me in the rubber room here. [chuckles]

0:00:32 Jacquie Phelan: Thank you.

0:00:33 Debra Schwartz: And sharing your story. You're somewhat of a rarity to me, because I've interviewed a lot of the founders of mountain biking, almost all men, in fact, 99 percent men, and their stories are wonderful, and the birth of mountain biking on Mt. Tamalpais is remarkable, but I've yearned to hear more of the women's perspective, so I'm thrilled to have you here in the library. Thanks so much.

0:01:06 Jacquie Phelan: Thank you. Happy to unload. [chuckles]

0:01:07 Debra Schwartz: Jacquie, let's start with a little bit about your family, about your personal history, so we can get a little context as to what brought you here to Marin and where you were in those early years of mountain biking. Tell me, were you born and raised in Marin?

0:01:27 Jacquie Phelan: No, I wasn't. I was born in San Francisco in 1955, and my parents moved me, I was the oldest of their clan, to Rhode Island when I was six months old. So, I spent five years there, then five years in Topeka, Kansas, and then about five years in Los Angeles before going to college in Vermont. But I knew I wanted to get back to San Francisco because of all the great stuff that was going on in San Francisco and the fact that my parents really had wanted to settle and raise the family there, but they couldn't wedge themselves into the psychoanalytic community up here, so they went to LA where there's more of a growth market for neurotic people. [chuckles]

0:02:10: So I lived, not exactly where dad wanted us to be, and I yearned to get to the Bay Area, which is legendary for its embrace of people that would be called misfits elsewhere. And it's a very beautiful place with an amazing, rich, artistic culture. I'm a maven of that kind of lively community, world. I'm trying to figure out how to put it into words. Because I did not succeed in the "become a doctor" thing that I was supposedly gonna do from the age of eight. It just didn't work out 'cause essentially I'm not a scientist. Plan B was to hang out in the Bay Area and figure out what I wanna do with my life. And I knew when I was crossing the Bay Bridge from a two-day drive from the East Coast that, "I'm gonna make my fortune here," a real nice cliché, as we were going over.

0:03:26 Debra Schwartz: You felt possibility.

0:03:28 Jacquie Phelan: I knew it. I was writing my own fantastic history. I just didn't know what it was gonna be at all. No idea.

0:03:36 Debra Schwartz: Let's go back a little to understand where your family came from, and include names if you can.

0:03:48 Jacquie Phelan: Sure.

0:03:49 Debra Schwartz: Your grandparents, have your family been in this country for a while?

0:03:53 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, I think that most of the Phelans were at least third-generation Irish-Americans. And my mom's side are Canadian and Irish and English. My mom is Doreen Stevenson Phelan, and my dad is John Robert Phelan. He was actually born in Ross, but I didn't find that out until years after living in Marin County, that he was actually born at the Ross Hospital. And that might sound a little odd, but I don't have strong family ties, and I definitely did not know my grandparents. My parents had nearly nothing to do with their parents, and so the six Phelan kids did not have the loving embrace of grandparents. So whenever my friends tell me they're becoming grandparents, I'm really happy for them because they're gonna get a chance to love these little kids and sort of close the life cycle in a healthy way. But for the Phelans, it was sort of like life as an assembly line, or I don't know what you call it, that thing that goes to the edge, and then you just drop off. What do they call that? [chuckles]

0:05:10 Debra Schwartz: Were your parents eccentric? I mean, were they therapists?

0:05:12 Jacquie Phelan: They were mentally ill.

0:05:13 Debra Schwartz: Oh, your parents were mentally —

0:05:14 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, my dad was a psychoanalyst. Everybody knows that shrinks are crazy. And my mom — I mean, don't roll your eyes.

0:05:23 Debra Schwartz: I'm just laughing. [laughs] I know it's a cliché, it's true.

0:05:27 Jacquie Phelan: My mom was pretty unwell, and these sorts of people seek each other out. Each had parents that were indifferent parenters themselves, and so they didn't know what it was like to be nurturing and loving. And then they had kids and had no idea how to be with them. I'm lucky I got one year of my mom's full attention because right after that she was practically a single mom for five more very rapid succession children, my so-called sisters, number two being Jill Kathleen Phelan, who lives in the East Bay. I haven't spoken to her in 40 years. I don't actually know her anymore.

0:06:04 Debra Schwartz: You're first, and then comes number two and that's your sister that you haven't spoken to —

0:06:08 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah. She's a year younger than me, and then a year younger than her is Llewellyn Phelan, LLEWELLYN, and he essentially lives in a truck in the East Bay somewhere really far away from neighborhoods because he's a registered sex offender. I don't have anything to do with him because he really manifests pretty unwell, and I can't really help him. It's tragic. I think of him a lot, and I think of my sister a lot, but they're not in my life, and so that's a heartbreaking element of my life history. And then the next two brothers are bachelors that live together in Yreka. One's a teetotaling bike mechanic who has a little shop.

0:06:54 Debra Schwartz: And his name?

0:06:55 Jacquie Phelan: His name is Jonathan Phelan. And then our younger brother is Sean, who's been drunk his entire life, ever since my mom took her life. He blames himself for not rescuing her. And then the caboose kid is five years younger than all of us. His name's Gregory, and he's a doctor, he's a neuro-radiologist and lives in Minneapolis. So he's quite successful, and has children, two boys that I'm sure he's got his challenges loving and raising, but at least he's doing it, and he's remained married to his wife and stuff. We're in contact, now and then.

0:07:39 Debra Schwartz: So, of your five other siblings —

0:07:42 Jacquie Phelan: I only have contact really with him. I haven't cut myself off or anything, they just don't reach out and I don't reach out, but I wouldn't mind if they did. Anyway, I guess the topic of family is very intense for me because the bicycle community has become my biological family. I spend the most time with people that are in two-wheel culture, and have bonded with people whose families and siblings all seem to get along, because I want to be around that sort, rather than the folks where you're not allowed to mention one or two names. I found out many, many years later at one of my relative's funerals that my father's father didn't allow his brother's name to be mentioned. My dad's father's name was Frank Ignacius Phelan, and he worked for the phone company. I don't know what his brother's name is, but something set them off. And my sister for sure cut everybody off. In my cousins family, one of those kids did the same self-estrangement, and it's like, "God, is it in the chromosomes?"

0:09:03 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, personality trait inherited.

0:09:05 Jacquie Phelan: Well, certainly the mental illness is inherited, and it's probably on the spectrum of dysfunctionality, emotive dysfunctionality.

0:09:15 Debra Schwartz: So you, in a way, when you came to the Bay, you were a solo rider.

0:09:23 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, I was winging it, and I was not gonna just take any ol' job. I tried applying for dress office jobs, but you have to wear makeup a certain way. And so, my first job ended up being vet technician, because dogs don't care if you don't have makeup. So I just put on my little lab coat, and I could ride my bike there, I could be sweaty, I could be myself.

0:09:44 Debra Schwartz: So, you're how old now? You're living in the Bay.

0:09:48 Jacquie Phelan: I'm 63.

0:09:49 Debra Schwartz: No, I mean when you moved to the Bay.

0:09:50 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, 22. It was 1978, and I was born in '55, so I was 23 or gonna turn 23 right when Harvey Milk was killed and Jim Jones killed 900 people in Guyana. Both of those things were very San Francisco-ish, and I think somebody shot someone over a parking spot in my neighborhood (the Haight), and I just went, "What am I getting into? This is freaky." And looking back, I was probably 11 when the Manson murders happened in Los Angeles. And, of course, Dad was a psychoanalyst. There's probably a fair amount of chewing all about that; I don't remember it at all. I just remember the sheer random savagery and how you really didn't know if somebody was gonna knock on your door and just come in swinging a machete. But that didn't sit at the top of my head, it was deep down inside. And I was riding my bike everywhere because my parents wouldn't let me drive a car.

0:11:04 Debra Schwartz: Where had you settled? Where was the first place that you lived in when you first moved here to the Bay?

0:11:08 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, in the Cole Valley in San Francisco sleeping under a friend's staircase until she finally said, "You gotta get a rental."

0:11:19 Debra Schwartz: You were entirely on your own financially?

0:11:21 Jacquie Phelan: Mm-hmm.

0:11:22 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So you're 23, and you're on your own.

0:11:25 Jacquie Phelan: Right. And I was not gonna pay if I could avoid it. I got the kind of job that didn't pay very well and I could live in a Victorian with five other people for 50 bucks a month, and fill up my days with all activities like seeing movies at the Strand on Market Street for five hours at a time. They were all, like, European art films for some reason. I never understood why I heard snoring, or why it smelled like pee, or that there might be guys making out or whatever. Mostly I was there for the movies, but it was only two dollars, for as long as you wanted to stay in there. Other people used it for being out of the rain, or out of the cold, and I totally did not grasp that, because I was something of a dimwit. I was a nanny, so I made sure to have jobs that gave me a place to live in exchange for my labor as a tender of children. Those jobs would usually last about

a year, sometimes two, and keep me from having to pay rent. The secretary at the animal hospital, Blue Cross Animal Hospital, she didn't use the bicycle that somebody gave her when she was in her 20s — a big, fat lady. So she sold me her Raleigh Sprite for 50 bucks, and that was probably the mid-60s model, very solid Nottingham steel. Anyway, great bike with a wicker basket, just like the kind that Ms. Gulch used in the *Wizard of Oz*. So I had this witchy old-lady machine.

[cackles, imitating the Wicked Witch of the West]

0:13:17 Debra Schwartz: Oh, yeah, that's it.

0:13:22 Jacquie Phelan: And her little dog, too.

[laughter]

0:13:24 Jacquie Phelan: I didn't have a car. Hit rewind! At Taft High School in Woodland Hills, I lived in Tarzana and I rode my bike to school when almost everybody carpooled. I was only three miles away from the high school so I rode my bike and it was a drag, because everybody else got to arrive in a car and stuff. But, of course, it got me strong and more self-sufficient. My mom just refused to drive the kids anywhere. She didn't buy into the chauffeur role because she learned to drive in her 30s. She was terrified of driving, and I inherited the fear of driving and the loathing of cars.

0:14:09: One of my teachers drew a Venn diagram and said, "This is your life, and you're gonna spend this much of your life earning to pay for a car." And that was about a third. "And you're gonna spend this part of your life earning to pay for shelter and your rent." And I raised my hand and said, "Mr. Vadetsky, I'm gonna wanna *sleep* the other third! When am I gonna play scrabble, go hiking, do nothing, if life is all working to pay for our house and transpo, you know?" I did not carry this lesson in my cerebral cortex. It lived further back in the brain and just sat there on a very low flame reminding me that Jacquie Phelan is not going to support a car company, and she's not gonna support a landlord. I'm gonna figure out a work-around, because — oh, and then, not have kids. That's another big thing. He didn't even put them in the Venn diagram, but if you have kids, that's probably the last third of your life.

[laughter]

0:15:20 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, right. Make that bigger. Yes.

0:15:23 Jacquie Phelan: It looks a little bit like a Mercedes symbol.

0:15:25 Debra Schwartz: Well, I can see the pie slice for the time where you just relax and let the pores open is minuscule compared to —

0:15:34 Jacquie Phelan: For an average American, it is really a rat race, and I didn't want to be part of that. And so I've gotten to own my entire prime and decide what to do.

