

John Gallagher

*John Gallagher: Veterinarian, Volunteer, and Longtime Member of Save Mount Diablo's Land
and Stewardship Committees*

Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Shanna Farrell
in 2021

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John Gallagher, photo taken by Stephen Joseph

Abstract

John Gallagher was born in Oakland, California in 1949. He grew up in the Bay Area where he has early memories of spending time outside in Tilden Park and camping on Mount Diablo with the Boy Scouts. He attended Merritt College, Cal State Hayward, and UC Berkeley before getting his bachelor's degree in animal science while living in Colorado. He earned a master's degree in physiology and doctorate degree in veterinary in medicine in 1980. He moved back to the Bay Area in 1980 with his wife and son and opened his own veterinary clinic in 1983. He was introduced to Save Mount Diablo in 2000 and later became involved with the land committee, and later, the stewardship committee. In this interview, Gallagher discusses his early life, growing up in the Bay Area, his family, education, early introduction to Save Mount Diablo through Seth Adams, joining the land committee, transitioning to the stewardship committee, involvement with the beacon, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of land acquisition by Save Mount Diablo, as well as volunteer work, and his gratitude for previous generations of conservationists.

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Project History

By the early 1970s, the Bay Area was in the midst of great social and cultural change. With plans for the extension of BART into the East Bay, and suburban sprawl threatening Mount Diablo and other open spaces, Save Mount Diablo (SMD) answered a call to action. SMD was founded by Dr. Mary Bowerman and Arthur Bonwell in 1971. It became a nationally accredited land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area comprised of biologists, conservationists, hikers, cyclists, equestrians, bird watchers, artists, and people who just loved to look at and enjoy the mountain. SMD has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since its founding. However, the organization's focus on educational programs and protecting Mount Diablo's connection to its sustaining Diablo Range has grown substantially over the last few years due in part to new leadership and the growing severity of the climate crisis. As an organization, Save Mount Diablo is both an exceptional example of local land conservation efforts, as well as representative of national and international environmental activism that extends beyond the Bay Area. This oral history project began in 2021 as SMD approached its fiftieth anniversary. All of the interviews were conducted remotely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Interview 1: November 12, 2021

01-00:00:08

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with John Gallagher on Friday, November 12, 2021 and this is an interview for Save Mount Diablo in their fiftieth anniversary oral history project. John, can you start by telling me a little bit of your early life, where and when you were born and some of your early memories?

01-00:00:31

Gallagher: Well actually, I was born at the brand-new Kaiser Hospital in Oakland shortly after World War II. My father had worked in the Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond during the war effort and so he became a member of the Kaiser system as an employee. I don't know when, somebody else would know, sometime during the war families were added to the healthcare system that Henry Kaiser had developed. While my older sisters were all born at a non-Kaiser facility in 1949, I was born at Kaiser at Broadway MacArthur in Oakland. That was a new development for them and so all of my developmental stuff as a young boy either happened at the Kaiser Hospital in Oakland or by house calls. Our pediatrician made house calls; I remember that well. Here's an early thing about mechanical background, I remember what car he drove because it was Henry J—the Henry J. Kaiser—Henry J. I remember him parking across the street to come and make house calls. They don't do that anymore.

01-00:02:03

But we lived in Berkeley, and as a young lad—as a baby actually—we moved to a house in Berkeley and that was my boyhood home up on the hill in Berkeley, and that was significant. I know we talked about it earlier on the phone that I was not far from Tilden Park, so I found my way to Tilden many times as a young boy either with parents or family friends or by myself or whatever. Early on, I knew my way around Tilden Park, camped there as a Cub Scout, I know.

01-00:02:42

Farrell: You were born in 1949, and I'm wondering growing up in Berkeley in the '50s, what are some of your early memories of Tilden in the 1950s?

01-00:02:52

Gallagher: Well, as we all know when you come into anything—well, Herb Caen, the great [*San Francisco*] *Chronicle* columnist, liked to always quote people, "The city was perfect when I moved here, and it's been going downhill ever since" because you take this picture of the present because you have no past, so Tilden Park was just there. I do remember going to the little farm and I found out relatively recently that the little farm was only built in I think it was 1954, so it would've been brand new when I went there. Of course, I had no clue about that, it was just there. I do remember walking around Jewel Lake, down that very steep hill from the top of Spruce Street. The pony rides were

there, I rode the pony rides as a little boy. They're not there anymore. The carousel was there; I do remember riding that probably with my grandmother who also lived in Berkeley. My mother grew up in Berkeley also, not a mile from where I grew up.

01-00:04:13

Farrell:

Yeah, can you tell me a little bit about your parents, maybe starting with your mother? What was her name and some of your early memories of her?

01-00:04:20

Gallagher:

Okay, well, my mother was Isabel Gallagher, Isabel Douglas Gallagher, and her mother, my grandmother, was also Isabel. When she was a little girl, way before my time clearly, she went to Thousand Oaks Elementary School there in Berkeley. I remember my mother telling me the story that she walked home from school to their house on Sonoma every day. One afternoon, somebody came to pick her up and give her a ride home, that was very unusual to get a ride home back then, and the story was, "Oh, what are you doing here?" The woman pointed out up to the Berkeley Hills, the whole thing was on fire; it was the 1923 Berkeley fire. Shortly after the fire, probably 1925, my grandparents moved to Poppy Lane up above Euclid [Ave.] close to Cragmont Rock Park and Pinnacle Park, which is still there.

01-00:05:40

My mom was a very bright student who went to Mills College for a couple of years and then transferred to Berkeley. She had gone to Berkeley High School as well, she was valedictorian, Phi Beta Kappa at Cal. It was there that she met my father at Berkeley.

01-00:06:09

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about your father, his name, some of his early memories and maybe what he was studying at Cal when he met your mother?

01-00:06:15

Gallagher:

My recollection is that both of them had lofty ambitions. My mother wanted to go to medical school, and of course, women didn't do that back in the day, but she wanted to go to medical school and decided that she couldn't take the blood and gore and guts, that that was not going to be her thing. Thanks to me she found out later that she could take it, but at the time as a young student, she didn't think that that would be a pleasant part of going to medical school. She thought about going to law school and—we're going to talk about this later about the influence of mentors—she had a mentor that told her to not learn how to type. Why? Because if she was a woman lawyer, all she would be doing is typing for the men for the rest of her career. Is that awful or what? But it was wonderful advice you see because this mentor, I don't know who it was, thought that she was better than being a typist, a law clerk. In any case, she ultimately graduated I think in psychology and then went to a year of graduate school to get a certificate of social welfare—they did not have an

MSW yet at Berkeley. She went to one year of graduate school and got her certificate in social welfare.

01-00:07:59

My father majored in political science; I believe he also wanted to go to law school but did not. It was the end of the Depression. I think he graduated in 1939, so it was still under the influence of the Depression. Of course, World War II was looming, nobody knew what was going on about that. As a young couple, he took a job at Pennzoil, the oil company in Sacramento, then they moved to Sacramento with bachelor's degrees. Of course that was unusual, a college boy and a college girl in 1939, there really weren't that many like that, man and woman alike, but they moved to Sacramento and started a family. My oldest sister was born in Sacramento and then—I'm not sure of the exact date but when World War II started, they moved back to the Bay Area and actually lived with my grandparents.

01-00:09:17

Farrell:

Do you know why they moved back to Berkeley then?

01-00:09:20

Gallagher:

I know a little bit; I talked to my one surviving sister about it, about her memories of this time. I'm seventy-two, she's seventy-eight or so, seventy-nine maybe, so she would have better memories of these early days than I would and of course would've heard different stories from what I heard too. My father, according to my mother, was treated very poorly as a truck driver, an oil delivery man up and down the Mother Lode Country driving for Pennzoil, and yet he was a college boy. I do remember my mother telling me a goofy story about that, but back when we went to a service station—and I do mean that service station—and a pump jockey would come up and check the oil and say, "Mr. Gallagher, your oil is a quart low." My father would always order Pennzoil and my mother would cringe because they treated him so poorly. How would he patronize this company that was treating him like that? Of course maybe he was a bit haughty because he thought he was a college boy, well he was, that could very well be too. In any case, they knew they needed to get out of this situation in Sacramento and move back to the Bay Area and with my mother's parents, my grandparents in Berkeley.

01-00:11:01

Now you know back in the day, even today, my father had to swallow a lot of pride to do that. I would very much like to talk to him about that experience. Since my father was an Irish Catholic and my mother was a Scottish Protestant, that was another of my story that my mother told me that when she was thinking about getting married to my father. She overheard her father, my maternal grandfather, saying, "Don't you know all Irishmen are drunks?" and that was thought process. Of course, his parents were saying, "Can't you find yourself a good Irish girl?" That was a sign of the times. With the interracial and interethnic and gay marriages we have today, obviously the times are way different with that, but back then, no—it was a big deal. He would've

swallowed a lot of pride to move in with his in-laws like that and ultimately got a job at the shipyard. I don't know, I guess it would be a question. Obviously, the answer is out there at the Rosie the Riveter Park in Richmond about when they ramped up, they may even have payrolls and so forth, I don't know, about when he started. But Pearl Harbor, which of course we know well was December of 1941, they would've ramped up the war effort probably 1942, but I don't know for sure. In any case, he worked there until after the end of the war.

