

Interview with Marian Del Vecchio

Kathy Hersh: My name is Kathy Hersh. I'm interviewing Marian Del Vecchio. Today is April 15th 2019. We are in the Art Deco Welcome Center. To start out, let's talk about your association with Miami Beach as a resident. When did you first come here to live?

Marian Del Vecchio: Okay. We had no intention of coming here. Frank and I were happily involved in our community, which was a nice suburban community where everybody behaved themselves and dressed appropriately. This was quite a switch coming here, but I'll tell you how we did.

Frank's brother is homosexual, and of course, this was a big place for gays in the mid '90s, just around the time of that Hurricane Andrew. That's when he was here. He kept inviting us to come to Miami Beach. We resisted because in our mind, Miami Beach was like an old nursing home. I wouldn't know what Joe was doing here, that's Frank's brother.

Anyway, we finally were freezing in Boston, and it was a little grey. We decided we'd visit Joe, and so we came to visit Joe. He could not get rid of us. That was the problem, really. We landed. We visited him and then we kind of parked, and we didn't want to leave.

That's how we landed up here. We bought a unit in the building that he was in, which we loved, right on Ocean Drive. We loved the building. He was trying to get us to move elsewhere, but we all stuck together. No, it's a wonderful building. The sky is blue, and it's technicolor. That's the difference between here and elsewhere, the colors.

Interviewer: You said culturally that was it quite different coming from Boston. In what ways did you [Crosstalk] [02:22] experience culture shock?

Del Vecchio: Oh my God. My culture shock is mild compared to what my husband experienced because my husband is a lawyer, and he's from Boston. Boston is in his blood and the way people act. As I said, they dress appropriately and they're well behaved. That's not the case here. I really, I thought it was fun from day one, but Frank did have a little problem getting accustomed to the way



people did things.

Interviewer: What way is that?

Del Vecchio: Well, one thing, and I probably shouldn't say this on camera, but what the hell. One thing he said when we got here was the differences. In New England if anyone was corrupt, they hid it. They generally, even if they were corrupt, they did a good job and they hid the corruption. Here, nobody bothers hiding anything, and they do a lousy job.

That was the difference, except Frank has never seen a problem that he doesn't want to solve. He set about trying to improve what we were confronting. One of the things immediately was homelessness. We overlook a little park, and it was absolutely full of homeless, pathetic but unpleasant to live next to.

I told Frank to do something about it, and he did. He did because he had been working at [Phonetic] [04:13] Hut. He was director of community planning for New England, so he had been in charge of homeless programs, among other things. He immediately got in touch with the police, and they worked out some program. Ultimately, our park is pristine and children play there, and it's lovely.

Interviewer: How long did it take him to do that? How long did it take him to do that?

Del Vecchio: Boy, I don't remember. I really don't.

Interviewer: Was it years or months?

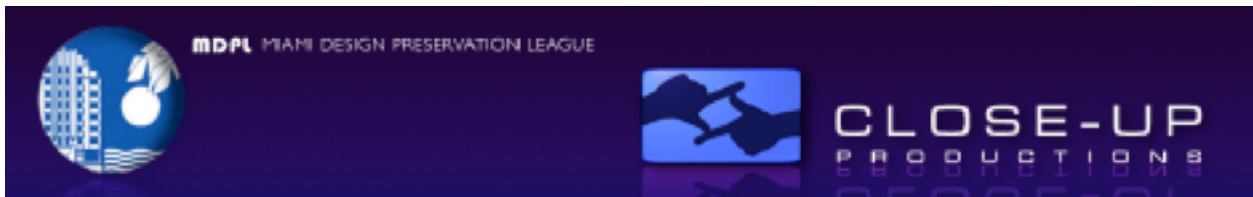
Del Vecchio: Oh, no, no, no, no, months, months.

Interviewer: The police were very cooperative.

Del Vecchio: The police were terrific.

Interviewer: Did it result in any solutions for homeless people?

Del Vecchio: Yes. Well, this was the Pottinger. This was the time of the Pottinger law, which if enforced, you cannot tell a homeless person to interrupt some life saving activity, whether it's urinating or sleeping or something unless you have another place to offer them. Now there are places.



Interviewer: Frank wasn't involved in making those places possible?

Del Vecchio: Well, he was involved in making sure that all of this worked out with their workplaces.

