

The Druid Heights Oral History Collection

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Edmund Stiles on Druid Heights

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

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INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz
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In this oral history, Edmund Stiles recounts his more than 50-year residency at Druid Heights. Born in Michigan in 1939, Edmund grew up on the East Coast and attended Dartmouth College. Edmund describes how he first came out to the Bay Area in the early 1960s, just as he was discovering his vocation to make furniture. He recounts the first time he visited Druid Heights and his first impressions of Roger Somers, one of the founders of the community, with whom he would develop a close friendship. In 1965 Edmund and his wife Marilyn joined the community. Edmund discusses how his work as a furniture maker evolved over the years, such that he ended up building a number of structures at Druid Heights, as well as several in Marin and beyond. Besides Somers, Edmund recalls a number of other denizens of Druid Heights, notably Elsa and Thea Gidlow, as well as the more short-term residents Gary Snyder and Alan Watts. Edmund vividly describes the life of the community, and how its ambience changed in the 1970s, causing several relationships to deteriorate. Finally, Edmund explains how the land eventually came to be owned by the National Park Service, becoming part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, with the future of the property's structures at the time this oral history was recorded uncertain.

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Oral History of Edmund Stiles
May 9th, 2018

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

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is May 9th, 2018. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm sitting here on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and GGNRA, the Golden Gate National Recreational Area. I am sitting here today on a beautiful spring day with Edmund Stiles. Edmund, Ed?

0:00:22 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

0:00:23 Debra Schwartz: Yes, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for sharing your story — the story that you're going to share with us — and thanks for being here.

0:00:35 Edmund Stiles: Thanks for having me.

0:00:37 Debra Schwartz: First of all, I'm just going to give a little context to this interview. Yours is a little slightly different interview in that I was contacted to interview you because of where you lived, Druid Heights and Parkland. That's a very interesting place that you have lived in. From our pre-conversation, I know you've spent a lot of time in those woods, and so we're going to include your experience living there. But before we get going, I'd love to get some background information about your family, if you could share a little bit. Maybe you could tell me where are your grandparents hailed from?

0:01:21 Edmund Stiles: I know very little about my grandparents. Actually, they were all gone except for, I think, one grandmother, my father's mother, by the time I was born. I came along late in my father's life; I think he was in his 40s when I was conceived. I'm the last of three children. There were a lot of losses taken before I came on the scene. So, by the time I arrived, I never really met any of my grandparents, and that one grandmother died while I was still a young guy.

0:01:49 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember your grandparents' name?

0:01:52 Edmund Stiles: No, I don't, actually.

0:01:54 Debra Schwartz: How about, let's have your parents' names.

0:01:56 Edmund Stiles: Captain Norman Ryder Stiles and Mary Sukow Stiles.

0:02:02 Debra Schwartz: And where were they born?

0:02:05 Edmund Stiles: My mother was born, I believe, in western New York state. I don't remember the town. And my father was born in North Haven, Connecticut. He was a classic Connecticut Yankee.

0:02:22 Debra Schwartz: What's a classic Connecticut Yankee like? [chuckles]

0:02:30 Edmund Stiles: Strong values, high integrity, somewhat stoic. Although, my mother once said that it was too bad I didn't know him before World War II because he changed during the war, and that he'd been light and funny and playful before that, which I had never seen. But he was a very iconoclastic kind of character in his later years. I know some about my family's history, but I have eschewed any particular enthusiasm. They go way back in the early history of this country, but I don't consider that to be any kind of a thing for me personally. I'm who I am and they were who they were. Plus, I think they were Tories when they fled to Canada during the revolution. I'm not sure of that, but that was some of them anyway.

0:03:16 Debra Schwartz: Stiles, what kind of name is that?

0:03:18 Edmund Stiles: English.

0:03:18 Debra Schwartz: English?

0:03:19 Edmund Stiles: Mm-hmm, I believe so.

0:03:20 Debra Schwartz: So you're an East Coaster? You were born and raised in the East Coast?

0:03:24 Edmund Stiles: Born there, yeah.

0:03:26 Debra Schwartz: Well, where were you born?

0:03:26 Edmund Stiles: Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

0:03:28 Debra Schwartz: In Michigan?

0:03:29 Edmund Stiles: Mm-hmm.

0:03:30 Debra Schwartz: And what year was that?

0:03:32 Edmund Stiles: 1939.

0:03:33 Debra Schwartz: 1939 in Michigan.

0:03:36 Edmund Stiles: Mm-hmm. Just before the war.

0:03:38 Debra Schwartz: Just before the war. What was that like?

0:03:41 Edmund Stiles: I don't know, I was an infant.

0:03:42 Debra Schwartz: How about when you were five, 10 — give me some ambiance.

0:03:46 Edmund Stiles: [laughs] Well, let me just tell you this much: my father was a Coast Guard career officer, he was a captain of an ice cutter on the Great Lakes when I was born. And they had, my mother and father, an apartment at the locks, the marine locks between the lakes. Father would break ice up and down the lakes, and then pass through the locks, and often tie up overnight, and that's probably where I came from. It was one of those overnights at the locks when he was between lakes, as it were.

0:04:16: I came along on January 16th, '39, on the coldest, stormiest place in the country that night. And within six months, my father, who had an unusually large, large capacity of memory for people and for capabilities — he knew all of the Coast Guard officer personnel at the time, it was a pretty small service then — they transferred him to Washington D.C. because the war was coming, and they knew it was gonna be a long one. He had the ability to make judgments about who could do what. And so he was in D.C., and we were in Bethesda, Maryland throughout the war. During that time, he assigned all the officer personnel to their duty stations, and lost most of them. So it was a hard time for him.

0:05:07 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my goodness. He must have felt like he was condemning men to their death, one after another.

0:05:12 Edmund Stiles: Pretty much, I think so. One of my favorite stories about him was that — I had heard things mainly through my sister, who was sort of the family oracle, but I never knew if I could really rely on some of the stories. But at some point, after my mother had died, he would come out and spend a lot of time with us here in California, and he asked me to take him up to see a particular old buddy of his, like one of his very best friends from the academy, Captain Earl Geisness. I knew who that was; he was my sister's godfather amongst other things. So I took him up to Sonoma County where Captain Geisness was living, and I was privy to this conversation in which it was apparent that Geisness was deeply, deeply angry at my father, because apparently — [chuckles] this still throws me — but apparently my father stashed him in the American Virgin Islands through the entire war.

0:06:05 Debra Schwartz: Oh, he protected him.

0:06:07 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, he kept him hidden. And he had done this with other officers, but he'd pulled them out one at a time, and sent them off as needed. He knew which ones could do what kind of jobs. I'll never understand how he could have hidden people, but he apparently did it. He sort of kept the list to himself as to where they were, and nobody else knew because they would try to pull them prematurely, in his opinion. This is all kind of my assumption about it, but I heard the conversation between the two

of them in which Geisness said, “Why didn’t you let me go?” And my father said, “Because I had to have somebody left, and you were it.” So he kept him alive through the war, and Geisness never forgave him [chuckles] till the day he died.

0:06:47 Debra Schwartz: How ironic.

0:06:48 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, it’s one of those stories that actually gave validity to much of what I’d heard and didn’t know whether I could believe or not. [chuckles] I figured in time of war, high up in the hierarchy, you can probably do almost anything and get away with it.

0:07:03 Debra Schwartz: It was before the computer anyway.

0:07:06 Edmund Stiles: Yes. [chuckles] Good point.

0:07:08 Debra Schwartz: And your siblings’ names, please?

0:07:10 Edmund Stiles: My sister, Norma, is three years older than I am, Norma Rae. And my brother, Stephen Ryder Stiles, was six years my senior.

0:07:21 Debra Schwartz: Well, Michigan’s more than just a jog away from California. What brought you to California?

0:07:28 Edmund Stiles: It’s a kind of a circuitous route and story, but basically after Washington, when the war ended, my father moved to Niagara Falls, New York, where he had a family connection and some business opportunities. My great-great uncle — we call him Uncle Steve — this is a man that was born off the coast of Africa on a whaling ship in the 1860s. I used to sit on his lap, and he would say stories about being a whaler in the late part of the last century, that century I should say. And it was quite an amazing thing to experience. He was totally cogent to the end. He died at 88 in 1947, but I had about a year of sitting with him. It was a wonderful time to have that crossover between generations, as it were.

0:08:19: So anyway, Father took over the companies when Uncle Steve passed and we stayed on, through my high school years, in Niagara Falls. And as soon as that was done, my parents moved down to southern Pennsylvania to take over a branch of the company down there that was in good health, and better than Niagara Falls. It kind of cast me adrift, because my whole experience at that point, my continuum, was in Niagara Falls, and the family had moved many, many times. I was lucky; I didn’t get that many moves. I think my father was transferred and moved something like 30 times in 35 years, or whatever it was, until the war when he was stationed there for all five years of the war. So, I kind of went off in my own directions at that point. I was not comfortable with the West Coast — pardon me, the East Coast society.

0:09:13: I just didn’t relate to the whole eastern, quasi-English, old-boy system, and I didn’t really wanna be a part of it. I didn’t feel a part of it. Even though I have the

credentials, I'm not one of them. I wanted my own life and my own world. I've had this conversation, trying to explain it to family members, that it's not personal, they were all people I cared for and loved, but I needed to be off on my own. Maybe while I was in college, which was at Dartmouth College, where I was kind of adrift trying to figure out what I was gonna do with my life, I finally decided that I wanted to emigrate, and I thought, "Well, I'm going to go to New Zealand."

0:09:54: So it was more that I was fleeing the society I grew up in. I'm a refugee of a sort. [chuckles] It took me the longest time to realize, but I realized that most of the characters that I've known on the West Coast are, let's say, extreme personalities or whatever. I don't think of myself that way exactly, but we're all refugees and renegades who couldn't handle living in the East Coast society. It's a broadly made observation, but I think it's pretty accurate. For instance, the people that we'll be talking about at Druid Heights I assume, the three main characters, myself, Roger Somers and Elsa Gidlow, we all fit that category. Elsa, of course, was a renegade escaped from England, although that was with her parents originally. But later she escaped from Canada and came into the United States looking for a better life, a freer life.

0:10:46 Debra Schwartz: What years were you at Dartmouth?

0:10:49 Edmund Stiles: I'm sorry.

0:10:49 Debra Schwartz: When were you at Dartmouth?

0:10:52 Edmund Stiles: I was originally class of '61, meaning I started in '57, and after two years I was not very happy there. I didn't relate to the place or to the people, and what they were doing there. My best friend was pretty much lost in an automobile accident, and in the start of the year my sister's fiancé was killed in an automobile accident. It was a rough year for me.

0:11:14 Debra Schwartz: While you were at Dartmouth?

0:11:16 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. He was like a second brother to me, so that loss was big. And I finally just thought, "I don't wanna be here anymore. I can't be here anymore." [chuckles] In those days, people didn't do this much; it was sort of unheard of to take a leave from school, as it were. So I told my parents I was gonna just go do something non-academic for one full year, that I just had to be out. They kind of grudgingly accepted it, and my father said to me, "Okay, there's one thing I want you to do then for me," and it was to stay in touch with one of the deans. So I said, "Okay, fine." I wrote one particular dean at Dartmouth a letter and said, "This is who I am. This is what I'm doing." We struck up a friendship by mail, and I haven't seen this man in a long, long time — I don't know if he's still alive — but we communicated with each other on a very personal level for many years.

0:12:07: He eventually became the dean of Harvey Mudd, one of the university colleges, at Harvey Mudd.

0:12:14 Debra Schwartz: In Southern California?

0:12:14 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and I kinda lost track of him after that. But anyway, it was a time in which I just had to stop being in school.

0:12:23 Debra Schwartz: And it was all men's school at that point?

0:12:25 Edmund Stiles: Yes, it was.

0:12:26 Debra Schwartz: I believe *Animal House* was written by one of —

0:12:31 Edmund Stiles: One of my classmates, yes. When I heard the story, I thought, "I got it. That's gotta be one of the guys that I know." [chuckles] And it was. It turned out it was one of the class of '61 who wrote that thing.

0:12:45 Debra Schwartz: Well, you might've just met my husband. He was there then too.

0:12:48 Edmund Stiles: He was? In Dartmouth?

0:12:48 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. After the interview, we'll —

0:12:50 Edmund Stiles: Okay.

0:12:51 Debra Schwartz: All the stories I've heard about Dartmouth, and you're talking about wanting to get away from the good old boy club in the East Coast.

0:13:02 Edmund Stiles: I couldn't have picked a worse school, from that point of view. Maybe Princeton or Harvard would have been worse, but I don't know.

0:13:08 Debra Schwartz: Yes, but I mean, if there could've been more of a clubby atmosphere, I don't know where it would be.

0:13:11 Edmund Stiles: I'm one of a very few people that didn't love Dartmouth. [chuckles] And I very much didn't love Dartmouth. So in a way, I've long considered the fact that I did take a degree from Dartmouth, eventually, that that's one of my great failures. That's one of my first really big failures in life was getting that degree, 'cause I didn't believe in it and I didn't want it, I did it for my parents. At least that's the way I felt at the time.

0:13:34 Debra Schwartz: It very much was at that time, from what I understand, very clubby. And so, you left that world, you're leaving the East Coast, and then where did you go?

0:13:46 Edmund Stiles: I tried to get to the West Coast on a couple of different occasions. In fact, the year that I traveled — I need to mention that — I set off on my little five-horse-power motor scooter, [chuckles] which I used to deliver papers on when I was a kid. I kept it at Dartmouth, and I just rode it across country, headed towards the West Coast, I was trying to get to California.

0:14:06 Debra Schwartz: Why?

0:14:07 Edmund Stiles: 'Cause I wanted to see —

0:14:08 Debra Schwartz: You wanted to “go west, young man”?¹

0:14:08 Edmund Stiles: That was going to be my departure point to New Zealand. That's what I was gonna do.

0:14:11 Debra Schwartz: Right, of course.

0:14:12 Edmund Stiles: I'd never been there, so I thought, “Well, I better find out what that's about.” So I got as far as Wyoming, and my backside had run out —14-hour days, at about 20 miles an hour against the westerly headwinds.

0:14:27 Debra Schwartz: I really can't imagine.

0:14:28 Edmund Stiles: No, I can't either, but I did it. When I got to the area of the Teton's I found some of my college climbing friends. I'd been trained in rock climbing, technical climbing by people in the outdoor club at Dartmouth, and they were the best of it for me in many ways. I had some skill at that, but I was never very experienced. I didn't have any equipment; I had the barest minimum of stuff with me.

0:14:53 Debra Schwartz: And you're at Jackson Hole?

0:14:54 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. And they used to maintain a campground for climbers at that time, I don't know if they still do. It was a wild and woolly scene. It was probably one of the best summers I ever had in my life. So I wound up spending the rest of the summer there, 'cause I just couldn't face the rest of the trip westward —

0:15:12 Debra Schwartz: Going 20 miles an hour, putt-putting your way?

0:15:14 Edmund Stiles: Yes, exactly. I was done. Occasionally, somebody would lend me enough gear to do a small climb, but I never got much climbing in. But I got a job in the lodge, washing dishes in the lodge, and I would steal coffee for the guys at the campground. Everybody was running on a shoestring and doing the best they could with no money.

0:15:36 Debra Schwartz: That's a Jackson Hole that nobody would see right now.

¹ Debra cites the famous saying of the 19th century newspaper editor Horace Greeley.—Editor.

0:15:40 Edmund Stiles: I don't know, I haven't been there in a long time, but I guess that's largely gone probably, that world. There're still people that climb there on a regular basis.

0:15:47 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:15:49 Edmund Stiles: And some of those people were famous; they have become famous climbers. Some of the guys that I knew at Dartmouth. In those days there were three climbing centers, and the sort of the pilot flame of that world was Boulder, Colorado, Dartmouth College and Berkeley, California. And I see the names of those people in National Geographic standing on top of the highest mountains in the world every now and again, or used to. I think we're all too old now. [chuckles] I heard many of them actually went on to a whole new entire life, and become doctors so they could make enough money to go climb.

0:16:17 Debra Schwartz: Right.

0:16:17 Edmund Stiles: It was a kind of compulsion that I've never had about anything that I can think of. I always had a lot of respect for it. I never quite had that kind of instinct, but I do enjoy the fact that I had some exposure to that kind of people.

0:16:32 Debra Schwartz: Sounds wonderful.

0:16:33 Edmund Stiles: It was. It was an amazing summer and it was probably, in a way, a turning point for me, because it launched me off. I hadn't intended to necessarily go to Europe, but I did. And one of the people I met at the campground mobbed up with me and we went off traveling together. We wound up catching one of the last regular passenger steamers across the Atlantic, before they had it pretty much shut down, and landed in Copenhagen in the fall of '59. I just traveled with him for a while 'till I couldn't stand it anymore, and then I set off on my own and spent the rest of the year wandering by myself. Then I got a job in Germany and worked for a shipping company, car shipping company. It was a great adventure. Those stories go on forever but —

0:17:22 Debra Schwartz: I'm still wondering what brought you to the Bay?

