



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Kris Swanson and Roy Mustelier

Interview Date: February 15, 2011
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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

DEUTSCH: OK, I am with Kris Swanson and Roy ...

MUSTELIER: Mustelier.

DEUTSCH: Mustelier. Is that a French name?

MUSTELIER: Yes.

DEUTSCH: It certainly sounds like one.

MUSTELIER: Via Cuba. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: Via Cuba. In fact, why don't we start with you Roy? Tell me a little bit about your family.

MUSTELIER: My family, well, my parents were originally from Cuba. As my father puts it, he came to the United States, both of them, in "BC"—before Castro.

DEUTSCH: BC, OK.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, he actually came in 1950 to do his internship and his residency in medicine. And, finally in '53, my parents decided that they were going to get married after they had been dating for ten years.

DEUTSCH: In Cuba?

MUSTELIER: In Cuba. Yeah. But my father was finishing up his—actually, I guess it was in '52—he was finishing up his internship.

DEUTSCH: Where was that?

MUSTELIER: In Chicago. I guess that would actually be the residency. His internship was in Trenton, New Jersey. And since he is finally now going to be earning an income, finally decided to get married to my mother and my mother's parents said that she couldn't leave Cuba unless she was married. So they got married by proxy.

DEUTSCH: Really?

MUSTELIER: My mother, who was in Cuba; my father in Chicago. Somebody stood in for him, somebody stood in for her, and they got married. But then in '53 was also the Korean War. He had a green card. He was issued a green card before he even left Cuba and that made him eligible for the draft. So, he got drafted in the Army. All of his friends just told him "Hey, you're going to Korea. Go back to

Cuba—they can't do anything, you're not even a US citizen." And, basically 27 years later he got out of the Army.

DEUTSCH: He went into the Army, drafted, and stayed in?

MUSTELIER: As a doctor in the Army and made it into a career. And got out in—I can't even think if—it was 1975, I believe, was when he retired.

DEUTSCH: Wow. So does that mean you grew up moving around, all over?

MUSTELIER: Yes, I grew up as an Army brat. Born in New Orleans. Then, California to Germany and in-between. And, in fact, oddly enough though, Kris and I, some of the places as kids, little did I know that Kris was living. And in fact, I've been to within a tenth, a quarter of a mile of her house, in 1970. I guess it would have been in 1972. I was in seventh grade. Whatever year that would be. But, literally within a stone's throw.

DEUTSCH: Where?

MUSTELIER: In Monterey, California, Upper Carmel River Valley. Where she was. Because I went to Los Padres Reservoir, went fishing there with my dad. And Kris lived right in that area. It's possible even our paths crossed then.

DEUTSCH: Fated. Did you ever go back to Cuba? Did you ever go to Cuba?

MUSTELIER: I haven't. My dad went four years ago for the first time in 42 years. They actually ... I'll give you something that you can say. My parents—it was my mother who said this—they went back, the last time was in 1959, post-Castro. They went to Cuba. My dad being a US Army officer at the time. But, it's post-Castro. But he hadn't aligned himself with then the Soviet Union. They went back to visit their parents who were in Cuba.

DEUTSCH: Were they in Havana?

MUSTELIER: In Montesano, to be exact. Toward Santiago. In the eastern part of Cuba. And they went there and they had my two brothers and my sister. I hadn't been born yet.

DEUTSCH: So they took their three kids.

MUSTELIER: Yes, but it's my, it's my mother who told me this, "But you were made in Cuba."

[laughs]

DEUTSCH: OK.

MUSTELIER: So that was ...

DEUTSCH: So that was the last time they went to Cuba until?

MUSTELIER: Forty-two years, and then my dad went. He went because he still had at the time two brothers and a sister. So he went there to visit relatives, and filled out all the paperwork you had to at the time. And subsequently, since then, one of his brothers has passed away. He still has a brother and a sister, so I've got an aunt and an uncle and a small little army of cousins that jokingly put it, if they ganged together they could form their own little hospital. Because, I mean there are some doctors, some nurses ...

DEUTSCH: Several medical ...

MUSTELIER: Yeah, several of them are, but my dad was the first one to go to college in the family. And went all the way through medical ...

DEUTSCH: So when your dad went back, what were his impressions? This is getting us off track, but it's fascinating.

MUSTELIER: He ... it was the people more than anything. That's what really stuck in his mind. He was seeing relatives. Cousins, or nephews, nieces, that he's never seen before and that he's heard about. And then, of course, seeing two brothers and a sister that he hadn't seen literally forever. I never saw my grandparents. I've never met them. They've passed away, the last of them in the 80s. I was actually, you know, on ...

DEUTSCH: Did you correspond with them?

MUSTELIER: No. This is a factor. It's me. And I—I'm paranoid about speaking Spanish and writing it. I can understand Spanish a lot better than I can speak it.

DEUTSCH: Did you speak Spanish at all in your home?

MUSTELIER: No, no. My oldest brother, first one, you know. My dad—oh, Korean War? He didn't go to Korea. He went to Germany. He got stationed in Germany for his first duty station. Tail end of the occupation forces. So now, they go to Germany. My oldest brother, who was born in Chicago, this is now '53, they go there. He's starting to speak and what do they tell him? What do they tell my parents? Your son is getting confused. He's speaking German, he's speaking Spanish, he's speaking English, all at the same time. Speak English at home. This is what they told them, told my parents at the Army post at the time, whoever the teacher, whatever. And so, they started speaking English with all of us. Since we were

all born, that became the norm. And then, of course, anyone living on Army posts, we always lived on Army posts until my dad went to Vietnam. That was the first time we ever moved off.

DEUTSCH: So dad went to Vietnam?

MUSTELIER: Yes, '68. '68. He went there for a year, commanded two hospitals. At that time, ridiculous how the military did things. We had to move off post. My mom didn't drive. She never drove. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: Where'd you live?

MUSTELIER: We just lived, not too far off Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. Just in San Antonio. We were just off the post, within walking distance of the elementary school when I was going. And Safeway was close by, so everything was close by. And then we had a great friend of the family, a nurse, Katie Galloway, who lived up in, when she retired, moved to New York state, we even visited her. When I first came into the Navy I went to visit her. So, you know, it was just a good, good background. Lots of traveling that we did. Lots of car trips. You're talking ... and it's a family that also ... you know, my dad loved to go fishing, loved to take us always places. Travel here, travel there. I can't remember lots of it because it's just at that edge of memory, but ...

DEUTSCH: Stimulating, but stimulating ...

MUSTELIER: Oh, yes, always. Going to Yosemite, Yellowstone, there I've seen the photographs and things like that. Sequoia. The National Parks. My dad, he had a total enthusiasm and, whether we felt it at the time or whether we enjoyed it at the time or maybe griped about it, all of us got that from him, from them. And then, of course, there was also the ingredient of that—and I think it's that international aspect—but of the love of food, wine, and just, you know, of doing things. I think getting involved, but I say that, it was, I'll say somewhat, almost repressed though, because I, growing up as an Army brat and then, as soon as, going to college, I was on a four-year Navy ROTC scholarship.

DEUTSCH: Where did you go to college?

MUSTELIER: Tulane University in New Orleans. And then 20 years active duty in the Navy and it was, I'll call it repressed in a sense, not in a bad sense, but you, still you had a life, you had a duty. You end up doing things...

DEUTSCH: What did you do in the Navy?

MUSTELIER: Submarines.

DEUTSCH: Oh, oh.

MUSTELIER: [laughs] I interviewed with Hyman Rickover, I interviewed with Hyman Rickover in 1981, the last year group to interview with him. He interviewed 100% of the officer corps in the nuclear Navy, whether surface or submarines. It was definitely an experience, coming here to Washington, DC, now CO Eight naval reactors, as they call it. At the time they were in Crystal City. My brother lived here. He lived here in DC, so we even stayed with them, and that actually is the first ingredient of coming to DC. When I graduated from college they were here, so I lived with them. I was a “stash ensign” so I lived up in, lived up in Mt. Pleasant. My gosh, my gosh, Harvard Street, just overlooking, you know, looking down towards the zoo. And, wake up in the morning listening to the lions and all that.

DEUTSCH: So are you in a second career now?

MUSTELIER: Yes, I’m civil service, working for the Federal Government at the National Defense University. It’s a ... I walked out on a Friday in uniform, retired, and walked in Monday in civilian clothes to the same mess, the same telephone number. So, I’ve been in civil service, and that is coming on nine years ago.

DEUTSCH: And, so what do you do with the ...?

MUSTELIER: I work with the Chief Information Officer. I’m the chief for plans, programs, and projects. IT, IT project management, all the project managers, all the contracts, the budget in our areas. A lot of what we do is that bridging between the technology side to the user community. Which, it’s, you know, the tendency for all working in IT, is to be IT geeks and talk this techno geek stuff, which is great, except that a lot of people don’t get it. So you got to bridge between the two and put it in English, a little bit easier. What does it mean to you, what does it mean to me? So. So that’s ... in fact, when Kris and I met, I was at Monterey at the Naval Postgraduate School and, uh, working my masters in information technology management.