Interviewer: What other problems did he then go on to solve after that?

[Laughter]

Del Vecchio: You got a year?

Interviewer: Sounds like an active guy.

Del Vecchio: No, I'm just fooling around because we do love it here, but there are problems. The kind of problems that we really were unaccustomed to because as I said, we spend a lot of time in this nice suburban community where everyone slept at night, lights out at about 11, that kind of thing.

I think noise was a big factor. Noise and the possibility that the entertainment district would start coming down to our neck of the woods. We live at Third and Ocean. It looked like they really wanted to expand south.

Frank really, with some great people, Victor Diaz and [Phonetic] [06:36] Sawgross, they worked very hard and they got some zoning restrictions enacted to prevent entertainment, any kind of noisy entertainment or clubs south of Fifth.

I must say, as a result, it's become one of the best neighborhoods. It really has. It's family-oriented. We never had families before. Now the playground is full. Of course, there are the new condos and people are happy. It's quiet. Relatively speaking, it's really quiet.

Interviewer: That is one of the tensions of Miami Beach, being a popular resort but also being a residence for many people.

Del Vecchio: I know. We need residents. I think if it wasn't for the residents, Miami Beach would not be a popular resort. For one thing, the taxes that the residents pay keep a lot of the popular resort doing well. It's just a whole different way of life, I think, when you pay attention to residents and quality of life, which has deteriorated



within the past 10 years around Ocean Drive.

When we came here, Ocean Drive, and I'm talking about the entertainment area. It was lovely. Really, 20 years ago, we used to, when we had friends we would have dinner there. We would be happy to show walk on Ocean Drive. That stopped, totally stopped. In fact, we warn friends who come to visit us, be careful when they go up Ocean.

Interviewer: Because of...

Del Vecchio: Because of recent problems and safety and crime, crime. Yes, crime. It's the kind of lowlife atmosphere, the blasting music, the overpriced food and drink and the whole atmosphere is something that I wouldn't recommend to any of my friends right now.

Interviewer: Are you still involved? Do you have any current causes that you're involved in or that Frank is involved in?

Del Vecchio: Oh, ask Frank. I'm an innocent bystander. I get involved because he's so involved, and I do. I can't get it. We have a small place. I have to listen to it, so I get involved, but the issues are he spends, I must say, to his credit, he spends a lot of time. A lot of people turn to him for help. They don't know where to go, what to do. He spends a lot of time responding to people out there, just helping individuals who are having a problem in their neighborhood.

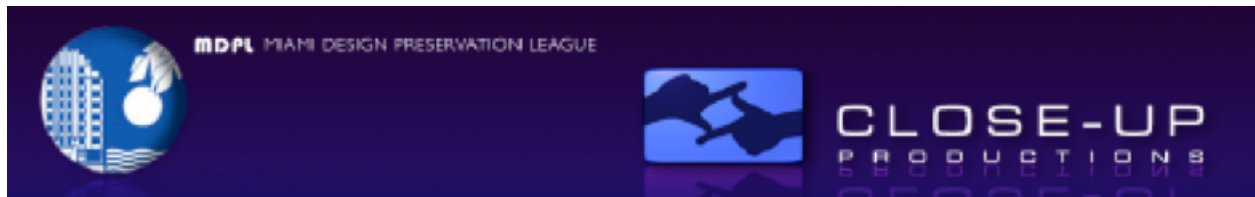
Interviewer: Let's talk about your career.

Del Vecchio: Career? That's a euphemism.

Interviewer: Why is it a euphemism?

Del Vecchio: Because as if prior to cartooning, I had a little business which was a lot of fun. If we go into that, it'll be a, well, I can tell you about it. Cartooning, which is my current career, I fell into. I've always cartooned. I've always done it, but I never had any intention of doing anything professional, partially because I'm very lazy. Just like I resisted talking to you, I don't want anything on the record.

I'd have never dreamed that I would do anything professionally with cartoons. I was doing a lot. When we moved here it was the Clinton era. As far as politics go, it's equal opportunity. Give me Bush, I'll have a hell of a good time, but at that time it was Clinton and I was doing a lot of cartoons just for fun.



A friend of mine, Don Worth, asked me if he could take some. He took them to the editor at the Herald. That's how I landed up doing cartoons for the Herald, which was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: To be recommended by Don Worth was quite a step up from being this.