I've misspent it for sure. I feel like racing was probably misspent. And of late, I have a knack for writing, and I'm not really doing that.

0:15:56 Debra Schwartz: Writing, W-R, instead of riding.

0:15:57 Jacquie Phelan: I should say scribbling and pedaling, that way they don't sound the same. Anyway, on a 50 pound or a 60 pound bike, I was riding all over San Francisco, because I went back and I finished college in Vermont, but then I went for seconds at City College because it was free, basically free. I kept trying to get a better grade in chemistry, so I would take chemistry again and physics again, and think about applying to medical school and having to pass the MCAT.

0:16:33 Debra Schwartz: To get into med school.

0:16:34 Jacquie Phelan: Well, yeah. It's a hurdle you have to get over. And I never even got close to taking the MCAT, but I sure wasted a lot of time chasing chemistry and physics down. I had no idea that maybe my brain isn't organized for — I mean, some people, like my younger brother Gregory, just loves geometry. He obviously got into and out of medical school. Different aptitudes.

0:17:00 Debra Schwartz: But your aptitude — it's just not so easy to ride a bike all over San Francisco.

0:17:09 Jacquie Phelan: Well, it's labor.

0:17:10 Debra Schwartz: There are a lot of hills.

0:17:11 Jacquie Phelan: It's labor and also survival tactics. One of my survival tactics was to wear a decoy. I had my first really bad crash riding with my groceries in one hand on my Peugeot PX10 10-speed. The right hand operates the back brake and I was on Irving Street, the light was green, and the driver didn't go, and I was trying to avoid the tram tracks, and then this car, like, "Go, go, go!", and she didn't because she was stalled, so I bumped into her car and fell over and tossed my groceries. I was fine, but the bike was not able to roll, so she drove me home, and I went and got a helmet a couple days later. Big ugly mixing bowl called a Bell Biker. This big white thing with two red straps that make a V. It's made of Lexan, and you can really, you know, you can dry lettuce when you swing it. You can use it for many things.

0:18:13 Debra Schwartz: Multi-use.

0:18:16 Jacquie Phelan: A head rest if you're lying down and tired, you can just prop your head up. Mine had a toy duck affixed to the top in order to get traffic not only to notice, but to point and laugh. So that little duck sailed through traffic above all the hoods of the cars, because, you know, when you're on a bike you're sort of eye level with all these motorists sitting around using fossil fuels to get them everywhere. And I'd rather be

the clown that makes them grin, rather than the bozo that ignored the red light or whatever.

0:18:54 Debra Schwartz: You're kind of known for that duck on the helmet.

0:18:56 Jacquie Phelan: I was, yeah. I raced with it, too. I raced with a hardshell helmet instead of a leather helmet because I felt like I didn't have a five dollar head, so I'm not gonna wear a five dollar helmet, I'm gonna protect my precious asset. I was really quite the snob about my education, because as I moved into bike racing, I came at it from being more an Earth justice type, using a bicycle and not having a kid. I wasn't ready to have a kid because I hadn't found my mate or anything, but I definitely wanted to pollute less, have less of an impact, and also get great legs. On a bike you are doing about six things: mental health, physical health, cardio. Not so great for the lungs, I mean, the lungs are taking in all the pollutants, you're sucking in vast amounts of diesel and bus fumes and car stuff, maybe not so great, but it's probably offset by all the positive things that come with riding a bike. And it does free up a lot of time, because you're not waiting for a bus and then late for wherever you're going.

0:20:08: On a bike, you know exactly how long it takes you to get places, because you can sort of ignore the traffic. If there are 400 cars not able to move, you just go alongside them. I knew how long it takes to get from where I lived when I was going to City College. I lived in about ten places, but for the longest time I lived in Cow Hollow, which is right along the bay. So I would go up through Presidio, and then along Parker, and then through the park, then up 8th to avoid the traffic on 7th, and then wiggle through some really beautiful neighborhoods, cross over, I forgot what the name of that street is, and end up in St. Francis Wood, which put me right by City College. And on a street with my name on it. They've changed it now, because Phelan, he was a senator who drafted the Anti-Chinese Immigration Act, and so they've given, I don't know what, maybe it's Tubman Street now, I have no idea what it is, but for awhile, the address of City College was 50 Phelan. I think they said, "Feeling," so I thought, "Well, okay, you can say 'Feeling, I still say 'Phelan.'"

0:21:26 Debra Schwartz: Before we move on to the mountain biking aspect of your life, I wanted to ask you, what was your degree in? You went to college, you finished school, your undergrad.

0:21:35 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, I finished in record time. Once I stopped being in pre-med, I took French literature. 19th century French lit was my major, and I took it because I switched from pre-med where you don't get any electives to that, because in order to live in a beautiful chateau that somebody had taken apart and reassembled at Middlebury, you had to be a French major.

0:22:02 Debra Schwartz: So you were in Middlebury?

0:22:03 Jacquie Phelan: Mm-hmm.

0:22:03 Debra Schwartz: Okay.

0:22:04 Jacquie Phelan: They had this chateau on campus, and I would do anything to live in that building, so French major, no problem, I'm really good at French. So then I took another language, too, German, so I could sort of justify a language major, and it was great. I made a whole bunch of friends in a neighboring dorm that were all freshmen, so they were a little younger than me. It's 'cause I'm so immature. I did have my friends from when I was a freshman, but the proximity of all these other freshmen made them the people I pretty much stayed in touch with for most of my life, with the exception of my best friend, Margie Norton, who took me to Thanksgiving one year 'cause my parents wouldn't fly me home for holidays.

0:22:53 Debra Schwartz: Did they pay for your education?

0:22:54 Jacquie Phelan: They did, until I switched majors.

0:22:54 Debra Schwartz: That's great. I mean Middlebury's such a good school.

0:22:57 Jacquie Phelan: Right. I got two years of their pay, and then I cobbled together some credits from AP classes so I could finish and graduate. But they stopped paying as soon as I stopped being pre-med. And it was not "they," it was Dad. Mom had a different take on it, but she really didn't make much of an income herself.

0:23:17 Debra Schwartz: So, you graduated what year?

0:23:18 Jacquie Phelan: '77.

0:23:19 Debra Schwartz: Okay. Let's back to San Francisco, and when was it that you ended up coming to Marin County? Or at least starting to ride with the guys, the whole biking gang that would soon become —

0:23:36 Jacquie Phelan: Well, pedaling around San Francisco, a guy sort of confronted me, 20 years older than me. His name was Darryl Skrabak, S-K-R-A-B-A-K, and he's probably about 80 now. He's just a total diehard biker-commuter, and he thought I should consider racing, but also would I kindly come with him to the San Francisco Bike Coalition meetings. He was one of the founders of the SF Bike Coalition. They're like a little political arm attempting to get funding for things like bike paths, grab it from Muni, which got all of the millions for whatever Muni wanted to do. So I go to those meetings, and the first race that he took me to was January 1st, 1981. It was called the San Bruno Hill Climb. Everybody mustered at the docks of Lake Merced and then kind of paraded to wherever the base of the hill is at San Bruno. I don't remember exactly how to get there, Brisbane, maybe. It was like a five-mile warm-up, and this is January 1st.

0:24:51 Debra Schwartz: And you're on a road bike, now.

0:24:52 Jacquie Phelan: On a road bike. They had announced that the Olympics were gonna permit women to race bicycles, and I immediately thought, “Oh, I should be in the Olympics, ’cause I’m so great at biking, now that they’ve lifted the ban on women being on two wheels.” They also lifted the ban on women doing marathons, so they introduced the marathon and the bike race at LA in ’84. So, ’81, I’m signed up to become an official bicycle racer, got my little license, and this Darryl had told me in November, “If you’re gonna go home for Christmas, you should really ride your bike.” So I did. It took about five or six days.

0:25:32 Debra Schwartz: You rode from San Francisco to —

0:25:34 Jacquie Phelan: To Los Angeles, Sherman Oaks. I don’t know how this plays into the document, but in 1980, January 1980, my mom shot my dad in the head, but didn’t kill him, and then nursed him back to health. And then at the end of that year, John Lennon was murdered. And that was when I was riding my bike to LA. Those things also sat way closer to the front of my head than say, worrying about Charles Manson, or murderous motorists that are mad at bikers, because we can beat ’em through traffic. So this, to me, was like evidence that maybe adulthood is *toxic*. “Don’t grow up, certainly don’t have children, never get married” — I forget what other bizarre takeaways I had from that.

0:26:42: But I won the race. It was like a mass start, three miles up hill, almost all up hill, and my bicycle friends at the time, I had three or four guys that were very big, these guys were huge fans, and they loved riding with me, ’cause I could keep up with them and stuff. And in this race, I bested them, too. I never even saw them. The gun went off, and I just charged for the top. I don’t remember what place I got, 27th out of 70, but first among women.

0:27:27: I had to call one of my dad’s colleagues, Ernie Masler, who at the time was actually housing my youngest brother, Gregory, ’cause Gregory was 15 when Mom shot Dad, and Gregory had to clean the bedroom wall, mop up the brains. Maybe it’s not an irony that he’s a neuro-radiologist. But anyway, my dad somehow, he recovered enough to be a therapist, for one patient who was quite perspicacious and found out how to reach Dr. Phelan at home, and asked to continue her therapy. She was a 50-year-old professor at Cal Northridge named Katherine. I don’t remember her maiden name, but she became Katherine Phelan.

0:28:15 Debra Schwartz: Oh. That became his second wife?

0:28:17 Jacquie Phelan: Yes. And at that point, when he began seeing her, that’s when my mom ended her life in 1983. Just like, “Take him, he’s yours.” She had actually threatened suicide most of our lives. We never knew when she was gonna do it.

0:28:41 Debra Schwartz: She suffered from depression?

0:28:43 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, depression, possibly bipolar. She was impulsive, and very smart. Because she had an indifferent mom, she didn't really know how to mother. She certainly did try a lot of the time, but she also was vicious and pitted us against each other. It was a fucking mess. The Phelan family was a disaster. And she checked herself out, but not before she met Charlie.

0:29:11: So, I rode down in 1980, I rode down to LA, and I was in great shape for that race on New Year's Day. I partied hard until four in the morning, and slept for two hours, and they went into that race, won it, called Masler, and said, "Hey I'm good at something, I'm gonna do it some more." He was so proud of me. Not only was he taking in Gregory to live with his family for half a year or something, he was a biker. I would run into him when I was living in the valley as a teenager, a high school student, riding my bike everywhere, like not only to the school, but out around Topanga, down to the beach, up along Mulholland. There were certainly not a lot of girls riding. I never saw many people at all, but I did see Dr. Masler, and I just like, "He rides a bike. Oh, how cool." And a couple of guys, named the Grossmans, Steve and Ken Grossman, brothers from Taft. They created Sierra Nevada Brew. They made their own beer.

0:30:12 Debra Schwartz: And they were riders as well?

0:30:13 Jacquie Phelan: They were big riders, big racers. I ran into them once or twice, and I remember one of them gently aiding me up the hill with a little touch on the small of my back. I'm like, "Oh that's nice."

0:30:28 Debra Schwartz: Not exactly catching the draft.