DEUTSCH: OK, let’s switch over to ... [pause] Naval Postgraduate School? What was it you were studying?

MUSTELIER: Information technology management.

SWANSON: [cough] I don’t know if I can talk.

DEUTSCH: You do sound awfully ... I’m so sorry.

SWANSON: I'm at the tail end of this. I had a very good day with no coughing, but at night sometimes it just kicks in. I can't think to get rid of the cough part; I feel fine otherwise. But, it's just hanging on.

DEUTSCH: Well, let's do the best we can.

SWANSON: Should I get a cough drop or something?

MUSTELIER: I'll get one. [background sounds] Do you know where the ... you're after the Halls, right? Halls will help.

SWANSON: Thank goodness, what a rip.

DEUTSCH: Oh, you poor thing. OK, Kris. You're from California?

SWANSON: I'm from California. I'm actually fifth-generation Californian.

DEUTSCH: Wow!

SWANSON: A couple of great-great-grandparents came around the Cape, and one came overland and arrived in time for the gold rush.

DEUTSCH: Get anything?

SWANSON: Well, I think between the two of them they contributed heavily to the delinquency of California. One brought the first hops to California and the other one started the first brewery, Buffalo Brewing Company, so they were the biermeisters, the good German biermeisters of California. I don't know, but they must have known each other.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. So where did you grow up?

SWANSON: I actually grew up in the Carmel, Monterey area. Born in the old Carmel Hospital. My dad was a working artist and when we were younger we did a lot of field trips in his pickup, you know, to Indian reservations and they became very good friends with the chief of the Washoe tribe in Nevada. And when my sister was born, I was two and a half, she nearly died and had multiple surgeries on her belly and the tribe got wind of it and came down. So, we were living in this old fruit picker shack, we ... truly lived the life of starving artists when I was a kid. And my dad was, had his easel right in the living room there, the main room, and in, down, our dusty driveway comes this old pickup truck and it's packed in the back with six, six members of this tribe, the Chief Earl James and his wife Naina. And they had hand-woven a cradleboard for my sister. And, so they ended up staying a week, just camping out in our little house and it was just a very vivid memory.

DEUTSCH: A lovely story.

SWANSON: She survived and whenever she started crying, they would tighten up that cradleboard against all her incisions and they really credit that with helping her heal, so, it was a very colorful childhood.

DEUTSCH: So, your father was a painter?

SWANSON: Yes. He's a western artist.

MUSTELIER: Those are hers. Those are Kris's.

SWANSON: I don't have ... we have one sketch of his upstairs.

MUSTELIER: ... and the bronze.

SWANSON: And the bronze upstairs.

MUSTELIER: One that went to each one of the kids.

SWANSON: Yeah, so ...

DEUTSCH: So you had a colorful childhood?

SWANSON: A colorful childhood. Everybody from Indian chiefs to celebrities would be flocking around, so it was very ...

DEUTSCH: And did you [phone rings] start being interested in art early on? [phone rings/background sounds]

SWANSON: I did, I had Play-Doh from a young age and Dad would ... I was one of those five year olds that would be making a little horse head out of Play-Doh, and Dad would give me a half hour critique on mandibles and what would be showing through the skin on a horse's jaw, and, you know, correcting my anatomy. So, I became pretty fascinated with anatomy and the shape of bodies and musculature, at a young age.

DEUTSCH: So you went to high school there?

SWANSON: Went to high school, Carmel High School.

DEUTSCH: And were you doing a lot of art at that point?

SWANSON: I started sculpting in high school, seriously, and did my first bronze when I was 16. I did a portrait of my brother. Dad took a look at the first time I started tackling clay as a young adult and said, “I know how you’re going to pay your way through college.” He was already figuring that was what would make my living.

DEUTSCH: Really? Well, he must have thought you were pretty good.

SWANSON: Yeah, he did.

DEUTSCH: And so, did you go to art school?

SWANSON: Informally. Informally, I went to art school. In the 80s, after about a seven-year career as a horse trainer, I ended up moving to New York City and went to the Art Students League.

DEUTSCH: Seven-year career as a horse trainer? Was that before college, instead of college?

SWANSON: Sort of instead of college. What I did after high school is take a year off and I had this notion that I really wanted to homestead.

MUSTELIER: In Alaska!

SWANSON: Somewhere north. I wanted my own land.

DEUTSCH: Could you still homestead in the state?

SWANSON: You could in Alaska. With ... you had to meet all this criteria. But, you could. And so, I headed north, north to Alaska. And started trying to meet those criteria, but it was a lot harder than I thought it would be.

DEUTSCH: Many things are.

SWANSON: Yes, many things are. I ended up living a year in Alaska. It was pre-pipeline so it was still pretty frontier like, and quite wonderful.

DEUTSCH: And then, New York City?

SWANSON: No, then, but while I was up there ... I was up there for a year, and then I came back and batted around for a couple of years and then headed back north with the intention I’d really do it this time. And, uh, ended up hitchhiking. I was getting waylaid in British Columbia, northern British Columbia and there I just did ... I was sort of an itinerant laborer. I grew up on horses, had always had horses to train as a child, so I ended up signing on with ranches. And, training horses for them.

DEUTSCH: I have to tell you, your bios are different from any of the other people I've interviewed. Distinctive. [laughs]

SWANSON: Yeah, so. I ended up being the sort of gift from California, I guess, because I knew the old vaquero techniques about training bridle horses and stock horses and good reining horses. It was a lot more refined than the northern British Columbia cowboys were on their horses, so all these problem horses started coming from all reaches of the area. I was around the Smithers area, sort of north central British Columbia. And suddenly I had my own little horse training business, without even meaning to, and did that for summer into the fall, until it started snowing. And then people, a couple of people really wanted me to stay, and offered to build me an indoor arena and everything and keep doing the horse training up there, but I was eager to ... I was definitely off mission at that point, I wanted to continue with this quest to homestead. But by then it was winter, and I decided to go back to California for a little while until fall came again—or spring came again—and end up deciding I really did like training horses. I grew up with horses and really thought I wanted to flee from that whole life, didn't really think that was what I wanted to do at all. I wanted to do my art full time. But, ended up coming back to California and apprenticing to a horse trainer in northern California and learning a little more. Sorry about my voice, boy, I'm just glad I'm not ... I can speak after that coughing jag.

MUSTELIER: Have some water.

[pause]

DEUTSCH: But ...?

SWANSON: Trained horses in northern California and came back to the family ranch and started my own horse training business on my parents' ranch. Ah, in five, I think I did it about four years, and I trained a really good horse and was able to—we sold her—and I made enough money to have a down payment on land of my own. And, at that point I met someone that I was attached to and we ended up buying the land together that was next door to my parents. It was not their land. We'd actually looked all over the place for property and so, we ended up buying that land, and it was great. And then, slowly over the next ten years, built a house on it. And, the guy and I broke up, but he built a house on the other end of the land and I built it on my end, so ...

MUSTELIER: He's a good friend, too.

DEUTSCH: It was amicable enough ...

MUSTELIER: Jim, I know Jim well.

SWANSON: Yeah, he and Roy are best friends now. [laughs] So, anyway, I still have that land in California that Jim and I bought. And, in 1982 ... I trained horses on that land. I had a whole barn set up and everything and in 1982, I switched careers and did a very dramatic leap out of horse training. I couldn't, at that point, I was eager to get as far away as I could, and moved to New York City.

DEUTSCH: Wow! So at this point, you're in your 30s? Mid 30s?

SWANSON: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: And just decided there was another part of you that was ...

SWANSON: You know, hungry to get out.

MUSTELIER: Any of the people, what about the people you met?

SWANSON: If I had to hang out with another horse person for another day, I'd probably scream, so ...

MUSTELIER: What about the people you met training? And the dude ranch?

SWANSON: Oh, one of the nice side businesses to having a horse training ranch, business, is the we also boarded horses and we also took out dudes. You know, we did trail rides and ... so I had a couple of people, wranglers, that worked for me, and I said, you know, if anyone really interesting comes along—I was just starving for intellectual stimulation at that point—please let me know, I'll take them out on the ride. So, I met the principal dancer with San Francisco Ballet, who became a life-long friend. Met two Czechs who worked for Voice of America and had both escaped from Communist Czechoslovakia and became dear, dear, friends. Met ...

MUSTELIER: John and Judy.

SWANSON: Oh, John and Judy, my best, best friends. She's the principle bassoonist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

MUSTELIER: Still.

SWANSON: Still. Yeah, to this day. And that was 30 years ago we met. So ...

MUSTELIER: And Jonathan Feldman, or Jonathan?