01-00:13:00

Farrell:

So your parents move back to Berkeley, he gets the job at the shipyard, and then they go on to have a family. You have three older sisters, can you tell me on them—Jean Page, Nancy Elizabeth, and Lynn Ellen? Can you tell me about some of your early memories of them?

01-00:13:19

Gallagher:

My youngest of the three sisters was five years older than, so I came along a little bit late. They were almost Irish twins, Irish triplets really, and then five years later I was born. First, I was the only boy, John Junior, so I hold kind of a special place being the only boy and so forth. My sister didn't like that because, of course, they got hand-me-downs and so forth, and now, they had to buy all new boy clothes for the boy. I got all this new stuff, and my sisters were getting hand-me-downs, they don't like that, but of course they like to say—tell later about how they used to change my diapers and so forth. Obviously, I don't remember that at all. But they were distant enough that—oh, and being girls that I don't remember playing with them that much. I knew they were there, and I was there.

01-00:14:33

But my mother liked to tell about she, as a psychology major, thought that the gender difference and preferences were all learned. Of course, they had all these girl toys around, dolls and stuff, and then I came along, and I didn't want to have anything to—this is a very young boy, before my memory. I didn't want to have anything to do with all those doll things; I wanted to play with trucks. My mom told me that and she said it was a real eye-opener for her that there is way more to gender difference than learning. They started getting me trucks and I had boy stuff to play with, and of course, it was all new, see. I'm sure people would think that I was sort of a privileged kid in the family because of that, only boy, youngest child, John Junior.

01-00:15:45

Farrell:

I know that you were involved in the Boy Scouts. Was that your gateway to being involved with the outdoors and nature, or did that come at a different point, your interest in the outdoors?

01-00:16:01

Gallagher:

I think if any of us look back at where made directional changes in our lives and careers, that it often was not one single event, and sometimes it was,

maybe a mentor or something like that just totally steered you in a direction. When I was teaching school, I would mention that to my students, all college students that you're going to look back at your life and your career and say that, and think the damndest thing happened, good or bad that changed the direction of my life, a job experience that was particularly good or bad, a class that you took, or a professor that you had that was particularly interesting or good or bad, whatever and of course, a boyfriend or a girlfriend or whatever, that changes the direction of your life.

01-00:17:08

With my interest in the outdoors, I don't think I could ascribe one experience. I went into Cub Scouts because you go into Cub Scouts. I barely remember the Cub Scout meetings, but I know I went camping with the Cub Scouts. I know I went camping with the Cub Scouts in Tilden Park. I remember the pancake-flipping contest where we proceeded to spill pancake batter all over the campfire, and it really was a campfire back [then]. But then, I joined the Boy Scouts, and I know I mentioned earlier, we just kind of fancy ourselves as an outdoorsy camping sort of a crew, and clearly, I enjoyed that. I wasn't much of a Boy Scout when comes to advancement in our badge and all that stuff, but I very clearly did enjoy being outdoors camping and pitching the tent and all that stuff. I look back very fondly at those days and then say what you want about the Boy Scouts, I do regret that Boy Scouts is obviously on a significant downturn over the last, I don't know, decade or so. They kind of earned it I think, but it's a shame because they successfully mentored so many boys to become members of the community, to learn leadership, and so forth, and it's a shame that it has gone downhill. Again I do feel that they've dug their own hole, but that's another story. So camping with the Boy Scouts was a big influence.

01-00:19:01

Well, here's just as an example, I look back and say this is really dumb, but we did it. Our troop went to Camp Wolfeboro, the council's camp up on Highway Four up on Ebbetts Pass. It's still there; my son went there. They have all these activities in the camp and we decided we wanted to go backpacking. We loaded up our stuff and went backpacking and I think, that's really nice that we went backpacking, and I enjoyed it. Obviously, I remember it well, but we missed out on half of what happens at Boy Scout camp because we were actually backpackers, but the backpacking was fun. I look back at that and say that was an influential time, but it was a mistake because there are so many other activities that happened in the camp with learning the merit badges and activities and so forth that they had, and we missed out on all of that because we were backpacking. But still that obviously planted a seed; I've been backpacking ever since.

01-00:20:12

Farrell:

One of the camping trips that you went on was to Mount Diablo in the early '60s. Can you tell me a little bit about your memories from camping on Mount Diablo?

01-00:20:24

Gallagher: It's funny I talked to Malcolm about it. Have you interviewed Malcolm?

01-00:20:31

Farrell: He's been interviewed, but I was not the one to interview him.

01-00:20:33

Gallagher: Oh, okay. I know we went to Mount Diablo, and I kind of thought that we went to Rock City and camped there. But what little memories I have were these sloping grassy slopes and going for a snipe hunt, the proverbial Boy Scout experience, and my memory of those grassy slopes did match Rock City. Finally, Malcolm and I were reminiscing about Mount Diablo and our earliest experiences there, and he mentioned Camp Force, and the light bulb turned on, that's it, that's where I went was Camp Force, which is not a quarter mile away from Rock City. But I had since been there, the site is well known, it's long has since closed, but I've since been there, and sure enough, there were the grassy slopes. Of course, we camped in many other locations too, Boy Scout camps and state parks and so forth, all over the greater Bay Area. I remember up in Napa along the Silverado Trail or someplace, we went to many different locations to go camping as Boy Scouts, and clearly, I enjoyed that.

01-00:22:06

Farrell: Thinking about your education, you went to Berkeley High, and did you have any particular mentors or teachers that were influential for you?

01-00:22:18

Gallagher: I mentioned one when we talked on the phone, and of course, there were others. As I was thinking about this interview coming up, walking downtown this morning, I was thinking, boy, what influence mentors have, good or bad but mostly good as you look back and think as a Boy Scout, for all the very unfortunate sexual abuse and so forth that's coming out about Boy Scouts in recent years. I had three different scoutmasters, none of them had a son, two of them had—two of them were not married, and back then, boy, was this all ripe for sexual abuse, but I don't remember anything about that tragic stuff. Honestly, I have no experience about that.

01-00:23:26

But nonetheless, I got into high school and you look back at what you're good at and what you enjoy and so forth and what teachers you remember. You can do this too, look back at your high school days and say, "Well, there is Mistress Johnson and Mrs. Smith and so forth that stick pleasantly in your memory. My physics teachers were particularly memorable, both of them, and I was not a good student in physics, I got Ds physics, but they were still significant mentors in two different ways. One of them used to count in German on the blackboard. I looked him up because he has an unusual name, I looked him up, and he has a website with all this weirdness on him to this day. The guy was nuts, but you know what, the physics that I had learned from both of those teachers was, in many cases, more advanced than the physics

that I took when I got to Berkeley, seriously. The stuff that we covered that I still remember today, electron orbitals and so forth, that stood me in good stead when I got into biochem and so on later on, and that was covered in high school and not at Cal, hard to believe.

01-00:25:04

But the one that's really worth mentioning with Mr. Fitz, Franklin Fitz. He rode a motorcycle to school, and here's a mechanical mind, I know what make and model of motorcycle he rode. He was also my homeroom teacher, so I got to know him a little bit more than as a physics teacher, and two things came out of that of significance. First, he was a nice guy, but he was the teacher sponsor of the folk song club. Now this is the early '60s —'64, '65—and he's the teacher sponsor of the folk song club, and I can still recite some of the lyrics that he sang. Listen to this one, the talk in Oakland Cop Blues. "I was sitting down the Oakland station preserving the peace and saving the nation when a call came over the radio to move as fast as I could go. Going over to UC, that's the university of communism, going to arrest me some students. Well, I grab my gun, I grab my club and practiced stuff on my knuckle rub." That was a song that he sang.

01-00:26:29

Farrell:

Your physics teacher was teaching that to you in high school?

01-00:26:34

Gallagher:

Yes. [laughs] I mean, he should've gotten fired.

01-00:26:43

Farrell:

I can't imagine that flying today.

01-00:26:45

Gallagher:

[laughter] And on top of that, I know it, I know in a bookcase someplace, I have the rest of the lyrics to that, and he sang that. He had a guitar that he hung in the wall in the classroom. Oh, by the way, I play the guitar today. In fact, I play it in Save Mount Diablo's house band with Ted. I should sing that for those guys that appreciate it.

01-00:27:21

In any case, totally off the physics thing, I know we were assigned to do term papers in physics but not about physics. There were all kinds of other topics that Mr. Fitz had suggested, and you can make them up, pollution, the population explosion. I don't think that birth control would've come up, but zero population growth and Paul Ehrlich were coming into their own at the time. Probably somebody did a report on Paul Ehrlich. Since I enjoyed being outdoors, I wrote mine on, as I mentioned, seashores, parks, and recreational areas. I'm also certain that report is hanging on a bookshelf some place. For references, he had bookcases full of Sierra Club bulletins. At the time, I thought, wow, these are really cool. I do remember the articles being pretty ponderous and difficult to read for a high school student, but there they were in our physics class, they weren't just tired textbooks about physics stuff and

so that's what we used for references. At that point, I joined the Sierra Club and remained a member of the Sierra Club until I moved to Colorado and it became kind of irrelevant for a Colorado resident.