0:30:30 Jacquie Phelan: No, no, no. He was just pushing me. He was riding alongside and giving me a little shove, and it was sweet, not harassment. It was welcome, 'cause honestly, I hadn't had a boyfriend. I didn't have a boyfriend until I was in college. So anyway, I'm riding around the Los Angeles area on a bike, and actually two of my high school chums were big bikers, so we would go ride, and sometimes even find ourselves on dirt on our road bikes.

0:31:00 Debra Schwartz: So you were basically, one way or another, finding yourself in the world of biking all the time.

0:31:07 Jacquie Phelan: Right.

0:31:08 Debra Schwartz: It was a lifestyle for you.

0:31:09 Jacquie Phelan: I never would call it a lifestyle. It was plan B, because I wasn't getting chauffeured by mom. And as with many things that you initially start off hating, you fall in love with it. I don't know if that's Stockholm Syndrome, or what. But the bicycle wooed and won me for sure. I used to make cartoons of me in bed with my bike, and actually when I went to college, my parents held on to my bike, and kept it hostage, and I had to go and steal it at that 1980 trip. I don't remember how I got home, I

did not pedal back from visiting that Christmas. It was the first Christmas with Dad being brain-injured and Mom taking care of him. The bullet remained in his head, 'cause they couldn't extract it without hurting him, and he lost his sense of direction and became kind of an invalid. He's legally blind, but an avid reader, so he read voraciously. Even though he was legally blind, he could somehow read. But he had shitty sight, so he qualified for a dog, which he got when he moved in with his second wife, Katherine.

0:32:30 Debra Schwartz: It's an interesting kind of foreshadowing, when I hear you describing this about your dad's brain injury, and that will come forward.

0:32:38 Jacquie Phelan: Oh yeah.

0:32:38 Debra Schwartz: I mean there's some reflection of that in your life.

0:32:41 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, it's a theme. But dating — let me just give three sentences to the dating thing, 'cause I lived in the city and I would go on dates, and my idea of a good time was riding from the city to around Tiburon and home. And I never got a second date with these guys.

0:32:55 Debra Schwartz: Because you out-rode them?

0:32:57 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, they were wasted. And sometimes we would have to bail and take the ferry back.

0:33:00 Debra Schwartz: Because it was a wild party time, when you're talking about the late '70s and early '80s.

0:33:05 Jacquie Phelan: Right.

0:33:06 Debra Schwartz: There was a lot of drugs and partying going on.

0:33:09 Jacquie Phelan: Well, that hasn't actually changed that I know of. It's just that it was safer. There wasn't such a thing as AIDS, and Reagan had gotten elected and I guess that was like a stampede towards Wall Street and the diminution of our social safety net. All kinds of other huge overlays that I was totally unaware of. But my classmates at Middlebury, even the ones that were artists, they were recruited by Wall Street to become that sort of money, paper-pusher that can get really rich. 'Cause kids at Middlebury were from very wealthy families.

0:33:51 Debra Schwartz: But not you.

0:33:52 Jacquie Phelan: Well, Dad didn't really share whatever fortune he earned as a psychoanalyst. So, we grew up believing we were middle class, and there were certainly no extravagances. Dad didn't take us on trips to Cozumel; Mom and Dad went here and there. They'd do a little traveling.

0:34:11 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, that was common at that time too, to leave the kids at home and the parents go by themselves. I've interviewed many people who describe that.

0:34:17 Jacquie Phelan: Right, so we —

0:34:20 Debra Schwartz: I'd like to move on to the actual mountain biking and your racing.

0:34:26 Jacquie Phelan: Otherwise, this is gonna take —

0:34:27 Debra Schwartz: Yes, because we have just so much time.

0:34:29 Jacquie Phelan: All day.

0:34:29 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:34:30 Jacquie Phelan: Well, I heard there was a faster breed. Darryl told me like, "We're going to Marin for a ride called the Appetite Seminar," on Thanksgiving, in 1980.

0:34:41 Debra Schwartz: The Appetite Seminar!

0:34:42 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, the Appetite Seminar. I rode my old green bike, which I called "Vic" for Victoria. This is like eight months after Mom shot Dad, before John Lennon was killed. So, we ride our bikes from where I lived, which was Genessee Street near City College, across the bridge and into Fairfax, on the old lady special. And everybody's all mustering and throwing their bikes in the truck, and I was like, "Why are you putting your bikes in the truck?" "Oh, there's a two-mile hill." So me and Darryl rode up the hill, pedaled to San Francisco City College, and that was like my opening gambit. Darryl said, "You gotta go meet that guy."

0:35:23 Debra Schwartz: And who's that guy?

0:35:24 Jacquie Phelan: Erik Koski. He'd say, "That's Charles Kelly, go say hi to him." So I'd say, "Hi, I'm Jacquie Phelan." And these guys, they wouldn't stick their hands out, they didn't know why I was introducing myself, but I was.

0:35:35 Debra Schwartz: Who else was there?

0:35:36 Jacquie Phelan: Gary Fisher. And so he said, "Go meet that guy." It was sort of like a coming out. Darryl wanted them to meet us, and we were the only people that were not from Marin. We were definitely outliers. Darryl was riding a 10-speed narrow Jack Taylor with a yellow MSR helmet.

0:35:54 Debra Schwartz: On the Appetite Seminar.

0:35:55 Jacquie Phelan: Appetite Seminar, yeah.

0:35:56 Debra Schwartz: Oh my goodness.

0:35:56 Jacquie Phelan: And I was on my girl's Raleigh with fairly narrow tires. They're called 1 and 3/8ths.

0:36:00 Debra Schwartz: How many gears?

0:36:02 Jacquie Phelan: Five. Darryl had 10.

0:36:05 Debra Schwartz: The Appetite Seminar is a famous race.

0:36:08 Jacquie Phelan: It's not a race, it's a ride.

0:36:10 Debra Schwartz: My husband has ridden it several times.

0:36:12 Jacquie Phelan: You just show up in Fairfax at around eight or nine —

0:36:15 Debra Schwartz: On Thanksgiving.

0:36:16 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, on Thanksgiving.

0:36:18 Debra Schwartz: But it's not easy.

0:36:19 Jacquie Phelan: It's a hard ride.

0:36:21 Debra Schwartz: I'm thinking that you're on a five-speed.

0:36:23 Jacquie Phelan: Right. I was on this vastly inferior machine, and I completed the ride. Darryl, I'm afraid, I dropped Darryl and I rode home alone — he's 20 years older than I am — on a skinny-tire bike. He had to probably walk some of the descents. That also shows what a thoughtful person I am, that I leave the guy who brought me. And I had to beg food from people in the window of a restaurant, like, "Are you done with that?"

0:36:51 Debra Schwartz: You mean, watching people eat, and if they're finished after the race, you're saying, "Can I have the leftovers?"

0:36:58 Jacquie Phelan: It's not a race, it's a fun ride.

0:37:00 Debra Schwartz: Oh, excuse me, the fun ride.

0:37:00 Jacquie Phelan: And everybody goes home to eat.

0:37:02 Debra Schwartz: Oh I see.

0:37:02 Jacquie Phelan: I just hadn't eaten. I'd ridden roughly 50 miles, half of them dirt, and I'm dumb and I probably had the bonk. Luckily, these people said, "Yeah, sure. Have that." So I had like three rolls and some butter, and I got home to my then boyfriend Mark's parent's house, and demolished their turkey, and then probably connected with Darryl and found out that he finally arrived alive or something. But that was like my intro to the Marin men. What I did not remember was that this nice guy noticed my toe-clip was missing a bolt and repaired it for me. It turns out it was Charlie Cunningham, and he told me that after we met. He goes, "Don't you remember your toe-clip was totally loose and I — " 'Cause he always carried tools to fix bikes.

0:37:49 Debra Schwartz: Did he have his mountain bike business then with Steve Potts?

0:37:51 Jacquie Phelan: It wasn't a business. No, he had built maybe three bicycles by then, three or four, and he didn't really know Steve Potts then. He didn't hang with any of the fat tire guys, who were all on Schwinn's and Bombers. They were a clique, and Charlie's got social anxiety, so he doesn't cut into cliques. He's totally his own guy, and he did not see the sense in riding a big old sled. He rode his mom's 10-speed all over, around Tam and devised his own idea of what kind of angles to use.

0:38:29: And finally, when wheels stopped having steel rims and started having aluminum, 26-inch aluminum rims, probably 1978, he went, "I'm building a bike to fit that." He was gonna buy a Klein once 'cause Klein made aluminum road bikes at the time, but then he goes, "I can probably weld just as well as that. I'll make my own. I'll spend the money I was gonna buy a Klein with and buy equipment" — you need gas tanks and welders and welding hood, and all that stuff. So, he ended up making these bikes that were highly experimental. Anytime he didn't like the angles, he'd just cut it and cut it and reshape it, so they were ugly, ugly, strange looking things but they definitely did very, very well. And he also had drop bars so his bikes didn't conform at all.

0:39:19 Debra Schwartz: But he fixed your toe clip.

0:39:20 Jacquie Phelan: He fixed my toe clip and kind of later saw me packing bicycles. The summer of '81, the five month period, I was with Gary Fisher, from May to September.

0:39:31 Debra Schwartz: You were in a relationship with Gary Fisher?

0:39:33 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, I met him when I was riding around Tiburon by myself and he was hanging out at the health food store that they used to have and goes, "Oh hey, I remember you. You did the ride on Thanksgiving last year." And I go, "Yeah, that's me." And so we rode together to the Blithedale intersection, 'cause I had to peel off and go back of the city. He gave me his phone number, and I couldn't believe the writing. It looked like a third grader's, and I was like, "Wow, what's this? He's probably dyslexic." I don't know. Anyway, we became an item very quickly.

0:40:11 Debra Schwartz: He grew up in Tiburon, correct?

0:40:13 Jacquie Phelan: No, he actually grew up in Burlingame.

0:40:15 Debra Schwartz: Burlingame. But his parents live there now, I know.

0:40:17 Jacquie Phelan: His step dad and his mom currently live in, and will finish off, in Belvedere, I think.

0:40:25 Debra Schwartz: He was already a racer then?

0:40:28 Jacquie Phelan: Yes, he was. He was a road racer and also a partner in mountain bikes, partner with Charlie Kelly and Tom Ritchey. They hadn't broken up yet. So, he was doing two things, and he got very excited about road racing again because his brand new girlfriend was this total animal.

0:40:46 Debra Schwartz: That's you?

0:40:47 Jacquie Phelan: Our first date was a race called the Cat's Hill, which I won, and the promoter was talking on the microphone, I guess, or the announcer was saying, "You're gonna see a bunch of women wearing green, and that's gonna be who your winner is, that's from the specialized bicycle team for Berkeley Bike Club, sponsored by Specialized." I was wearing a wool orange and white thing that I'd won probably at the December hill climb, and I decorated the middle part, 'cause it was like half orange and half white, vertical with lace. I trimmed it with lace. And, of course, I had the helmet, I had the duck.

0:41:23 Debra Schwartz: The duck, right. So, you rode with Gary wearing the duck helmet?

0:41:29 Jacquie Phelan: Well, he wasn't real crazy about that actually, so I probably didn't wear the duck at Cat's Hill, which has probably gone on for 50 years now, it's an annual springtime tradition in Los Gatos, and it has the famous hill. I was so worried 'cause there was this famous hill, but it's like it's the very same as the little one that leads up to the Presidio on Arguello, it's just this little tiny hump. I think maybe we even raced with the older guys, with all the veterans. But anyway, I win on a bike whose headset was totally loose, it was a mess. Gary gets third in his race and gets this incredible prize, \$300 wheels. I, of course, won a pair of gloves and some grease.