SWANSON: Yeah, Jonathan Feldman. He's the chair of the Juilliard piano department.

DEUTSCH: So you had all these people, giving them trail rides.

SWANSON: Yeah, taking them out on trail rides.

MUSTELIER: Dudes.

SWANSON: Yeah, my dudes.

MUSTELIER: Tell them about taking Jonathan for a trail ride.

SWANSON: [cough] The fact that Jonathan and Judy and I stayed friends for the last 30 years is kind of a miracle, because, we had, as I did when I took my folks out, it would be a half-day ride and we'd go way out into the mountains, up to the headwaters of the Carmel River. And it was beautiful, and we'd talk all the way up and I'd haul, bring a big baguette and a bunch of cheese and some salami and wine and glasses and then we'd sit and have a big picnic by the lake. And, so we had consumed the wine and gotten back on our horses and decided—oh, and even swum the horses out in the lake, gone swimming with the horses. So it was really quite a day with them. And he had [noise in background] Sorry, they're rehearsing in the other room. This is Faction of Fools. Taffety Punk also rehearses out here. But, so we'd been swimming on the horses, got back on the horses to head back home, and Jonathan's horse ran away, back to the barn. So ...

MUSTELIER: With him on it.

SWANSON: With him on it.

DEUTSCH: Oh, dear.

SWANSON: Yeah, so ...

DEUTSCH: I thought he was not too much of a dude to know what to do.

SWANSON: Well, he did all the wrong things. He clamped down with his legs and just hung on for dear life and the horse was just shooting down this mountain. I jumped on my horse and galloped down the mountain after him and I got up to him and right as I was almost approaching him to grab his horse's reins, he was, I could see him bounce, bounce, bounce, you know, shooting off to the side, and finally sailing off right in front of his horse at a dead gallop, rolling. His horse galloped right over him. I leapt off my horse at a dead run and landed right on, nearly on him, and I went "Oh, my God, are you alright?" And I said, "Show me your hands" and he picked up his hands ...

MUSTELIER: He's a piano player!

SWANSON: He was doing a concert that night at Hidden Valley's Masters Concert ...

MUSTELIER: At Carmel Valley Village.

DEUTSCH: Oops.

SWANSON: So, I, the fact ... so, we had to walk off the mountain. Our horses had run away back to the house. So he walked off the mountain, but we were all young and bouncy. And so, we got back and he went back home, back to the hotel, and played his concert that night. And it was kind of hilarious, I was sitting in the audience and he picked up his piano stool and was walking towards this, this beautiful baby grand, put it down, and I could see that he was stiff. But he played a gorgeous concert. And I thought, well that's the last I'll see of these people. And they became my friends for life, you know, they're still dear friends.

MUSTELIER: ... and when you moved there and even I met them.

DEUTSCH: So, you decided to change life and move to New York.

SWANSON: Well, yeah, and at that point because of the trail rides, I'd met a number of people who were in New York. My friend Ricardo, who danced with San Francisco Ballet, had moved to New York, American Ballet Theater. And he was, before he blew his knee out, he was Baryshnikov's protégé, so I got to go backstage at American Ballet Theater when I moved there. And John and Judy. I had free tickets to the Philharmonic whenever I wanted them, and we still do, by the way, if we ever decide to go again. So, it was just nonstop. It was a very interesting juxtaposition of extreme sort of wilderness living and New York City, the heart of the city.

MUSTELIER: She was going back and forth for eight ...

SWANSON: Yeah, for seven years I went back and forth after I shut down the horse training business. I went to school at the Art Students League and commuted back and forth from New York to California. This was the 80s.

DEUTSCH: The Art Students League.

SWANSON: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: And you were studying sculpture.

SWANSON: Figure drawing and sculpture. Yeah. I was already a sculptor. In fact, I was already showing in a gallery in New York at that point.

MUSTELIER: And, we realized we were going to some of the same plays, I was now in Groton, Connecticut.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

SWANSON: Yeah, I had started ... I was sculpting actually even when I was still training horses. But then I sculpted full time for several years. Had a one-woman show in Carmel. And then, decided, well, I'd like a gallery in New York and so I flew out to New York and just started pounding the pavement with a portfolio. I finally got into the first gallery I showed with was at 57th, West 57th, Frank Fedele Fine Art. And, they were the first gallery that accepted me. And that was great. I had a group show with them. But the key thing was, that shocked me more than anything, was that in that week of finding a gallery in New York, I found that I loved New York. So, sort of went home, closed out the last of the horse training business and made arrangements to move there. And, you know, because at that point, I had some friends there, I had places, floors to crash on.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

SWANSON: And so I did that for a while and finally co-rented an apartment down in Hell's Kitchen.

DEUTSCH: And at what point did the two of you meet?

SWANSON: Oh, not for years.

DEUTSCH: We're not there yet?

SWANSON: I'm sorry. Yeah, yeah.

MUSTELIER: These are early 80s. We haven't gotten to the ...

SWANSON: I could skip over tons, so ... I came back to the ranch after about a decade in New York, commuting back and forth. Came back to the ranch and sort of decided well, this part of my life was over and I was going to be settling down on my land in California and sculpting full time.

DEUTSCH: So you were finished with New York and you were going to come back to California?

SWANSON: I did move back full time to California, after ...

DEUTSCH: After ten years?

SWANSON: I think it was more like eight years; it was eight very wonderful years.

DEUTSCH: Back to the ranch.

SWANSON: Back to the ranch. And, I just felt like I was moving ... I loved it, it was beautiful, but I missed the energy of the city, I missed the community of the city, I missed the stimulation, and part of me, sort of felt like, well, it's like I'm retired, a little young, not hitting all cylinders any more, and ah ... but it was fine. I just decided this was how life was and then, lo and behold, I started whisking around town. I got a new puppy, I decided, oh, I was so set that I was going to stay on the ranch forever that I chanced it and got a dog.

MUSTELIER: And plus, what were you doing workwise?

SWANSON: Well, I was sculpting full time.

MUSTELIER: What about the video?

SWANSON: Oh, and then doing video on the side, yeah.

MUSTELIER: So you were getting somewhat burnt out.

DEUTSCH: So your sculptures were commissions mainly or ...

SWANSON: Commissions partly, but mostly I'd just do sculptures and have shows and then sell them.

MUSTELIER: Numbered series; numbered editions.

SWANSON: Yeah. And I made enough to make ... to live on. I didn't have to have any other job.

MUSTELIER: Pay the mortgage on the land.

SWANSON: Yep, that was my full income.

DEUTSCH: OK, so now you're such an old retired person that you've gotten a dog.

SWANSON: Gotten a dog and settled into the ranch ... the county life.

DEUTSCH: What kind of dog?

SWANSON: She was actually a wolf hybrid that ... [laughs]

MUSTELIER: Husky, timber-wolf mix.

SWANSON: Here I was, just a mountain woman with her wolf. And thinking, that's how it's going to be. I'd just wear my lumberjack shirts and tromp around the mountains for the rest of my life. And then, lo

and behold, took my puppy to town and she jumped out of my truck and chased this really cute guy down the sidewalk and wouldn't come back to me.

DEUTSCH: She jumped out of the window of the car?

SWANSON: No, I'd just opened the door to show her to a friend of mine and she ...

MUSTELIER: She came right to me.

SWANSON: And she scooted out and chased Roy down the street.

DEUTSCH: There are probably a lot of people who would like to have a dog do that for them. [laughs]
Saved you a lot of trouble.

SWANSON: Yeah, she sure did. I'd pretty much decided ...

DEUTSCH: And chased her down the street ...

SWANSON: And Roy had to pick her up, actually pick her up, and bring her back. And he said, "I have a dog just like this," and he whips out a picture of his dog.

MUSTELIER: I had a picture in my wallet a friend had taken down at Big Sur on a big redwood, and I'm kneeling down and Mystic, my dog, is on the stump, also.

SWANSON: Anyway, he had a dog that looked exactly like mine which was pretty ... she'd been a rescue from Mystic, Connecticut ...

MUSTELIER: Waterford.

SWANSON: Waterford.

MUSTELIER: But she was named after Mystic, Connecticut.

SWANSON: And uh, so that's nice, a guy with a picture of his dog that looks like my dog and my dog obviously likes him. But, then he left.

MUSTELIER: Well, he went back up to the friend.

SWANSON: And then, I forgot him.

MUSTELIER: Until the very, until the next day. And then I was at the coffee shop.

SWANSON: He can take over from here. Do you have your mic on?

MUSTELIER: I was at the coffee shop, Pacific Grove Coffee Roasting Company, and then up drives Kris. And this time I've got Mystic with me, because I didn't have Mystic at that point, I was going back into Bookworks, the book store in Pacific Grove. And Kris shows up and she has Kachi, and Kachi and Mystic now meet.

DEUTSCH: It's a four-way.