01-00:29:18

Farrell:

Yeah, so when you started at college, you were undecided in what your major you wanted to be. You started at Merritt College and transferred to Cal State Hayward and then to UC Berkeley. Can you tell me a little bit about transitioning from UC Berkeley and then moving to Colorado in 1971?

01-00:29:37

Gallagher:

Well, like so many young college students, I had all these ideas about what I wanted to do but I certainly didn't have any specific direction. I really didn't know what I wanted to do, just I had a whole bunch of ideas, some that were just off the wall. My older sister was a graduate student in Spanish and she passed away, and I thought about majoring in Spanish of all things. I thought about all the usual stuff, forest ranger and so forth and finally settled on geology, which I found interesting. I was a geology student at Cal when I dropped out mid-quarter. You can imagine how angry my parents were of that. There I was, I finally straightened my way into Berkeley and then dropped out, and my mother insisted that I go to the counseling center at Cal. The buildings are no longer there, they were World War II bungalows immediately north of the old library, and I went in there. Even though I was already not a student, I had dropped out, they accepted me into their counseling program and took all those tests about what I should be when grow up. First, they said that I had an aptitude in science, which I went, "Huh," and "Me?" and number one on the list of things whose occupations or careers matched my personality was MD and number two was chemist. At the time, I was afraid of taking chemistry because I knew it was hard and there they are saying I had an aptitude for. That was another eye-opener.

01-00:31:46

Well I thought about veterinary medicine for a long time and didn't think that that was in the cards for somebody who's such a crummy student, and I really was a bad student, and veterinarian was number four on my list of things to do. Armed with that, I started thinking about it way more seriously than I ever had and decided I didn't want to go to UC Davis, California's veterinary school. It was too close, I'd be coming back on the weekends, I really wanted to sever my ties with the whole scene in Berkeley. Colorado was "Rocky Mountain High" and John Denver and all that stuff, so I moved to Fort Collins. Popped into my VW bus and took off across the country and ended up with three degrees and a wife and a baby.

01-00:33:03

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience living in Denver and then going on to get here your various degrees?

01-00:33:16

Gallagher:

Well, again, times are different today. At the time, okay, I moved to Colorado with the idea that I was going to go to vet school, and it turns out that veterinary schools at the time had very strict residence requirements. Colorado State would not be interested in a student from California, the student from California should be going to Davis, likewise UC Davis wouldn't be interested in a student from Colorado either. But there I was, and I didn't want to go to Davis, so I took a year off, was a part-time student only taking one course each quarter so that I could become an official resident of the state of Colorado. Got my Colorado driver's license, registered to vote, did all that stuff to become an official honest-to-goodness resident of Colorado. That meant first that I was a resident and secondly, that I could pay in-state tuition and then as an undergraduate.

01-00:34:31

During that time, I was doing farm work, so I learned how to feed cattle, I learned how to drive a tractor, learned how to milk cows, and then learned how to breed cows too, artificial insemination. Kept taking courses in animal science stuff, which included some agronomy courses and so forth, crop production, and that sort of thing, things that this Berkeley boy didn't know anything about and my parents didn't know anything about, so I had no background in this stuff at all, didn't know anything about cattle, didn't know anything about horses. Loved it though, I was outside. Breeding the cattle, once you get the idea or get over the idea that it's gross sticking your arm up a cow's butt, if you can get over that, which I obviously did, that was a really fun job, outdoors, knocking the cattle around the chute, and talk with the cowboys, and providing a service that the dairy farms and ranches and so forth needed, that was a great job, it really was, and I did that all the way through.

01-00:35:56

Anyway, I ended up with a bachelor's degree in animal science, applied to vet school, and get in. So what do you do then? I got accepted to graduate school. The day I took my GRE that everybody has to do, I went backpacking with my nature professor. I literally drove to campus with my backpack in my car, took the test, and drove straight up into the Rockies to meet with my professor and his wife and another graduate student, a veterinarian too and went backpacking.

01-00:36:45

The experience in graduate school also was incredibly interesting, not so much a project that I did, but the coursework that I had and above all, helping out the other graduate students with their projects. Because I knew how to handle cattle at that point, bulls included, they tapped me into helping with all sorts of other projects. Those experiences were just dynamite. I had just gotten married at that point, my wife came with me on a lot of them, so the two of us would go out. We went to Wyoming to breed a herd of cattle for three weeks, way out in the sticks of Wyoming, I mean real cowboy stuff with a horseback with a slicker on the back the saddle and cowboy boots and the whole bit.

Loved it and I got paid. People paying to go do what I did, I got paid, and that was the best job I ever had. I ended up with a master's degree in physiology. If you want to know anything about—you learn diseases in dairy cows, you got to. And then point I did get into vet school.

01-00:38:11

Farrell: Yeah, you ended up getting your doctor of veterinary medicine in 1980, is that correct?

01-00:38:17

Gallagher: Correct.

01-00:38:17

Farrell: Okay, and just one quick kind of a side question, what's your wife's name and how did you meet her?

01-00:38:24

Gallagher: Oh, her name is Tena, T-E-N-A. She was a student teacher in Fort Collins, teaching at Fort Collins High. As a side job, which she wasn't supposed to be doing, she was scooping ice cream at Baskin Robbins, that's the short story. I love the term, we started courting, and isn't that cute? She was working in homes for retarded adults in Fort Collins at that point. She drove one of those big vans taking these development-disabled people to Kmart and outings, and so forth, bless her heart. I do remember going camping. She was determined to take the kids and adults camping, and none of the relations of these people would go. She said, "Well, I'll just take them by myself." "No, you're not doing that." So I went camping with them as well. We're not yet married, and this is the honest truth, I thought she was so good working with these people that if she can put up with them, she can put up with me. That was my part of my thought process about getting married.

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We got married, and we got married right when I was starting graduate school. She was there when I was dealing with the cattle in graduate school and so forth, and we were together when I got accepted to vet school, and that's a big deal to have that happen of course. She's a very friendly woman, so she met all of my classmates. If I see one of my classmates today forty years later, they say, "So how's Tena doing?" She finally did get a job teaching special ed at a junior high school in Loveland about fifteen miles away from Fort Collins. And the whole time I was in vet school, she was teaching junior high, special ed.

01-00:41:03

Farrell: So you got married—

01-00:41:03

Gallagher: And we're—

01-00:41:03

Farrell: —oh, sorry, go ahead.

01-00:41:05

Gallagher: Oh, we're still married.

01-00:41:08

Farrell: Right. So you got married, you had a son, and then you moved back to Berkeley in 1980, is that correct?

01-00:41:14

Gallagher: Yeah, I finished vet school and I was excited to move into the snow country after growing up in Berkeley, where obviously there isn't any, and I wanted to experience that. Did you grow up around here?

01-00:41:34

Farrell: No, I'm from New York.

01-00:41:36

Gallagher: Oh, okay, well you know about the snow and sledding and cross-country skiing?

01-00:41:42

Farrell: I do.

01-00:41:42

Gallagher: Of course, those of us who grew up in the Bay Area had no experience with that unless we go up to the Sierra. I thought that would really be cool to see what that was like to have to shovel your car out to go to the grocery store. By the time I was finishing vet school, I was tired of it, tired of scraping the windshield, tired of jumping a car, tired of jumping somebody else's car, all that stuff, tired of the whole thing. Even though I really, really enjoyed being in Colorado, I really did, I was ready for something new. We came out into the Bay Area, and I got a job doing mixed animal work. They wanted me to work in Brentwood or live in Brentwood on the other side of Mount Diablo and take farm calls up and down the Central Valley. I went to Stockton and Tracy and Manteca and all around there doing farm calls.

01-00:42:51

For me, it was not all it was cracked up to be. I really felt like I was being taken advantage of not by my bosses, but just the nature of the business model, set the veterinarians up for being taken advantage of. You go make a farm call to see one horse, they pay the bill, and then the client says, "Oh while you're here, can you look at this one?" and they've already paid the bill. You're a jerk if you say, "Well, let me start the clock again," that kind of stuff. It was never the animals. Or getting a call about a horse that had been cut, and you show up in the afternoon, and the only person who's there is a twelve-year-old girl because mom and dad both have jobs, so they can support their horse habit, and there's nobody there to hold the horse, so safety became an issue. I finally said, "I don't need this" and quit and moved to Danville, and I've been doing small animal stuff—well not now, but I continued to do small animal stuff only until I quit completely, so dogs and cats. I'm really, really glad that I did it, that I had the experience even though it was not a good one.

I'd like to say in that one year of large animal work, I got a lifetime of stories to tell, some of them were fun.

01-00:44:32

Farrell: After moving to Danville, you started your own vet clinic, is that right?

01-00:44:38

Gallagher: Yeah, I went to work for an old guy that burned out who I got along with very well, didn't come to terms with buying his practice, and so I started my own. It was 1983, just the two of us. My wife ran the show and I was the veterinarian. She was the receptionist, she wrote the check, she dealt with the insurance companies and all that stuff while I was trying to be a vet. We worked together for twenty-five years side by side, and we're still friends.