0:42:22 Debra Schwartz: Oh dear.

0:42:22 Jacquie Phelan: There's a huge, huge difference.

0:42:24 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:42:24 Jacquie Phelan: And we fought the whole way home. He goes, “It’s not fair that you win your first race.” And I go, “It’s not fair that you get third and you get these nice wheels.” And he was driving around a BMW sedan with the back seat taken out so he could put bikes in it. He was kind of ratty, but aspired for wealth, at least the outer trappings of wealth, which he continues to this day to aspire to.

0:42:54 Debra Schwartz: He certainly is a very fancy dresser.

0:42:57 Jacquie Phelan: I would say not a whole lot going on inside, but he has to have a lot going on inside in a way because he’s had at least four wives, he might be on number five. He’s laid children all over the place, tried to get me impregnated and I just left my diaphragm in more or less 100% of the time for five months ’cause I did not wanna have a child, and he kept wanting to slip one in. I was like, “That’s not gonna happen.” And that along with him not liking my friends when I went back to East to race the nationals —

0:43:32 Debra Schwartz: So, did you find that he introduced you to a lot of the Marin riders?

0:43:36 Jacquie Phelan: He didn’t actually introduce me. I went with the men on their rides and then I found out how much they loathed me when we broke up.

0:43:48 Debra Schwartz: After you —

0:43:49 Jacquie Phelan: After I broke up with Gary.

0:43:49 Debra Schwartz: Let’s talk a little bit about those rides.

0:43:52 Jacquie Phelan: They were hard rides like to Petaluma or Valley Ford or Occidental.

0:43:55 Debra Schwartz: And who are the men you’re riding with? You’re the only woman?

0:43:58 Jacquie Phelan: I was the only woman. I was riding with people with names like Jerry Heidenreich, Otis Guy, Martin McBurney, Owen Mulholland, of course, Gary Fisher, not Charlie Kelly.

0:44:12 Debra Schwartz: How about Joe Breeze?

0:44:14 Jacquie Phelan: Joe did not ride with them. I’m trying to think of a few other names. Jerry Heidenreich, I called him “Jerry Heidenwrong.” Oh yeah, and Maynard Hershon who worked at Sunshine bicycles. Maynard really saw himself as this paragon of European style and virtue. Nobody wore helmets. I wore a helmet, but they didn’t wear helmets. If they wore anything, they wore a little bike cap and they had rolled jerseys, and long socks. Everything was a uniform, and I was wearing Wallabee shoes which are

crepe sole and madras shirt and not getting dropped. Well, Gary lent me clothes so that I could conform a little better.

0:45:03 Debra Schwartz: What do you mean not getting dropped?

0:45:06 Jacquie Phelan: They could not leave me behind. I'm too strong.

0:45:09 Debra Schwartz: Oh, so they might try to pedal ahead and you just would keep up?

0:45:13 Jacquie Phelan: I would stick on, yeah. The only way they could ever drop me, and this happened after Gary and I broke up, was when I was sort of in front of the group as we were wheeling through Fairfax in the little network of streets. I come upon Gary Summers and Otis Guy waiting at the corner, they always waited on the Wednesday rides. And they go, "Where is everybody?" And I go, "What are you talking about?" And I looked over my shoulder, there was no one there. They came from a different street, streamed on by. So, Otis and Gary Summers jump on. I jump on. And then it's a group of maybe 15 guys, all buzzing away. I could hear somebody say, "You'd think she'd take a hint." And I asked Martin McBurney, "What's the deal? What hint?" He goes, "Well Jacquie, it's sort of a guy's ride." And I go, "It never was a problem the whole summer when I was training to be at the National Championship." He says, "Well, that's 'cause you were riding with Gary. You're his — you know."

0:46:06 Debra Schwartz: Interesting.

0:46:07 Jacquie Phelan: I just was shattered. Did I go with them anyhow? No.

0:46:17 Debra Schwartz: So, you were riding and they diverted away?

0:46:21 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah.

0:46:22 Debra Schwartz: And when you came up to Otis and —

0:46:24 Jacquie Phelan: On the corner of Spruce and Azalea or whatever.

0:46:27 Debra Schwartz: They were expecting to see the whole group.

0:46:29 Jacquie Phelan: The whole gang and they weren't there.

0:46:30 Debra Schwartz: They had bailed off.

0:46:30 Jacquie Phelan: They'd just taken an alternate route.

0:46:31 Debra Schwartz: And so then Otis and the other guy —

0:46:34 Jacquie Phelan: Gary Summers.

0:46:35 Debra Schwartz: Gary Summers went and then caught up with the gang.

0:46:38 Jacquie Phelan: They all merged. That's what they did. Just like the group came along and subsumed Gary.

0:46:44 Debra Schwartz: Oh, they went off and left you going one way and then they were —

0:46:48 Jacquie Phelan: No, no, no, no. They didn't. I just rolled along with them, puzzled and talking to Martin McBurney, "What the fuck?" And he goes, "Well, Jacquie, you know, some guys don't like having you along, and you're just kind of a squirrely rider." And, of course, that's true.

0:47:00 Debra Schwartz: What do you mean by "squirrely rider"?

0:47:03 Jacquie Phelan: Well, you can imagine: how do squirrels behave?

0:47:07 Debra Schwartz: You could be unpredictable.

0:47:09 Jacquie Phelan: That was like the worst insult you could sling at a rider or racer. There was one other older guy named Bob Snyder who was probably Darryl's age, maybe a little younger, and a fine, fine rider. He could keep up with them even though he was 40. These guys were in their late 20s. I was 25. And just I was strong as a fucking horse.

0:47:38 Debra Schwartz: You look strong now by the way. People can't see you but you're so fit-looking. I didn't see it before, but looking at you now I can.

0:47:48 Jacquie Phelan: I was probably a little leaner then. I'm about 10 pounds over my racing weight.

0:47:53 Debra Schwartz: You look quite well-formed as 63-year old woman, extraordinary, so I can only imagine —

0:47:58 Jacquie Phelan: I'm sort of built like a guy. I got long waist, short legs.

0:48:01 Debra Schwartz: I can only imagine how strong you must have been at that time.

0:48:04 Jacquie Phelan: Well, yeah. I'm probably between the two poles of extreme feminine and extreme masculine. I'm kind of in the middle. I remember when I was in elementary school getting teased about my mustache. I certainly had hairy legs and hairy arms. And so I probably had like a *skosh* of testosterone that did not hurt in the power department. So, I could ride like a guy. And I certainly didn't have a problem with flirting or burping and being gross like a guy and laughing at anybody that was

judgmental. And so anyway, these group of guys wanted me out. I peeled off and had a good cry. Owen Mulholland was late that day 'cause he hadn't put his shoe cleat on correctly, so he and I rode together and I told him how the guys didn't want me on their ride. And he was like, "Yeah, well, you know for one thing they're jealous because you're in your third month of racing and you're winning all the road races. You're winning everything. It's not fair. These guys are never gonna see the amount — "

0:49:17 Debra Schwartz: But you're racing with women or racing with men?

0:49:19 Jacquie Phelan: I was racing with men, I mean sorry, women. I was winning races against women. Sometimes I would train by racing with men before the women's race just to get stronger.

0:49:32 Debra Schwartz: So, it was the prize that you feel that they were intimidated by? It's just that you won, won, won.

0:49:39 Jacquie Phelan: There was a combination of things. Of course, if you can keep a gal out, what you're doing is less groovy. But if there's a woman doing what you're doing then what you're doing isn't quite as awesome because a chick can do it. And certainly, there were guys that were like, "I'm quitting if a woman ever beats me."

0:49:55 Debra Schwartz: Really?

0:49:55 Jacquie Phelan: Oh yes.

0:49:56 Debra Schwartz: Let's talk about some of the misogyny.

0:49:57 Jacquie Phelan: It's a 100 percent misogynist little group of guys.

0:50:03 Debra Schwartz: Was there passive-aggressive swipes your way regularly?

0:50:05 Jacquie Phelan: All the time, all the time.

0:50:07 Debra Schwartz: Let's talk about this from the feminist perspective, because I'm just not getting this kind of information in any of my interviews with anyone else, really.

0:50:15 Jacquie Phelan: Okay.

0:50:16 Debra Schwartz: Okay, so describe, if you were to take an inventory of the various things or swipes or passive-aggressive —

0:50:23 Jacquie Phelan: Let me tell you an anecdote or two.

0:50:25 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:50:25 Jacquie Phelan: I could be at Lucky Market, which is now the Good Earth, 100 feet away from Maynard Hershon, 'cause that's the supermarket right across from Sunshine. They were probably mustering from the city and all around, and I could see Maynard lean over and say something to the biker standing next to him, and like pointing at me with his chin and then the other guy would just laugh. It's not the same as going, "Ha, ha, ha", and pointing, but I knew that he was saying something derogatory about me.

0:51:01: And then fast forward 20 years, I'm taking a class at College of Marin on screenplay writing, and I turned in a screenplay about a standout woman rider who's not favored by the men that she had to ride and train with, 'cause in order to be good enough for the Olympics, you have to ride with fast people and fast conditions with big turns. You have to get better at riding in a crowd. You can't do that riding by yourself, unlike mountain biking. So in 2009, Sandy Hancher, my screenwriting teacher, heard Otis talking at the coffee shop, she was having coffee, 'cause Otis is calling out names and greeting everybody that goes by on San Anselmo Avenue. "Hi George. There goes Owen."

0:51:47 Debra Schwartz: This is the community of bikers that all know —

0:51:52 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, they've known each other for 20 or 30 years.

0:51:54 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Okay.

0:51:55 Jacquie Phelan: 2009 is 25 years after my entry into this world. I'm now permanently installed in Marin County, and I'm riding along on my Breezer going to College of Marin, or doing something. And I can hear Otis's booming voice greeting all these people and showing off how many people he knows. So, he calls out my name and I don't even look up. I don't even wave. I'm not giving him the pleasure of acknowledging him, because you're just doing that to use me. And sure enough, Sandy gave me the entire script after. She's at class that week, and she says, "Jacquie, that thing you were writing about is still going on. You go by, Otis says, 'There goes Jacquie Phelan, she's crazy.' And the guy he's next to who looked Latino said, 'Yeah, well she's married to Charlie Cunningham.' And then Otis goes, 'Yeah, well, I do have to admit she does something three times.'" And I'm guessing Sandy couldn't make it out, but I've beaten Otis in some races.

0:52:55 Debra Schwartz: And Otis is a big strong guy.

0:52:57 Jacquie Phelan: Yes, he is. But he was probably a hard-working fireman and couldn't train quite as much.

0:53:01 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:53:02 Jacquie Phelan: Or I might have best of him when he was sick. That's usually what happens. You're sick, you've been off the bike for 500 years, and that's why. But

anyway, he's my number one detractor, but he never shows it. He makes a big deal of saying hi when he has to, because people see him not saying hi to me. All I can do is give him a glare back because we're not friends. I'd love to make up. But he and Jerry wanted me out of their club. It wasn't even a real club. And so I'd prefer to remain —

0:53:36 Debra Schwartz: Do you have a sense that your sex itself —

0:53:44 Jacquie Phelan: My gender.