0:17:30 Edmund Stiles: When I came back from that year abroad, I was pretty beat up. I went places I probably shouldn't have gone on my motorcycle. I went to Algeria during the Algerian War. I was out on the street and roughed up, not physically — I was not beat up — but I had put myself into just a lot of rough situations. And I was kind of exhausted and broke again [chuckles] 'cause my boss in Germany failed to pay me, so I had stayed extra time to try to put him out of business. But anyway, I got home and went back to Dartmouth because I needed to go somewhere where I knew where the men's room was. [chuckles]

0:18:09: I just didn't have what it took to go start something entirely new. That's why I have a degree from Dartmouth, really. I capitulated, and said, "Okay, fine. Take me, I'm yours." And they did.

0:18:20 Debra Schwartz: Well, you got a little bit of that traveling out of your system, enough to settle down for a month or two?

0:18:28 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and unfortunately the settling down didn't really happen for quite a long time. It happened in the course of somewhere in that period of years. I met a girl in Hanover, Pennsylvania where my parents were living.

0:18:41 Debra Schwartz: Hanover?

0:18:43 Edmund Stiles: Hanover.

0:18:44 Debra Schwartz: As in Hanover —

0:18:44 Edmund Stiles: I went to school in Hanover, New Hampshire and would go home to Hanover, Pennsylvania, which was a desperate place for me. I didn't know anybody, and it was kind of a conservative little town with more churches than houses, I think. Anyway, we had a thing kind of, and she went off to the West Coast to start her life as an artist, in San Francisco. And then she started writing me these beautiful letters from San Francisco saying, "Come, come join me."

0:19:10 Debra Schwartz: The siren calls.

0:19:13 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, so that's how I first got to California finally.

0:19:16 Debra Schwartz: And is that the artist that you still live with today?

0:19:17 Edmund Stiles: No, no.

0:19:18 Debra Schwartz: Another.

0:19:18 Edmund Stiles: No, this one begged me to come and I finally left Dartmouth, never intending to come back as a matter of fact; I thought I was finally breaking out and moving. I went to see her at Christmas time, and when I got there she had fallen in love with somebody else while I was on the road —

0:19:33 Debra Schwartz: Oh, cheap shot!

0:19:35 Edmund Stiles: And started a relationship, and married him. So I think, "Okay, fine."

0:19:40 Debra Schwartz: "Well, I'm in San Francisco."

0:19:41 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, it cast me adrift into literally Marin County the next day, and that was my exposure. I got in my car and the next morning found my way into some flophouse hotel somewhere in the city. And then next morning, I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, and just drove and drove and drove through Marin. And I went, “Oh, this is not too bad.” [chuckles] At the time it just really opened me up. I won’t go too deep into that, but it was an amazing day that sort of said, “It’s okay, you’re gonna be okay.” And I went on from there.

0:20:13 Debra Schwartz: Before we leave Dartmouth, what was your degree in?

0:20:16 Edmund Stiles: Well, my degree was in geography, which at the time, in that university, was a very, very much more complicated specialty than you might think. It took me the longest time to realize it, but geography at Dartmouth was really — or at least on the university level at the time — it was the gestation point for many subjects that are taught as full subjects now, full-degree subjects. Everything to do with ecology; everything to do with the greening of the world; that stuff was all kind of rolled into geography ’cause it had no other home at the time. I think the word “eco” — what am I looking for? Anyway, some of those terms were invented while I was in college, which is hard to remember that that hasn’t always existed, that it kind of blossomed in that period of time.

0:21:06: I had to choose a major, and I was not dedicated to anything. That was my biggest problem at the time. I didn’t know what I was gonna do, and I didn’t wanna be any of the things that most of everybody else there was striving to be: doctors, lawyers, Indian chief, whatever. I had none of those instincts.

0:21:25 Debra Schwartz: Is that a pun for Dartmouth?

0:21:26 Edmund Stiles: Well, a little bit. [laughs] So I was adrift and looking for some direction to go, and — I’ll just skip around here a little bit — in the course of that the art department had a show my senior year of the furniture work of a former Dartmouth graduate, or a Dartmouth graduate, named Walker Weed. Walker made custom furniture for a living over on a farm in central New Hampshire. I never met the man until much later, but his work just stunned me; I had never seen anything like it. It was very derivative of Shaker work, but it was contemporized and it was beautiful. And I just walked in the room and went, “Oh my God.” I had made furniture since I was 14. I was a model builder, I was a tinkerer and a builder of things, but it had never occurred to me, especially in an environment like Dartmouth, that I could do something like that to make a living.

0:22:28: It just had not been part of my psychology, I guess. I always thought I would be doing something different, more mainstream or whatever, I just didn’t know. But when I saw that work, I went, “Oh my God, I could do that, maybe I could do that.” So that’s what started me on my furniture making career. I started seeking out anybody that I could find who was making custom furniture of their own designs out of hardwoods, as opposed to boxes and cabinets and things like that. And over the course of the rest of my

college time, I identified what I thought was seven people, or six people. Actually, I became the seventh in my opinion. I missed a couple of course, but at the time I had a list of names that I picked out of various resources — where there was no internet, it wasn't that easy, just they came along to me as they came along. And I already knew one of them, Wendell Castle, who was one of the biggies. He was a friend of my brother's at University of Rochester. I had met him, I knew him, and that one was an easy one. Wendell has been a friend all the rest of my life.

0:23:36 Debra Schwartz: So, you make your connections with others on your list of seven.

0:23:43 Edmund Stiles: I tried to meet all of them, but I missed several of the most important ones. I missed Wharton Esherick. He is the grandfather of us all, that's the way I think of him. He's the one who really started what I would call this kind of creative furniture making and design. One of originals. I went to see him on my way west, to the West Coast, on one of my trips west, and I arrived on a Thursday, not being smart enough to have called ahead or anything like that, and just showed up at his farm. He was gone for the day, 'cause it turned out Thursdays were the day he went into the big city to do his materials gathering and such. And his wife said, "Oh, come back another day. He'd love to meet you," and all that sort of thing. So I thought, "I'll be back next year." He died that year, so I never got to see him.

0:24:31 Debra Schwartz: Oh, the regrets.

0:24:32 Edmund Stiles: Well, I live without regrets, I refuse regrets, I just will not regret. But, yes. [laughs]

0:24:38 Debra Schwartz: But you still got the story.

0:24:39 Edmund Stiles: That one, that one hurts. And he's not the only one. That sort of thing has happened because I didn't do it right.

0:24:46 Debra Schwartz: Hearing you tell your stories so far, I'm seeing some common things — some alienation, a certain kind of wanderlust, adventure around the corner. There is some self-identification going on as well, finding yourself by — I guess it appears to me, correct me if I'm wrong — by what you don't wanna do, and by those that inspired you. But happenstance and love, or lust perhaps, bring you to San Francisco. What year did you actually move to the Bay?

0:25:33 Edmund Stiles: Well, the first time I actually had any residential time there was 1961 — no, I'm sorry, '62, right after I graduated. Because I took the year off, I was a year behind my class. In the spring of my junior year, I discovered Dartmouth had gone to the trimester system before anybody else in the country, and they did that while I was gone on my travels. So when I came back it opened this little surprising window, which is that the trimester only had three major classes per trimester. And I discovered that I could go to U.C. Berkley and take a summer session and I could knock off an entire Dartmouth

trimester in six weeks at Berkeley. So I did that. I just grabbed that and ran with it. I was so desperate to get out of college; I just wanted to be done. So I came out to Berkley and it blew my mind. I thought, “Oh my God, I could have been here the whole time.” [laughs] It was so beautiful and such a relief to see women on the campus. Oh God, it was a heartbreaker in a way, ’cause it’s like, “I could’ve had a V8,” as they say and —

0:26:47 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:26:49 Edmund Stiles: Instead I was at Dartmouth. Well, anyway —

0:26:50 Debra Schwartz: I love how you — you’re a bit of a storyteller yourself, not just your uncle.

0:26:56 Edmund Stiles: I don’t think of myself that way.

0:26:57 Debra Schwartz: Tell me, when you went on the campus what was the ambience that you perceived? What caught your eye at Berkeley?

0:27:05 Edmund Stiles: Consider where I’d been for the last three years.

0:27:07 Debra Schwartz: Okay, well, there were females there.

0:27:09 Edmund Stiles: Yes, there were females, nice looking ones and friendly ones.

0:27:11 Debra Schwartz: And the weather I suppose.

0:27:12 Edmund Stiles: Huh?

0:27:14 Debra Schwartz: The weather could be —

0:27:14 Edmund Stiles: The weather was fantastic. The first morning I found myself a little apartment under somebody else’s house in a couple of blocks from campus. It was one of those places with flowers and a beautiful little garden walk and that kind of thing. It was just the kind of thing that you don’t see in the East, at least in the parts that I was living in. And the first morning that I walked in, I had all my books stuffed under my arm and I was walking quickly, and all of a sudden I was airborne and I fell completely way out of control, books everywhere, and I was on my back, and I’m like, “My God, what just happened?” And I’d stepped on a banana slug. [chuckles] I’d never seen one before.

0:27:51 Debra Schwartz: Boy, I bet you see them all the time where you live.

0:27:52 Edmund Stiles: It was a big one, and it skidded me for about six feet vertical and then horizontally. [laughs] It didn’t get anything broken, but it was like suddenly I was down hard and I thought, “What the hell happened?” [laughs]

0:28:06 Debra Schwartz: Had you never seen a banana slug?

0:28:08 Edmund Stiles: No. And I looked at it like, “Oh my God, what was that?” I’ve become very fond of them since.

0:28:15 Debra Schwartz: I should hope so where you live.

0:28:15 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, we see them. Marilyn loves them.

0:28:17 Debra Schwartz: So, you’re in Berkeley.

0:28:19 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, I’m in Berkeley and —

0:28:19 Debra Schwartz: And it’s very different from Dartmouth.

0:28:23 Edmund Stiles: Oh God, very. And the classes were fabulous. I’ve never been an academic; I don’t do well sitting in classrooms, and I will do almost anything to avoid sitting in a similar situation. It’s sort of like you cannot put me in a classroom situation. If I have a way out, I’ll take it. So that experience academically was about as good as it ever got for me.

0:28:45 Debra Schwartz: For having to sit inside. Did some of the professors take you outside?

0:28:51 Edmund Stiles: I don’t remember that they did, it didn’t matter. It was brief enough that it didn’t matter.

0:28:55 Debra Schwartz: Were you in the geography department there?

0:28:56 Edmund Stiles: I was taking geography courses.

0:29:00 Debra Schwartz: McCone Hall?

0:29:00 Edmund Stiles: Hmm?

0:29:00 Debra Schwartz: You were in McCone Hall, is that where it was?

0:29:01 Edmund Stiles: That sounds possible. I don’t remember particularly.

0:29:02 Debra Schwartz: On the north side?

0:29:03 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. I think so. I don’t remember particularly. That whole period of time was kind of a blur. I was there just processing it to get it out of the way. But the experience of being at Berkeley, the diversity, the freedom and the sense of diversity there just was what I’d been looking for all my life. East Coast people, where I grew up, especially Niagara Falls, was a series of ghettos of different ethnic groups that kept to themselves largely. We had Poles and Jews and black people and not many

Hispanics as I recalled it. There were these pockets of Italians, lots of Italians, and everybody kept to themselves. Nobody was overtly vicious towards each other, but they didn't get along. Everybody was jealous of their ethnic diversity, and they kept it to themselves. And so when I came to Berkeley, it just kind of blew my mind 'cause I saw this mixture, this admixture of every kind of people of every color, and they seemed to get along and they smiled and waved to each other. And I go, "Oh my God, it is possible." [chuckles] So it really opened my eyes to the West Coast mystique, if you will, and I was totally at home almost immediately.

0:30:15 Debra Schwartz: Ha! Funny. Because when you're describing your experiences on the East Coast, never feeling part of things, you're always feeling a little alienated, and then you come to a place where suddenly, click.

0:30:28 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

0:30:28 Debra Schwartz: You don't feel that at all.

0:30:30 Edmund Stiles: Well, in a way that's my West Coast story, because as I said, I always thought I was gonna emigrate, at least that was my intention, and when I hit Sausalito in the winter time, and I saw what was there and what was going on there — this of course is not the Sausalito today. It was not the tourist trap it is now, but it was a rather amazing collection of extraordinary characters living extraordinary lives. 'Cause it was house boats, and —

0:30:58 Edmund Stiles: All of it.

0:31:00 Debra Schwartz: Let's say some of the names of the characters, for those that are listening that wanna go back. You're walking down the street, or maybe you're in the house boats, who are you seeing? What's it like?

0:31:10 Edmund Stiles: Well, [chuckles] the one that stands out the most immediately — there's several. Barney West lived and worked at what he called Tiki Junction, and he was a chainsaw tiki god carver. [laughs] He made sculptures, and anybody who was in Sausalito in those years would have known him, because they were right along Bridgeway. I don't remember exactly how I met him. I probably walked up and said, "Hello," but I was looking for a place to live 'cause, again, this was right after I graduated in '62.

0:31:45 Debra Schwartz: And you're how old now?

0:31:46 Edmund Stiles: Well, I graduated in March of '62. I would have been 23, 24.

0:31:49 Debra Schwartz: 23, 24, very young man.

0:31:51 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, but I was a year old for my class, and that was because I started school late. In the war years, I was one day too old to get into the prior class, and

so I had to wait a year to go into kindergarten. So I was always a little bit older than my classmates.

0:32:08 Debra Schwartz: So, did you see him with his tiki carving?

0:32:10 Edmund Stiles: So, there's Barney in this crazy hat, and making these wild sculptures with a chainsaw. I'd never seen anything like that either, typical West Coast thing I suppose. Anyway, I kinda became friends with him, and he had a little boat and he had had built a little rickety dock out behind that, it was like a projection of that area. I've forgotten what it was called.

0:32:31 Debra Schwartz: Which side of Sausalito are we talking here? Wait, the north or south?

0:32:36 Edmund Stiles: Right at the south, I'm sorry, the north edge.

0:32:40 Debra Schwartz: Waldo Point?

0:32:42 Edmund Stiles: Not that. You know where the police department is?

0:32:46 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. Oh, right there, that little spit.

0:32:49 Edmund Stiles: Let's see, it's all kind of hard for me to place. I was thinking it was by Schoonmaker, the diesel company, but it wasn't entirely that close. I had a conversation with somebody the other day that refreshed for me that that wasn't where it was. I used to look at that building from the boat. Anyway, wherever Tiki Junction was, it was sort of like, it would have been south of Schoonmaker Diesel. And he had built this illegal, what of course would now be defined as a totally illegal little dock, and it was a rickety little thing. And out on the dock he had this little sloop called the Black Gull. It had to be care-taken because it was in shallow water, and it was a keelboat. Every time the tide would go out it would fall over on its keel. So he had to have somebody aboard to kind of manage the lines and let them out properly and then bring her back in again. So that became me.

0:33:41 Debra Schwartz: That was you. You were the line man.

0:33:43 Edmund Stiles: Yup, I was, I lived there for free.

0:33:45 Debra Schwartz: At the Black Gull.

0:33:46 Edmund Stiles: That's right. And Barney and I became sort of friends.

0:33:49 Debra Schwartz: And were you able to bring your skills as a craftsman to his work? Is that something you could appreciate with each other?

0:33:58 Edmund Stiles: Well, his thing was very different than my thing for sure, but I found it interesting 'cause I had never seen anybody work with a chainsaw that way. And he'd make these big old sculptures and sell them to tourists, I guess, who went in and bought them. But he had this little thing going there, and it was like a little messy depot right at the edge of Bridgeway. So there was Barney. And then I got to know Sally Stanford at some point, and she was like extreme —

0:34:27 Debra Schwartz: Sally Stanford, who owned the restaurant.

0:34:31 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and who became the mayor. She was a former madam who became the mayor of Sausalito, which I still love. [chuckles] I took my father to meet her, and he loved her and then she loved him. They got to be friends right off the bat, and I thought that was always kind of fun.

0:34:44 Debra Schwartz: I think everybody loved her.

0:34:45 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, I guess so.

0:34:47 Debra Schwartz: So you were friends with Sally Stanford?

0:34:48 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and then I made friends with Juanita. It's so hard to find anybody that remembers Juanita, but I don't know why, 'cause she was just the most amazing character.

0:34:57 Debra Schwartz: Who's Juanita? I've not heard of Juanita.

0:35:00 Edmund Stiles: Juanita ran a restaurant, not just any restaurant, but it was this amazing operation in one of the old beached ferry boats — was it the Charles Van Damme? It might have been the Charles Van Damme.