01-00:45:18

The opportunity came along, a whole bunch of serendipitous things happened at once, a lot of coincidences. In 2004, I sold the practice and continued to work there as an employee, worked there until 2006, a little over two years, and worked other jobs here and there. I know it's in the notes about a career change. At exactly the same time while I'm negotiating the sale of the business, an opportunity came up to start teaching human anatomy at the local community college, and I took it, and I did that for ten more years. It was a related thing, and people ask all the time, "Wait, you're a vet, how can you be teaching human anatomy?" Any veterinarian will say, "That's just one more species, what the heck?" There was no stretch at all to be knowledgeable in that. I taught physiology a few times too, which is way more complicated but since my graduate stuff was mostly physiologic or physiology related anyway, I was actually better prepared to be teaching physio than anatomy. I did that for ten more years.

01-00:46:50

Farrell: That's great, that's great—

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Gallagher: So—

01-00:46:50

Farrell: —and—

01-00:46:50

Gallagher: Yeah, go ahead.

01-00:46:52

Farrell: I was during the period of time that you had your own practice that you got involved with Save Mount Diablo and your son was sort of the gateway for that. Can you tell me a little bit more about how he helped get you involved in Save Mount Diablo?

01-00:47:11

Gallagher:

I asked my wife about that. I know I mentioned to you that on his bedroom door to this day is a Save Mount Diablo bumper sticker, and I don't know where or when or how that got there, but it's one of the real early ones showing a post office box. I asked my wife about it. I said, "So, we talked about that" we were on the phone and I told her, "What's the story behind that because I really don't remember?" She said, "We joined Save Mount Diablo," and I said, "We did?" I don't know what year it was, maybe Save Mount Diablo has it in a record someplace about when we became members, just dues-paying members, no volunteering or anything. No particular and personal involvement, we just paid our dues and read their newsletters, and that was that, but I don't know what year that. Probably the mid-90s, somewhere in there.

01-00:48:25

My wife was involved with an unrelated nonprofit, AAUW, American Association of University Women. She was and still is involved with that group, an interesting and good group. They rented a clubhouse around here in Danville to have a speaker show up, and the speaker was Seth Adams. Again, I don't know what year that was, probably around 2000. I listened and Seth had a little slide show, an honest-to-goodness slide show, not PowerPoint and that's what we did. He showed these slides about these properties and great vistas and how Save Mount Diablo was able to protect this and over here was slated to be houses, up here, and now it's this, a nice vista of the property. I remember just telling the Tena that "I need to get involved with this group." I was still working and so forth, but somewhere along the line, the involvement started to happen. I know that that talk was significant to me to hear about the accomplishments in our own backyard, and as we speak, I'm looking at Mount Diablo by the way. That was another seed I guess you could say. I could ask Seth, I wonder what year it was, he might be able to figure it out because I remember the boyfriend that he brought with him—because Seth was gay, I'm sure you're aware. I remember who had helped him with setting up the slide show and all that stuff.

01-00:50:32

In any case, I was so impressed and Seth was so good at speaking about this stuff believe me. I was so impressed with what the organization had been doing over, oh, its twenty years of existence at that point—thirty years. I said I needed to get more involved somehow.

01-00:50:59

Then there was another event celebrating scenic easement on some property that I walked on myself with my mountain bike. It's not worth telling the story of that particular property, but we went to a little celebration there, the wine and cheese kind of thing while various dignitaries talked about conserving this critical entrance on the southeast side of Mount Diablo State Park, very important access point as it turns out that had been in private hands completely and now also a legal access point, which I continue to use to this

day frequently either on mountain bike or on foot, doesn't matter. We went to that and I said, "I'm going to offer to help on whatever."

01-00:52:03

At about that time, we did Four Days Diablo, and I know I asked her about it, we had to figure it out, we did that in 2005. You walk from Walnut Creek to Brentwood and at the time Seth was leading every hike, so he was able to brag and brag and brag about what Save Mount Diablo had done with this property and that property. Standing up on a ridgeline, which I could take you to today, and show you the building pads that had already been carved to put houses up on this prominent ridge, and that's now preserved, and it was Save Mount Diablo who did that. I continued to say, "I'll help, I'll help." At that point, I know Scott Hein asked if I was interested in joining a land committee.

01-00:53:06

Farrell:

I do want to—before we get there—back up a little bit. When you first saw Seth talk, what were your first impressions of him?

01-00:53:16

Gallagher:

Seth can be a very charismatic person. He's got his booming voice and his waving arms and—oh, Seth, where are you right now? He looks like a bear, are you familiar with that term? He told me that one [laughs] because I didn't know. He said, "Yeah, I'm a bear." And, "Okay." He's the one that clued me in on the gay scene on that one. He continued to give his talk about how this conservation group, I don't want to call it a mom-and-pop group because it was quite that, but it was a real grassroots effort at the time. Bob Doyle can talk about addressing envelopes on somebody's dining room table before they had an office. I do know it was about when I became involved or shortly before I became involved that they had their first office, and you can imagine, how are we going to pay the rent on this thing, right?

01-00:54:41

I continued to listen to the accomplishments that Seth is honestly eloquently explaining what Save Mount Diablo has done. He's really good at it, he's really good at it, he just sort of turns on a switch. If he's leading a hike or a group of people out on the hillside at some place and he explains the property in a way that anybody can understand, in a way that people can appreciate the threat that was there beforehand, or in a way where people can see how it's a part of a wildlife corridor, connections that we wouldn't know unless somebody told you, and he is really good at that, really, really good. He did that at this talk and, as I mentioned, I was already kind of conservation oriented, I was obviously already a member of the organization but had not been involved voluntarily, I was paying my dues. That's when the land committee started.

01-00:55:56

Farrell:

Yeah, and then so after that talk, after going to the land easement gathering and then after Four Days Diablo, what were your impressions of the

organization? Aside from Scott Hein asking you to get more involved, what made you keep saying, "I'll help, I'll help, I'll help?"

01-00:56:19

Gallagher:

It will be a combination of things. First is that I was starting to have some time to be involved, the kids were getting grown up and so forth, and that plays a big role. As a board, we're always taking about how can we get some younger people in the board. we're all a bunch of old white guys and so forth. Well, the fact is every organization talks about that. This is not relevant to this discussion, but I've been a motorcyclist for decades too, and sure enough, you read the BMW Motorcycle Owners magazine, and they're always talking about how can we get younger people involved. The average owner of a BMW is fifty, sixty years old, and nobody is riding motorcycles in college anymore, and that's when we all got started. What are we going to do about this? Well, it's the same with Save Mount Diablo, and you can bet the Scottish bagpipers organization too, how can we get young kids to play the bagpipes, right?

01-00:57:27

So I was typical, meaning I was a busy dad, I had a wife and a house and a business and two kids, and I would rather be a Boy Scout dad or a soccer coach than be involved with a conservation organization even though I obviously believed that from early on. I was just doing other stuff. While all my kids were in Boy Scouts—my daughter was in Boy Scouts also—and so while all that was happening, Save Mount Diablo was just not part of it. And finally, soccer had wound down and Boy Scouts had wound down, the kids didn't want anything to do with their dad anyway because they're teenagers and so I started dealing with Save Mount Diablo. That's a pattern that would fit many, many people, and that's why boards of directors are often a little bit older is because we have the time to be involved.

01-00:58:40

Farrell:

When we spoke on the phone earlier, you mentioned that you have a little bit of a learning curve when you joined the land committee.

01-00:58:47

Gallagher:

Oh yeah.

01-00:58:47

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about that learning curve and how you solved through that, I guess?

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Gallagher:

Well, my background could not have been more useless for being on the land committee. I'm a veterinarian, I don't know that stuff. I know how to spay a cat, but I'm sure I can spay a cat better than anybody else on the land committee. But I went to the first meeting, and an anecdote will come up. They started talking with all these acronyms and rattling off property owners' names and this parcel and that parcel and that this section and that section and

twenty acres over here. You talk fish out of water, I mean I thought this is really cool, but I don't know anything about what they're talking about, I really was in the dark. But heck, Scott is a chemist by trade, he didn't know anything either. Of the people that were on the land committee—I'll have to think about it—the only one that really knew anything was Malcolm at the time. His occupation is doing this stuff, so he knew all of these farmers and, not farmers but he knew all of these ranchers and other property owners around the mountain because of his job. His knowledge bank was and still is today invaluable for Save Mount Diablo, incredible. But Scott is a chemist, I'm a veterinarian, and so forth, and so I just kept listening, didn't really know how to be influential. It's hard to be influential when you don't know anything and so I kept learning. It did take time, and that's the one committee where the real strategic decisions about the organization are made. Strategic decision about land acquisition or land use advocacy and so forth, that all happens at the land committee.

01-01:01:15

Farrell:

Was there anyone there to help you understand what the acronyms meant or where those properties were, kind of helped shepherd you into that process?

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Gallagher:

No. Nobody looked at me condescendingly when I said, "I don't know what you guys are talking about." They were more than generous with filling anybody in, and Seth or Scott or Malcolm would often just—Seth does to this day—fill us in with a little background about a subject even if the board has discussed the subject in the past just to refresh our memory about it. Because of course, we're all part-time volunteer types, and Seth is working on this, it's his occupation and passion, so this stuff is in the very front of his brain and then it's not necessarily in the front of everybody else's brain. He was real good about giving a background about whatever the subject was for everybody and still is. No doubt about it I'm so grateful, but it just took time. Nobody ever looked at me and said, "John, you should know this stuff." That never happened. If I asked what this three-letter acronym was, I never felt like somebody was looking down on their nose because I didn't know what it meant, which is appreciated obviously.