0:53:45 Debra Schwartz: Yes, you're gender in that —

0:53:47 Jacquie Phelan: Well, I'm not conforming to the "girls can't keep up" thing.

0:53:50 Debra Schwartz: I'm the same as you. I remember the way that women were received.

0:54:03 Jacquie Phelan: They had to be accommodating and pleasant and actually they needed to smile. I should say, we are supposed to smile. People see you on the street and the guy will say, "Put a smile on your face."

0:54:15 Debra Schwartz: Right, back then very common. Men might even say, "You need to lose five pounds or gain five pounds."

0:54:21 Jacquie Phelan: Or, "You'd be great if you had bigger boobs."

0:54:24 Debra Schwartz: Yes, this was very common.

0:54:25 Jacquie Phelan: Or they talk in mixed company about being a breast man or a leg man or whatever.

0:54:30 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:54:30 Jacquie Phelan: And my dad, he was Freudian psychoanalyst, and we grew up in a hyper-sexualized environment where almost every gesture, every wrestling match, was interpreted as latent wish for sex with your sibling or whatever.

0:54:52 Debra Schwartz: I think at that time when for many men intimacy with a woman would have been considered a sexual thing exclusively.

0:55:03 Jacquie Phelan: It barely existed.

0:55:04 Debra Schwartz: Yes, it barely existed. Men and women were in such different worlds, it's hard for some people to imagine now, but I certainly recalled that the idea of men didn't really know how to be friends with women.

0:55:16 Jacquie Phelan: Right, and they also didn't know how to be dads. There was the women's sphere and the men's sphere and a guy came home hoping for dinner like *Family Guy*. It was very restricting, and lead to early death, for the kids not knowing their dads growing up through the '50s and '60s.

0:55:33 Debra Schwartz: There were tropes for both women and men in that time.

0:55:37 Jacquie Phelan: But the '60s were the time of all that social ferment. And my mom definitely, she bitterly complained about the pope being anti-contraception, and that he should be paying for all the babies that come from all that. I mean, I really got a snoot-full of feminism, and then that was also when I went for my junior year abroad. I took feminism as one of my classes, the history of feminism. Especially because in France there had been this student revolution in 1968, and some of the universities were still kind of in tatters from having nearly no janitorial services, and the students were running the show. But it was a real great eye-opener to be away for 1976, away from the bicentennial of this great country that is not such a great country.

0:56:33 Debra Schwartz: But back to the gender issue.

0:56:37 Jacquie Phelan: Right.

0:56:37 Debra Schwartz: Male versus female. Because I really would like to capture this part of your story. At that time that was kind of on the precipice of change, and it's easily forgotten, the subtleties of chauvinism.

0:56:55 Jacquie Phelan: Right or the insidious-ness. It wasn't subtle, it was baked in.

0:57:01 Debra Schwartz: It was ubiquitous.

0:57:02 Jacquie Phelan: It was ubiquitous, baked in, assumed. Oh, and by the way, in the intro I forgot to say that I had this alter ego named Alice B. Toeclips.

0:57:13 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:57:14 Jacquie Phelan: 'Cause having spent my six months in Paris, I knew all about Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, the Oakland heiress. There were these two rich ladies that were lovers, life-long companions and history makers, and they lived in Paris, and fed all the starving artists, the Picassos and the Artauds, and Miro, James Joyce and Hemingway, whoever. Gertrude entertained the guys and Toklas fed the wives. And I liked that nickname. That allowed me to have this gnarly, self-assured side, as well as the frightened little girl that just wanted to be liked. "That's Jacquie Phelan, the one with no self-esteem at all." So, I had this binary personality, because on the bike I'm Alice B. Toeclips, a sort of a court jester for what I think of as entertainment. To me bike racing was entertainment, not rocket science.

0:58:15 Debra Schwartz: Were there any other women that raced with you back then?

0:58:18 Jacquie Phelan: Oh yeah.

0:58:19 Debra Schwartz: Lets get their names.

0:58:19 Jacquie Phelan: Well, when I got to the race, there weren't any Marin County women who raced. The Berkeley women were very strong: Cindy Olavarri, Madeline Roese. R-O-E-S-E, Kim Lucas. Lucas really, really hated me. Everybody was like, "It takes five years to be a bike racer." I'm like, "Oh, me, I'm in my third month, ain't I something?" And it's like, "Yeah, you're something scary, 'cause you can't ride in a straight line and you keep asking for room. Well, you have to be able to be knuckle to knuckle with people and calm, cool and collected and not afraid to crash." I was not too afraid to crash. Buy anyway, Cindy Olavarri was nice to me. A gal name Hannah North from San Diego was very nice to me and Liz Newberry who went to Stanford. I did race for two or three months before I really got into the United States Cycling Federation (USCF).

0:59:22: I had a student card from City College, and I called myself the Gang of One, 'cause I just made up the fact that I was on a team, and I decorated a t-shirt, and Stanford drove me to all the races. There were races in Davis, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo. And since there was room in the team van of Stanford, Liz Newberry very graciously let me come along with her team. Collegiates were started by Tim Nicholson at Stanford in the mid-70s, probably, so it was relatively fresh thing to have inter-mural bike racing, as well as, track and field, tennis, fencing, and other stuff. And Newberry is just an incredible woman. She's now Liz Chapman and she was gracious to me, and we're in touch, we've gone on rides. We're pen-pals. She lives down in the South Bay. She married her Stanford classmate Harland Chapman, and he's a great guy too. So anyway, she really is like a shining star. And Olavarri was just nice because she was hard to beat and could be magnanimous. I don't know if her being a lesbian helped, because I think Kim Lucas might have been a lesbian and she hated me. But a lot of women were just like, "Ah God, this chick. She's just too much. Stay away from her. Stay off her wheel."

1:00:43 Debra Schwartz: Too much. Interesting choice of words. Now I have heard a story, and I want to ask you if it's true or not, that when you go across the finishing line

1:00:53 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, that happened one time.

1:00:55 Debra Schwartz: One time?

1:00:56 Jacquie Phelan: And it was mountain bike racing.

1:00:57 Debra Schwartz: Let's tell that story.

1:00:58 Jacquie Phelan: Sure. So, Gary and I were together only five months. I did one mountain bike race called Whiskey Town, in 1981, and then after we broke up and I

began seeing Charlie Cunningham, and rode Charlie's bike. I was finishing real early in these mass start races of three to 600 people, and one day, a week after having put a women's mountain bike camp together with my friend Casey Patterson, I told the gals at that camp, "If I don't get my jersey from Sun Tour," which was one of the sponsors of the team I was on, Sun Tour WTB, "if they don't deliver the jersey, I'm gonna wear a swimsuit with Charlie's last name, Cunningham, painted in Carolingian minuscule script, big three inch letters by a friend of mine who's an artist." Ross Shafer's wife Colleen Hillis decorated my back, so I was wearing a competition swimsuit that showed all my back. Polka-dot Lycra bike shorts, and by this time, this is 1984, I've been with Charlie for at least two years.

1:02:21: I've won all the mountain bike races, and there are three women that really took racing kind of seriously, and one of them was Cindy Whitehead who apparently had, according to some journalist, my picture on her mirror. She really wanted to beat me. It took six years before she beat me, but anyway that day, up in Santa Rosa, the race was called the Rockhopper, and it was a benefit for the American Lung Association. The promoter, Lynne Woznycki was a phenomenal fundraiser for the Lung Association. Of course, we're all gasping for air when we get across the line.

1:03:06: The pack starts off, and we're all wearing scarves on our faces 'cause it's so dusty, and the pro men had to do an extra four miles or something. So somehow when I'm coming back I'm all by myself, and I stop and roll the one piece bathing suit down and finish the last five miles without a shirt on. That's different than "hoisting my shirt" at the finish line.

1:03:31 Debra Schwartz: I had heard that you hoisted your shirt off, but you didn't.

1:03:31 Jacquie Phelan: I know. Well they're wrong.

1:03:33 Debra Schwartz: But you had the writing on your back?

1:03:36 Jacquie Phelan: I had my writing. That was my sponsor's name. I had my number.

1:03:40 Debra Schwartz: Had you planned to roll your bathing suit down?

1:03:42 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, of course. I wanted to have Cunningham. And when the sun is just right you can tell how many people have passed, even though there's 600 people racing. There's one set of tracks, so I'm gonna be the second person to cross the line. Great. So I cross the line like this.

1:04:05 Debra Schwartz: Your hands up.

1:04:06 Jacquie Phelan: My hands are in a big, fat, victory salute. And I hear from a kid named Darryl Price years later, "You corrupted me. I was 13." And some guy said, "Oh, now I *know* I'm in California."

[laughter]

1:04:22: Somebody else said, “It’s a guy, it’s a girl, no it’s a guy, no it’s a girl.” They couldn’t tell. Because when I’m spread eagle I’m pretty flat, and I was very, very fit and a lot of dancers and a lot of athletic women don’t have massive jugs. Cindy Whitehead had phenomenal pillowy bosoms and she was very favored for that. It was very obvious, because there was slobbering admiration that grossed me out. She, of course, sucked it up and I don’t blame her. Us women will just do almost anything to be popular. [chuckles] Or some of us will. Not the lesbians though. They don’t give a shit about what guys think. I wanna be more lesbian.

1:05:04 Debra Schwartz: But when you’re going across —

1:05:05 Jacquie Phelan: I’m crossing spread eagle, I have no shirt.

1:05:07 Debra Schwartz: I’m looking at you. You look very feminine. Anyway, you’re topless and you are a woman.

1:05:14 Jacquie Phelan: Right. But I got the helmet on, and we all look the same with the helmet. By then the V1 Pro came along. It was a little bit more tidy looking helmet. Charlie Cunningham was the first person that crossed the line.

1:05:25 Debra Schwartz: So your husband to be?

1:05:26 Jacquie Phelan: My husband to be, my boyfriend.

1:05:27 Debra Schwartz: Would be the first and then comes —

1:05:29 Jacquie Phelan: He was the first, and then me.

1:05:30 Debra Schwartz: Do men cross the line without tops on?

1:05:33 Jacquie Phelan: There were plenty of guys with no shirt. Plenty of guys. And there were people like Tom — I’m trying to remember what his last name is, Tom Hillard from Specialized, but I don’t know if he worked for Specialized then — he thought I should be banned from racing.

1:05:49 Debra Schwartz: What’s the fallout?

1:05:51 Jacquie Phelan: Well some of the fallout was photos in the paper of me, kind of walking away. It didn’t really show me too much, but you know, “She loses her shirt at the races.” And then some negative fallout about, “How dare you? What would you think if a guy whipped his dick out at the finish line?” And I go, “Well, there’s actually a slight difference between the sexual organs and breasts.” To me, that’s not the same at all. It shouldn’t be in an affront to show my front. And luckily, the promoter was this woman

who thought it was hilarious. I don't think there were too many people shielding their children's eyes. And I rolled my swimsuit back up after I crossed the line.

1:06:34 Debra Schwartz: The bathing suit?