MUSTELIER: Well, sort of, kind of. Kris talks about that she's just been to Asilomar. We talked for a while, we both have coffee and then she leaves. That was it. And then, boy, going to the beach. Ah, so then she talks about Asilomar ... and says I haven't been down to Carmel Beach for a while. You can bring your dogs on the Asilomar Beach and you can bring them to Carmel Beach. So, I figured I'd go to Carmel Beach just by chance. Kris, I figured Kris has just gone home. Soon as I'm arriving, guess who is just departing. Kris. So she's there, but she didn't see me. Within about a week or two weeks, the weekend, about seven different times. The next time at the Cachagua Country Fair; guess who's at the ...

SWANSON: Somehow without getting each other's names in all this time.

DEUTSCH: That's hard to believe.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, she's at the "stop the dam" booth; stop the building of a dam.

SWANSON: Mind you, I live way, way out in the mountains.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, headwaters of the Carmel River.

SWANSON: They were trying to dam up the river; make a bigger dam and be flooding our valley. So, I had petitions out and we had a little Cachagua Country Fair and I was at the booth getting petitions. And who should walk up but Roy, way, way out in the mountains, an hour from town. And, so, I was really surprised to see him out there.

MUSTELIER: So she ended up ... we're sort of like accordions, come together, talk a lot, we're just, sort of a feeling that we're going to, the gist of it, we were going to go dance as soon as the music started up later in the evening. But she had to work at the booth, so I walked around, did some things, and then I came back. She was gone. I couldn't find her.

SWANSON: Well, I decided, the little country fair is only about a quarter mile from my house, so I jumped in my truck to go change if we're going to dance later, I want to change. So, I came back and he was gone.

MUSTELIER: And this country fair is right at that reservoir, this reservoir I told you at the very beginning that in the 1970s, I was just a quarter mile from her house. But, she's not there, I leave. She comes back, can't find me, and that's it. So the next day, I think it's the next day or within the next day or two, probably two days, I'm in town at the Bookworks again, and I'm there, and guess who walks in. Kris. And then shortly thereafter, her mom walks in and then they leave. And we still ...

DEUTSCH: And you still don't know each other's names?

MUSTELIER: Well, I think maybe we did know each other's names. Because what I was doing at Bookworks, after classes, there was a guy by the name of Jeff and I'd play cribbage for cups of coffee with him.

SWANSON: Your tax dollars hard at work. As I told him. [laughs] So anyway I left, and then he started pumping Jeff on how to get in touch with me. He realized Jeff's sister knew me. It was very convoluted ... but finally, finally ...

DEUTSCH: Eventually, you?

SWANSON: Seven times, seven random meetings, in a couple of weeks.

MUSTELIER: I got to tell you about the last two, I leave there, go back up home, I only live maybe about three blocks, living in Pacific Grove, go up about three blocks, get Mystic, we're going to go running. And then at Lovers Point ...

DEUTSCH: Running off your frustration.

MUSTELIER: At Lovers Point, all of a sudden I hear this "Roy" and there's Kris, she's just getting ready to leave, too, and she ends up, we finally start talking. We go to ... she mentioned about her galleries and I start ...

SWANSON: I'd just had a one-woman show at a local gallery, and I said, "Oh, if you want to see my, not my etchings, but my bronzes?" [laughs]

MUSTELIER: We ended up going to the gallery. The gallery is closed, but I had to go home and do that, but she's waiting for me, and finally for the first time after that we go to eat dinner for the first time.

SWANSON: Finally went out on a date. And then we got married the next day.

MUSTELIER: Within two months after meeting, we decided to get married and within five we were married.

SWANSON: But that night I decided ...

DEUTSCH: This was it.

SWANSON: Yeah. Yeah.

MUSTELIER: Sixteen and a half years ago.

DEUTSCH: So, you're married, but you're out in California.

MUSTELIER: Yeah.

SWANSON: But, he's in the Navy.

DEUTSCH: Right.

SWANSON: So, maybe ...

MUSTELIER: I got transferred here within six months after getting married. We ... I get transferred out here; she's still working on, she's working on a commission.

SWANSON: I had this big mind-numbing commission that was just killing me.

MUSTELIER: Life size bronze. And it was somebody who was dying of cancer.

SWANSON: So, I was having to take body castings of his body, of this dying man and, oh my God, it was tough. And, make sure that I could breathe enough life into it that his widow would be happy who had commissioned the piece, so it was really a, really a grueling job.

DEUTSCH: So how did you feel when you knew you would be moving to Washington?

SWANSON: I was happy. I was ready for a change.

DEUTSCH: Yeah?

SWANSON: I was ready for a change. As a successful mid-career artist and, kind of in a doldrums. I'd been sort of ... ehh!

MUSTELIER: Doing the video, oh ...

SWANSON: I didn't have New York any more. I was on the ranch. I had a lot of these commissions that were just really sort of heavy, heavy work, and not a whole lot of passion or inspiration in the commission work. And ...

MUSTELIER: I became her second camera, because her backup, not that it would make an income, since she was burnt out on doing bronzes, was doing, she'd bought a video editing deck, two hi-end video cameras, and she was doing weddings. She was doing ...

SWANSON: I had started a little video business on the side, so that was fun. That was just fun.

MUSTELIER: And I became her second camera while we were dating.

SWANSON: Yeah, that was a good time.

MUSTELIER: And then she said, "I'll double your pay."

SWANSON: Yeah, because he was getting so good at it. From zero to zero. [cough]

DEUTSCH: So you came to Washington.

MUSTELIER: Yes.

DEUTSCH: And?

SWANSON: I had to finish the commission so I came a couple of months later.

DEUTSCH: And did you live? Did you find a place ... ?

MUSTELIER: We looked at ...

DEUTSCH: Did you find something right here, right away?

MUSTELIER: I was looking while Kris was out in California and then finally Kris came out for a ten-day period. She had a ten-day break.

SWANSON: He stayed with his brother in Mt. Pleasant.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, this time they moved out onto Rosemont Avenue, sticking out into Rock Creek Park.

SWANSON: So that's where we thought we wanted to live, is Mt. Pleasant, to be close to ...

MUSTELIER: We made circles out of that area.

SWANSON: But we had two dogs, so that cut out a lot of places.

MUSTELIER: We actually offered somebody, we said \$2500? What do you want for a deposit? We'll give you the deposit. We almost ...

SWANSON: It was a beautiful, freestanding house near Politics and Prose. [bookstore]

MUSTELIER: Yeah, south of there.

SWANSON: And we both love bookstores and, yeah, the whole bookstore scene was really important to have and some sort of a walkable coffee shop area in a nice neighborhood.

MUSTELIER: When we met I was actually reading “Women Who Run with Wolves”. [laughs] I was. I really was. [cough in background] Clarissa Pinkola Estes.

SWANSON: Where’d you ever get that? Some other girl you were trying to impress, maybe.

MUSTELIER: No, no.

DEUTSCH: That would seem to have been fateful ...

SWANSON: That was truly weird, that was truly weird, yeah.

DEUTSCH: OK, so how did you find the Hill?

MUSTELIER: For a ten day period ...

SWANSON: I started walking without ...

MUSTELIER: ... she came out for ten days. You came out for ten days.

SWANSON: Uh huh, I still wasn’t quite finished in California.

MUSTELIER: And we were looking at all these places and the very last day ...

SWANSON: I decided to give Capitol Hill one last chance. And I came back down here. I think Yarmouth ...

DEUTSCH: One last chance, because you just couldn’t find anything?

SWANSON: Right, and I think Yarmouth at that point was helping me.

MUSTELIER: Yes. And in fact, that was the only day where you came down to Capitol Hill.

SWANSON: No, I’d been down once before on my own and I’d gotten lost in some netherworld.

MUSTELIER: Bee Yarmouth helped out.

SWANSON: Yeah, Yarmouth.

MUSTELIER: ... and the very first house ...

SWANSON: ... that I saw down here that Yarmouth showed me, I said yes, I like that.

DEUTSCH: What was it?

SWANSON: It was 1241 E Street, [Southeast] right near, just below the CVS.

MUSTELIER: He's a reporter ...

SWANSON: Mark Seagraves lived there after us.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, he just sold the house, too.

SWANSON: But we rented that house, of course. It was a rental. And we lived there four years. And then the owner wanted to move back in and so, and we were unsure about what the Navy was going to do with Roy. He was still active duty. And so, we moved to another rental house, on 11th Street.

MUSTELIER: We were looking for houses.

SWANSON: ... near Lincoln Park, so. But while we were in the E Street house, within the first month of being there, I met all these kids and that's when the whole, what became The Corner Store started.

DEUTSCH: So you met the kids from Potomac Gardens?

MUSTELIER: Yes.

SWANSON: Right, they were all out in the streets. I was out there walking my dogs.

MUSTELIER: They wanted to walk the dogs.