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Farrell:

Yeah, yeah, I bet. When you started on the land committee, can you tell me about some of your roles?

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Gallagher:

Well, I didn't really have a role per se. I was just there to listen and ask questions and learn. I don't believe I took on any specific projects as a land committee member and I believe I still haven't really. We have other people with greater expertise on that stuff than I ever will. Well, one that just came up, I was talking about somebody the day before yesterday about, "Well, what about this property was—," you know? They say, "Well, we need to get an easement over here for a driveway because of the access issues and somebody

is supposed to be working on that." I'm clueless how to go about that, I'm clueless even how to learn about how to go about that, but we do have people with that expertise who can work on them.

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But the reason I was out of this property a day before yesterday is because there's a trailer that we want to tear down and haul away and I have the equipment to do it. It was that kind of experience when I said, "You know, I don't know this stuff, I'm interested, I realize this is really what Save Mount Diablo does, but I am handy and knowledgeable and I'm probably more valuable doing stewardship stuff." While I still participate in the land committee—well, there's a time when I was teaching my anatomy, I was teaching a night class and it was—the night class is on the same night as the land committee, and that went on for several years when I couldn't participate except to get their notes. I was a member of the land committee, but I was unable to participate in any of the meetings. That was kind of an interesting period; it went on for several years actually.

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But I finally said, "You know, we have all these properties, I need to be doing the stewardship, that's what I'll be most useful." Of course, it's all outdoors, we get to go places where other people don't get to go, and I like that.

01-01:05:55

Farrell:

Yeah, and you started working with the stewardship committee around 2007–2008. Can you tell me about some of the differences between the land committee and the stewardship committee for those who are uninitiated?

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Gallagher:

Well, if I had to categorize, the land committee does two things: we decide on acquisition potential. The organization keeps a list, an updated list. Yes, this is not a static list, keeps a list of properties of interest to Save Mount Diablo on and around the slopes of the mountain and so forth, where it would fit into strategic acquisition and so forth. We keep a list about that and then try to decide if the cost of the property is worth it. Just as you and I might decide to buy a new couch or something like that, you just have to make that calculation. Well, I really like it, but is it worth it, do I need it that badly? The land committee makes those decisions and recommendations and said, "Hey, listen, there's a nice property, but it's totally surrounded by houses, and even though it adjoins a state park, it will never be a place for access or anything else, it would just be another parcel. So if it's really cheap, let's go for it," but no. Or we say, "We need this one, this is something we've looked at, it's been on our list for twenty-five years."

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That's the first thing on the land committee, and the other one is even more important, way more important actually is the land use advocacy that the organization does, commenting on development proposals and so forth. It's

certainly true, we have preserved way more property through the land use advocacy than we ever have through acquisition of another property and turning it over to a state park or East Bay Regional Park District or whatever. The land use advocacy has a way, way bigger role. Ted likes to say that's one of the reasons he took the job is because as—and his whole career has been on conservation. He had not worked with an organization that does the kind of land use advocacy that Save Mount Diablo does and he wanted to learn about it. He got kicked in on the deep end on that as we continue working with commenting on development proposals and I'm talking about professional, legal quality comments that Seth and or Juan Pablo write. Of course, we work with a law firm, an environmental law firm as well to help us with that stuff.

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Developers and city and county governments today take Save Mount Diablo very seriously, which of course back in the '80s, let's say before my time, that they were just saying, "Hey, listen, you're a bunch of little old ladies in tennis shoes, I'm not going to listen to you." They found out that we can really make a difference in a project or in stopping or the delaying or whatever and our reputation and influence has been very strong, and I'm proud of that. It's just way more important than the land use and not—the land acquisition when you look at the greater scheme of what this organization does.

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Still though, I know I mentioned it before in the late 2000s when we had the recession, we really didn't have a stewardship staff at all. Seth took care of it, but there was nobody dedicated to stewardship. We didn't have very many properties anyway and then during the recession, we acquired a whole bunch of them, bang, bang, bang, bang. They were often distressed properties that had junk on them or gates that didn't work or fire abatement that wasn't being done, and so on and so that's where the stewardship really started to come of its own. Seth realized that he was too busy doing other stuff and then we hired our first employee just to deal with stewardship. I don't know when he started this—fifteen years ago that would be, something like that. It's 2021, 2000—yeah, 2010, 2011, something like that—when we realized that Save Mount Diablo is being overwhelmed with these acquisitions that we had made.

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Secondly, the State Parks was reluctant to take properties off our hands. You may have heard that that was a very frustrating time in that department. The state park system, across the board, the whole department of parks and recreation was embarrassingly underfunded and so it was unclear. They were telling us that the state park by policy was not taking on any more land and then we found out there really wasn't a policy, they just, sort of, started saying that. But that meant that we didn't have a way, an avenue to dispose of these properties. Even if they were adjacent to the state park, the state park didn't want them. Oh, and some of the parcels that we bought while they were cheap, and I don't regret buying them, that's not the point, it was clear that we're going to be keeping these properties for a lot longer than a year. The

business model that had been buy a few acres, clean it all up, sell it to the state and move on and that would replenish our kitty, and we buy another one. That's what we did in the '80s and '90s, and we started acquiring these properties 2008, 2009, '10, that we still own today. There's no avenue to dispose of these properties in the near future, so we're going to be keeping them for a long time and they need to be taken care of. The stewardship committee and now staff of four—I don't know, when I got involved, it was a staff of zero, now it's a staff of four—are taking more of a management role today than we are clean it up and move on.

01-01:13:42

Farrell:

I'm curious to hear a little bit more about the how the state park's decision to not buy land from Save Mount Diablo or other organizations, how that impacted Save Mount Diablo. You mentioned the staff crew, but are there any other ways that that impacted the organization?

01-01:14:04

Gallagher:

Well, for me doing stewardship, I had the dual role. I still do, with the land committee. If a property comes up that we might be able to acquire, just as you or I might buy anything, again a couch for your living room, you weigh all those factors—well, is it the right color, is it the right sizes, and can I get it up the stairs into the living room, will it be comfortable, how much does it cost, all those things, right, for any old acquisition, a new car, anything. A property comes up with possibility and we weigh those same things. Well, one of things that we have to weigh is will we be able to hold it into the state park or the East Bay Regional Park District? Before the answer was, "Yeah," otherwise we wouldn't buy it. Some that came up that were cheap enough for whatever reason or they find it along Marsh Creek, creek frontage is it's important, it's a strategic decision to try to preserve as much of Marsh Creek as we can. If a property came up and we acquired it for a suitable amount of money, well then, we could buy it, but we're going to be keeping it for a long time because it's not adjacent to anything that will become part of a park for years to come, maybe forever. That's been a paradigm shift I think for the organization that we're going to be keeping these properties for a really long time. If you are going to keep something for a long time, something as living as a piece of property, you got to take care of them.

01-01:16:31

Farrell:

Has that changed the way that the stewards have started to care for the land?

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Gallagher:

Oh yeah. Again, I can't tell you the number of trailers full of old car tires that we had hauled off for example. Piles of pipe, barbed wire, and so forth that we've hauled off to the recycle center or whatever. Well, all that's done now and so what will be our stewardship role? Well, if you went out to some of our properties today, this is just happened in the last year or two, and I can't say is I'm really involved on this one as much as I should be perhaps. Save Mount Diablo developed a very elaborate and sophisticated climate action plan a

couple of years ago and it took a lot of work by the staff to come up with concerns and goals and so forth, and the usual buzzwords, carbon footprint and all that stuff. One of the things that came out of it is we should be planting 10,000 trees. Well, trees plant themselves, but they get trampled by deer and cattle, so why don't we just go out and plant some of these little seedlings and protect them? As recently as five years ago, we couldn't even consider doing that sort of thing; we just didn't have the resources, financial or man hours, both to do that stuff. Because we had gates to repair and to fix and barbed wire to remove and so forth, and now, we're beginning to have time to do some restoration projects. That whole restoration thing, while it started several years ago, has really kicked into more and more of what the stewardship does. Much of that is staff driven since we have the staff resources to be doing this stuff today. That's been a major change.

01-01:19:09

Farrell:

Aside from the staff resources, what else changed that allowed you to start thinking about protecting the seedlings versus planting 10,000 trees?

01-01:19:20

Gallagher:

It's like with anything, you have a list in your head of things that you want to do, but you just can't get to them for whatever reason you can't. You don't have the time, you don't have the money, you don't have the knowledge or ability, the knowhow to get whatever it is you want to get done, done, but you'd like to. Let's say you want to rip out the lawn on your front yard, but you don't have the money to hire a gardener, and you don't really know how to do it yourself. You don't really know how to buy particular plants to raise your lawn, so you end up not doing it, you do something else instead.

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For us, when we were on this acquisition mode, we couldn't even be thinking about that, I mean about restoration activities except in a few, small places. We had a botanist on our board of directors for a while, so we could tap into him and say, "Hey, listen, we got a bunch of nonnatives there along the creek, what can we do about it?" It was all very quaint in the way we went about it, and today, it's just become more and more sophisticated as we're moving along with that.