0:35:10 Debra Schwartz: Was it the Van Damme? Golly!

0:35:13 Edmund Stiles: Might have been. If it wasn't the Van Damme, it was the other one.

0:35:14 Debra Schwartz: Tell people about, in this interview, about the Van Damme, well, after you talk about Juanita.

0:35:20 Edmund Stiles: Well, the Issaquah [Dock] was next to it almost. And a good friend of mine who worked with me on some projects later on, Jim Jensen, who was always known by everybody around there as Bat Fang —

0:35:35 Debra Schwartz: Bat Fang? [chuckles]

0:35:36 Edmund Stiles: He was a pretty extreme character, but he had a heart of gold. He was like a Chico, California hot rod builder, metal guy.

0:35:46 Debra Schwartz: So he had those, not monster cars, but the —

0:35:54 Edmund Stiles: Hot rods, '32...

0:35:54 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:35:56 Edmund Stiles: He gave me a '32 Ford Deuce Coupe, the classic hot rod vehicle. He borrowed a lot of money from me when I could give him something, and he gave me the pink slip to this car, but I didn't really know what it was, or I didn't have any way to value it.

0:36:10 Debra Schwartz: Don't you wish you had it now?

0:36:12 Edmund Stiles: Yes, [chuckles] I sold it for a song. And he got into some trouble, he was a dope guy, it turned out.

0:36:21 Debra Schwartz: What kind of dope back then?

0:36:23 Edmund Stiles: He had everything. He had a sample case apparently. I never saw it. Many people in my life have been doing things without necessarily forcing me to know it, and Jim was one of those people.

0:36:33 Debra Schwartz: They were polite about it, huh? So you wouldn't be responsible for it?

0:36:36 Edmund Stiles: Well, I also see that people go in and out of things, and I think he slipped into it a little heavier stuff later on. I don't know if this is germane to the story, but ultimately he rolled his car somewhere upcountry and wound up in a paranoid state. He was completely whacked out. When they found him, he was hiding in a culvert, and he had a case of every kind of dope you can imagine. So, he wound up in court, of course, and that's when he borrowed the money from me to hire a lawyer, because he had been in the inside once before and he was not gonna go back if he could help it.

0:37:09: So, the upside of it is that I took the pink slip to his car and stored it, not knowing anything about its value. He then pretended to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge, and committed pretend suicide. [laughs] I never believed it, not for a minute, and I don't think anybody else did either.

0:37:28 Debra Schwartz: But that was the end of his legal problems?

0:37:30 Edmund Stiles: Well, he sort of solved it that way for a while and then, at some point, I put the word out on the street, knowing that he had to be alive — I just didn't know where he was in hiding for quite a long time — and I said, "You gotta get this car taken off." I never got a response. The grapevine didn't work, or he didn't

respond. So finally, I wound up selling it. I put an ad in the paper and some guys came over from Central Valley, and I think I sold it for about —

0:37:57 Debra Schwartz: Oh, I'm sure they did.

0:37:58 Edmund Stiles: Oh, I think I sold it for about \$1,200 and it turned out it was worth six or \$7,000 at the time. It's worth God knows what today. It was one of the few, really honest to God original, fully operational, early hot rods. It had an engine and the whole thing.

0:38:11 Debra Schwartz: Oh, God knows how much that thing would be worth today.

0:38:13 Edmund Stiles: Oh, yeah. I don't dare think about it.

0:38:16 Debra Schwartz: So these were wonderful, colorful people. Who else? Juanita, we didn't get to hear about Juanita.

0:38:21 Edmund Stiles: Well, Juanita's like the most colorful of all. She ran this amazing restaurant with an iron fist, and she was, on the surface of it, one of the fiercest characters I've ever known. She was a very large woman — heavy, heavy lady — plenty of gravitas, and she ran this amazing operation. We used to go there in the wee smalls of the morning and have breakfast in the — I don't remember.

0:38:43 Debra Schwartz: And so was it in the Charles Van Damme?

0:38:45 Edmund Stiles: I think it was. If that was the name of that particular ferry, it was one of the two ferries that were beached there by Gate 6 I think.

0:38:51 Debra Schwartz: Right off of Bridgeway, you could see it.

0:38:54 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and it was a very popular place at the time. A lot of people would go there, but it was a wild scene. And on many occasions, I saw Juanita deal with somebody who was out of line. [chuckles]

0:39:05 Debra Schwartz: How'd she deal?

0:39:07 Edmund Stiles: Sorry?

0:39:09 Debra Schwartz: In what fashion?

0:39:10 Edmund Stiles: Well, she would grab them by the scruff of the neck and give them the heave-ho physically out the door if she didn't like them.

0:39:14 Debra Schwartz: She did not suffer fools lightly.

0:39:16 Edmund Stiles: No, she did not. She was the real deal. She was like Tugboat Annie on steroids. [laughs] Anyway, because I feared her, I made a friend of her. That's the way I've dealt with people all my life: if I'm afraid of them I make friends with them. [laughs] It's my best defense. And I learned to run. So Juanita and I became sorta pretty friendly. I liked her very much.

0:39:37 Debra Schwartz: Walking along the docks, surrounded by all this color in so many ways, did you ever think, "Here I am. How did I end up here?" Or some version of that?

0:39:50 Edmund Stiles: Well, yeah. I sort of wonder that all the time. It comes up for me fairly frequently. The way things unfolded for me once I left the East Coast, it was pretty amazing how things kinda began to unfold. My year in Europe was pretty amazing. I had experiences and went places and did things that I value very much, but it was a hard year and it was hard travel. I was alone almost the entire time, which is not typical of college students in Europe today. They go in patches and they drink all the beer and have all the fun. I never had any fun, but I had amazing times. [laughs]

0:40:22: You mentioned earlier that I have a streak in me, I push myself into situations. I'm an experience junkie. I value experience, almost any experience, above most things. Even bad experiences, I think are very valuable 'cause you learn from them, and they give you something to think about. Obviously, there are limits to that, of course. But nonetheless, at that time when I was out on my own and rattling around, I didn't know where to stop, like going into Algeria was a stupid thing to do and I had to fight to get the visa to do it, and they didn't wanna give it to me 'cause they didn't wanna admit that they had no control in Algeria, the French. So I spent a week in Paris to get that visa, and it was denied and denied and denied. And finally, on my last day that I could possibly go harass this woman, she said, "Bon!" And she stamped this piece of paper.

0:41:11 Debra Schwartz: Go get killed.

0:41:11 Edmund Stiles: Exactly. [laughs]

0:41:13 Debra Schwartz: If you want to.

0:41:14 Edmund Stiles: The French were not telling people on the outside that they were losing in Algeria. When I crossed into Algeria, I learned very quickly that it was a fool's mission.

0:41:23 Debra Schwartz: "What am I doing here?"

0:41:24 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, I had to leave.

0:41:25 Debra Schwartz: So back we go to Sausalito. Any other characters you wanna bring up before we walk away?

0:41:33 Edmund Stiles: Oh, God.

0:41:33 Debra Schwartz: Local personalities?

0:41:34 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, I couldn't talk about Sausalito time without talking about the No Name Bar, which became, later on especially, my "local" as the Brits would say. It was the most amazing collection of people that you could ever imagine meeting in a drinking establishment, and particularly Neil Davis, behind the bar, who owned it, and the sailor, Spike Africa, was at that time extant, and having more fun than anybody I've ever seen. To be in the bar when Spike would come in and do his little thing was just —

0:42:08 Debra Schwartz: What was his little thing?

0:42:09 Edmund Stiles: Oh, he and Davis had a series of running jokes. It varied all the time but it was a sort of thing of like one time when the bar was full of strangers, outside with the tourists and so on, Africa, who was this wild looking little guy with a big twisty moustache, came in the door and shouted at Davis behind the counter, "Goddamnit Davis, Mrs. Jones up in 3B says that the water doesn't work and the hot water's off, and goddamnit get up there and fix it." And Davis said, "Nah, I don't answer to you." Davis is in flight. He's jumped across the bar and chased him through the bar. And Spike Africa ran through the back of the bar, and there was an open patio in the back, with a latticework up the side wall about 10 feet, and Spike who was in his, I don't know, 60s or 70s at the time but was a wiry little guy, he just scampered up that chalice, that latticework like a monkey and disappeared over the top. [chuckles] Davis was standing there shaking his fist at him, and all the tourists in the bar were like, just with gaping mouths. [laughs]

0:43:10 Debra Schwartz: They're wondering, "Who's gonna pour my beer? Where's my scotch?"

0:43:13 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, well, they were just astounded to see this display of anger and ferocity, but it was of course, a little act that went on and on like that in many ways.

0:43:22 Debra Schwartz: They amused themselves, did they?

0:43:24 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, they did. They had a nice time.

0:43:25 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:43:25 Edmund Stiles: And I loved that stuff.

0:43:27 Debra Schwartz: And music, was there music at the No Name then?

0:43:30 Edmund Stiles: Not like there is now. No, not so much. It was more about the encounter, people encountered there, they'd go there to meet other people. Evan Connell,

the writer, would be there frequently. There were a lot of intellectuals and writers and poets at the time.

0:43:47 Debra Schwartz: A real Bohemian scene.

0:43:48 Edmund Stiles: I never thought of it as Bohemian. It was also kind of a meat market, and some of the prettiest people would drift in there and they'd connect up and leave. At that point I was married, so I was outside of the game there, but I used to watch it with great interest. It was a very, very fecund place at the time, and I'll always mourn for it. But these things never last, they are what they are, and they come and they go.

0:44:13 Debra Schwartz: Everything has an era.

0:44:14 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, so anyway —

0:44:15 Debra Schwartz: Druid Heights is central to this interview, because there's a lot of interest about Druid Heights just about now, and we can talk about that. But at some point along the way, you fell in love and got married, and found yourself at Druid Heights. Maybe you can catch me up with that.

0:44:36 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. This is a dangerous subject, 'cause it's so complex. As they say, it's "complicated."

0:44:41 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's try to keep it general.

0:44:45 Edmund Stiles: Okay. Well, I have to go back to high school when I met Marilyn, my wife. I fell crazy in love with her, but she was not having much of it at the time. I'd take her out to dances and things, but only because her real boyfriend was in the Army and hadn't come home for a while. I got to escort her around a little bit, but she was not interested in me at the time. So, we went our ways, but I communicated with her. I used to write letters a lot: I hand-wrote, type-wrote, I wrote. It was my way of staying grounded when I was far away from my anchors, my own anchors. Well, I didn't have any anchors at that point, that was really actually the point of them.

0:45:25 Debra Schwartz: You were adrift.

0:45:26 Edmund Stiles: I was adrift on my journeys, and didn't have a place I wanted to go back to, and that was a state of being that I was very affected by. I was always very conscious of that, 'cause I always wanted to have a home that I could call my home. I realized that I can go anywhere and do anything, but I need to have a place I know is there so I can go back. And that's why Druid Heights was so important to me, because that was going to be the place. It turned out, of course, that we lost it to the GGNRA [Golden Gate National Recreation Area].

0:45:56 Debra Schwartz: But you're still there.

0:45:57 Edmund Stiles: Yes. But at the time —

0:46:00 Debra Schwartz: We'll get to that.

0:46:00 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, we'll get to that. So, I fell in love with Marilyn and stayed in love with her through all those years of wandering. And during the time that I came back, I graduated, I worked on a sailing ship in the Bahamas for about six months for Captain Mike Burt. That was my first job out of college. At the end of that I was festering to get to the West Coast, and I went back through Niagara Falls to see old friends. I had, at that point, kind of gotten over Marilyn. I decided, "No, that's never gonna happen." So I just let it go. And my seventh grade science teacher, he and I had been friends, his name was Dick Vartanian, I called him up to say "Hello, just passing through town," and he said, "Well, have you seen Marilyn?" And I said, "Nah, no, no, that's done. I'm not doing that." "Oh, come on," he said, "she's your friend. Go say hello to her." I said, "No, I'm done. I don't wanna do that."

0:46:57: He convinced me, sort of cajoled me, and I guess I wanted to be convinced, so I went to see Marilyn, and things had changed for her. We'd been writing back and forth for a long time. And so, I walked in —

0:47:09 Debra Schwartz: And you're growing into your manhood, too.

0:47:12 Edmund Stiles: I had. I had changed. I grew a beard. That helped. [laughs] I always looked rather young for my age. I looked like a little boy, I guess.

0:47:20 Debra Schwartz: And a man shows up.

0:47:22 Edmund Stiles: Well, at least a couple of years. I had a couple of hard years, and I showed up later, and something had changed there. So she and I got together at that point. And I tried to convince her to come to the West Coast with me, which is where I was headed. I was driving out in my old Volkswagen van that I'd brought back from Europe. And she couldn't go. She couldn't cut loose that quickly or that easily. So I said, "Okay, fine. I'm going." And off I went. But the whole time I was out in Sausalito living on Barney's West Black Gull, that was in the back of my mind, that I was still nuts about her. And so along came —

0:48:02: I was draft bait. I was ripe as hell for the draft, and along came the Cuban missile crisis in the fall of that year. I just knew I was gonna get the call, and I did. But knowing that it was gonna happen, and knowing that I didn't know what Marilyn wanted or what could happen between us, I left the West Coast and went back east, to see her really, to find out what was going on between us. I couldn't figure it out from a distance. So, I got east, and sure enough, along came the draft notice, and I was supposed to go to Fort Dix in January or February, which was a couple of months away.

0:48:39: I don't remember now if Vietnam was starting to cook at that point. This was 1963, late '62 and into '63. But I thought, "Well maybe I'll go to Germany," which is

where I had worked and so I had the German language of sorts. [chuckles] I probably spoke like a five-year-old but I had some training and some time in the country. So I thought “Well, if they posted me to Germany out of Fort Dix, that wouldn’t be too bad.” But then I realized, well, I wouldn’t get to see her for the next couple of years, ’cause I’d be in Europe, so I was concerned about that.

0:49:25: I was drifting through New England. I’d gone to see a friend of mine at New Year’s time, and I was very much adrift myself, hoping to connect up with this old buddy from college that I had sort of taken care of. He was a little bit emotionally unstable. And then he had sort of stabilized and I was emotionally unstable, or at least my life was in chaos. So, I was gonna go see him, and I arrived in town at Hanover, New Hampshire, and my old girlfriend, my townie girlfriend, saw me and came across the street. And I knew as she walked across the street that he was gone. His plane had blown up in mid-air. So, while I was driving to go see him, he was supposed to show up that weekend for this Dartmouth outing club thing, he and his wife — Peter died that day.

0:50:06: Somehow I knew it, I knew there was something really wrong. So I wound up adrift in the hills of Vermont, as it was, and I spent New Year’s in some ski lodge somewhere that could have been one of the famous places. My father got ahold of me and said, “Would you rather go in the Peace Corps than the Army?” I had applied for Peace Corps, this is early Peace Corps, John Kennedy —

0:50:30 Debra Schwartz: This is a military man, oh my goodness.

0:50:31 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, John Kennedy was still alive and —

0:50:34 Debra Schwartz: He was thinking about his son, where he’s gonna put him safely.

0:50:37 Edmund Stiles: Well, I had applied and it took them six months to respond. At about six months, they offered me an assignment in Colombia. And so father called me up and asked, did I wanna go? Would I rather do that? And I said, “Oh, hell yes.” [chuckles] But then that was when I realized that if I took that assignment I would really be gone for two years, ’cause I knew there was no just popping back from Colombia, or wherever it was I finally went to. That put the squeeze on my situation with Marilyn, and so I thought, “Okay, this is it.” I asked her that if I could get her into the Peace Corps would she come with me and we’d get married. And she said yes.

0:51:19: So I flew to Washington, D.C. I mean, this is one of those stories that now I look back on I think, “You dud-head.” [chuckles] But this is where I kinda got into trouble, one of my early problems with government agencies. So I fly to Washington D.C. where I grew up, in my earliest years, and I’m the son of somebody who’s fairly high up in the government system, from his days when he was, and so I’m not afraid of anybody. I walk into Peace Corps headquarters, and I said, “Hello, this is who I am and this is what you’ve offered me, but I’ve heard there’s this other program in Peru, which is more suited to my needs. And by the way, there’s this woman I’d like to bring with me.”

0:51:58 Debra Schwartz: And may I have a cup of coffee too please?

0:52:00 Edmund Stiles: That sort of thing.

0:52:00 Debra Schwartz: Yes. [chuckles]

0:52:01 Edmund Stiles: And they looked at me and basically — I don't remember if it was immediate or within a day or two — they said yes. Normally it would take six months for anybody who applied to get into the Peace Corps. They took Marilyn and me almost on the spot, so it gave me this sense that, "Oh my God, here is a government agency that isn't like all the other government agencies." That was a very big mistake on my part because it turned out, no, it was a government agency, but it was so early in its formation that they were running on —

0:52:32 Debra Schwartz: More flexible.