1:06:35 Jacquie Phelan: I meant my TYR brand swimsuit, one-piece swimsuit. I rolled my swimsuit back up so I could be decent. Although, you gotta admit, racing one-pieces are extremely — our swim coaches at City College picked the most nauseating, sexy swimsuits that they could, which were super high cut. And the coaches complained that I should shave my pubic hair. I was like, “Dude, you picked that suit. I’m not shaving. You just look the other way. Okay. Get used to these couple of curly pubes sticking out. It’s your problem, not my problem.”

1:07:20 Debra Schwartz: “In your face.”

1:07:22 Jacquie Phelan: I always had a “fuck you attitude” about people wanting to have their women shaven clean and look like a little pre-pubescent girl or whatever. And I did get some fallout. Luckily, it didn't take away my first place or anything. It cemented into a legend that I lifted my shirt, at the finish line which is not quite true, so it's really nice to waste two and a half minutes —

1:07:44 Debra Schwartz: Be able to clarify it.

1:07:45 Jacquie Phelan: But yeah, I had a swimsuit on. I rolled it down and then 10 or 15 years later I'm in Hungary, reading a magazine that's Hungarian, an interview with Tom Ritchey. “Why is my name in the Tom Ritchey interview?” And so, the Hungarian guy that flew me out to teach Hungarian boys mountain bike skills and manners, goes, “Well, it says here, ‘What was the wildest thing you’ve ever seen mountain biking?’” And Tom's answer was “Jacquie Phelan finishing topless at the Rockhopper 1984.” So that was Tom Ritchey's wildest thing he's ever seen.

1:08:18 Debra Schwartz: Boy, and he was in the Bay Area?

1:08:20 Jacquie Phelan: Well, he lives in a retro world. He's a conservative Christian, an Evangelical Christian, that has beliefs about women and their role, still does.

1:08:29 Debra Schwartz: Do you still face this kind of sexism? Because the men you were with, they're still the older men. They're a product of their upbringing.

1:08:48 Jacquie Phelan: Their time.

1:08:48 Debra Schwartz: Of their time and their place. And socialization. Do you find that the men that were so shocked back then have softened in their view of what women can and cannot do with time or how they should behave? Or is it something that you've faced all of your life?

1:09:07 Jacquie Phelan: It's a damn good question that I don't really know the answer, to. I was hanging with one of my racing friends from a different team. He's a guy, he was up for the weekend, 'cause there was a fund raiser at the Bike Museum. His name's Jim Harlow and he raced for the Ross team. Cindy Whitehead was on the Ross team, and she asked her teammates to please block me so that she could win. But in order to do that, Cindy would have to be ahead of them, and they'd be behind her somehow and then they'd slow down or whatever to keep me from winning. I had asked Harlow, "Is it true that Cindy wanted you to fall over in front of me?" He goes, "No, no, no. She wanted us to block for you, but she was never in front of us, so she could never do it. But she sure wanted us to block you." And that's perfectly legit in *road* racing, by the way, but unheard of, at least back then, in mountain bike racing.

1:09:58: On big teams, you try to get your guy or gal up in front and then the rest of the team tries to impede others from making progress to catch that person. It's a type of classic road tactic, and she was a road racer as well as mountain biker. But this past weekend, Harlow was talking about being beaten by a girl, like "I've never been beaten by a girl, I never wanna be beaten by one." And when he said "beaten by a girl," I said, "Jim, don't forget who you're talking to." And then he went on for like a minute or two later saying something. "Yeah, I've still never been beaten by girl." And I go, "That's your second chance." I was with a younger couple of guys that are in their 30s and they noticed, but he didn't notice. It was funny, you know. He is a product of his time and he's a dear, dear person. I don't care, I like him anyway.

1:10:48 Debra Schwartz: What if you were to take your shirt off in a race now, what do you think?

1:10:51 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, I've actually done it. I did it at the Single Speed World or the Bike Messenger World Championship. I'd raced an entire lap naked in San Francisco in 1996. '96 was when the Bike Messenger Championships were. They're here and they're around the world.

1:11:09 Debra Schwartz: The Bike Messenger Championship?

1:11:11 Jacquie Phelan: Mm-hmm. And so all you do is pay your 75 bucks and you get to be in it.

1:11:13 Debra Schwartz: So you bicycled naked?

1:11:16 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah. There were three days of festivities, different kinds of races, and on one of them —

1:11:19 Debra Schwartz: Were you alone or were there others?

1:11:21 Jacquie Phelan: No, I was the only person racing naked.

1:11:25 Debra Schwartz: I had to ask.

1:11:28 Jacquie Phelan: I only did one lap, but in it was a race where they'd take the last person out of the race. It's called "Devil Take the Hindmost."

1:11:38 Debra Schwartz: Kind of like a relay thing?

1:11:40 Jacquie Phelan: No, it wasn't a relay.

1:11:41 Debra Schwartz: Oh, they just shed you off if you're the last person.

1:11:43 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, they're like, "You're the last, you're done." And all the lasts were women, so I was like, "They should have figured out a way to not cull only the women because then there won't be any." There was a very, very strong woman named Kraft. I don't remember her first name but in German that means power and she did very well. She was sort of like I was.

1:12:03 Debra Schwartz: Back to the naked riding.

1:12:05 Jacquie Phelan: So I just did one lap naked as sort of a friendly —

1:12:07 Debra Schwartz: And what compelled you to do so?

1:12:09 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, just because I could. I'm in San Francisco. And it was certainly embraced, which was great. And then I went back and put all my clothes on, but I didn't get arrested. I got to ride my bike naked and somebody took a picture, and believe me when you're crouched over a race bike, everything interesting is covered up. I also had a rather large messenger bag on my back so I'm sure my gluteal fissure showed. And we were going up and down, like, Vallejo, really steep streets in the downtown area.

1:12:41 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:12:42 Jacquie Phelan: To me, it was hilarious, but I think there is a strong exhibitionist part of me that's like, "Here I am. Look at me. Deal with it." And now that I'm 62 or 3, I feel like I've actually gotten feedback 'cause I've done the Appetite ride now and then with no shirt and friends would send me comments from Facebook or something like, "My eyes bled after that" or "I felt my eyes melting" or "What an awful sight to see a pair of old lady boobs." That was what they were saying, and I just went, "Wow, well I'm still bringing it."

[laughter]

1:13:25 Debra Schwartz: Now, unfortunately we can't stay here for too much longer.

1:13:29 Jacquie Phelan: It's 2:30 in the afternoon.

1:13:30 Debra Schwartz: I really would like to —

1:13:31 Jacquie Phelan: Talk about WOMBATS. Could it be two parts?

1:13:33 Debra Schwartz: Yes. The interview?

1:13:38 Jacquie Phelan: Or I could just talk faster?

1:13:39 Debra Schwartz: No, don't talk faster.

1:13:46 Jacquie Phelan: We'll be fine.

1:13:46 Debra Schwartz: We'll catch it up here a little. We'll bring in some other things, 'cause there's a few things I'd like to ask you. One will be about WOMBATS. Also, your long-time with Charlie Cunningham. Recent changes in your relationship and your affiliation with your friends that are mountain bikers now. And the Bike Museum. I'd like to capture, if we can, those topics. So, which would you like to address first?

1:14:20 Jacquie Phelan: I guess WOMBATS because to me, having this domain be male-defined, while I'm in it trying to create a welcoming space for women, was a piece of cake. Literally. Fred Heitzman's Bread and Chocolate Bakery provided free pastries on Sunday rides when I led WOMBAT rides, and they were almost every week in the mid-80s, though I hadn't come up with the name WOMBATS quite yet.

1:14:50 Debra Schwartz: And that's an acronym for?

1:14:51 Jacquie Phelan: For Women's Mountain Bike & Tea Society. I'm particular about that "&" (ampersand) because it looks so nice and old-fashioned, and I wanted the club to resemble the period when women took to bikes big time in the 1880s during the huge bicycle craze. The burgeoning and growing mass market was a chance for manufacturers to double their profits if they could just allay Victorian fears about women being outside of their sphere and away from the control of their husband or chaperon or parent. So how they did that was to pay for ads in the magazines with names like Godey's Lady's Book and Munsey's Magazine.

1:15:55: Magazines exploded when lithography and type technologies made it possible to have cheap publications. They weren't subscription-based, they were funded by advertising, which was a huge change. So, advertisers wanted to sell twice as many bikes but they had to overcome, "No daughter of mine is gonna be found straddling something." My dad actually used that expression. When I asked him for some more gymnastics lessons in junior high, he was like, "No daughter of *mine*'s gonna be a trained seal." Surprise dad! Be careful what you forbid.

1:16:34: In the 1880s and '90s, the golden age of bikes, women caught onto the machine.¹ They got cheaper, and girls were able to buy them. They cost three months

¹ The following historical section was added by Jacquie Phelan when reviewing the transcript of the interview and as such does not appear in the recording.—Editor.

wages or so. You didn't need to saddle them up and they didn't require upkeep. The first wave of feminism was fueled by the worldwide movement to abolish slavery and morphed into "enfranchising" women, who were in many cases slaves to their parents or husbands. Bicycles truly set them free. Unsurprisingly, there was a violent backlash, and lone women were arrested for indecent exposure when they wore "bloomers," or for taking to the streets for the vote. Modern people cannot grasp how shocking "loud" women were, or solitary, unmarried women out in public. Meanwhile, the whole world was going bike crazy, and bike manufacturers wanted to double their market. Thus, short stories in those cheap, widespread women's magazines featuring a bicycling heroine. This sartorial shock of women wearing bifurcated garments, known as bloomers, and finding their own time and traveling way beyond their own town. They'd go two towns over and not be served when they try to go to a roadhouse and order up a little lunch or something, or a beer, because they were unchaperoned.

1:17:12: So, there were laws that had to be changed and all this stuff. And that led to the 70-year fight to get the vote in 1920. And I saw an analogy between me freeing the women and the bicycle freeing the women back in the day, that I wanted to forge a more concrete conscious. It's not by accident. I definitely wanted to graft women's cycling and women's lib history. It is reenacted every time a woman throws her leg over the bike now, she's taking part in history. We're gonna have *Roe v. Wade* overturned, and we're gonna have to fight again. These things come in cycles, and we have to be strong, and the bicycle is gonna help us be strong. But motorists hate bicyclists, and so if you're scared of angry motorists, as anybody who's been a passenger in a car with somebody with road rage knows, you'd better ride in the dirt. However, the dirt didn't appeal to women. Since I was almost the only racer, it must be 'cause women don't like doing this, and I go, "No, no, no. It's because they've got other hurdles. They're taking care of their families, or they're scared, or they believe you about how dangerous this is." So I go, "Hey, it's easy, safe, and fun. And No Cars. And by the way, I'll serve you hot tea and a great cheese danish from Fred Heitzman's Bread and Chocolate Bakery."

1:18:40: Anyway, all the free Danish pastries you want, and just we'll never even think about our thighs, our hair, our 72 cents for every dollar a guy makes. You just get out in the woods, you eat, drink, make friends, bond, have a great time, come home and then in a year you bring your bike in, and the bike guy goes, "You actually ride this thing," and then you go, "I think I need to go to a new shop. Obviously, they can't believe that I actually ride this thing." So, through a newsletter we were dinging sexist shops and applauding less sexist shops, and I'd get shops to pay 100 bucks to have a mention in the newsletter.

1:19:19 Debra Schwartz: Did you write the newsletter?

1:19:20 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah. With all these phony names. Anita Beer and Carmen Denominator.