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Another one is, I was just talking with Sean Burke about it just the other day, saying, "Listen, you've been doing all these kestrel, American kestrel nesting boxes over at this one property. What about over here? We need them here too?" Five or ten years ago, we're worried about removing old car tires, and so today, we can start doing some of those programs that we had wanted to do but couldn't.

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The other thing is, of course, well, if you have a bright person, they can learn how to do something, but if they come into the background—our previous

head of stewardship and so forth was Meredith, Meredith Hendricks who was really great to work with. She didn't know anything about stewardship and restoration and so forth, and I don't mean to demean her in that one bit. She didn't know about how to pull a trailer or drive a tractor or that kind of stuff and so she had different skills. Sean comes on and he knew more about raptors and so he said, "Hey, why don't we do this raptor thing?" Everybody said, "What? Well, that's a cool idea." That's been a change just since Sean has come on board. His first day was Monday of the shutdown, so he really got kicked into the deep end on that. He showed up for work on Monday morning and was told to go home, [laughs] and that was his first day on the job. It's been my tradition if we have somebody new who's going to be out there on the land in some sort of way, I've tried to take them on a tour, but I couldn't do that with Sean because we couldn't sit in the same car. But anyway, he brought different skills and knowledge and so forth to get things done, and that's been, yeah, very helpful about it all.

01-01:23:42

Farrell:

One thing I wanted to talk a little bit about is you taking over as the chair of the stewardship committee. Dave Sargent, he was chairing, he was a board of director member, and he moved on, so you took over. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your experience chairing the committee?

01-01:24:04

Gallagher:

Well, I don't know what year it was, but fifteen years ago? Too long, I really should step down to be honest. Dave was one who had less of a background in doing stuff than I do because I was pretty handy and know how to swing a hammer and so forth. But Dave was willing to work and work and work. He'd go out there by himself and pull one weed at a time, a capability that I do not have at all and no way do I have the patience to do that kind of stuff. But he also didn't have the staff, so, to support him in anything that he wanted to do. But he would say, "Well, how can we get this stuff cleaned up? We don't even own a trailer to haul this stuff away?" Save Mount Diablo didn't have a truck and he did, so he'd haul stuff away in his truck and then I came on board and I had a truck, so I haul stuff away in my truck. Oh, I knew how to pull a trailer. Actually, Dave bought our first trailer with his own money and then he moved away. He would dutifully report to the board about what we had been working on, but I don't know that I would've called him an idea person where he was finding things to do and so forth. Let's just say hypothetically that Dave, just by background, was a restoration expert during his career. Well, we wouldn't have been throwing old car tires, we would've been doing restoration projects instead simply because that was his background. But, yes, you're on a piece property and you see a bunch of junk, and it's pretty obvious that haul away the junk first, and we did that so much dumpster after dumpster. You can't believe the stuff that we had thrown away and Dave was part and parcel of that. Probably you can say the same about me, if I had a background in restoration and botany and so forth, the direction of the stewardship

committee would be different today too. But my background is I'm a homeowner and I do everything myself.

01-01:27:11

Farrell: How would you describe your leadership style or your philosophy?

01-01:27:17

Gallagher: The biggest challenge to me is that I'm not organized enough to be walking around saying, "Okay, on February twenty-fourth, we need to get twelve people out to do this." I don't have the background or mindset really to do that, I kind of wish I did, but I don't. If I were a more organized person, and I'm not, then I would be out there finding projects for other people to do rather than me doing it. As a case in point, really, it's happening just this week, there's an old trailer we want to throw away. It's been on our property we own for about ten years now, and again, there's probably been something more important to do than to deal with this trailer. We look at it and say, "God, that's a big sucker, how are we going to get rid of that? We can't tow it away, it don't even have wheels on it," and so, and it wasn't that much of a priority.

01-01:28:38

Finally, one of our other stewards who takes care of the property said, "Hey, how are we going to get rid of this thing? If we do this and this and this," and the next thing you know it's getting done." We were out there a day before yesterday doing the preliminary work and next Wednesday, we're going to cut it all up into little pieces and haul it away. Sean is getting a trailer, a dump trailer to haul the stuff away in pieces and we're getting a whole crew of people, but it was not I who instigated the project, it was our steward. I just kind of ignored him because we had other things to do. Of course, COVID messed everything up where my role had, oh, for the first year of COVID had practically gone out the window because we couldn't do anything, we couldn't get together as a group. That's why you're at home instead of in Berkeley.

01-01:29:44

Farrell: That's true.

01-01:29:46

Gallagher: Yeah, I know, I know. My daughter and son-in-law working from home in Campbell right now. That's where my wife is babysitting our granddaughter, so they can work even though they are at home hiding out in the bedroom. Yes, how times have changed. But for all these outdoor group activities for the last year, year and a half, we couldn't do them. That was really frustrating because this lag time where time stood still. It was kind of nice but coming up with throwing this trailer away, it wasn't I that instigated that and really that's the kind of role that I should be playing, and I'm not very good at it.

01-01:30:48

Farrell: I do also want to talk about your involvement with some of the Save Mount Diablo events. I know that they're coordinated by the staff, but the volunteers play a role in pulling them off. One thing I know that you've been involved in

is Moonlight on the Mountain. You've hauled equipment, you've helped set up, you know where ether equipment is stored. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience helping with that event?

01-01:31:13

Gallagher:

Well, I'm pretty sure—in fact, I'm certain—it was at Moonlight when we were setting up stuff. I was new to the whole thing, but it was at Moonlight when Scott asked me if I was interested in joining the land committee. I know because we were out there and it's an interesting event. Yes, you're quite right, it's coordinated by the staff. All of the staff work on Moonlight in some sort of capacity. Everybody pitches in, even though it's not what you do they're there to lend a hand in some sort of way, and so they all play a role. It is Save Mount Diablo's biggest fundraiser as I'm sure you're aware. There are half a dozen of us men who help with transporting and setting up the equipment that we need to have. Again, I have a truck, I know how to pull a trailer, I know how to load stuff and so I end up doing that. But in no way could I load all that stuff so we meet, but who meets where and when, the staff and I say, "Well, we need to bring all that stuff in Friday morning, so I need four bodies out here to load the trailer," and they find the four bodies typically and then we load up. But there are other groups too.

01-01:33:04

The reason that our very important employee, Shannon. Shannon Grover is involved. She got started with NCL, National Charities League, a mother-daughter volunteer thing, kind of a cool idea really, where they look for projects that a mom and a teenage daughter can do some good for the community and hopefully bond a little bit at the same time. These moms and daughters show up and they set the tables, put the chairs around just so everything looks good and so forth, and I'm not involved in that at all. Am I grateful to them? Oh, my gosh, I don't want to be setting 500 places, putting the napkins just right, but they've been invaluable with that. Yeah, the role of volunteers in an event like that—I mean I know there are commercial events that go on outdoors, company picnics and so forth that go on outdoors, I can't imagine doing that, the cost of paying everybody to set it up. We pay our staff; key staff work on the event for months. During, I don't know, two weeks before it actually happens, the entire staff is working on it in some sort of way while still trying to do justice to their regular roles. I mean somebody still has to answer the mail and so forth. They take this one, but they also know that's where the paychecks come from. As a volunteer, I don't have the stress of worrying about that and that make a big difference.

01-01:35:20

I don't know how I got started. Somebody asked me to spend Friday night out there as a sort of a security guard and I went, "Yeah, I'll do that." Of course, we hadn't done it for the last two years now, but I'd go out and sleep in the bed of my truck. I always make sure to park my truck in an appropriate incline, so I can crawl into my sleeping bag on Friday night after everybody has gone home and I have the whole place myself. It's lovely.

01-01:36:00

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more what that's like to spend the night on Mount Diablo by yourself?

01-01:36:07

Gallagher: Oh, it's great.

01-01:36:08

Farrell: I guess maybe some of the sounds you hear or what it looks like or what it smells like, some of the sensory details?

01-01:36:20

Gallagher: Well, of course every night that I'm out there, I mean the Friday night is by myself with nobody out there. Once in a while, the cows will come around and stick their nose in my nose while I'm asleep in the bed of my truck, and of course I hear the coyotes calling, which is always a delight. One year, there was a fire. I'm not sure where it was nor what year it was, but I could see the glow of the fire and that's a little disconcerting. It's kind of hard to sleep when you can see the glow of a fire even though it might be five miles away and there's really nothing to worry about whatsoever. That was a little eerie. But the wind comes up and the fog comes in or something like that, and it's just nice and quiet and serene. I also spend Saturday night out there with one or two or three other people. Usually my wife joins me at that point for Saturday night so that we can just be there Sunday morning to help with takedown. At that point, if we have four or five people that are going to spend the night out there, we'll cook breakfast for everybody, and that's kind of fun. Other people start to show up to set tables and so forth. We're working till noon and we go home and finally get a shower. I look forward to that. They're all grateful that I do it, but the fact it I look forward to it. I'll be disappointed when I could—well I was disappointed these last two years of course that we couldn't do it all, so, and that's the way it goes.

01-01:38:24

Farrell: Another thing that you've been involved in is the beacon. Can you tell me a little bit about your role in the lighting of the beacon and the beacon talks?