SWANSON: Yeah, so we organized, I organized games for them and what not. I didn't have any of them into the house at that point, but by winter, that was that winter of '95 when it was just blizzards, blizzard after blizzard. So by winter, I knew a bunch of the kids well enough to feel comfortable with them. And the blizzards started closing down the schools and they'd tramp across from Potomac Gardens and we just started having a ball in my studio. We did masks, and castings, and finger-painting, and ...

MUSTELIER: Cooking.

SWANSON: Cooking, a lot of cooking.

DEUTSCH: How many kids, how many kids are we talking about?

SWANSON: Twelve, initially.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, three of them were brothers.

DEUTSCH: They were ... are we talking middle school age or?

SWANSON: Age six to eleven.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

SWANSON: And, so that's, that was the start of me working with kids. And the kids reintroduced me to pure pleasure and just that joy of creating again. Because I was a burned out mid-career artist, face it, and I was in a real doldrums when I moved here. And, the kids really brought my art alive again. It was just so much exuberant fun that went on in that house every day after school that it really pulled me through an important stage of my creative life. And I'd like to think, you know, that I did them a lot of good, too, so ...

DEUTSCH: Are you still in touch with any of them?

SWANSON: Oh yeah, yeah, but not that much. Every so often they'll do little visits to me to say hi and we sit and visit for a while. Some of them are in, some of them did not do so well. I'd say about half of them did fine and half of them not so fine.

DEUTSCH: So, when did you get this place?

SWANSON: 2001.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, there was one rental in between. We were over on 11th Street across from ... where Dick Wolf lives [100 block of 11th Street SE]. We got a chance to meet him when we were across the street.

SWANSON: Directly across the street from Dick, yeah. So we lived there for two years and the kids followed me there. And I actually rented a basement in that house to have a studio with the kids. And then when we started looking for a house to buy, the only criteria was that it be within walking distance of Potomac Gardens, because I was very, very committed to the work we did with the kids at that point. And we, we had done numerous art shows, collaborative art shows with them at that point and we had quite a following in the community. And this was long before The Corner Store.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

SWANSON: And I just thought this is what I'll probably be doing for quite a while and I loved it. And, of course, my original kids, I had a younger set of kids, I had branched out, I had worked with probably about 30 kids at that point. So, it was a really ... a lot of fun, it was just tremendous fun.

DEUTSCH: So when this place?

MUSTELIER: Oh, boy.

SWANSON: So when this came ... oh, we had a big decision to make. To stay here or to go to California.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, I had one more year and whether or not to go back to California, or whether to stay here because the land, everything was paid off in California and I'd have 20 years in, so ...

SWANSON: He could retire fully if we moved back to California.

MUSTELIER: But, ah, we had ... we continued ... we almost closed on a house two years before that. Up in Northeast, on F Street, right around ... we almost closed on a house, but I didn't have my final set of orders, and we couldn't commit until we had that because there was a possibility I could be sent anywhere.

SWANSON: And it turned out to be a great thing, because we never would have gotten The Corner Store.

MUSTELIER: Yes, maybe the idea was meant to be, things just didn't fall in ...

SWANSON: One thing led to another.

MUSTELIER: In coming here. Kris came here, I was ... we'd gone to California. For some reason, she came the day before ...

SWANSON: For Christmas, just for Christmas, and I came home early.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, for the day before, and I get this phone call, "Roy, there's this house. It is great. Now, we're going to try and get ... " And I'm in the plane, I'm in this plane getting ready to take off from Monterey to go to San Francisco, then come cross country, and Kris is telling me, "There's this house, it's great, you're going to end up, you're going to love it, and we're going to try to get the keys so as soon as you land and you get here we can show it to you the realtor" ... also a friend ...

SWANSON: John Smith.

MUSTELIER: John Smith. So, he ... so, I land, and then Kris said, "Well, we can't get the keys until tomorrow morning, so we won't be able to get in until then, but I want to show you the house." So I look at this thing ...

SWANSON: Of course, it's all boarded up, the plywood is on the ... weeds, weeds all around. It's just ... a complete mess.

MUSTELIER: It's just a, just a ... paint is peeling off.

SWANSON: A dilapidated ruin on the corner.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, some of the front windows were there, some of them weren't.

SWANSON: You said. "Are you sure this is the right house? Are you what?"

MUSTELIER: And I thought, what the heck are we doing here?

DEUTSCH: I should say for the tape that we're talking about, what's the address here?

SWANSON: 900 South Carolina Avenue.

DEUTSCH: 900 South Carolina Avenue, it's at the corner of Ninth and South Carolina Avenue.

SWANSON: Southeast.

MUSTELIER: So, the very next day we come here in the morning. And there is Huston Bigelow, we jokingly call "the speculator" in our little history of the house we put up.

SWANSON: He bought it from the estate in '97.

MUSTELIER: From Tony Cuzzo.

SWANSON: From the Cuzzo estate. And just sat on it and had plans to turn it into an apartment complex.

MUSTELIER: Double condo, upstairs, downstairs.

SWANSON: But he let ... he stripped everything out of it and let the leaks continue and let it keep continue to go to rack and ruin. Just extracted everything that was worth anything out of it, and then tripled the price on it. He got it for ...

MUSTELIER: \$120,000 and sold it for \$360,000.

SWANSON: \$380,000. It was one of those deals that, meeting Tony later, the oldest surviving son here, and talking to him and finding out how much Mr. Bigelow had bought the place for and how contentious the whole thing had been, just said, “Oh, if only we’d known you, if only we’d met you back then, it would have been so great, but ...”

DEUTSCH: But, you got it.

SWANSON: But, we got it eventually for triple the price.

MUSTELIER: The next day, going into this, it was like ... she saw the vision, but walking through the house, lifting up some of the carpets that were upstairs, just the rugs that were there, beautiful floors under.

SWANSON: ... underneath the rugs and then grime about that deep everywhere else so you couldn’t, couldn’t see the floors where they were exposed. But lifting up the rugs said all. So we were able to preserve all the wood floors in the house except for the front room, which was rotted through to the dirt.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, a hundred percent of the flooring had to come out of there.

DEUTSCH: So, you had to do a lot of renovation?

SWANSON: Well, in the front. The front was a full gut job. But, the rest of it was ...

MUSTELIER: The beams were perfect except for a little, two corners that had some termite damage.

SWANSON: We had to replace all the plaster and sheetrock, but the bones of the house were really great. And even the floors were still good, we just had to resurface them.

MUSTELIER: Only two ceilings upstairs had to be brought down. All the rest of them were in great shape. It really, it was bad, but it wasn’t that bad.

SWANSON: It was visually, cosmetically horrible. You know, all the plastering had to come down, but it was, it was structurally a very sound house, so we didn’t have to do anything major in terms of structure.

DEUTSCH: So when did the idea of The Corner Store as the phenomenon it has become, when did that start to take place?

SWANSON: Ah, this is the meat of the matter. Of course, I had my whole little army of children. So ...

DEUTSCH: And you’re doing your art project.

SWANSON: Doing the art.

MUSTELIER: And, may I, doing the annual holiday show.

SWANSON: Yeah, the holiday show, and by then I was connecting kids with artist mentors and we were doing summer camp projects.

DEUTSCH: I remember the summer video projects.

SWANSON: Yeah, the video projects. And I was always just dreaming up things for us to do together to keep them out of trouble. And they were all at that age when it was becoming more difficult to do that. And ...

DEUTSCH: And, at some point in there, you did the Yume Tree?

SWANSON: Very early on, because when we lived on E Street, six years, you know. When we first moved in there, there had always been this huge blank wall. [Reference is to the E Street SE wall of the CVS Pharmacy at the corner of 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue SE.] And as a person who did public art for a living, I really always had my eye on that wall. I'd never done mosaic before, so initially it was some sort of a bronze project with the wall. So I did some casting of the kids faces and was thinking that I'd do maybe bronze castings of children in the neighborhood and work it into some sort of a big wall piece. But, of course, which would have been horrendously expensive and heavy and hard. So, I kind of let go of the idea for a while, and by the time we got to The Corner Store, the possibility of the CVS wall came up again because they had a new district manager who was very amenable to the idea.

MUSTELIER: And, neighbors who are friends, people we've known from the very beginning ...

SWANSON: ... on E Street still were promoting the idea because they loved it. And, so Wally Zinler, who lived closest to the CVS, talked to the district manager and approached me about doing the job. And that's when, I would say, that's when, doing the Yume Tree, is when I expanded from my core of say 30, 40 kids at that point, we were a very insular little group, to 1500 kids and working in the schools. So that was when, you know, the outreach became exponentially bigger. Is through the Yume Tree.

MUSTELIER: And somebody mentioned about doing the ... establishing formally the nonprofit.

SWANSON: Oh, and, because it was such a big job and involved so many people in the community, I got help to become a nonprofit, so that we could actually get grants that could help mitigate some of the costs of doing the tree. So, that's when we became established as a nonprofit.