Del Vecchio: Oh, he's terrific.

Interviewer: He's one of my favorites. I'm looking around and seeing all these cartoons on the wall. Some of them are pretty wicked.

Del Vecchio: So am I.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. Did you ever get into trouble for some of your satire?

Del Vecchio: Oddly enough, oh, there was one funny time. I did a cartoon of Club Madonna at the time Leroy Griffin, the owner, was suing one of our commissioner's wives because she had objected the possibility of them getting their liquor license. I just innocently did this cartoon of Leroy in the middle. I must say I nailed him. It's a pretty good cartoon of Leroy surrounded by naked women. I got a call from the editor, "No no. This is a family newspaper, and we can't have that."

Interviewer: This was the Miami Herald?

Del Vecchio: The Miami Herald. "We can't have that, so would you please see if you can do something about it?" I said, "Yes I will," and I hung up and I thought, "What the hell do I do? I like them the way they are." Frank had more experience with, I guess, strip joints. He drew the pasties. He figured out, and he put pasties on and stockings. They looked a hell of a lot worse than they did before, but it was accepted.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Del Vecchio: He's now very proud of himself.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: I wonder if today that would have the same reaction at the Herald.



Del Vecchio: Oh, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Everything goes now, right?

Del Vecchio: Anything, anything, right.

Interviewer: How long have you been doing this?

Del Vecchio: I've always done cartoons. I started doing for the Herald in 200. That lasted through 2005. I either was kicked out for making too much fun of our way of life, or they just were kicking a lot of people out at that time. There was a turnover in the Herald. After that, I'd had fun illustrating Frank's long-winded messages to the neighbor. He has a huge email list. People appreciate his letting them know what's happening. He sometimes is very verbose. A cartoon kind of nails it.

Interviewer: You're kind of an ally indirectly in the cause.

Del Vecchio: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: The causes.

Del Vecchio: Yes.

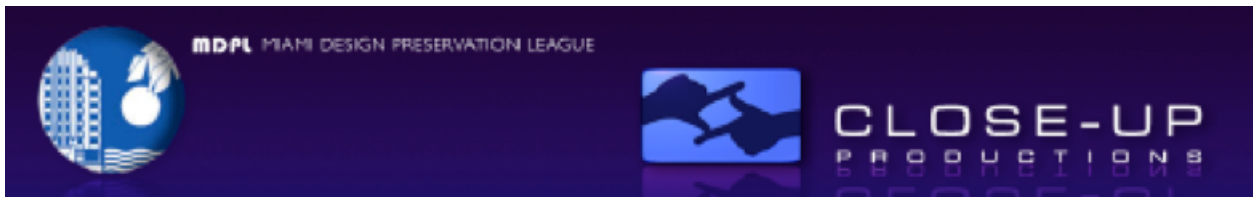
Interviewer: What are some of the ones that you're most proud of that stand out in your mind that may have gotten the most reaction, perhaps?

Del Vecchio: I think probably the most important, the one that stands out in my mind, of course, is the zoning restrictions. Right now, I think people who've moved here just take it for granted that our area is the way it is.

They probably feel if you let in a little violinist or something, it wouldn't make a difference, but of course they don't realize once you open up the door, you can't discriminate between a violinist and a rock band. That's dangerous. Those are some of the things we worry about and are concerned about.

Interviewer: Noise?

Del Vecchio: Noise, noise. Right now it's beautifully under control in our area, at least where we are. I know some of the buildings that are closer to



Nikki Beach are having a problem.

Interviewer: Someone noted that people coming in here looking at the cartoons on the wall have really enjoyed them and relate to them. You wouldn't necessarily think that they would.

Del Vecchio: I know I got a big kick out of it. Actually, when we came here because, okay, I'll admit it. I'm not crazy about looking through other people's cartoon books. I love cartoons, and I'll look at them in a magazine, but a whole slew, it's overwhelming. I don't appreciate it.

I really wasn't. I didn't think that being surrounded by cartoons would be as much fun as it's turned out to be actually. I got a big kick out of seeing people who clearly were not American who were looking at some of these and laughing. I got a big kick out of that.

Interviewer: There's a universal message then.

Del Vecchio: Yes.