0:52:32 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, they were just —

0:52:33 Debra Schwartz: You might later be —

0:52:34 Edmund Stiles: They were just figuring it out.

0:52:36 Debra Schwartz: So I'm sure we could go off into your Peru adventures.

0:52:39 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

0:52:40 Debra Schwartz: But we do need to come back to Druid Heights. Eventually, you and Marilyn moved to Druid Heights?

0:52:47 Edmund Stiles: Right. So we wound up in South America together after a very, very chaotic time. In fact, we split up a couple of times while we were there, and I had gone out on my own. She was taken into the Peace Corps; I trained and was thrown out the other side of it, because I had a kind of a conflict with the head of the Peace Corps Peru project, Frank Mankowitz by name. I didn't know when to back off and he more or less shot me down. So I get kicked out, they keep her, and she goes to Peru, and I go to the military. I was like on a rubber band into the draft; they got me out of the draft. By the way, people say to me, "Oh, you couldn't have gotten out of the draft. They wouldn't do that," but they did it.

0:53:30: So I got out of the draft to go into the Peace Corps, when I got thrown out of the Peace Corps at the end of the training program, I was on a rubber band back into the draft again. I joined the Coast Guard reserves as quickly as I could, and there were six months, five, six months before they were gonna actually take me on active duty. So I had that block of time. That's how I wound up going back to Peru, going to Peru the first time, as an independent.

0:53:55 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's segue back to —

0:53:57 Edmund Stiles: That's another story, sure.

0:53:58 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, let's stay with getting back to Sausalito.

0:54:01 Edmund Stiles: Well, okay. I wound up in the Coast Guard reserves, and I went on active duty on August 21st of '63. I came back from the jungles of Peru and reported for active duty like the day after I arrived back from the jungles. [chuckles] I transited from Miami to the West Coast in one of those U-Drive-It cars, didn't stop. I stayed overnight with my friend in Berkeley and went on active duty the next day. And that put me in the Bay Area full-time at that point. So I was a Coast Guard slave there for the next six months, and once I was done with boot camp I served on ships out of Alameda. And when that pitch was done, I went back to Peru and wound up getting reconnected to Marilyn. But that established a history on the West Coast that was the pick-up from when I lived there on the waterfront.

0:55:01: Now, when Marilyn and I finally came back from our adventures in South America, which was two years, we had split up again. She went her way, I went mine. I got to the West Coast and was gonna make my life, and I realized that, well, I really didn't know how to live without her; I didn't wanna live without her. So I called her up and said, "Well, would you be interested in getting married?" [Chuckles] She had been in and out of the relationship a number of times, and I just had no idea what she actually wanted to do at that point. And she said, "Yeah," she'd like to do that. So I went back east, and we got married in —

0:55:40 Debra Schwartz: Sausalito.

0:55:42 Edmund Stiles: I had rented a little apartment in Sausalito up on the hill, and I was able to order my basic wood shop machinery from Powermatic Company. I was going to pick it up in McMinnville, Tennessee where it's manufactured. So we got married, had a little short honeymoon, and then drove my father's Oldsmobile, big old heavy Oldsmobile —

0:56:06 Debra Schwartz: A lot better than that little scooter of yours.

0:56:07 Edmund Stiles: Yes, yes. With the biggest trailer that U-Haul would rent you. And we filled it up with woodworking equipment at the factory and off we went across country, and wound up arriving in the late at night in Sausalito. With having survived that trip — there were a couple hairy incidents. I don't know how many tons we had behind us, but it was a lot for a car and we made it. And then we moved into this little apartment there and immediately I had to get the machinery out of the trailer so I could return the trailer. I didn't know what I was gonna do; I didn't know where to put it.

0:56:42: So I called up Roger Somers. I had met him that time I took the classes at Berkeley. He was one of the names on my list. He was not actually a furniture maker, but he was referred to as a furniture maker in an article that I saw in *Esquire* magazine while I was at Dartmouth. That winter, leading up to my graduation, I was desperately looking for anything that would give me some pointers about that possibility, and I picked up the various names of different people, Wharton Esherick, and so on. And Roger was one of the West Coast people, and Art Carpenter was the other. Somehow, I missed Sam Maloof till later; I got to know him later.

0:57:28: So when I arrived on the West Coast, here I am, a new bride, a new old relationship, and tons of machinery in a trailer, and I didn't know what to do with them. So I had met Roger during that summer break school session, at U.C. Berkeley, and he had said, "When you get back give me a call." And so four years later, I call him and I say, "You don't remember me but —" He said, "Oh yeah, I remember you." And I said, "Do you know where a guy could put a woodworking shop?" And he'd go through this whole thing like, "Yeah, well there was a barn down by — no, no, that burned." That sort of thing. So he said, "Well, come on out, and we'll have a glass of wine, and we'll talk about it." So, we did, and —

0:58:08 Debra Schwartz: "Out" being?

0:58:10 Edmund Stiles: To Druid Heights.

0:58:11 Debra Schwartz: To Druid Heights.

0:58:11 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and I —

0:58:12 Debra Schwartz: For those that are listening now and may not know about Druid Heights, can you give us a little background information about Druid Heights?

0:58:21 Edmund Stiles: Well, at the time that I was first aware of it, Druid Heights was, I don't know really — Elsa Gidlow, the poetess, named it Druid Heights, and I'm not sure exactly when she did that. I don't remember referring to it as Druid Heights at the time. I think maybe that became popular later on. At the time it was this amazing little lost piece of land down a mile of dirt road. I didn't realize that it was just above Muir Woods but it is, and I found my way there because Roger and I met on the highway actually. He saw me looking at a map along the roadside, trying to figure out where it was that he might be found. And he came around the hairpin bend on Panoramic Highway, in an old beat-up TR 4 Triumph, with pieces of lumber sticking out the back. He was in a four-wheel drift and driving like a maniac, and I said to my partner at the time, I said, "This has to be Roger Somers," and of course it was.

0:59:17: So he stopped and said, "Hey, can I help you?" And I said, "I'm looking for Camino del Canyon." And he said, "Well, I live there." And I said, "I'm looking for Roger Somers." He said, "Well, that's me." And he said he couldn't take the time because he was off to the city to do something, so he told me how to get there, and he

said, “Go on down and meet my wife, Barbara.” Or was it Mary? I’ve forgotten which one it was. Anyway, one of his early wives. And so I did; we did. His wife was a little wary or a little — I could guess, now that I know a lot more than I knew at the time, that she’d been through this kind of experience many times. Roger was astoundingly open to almost anybody at any time, so she’d probably done this thing more than once. But the place just blew my mind when I drove down the dirt road. The dirt road that other people say, “Oh my God. How can you do this? This is horrible, this is scary, this is awful.” And I think I was in my paradise, but of course I’d also just come from a couple of years in Peru, so people in this country don’t even begin to know —

1:00:20 Debra Schwartz: Nothing like a few potholes, mud, some over-growth, and filtered sunlight to make a guy feel at home, huh?

1:00:27 Edmund Stiles: It was not only that, but it was a perfectly fine road by my standards. [laughs] Anyway, I remember thinking that it was a green tunnel, it was like going into a green tunnel ’cause it was over-hung with these trees.

1:00:37 Debra Schwartz: I think it’s still very much like that.

1:00:40 Edmund Stiles: It’s not ever quite been like it was then, or at least in my memory anyway. So I had met Barbara and saw the place, and it just blew me away. So when I got back with Marilyn and the machinery, and was looking for some place, Roger was the only person I really knew. And he had been very receiving before, so I just called him up, and we went out to have a glass of wine with him. It was a beautiful day, and he showed us around the place. And in the course of that, we walked through all the buildings. He was very proud of his place.

1:01:14 Debra Schwartz: And when would have the buildings been built? Had he done the work?

1:01:17 Edmund Stiles: No, most of the buildings pre-existed, but he had been tweaking them since he came. So he had thoroughly redone this old farmhouse where he lived. And he had a workshop in one of the buildings that had been originally just kind of a classical, typical farm structure —

1:01:36 Debra Schwartz: ’Cause there had been a farm there.

1:01:38 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, it was an attempt at a farm. It never was successful particularly that I know, but the buildings were ramshackle and in big trouble when Roger acquired them. And he just rehabbed them in his own inimitable style, and that was like a wild-man carpentry style. I don’t know exactly how to express it, what Roger —

1:01:58 Debra Schwartz: Gonzo carpeting? Flowy?

1:02:02 Edmund Stiles: He did what he wanted to do, and he did things that I'd never seen anybody else do. He had a very, very high energy, almost humorous way of approaching construction. [laughs] He just did what he wanted with whatever he had to do it with and got it done. I've never met anybody quite like that, before or since. He played the same way he built, and he could stop and turn on a dime. He'd be deep in a project and if somebody came along and said, "Let's play drums and honk your saxophone," bang, he'd be in the play mode and he would just spend the rest of the day doing music. It was a very amazing combination. To this day, I've never seen anybody else who can do what he did, in that sense. He was mercurial and playful and wide open, and that was the best of him. I loved that part of Roger. He was also very creative and inventive 'cause he didn't have any stops, he didn't have any filters and holds on him, and he was not beat down by the system at all. [laughs] He challenged the system.

1:03:02 Debra Schwartz: "System? What system?"

1:03:03 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, exactly. He challenged it and won every time. So anyway, we're looking through these buildings, and every one of them is old and somewhat rehabbed, but constructed between two of the old buildings, there was a brand new structure that was a classic perfect woodworking shop, but there was nothing in it — maybe one or two pieces of strange machinery, but they were just sitting off to the side. And we walked through and I'm looking at this thing, and my eyes are just popping out of my head, and I'm thinking, "Oh my God." You couldn't imagine more of a dream workshop for a guy like me, and Roger didn't say anything. I thought, "Well, obviously he's being careful not to blow whatever this is, and I bet he's not about to share." We wound up back at the house having a glass wine, and we're drinking the wine and my mind is going a thousand miles an hour, I think.

1:03:52 Debra Schwartz: You're already thinking, "Want, want, want!"

1:03:55 Edmund Stiles: Oh, absolutely. I have a total shop list. I still have a shop list.

1:03:58 Debra Schwartz: Shop list.

1:03:58 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. Shops are my thing. My brother once accused me of — the best product I ever made was my shops. I built better shops than anything else. Anyway, finally I just got up my chops and I said, "Roger, what is that building out there?" And he said, "Well, we built that to do this thing, and the thing failed and the guy's business didn't happen, but he put up the money and I built a building." And I said, "Well, what are you gonna do with it?" A strange look came over his face, and he thumped the table and said, "I've got it. You can put your shop in there." And to myself I said, "Are you kidding me? You've got to be kidding me." I thought for sure there was —

1:04:36 Debra Schwartz: La, la, la, la, la. [laughs]

1:04:40 Edmund Stiles: So the next day I drove out there with my trailer and unloaded all that machinery which was still in crates. Roger had always wanted to have a proper shop but he couldn't afford it. Roger had always run on fumes and much of his buildings started off with no actual financial stuff. So to have me show up with all this shiny new machinery, just blew his mind. And I didn't get to open any of it myself, it was like Roger at Christmas time as a kid. Packing crates were flying apart, and Roger was just dancing and giggling and he loved it.

1:05:17 Debra Schwartz: So how long did that equipment actually sit in that trailer before it came from the road to this new home?

1:05:23 Edmund Stiles: Maybe three days at the most.

1:05:24 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

1:05:25 Edmund Stiles: As I would say, it was probably on the third day after we arrived that I was able to unload it there.

1:05:31 Debra Schwartz: How old is Roger at this point?

1:05:32 Edmund Stiles: At that point? Roger was 12 years older than I, and that was 1965. Oh God, do I have to do the math? [laughs]

1:05:41 Debra Schwartz: '39, '49, '59, '69. So he's about in his 30s.

1:05:47 Edmund Stiles: No, I'm in my 30s, he would be in his — I'm late 20s, I guess.

1:05:52 Debra Schwartz: Late 20s, so he's in his late 30s?

1:05:55 Edmund Stiles: Or early 40s.

1:05:56 Debra Schwartz: Or early 40s?

1:05:56 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and I'd have to really —

1:05:57 Debra Schwartz: What does he look like at that time?

1:06:00 Edmund Stiles: Alan Watts made a description of him in one of his books, using a false name for him. It might've been *Cloud-Hidden*, I never read it, but I've seen a quote. And he describes him beautifully, he's sort of a Pan character.

1:06:18 Debra Schwartz: The forest god?

1:06:20 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. Roger was very handsome. He had a shock of curly white hair and kind of prominent features. He had very large nose, and he laughed and

smiled so much that he had kinda crinkly features. He could've been Santa Claus, but without too much extra stuff. He had a small beard, but it wasn't real pronounced. He was a very nice —

1:06:48 Debra Schwartz: How tall?

1:06:48 Edmund Stiles: Huh?

1:06:48 Debra Schwartz: How tall was he?

1:06:51 Edmund Stiles: Taller than I, but not by much. He was not a huge man by any means, but he was wiry and tough. At that point in his life I suppose he was at his peak, though I never thought about that fact. I've been there so long, and I watched him get old, and he watched me get old — [laughs]

1:07:09 Debra Schwartz: So you moved in there and then you stayed?

1:07:13 Edmund Stiles: Not quite. At that point, there was a house on the property that I fell in love with the minute I saw it, and it is the house I now live in. But it was then occupied by a sculptor, who had been there for quite a long time. He had been instrumental in remodeling it from the chicken barn that it had been. So, we got to see that house, and meet those people, and it was just an amazing scene. I walked in the house and knew right away that that house had been built for me, that it was my place, that it was meant to be my place. But Ron Yurowitz said, no, he was never gonna leave and that was that.

1:07:50 Debra Schwartz: What was his name?

1:07:52 Edmund Stiles: Ron Yurowitz.

1:07:52 Debra Schwartz: Ron Yurowitz, sculptor.

1:07:53 Edmund Stiles: He and Claire, yeah. Claire had goats and chickens and —

1:08:00 Debra Schwartz: Claire is?

1:08:00 Edmund Stiles: His wife. And [she had] a huge number of beautiful plants well-kept and everything; the house was just alive with critters and plants. It was a thing that it was so rustic and primitive and wonderful that I felt immediately at home. So, that hurt, but I knew, well, "Okay, fine, it's his house. I can't have it." So we wound up buying a house in San Rafael, because it was offered to us by this old couple that we met.

1:08:28 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

1:08:28 Edmund Stiles: You know?

1:08:28 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm.

1:08:29 Edmund Stiles: So, we wound up living in San Rafael, and I would commute to Druid Heights to use my shop. The deal I made with Roger, or that he made with me, was that he wanted to use my equipment, 'cause he'd never had any good equipment, and I got to use his building. And this was kinda critical to our circumstance, 'cause I put what money we had into the machinery for the most part, and I was holding on to a little residue of it, but basically was trying to get into making furniture, and making a living as fast as I could. The shop was free to me in that sense, and Roger helped me put it together to actually get the machines in there and get them working.

1:09:10: A little Roger story that I really value is — this is a demonstration of the difference between us. I'm more of a precision sort of disciplined person and Roger was this wild and creative and flamboyant personality, to say the least. So, it happened that I had this big radial arm saw machine that had a big arm that had to go back behind the work bench that it sat on, and there was no way to have that without it sticking way out in the middle of room. So Roger said, "Well, we'll cut a hole in the wall." And I said, "Really?" [chuckles] "Yeah," he said. I said, "Well, then what?" And he said, "Well, we'll build a box, you know." I said, "Yeah, okay." I visualized a week-long project while we designed it and figured out, and then, meticulously built it and figure out. But while I wasn't looking, he got out his bent hammer and bent screwdriver, and a sharpened-up piece of steel that passed for a chisel and zip, bang, bang, saw, and it was done within about three hours. And I went, "Oh!" [laughs]

1:10:07: So, it was not very pretty to look at, but it was done and it worked. And so, that sort of said something to me about the difference between the two of us. I was sharpening my chisels while he would be out there building something with his broken hammer. His tools were terrible.

1:10:24 Debra Schwartz: We have a lot of people to talk about at Druid Heights. So, you're living in San Rafael, but then quickly end up back —

1:10:37 Edmund Stiles: Within about six months.

1:10:40 Debra Schwartz: You're back.

1:10:40 Edmund Stiles: Yurowitz left. He got offered some kind of a teaching job back east, and took it and I had a feeling in retrospect, maybe their relationship was ending, I don't really know, it didn't matter to me at the time.

1:10:54 Debra Schwartz: But you got the house.

1:10:54 Edmund Stiles: They suddenly left.

1:10:54 Debra Schwartz: Your beautiful house?

1:10:54 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. The house became available to us. Roger was our landlord, and the rent was very modest. Even then at the time, I think it was \$120.