MUSTELIER: That's 2002.

SWANSON: 2002, November 2002. And then, once you're a nonprofit, suddenly there are all these other things. I was an art center, officially at that point. And we had this marvelous space and we had lots of people who wanted to use it all the time, and so I had to start making decisions.

DEUTSCH: People wanted to use it for?

SWANSON: Oh, author readings and such. It was just ... dance studio. It was ... people wanted to use it. And I'd say, "No, it's my studio." And plus, I was using it everyday with all the kids, and it was taken up with the Yume Tree for eight months, so it was really ...

MUSTELIER: Class projects.

SWANSON: And then we'd started the dinner clubs, so once a month we were having a big feast in there, so ... it was still our private home, with the exception of the kids working in there. For a number of years. And then art shows, and then for the art shows, we started having bands. And so, we started, music started happening in there.

MUSTELIER: The very first one would be Marian Licha doing "Frida, Vice-Versa."

SWANSON: And then in 2007, yeah, we had the first theater piece in there, a solo performance with Marian Licha.

DEUTSCH: Marian?

SWANSON: Marian Licha did "Frida, Vice-Versa."

MUSTELIER: L-I-C-H-A

DEUTSCH: L-I-C-H-A; Marian.

MUSTELIER: Marian.

SWANSON: She's a lovely actor around town and has developed a one-woman show that she takes on the road on the life of Frida Kahlo. And, which I saw at the Warehouse, and sitting at the Warehouse in their little black box there, I was looking around and going, wow, this is slightly smaller than my room. And I always loved theater, especially solo performers. In New York, I probably saw two or three plays a week. It was just my thing and especially, the deeper off Broadway and the tinier the venue, the better, as far as I was concerned, because it was so intimate. And, for the first time, I realized that that was something we could do in that room. And, I actually hired Marian after that show, asked her if she'd be willing to do it here and she was. And it was a big hit. And all our neighbors came and she was a rave and

then that began the collaboration with different theaters and different performers. And so we've been, of course, ended up having something like 13 performances in three weeks.

MUSTELIER: Oh, you mean for the ...

SWANSON: I did a mini-theater fest.

MUSTELIER: Nine, nine plays over six weeks. Some of them being one day, and one of them being four days. Actually four different shows ... and the very last day of the last show, we actually gave the keys to somebody to close up everything because they were pulling everything out because we ...

SWANSON: We had to catch a plane.

MUSTELIER: A month before, my brother sent an email and said some of it had collapsed a bit, but we had a place to stay in France ...

SWANSON: For free.

MUSTELIER: ... and all we needed to do was get there. And Kris' mom also said "OK, I'm in."

DEUTSCH: So she came out?

MUSTELIER: And, so the very next day, and we caught ... they're cleaning up and everything, "OK, here's the key, close it up, just toss in the key when you're done, see ya later" and we went off to the airport. [laughs]

SWANSON: A little bit of a digression. So, that was the first, in 2007. And we had a big theater fest after. And then we've just constantly had performances since then. Some years we do more theater and some years we do more music. The things ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

SWANSON: The brochure there ... tells you just what's coming up.

DEUTSCH: I can keep that?

SWANSON: Yeah. You can see some of the up ...

DEUTSCH: I think I've seen this before.

SWANSON: Probably not, we just finally got ...

MUSTELIER: Yeah, this is where the board has been really, really helpful. The nonprofit and the board and the aspect of that has really become significant.

DEUTSCH: So, you have, how many board members do you have?

SWANSON: We have ten, ten board members.

DEUTSCH: And, something happening pretty much every week? Or every month?

MUSTELIER: Yeah, and sometimes ...

SWANSON: We have about, I guess, some weeks, we'll have four events. And other weeks we have two or three events.

MUSTELIER: But, like last, not this weekend that just passed, the weekend before, let's see, music on Friday. We had our dinner club on Saturday. Then on Sunday it was cooking and prepping because I made black beans and rice, Cuban black beans and rice, for somebody's birthday that we were ...

SWANSON: ... hosting ...

MUSTELIER: ... hosting.

SWANSON: A friend's 63rd birthday.

MUSTELIER: ... for Monday.

SWANSON: And then I had a children's concert in the morning, on Monday morning. Sponsored by Boogie Babes. So that was, we had concerts ...

MUSTELIER: It was exceptionally busy.

SWANSON: ... dinner club, children's concert, and birthday party. Yeah, it was a busy ... and every single event was crammed to the gills.

DEUTSCH: What's the capacity? How many people can you seat?

MUSTELIER: [laughs]

SWANSON: Ah, 50 is very comfortable. And 65 is fine.

MUSTELIER: Should I tell them the ... no, I won't mention it. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: So, what's exciting on the horizon?

SWANSON: Well, we have a few return performers that are just dynamite. Tik Tok is coming back in April, and they are a quartet, New Orleans style. I call it the New Orleans-infused klezmer blast. They're Jewish, but they do this fabulous, sort of a New Orleans style, with the washboard and the accordions and the harmonies. They're just adorable, all of them.

MUSTELIER: The accordion player is from Granada, Spain.

SWANSON: They spent the night after their gig, they were on tour, and the next day at noon, we had the accordion player, a classically trained flamenco guitarist, and he sat there and gave us an hour long flamenco concert, on my old guitar which has never sounded so good in its life.

MUSTELIER: And the odd thing ...

SWANSON: ... and I thought, this is when I just love this job, I mean ... magic moments like that when you have the talent that's coming through this place now is just mind-boggling to me.

MUSTELIER: And it was by chance that we met them. We were in Providence, one night.

SWANSON: Yeah, down at a bar in Providence.

MUSTELIER: We were post-dinner and we just happened to come across them. And then Chris gave them a card. Very next day, she gets an email from ...

SWANSON: I scout all over. So many of these great bands are on tour, so if you meet them in Quebec City, or you meet them in California, chances are they'll come through DC, too. And we get them if they do. We try to get them.

MUSTELIER: And also connections. Martha, what's?

SWANSON: Oh, Martha Stracener now, Quicksilver Productions, is finding quite a few Nashville-based artists for us now, so it's been very exciting.

DEUTSCH: Any problem with the neighborhood? I mean has it been ...

SWANSON: We have never, knock on wood, [tapping sound] had a single complaint, according to our ANC Commissioner.

MUSTELIER: [laughs] But, we've, and we've talked very well with either our next ... for the first years,

SWANSON: We never had anyone at all ...

MUSTELIER: ... nobody was there, only two, a year, two years ago, less than two years ago, for the first time we had a neighbor. That was an open house. And they ...

SWANSON: I thought quite possibly this could be the end of The Corner Store, because it is all dependent on neighbors being happy. That's the whole point of it.

MUSTELIER: And we talked with them and said ...

SWANSON: And they've been wonderful. They haven't ...

MUSTELIER: And we've always invited them over whenever they want to ...

SWANSON: So, anyway, it's been, it's actually all our immediate neighbors that seem to write the most glowing letters for us and we need them, so ... [laughs]

MUSTELIER: And they attend, too.

SWANSON: Yeah, they're our core audience, too.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, but we've got a great block here, though I'll tell you that.

SWANSON: We've got two great blocks.

MUSTELIER: Incredible, yeah, actually it's more than that because it's ... there has been for now, 14 years? I mean we've been here now for coming on ten years. For 14 years, ah, no, more than that. How many years has the block party been going on?

SWANSON: About 14 years.

MUSTELIER: 14. So ...

DEUTSCH: When's the block party?

MUSTELIER: In September. Yeah, September every year. And in March, there's a block dinner. We all go out to dinner, um ...

DEUTSCH: To a restaurant?

MUSTELIER: Yeah, for our ...

MUSTELIER/SWANSON: Last year we did it here.

MUSTELIER: But, then it's going, it would always be at La Plaza. Now we're going to go, this time we're going to go to Henry's other place. Down near Frager's. I can't even think of the name of it. But, yeah, so we're going to go there. Pardon?

SWANSON: Mi Vecinda? Mi Vecinda.

MUSTELIER: So, we're going to go there.

DEUTSCH: Is there any, ah, I'll have to look through this, but are you doing anything with the kids now?

SWANSON: Well, we're doing the Boogie Babes. We're working with Boogie Babes.

DEUTSCH: What is Boogie Babes?

SWANSON: They're a couple of moms on the Hill who sponsor concerts all over DC for children and toddlers. And so, it's kind of fun. It looks like a hitching rail out front and you have about several dozen strollers, and so we're doing that on a monthly basis now. And then the kids, the work that I'm doing with the kids is mostly just trying to find jobs for them. They're young men now and so, I have about five kids that still ... Kids? They're not kids anymore. Five that come by regularly and need jobs, odd jobs, so ...

MUSTELIER: There was an ingredient of our dogs that ...

DEUTSCH: I notice there are no dogs.