Interviewer: What is that message, do you think?

Del Vecchio: I think it's kind of everybody is disgusted with their own government for a variety of reasons, some valid, some invalid, but there's always some sort of anger. I think that I capture some of those reasons in my cartoons, and so people get a kick out of it.

Interviewer: Is it cathartic as an exercise to do this?

Del Vecchio: No.

Interviewer: No?

Del Vecchio: No. Not as good as drinking.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: We'll switch subjects now.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: I'll ask you what in your life story is fascinating, and we'd like to



hear it and how it relates to what you've turned out to be involved with and what you care about in your work.

Del Vecchio: That's a hard one to answer. If you read my book, you know I was born in Europe at a bad time in the mid '30s in Czechoslovakia. My father, I asked him. My parents never really talked about the war. They got us out, but they never. I asked my father how he knew to get us out in the nick of time.

He said, interestingly, especially these days. He said, "Everybody dismissed Hitler as a joke, at least his friends. They didn't take him seriously." My father said he did. He took him seriously, thank God. We got out of Czechoslovakia in '38. We couldn't take anything with us, and travelled through a lot of Italy, Switzerland and England during the Blitz. I have memories of that.

Of course my parents, I grew up with parents who were wonderful. I'm very happy with my parents. I did very well, but it was a bad time and a horrible experience for them. As a child, I didn't feel, I suppose, the kind of security, you could call it, that most kids feel. It's not that I was particularly afraid or anything because I was too young to know what the hell was going on, but there's a sense of things not being right.

Interviewer: Well, if you had to keep moving, that was an indication.

Del Vecchio: In those days we didn't know that there's anything wrong with moving. We thought everybody moved.

Interviewer: How old were you living through the Blitz in England?

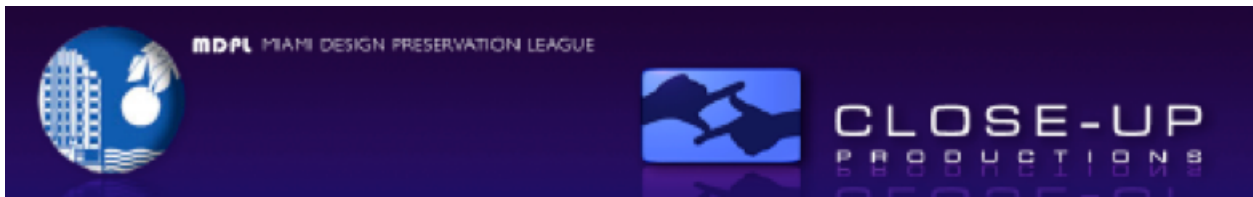
Del Vecchio: 5.

Interviewer: You have vivid memories of that?

Del Vecchio: Not vivid, just memories of getting little gas masks. I remember my parents being worried and sleeping in the sleeping shelter, but as a child, you're not as worried as your parents are. It's almost like an adventure, except you sense when your parents are concerned and upset and fearful. Then that's contagious.

Interviewer: You lost family in the Holocaust?

Del Vecchio: Not the family we were traveling with, but yes. Like a grandmother and uncles, yes.



Interviewer: It's interesting, the history of the beach and its relationship to Holocaust survivors. It at one point had the most, I heard, concentration of any place in the country outside of New York of people coming to have their day in the sun finally.

Del Vecchio: I know that.

Interviewer: When did you come to the States?

Del Vecchio: 1941 just before Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: What age were you then? What age were you then?

Del Vecchio: 6.

Interviewer: 6? Do you have memories of that?

Del Vecchio: Not really. Not really.

Interviewer: Where did your family live?

Del Vecchio: We lived in Washington Heights. Do you know New York?

Interviewer: A little bit.

Del Vecchio: Near the cloisters, way uptown. It's changed dramatically, but it was...

Interviewer: You said you came down here in Miami Beach in the Clinton years. That would have been around, you said right after Andrew.

Del Vecchio: 1996 was when we...

Interviewer: Okay, because Andrew, the hurricane was '87. '92, sorry.

Del Vecchio: That's when.

Interviewer: Right. Thank you Carl. Okay. Tell us about the writing of the book. The book has a lot of pain in it. It's a very courageous book, by the way. Tell us about the origins of how that came that be. Why did you write it?