[laughter]

1:19:27 Debra Schwartz: Anita Beer, Carmen Denominator?

1:19:30 Jacquie Phelan: Just to make the newsletter more silly.

1:19:35 Debra Schwartz: Yup, it's funny.

1:19:37 Jacquie Phelan: Don't forget Gloria Stitz. [chuckles] Anyway, WOMBATS burgeoned. This is before social media. I was the person turning all the women on to each other, and we had a phone list —

1:19:53 Debra Schwartz: And this is in Marin County?

1:19:54 Jacquie Phelan: It was in Marin County, but it quickly grew to New Mexico, LA, Utah, Massachusetts. It got up to about eight or 900 card-carrying members.

1:20:03 Debra Schwartz: Oh my!

1:20:03 Jacquie Phelan: It was a hassle, but somebody who worked at Firemen's Fund did the xeroxing for free for me. Thank you very much, Lynn. Don't wanna out her, though. She's probably retired by now, but the women that met in those first two or three different pods of WOMBATS, they all stuck together and sometimes they resented newcomers because they were slow. And I go, "Well, I went slow for you."

1:20:31 Debra Schwartz: The inclusiveness, yeah.

1:20:33 Jacquie Phelan: Well, it was for scaredy cat beginners, 'cause it's easy and safe out there, it's not dangerous. Of course, when you get better and better you seek more complex challenges, which is called technical riding, and it is fun. I certainly got better and finally enjoyed the rides Charlie used to like to take me on. I couldn't do 'em very well, and I was ending up fighting, because it was just too damn hard, but after years and years of racing, I'd do some of the rides with Charlie around the backside of Kent Lake, or not Kent Lake but Alpine Lake. There's something called Helen Mark Trail. It's very technical and hard and vertical. But once I was strong and skilled then it was like, "Oh I get it, this is fun, because I'm better at riding." Pick up the backside of the canvas tent. That's the Boys Club. And the bicycle world is a boys club. I ushered a lot of women in, and tried to model being generous to other women, rather than refusing to speak the way the roadies (road riders) did to me.

1:21:36: They were really unkind, except for Liz Newberry and Cindy Olavarri. I wanted to model a different behavior. And also being for years the champ, to some people that was proof that the women's side is never gonna grow because there's no women interested. And I go, "No, there's always other invisible social hurdles, and you guys aren't taking care of them, and all your ads are so sexist. It's disgusting! Why are you using for Marzocchi brakes or shocks these bondage and discipline rubber-clad women models in your ads? Or the 12 women in rainbow colored thongs looking over their shoulder for — I can't remember which tire maker, but it was just so gross!

1:22:20 Debra Schwartz: Just like the garage calendars.

1:22:23 Jacquie Phelan: Yes, the girly calendars, sexist advertising. I actually issued awards for them. The *most* sexist got the golden testicle. The *next* best was the silver testicle, and the third was the bronze. And I would mail a letter of congratulations. GT Bicycles, then Diamondback, got the first one. [chuckles]

1:22:40: I figured I'd do this since you can't complain, because women are famous for being irritable. There's no such thing as a feminist comedian. You've probably heard that, too, like: "They're not funny. Those women are not funny." Well, of course we're fucking furious! But amongst ourselves, we're God damn hilarious, and to me to cite an affront and give it a prize was way cooler than complaining about it. Because then they can frame it.

1:23:12 Debra Schwartz: What was the reception?

1:23:14 Jacquie Phelan: I never heard back from any of them. I would hear years later through the grapevine that it's up on the wall or whatever. But people know Jacquie and they knew what her feminist thing was, and it was like, "She's just crank." But I'm happy to say that most of the women that were in WOMBATS had no idea that I had been a racing champion. That did not come into play. It was just not an issue. I was their mom showing 'em how it's done, being a mother hen. And then later they might find out that I was a racing champ. But it's a good thing because a lot of girls won't try something if they're intimidated by the person trying to talk them into doing it. And if I could have been black, and maybe 40 pounds heavier, it would have been even cooler to, A, keep up with the guys, and B, in their races not get dropped — oh, and a lesbian. If I can just be a three or four more, what do you call 'em, versions of diversity, layers of otherness, that would have been even cooler, but I'm stuck with having all the privileges accruing to being a white, educated women.

1:24:33: So, I find my otherness where I can, which is in my x chromosome, and work it as much as I can. And also, I don't wanna be a part of consumer culture. That's something I protest against. I came into biking from riding my bike as a gesture of respect for the Earth rather than like as a sport. And so I call it a pastime 'cause I'm really not like a professional athlete. I'm just a super charged eco-fiend that never uses a piece of paper towel or toilet paper only *one* time. It's gotta get used at least two or three times. First blow your nose or cry and then use it to wipe yourself on the toilet or something. I have been dumpster diving for food for 15 years 'cause I feel sorry for all the food they are throwing away. Basically, I'm trying to not make a huge consumer footprint. And yet now, thanks to Charlie's brain injury three years ago, we drive around in a car. I'm just like, "Sorry planet. I did my best."

1:25:41 Debra Schwartz: Let's talk about that. You've been with Charlie for how long now?

1:25:45 Jacquie Phelan: Since '82. A long time!

1:25:52 Debra Schwartz: And he went on to have a career as a bike manufacturer.

1:25:57 Jacquie Phelan: Builder. I would say Charlie was an inventor, frame builder, and founder of a company called Wilderness Trail Bikes, which he was then swindled out of by Patrick Seidler and Mark Slate. He and Steve Potts lost everything, including the building they bought on 475 Miller. That was an ugly chapter and Charlie really gave up bike frame building during the tenure of growing Wilderness Trail Bikes, all the while not understanding how Patrick and Mark were stealing the company. He tried really hard to get them into Alcoholics Anonymous, and whatever other Anonymous's there are for drug use, 'cause they're very into their drugs. And there was a giant split between Potts and Charlie and Slate and whatever. So Charlie finally after working for free for one whole year to try to save the company and get CEOs from other companies to come help WTB move up. But they would all stomp out in a huff because Patrick would never let them look at any of the numbers, any of the actual figures, because he was carrying on fraudulent behavior.

1:27:17: And then it turned into a lawsuit, where he's trying to litigate to get their one-quarter each, and they didn't succeed. But the 475, the secretary was shredding for weeks, shredding, shredding, shredding, getting rid of all kinds of evidence, so that nothing could be subpoenaed and stuff. Charlie emerged being still the owner of our house. He had lent our house for a second mortgage to that business, and Seidler stopped paying the mortgage in hopes that it would be put up for foreclosure and sold to some friend of his on the courthouse steps.

1:27:56 Debra Schwartz: Ouch.

1:27:58 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, and it happened to coincide with my having breast cancer, and Charlie's parents aged about 10 years during this. It's the only time I'd ever seen Charlie cry. He stopped having anything more to do with the bike world. And then about 15 years later, after doing freelance machining for people that want jet engines improved or something, he was somehow sought out and found, 'cause he is quite the machinist genius, creative guy. A couple of friends bore down on him to build them one last bike. And so he revved up the heat treating oven, and made himself a bike, and four other rabid collectors. First, they all paid Steve Potts to make the bike that Charlie would design, but since Steve never actually came forth with the bike, they leaned on Charlie. And he's a gentleman, so he caves rather than just like, "I told you. I'll design the bike, but Potts has to make it. I know you guys are really good friends, but he's sort of incapacitated. It's a miracle he even gets bikes out." But he definitely did not build any bikes for those four or five collectors. And I don't know if he ever gave them back their money either.

1:29:14: But Charlie was sort of pressured into making them some bikes, and they were very fine machines. And then he was on his way to making me a bike, because he was raving about his road bike that had slightly different geometry from the 1950s, from the

French *constructeurs*. They're longer road bikes, and better for touring long, long hours in the saddle, whereas almost all the road bikes manufactured here by mainstream companies, they're made for racing criteriums (lap races) and so they're too steep. So, if you don't want that kind of bike, you had to have a handmade bike by some guy that'll take suggestions from you and use their know-how.

1:30:05: So Charlie began doing that, and right in the middle of finishing the fork, he went out on a 45-minute ride in August 2015 and crashed. I was in Vermont learning Japanese, 'cause there was a race I wanted to go to in Japan. Then I got the word that he was in the hospital, so I flew home. And he was all broken, but fine from the neck up. And the next seven weeks as his bones healed, he seemed fine. And then he had a killer headache September 16th or so, and they raced him by ambulance from Marin to Redwood City. He told me about it when he got there: "Hey, they had sirens going and everything." And the neurologist or whoever, the brain people, they were freaking out because his brain had a closed head injury bleed.

1:31:06 Debra Schwartz: Subdermal hematoma.

1:31:08 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah. He had a "Mount Fuji sign," because there's blood on two sides and one little peak or something.

1:31:17 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, so the pressure builds and builds and builds and starts damaging cells in the brain.

1:31:21 Jacquie Phelan: Right. And remember my dysfunctional family? My youngest brother, a neurologist, never saw any of those radiology screens.

1:31:32 Debra Schwartz: So, after Charlie's accident, it's a —

1:31:35 Jacquie Phelan: It was quiescent until just before I went to Japan. Redwood City said that, "You have a choice, you can do brain surgery, or take steroids."

1:31:42 Debra Schwartz: There was a slow bleed, in other words.

1:31:45 Jacquie Phelan: Well, it was fine, and then suddenly it began bleeding. The injured brain began bleeding.

1:31:50 Debra Schwartz: He had a concussion.

1:31:51 Jacquie Phelan: Right. And the hematoma manifested, and they said, "You can take steroids or relieve the pressure by surgery." And we chose the wrong one, we said steroids, but we should have said, "Drill, drill, drill." And I was encouraged to still go to Japan. So I made sure to take Charlie to the Good Earth, 'cause he still had a broken collarbone, five broken ribs and a broken pubic bone — no leg bones and no arm bones, but the collarbone. So, he was gonna take care of himself for the month or two that I was gonna be in Japan. But I didn't even get to Japan. I got word from a friend that works at

Marin General that he had just had emergency brain surgery, and so I flew home, and I reached him at midnight, and he's all tubes and machines. I grabbed his hand and said, "Hey Charlie, it's Jacquie. If you can hear me, squeeze my hand." And so I felt the squeeze, and I went, "He's not a vegetable!" And they all like, "Ssh, it's midnight at Marin General ICU. Don't wake up the vegetables."

1:32:56: And that just began a very, very long road to Charlie's brain recovery, and my assuming actual responsibility, which I've never wanted to have. I've never wanted to be in charge. And as a control freak that meant Charlie got to be in charge with no complaining, sometimes bitter bickering, but not seizing control or anything. And so once a month, I'd write checks. We had to pay our bills and stuff, and the house was his, not mine, but we shared all the expenses. Each of us bought our own food. And all of a sudden, I'm in charge of a 140-pound infant that can't even walk. They took him from ICU over to a rehabilitation hospital in Vallejo where he learned to walk, talk, swallow, for one month.

1:34:01: During that time, my dad died, which was fortuitous. They kept Charlie in for another week so I could get a ramp built into our house 'cause I wasn't sure he could walk. Charlie has been crawling back from the edge of death. He took himself to the hospital when I had just jumped on a plane to go to Japan, and he taxied to Kaiser, and then just sat there and turned down all the requests for scans. They should've ignored him.