MUSTELIER: When Kachi got hit by a car, fortunately just here on Ninth Street, I mean she was smart as a whip, but had zero appreciation for cars. I mean they were just ...

SWANSON: Roy opened the gate and he was going to cross, it was actually just after one of our block dinners, and it was probably midnight and you came back downstairs and ...

MUSTELIER: It was not even after midnight. It was after we came back from it, came downstairs because some friends were across the street and ...

SWANSON: Everyone was taking their dogs out for a walk after the block dinner.

MUSTELIER: And I just didn't think that she would ... the second the gate opened, she just bolted out and it wasn't the person's fault.

SWANSON: She just crossed the street to the dog across the street who she knew very well, you know. They were standing across visiting. Roy was heading that way, so she just trotted out ahead of him ...

MUSTELIER: No, she just bolted between two cars, I mean just full gallop ...

SWANSON: The poor woman that hit her, I mean, was just heart-broken. Oh, man.

MUSTELIER: It wasn't her fault.

SWANSON: Not at all.

MUSTELIER: It was just a bad scenario. So, we haven't had a dog. When Chris had Kachi, she had, she basically was with her 100% of the time, raising her. That timber wolf aspect, she, people became her pack. And then I had Mystic from being a puppy, it was ...

SWANSON: Yeah, and so Mystic died when we were over on 11th Street, just of old age. I was actually working on the bears out in California. I was doing a monument in California. And Mystic, at that point of her life, I was seven months out in California off and on and Mystic was dying that year. So, it was just heart-breaking for me. Because it was just ... I was the one, her primary caregiver all day and to have her dying with me being so far away. So Roy said I think we're going to have to put her down. I'd get home and nurse her back, cook her chicken and rice, and nurse her back to life. And then I'd have to fly out again for the next stage of this project and so, it was really a hard year. And, but she held on and I was back home when we finally ...

MUSTELIER: Yeah, the dogs shifted. Kachi became somewhat more of my dog because I'd take her running and Mystic became more of Kris's and would always follow her.

DEUTSCH: How do you spell Kachi?

SWANSON: K-A-C-H-I.

DEUTSCH: That's how I spelled it.

MUSTELIER: And that's how we met so many people also, was through our dogs ...

SWANSON: Yeah, a lot of our first good friends were friends with our dogs ...

MUSTELIER: ... yeah, from Congressional Cemetery ...

SWANSON: And you can just say she was a husky, a husky mix. You don't have to say anything about her being a wolf. [laughs] I never in a million years ...

MUSTELIER: Doesn't matter any more.

SWANSON: ... if I knew I was going to live in a city, would have gotten a dog like that.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, but she ... you've seen what, having the car there. All we did was pull the gate so it would go there. If she wanted to get out, she could. At any time, you wanted to. And she would go out there and just enjoy.

SWANSON: She never ... she was not one of these escape-artist dogs at all.

MUSTELIER: She could go over the top of the fence if she wanted to.

DEUTSCH: Tell me about the bear sculpture in California. I've heard about this before, but I can't remember. It's where?

SWANSON: It's at the Colton Hall, which was the original capitol of California, in Monterey.

MUSTELIER: In downtown Monterey.

DEUTSCH: Monterey was the original capitol of California?

SWANSON: Yeah, it was when the Spanish ceded to ... excuse me, I'm coughing ...

MUSTELIER: Actually, when they landed, they actually took Monterey. The Americans took it actually and then they realized, oh, the war hasn't started yet. [laughs] So, but, Monterey was the Spanish capitol and it's where the constitutional convention for California met and it was in that hall, in Colton Hall, where they wrote the California constitution.

DEUTSCH: And so you did a bear. And the bear is the symbol of California.

MUSTELIER: Yes, and all ...

SWANSON: It's on our flag. The California bear flag. I was actually part of a call to artists for this public project for the Sesquicentennial, the 150th year of statehood for California, and ended up winning that job. And so,

MUSTELIER: It's a grizzly bear and two cubs.

SWANSON: And what they wanted was a very exact replica in three dimensions of the California bear flag. I had to unveil ... and then two cubs doing whatever.

DEUTSCH: I was going to say, there are no cubs on the flag.

SWANSON: No, that I had complete artistic license with ... so I did the bear pretty much straightforward.

MUSTELIER: Nine feet in length. Four and a half feet high.

SWANSON: Do you have ... there's a postcard over there.

DEUTSCH: It's a bronze?

SWANSON: Yeah, it's a bronze. It's ...

DEUTSCH: I assume that's the largest sculpture you've ever done.

MUSTELIER: No.

SWANSON: No, I did a 15 foot cowboy that actually Roy modeled for in '97.

MUSTELIER: In that house on E Street, there's a bay window that faces towards a brick wall of the adjoining house. In that bay window slowly grew a ten-foot cowboy. Our neighbors would walk by, people walking by, periodically you'd see people looking in through the window. And, the height of the bronze was set by the ceiling.

SWANSON:...the height of our ceiling, yeah.

MUSTELIER: She built ...

DEUTSCH: Was that a commission that was going somewhere?

MUSTELIER: Yes, in Salinas, California.

SWANSON: Yes, it's in Salinas, California. Actually, it's on our website, too, there's all the history about these guys, too.

DEUTSCH: And what's your website?

SWANSON: [www.] Cornerstorearts.org.

MUSTELIER: But it was, that was a ten-foot tall bronze, five-foot base and that's the biggest.

DEUTSCH: Do you have a card.

SWANSON: Yeah, I think ... [background noise]

MUSTELIER: It's no longer there, I was looking the other day. It used to be up on the cabinet. [background noise] ... it's on the other side, sort of like the basic info on it.

DEUTSCH: So, it seems like you've done so many different things. Are you having enough fun with this that this seems like it for now, or is the next thing already appearing on the horizon?

SWANSON: That's a good question and not ... and it is one that I've been thinking about. The Hill Center's opening soon. I'm very excited about collaborating with them and seeing ...

DEUTSCH: Where you might fit in?

SWANSON: Where we'll fit in, what niche we're going to fit in with that major ...

MUSTELIER: One of the things that the board has been, you know, if you want to call it challenging, and actually had a person, who is our neighbor Mary Case being very much as a facilitator for a board meeting, an off-site, our off-site ...

SWANSON: A board retreat.

MUSTELIER: A board retreat, yeah, was what's the vision? What's the idea of The Corner Store? This is where the board really participating, but it's also, she came and talked with Kris and myself.

SWANSON: And what sets it apart? What is the next five years going to look like?

MUSTELIER: But what makes something a Corner Store event?

SWANSON: For instance, we do have one off-site event going on now at David Weiner's house.

MUSTELIER: 21 Gessford Court.

SWANSON: It's the 21st every month; we have, it's an off-site salon. It's very effective, and it does feel right. He's on our board.

DEUTSCH: And what is an off-site salon? I mean, is it ...

MUSTELIER: Music.

SWANSON: He has a fabulous house, full of art and, it's been in architectural books and everything. It's a wonderful, wonderful space. You walk into it and you just feel enfolded by his aesthetics, which are very strong. And then there's this sort of a sub-basement that has a, where the band, a well, where the band sets up. And, he has a band, so there is always The Corner Store, the 21 Gessford Court, band is set up. And then people are invited to come and jam with them.

MUSTELIER: It's all jazz music.

SWANSON: Jazz and blues.

MUSTELIER: And singers.

SWANSON: The singers know their ... musicians are invited. And, it's a big one pot meal and it's a BYOB event so, it's

MUSTELIER: \$10 dollar donation.

SWANSON: Yeah, it's the 21st of every month and it's just a wonderful party.

MUSTELIER: This coming Monday, next week.

SWANSON: And it's actually, so it goes out on all our press. This is the ... can you find one that doesn't have these ... I had a few multi ones. Just grab a handful and put up here ... thanks.

DEUTSCH: So Chris and Roy, why do you think you like doing this? You've chosen to make your home a public venue.

MUSTELIER: I ...

DEUTSCH: It wouldn't be for everyone.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, I think, well, I can, looking at Chris' life, not being there for all of it, but hearing the background, it's that aspect. She grew up in a very open house with all these people, from artists to actors and people coming through the house ...

SWANSON: Indian chiefs to movie stars.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, and some of the best artists you would ever imagine that retired in the Carmel area were ...

SWANSON: Yeah, some great artists.

MUSTELIER: ... and giving great critique.

SWANSON: I grew up in very, sort of, rustic, bohemian, countryside lifestyle. My folks' home was a magnet for other, I'd say, luminaries of the time, come up from LA and get away to the mountain. And I'd wake up and there'd be Doug McClure. Remember him? The actor? He was Rowdy Yates in *Rawhide* and a million San Francisco PD. [Editorial note: Clint Eastwood played Rowdy Yates in *Rawhide*; Doug McClure was Trampas in *The Virginian* TV series.] He's been in a lot of shows. He had a bad alcohol problem, so I remember waking as a kid and catching Doug in our liquor cabinet in the morning. So, he

spent the night. And then, Sam, oh gosh, beginning way back, Jimmy Cagney waterwitched our first well for my dad.