Del Vecchio: I'd be happy to talk, but it's totally removed from history of Miami



Beach.

Interviewer: Well, that's fine.

Del Vecchio: No. I think I mentioned in the preface in my book. The fact is that I was talking to a friend, Dick Worthman, who lives here now, part of the tide. He's a doctor. I told him about my history with the psychiatric profession. He said, "My God, you're a walking compendium of everything they did wrong. You should write it up."

I started to write, and I had fun writing. It was memory time. I'd kept the diary, and Frank got the medical records of my experience of McLean Hospital. Looking through my medical records in particular, I realized what a crazy time it was and how unfortunate a lot of the people were who subjected to the Freudian analysis and treatment.

I was one of them, but I think because I had enough brains to get out and take care of myself and have some perspective on it, it wasn't as damaging as it was to several of my friends who killed themselves.

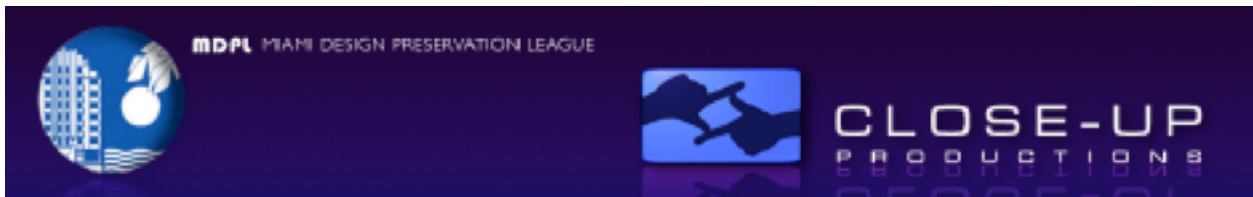
Interviewer: Explain why you went into the facility.

Del Vecchio: Oh, I had an eating disorder. I was bulimic. In those days, nobody knew anything about. Well, they still don't really, but it's more popular now. Princess Di, Jane Fonda, everybody has an eating disorder. It's almost like a mark of distinction. In those days, nobody knew about them and it was rather disgusting, I thought, very shameful to have an eating disorder. What a bore.

The treatment was really, there was no real treatment. They put you in a mental hospital McLean's, which was a lovely mental hospital, but it was a waste of a year and a lot of money. It opened my eyes to the downside of the psychiatric profession.

Interviewer: Would you say they misdiagnosed or were they just completely ignorant or...

Del Vecchio: No. In those days, I think they had. Their approach was Freudian. A lot of their concern was suicide. They didn't want anyone killing themselves because of liability. As far as treatment went, I frankly don't remember any so-called treatment other than seeing a shrink and talking to the shrink several times a week, which was not particularly illuminating or useful.



Drugs were not. See, I wasn't in the next stage of craziness where you get treated with drugs. In those days they really didn't do anti-depressants or anything like that as far as I remember. It was Thorazine for people who were really, really ill and needed some serious meds.

Interviewer: In reading the book, it strikes me that you're lucky to have come out of it intact.

Del Vecchio: I think so. I think so. You know what saved me? I think sense of humor. I mean it.

Interviewer: Well, that comes out in the book as well.

Del Vecchio: Well, I think you can't. I mean, I can't help it. My funniest episode, no one else reading the book has mentioned it, but to me, one of the most interesting, crazy episodes when I was at McLean was when they moved me from one house to another house. I was new. I was entering this new house, prison, whatever it was. There was the craziest couple.

Waiting at the door was the absolutely craziest, most scary couple at McLean Hospital, a crazy woman, manic depressive schizoid, paranoid schizophrenic, very angry all the time. They let her have a dog, and the dog was equally scary and angry. They both scared the hell out of everyone. She was always storming around. She hated communists, called them the dirty reds. They were out to get her, so people knew not to wear red.

Well I, when I showed up, I thought, "Oh shit." I was wearing a red turtleneck. There she was, and I knew that about her. It was known. You don't wear red with Joanie. There she was with her dog scowling at me, angry. I looked at her, and I thought, "I can't."

Still my problem was trying not to laugh. I always thought things were funny when it was not appropriate to laugh. It was the same thing. I thought, "Don't laugh. Don't laugh," but I couldn't stop. I laughed right in her face and I thought, "Uh-oh, what now?" She looked at me, and then she smiled. She liked me. After that, she followed me around. She was my friend. I kind of think it's because I wasn't scared of her. I think it was because I wasn't scared of her.