01-01:38:35

Gallagher: I'm the one that lights the beacon. [laughs]

01-01:38:38

Farrell: Oh yeah, what's that like?

01-01:38:40

Gallagher: It was Dick Heron who really spearheaded that whole project. Dick is a retired engineer and very skilled in ways that I'm not. First because of his job as an engineer, he knew about project management and so forth, something that I—even a project management software about which I know nothing, still know nothing. He really did the bulk of the coordination, but the two of us worked as partners on it in many different ways. Still total credit to him for being the manager of the project, no doubt about it and we get along very well with the

Crens. I got involved because Dick and I had worked on many other Save Mount Diablo projects, volunteer stuff here and there. I was walking into the office one day and he was just leaving. I said, "Huh, what are you doing here?" and he said, "Well, Ron and I were just talking about restoring the beacon." I just immediately said, "Wow, I want to be involved in that," because I have some restoration skills; I used to have a business repairing antique clocks back in the day.

01-01:40:12

The next thing you know, we became partners doing this as we took on different roles. Dick would bounce ideas off me and we'd scout things and visit the beacon and meet with various state park people that have to approve everything. The two of us did that hand in hand as we met with the department of parks and rec, history people, and construction people. And then meeting with, "How are we going to lift this beacon down?" It was kind of funny how it started. Dick and I went up to the beacon and I said, "You know the stumbling block here is a crane, we can probably lift this. It can't weigh so much that we can't just lower it into the bed of my pickup truck and drive it down the hill. I've got room in my garage; we could do this." That's how it started.

01-01:41:14

Little did we know, none of us knew that it was going to grow into this huge community project with frontpage articles in every newspaper, TV and radio interviews, the whole bit. We had no idea any of that was going to happen. This little project of replacing bearings and a new paint job blew into this huge undertaking as the community came forward and really that was one of the most gratifying. Dick and I would totally agree on this, that short of meeting our Pearl Harbor veterans, which was and is amazing, the way the community came out to support the project has been the most gratifying part of the project itself. We had a frontpage article in the [*San Francisco*] *Chronicle*, not to pat myself on the back, a picture of me on the front page at the beacon. Carl Nolte, the wonderful writer for the *Chronicle* came out and did a very nice story about how Save Mount Diablo, this environmental group, is going to undertake restoring this historic beacon on the summit of Mount Diablo. People contacted Save Mount Diablo from out of the woodwork saying, "That sounds like a cool project, how can I help?" One of them, Rex Bothel, he did exactly that, send an email to Save Mount Diablo or called and said, "I have a construction background and I have a secure warehouse in Concord where, if you want, you can store the beacon while you did the work." I guess it was an email that came, Dick and I got that and said, "Wow, this is too good to be true" because we didn't know where we were going to take this thing" As it turns, it wouldn't have fit in my garage anyway, the thing is eight feet tall from the bottom to the top but we didn't know that yet. It turns out that Rex not only had a secure warehouse in North Concord, but he also had a forklift that turned out to be crucial to the project, all volunteer, all volunteer. He contributed all of his time, contributed his staff member on the

forklift whenever we needed it, an affable guy, he was just terrific to work with. During that whole time, we're the business out of his warehouse and that was just one.

01-01:44:10

Another one, a machinist has a sophisticated machine shop, even makes parts for the Tesla, contacted us in the same way, "Hey, saw the article, my father was a veteran of World War II, my father-in-law was a veteran of World War II, I'm a veteran myself. That sounds like a cool project. I have a full machine shop at your disposal, what do you need?" I mean like that.

01-01:44:43

That coming together and then needing to take the beacon down. Of course, the biggest contributor was Shell, the crane company, by far. We are so grateful to them. The small community stuff like this too, Rex and the machinist, his name is Dale, they contributed in a small but significant way. But the big one was that Shell provided the crane and the riggers for us to lift the beacon down and then to put it back again. Twice, they drove their crane up to the summit, and that stuff's expensive, and that was at no cost to Save Mount Diablo. That was just really cool. I mean our most articulate of the Pearl Harbor survivors, Chuck Kohler, he's one that can come up with a phrase that'll get in. He liked to say—he's quoted many times for this—he walked over the crane operators and said, "When you lift that beacon off the crane—off the summit of Mount Diablo, that's the same as if you were lifting my fellow sailors out of the water at Pearl Harbor." The crane operator was saying, "Where are my sunglasses when I need them?" because he got him, he said that many times. But there we are at the summit while these burly crane operators are up there doing what they do, and it was touching, it really was.

01-01:46:41

And then lighting it, yeah, it just worked out that way that since Dick was the head with that. We thought, hey, he should be down there with the celebratory speeches and so forth, and I'll go up to the summit and I'll turn it on December seventh. I'll be up there in three weeks, I guess, to turn it on. Is it a privilege? Yeah, sure it is. Physically, is it demanding? No, it's a drive up to the summit, three staircases and three batteries, and I'm up there and then it's no more complicated than turning a light switch. But the significance of it is another story that people look forward to it.

01-01:47:34

The lighting, I'm sure you're aware, we lit it every week for a year because of the coronavirus. That got started because two of our supporters independently called Save Mount Diablo and said, "Hey, why don't you guys light the beacon?" Ted called the head of the state park district, Eddie Guaracha and said, "What do you think about this?" He said, "That sounds like a good idea." In a typical bureaucratic way, he said, "But I have to check with Sacramento." Ted called me and said, "What do you think about it?" I went, "Whoa, wait a minute, you've got to talk to the Pearl Harbor guys because this is their thing."

They said, "That sounds like a great idea." On Easter Sunday—so this is three weeks after the shutdown—Ted and I went up to the summit and turned it on. Every other week, Dick and I alternated turning it on, and every Monday morning at sunrise, Ted drove up there himself and turned it off. Boy, did we get a lot of mileage out of that. The positive vibes from the community, from everywhere, healthcare workers especially, of course. You have to think back last April, a year and a half ago now, April and May when we're all saluting our healthcare workers, they didn't have masks, obviously there were no vaccines, that was a heady time for all of us, cops, first responders, ambulance drivers, the whole works. We got so many nice notes that Save Mount Diablo was turning on the beacon. I look forward to driving up there besides being able to see some really nice sunsets.

01-01:49:44

Farrell:

Thank you for sharing all that. I think it's such a powerful story and very significant about a community coming together, but also the significance of lighting it during the pandemic. I've heard a lot about how much it's meant to people, so I appreciate you sharing all of that.

01-01:50:00

Gallagher:

Again, it was just these two supporters that called Ted or called Save Mount Diablo, really, and made that suggestion; they were independent. He told me who they are and they are people that I didn't actually know, but they made that suggestion. I hadn't thought of it, they made that suggestion and said, "Eddie, the district superintendent had to get approval from Sacramento." That came through something like at ten minutes to 5:00 on Friday. Ted called me and said, "Hey, we're a go for Sunday, how do you want to meet?" because he didn't know how to turn it off.

01-01:50:49

Farrell:

Yeah. [laughter]

01-01:50:50

Gallagher:

The two of us drove up and turned it on. Of course, again, everybody is so paranoid about meeting together. Ted and I are wearing masks and think, should we really be standing up in that confined space at the beacon unprotected? Nobody knew.

01-01:51:15

Farrell:

And there were really no tests then either.

01-01:51:19

Gallagher:

No, there's nothing.

01-01:51:20

Farrell:

Yeah.

- 01-01:51:20
Gallagher: We went up there kind of paranoid and petrified and not shaking hands. There were people that asked me about say, "Hey, I'll come with you one time," I went, "No, we can't ride in the car together."
- 01-01:51:42
Farrell: Yeah, yeah.
- 01-01:51:42
Gallagher: And then for Father's Day that year, my son and grandson came over from Redwood City, so my grandson got to light the beacon. That was fun.
- 01-01:51:54
Farrell: That's cool, yeah.
- 01-01:51:55
Gallagher: Yeah.
- 01-01:51:55
Farrell: Yeah. Another thing you mentioned earlier that I wanted to ask about was playing in the Save Mount Diablo house band.
- 01-01:52:03
Gallagher: [laughs]
- 01-01:52:04
Farrell: This is a house band. You mentioned you played the guitar, Ted's also in it. Who else was in it and what kind of music do you play?
- 01-01:52:12
Gallagher: What does this have to do with an oral history? [laughs]
- 01-01:52:17
Farrell: I mean it's all part [of it].
- 01-01:52:21
Gallagher: Well, I've played old-time banjo for almost fifty years. Wow, fifty years. Somewhere along the way, I picked up the lap guitar, everybody calls it a dobro. You play it horizontal rather than like a typical guitar; that's what I do. When Tena and I participated in Four Days Diablo the first night—and this is what we still do, I mean with—to hold the event. The first night, we have had Ken Lavin, a wonderful naturalist who would talk about the geology of Mount Diablo and he has a nice talk all put together for that. He's done that the first night, four days every year, that is a nice talk. The next night has been a naturalist typically from EBRPD to talk about whatever he wants to talk about. Third night when Tena and I participated, again 2005, there's really nothing except Ron Brown's tequila and kicking back. At that point, the participants are tired, but they know they're going to make it because you just have one more day on top and so everybody wanted to kick back.