1:35:07 Debra Schwartz: After his fall.

1:35:09 Jacquie Phelan: This is seven weeks after his fall and after his trip to the brain center in Redwood City. He was now living at home, but he got a second horrible headache, took a taxi, and then denied them doing scans, which they should not have allowed him to deny. So when he got to Marin General, they said, "What's the word? Why was he sitting for seven hours in the ER at the emergency room without a scan? Why was he languishing there?" Sorry. So anyway, he languished and died, and they dragged him back to life with a doctor here in Marin General, and now we just — one step at a time. He went to speech therapists; he went to 20 different therapists. I drove him all over the place. I didn't sleep. I found a caregiver, we had a live-in for about two months, which was kind of intense.

1:36:01 Debra Schwartz: So, in short, because we're gonna have to wrap up this interview, it seems to me that you've lived, in many ways, a life of your own making with a lot of freedom. You've been strong enough to speak for yourself and exert yourself out there. You've been incredibly robust physically — and really, when listening to your story, psychologically and mentally — to forge onwards and make your own world. And you've enjoyed that kind of freedom, and now you're a caregiver.

1:36:41 Jacquie Phelan: Right.

1:36:43 Debra Schwartz: We've socialized, I've watched you with Charlie, who's great. He's doing much better.

1:36:51 Jacquie Phelan: He can walk and talk, thank God.

1:36:52 Debra Schwartz: But he's not the same.

1:36:54 Jacquie Phelan: No, he is not.

1:36:54 Debra Schwartz: He's not an independent man.

1:36:55 Jacquie Phelan: And he's never gonna be.

1:36:56 Debra Schwartz: And neither are you the same independent woman that you were before.

1:37:00 Jacquie Phelan: Well, I was independent because I had this Lexan safety net underneath called Charlie Cunningham, who fixed everything that I broke, repaired every single part of the house. When his injury happened, suddenly I'm in charge of plumbers, electricians, and it seems like everything fell apart right around then. So, I had to deal with all these things, and sometimes I did not do a good job, 'cause I don't know how to be a foreman. Putting a new roof on his machine shop, for example, I destroyed the machine shop doing so.

1:37:32 Debra Schwartz: But, from what I can tell, you've got the support of the biking community in so many ways.

1:37:36 Jacquie Phelan: We do.

1:37:37 Debra Schwartz: And let's close with that.

1:37:38 Jacquie Phelan: Sure. It's been quite a fantastic, pleasant surprise finding out how much Charlie is beloved. He's this angelic man. He's always been sort of beatific. The journalists always grab those words when they wanna describe soft-spoken Charlie Cunningham. It's always what a sweet, kind, and ethereal kind of guy he is. He's got a very deep spiritual side. He's a Sufi. He always was quite comfortable in his skin, and didn't care what other people thought, and knew his own role in the universe. He really was at peace. And now it's the opposite. He hates his life. He bitterly complains. He misses the old him. And I have to remind him, "Well, I'm glad you're not dead. You've made amazing progress. You can read a little bit now, and you're walking independently." He still doesn't have a sense of direction, so he has a memorized walking route. And I don't think he'll ever drive; he's not even gonna ride a bike by himself anymore, although I certainly put him on a bike and had him ride by himself, but he kept steering off the road, 'cause he's got a very, very tiny narrow band of vision, very poor visual processing, and probably some cognitive issues as well.

1:39:06: But anyway, he's crawling back, I'm crawling back. I'm learning responsibility. I'm trying hard not to become like an alcoholic, embittered old lady, but I always ask people to come visit and they never do. We had this massive fundraiser that the bike museum produced, they did a beautiful job, and I got to see people who I routinely beg to come visit and they never do. And I go, well, that counts as a visit, so I won't hear from them for another three years. I'm usually the one asking people to come by, and they just don't have time, nobody has time. So my friend Kay Ryan said, "Find new friends." And I go, "As a 63-year-old woman, I'm going to find friends? Okay, I'll work on it."

1:39:50 Debra Schwartz: I saw there was just a fundraiser.

1:39:54 Jacquie Phelan: People adore Charlie. There's a part of me that's kind of convinced that maybe his wife's a tough pill to swallow. I have my own friends, and they love me, but I definitely feel like I'm a thorn in the side of people. Certainly before his accident, people had to figure out how to get around Jacquie to talk to Charlie 'cause I shielded him from the onslaught of people and their needs. They took advantage of him. They'd come by at any time of day and just hang out in the shop, and Charlie could never say, "Hey, look at the time, I gotta go." So I'd just go in the house and call his phone, and then I'd go, "Okay, now if we just pretend to have a nice conversation for a while that person's finally gonna get tired of waiting while you're on the phone, 'cause you're busy now, and now they might realize they should go." 'Cause Charlie was busy, but he never told anybody to get lost.

1:40:47: Anyway, we have a loving community. I still have this problem with my shitty self-esteem because I'm not easy, I'm not an easy person, I'm still too much. I'm grateful for the help that they give Charlie, and it is helping me, obviously, because it's paid for one caregiver, who's actually been out for two months, so I've been taking care of Charlie 100 percent now. I haven't ridden to Mill Valley in, it feels like a year.

1:41:19 Debra Schwartz: I'm glad you rode here today for the interview.

1:41:20 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, I miss the comings and goings. But I realize that as I had somehow predicted, I used to say, "Have dessert first." I made sure to have dessert first. I'll probably have to have broccoli later. And I also said, "I'm never gonna have a kid, but I'll probably be assigned one in later life." And these things sort of came true, and it's not because I wished it to come true, it's just kind of ironic. I guess it's strangely ironic that my husband is a brain patient and my dad was a brain patient. And I married Charlie for his brain. We were two very alive minds. We also appreciated each other in a big way, and I grew to love him more and more, the longer we were together. But my habit had been to like dangerous, druggy people like Gary Fisher, who more resembled my father. It took quite a jump to stay and appreciate a safe, loving man who wasn't so unpredictable. I learned to love Charlie.

1:42:32 Debra Schwartz: And it seems like Charlie is helping you to learn to love him.

1:42:34 Jacquie Phelan: Still learning. He's helping me learn to love myself.
[chuckles]

1:42:38 Debra Schwartz: There's one thing in closing I'm going to ask you. You've been a vanguard for women in riding. For young women riders, do you have any advice?

1:42:51 Jacquie Phelan: Wow. [chuckles] Well, your sport is not the one I was in. Your sport is a job that you're trying to excel in so you can spare your parents the \$500,000 college. So, if you can, try to hold a little bit of an ember for loving the activity before you burn out. That's for the girls who are racing at the top of their game like Katie Courtney, world champion. She's the first American world champion in 17 years, 'cause Europeans have support. European girls have state support for competing, where here you have to find *private* sponsorship. We don't have government assistance for athletes the way other countries do. So luckily, she had parents who could afford to keep her in all the right equipment, with a good psychologist, and all that stuff. And I wonder what she's gonna do with her life. I've tried to let her know that I'd love to meet her, but I haven't gotten to yet. I've gotten to see her speak at the museum, but I didn't get to talk with her.

1:43:54 Debra Schwartz: What other advice?

1:43:55 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, I don't know if it's advice, I just —

1:43:57 Debra Schwartz: Or lessons learned.

1:44:00 Jacquie Phelan: I hope you'll share what you learn with other women and try being gentle on the planet, 'cause that's what the bicycle is for me: it's not a path to Olympic glory, it's really saving the planet. Although I certainly wanted to get into the Olympics, and then when they announced mountain biking in the Olympics, I tried to get in. But my mom's brother, his mom grew up in Ireland, so I couldn't prove Irish ancestry and get in that way. Yeah, the whole family hates each other. But loving, being loving even maybe to your competitors wouldn't hurt if you compete. The bike is this fantastic freedom machine, and I hope you can enjoy it, especially off-road where there really aren't cars, and all the same dangers.

1:44:55 Debra Schwartz: I don't know, I think that's good advice. "I hope you can love it." When you're talking about this, I'm envisioning the drawing that you made of you in bed with your bike.

1:45:06 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, the bicycle has so much to give to the world still. Maybe we'll be taken seriously and careless drivers will be punished badly for hurting us. Nowadays, it's just like if you said the sun's in your eyes then you're exonerated and it doesn't matter if you killed three people.

1:45:25 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's close with the vision of you and the bike.
[chuckles]

1:45:27 Jacquie Phelan: Something positive.

1:45:31 Debra Schwartz: And the affinity you've had, obviously, from such an early age, and that you've maintained despite all different kinds of life experiences, and the challenges you're facing today — Jacquie, I want to say thank you for coming and sharing.

1:45:45 Jacquie Phelan: Oh, thank you so much, Debra.

1:45:48 Debra Schwartz: I've learned a lot in this interview. I'm really very grateful that you're sharing your perspective as a woman rider, and particularly at the time that you were competing so much. It's precious information, and I hope that women riders will listen to this, and men as well. I have noticed on the hiking trails there are pleasantries or exchange now between bikers and hikers. And I see a lot of female riders.

1:46:17 Jacquie Phelan: That's great.

1:46:17 Debra Schwartz: That is great.

1:46:19 Jacquie Phelan: I have a postscript. I didn't mention anything about my scribbling. And I did support myself with my scribbling throughout my racing career.

1:46:27 Debra Schwartz: Your writing, not riding.

1:46:29 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah. I say "scribbling" and "peddling" so I don't confuse "writing" and "riding." I had columns in bike magazines and stuff, and all kinds of platforms for getting out my belief that there's bias in the prize-giving. And so I had a column called "Prize and Prejudice." [chuckles] And I'll continue to write. I really hope I put some of this stuff I'm telling you onto paper. I really struggle with, "Why won't I write?" I've had three and a half years of all the time in the world, and I haven't done it. But that's my postscript.

1:47:07 Debra Schwartz: Well, to be continued.

1:47:08 Jacquie Phelan: Yeah, it has to be continued.

1:47:09 Debra Schwartz: That's your postscript.

1:47:10 Jacquie Phelan: Thank you.

1:47:11 Debra Schwartz: Who knows what the future brings?

1:47:13 Jacquie Phelan: Right, we can't know.

1:47:14 Debra Schwartz: Keep on pedaling.

1:47:14 Jacquie Phelan: Rightio.

1:47:17 Debra Schwartz: Right to it.

1:47:17 Jacquie Phelan: Right. Oh, and I've got the advice. Look where you want to go. Try not to look where you don't wanna go. For me, it's trying not to imagine that everybody driving is on their phone or looking at their dashboard computer. Try to banish the thought and see myself moving in a golden cloud of good luck. And there is a bike thing where you tend to go where you're looking, and so if you really don't like the direction you're going, you better rip your eyes off and look exactly where you wanna go, and your bike will follow. So, there's my advice. Sorry.

1:47:46 Debra Schwartz: A perfect closer.

1:47:48 Jacquie Phelan: I just kinda had to patch it in.

1:47:49 Debra Schwartz: You got it in there.

1:47:50 Jacquie Phelan: Okay.

1:47:50 Debra Schwartz: And that's a beautiful way to end this interview.

1:47:52 Jacquie Phelan: Alrighty.

1:47:53 Debra Schwartz: So, on behalf of the Mill Valley Public Library, and the Mill Valley Historical Society, this concludes our interview. Thank you.

1:48:01 Jacquie Phelan: Thank you.