Interviewer: She was a bully. Wow.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: Well, you have to have a sense of humor to be a cartoonist, so I should think. What other characteristics do you think you have that made you good at this job?

Del Vecchio: I don't know. That's hard to answer. Just I can't help it. Everything, I see the funny side of most things. It's just my point of view. There's no history there.

Interviewer: You said you'd been cartooning your whole life. Did you do it as a child?

Del Vecchio: Oh yes. Actually, my grandfather, when I'm thinking that my grandfather was not a professional artist, but he was an artist. He did a lot of cartoons. People always said I was like him.

Interviewer: You have memories of him doing that.

Del Vecchio: Yes, yes.

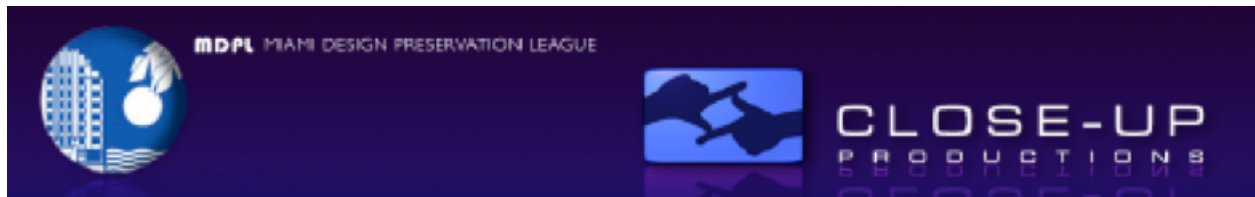
Interviewer: Did he sit down and show you how to do it, or did you just watch him?

Del Vecchio: No, he would send letters with his crazy cartoons in them. In those days people wrote letters. That's another thing, you see. I would write letters to my daughter when she was at college, and I would do a lot of cartoons. That was fun, but now you don't do that because it's all email or text.

Carl Hersh: When you were working for the Herald, did you go into the Herald office or did you work from home? Did they suggest ideas? Are all these your own?

Del Vecchio: No. They didn't suggest anything. I just, rather than even, even though we had computers actually. We weren't that out of it. I still would bring my little cartoon to the Herald and drop it off every week rather than just doing it online. No. They didn't give me any ideas. I think Miami Beach, it was a neighborhood kind of thing. I could just do anything I felt like, and it worked.

Interviewer: Life here was rich enough to provide you material. Life here was rich enough to provide [Crosstalk] [30:12] you plenty of material.



Del Vecchio: That's right. That's right, honestly. When we came here, it was like I, really, that's where I did those cartoons of cities. When we came, I'd never thought about doing cartoons like that before, but everybody looked like a cartoon.

Interviewer: I was told by a well known newspaperman editor, Howard Kleinberg, that they used to punish people by sending them to cover Miami Beach commission meetings, some of their reporters [Crosstalk] [30:45] if they got out of line.

Del Vecchio: Oh my God. I could see why they still could do that. They still could do that.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: What do you think it is? Is it unique to Miami Beach or is it...?

Del Vecchio: Well, it certainly wasn't like that in the Boston area, but this is like a small town. That's why it's really. That's one of the things that struck me so much about this place. Maybe it's the weather, everybody's outside all the time. You get to know people. You can't get away with anything because people will know everybody. If anything happens, everybody knows about it. It's a small town.

Carl: I'd like to explore a little more of this small town.

Del Vecchio: Okay. Small town. We lived in a small town in Belmont, but this is much more fun than Belmont because there are many more different kinds of peoples from all different kinds of places. I was sitting at the gym. One guy was from Romania. The woman next to me was from Guatemala, all over the place. That's what I love about being here.

We have wonderful friends, wonderful friends that are totally different, I think, from people that we stuck out with in Belmont, Mass. They're just great. They're all different kinds of people. That's what I love about it here really more than anything. Well, the weather, sure. The technicolor, the blue skies and the whole attitude, which is a little crazy, which is okay and the totally different kinds of people and the great friends we have.

Interviewer: Sounds pretty wonderful.



Del Vecchio: That's why I wouldn't leave even if I get angry.

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