01-01:53:50

I asked Ron, the executive director at the time, I said, "Ron, I've got some friends that can play music and one of them is Bev Loomis's husband who I play with regularly." Bev had volunteered in the office for a number of years, Bev Loomis. You can see Ron's wheels turning, he went [nods head]. The following year, Bob and I got together, Bob Loomis and I team up a little set list of a dozen or so Americana-type songs, a Dead song, a Dylan song, that sort of thing, and we played, just the two of us. One of the participants that year—this will be 2006 I think—one of the participants practically grabbed the guitar out of Bob's hand because she wanted to sing too, and she could sing. We say, "We got to do this again next year," and her name was Patti, Patti Petromilli. She said, "Yeah, this is really fun, that'd be a great idea, let's do this next year. In fact, we'll call ourselves Blue-Eyed Grass." Now blue-eyed grass is one of the local, indigenous flowers on Mount Diablo and so it's a native, and all three of us at the time had blue eyes, so it was perfect. On top of that, nobody would know this, but I do, blue-eyed grass is not blue, and it doesn't have eyes and it's not a grass, so. [laughs] My daughter is a botanist, so there you go. The name just stuck immediately and then Patti moved away, she moved to Arizona and that was that. She did come back, a lot of them I think, but that's a stretch.

01-01:56:12

Another friend of mine came and played right when Ted was brand new. Bob couldn't do it, if I remember right, and so this other friend and I did it. He's more of a bluegrass guy and so we played a bunch of bluegrass stuff that you know. The new guy, the new executive director, Ted, said, "Well, I can play the guitar, can we do some blues in E maybe?" "Oh okay." It turned out he could and I said, "Listen, you know, we get together with Bob Loomis pretty regularly." We've been playing with the trio ever since. We had a bass player for a while, which as a musician you would know, bass players are a real asset to help keep time and keep people in line and so forth. I mean the audience doesn't know, but it's really a benefit to have a bass player and he played with us for a while too, and now we're bass free. But Ted and Bob and I became the house band, so we played for many different get-togethers, donor support events.

01-01:57:40

One of our fundraising things that Ron started was the dinner at the summit. Among other assets, it turns out, Ron knows how to cook for a lot of people, and it has since morphed into something different where people will buy at our auction, Moonlight auction, a dinner for ten or twelve up at the summit of Mount Diablo so we schlep everything in. We now have a restaurant do it rather than Ron and put on a nice dinner people for twelve people and whoever sponsors this thing pays a lot of money for it. We've done many of those; we did one two weeks ago. While everybody is having hors d'oeuvres and a glass of wine before the dinner starts, Bob and Ted and I will play. It's always fun because Ted being the executive director and I being a member of the board of directors if we're up there, we actually should be schmoozing

with the people, meeting and say, "See that property over there, that's Save Mount Diablo's property, we acquired that." That's what we should be doing, "Nice of you to be up here," and Ted especially wants to play music, but it adds a lot to a little thing, it's acoustic and so forth. The three of us get together and Bob's not on the board, but he's been a longtime supporter of Save Mount Diablo and so the three of us politically were in the same position. So far, we get along great and have fun.

01-01:59:32

Farrell: That's fantastic.

01-01:59:33

Gallagher: It is. It had really worked and for the three of us it worked really well. We get along well together, we're of comparable abilities. Bob does most of the singing and Ted and I avoid it, and so it's fun.

01-01:59:54

Farrell: Yeah. I do want to ask you some reflective questions before we wrap up, and one of them is I'm wondering what it's meant to you to be involved with Save Mount Diablo over the years?

01-02:00:07

Gallagher: I'm certain if you look back, as I already have, that—well, I say this many times, everybody should be volunteering for something no matter what it is. I mean if you volunteer for the street garden or the local knitting club or the gay rights group or whatever, being involved in whatever floats your boat is so rewarding in so many ways. I mean if you want to help with the Veterans Day Parade or pick, work at the hospital as a Pink Lady, it's so rewarding to do that in so many different ways.

01-02:01:00

If I had ended up in Santa Rosa instead of Danville, I almost did, I'd be involved in the Sonoma Land Trust today. There's no doubt in my mind because conservation was something that goes way back. Well I told, I'm a motorcyclist, I could be involved in a motorcycle club. I'm not talking about motorcycle gang kind of a thing, a tours club to help support those of us that travel long distances on motorcycles, which we did. To me, that's a nice thing to do, and those that do that find it very rewarding, but that's just kind of a selfish activity and that was not for me. The conservation is helping everybody, everybody. Even if you don't like going for walks, even if you don't like being outdoors, if it's not your thing, you still like seeing a nice view. People like seeing Mount Tamalpais, people like seeing the ridges along the peninsula, people like seeing Mount Diablo and were it not for those conservation-oriented people over the last really century, more than a century, since the turn of the last century 1900, obviously John Muir is the icon of all that, we wouldn't have that today. Houses were proposed in Rock City a hundred and ten years ago.

01-02:02:50

In the '30s when the whole state park—well, the State Park Commission was formed in 1928 and so there is a push, a grassroots push by do-gooders, and I mean that in the best way, all over the state to have parks, state parks, more in Northern California than in Southern California but all over the state. We owe an incredible debt to those people that work so hard but obviously on their own time to make the State Park's Commission happen. In the depths of the Depression, 1934, voters of Alameda County voted to form the East Bay Regional Park District—and not Contra Costa by the way but Alameda County only at the time. You go, "Wow, I'm not just grateful for the people that spearheaded it, but I'm grateful for the people that voted for it [in] 1934." The vision that they had at the time to persevere the first parks—and Tilden was one of them. You look at the infrastructure at Tilden Park the Brazilian Room and so forth, all built by CCC labor during the Depression. Isn't that cool? Again if I weren't in Danville—well if I were living in the city, I'd be involved in the Presidio Trust or GGNRA [Golden Gate National Recreational Area] in sort of way; there's no doubt about it.

01-02:04:43

Farrell:

What have your proudest moments been during your involvement with Save Mount Diablo?

01-02:04:51

Gallagher:

Well, the proudest times were when we have a success and certainly acquire Curry Canyon Ranch is Save Mount Diablo's biggest success by far. It doubled our land in a day, a thousand and eighty acres, and that was May of 2013. I mean you might've thought I would've said the beacon but well, the beacon had its own significance in many, many different ways, more than we know. The lasting thing that we can do for conservation is, well, conserving property and acquiring this thousand and eighty-acre parcel. It was way more than Save Mount Diablo could afford. I mean we didn't have the capacity to buy, own, and maintain, and manage such a property in no way. We had bought a hundred-acre parcel in the past; this is ten times that size and that was a big step. We didn't have the personnel, we didn't have the money, we didn't have anything. The organization rose to make it happen and the supporters rose to make them happen. That's rewarding; you can't deny it. I haven't been out there since day before yesterday. [laughs]

01-02:06:41

Farrell:

My last question for you is what your hopes for the future of the organization are.

01-02:06:47

Gallagher:

Well, Seth likes to say that when Save Mount Diablo was brand new, that they had this idea that it would exist for five or ten years and then go out of business because we've saved Mount Diablo. We look, the visionary on this one is clearly Seth who started to say, "You know, we're going to run out of properties to save, properties of real significance to save that are on and

around the mountain," which is what our mission says. He started to look at the Diablo Range clear down to Kern County, and that started, I don't know, three years ago or so as we started to change our paradigm to learn and think about what we can do up and down the Diablo Range, where can Save Mount Diablo fit into that picture. The vision of that is significant. There are huge parcels out there way bigger, I'm talking 5000 and 10,000 acre types parcels, the likes of which don't exist on and around Mount Diablo itself.

01-02:08:12

Save Mount Diablo will play a role in conservation up and down that range, we are still learning about how and where and when we will play such a role, and that is the future of the mountain. That's not to say we're slowing down with interest in parcels that are truly on and around the mountain, but our vision is farther south and much greater than simply Mount Diablo to the point where I'm certainly not advocating for it but even our name Save Mount Diablo, that sounds very local and so forth. Nobody has even talked about changing our name, but the thing about it if we're extending our vision then maybe our name should be Save the Diablo Range. Mount Diablo is the northern end of it. I'm not proposing that, but that will be the future and I'll be dead and gone when much of that has happened. I have no doubt that Save Mount Diablo will exist for a long time to come, no doubt.

01-02:09:22

Farrell: I think—

01-02:09:23

Gallagher: I—

01-02:09:23

Farrell: Oh sorry, go ahead.

01-02:09:25

Gallagher: Well, one other thing to say, Save Mount Diablo would not exist were it not for the fact that we have a relatively wealthy county where people have disposable income that can support an organization like this. If Contra Costa County were a depressed county, and you can think whatever you want, and you're starting to look for a donation, people say, "Well, I got twenty-five bucks," we would not be where we are today were it not for the fact that there are supporters who have the capacity to make significant contributions to the local conservation organization. For that, the entire organization, staff and board of directors get that and are very, very grateful, no doubt about it.

01-02:10:24

Farrell: Well, thank you so much for sharing your story, your perspective on things. This was really great. I feel like I learned a lot, so I really appreciate it. I am going to pause the recording and tell you about next steps.

[End of Interview]