1:11:03 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

1:11:04 Edmund Stiles: Of course, it was a very simple house, it wasn't even much of a house by most people's standards, and when we moved in, it was paper thin walls and barely there. It was more imaginary than reality, but over the years I've done some things to make it a little more livable for real people. This is California, and in my mind all you really needed, especially when you're young, is shelter from the rain. If the wind was at least slowed down before it went out the other side, well, to me, that was good enough. We come from a world in which life conditions were far harder and worse than anything at Druid Heights.

1:11:43 Debra Schwartz: From the East Coast?

1:11:44 Edmund Stiles: Well, that plus Peru. We'd just come back from Peru.

1:11:47 Debra Schwartz: Right. So, what was it like to live at Druid Heights? Let's focus on purely the world there for a little while, shall we?

1:11:54 Edmund Stiles: Mm-hmm.

1:11:56 Debra Schwartz: What was it like living at Druid Heights? Tell me about your world, your people.

1:12:00 Edmund Stiles: It was my paradise at the time. I loved Roger. I got along well enough with Elsa; I mean, Elsa was a little tougher, but she had a sister, Thea, who lived in a little trailer down in the woods below Elsa, and Thea became our friend. Thea, Marilyn describes Thea as kind of gamine, sort of wood sprite character. She had henna red hair and she was, I don't know how old she was, but she looked like a pretty old woman. I don't know if she's older or younger than Elsa. I don't remember now, but I must have known that. Anyway, Thea became our friend, and Thea was totally charming. She was this wild little old woman creature that lived in the woods.

1:12:49 Debra Schwartz: Old woman. How old are we talking here?

1:12:51 Edmund Stiles: She's gotta be in her 60s-70s? She was tiny, kind of wizened a little bit, and a slightly humped back, but she had this spirit like life, she was a forest sprite, and she had this wonderful sense of life, and she enjoyed every aspect of her life, not entirely, but she was just an amazing spirit. And she loved cats. For a long time, she was the only babysitter that would help us with the children at all, once we had kids. So, that became an important part of my experience at Druid Heights. I don't know if I wanna spin off into that yet. So all right, let me finish. What life was like — so Elsa was Elsa, and she had a very disciplined lifestyle.

1:13:43 Debra Schwartz: For people that are listening to this and don't know who Elsa is, maybe you could talk a little bit who she is, her poetry.

1:13:49 Edmund Stiles: Well, Roger and Elsa bought the property together, I believe that Roger had identified it, seen it, fallen in love with it, wanted it, but he didn't have any money. He had zero money in fact, at that time, he had kids and a wife and they lived I think near Tiburon in a ramshackle house or something. Just recently I made this connection that maybe he met Budd Isaacs, who was a prime character in our story up there. Budd had the big old lodge just below where we all live.

1:14:24: And Budd was a very sour, hard-working, iconoclast of some kind or other. I don't exactly know how to describe him, because he became our enemy. He hated Roger with a bright blue passion. So, Budd Isaacs is a thing that plays large in the early years there. He and Roger had worked together for a long time. Budd was a stone mason and worked all the time. Roger had assisted him with something and I think that's how Roger learned about the property. It turned out that Budd had always been waiting to buy that property for nothing because it had been on the market for a long time and nobody bought it because there was no water. The buildings were totally ramshackle and it was just not something anybody was willing to take on. And Roger fell in love with it. He had met Elsa Gidlow, who was a lesbian poetess and had around her a circle of, I guess you'd say, intellectuals, and Alan Watts was one of them.

1:15:26 Debra Schwartz: A circle of what?

1:15:27 Edmund Stiles: Intellectuals.

1:15:27 Debra Schwartz: Intellectuals, yes.

1:15:28 Edmund Stiles: Writers and other such people, poets. And so Elsa had a little puddle of money that she had gotten from — these things are documented, I don't know where that money came from. She sold something that she had, a house possibly in Fairfax or something along that line. All I know is it the Roger went to her and said, "Hey let's buy this property together. You put up the money, I'll give you the best house and your choice of buildings." And so far as I know, that's more or less what they did: it was Elsa's money and Roger's abilities that made the place come together.

1:16:05: So, when Marilyn and I arrived in '65, they had been there since — I think it was roughly '54 when they bought the land, and so they been there since then. Roger had been rehabbing his house and he gave Elsa — or Elsa took — what you might say was the most well-constructed and best-preserved structure. And then Roger took the rest and started doing his thing. By the time I got there, he had done his own house into this sort of Japanese Frank Lloyd Wright — I don't know what they call it exactly, his style. He obviously was heavily impressed by Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright. And he was, like all West Coast builders that I've ever known, obviously very impressed by Japanese building elements.

1:16:57: I'm one of the few hold outs on it. I've never been particularly taken with Japanese style at all. I've never spent any time in the orient either, in Asia, and I don't have that influence at all. He never did either by the way, but he was highly impressed by it.

1:17:15 Debra Schwartz: It definitely was a wave going through at that time.

1:17:16 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, it was guys coming back from Korea and World War II for that matter. The influence on the West Coast of America, of Japan especially, was huge. And you know, it took me a long time to realize that much of the art of the '20s — and earlier than that, all the way back to Britain — there were waves of impressions of a valuable art that came into those cultures. There were tons of pottery made with Asian influences, and all that stuff was important. So Roger was one of those people, and I just am not. I never liked it, particularly.

1:17:58 Debra Schwartz: So Roger has that Asian influence on his place.

1:18:01 Edmund Stiles: I would say so, yeah.

1:18:04 Debra Schwartz: And he took care of Elsa.

1:18:07 Edmund Stiles: He took care of Elsa. As far as I know, he gave her what she needed, and she then created her gardens around her place, and she lived there in really great comfort and style and quiet.

1:18:20 Debra Schwartz: And then the other fellow. What's his name again, the arch enemy?

1:18:21 Edmund Stiles: Oh, Budd Isaacs.

1:18:24 Debra Schwartz: And he's down below.

1:18:27 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

1:18:27 Debra Schwartz: And who else?

1:18:31 Edmund Stiles: Thea, Elsa, Marilyn, myself and Roger. And at the time that we arrived in '65, Roger's most recent wife — again, I'm sorry, Mary or Barbara, I don't remember, both of his wives were beautiful blondes, and they kinda blend together in my impression of them.

1:18:49 Debra Schwartz: You gave me a list of some of his women. There's a long list of women.

1:18:56 Edmund Stiles: I think Mary was the mother of the two children, Tagore and Geraldine.

1:19:03 Debra Schwartz: There's Massa.

1:19:04 Edmund Stiles: It was Barbara that was living there when I first met Roger. It was Barbara he was living with.

1:19:09 Debra Schwartz: Oh no, here it is: Margot St. James.

1:19:13 Edmund Stiles: Oh well, they came later.

1:19:15 Debra Schwartz: Gail, Fay, Beking Somers.

1:19:18 Edmund Stiles: Yes?

1:19:20 Debra Schwartz: Dionne, Kim Von Tempsky, Catherine MacKinnon and Echo Heron. No, that's another person?

1:19:29 Edmund Stiles: Those are all people who lived there over a period of time.

1:19:35 Debra Schwartz: But some of these are his women.

1:19:36 Edmund Stiles: Oh yeah, the first three or four you mentioned were sequential. Roger was a sequential monogamist. He seemed to be very sexually on all the time, but the truth is he was basically sexually monogamous. He had a series of different women and they were all interesting and strange and wonderful characters, especially Margot I would say. Echo Heron was not one of them. Echo was a tenant who in fact was connected up to Roger's son Tagore. So Echo lived with Roger's son Tagore for many years. She's one of the resources of that place 'cause she had experiences with close in to the family itself that I didn't have 'cause that was in the period where Roger and I had sort of separated.

1:20:24 Debra Schwartz: Before we go, who are some of the other people you remember from that time that hung out there?

1:20:30 Edmund Stiles: Okay, I was trying to work through who was there when we first came, and that's who was there. In other words, it was just three households really.

1:20:37 Debra Schwartz: That was modest. It wasn't a flamboyant place. It was modest, just a little small community of people living in its small clustered houses.

1:20:45 Edmund Stiles: There was always a certain tone of flamboyance about Roger. He partied a lot, he had a lot of friends that would come by even then, but they were not residents, they were just people that would drop in, and he was very, very open. He'd have parties and invite people, kinda open house parties and people would come from the city. Those were halcyon days for me; I loved all of it. I loved all the craziness and all the wild stuff and the wacky stuff. I come from an Eastern conservative background, and I

was trying to escape that, and I found in Roger and that place everything I could have actually hoped for. It was a wide open. Anything was possible on any given day, but it wasn't dangerous. It wasn't weird, it was just like wide open. And mostly we worked. I worked every day in my shop. I was struggling to make a living and to prove to myself that I could make custom furniture.

1:21:37: So I'd have to say that, when I started up, I didn't know if I could do it or not. The only thing I came out of Dartmouth with was the absolute assurance that there was nothing in that world that I wanted or could do without going crazy or blowing it and the only thing I came up with that might possibly work for me was working with my hands in a wood shop. And I didn't have an ambition to be a star. I always said "nicer than average things for nicer than average people." That was my dream in that situation and Druid Heights gave me that possibility. The overhead was low. It allowed me to work out my skills and find them. I'm self-trained in everything I've ever done, so I taught myself to do it and discovered over time that I could.

1:22:26 Debra Schwartz: We'll digress just for a moment here, if you don't mind, but we will need to get back to Druid Heights. I have been told by someone who was there that you were probably were one of the greatest craftsmen of furniture that he'd ever seen. And this is a builder himself.

1:22:41 Edmund Stiles: [chuckles] Well, that's obviously very flattering, but I never heard anybody say anything like that. For the most part, nobody paid much attention to what I was doing.

1:22:48 Debra Schwartz: But you have had some commissions.

1:22:51 Edmund Stiles: Oh yeah, I've had some great clients. I love my clients.

1:22:54 Debra Schwartz: Who were some of your clients?

1:22:58 Edmund Stiles: Who what?

1:23:00 Debra Schwartz: Who were your clients?

1:23:00 Edmund Stiles: Well, the one that stands out most is Graham Nash. I worked for him for the best part of five years. I didn't work for anybody exclusively ever, and I never collaborated with Roger in the shop. That's a misunderstanding on the part of a lot of people. They thought I was working for him in that shop. But you know, Roger and I had our separate worlds. He built things, houses and remodeling; I worked in a shop. Amongst my clients, it took a surprising turn fairly early on that I got a commission to do some furniture and lighting fixtures for the Christian Scientist Church in Mill Valley, which was just being finished. It was a Charles Warren Callister design.

1:23:37 Debra Schwartz: And where is that?

1:23:40 Edmund Stiles: It's on Camino Alto on the way to Larkspur.

1:23:47 Debra Schwartz: Oh right.

1:23:47 Edmund Stiles: As you leave Mill Valley.

1:23:47 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:23:47 Edmund Stiles: It's on the left. So that building was just finishing up, and Callister had designed everything. So this was un-typical for me, or atypical for me, 'cause I usually designed my own stuff. But they came to me through Al Klyce, who was at that point a casual friend.

1:24:05 Debra Schwartz: This is the son or the father, Klyce?

1:24:09 Edmund Stiles: The son, the youngest son, Alan, now who is 90 something.

1:24:13 Debra Schwartz: Klyce is a very familiar name in Mill Valley. He is a builder.

1:24:17 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, three generations in fact. Many of the most beautiful houses in Mill Valley were built by Klyces. I just learned it's Harvey, I thought there were three generations of Al, that Al was the third. Harvey Klyce and then two Als, I think. So anyway, Al had been offered the job and he knew me and knew about me and brought it to me and said did I wanna do it, and I thought, "Hell yeah, I'll do anything that I can feed my family with." So it was not what I wanted to do the most, 'cause I like to design my own work, but it was just executing from Callister's drawings. But it was a major project, in that there was a central chandelier that was about 18 feet long and had these sweeping arms and light fixtures on the ends of the arms, and so on. And so, I just built what they asked me for — the lectern, the chandelier — and then my old friend, Bat Fang the metalsmith, I hired him to come into the shop and make the copper light fixtures.

1:25:12 Debra Schwartz: Bat Fang? That makes me laugh! [chuckles]

1:25:14 Edmund Stiles: Well, it makes me smile too to remember that. Jim Jensen did a really fine job on these copper light fixtures and I did the rest and together we installed all this stuff. Installing the chandelier alone probably should have been the price of the — that is to say, I charge nothing for installation, I never did. I always did design and everything but the actual making of the furniture, I always did for free; I never charge for designs. Consultation time though, that was one of the reasons I think we had a hard time making a living with. When we installed that chandelier it was a huge project and I almost got killed while I was doing it on the scaffold.

1:25:56: And Jim Jensen may have saved my life, 'cause this big old drill I borrowed from Roger locked into a steel cross member and spun me off the 30-foot high platform

while I was drilling holes in the very peak at the top of the church. It was this monster machine that was a clunker. He'd replaced the real trigger switch with an old standard flip switch, which I couldn't reach because if I let go, I would have been completely thrown off. It hit me in the chin and knocked me half unconscious and spun me off the scaffolding. So I've got one foot hooked on the scaffold and Jensen jumped over and yanked the plug out of the drill and I just sort of wound back on to the platform, but the pews had already been installed. If I'd fallen on the pews I'd have been dead, no question.

1:26:38 Debra Schwartz: Oh my.

1:26:40 Edmund Stiles: So, anyway, that installation was my first introduction to playing with the big boys. But that then led to three more church commissions.

1:26:48 Debra Schwartz: In the vicinity?

1:26:49 Edmund Stiles: No, they were kind of scattered here and there.

1:26:51 Debra Schwartz: What else locally that people would be able to see?

1:26:54 Edmund Stiles: Not much. Most of my work was in private homes and the churches. My work can be seen in the churches if somebody wants to go.

1:27:03 Debra Schwartz: So the other churches are — ?

1:27:06 Edmund Stiles: In Palo Alto, Mountain View, and Sokel is the most significant one. It was a chapel connected to a new Catholic church — sorry, a new Catholic hospital. I furnished the entire chapel plus the nun's dining hall furnishings. I've forgotten how many tables and how many chairs — and all on a very, very tight budget, even the most minimal of those things, which had to be minimal 'cause there was no money for them. That job was almost the biggest thing.

1:27:40 Debra Schwartz: And Graham Nash?

1:27:41 Edmund Stiles: Well Graham Nash, I got hired to work on this house in the city. I didn't know who he was at the time. I was busy in the shop every day. Even though the '60s were raging around us — the period '65 to '70 was really when all of that was happening — I was in the shop every day, and I really didn't know what the hell was going on around me, particularly. And I didn't care. I was happy as a clam. I'd wake up giggling in the morning 'cause people were paying me to go play in my toy shop, and I'm like, "God, this is just amazing." I never actually quite got over that feeling of astonishment, that people would give me money for doing such fun stuff. [laughs]

1:28:18: It was hard sometimes, but I mean, it's what I love to do. I really like to find solutions for people. That's my real subterranean motivation, fixing something that somebody doesn't know how to fix themselves, and giving them what they want. So,

furniture was my modus at the time but it's kind of been that way ever since. If I build a house for somebody, I really love giving them something that they need or like or want. So I got hired by this contractor I'd met. He just called me up one day and said, would I come to the city and work on this house. They'd gotten into a problem and he thought I would be technically able to solve it for them. And I said, "Well yeah, sure, I'd love to do that, but I'm busy right now, maybe in about two weeks." I had some project that I was just finishing. He said, "No, no, Ed. We need this tomorrow, and we'll pay you this much." It was a big number for me, and it was a packaged price to do what they wanted me to do.

1:29:14: So, I said yes and dropped my tools and went to the city and started working on this house. And it was one of the more amazing construction scenes I've ever seen. They had gutted this giant three floor Victorian on Buena Vista West, and they'd taken out the front of the house and the back of the house, so it was like a wind tunnel. It turned out they had no permits whatsoever; they just did it. And I thought, "My God. Talk about risk-taking." So they were very anxious to get it closed back up again, and they wanted a very special kind of woodwork done on the back of the house, and it turned out it was the bedrooms that were critical to the owner and people that stayed there. It turned out that the owner was some musician guy that I kind of recognized the name, but I didn't know much about him.

1:30:00: Because it was a package price, and because if I got it done in a hurry, it would be a better pay out for me. So I stayed there and worked all that week, and then through the weekend. I was there all weekend working. All the other carpenters were gone. I was there by myself and this person walked up behind me, a young man, and he said in this charming English accent, "Did you do that?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "God bless you." And he walked away. I fell in love immediately. I'm a total Graham Nash groupie. I just fell in love with him.

1:30:26 Debra Schwartz: For people that are younger, they may not know that he's quite a musician. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Graham Nash, in his own right, was a very, very popular musician at that time.

1:30:44 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, I think they were just reaching the peak of their success.

1:30:46 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, just starting out, and they would soon become so big.