DEUTSCH: Really? Waterwitched?

SWANSON: Yeah, he was a gifted waterwitcher.

MUSTELIER: A divining rod.

SWANSON: A divining rod to find water underground.

DEUTSCH: What's the word? Waterwinched?

MUSTELIER: Witch, waterwitch.

SWANSON: It's like you're a witch with water.

MUSTELIER: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. Wow.

SWANSON: And we always had, you know, kids that would be staying at the ranch, to be sent up to the ranch to stay or get out of trouble or work, work the land and milk the cows and ...

MUSTELIER: Even relatives who were kind of ...

DEUTSCH: You were used to that?

SWANSON: Used to a sort of communal life with lots of art.

MUSTELIER: And, that's on her, and then I, my parents, my father more so, just very open, I mean. Send him to the grocery store and he will continue talking with whoever; but it was always very much food related. One of his favorite cities, always, going back to it, my mother loved it too, was New Orleans, and that's where ...

DEUTSCH: That's why you had to go to Tulane?

MUSTELIER: And that's where I was born, too. I was born in New Orleans, but it was six months later we moved. But, um, ...

SWANSON: So, he brings the ... Roy brings more of the food and wine to the mix; and I bring the people to the mix. In terms of the arts.

MUSTELIER: But there is a love of people on both ... Kris is, yeah.

SWANSON: But I'm very comfortable being surrounded by arts, and it's just such a privilege and a gift. I just love it.

DEUTSCH: But, you also could open your house to all those children.

SWANSON: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: That you didn't know, I mean, that was a different element.

MUSTELIER: Now is in, ah, well, Kris has got ... how many relatives would you say in Sacramento area? [laughs] I mean, it's not been, well, you had kids come down ... some relatives ...

SWANSON: The kids were something else. That was ... that goes back more to the horse training days because one of the elements of having the barn was that there were always lots and lots of children around with their horses. And a lot of them were in very dire straits. They happened to all be white, but they were just as poor and just as needy. And, a lot of them lived in the trailer camp below our ranch, so they were, you know, same problems, the same issues. And I found working with horses, at that point, was really helpful for those kids. And working with art here was helpful for these kids. So, there was ...

MUSTELIER: I never in my entire life truly called anywhere per se home. [laughs] That's a, you know, constant moving until finally high school, living one place five years. But, coming here to DC, I never lived anywhere this long, in this house. As soon as we passed through five years, is longer than I lived anywhere one location, anywhere in my entire life. And, it was much more of a, I mean we, meeting the people of this Capitol Hill community, neighborhood, it has just been, it has been different, it's been a place to get involved. And the very first time I ever really had a chance to do that was actually out in Monterey. And I actually went to the legal office and said, "What can I do, if I get involved with stopping this dam that they were going to be building," I'm helping Chris. I actually visited the legal office because as an officer in the Navy I was like, "OK, what can I do?" I've never done this before; I've never gotten involved really in the community.

DEUTSCH: You were there long enough.

MUSTELIER: Exactly. And then finally here, but we weren't a hundred percent sure whether or not we were going to stay here. And then, until finally we found this house. That was really that final ingredient of, we knew the people, we loved the community, we didn't know these immediate neighbors, we hadn't met, but this house was a tipping point of finding the right house and then it just ...

SWANSON: One thing led to another.

MUSTELIER: Yeah.

SWANSON: We definitely didn't envision the whole thing, the whole cloth, from the beginning. People say how did you get into this, and I always say bumper cars. [laughs] One thing leads to another.

DEUTSCH: And, obviously with the way your lives have been, you probably don't plan tons ahead, but do you see yourselves staying here?

SWANSON: Oh, yeah, yes.

MUSTELIER: Yeah, that's, actually to tell you the truth, see, this is the ... I'm still the engineer. I was a chemical engineer in college, and chemical ... the engineer, IT, naval officer, nuke trained, and I can tell you within three years, the day that I can totally retire and everything, finances and everything, so I am planning on that. And I know what year, in probably one year, that I can probably say, that's it. Pay off all the mortgage, cut the ... from retirement pay, pension, everything, and can make it work, so that's ...

DEUTSCH: To stay?

MUSTELIER: So now, that piece is growing in there too, so got a life image, or an image that's ahead just on a financial aspect, so we can stay here and make both, this is the other part we ...

SWANSON: Make both parts work.

MUSTELIER: We will not make ... we will not give up California, the house out there. So it's sort of like some place we can go to if we wanted to.

SWANSON: OK, Stephanie, push one of these, whatever one interests you ...

DEUTSCH: Tell me about Thalia. Thalia is one of the kids you worked with in the art ...

SWANSON: Yes, Thalia is one of my kids. Thalia Wiggins. She quickly on became an assistant at The Corner Store.

MUSTELIER: Tell them how you met. It was through her brother.

SWANSON: Oh, her little brother was clipping ... she has an autistic brother and he was flipping our mail slot when we first moved in and it was kind of annoying. And we were [background noise] sitting around with friends in the front room. I opened the door and this very nice young woman was standing behind her brother saying, "Timmy, come on. Timmy, come on." And I said, "Oh, it's no problem." I sat

and talked with them for a little while and then we invited them in, and as Thalia says later, “I’m thinking this part of town, I’m thinking Hansel and Gretel.” [laughs] So, they came in and it’s been a great friendship ever since, ten years.

MUSTELIER: And she’s going to school at UDC.

SWANSON: She is one of these gifted young women that could of, she was I think 17 at the time, and could have gone. Life was really on the crossroads, and I really think the work at The Corner Store, day in and day out, being my assistant, shifted things pretty dramatically for her.

MUSTELIER: But she’s very strong-willed in a totally positive way. Again, to be an ANC, she, one ANC lost his position

DEUTSCH: She must be pretty young.

SWANSON: Someone just knocked.

MUSTELIER: She is. No, it’s just the refrigerator.

SWANSON: She’s 20-something now ... 27? 25?

MUSTELIER: No more than 25.

DEUTSCH: And does she still live ... ?

MUSTELIER: She lives up in Northeast.

SWANSON: Near Gallaudet. [University]

MUSTELIER: Yeah, just immediately east of Gallaudet.

SWANSON: That’s her neighborhood, in fact. I can’t think of the name of it, I know we were all really excited when ...

MUSTELIER: It’s one block over, we’ve dropped her off many a times after a show or something, just, I’ve dropped her off ... So she’s very entrepreneurial, very much wanting to get ...

SWANSON: She’s a great young woman.

MUSTELIER: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: How satisfying.

SWANSON: It is. It is. Those few success stories are very good. And what else were we talking about? Oh, music and ...

DEUTSCH: Plans, long range plans.

MUSTELIER: But, here. We've got it figured out how to do that. Yep, I've got to work a few more years, little bit more than a few, but [laughs] it's not ... there's definitely light at that end of that tunnel and the thing is, that I can ... with plenty of time to do more things, maybe pick up more of the history stuff that I've just let languish. I love history.

SWANSON: Yes, Roy's the historian for the block.

MUSTELIER: We jokingly call, across the street is Carl Reeverts. He's the mayor of Ninth Street and then I'm jokingly called the historian. And I actually found for most of the people on this block, there are several, primarily the other side of the street, the original, my gosh, permits, the building permits for their houses because basically everyone thinks that their house is built in 1900. That's what we thought ours was. Actually it was listed as 1926, something like that for this house, and it took going through records. Kris was like, where's he going. And I took her one day to do it, and she was like, I can't do this ever again going over to ...

SWANSON: Microfilm at the library.

MUSTELIER: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: So what did you find out? When was this house built?

MUSTELIER: 1870. 1870.

SWANSON: Here's the brochure, too, Stephanie. Here's the whole little synopsis we finally put together.

MUSTELIER: But, it came down to is going through all the history and everything and creating even a binder and then we put it up on the website in which it also explains for anybody, if they want to do it, what all the sources were, what were the references, where can you find all this stuff. I just put it there and the whole history, the interview with Tony Cuzzo, when we went with Nancy Metzger, we put that up.

SWANSON: You know the reason the store was boarded shut was because of a murder.

DEUTSCH: Yes, I do know that.

SWANSON: Yeah, the basic history of that ...

DEUTSCH: Do we know what year that was? In the mid-60s?

MUSTELIER: 1968. Yeah, we've actually got ...

DEUTSCH: Is that part of the riots or?

SWANSON: No. Just, it was ...

DEUTSCH: A burglary gone wrong.

SWANSON: Yeah, a botched robbery, as we say it. We actually found a Post article on it, here.

MUSTELIER: Yeah

DEUTSCH: Ummm

MUSTELIER: So you ...

END OF INTERVIEW