1:30:49 Edmund Stiles: I guessed that that was probably my client. And I knew that his name was Graham Nash, but I really didn't know what that meant. So I went out and bought one of his records, his earliest record, in fact.

1:31:00 Debra Schwartz: Which one?

1:31:00 Edmund Stiles: It's called *Songs for Beginners*, and hardly anybody, I think, has ever seen that album. But it was what I picked up, and I took it home and I played it.

It's all solo pieces by him, all that he wrote, every one of the pieces. And I thought, "Well, his voice is kinda thin and small, and it's not all that impressive, but, well, okay, he's successful. What do I care? He's paying me to do this." I almost never listened to tunes, or I never played anything over and over much. But over a period of time, I played his album several times, and it began to percolate into my head until finally I came to love it. I don't think I'd ever had that experience before, falling slowly in love with music. And then I got the opportunity one time to say that to him, when we had some time together, I said, "You know, I got your album, and I played it, and it kind of really got to me after a while." And he said to me, I'll never forget it — to me, this is one of the great demonstrations of a good ego, but it wasn't a narcissistic thing.

1:32:00: He said, "Yeah, they're like little time bombs, aren't they?" And I said, "Yes, that's exactly what they are." [chuckles] I loved that, that he had that confidence in himself. But it wasn't chutzpah. It was the real thing. Anyway, I wound up working for him for a long time. And to flesh this out a little bit, if you have the time, while I was working in his house by myself, he disappeared to the back of the house. I started to hear this beautiful sound coming from some kind of a musical instrument I couldn't recognize. It was a piano-like device. He was working on a tune, and I could hear him give repetitive lines and singing to himself. I heard it, and it kinda went into my head, and I drifted back, and I stood there and watched him do this for a while. So here's the two of us in the house by ourselves, and he's working on this tune, which later on I saw on an album, and I realized, finally, that it relates to one of his women.

1:32:54: It was an early Wurlitzer electronic piano, the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life. It was just unbelievably ugly, to my eye at least. It was a thing that he took on tour with him, and it was a beat-up piece. It had a classic piano mechanism that struck on a tuning fork, like a music box tuning fork, instead of on strings. And that was then amplified with this little old tube amplifier. So anyway, looking at this thing, I couldn't believe that it made this beautiful sound, and that it was so ugly. So I said to him — and he didn't know me from Adam, except that he saw what I was doing on his house — I said, "Would you let me take that thing home and remake it?" And he said, "Sure. Take it." So I did, got it home, took it apart on my work bench, and then I didn't know how to put it back together again. It was far more complicated than I'd realized it could be. And so, for three days, I sweated bullets. I stood there and looked at it, and fiddled with it, and sweated, and looked at it.

1:33:55: I thought, "Oh, my God, I ruined his favorite tour axe. I'm never gonna be able to put it together again." And then finally, little by little, I had some breakthroughs, and I began to figure it out. And when I finished the piece, which is on my website, I took it in there with Seth, my older son, he went with me over there, and Seth was seven. The boys didn't pay much attention to what I did in the shop. It didn't mean that much to them. But I took him over to meet Graham, and to deliver this piece. They were upstairs having a business meeting, and when he came down and saw the piano, he absolutely flipped out. It was the best reaction I ever got out of any client ever. He was so blown away by it, and it's a memory I'll treasure all my life. And my son got to see that, I guess,

that I did something a little bit unusual, and he was impressed. [laughs] And Seth, as an adult, he became —

1:34:44 Debra Schwartz: That's worth a lot right there.

1:34:46 Edmund Stiles: It was worth a lot to me. I'm really grateful for that experience. Anyway, Seth became a Graham Nash fan for the rest of his life too.

1:34:55 Debra Schwartz: I have a couple of questions about the Druid Heights —

1:35:02 Edmund Stiles: Sure.

1:35:02 Debra Schwartz: Because, let's just — short answer with this, okay? How long have you lived there in total now?

1:35:13 Edmund Stiles: Fifty-three years, this year.

1:35:16 Debra Schwartz: When did your relationship change with Roger?

1:35:24 Edmund Stiles: About 1972, I would guess. Roger had gotten a new lady in his life, and she had a lot of connections in the underworld of San Francisco. I didn't really understand it all, at this time. I didn't realize that that's where these people came from. But Roger had been building little residential spaces, and renting them out to people, and taking cash under the counter, so to speak. It was kind of his retirement plan, I guess you could say. So there were more and more and more people all the time, and there were interesting things going on all around us all the time. I resented it some, because to me the beauty and privacy of the place was what I most loved about it. And also, I liked the way our relationships were, all of us, Roger and Elsa and myself, and Marilyn and our kids. By that time, our kids were young children.

1:36:19 Debra Schwartz: You have two sons that were born there?

1:36:21 Edmund Stiles: That's right. Yeah.

1:36:23 Debra Schwartz: And their names?

1:36:24 Edmund Stiles: Seth was born in 1966, a year and a half after we got married. Wyeth was born in '69, and that was the year that Gary Snyder was in residence.

1:36:34 Debra Schwartz: We're gonna talk about Gary Snyder and we're gonna talk about Alan Watts, too. We're gonna need to include all of this in here as well. And your opinions about the celebrities up at Druid Heights, we wanna be able to have a little time for that. But you've just started talking about this underworld of San Francisco. Did you find that the people that Roger was hanging out with changed the ambience of the space when they started coming over? Is that what you're suggesting?

1:37:06 Edmund Stiles: Well, yeah. The partying got harder, and the drugs got harder. I was aware of all that up to a point, but I think I said earlier that I loved the wild and wooliness of the entire West Coast experience. When I got here, it was so open by comparison where I'd come from, and it was what I wanted. By the way, I thought I was just gonna go to New Zealand, but once I really saw what Sausalito and the West Coast was like at that time, I thought, "Is this still America? Holy cow, this is good enough for me." So I never went any farther than that, and I've been here ever since. When the drug thing got heavy in the '70s — Marilyn and I grew up in a mafia town back east, and in so doing you learn things that you see, you understand things that are going on around you, that maybe other outsiders wouldn't.

1:37:56 Edmund Stiles: And so I had an awareness that, I think, maybe was a little unique for this group of people. They were all, at that point, kinda West Coasters. I don't know about Roger's own perceptions, but some of these people were getting a little wilder and woolier and some of them appeared to be a little bit nuts, and it's hard to say how much of that was drugs. I was offered acid all the time. There was plenty of LSD, acid. The original Clear Lite was around and a lot was available. I chose not to participate. I was trying to build myself up and not bring myself down.

1:38:28 Debra Schwartz: So you went through the '60s on the natch?

1:38:31 Edmund Stiles: Yeah.

1:38:31 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

1:38:32 Edmund Stiles: Well, we smoked a little of the early weed, just to see what that was like. But when we came back from South America and got married, we couldn't figure out what the hell was going on, because in the years we'd been in South America, this whole marijuana thing had taken hold and everybody was stoned and we didn't know it, we didn't understand what the hell was going on. [chuckles] I think we stayed confused for at least 10 years. And it's not like I'm totally naïve; it's just that I don't choose to participate in that. I've always been wary of it.

1:39:00 Debra Schwartz: So, in come these people and the drugs are getting harder.

1:39:03 Edmund Stiles: Well, yeah, more and more, but the people were getting harder, too. There were more people of questionable intent and lack —

1:39:09 Debra Schwartz: Was coke in yet? Had coke come in?

1:39:10 Edmund Stiles: Oh, god, yeah. Sure.

1:39:11 Debra Schwartz: Okay. Do you think that changed things?

1:39:13 Edmund Stiles: Oh yeah. Coke changed everything on the West Coast. Coke is one of the things that made it easier for me to leave whenever we went up north to

Washington State because I was so tired of watching my friends kill themselves and ruin their businesses and their marriages. In the '70s, it was devastating for me. I can't stand to watch people suffer, and people were ruining their lives and throwing it away all around us.

1:39:35 Debra Schwartz: Yes. There was a time when it snowed all over California, and some people got lost in the storm.

1:39:42 Edmund Stiles: The early '70s was when it was really gathering momentum and I didn't understand it. I just knew that it was doing massive damage.

1:39:53 Debra Schwartz: And it did bring in a real rough element.

1:39:56 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, well, that's the thing. As a person who grew up around mafia, I recognized the element. I didn't know who it was exactly, I didn't need to. I just knew that the fun days were over and the heavy guys were moving in. It wasn't a good friend, but he was a good friend of a good friend, and I'd hired this man to work for me because he was a master carpenter and I needed help on one of my projects in town, and he just didn't function. I wound up going to my friend and saying, "Do we need to be worried for him, because there was something really wrong." And my friend said, "Yes, we do." And then this man disappeared and turned up dead a few days later and he was murdered. It turned out he was a gunrunner, but that's another story. So there were all kinds of things.

1:40:40 Debra Schwartz: So, things were getting a little rough in the county, and you and Roger had a problem — did you confront him?

1:40:46 Edmund Stiles: Yes, I had a problem, because two days, sequentially, maybe within three days of each other, there were a lot of people living on the property, including some young attractive women. And one of them came to me one day — I'm in the shop doing my thing, working away — and she came into the shop and said, "Are you gonna be here today, all day?" And I said, "Yeah, why?" And she said, "Well, I don't wanna be here if you're not here." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Well, because there's this crazy guy walking around here and he's hitting on me all the time and he comes around and he tells me that he's staying up in the woods at night with a loaded rifle to protect us from the narcs and the little green people from outer space." And I thought, "Oh, really?" 'Cause I'd gotten used to seeing people stoned on acid and partying down and having a nice time, day or night, it didn't matter.

1:41:35: I kinda liked all the people playing. They're jumping up and down on cars naked. I didn't care as long as it wasn't my car and as long as it wasn't in my house. Once in a while, they'd drift into my house and drift back out again, but it wasn't a problem. Again, I rather enjoyed all of that wackiness, but when it turned to heavy drugs, and then I found out that there were lots of guns and a lot of false identities down at Roger's main farmhouse, which he had rented to a bunch of people, that changed my overall alertness. And then when this woman came to me and said what she said, I went,

“Oh, boy. This has gone way beyond anything I realized.” I was raising two sons there, and Marilyn was working in her studio just a few hundred yards, a few feet away, really, and I had kept her a little bit in the dark about some of the things I knew that were building up. But the upshot of it was that, all of a sudden, I thought, “Oh, my God. I put my family at risk and didn’t know it.”

1:42:34 Debra Schwartz: A sinking feeling.

1:42:35 Edmund Stiles: Because I wasn’t paying attention. I didn’t pay enough attention, and I was too casual. So, I probably didn’t handle this very well, but it was unusual territory for me to say anything negative to Roger. I loved Roger, and I trusted him. So I called him up and he was on a job somewhere, and I said, “Roger, your empire is out of control. You have got to reel it in.” And he said, “I don’t have an empire.” It was the first time we ever had bad words between us, and he got all very huffy because I used the wrong approach, I suppose you could say, and I wasn’t very diplomatic about this. This really freaked me out. I didn’t say also that after the first incident, about two days later, another woman, also resident of the property, came and said almost the same thing about this guy. I never met this guy at the time. I didn’t know who he was, had never seen him. If I saw him, I didn’t know who he was, but he was related to one of the characters that was renting Roger’s farmhouse at the time, Walter Voorhees by name.

1:43:37: And then, I had a woman that worked for me from time to time on a property that I owned in town. She was smart and experienced and I trusted her, and she said, “Oh, his name is actually — they know him as Rocky in the city, and he’s involved in drug murders over there.” I’m not the FBI. I don’t know how to check these things out, so I just had to take it at face value, that’s what I was told. The combination of those two women, and my woman friend, who seemed to know what she was talking about at the time — by the way, I’m not sure that she did, now in retrospect, but that’s what she said to me. So I thought, “Okay, this guy is not the player that he seems to be. He’s something else entirely.” And as, again, an observer, I realized that he would disappear for periods of time, that made no sense. I suddenly realized that, “Oh, my God, I let this go way too far.” And I was heavily invested at that point. I owned property there. I built the house for Thea. I was a primary owner of the place, at this point, and my world was there. I built my world there.

1:44:44: All of a sudden it just came crashing down, because if Roger wouldn’t help me reel it in some — and I wasn’t asking for a lot, I just needed it to be not entirely crazy. And the guns and the drugs — the drugs were never gonna go away — but the guns were an issue for me. And crazy people were an issue for me. This guy was supposed to have been a Vietnam burnout, who came home crazy. Never met him. Roger reacted very strongly and was insulted that I would imply that something was wrong with — he said, “I don’t have an empire,” and, “Blah, blah, blah,” and then he just blew me off. I never challenged Roger for the place in any manner, shape, or form. I wound up being there, working there. I worked on his buildings gratis. I just gave him what I had of myself to give. And in turn, when I needed something from him, he wouldn’t even

discuss it. He thought it was nuts. He actually went to Marilyn and said, “What’s wrong with Ed? Has he flipped out? Has he lost his mind?” And that really did it.

1:45:45 Debra Schwartz: So at this point, you decided, okay —

1:45:51 Edmund Stiles: It was Roger’s place. It was always Roger’s place. It’s like they say, “You’re there at the discretion or the pleasure of the president.” Well, Roger was the president. I was always there at the pleasure of Roger, and he had welcomed me. I loved him for that. He gave me what I most wanted at the time, and then it ended because I wasn’t welcome there anymore. I couldn’t be comfortable that I was honoring my family obligations onto that circumstance without help from him to at least slow it down some and assess it some. He wouldn’t do it. So I thought, “Okay.” I was in the middle of furnishing that Catholic Church, I think, so I was really caught between a rock and a hard place.

1:46:31 Debra Schwartz: So what happened then?

1:46:35 Edmund Stiles: I thought, my solution is, “Okay, fine, we have to leave.” I didn’t wanna leave. I didn’t want this to happen, but I had no choice. In my mind, I had no other options. So I went up north and bought some lands — that’s compressing it, that’s also [chuckles] much more of a story, but —

1:46:53 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, we’ll stick with that.

1:46:55 Edmund Stiles: So I bought land and was going to move us up there. There was an old cabin on the property, and I got 20 acres. And the first summer we went up there with the idea that we weren’t coming back. I realized, “Well, we’re a family of four in a tiny little cabin, with one sleeping space, no shops for Marilyn, or me, and —

1:47:16 Debra Schwartz: You’re still there, though?

1:47:20 Edmund Stiles: Well, yeah, I had to build those things.

1:47:23 Debra Schwartz: No, I mean your —

1:47:24 Edmund Stiles: I didn’t make the decision not to leave. I made the decision to come back, until I could figure out how to get buildings built.

1:47:31 Debra Schwartz: Oh, I see.

1:47:32 Edmund Stiles: So we started this split lifestyle of spending summers up there during the building season, and winters down here during which time I’d work on projects of my own to make a living, and then accumulate materials from sources that I knew. I used to move lumber from here to there. Every summer, I’d take up another truckload.

1:47:53 Debra Schwartz: We're gonna come back to this point, but we've talked about some of the people that have lived there. There's a lot going on about Druid Heights because of other individuals as well that were there: Gary Snyder and his wife Masa, and Alan Watts.

1:48:08 Edmund Stiles: Right.

1:48:10 Debra Schwartz: Let's talk about that a little bit, and the legacy that their time there has left with Druid Heights, and who they associate with the actual property itself.

1:48:25 Edmund Stiles: Well, [chuckles] this is really, in a way, this is my problem, because the famous people that came through there are famous, and a lot of people wanna be around famous people. But all the famous people who came and went through there, were mostly passersby. Most of them were day trippers, there for the day, I mean visitors for the day.

1:48:45 Debra Schwartz: Like who? Who are the day trippers?

1:48:48 Edmund Stiles: I don't mean to be disrespectful of that. Those people were mostly friends of Margo St. James. Margo loved celebrity, and she was active in the city, and was a famous person in the city.

1:49:01 Debra Schwartz: And Margo is — ?

1:49:02 Edmund Stiles: Margo St. James. She claimed to be a former madam, or a prostitute, sex worker.

1:49:09 Debra Schwartz: One of Roger's girlfriends.

1:49:11 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

1:49:11 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:49:12 Edmund Stiles: She was the lady at the time, and she was with him for years.

1:49:18 Debra Schwartz: So she had a —

1:49:18 Edmund Stiles: She had a whole flock of famous folks that she knew. She knew everybody from the city, and many of them were famous celebrities, and so on.

1:49:27 Debra Schwartz: Madam, you said? Madam.

1:49:28 Edmund Stiles: Well, she was a champion for the sex workers at the time. She was trying to get the respect and the legal status for sex workers, and she claimed that she had been a prostitute at some point, but I figured out that probably she never really did. If

she ever turned trick, it was maybe once; I don't think it was very often, if at all. That was her image and aura, but she had a heart of gold. She was a wonderful woman, really.

1:50:01 Debra Schwartz: But she attracted a certain —

1:50:04 Edmund Stiles: Well, she brought around a lot of famous people that she knew; she invited them out to the place. And so, we never knew who we'd run into on a given day. Lots and lots of folks came and went. And then, at some point, she wound up sharing the house. After she and Roger were no longer together, she rented the house with Kim von Tempsky, who was a Hawaiian, a man from Hawaii, from Maui. He worked in the importing industry and he knew a lot of celebrities. I'm not sure exactly why or how, but he was in the entertainment industry somehow or other, so he knew people like Maria — well, he dated a lot of them. He dated Maria Muldar, for example, and so she was around. I had built this hot tub, and we had opened it up to everybody on the property, so I never knew who I'd find in my hot tub, and sometimes famous people would appear there. That part was interesting. I didn't mind that particularly. Most of them were nice enough folks.

1:50:58 Debra Schwartz: What other people?

1:51:00 Edmund Stiles: Oh, Lordy. There was a comedian that's quite famous — my memory for names is shaky at this point.

1:51:10 Debra Schwartz: Okay. Well, don't worry.

1:51:10 Edmund Stiles: It'll come up for me later.

1:51:12 Debra Schwartz: Yeah. How about Gary Snyder and his wife?

1:51:15 Edmund Stiles: Well, Gary was the best of it for me. The year that Gary was there was my best year at —

1:51:20 Debra Schwartz: What year was that?

1:51:22 Edmund Stiles: '69 into '70, I would say, 'cause Gary was there — Wyeth had just been born, and Gary's wife, Masa, had her premature son, Gen, was born about six months after Wyeth. So that would put it late '69, maybe early '70. Gen was in the hospital for about six weeks, maybe closer to two months. Marilyn doesn't like me to tell this story, but Masa, of course, was brimming with milk because her baby was in the hospital, and so Wyeth was nursed by both women.

1:52:00 Debra Schwartz: Your baby had a wet nurse. [chuckles]

1:52:03 Edmund Stiles: He was a peaceful child.

1:52:03 Debra Schwartz: Gary Snyder's wife was your baby's wet nurse.

1:52:06 Edmund Stiles: She would come over and relieve her problems using Wyeth as a method, and Wyeth would sit there with a little grin on his face. [chuckles] He looked like a little Buddha. I swear it gave him some kind of a Zen presence, 'cause he's always been a very Zen man. [chuckles]

1:52:20 Debra Schwartz: That's actually sweet.

1:52:20 Edmund Stiles: It makes me smile.

1:52:23 Debra Schwartz: So how long did Gary and Masa live there?

1:52:26 Edmund Stiles: One year.

1:52:27 Debra Schwartz: One year. You said that.

1:52:27 Edmund Stiles: Just one, yeah. But it was a great year because I really enjoyed Gary. He has one of the highest intellects and is one of the finest individuals I've ever known. Like Graham Nash, he has the perfect amount of ego. What is the right word for that? I don't know, he just knows who he is. He's good, and he knows it, and it shows. I really liked his aura and spirit. It's not that I'm infatuated with his poetry. I just like the man. I like the human being. He was the best of it.

1:53:00 Debra Schwartz: How about Alan Watts?

1:53:02 Edmund Stiles: Well, Alan's another issue.

1:53:03 Debra Schwartz: 'Cause there's a lot of attention — people that love Alan — Watts — Druid Heights —

1:53:09 Edmund Stiles: Well, unfortunately, Alan has become Druid Heights in everybody's mind, which I regret because Alan was just there for two, maybe two-and-a-half years before he died.

1:53:19 Debra Schwartz: He died there, correct?

1:53:21 Edmund Stiles: Yes, he died there. He died there in the house that I built for Thea Gidlow. He lived and died in that house. Roger lived and died in that house. That house sort of became everybody's departure point. [chuckles] It's hard for me to talk about Alan, because Alan and I had an unhappy relationship. I don't even like to say it, but I had no other option. Alan wanted the house that I'd built for Thea. He got together with Elsa, and he wanted to live there. Thea was there, which was my intention: I gave the house to Thea and Elsa, gave them a life estate on it. I owned it. I built it; I owned it.

1:54:03 Debra Schwartz: At some point along the way, you purchased your property, yes?

1:54:07 Edmund Stiles: It's much more complicated than that.

1:54:09 Debra Schwartz: Okay. Well, let's pass on that.

1:54:10 Edmund Stiles: Yeah. I'll just say this much: Alan was going to build a house there using Roger's design skills, and Roger was gonna build it. And Roger was so flamboyant. This is my understanding of what happened. The house that Roger designed for Alan on that site was way beyond Alan's ability to afford or anything like that. That happened with a lot of Roger's designs. They were just too far out. They were amazing renderings. I loved his flamboyance, but almost nobody could ever build them. So Alan bailed, and that meant that Thea had to leave, because Budd Isaacs, our down-the-hill neighbor, had gotten Thea's trailer condemned by the county. I was new there. We had been there maybe a year when that happened, and I was outraged that this guy would do that.

1:55:00 Debra Schwartz: And this is Elsa's sister.

1:55:03 Edmund Stiles: Yes. And so the one thing that never occurred to me was that Elsa would get rid of her own sister so that Alan could have the place, and that's what happened. When I had the papers drawn up to give the life estate to the two women, Thea and Elsa — Thea, because it was her house, I built it for her, and Elsa because she put up the land that it was on. So that was our deal. She put up the land, I put up the house. I built it physically myself and it took pretty much all of our resources and about two years of my time. I was trying to make a living at the same time, so it took a while. And when it was finally done, Thea moved in and I think she was there for about a year before Marilyn and I got away for a weekend for the first time since our kids were born. We're gone for three days, and when we came back Thea was gone and Alan was in the house. And I went, "What the hell just happened?" And it turned out that Alan had gone to Elsa and said, "Well, I really like that little house that Ed built and I want it. And so here's the deal, I'll give you a certain amount of money, you move Thea out of there, and we'll support her in some other place" — with the money that he would give Elsa. So Elsa sold her sister out, in my opinion. I loved Elsa, but —

1:56:17 Debra Schwartz: Where did her sister go?

1:56:18 Edmund Stiles: They put her into some chicken shack up in Petaluma, or what's that other community near Petaluma? Never mind, somewhere out in the countryside, and she lived out her life there and died not very well, as a matter of fact. So that was a violation of the trust of the place, as far as I was concerned. That tore it for me absolutely with Alan. I could never forgive him for that. Instead of coming to me and saying, "Is there any way we could work something out here?" he went to Elsa and made a pact with Elsa, and Thea was gone, *fait accompli*. And then he did it again later when he wanted to build his library. I had a right of first refusal on the land next to the library, because I'd asked Elsa for that when I built the house, and the reason I asked was that house was not a place I wanted to live. It was built for Thea.

1:57:14: And I thought, “Well, the real charm of the house is its privacy and its setting, and I didn’t want somebody to build something really stupid next to it.” I’m sort of buggish about about that. So I had this right of first refusal, which I didn’t really think I’d ever exercise. I had no reason to, but at least it gave me some option if somebody wanted to do something stupid. Alan wanted to do something stupid, which was that he wanted to build a really ugly white box for a library in the woods, right next to the model house. I was waiting for him to come and approach me to ask me for the right of first refusal, and I would have given it to him if he’d just come to me and said, “Hey, what do you want for it?” I’d say, “It’s yours.” He never did. And I’m still offended by that, to be honest.

1:57:58 Debra Schwartz: Do you think his celebrity had something to do with the sense of entitlement or was he just that kind of guy, just forged ahead without thinking?

1:58:06 Edmund Stiles: I think that he had become paranoid and acquisitive in a way. I’ve been trying to understand him, actually, all these years. I use him as my example of when good people go bad. With that intellect, for him to become that kind of son-of-a-bitch, I never understood it. I couldn’t understand it. Of course, I was offended by it because all I wanted was for him to acknowledge me as a human being and tell me what he wanted, and I probably would have just given it to him. But he didn’t wanna take that chance, so he used a legal maneuver to get it out from underneath me. It didn’t change the outcome.

1:58:41 Debra Schwartz: And yet his name is quite associated with Druid Heights.

1:58:46 Edmund Stiles: But he only lived there for two years. We’ve been there for 53 years. I see Alan as sort of a footnote to the place. It was a big one.

1:58:55 Debra Schwartz: What do you say to the people that associate him primarily with Druid Heights? Apart from, “He was a footnote.” Is this something you have to confront?

1:59:05 Edmund Stiles: I don’t know how many people I’ve talked to, and every one of them really wants to talk to me to find out about Alan Watts. And it’s always hard for me because I have this tremendous anger. It’s not exactly anger, it’s disappointment. It’s like, I felt disrespected, to say the least, because of the way he did it. Plus, it’s a little hard for me to forgive Elsa because she sold out to Alan. He took advantage of her as well, ’cause he gave her practically nothing in exchange for what he got. He got the house after I built it and he had refused to build it because he didn’t wanna put that kind of money into it. So I built it to keep Thea from having to leave. It was a gift from me to the community. I didn’t want the community to lose a member.

1:59:53 Debra Schwartz: We have to keep moving along here, but I wanted to ask you about the idea of community in this place. If nothing else, you are living in an enclave, in a community of trees. There’s no denying that there’s a connection between the houses when you go to Druid Heights. You can see that there’s the driveway here, there’s the

driveway there. Certainly, you people that lived there at various times were encountering each other regularly, correct?

2:00:30 Edmund Stiles: Absolutely. Sure.

2:00:33 Debra Schwartz: Yes. So when you think about Druid Heights, is it a community dream or is it not? Was it a communal existence, or was it not? Looking back now, with hindsight of knowing what you were looking for. You came to the West Coast looking for an alternative way to be. Feeling disassociated or alienated from your East Coast life, you come to the West Coast, you're living in an environment which is home to you right from the get-go.

2:01:11 Edmund Stiles: Physically, and visually it was gorgeous. It was perfect. And the fact that I had my work right there —

2:01:16 Debra Schwartz: You had your work. Magically, everything sort of magically comes together.

2:01:20 Edmund Stiles: I had dreamed for years — when I was out in the world rambling through other people's terrain, for years and years, by myself — I dreamed of living close to San Francisco in a rural environment, but able to go to the city for an opera. When we were in Peru together, we used to talk about when we get back to San Francisco, we'll go to the opera, we'll go to restaurants, we'll have a nice life, we'll do all these wonderful things. And by the way, that is possible. We're only 25 minutes from downtown San Francisco.

2:01:48 Debra Schwartz: You've really landed in the sweet spot that you could only dream about.

2:01:51 Edmund Stiles: Yes.

2:01:52 Debra Schwartz: Now looking back on it, life is like that. Things come and go. The world is something and then it changes. When you describe it to yourself, the kind of environment you were living in, this collective of individuals, what was it that you were living in?

2:02:15 Edmund Stiles: I was the odd man out. I became the odd man out because I didn't do the drugs, and once I declared myself to be a contrary to the drift of all those people with drugs, with guns that was it, I was essentially a non-member of that community anymore.

2:02:33 Debra Schwartz: So, you were ostracized even while living there.

2:02:34 Edmund Stiles: Not ostracized. I separated myself.

2:02:35 Debra Schwartz: You separated yourself even while —

2:02:38 Edmund Stiles: I talk about the invisible wall that I built between my house and Roger's group, because for us to be there at all was hard at that time. I didn't want to participate with any of that any more, or I'd let it go too far. And so, I had no choice in my mind. The question is, "Well, why were we there at all?" We were there because I didn't have any buildings to work from up in Washington until I could build them, so I spent 12 years building the same buildings all over again. A new shop, a new house, I built about four or five bedroom houses up there, buildings up here on my land and by the time I got 'em done, my kids had grown up and gone off to college. [chuckles] And we'd been doing this split lifestyle all this time.

2:03:20 Debra Schwartz: And then, in an ironic twist of fate, even though you still own the property — correct? — in Druid Heights, you're living basically with the invisible shield between you and others, but you're coming and going and you're having your life. There was that day in the sun there, it was everything you could've hoped for.

2:03:43 Edmund Stiles: For which I am deeply grateful.

2:03:47 Debra Schwartz: And then there's a change in the land, in the ownership. All of a sudden, it's park land.

2:03:56 Edmund Stiles: It's what?

2:03:56 Debra Schwartz: The land is no longer yours now.

2:04:00 Edmund Stiles: Well —

2:04:00 Debra Schwartz: Can we talk a little bit about that? I mean you are not the owner of the property that you reside on.

2:04:06 Edmund Stiles: No, and that was a big part of the deterioration of the whole thing. when GGNRA was formed and they came in to buy all the land in the valley and everywhere else in West Marin, they didn't have enough money to do it properly, so they simply made offers that were low. Roger took the money immediately and got what he could, and in so doing, he also sold things that were mine and kept the money, which is, by the way, another thing I found a little hard to accept. I'd actually even said to him, "You know, if they give you money for my hot tub" — which was on his land, admittedly — I said, "I expect you to give it to me." And they did; and he didn't. I learned through a circuitous series of things that they paid him \$6,000 and he hadn't given me anything. So those kinds of violations, around money, I had never expected that, but Roger became very, very focused on the money. And when you start dangling money in front of people who have been living kind of off of their efforts in going day-to-day with not much in reserve, it changes everything, very quickly.

2:05:16: I'd kinda forgotten about that aspect, but that is an important part of how deteriorated was it. A lot of the carelessness that Roger was doing as far as I was

concerned, in my opinion, had to do with, he was getting money from all these people, and they had an active dope society going and it was all a part of that world. And I have always not liked the dope world, going all the back to —

2:05:43 Debra Schwartz: And this is, again — Coke's going on.

2:05:45 Edmund Stiles: Yeah heavy dope. Heavy drugs. Heavy drugs.

2:05:45 Debra Schwartz: I mean, people have lost their heads.

2:05:46 Edmund Stiles: I mean acid almost makes you smile. Acid never concerned me like the cocaine thing did. The cocaine was turning people up. Early on I was, I think, one of the very few people that realized — everybody was saying, "Oh this stuff is wonderful. The only wrong with it is it's kind of expensive." Yeah, well, I'm thinking if that's true, then what happened to that business and that marriage and why did that guy jump off the bridge?

2:06:11 Debra Schwartz: It was a dark time in the —

2:06:13 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, and it was dark for me because it was something that I —

2:06:14 Debra Schwartz: It did not bring out the best in people.

2:06:17 Edmund Stiles: No, and a lot of people destroyed their lives at the time. That was one thing about going up to Washington State. There was hardly any of that up there at the time, and I was naive enough to think it would not come up there. Of course, it did. [chuckles]

2:06:28 Debra Schwartz: It did. Let's get back to GGNRA. You're living on property, you have a life estate now, correct?

2:06:36 Edmund Stiles: Mm-hmm.

2:06:41 Debra Schwartz: What to do about Druid Heights? Eventually, your time on Earth will be done and the GGNRA's got to decide what to do with this property. Anybody that's been there can see it's a blink away from being subsumed by the natural environment. The forest is just whispering around every corner.

2:07:00 Edmund Stiles: It doesn't take long.

2:07:02 Debra Schwartz: No.

2:07:04 Edmund Stiles: Well, the national park people made a decision to run everybody out, which they did. Anybody that didn't have life credentials, life estate credentials, and/or their tenants. So everybody who lives there now, there's seven of us,

are either Marilyn and myself, that's two; Fay Beacons has the life estate on Mandala house, the house I built that Alan lived in, and so on. She lives in Mexico, and she's probably in her 90s by now, I think, but she's a long-lived person.

2:07:33 Debra Schwartz: So nobody's in the house?

2:07:34 Edmund Stiles: No, the house is rented by her to other people. She has three tenants down there, a couple and a single bachelor guy in a separate building. So, like I say, there's seven of us. And just a few days ago, I ran the numbers, I thought, "Oh, that's about what it was when we first came here." It is, to use your word, subsumed back to kind of where it was when we first came. We were five and six or six and seven, if you will, if you consider Geraldine, Roger's daughter who was 14 at the time. We were six and seven, and now there are seven of us there, and it just made me smile to think that, in a way, it's back to what I find frankly —

2:08:10 Debra Schwartz: And quiet again.

2:08:12 Edmund Stiles: Very quiet, very quiet.

2:08:14 Debra Schwartz: Does the attention that the place has been garnering from the association with Alan Watts and others, Gary Snyder, and so on, does that intrude in your space, your quiet?

2:08:22 Edmund Stiles: Not in any real substantive way, except that the number of commitments and obligations or interesting people that come by wanting to know about things. It's a trickle for the most part, but it does add up to quite a bit of time. My fear has always been that now that it's gone onto the internet — first off, I was astounded for a long time that people consider it history, 'cause it's my life and I don't think of my life as history. It's just a few years, poof, and then it's gone. [chuckles] I have a hard time with the concept, but in this culture, which has no history worth mentioning, compared to like Europe and so on, ten years is history. And then I had the realization —

2:09:04 Debra Schwartz: Well, now it is coming along a few more than that.

2:09:06 Edmund Stiles: It's amazing to me, the kind of nostalgia for the '60s, because the '60s were our youth, and we lived it. That's another thing: I keep running into people, younger people, who are just so jealous and envious or regretful that they weren't alive in the '60s. They think that it was the ultimate thing. And my take is well, it was what it was, and yes I'm grateful to have been there, so to speak. But when I think of all the things I missed that I didn't pay any attention to, you know, like I didn't go to all the rock concerts. You know, I wasn't particularly a music fan at the time, and I missed a lot of stuff because I was working. I was trying to make a living. So looking back on that — but I didn't miss it all. We had some good times. We had a lot of good times.

2:09:51 Debra Schwartz: It's hard to get it all for any one person.

2:09:52 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, so, I would say that we had a great time to begin with and it was wonderful to be raising our sons there. That was a little bit hard 'cause there was no help there worth mentioning. Margo sometimes helped with the kids and Thea had been helpful, but basically we raised them alone in a world full of young partiers. [chuckles] It was okay. I didn't begrudge that to them, but it wasn't easy. We didn't have a support system of other parents, and so on.

2:10:18 Debra Schwartz: Do you have opinions about what should happen ultimately to the buildings on the property?

2:10:25 Edmund Stiles: I'm pretty ambivalent. I kinda think they are at their highest and best use right now. They're just, they're running away, like they should because to save them — I don't know if you know anything about Frank Lloyd Wright's work and what it takes to save a Frank Lloyd Wright building, but it's very similar. Both Roger and Frank Lloyd Wright built very shoddily and with no concern for the future or the present for that matter. Wright built things that couldn't be heated and that people had to sit in the dripping ceilings in his churches, and so on. I don't respect Wright. All the things that most everybody else in California think are fabulous, I'm kind of like a skeptic about people like Wright. He was a son of a bitch, [chuckles] and he bankrupted most of his clients. Yes, he was a visionary; that's the trouble. Visionaries are very seductive, but they're also very destructive in many cases. So, Roger built things that were not really intended —

2:11:19: He didn't think beyond getting it done and getting it online or whatever. I don't fault him for that. We all built. I've done a lot of building since I stopped making furniture, and I built out of salvaged materials, 'cause I didn't have any money, and that started a thing. I've been on the forefront of that for a long time now, but it was all because I didn't have any money. And so, everything that Roger and I built largely was done with our own resources, whatever we could get our hands on, and that's something that nobody quite understands. I think that if you think it was fantastic and wonderful and design-wise it's interesting, you have to consider the fact that it's also done out of pocket, with no permits, without anybody else's authorization or permission. That's how we all lived and worked all this time. And I'm grateful for that, by the way, because it allowed me to do things that were, let's say, more creative and inventive than most.

2:12:13: I had more permits than Roger did, I think, except when he worked for clients, but I took out permits when I absolutely couldn't take the chance. I loved to build without them 'cause it allows you to do things that are freer. So, we were all sort of renegades who made our way, day-to-day, with anything we could get our hands on. I look at some of my early projects, and of course, aside from the rot of forty years, many things were done with materials that were somewhat inappropriate. You learn the hard way sometimes. And I used to think, "Oh damn, why didn't I use pressure treated lumber on that deck? It's all shot."

2:12:51: And I think, "Oh, well, because it didn't exist when I started building those things." When you go back and look at the whole package of it — in my opinion, this is

just my thinking — we all escaped from rigid, tight societies 'cause we couldn't live in rigid, tight societies and survive. We had to breathe, and so we came out west. I think that's what made the West Coast what it is or what it has been. Now it's become a very safe place. There's coffee available everywhere. [chuckles] I remember in the '60s standing on a street corner in Mill Valley saying, "Why doesn't somebody start a business and just sell coffee?" And everybody laughed at me. [chuckles] "I think it would work." "Nah, Ed you're crazy." Well, the stuff that's come to California in the 55 years or so that I've been exposed to it — it was wide open.

2:13:42 Debra Schwartz: We've gotta start to think about closing this long beautiful interview.

2:13:47 Edmund Stiles: Wow.

2:13:48 Debra Schwartz: What haven't we talked about here that should be added?

2:13:50 Edmund Stiles: Well, there's so much to do with the life of Druid Heights that I know is what you're more interested in. I have a hard time holding on to a specific thread, 'cause there's so many.

2:14:05 Debra Schwartz: You have a lot going on in that head of yours, Edmund.

2:14:05 Edmund Stiles: Well, it's a messy head. It's so chock full of different trails and things. In my own work, so much of what I've done has been trying to solve the problems created by Roger, by GGNRA. I own property that I would never have otherwise owned because that's what I did to try to salvage my own life, as it were, kinda like the hardest thing I ever did in my life. One of them was building my own new workshop in this beautiful site, and it's a building that I've always wanted, but I had already decided to move north, and I didn't know what to do, so I built the shop to get me going again — to get my juices flowing. And in fact, I have not used that shop the way I used to work in the one that I started off in. I don't make furniture anymore, and that's because I had to do something else to make money, to get through this. All of this.

2:14:57 Debra Schwartz: You know, I'm remembering something that I wanted to ask you about. You may not be saying something we've forgotten or we haven't talked about, but I have something I would like to ask you.

2:15:08 Edmund Stiles: Sure.

2:15:09 Debra Schwartz: You own the church, on Summit Avenue, don't you?

2:15:12 Edmund Stiles: I do.

2:15:13 Debra Schwartz: That beautiful church going up Summit Avenue from Throckmorton. Throckmorton, take a right, take a left, take a right.

2:15:20 Edmund Stiles: I call her my 122 year old mistress.

2:15:24 Debra Schwartz: She's a beauty.

2:15:25 Edmund Stiles: Well, I realized that no, she not my mistress, I'm her gigolo. [chuckles] Because I go under her skirts and fiddle with her innards, and make things that make her happy and make her smile and then she gives me money. So I'm her gigolo. [chuckles]

2:15:39 Debra Schwartz: Can you just talk a teensy bit about this church?

2:15:44 Edmund Stiles: Sure.

2:15:44 Debra Schwartz: I mean, because so many people have admired this church.

2:15:48 Edmund Stiles: Well, it's been the home to a lot of people too, and that's been one of the pleasures of my life. And one of the agonies of my life was being a landlord, I never dreamed I would be a landlord.

2:15:56 Debra Schwartz: What is the address of your church?

2:16:00 Edmund Stiles: 24 Summit Ave.

2:16:00 Debra Schwartz: 24 Summit Ave. What does your church look like?

2:16:03 Edmund Stiles: Well, it's a very gracious. I would say it was probably influenced somewhat by possibly Maybeck.

2:16:12 Debra Schwartz: A bit of a craftsman.

2:16:15 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, oh yeah. I think it was Victorian, but that's probably not correct. It has flamboyant architectural details, some of which are quite subtle, like the walls flare towards the bottom, and they're like, three feet apart, the inner wall and the outer wall, flares to almost two to three feet at the base, and then comes together at the belt line.

2:16:40 Debra Schwartz: When did you buy the church?

2:16:44 Edmund Stiles: When?

2:16:44 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm.

2:16:44 Edmund Stiles: I bought it twice, once in 1968, I think it was. I bought it like you might, if you had a few extra dollars, you know, buy an antique clock. I loved it. A friend of mine lived there. He was a young man from Santa Barbra, and he was the country mouse, and his buddy Jim West was the city mouse. The city mouse was a very

wealthy young man. Jim and my friend Dion had grown up together in Santa Barbara, and they came up to the Bay Area and Jim had bought this building. Jim was a very, very wonderfully, generous, well-motivated young man and he wanted to create a society of friends. He was hoping to turn this into a sort of a free-flowing center of creative energy.

2:17:34 Debra Schwartz: I mean, because there's these little apartments in there. And isn't that just what happened?

2:17:38 Edmund Stiles: Well, it started off okay, but then as it sort of evolved, and especially in the '60s, all the free floating freeloaders that didn't have a place to bolt down anywhere else, were attracted to him because he was so generous, and he let them come and he let them stay, and pretty soon they kinda overran him and he finally realized that they were only there because of his money. It wasn't that they loved him, it wasn't that they loved anything else that he cared about. He was giving them, you know, sustenance.

2:18:07 Debra Schwartz: They were on the mooch.

2:18:09 Edmund Stiles: Absolutely. And there's plenty of those people around always. So, it kind of soured him, and I had been hanging out in that building with my friend Dion drinking wine, and he was a bachelor guy, a gardener, very much more evolved than a gardener, but that's what he did at the time. We were very tight friends, and one day Dion came to the shop where I was working and said, "Ed, Jim wants you to buy the building." [chuckles] "Are you kidding?" He said, "No, no. Jim wants you to buy it." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, he'd rather you get it than somebody from the city that will do something stupid with it." Jim loved the building, but he just couldn't do that anymore, so he wanted it to go to somebody that he chose, and he chose me. So I said, "Well, I don't have any real money." And he said, "He'll make it easy. A very small down, and so on." So, I thought about it for a while, and I thought, "Well, you know, you really did love the building, and it was just on —"

2:19:05 Debra Schwartz: Who doesn't love that building?

2:19:07 Edmund Stiles: I'm not acquisitive about things, and I certainly never dreamed I would have real estate in my life. I would have been dirt poor, if some of these things hadn't happened, and today, in my 70s, I would be scratching around in the shop every night making widgets, trying to feed the family. But the upshot of it was that Jim insisted I buy his building, so I did. And I had just enough money. My mother had passed, and she left me a little bit of money. I had just enough for the down payment. Jim carried the note, and he made it as easy as it could be, but it was a business relationship. And by the way, the price was about what it was worth on the market at the time. Nobody else wanted it, that was the other thing. It was never really officially on the market that I know of, but it was about what the building was appraised for at the time.

2:19:49 Debra Schwartz: So, I just wanted to add that in this interview, that you're the proud owner of a very, very beautiful church. One that anybody that goes up Summit Avenue, is going to take a look at, and then take another look.

2:20:01 Edmund Stiles: People stop in the middle of the road and stare at it. I always find that interesting to watch.

2:20:05 Debra Schwartz: Yes, you must be very proud.

2:20:06 Edmund Stiles: Yeah, well, I love that building, and I put a huge piece of my work life into it to keep it alive, and make it work. I've enjoyed the fact that I've had really good relationships with most of my tenants. And, slowly, slowly, I lost it. I gave it back to Jim at one point, because I never collected the rent from a lot of people. They also took advantage of me. I wasn't a landlord, I didn't know how to be a landlord, I didn't wanna be a landlord. So, I finally got behind on the taxes, and I called up Jim, and I said, "Jim take your damn building back, I don't want it." And he did. He kept it for two more years, and then one day he came to me and said, "I want you to buy the building again." I said, "Jim, I can't afford it anymore." And he said, "Yeah, no, no, the same deal, same price, everything." So, I wound up buying it a second time, 'cause I got a little smarter and I realized, "Jeez, I work with my hands. We don't have anything that is beyond the end of this month." And I realized that If I had an accident, lost a finger or two —

2:21:01 Debra Schwartz: Boy, the fates are kind to you, my friend.

2:21:03 Edmund Stiles: Well, yes I'm very aware of that. And this man, Dion, is one of my best friends to this day. And I'm trying to lure him back up to put him back in the building, 'cause I love him, and I want him there. But he refuses to admit that he was key in my buying it in the first place. He just says he was the operative.

2:21:19 Debra Schwartz: He is rare and wonderful. Let's end with what you called the "smiling dog moments" philosophy. [laughs] What is the "smiling dog moments" philosophy?

2:21:34 Edmund Stiles: Well, in my wanderings, especially abroad, and in places that I shouldn't have been, I was alone and quite unhappy, much of the time. I had great adventures, but I wasn't having much fun. And little by little, I realized that there were things around me that I needed to pay more attention to. Whether it was unconscious or not, I just began to develop this idea that it was important to participate. I had a tendency to isolate myself, especially when I was traveling alone. And I was often in places where I shouldn't have been, so I just had developed this kind of idea that the experience was what counted, and that all around me were experiences that I probably had missed, many of them. We have just a laser thin slice of life that we see as we go through our lives. And if you don't see the good things and participate, then they didn't happen for you. So it's like the music world of the '60s, I kind of missed that, even though I worked in the middle of it for a while.

2:22:34: I got some of it, but I'm well aware I missed a lot of it, something that I might have enjoyed on another level. Over time, I began to realize that my day would be changed by a smile from a person on the street, particularly pretty young women or something like that, just you know, the kind of momentary eye contact, and a little bit of a smile. So I noticed that every once in a while you walk past a dog on the street, most of them are moping and waiting for their owners, and they look at their feet. Once in a while one of 'em looks up, and he smiles at you. And I thought, "Ah, that dog just smiled at me". [chuckle] So I realized that if I hadn't been watching the dog and looking at him, I wouldn't have seen him smile. And so, if all of a sudden the whole background of these experiences, kind of coalesced for me, and the idea is this: if you go through life looking at your feet and moping, you'll miss the smile. And if you missed the smile, it didn't happen. Not for you anyway.

2:23:28: So you have to participate. It goes all the way from an instantaneous glance on the street of a stranger acknowledging you. I have that with other old men now, other old men look at me, and we acknowledge each other in a way that's — have you ever seen babies look at each other on the street? Total strange babies?

2:23:49 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

2:23:49 Edmund Stiles: It's like they crank their heads around, and follow each other. It's that kind of a thing. But then it goes to like a music group. Somebody comes to town, and they play music that you really like. Everything is cyclical. Everything has a life expectancy. Everything, including human beings obviously, so if you don't participate, and if you don't take advantage of the goodness when it's around you, then you missed it. I missed a lot of things, but I participated in a lot of things, too. So my philosophy is this, the smiling dog moment: pay attention when the dog smiles, and smile back. Simple as that. And it really has changed my life, just that basic idea. When I see something and think, "Oh, this is something that's just starting and it's interesting," I try to jump on it. I'm not a fearsome participant, but I do try to pay attention.

2:24:40 Debra Schwartz: I would like to ask you a favor. Let's close with a moment, a smiling dog moment, that you've had at Druid Heights, your property. Before it was Druid Heights, it was just the land. Druid Heights is a stage but there are those trees have been there a lot longer than any history that we can calculate, so let's honor that. Can you just give me a moment, some smiling dog moment some time in the vast period of 50 something years that you've been there, a moment that stands out?

2:25:20 Edmund Stiles: I don't know if I could choose one; I mean, I'd have to think about it for quite a while.

2:25:24 Debra Schwartz: It doesn't have to be the *one*, but any one.

2:25:31 Edmund Stiles: Okay. I'm not sure this is quite qualifies, but in my early years as a furniture maker, my father, who was a ship's captain, and an industrialist in his

later years, was always pushing me to go commercial, to go industrial. When would I set up the shop and hire the people and start making thousands of widgets so that I could make a really good living?" He used to come out and visit with us after my mother died, and I came from the East Coast so he'd fly out and spend two or three weeks with us at a time, and little by little I could see he was getting it. Then one day he said to me, he said — and believe me this is incredible for him to have said this to me anyway — he said, "Your friends are like gods and goddesses." He said, "And I understand what you're doing and why." And it was like "Wow," I never dreamed that he would understand and that he would accept me for what I was doing, 'cause I was working with my hands and he was a ship's captain, he was a powerful man. So for him to say that he understood what his youngest son was doing, and that he approved of it. That was big for me.

2:26:43 Debra Schwartz: I completely think that qualifies, Edmund.

2:26:47 Edmund Stiles: Thank you, but I'm not sure it does. It's more a verbal exchange that was incredibly satisfying.

2:26:52 Debra Schwartz: Actually, your father's observation is rather poetic and is beautiful, and it has helped me to see that time a little clearer just for this moment, too. I think that's a good place to close.

2:27:09 Edmund Stiles: Okay.

2:27:10 Debra Schwartz: Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down and tell me your story of your life, your adventures, your experiences, the people that you've been with in this alternative world, really, from which you came from, all of it — what a story.

2:27:29 Edmund Stiles: There's a whole lot more.

2:27:31 Debra Schwartz: I know.

2:27:33 Edmund Stiles: That's my problem. I don't know where to begin or where to end. It just goes on and on.

2:27:36 Debra Schwartz: Life is like that, isn't it?

2:27:37 Edmund Stiles: Well, yeah. It ends, too.

2:27:39 Debra Schwartz: Well, here's to life! Thank you very much.

2:27:41 Edmund Stiles: You're welcome.

2:27:42 Debra Schwartz: On behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and GGNRA, let us conclude this interview.

2:27:48 Edmund Stiles: Thank you.

2:27:49 Debra Schwartz: Thank you.