

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Dr. Herbert H. Wong

TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR, AUTHOR, INNOVATOR:
A PASSION FOR JAZZ AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

Interviews conducted by
Caroline Crawford
in 1998

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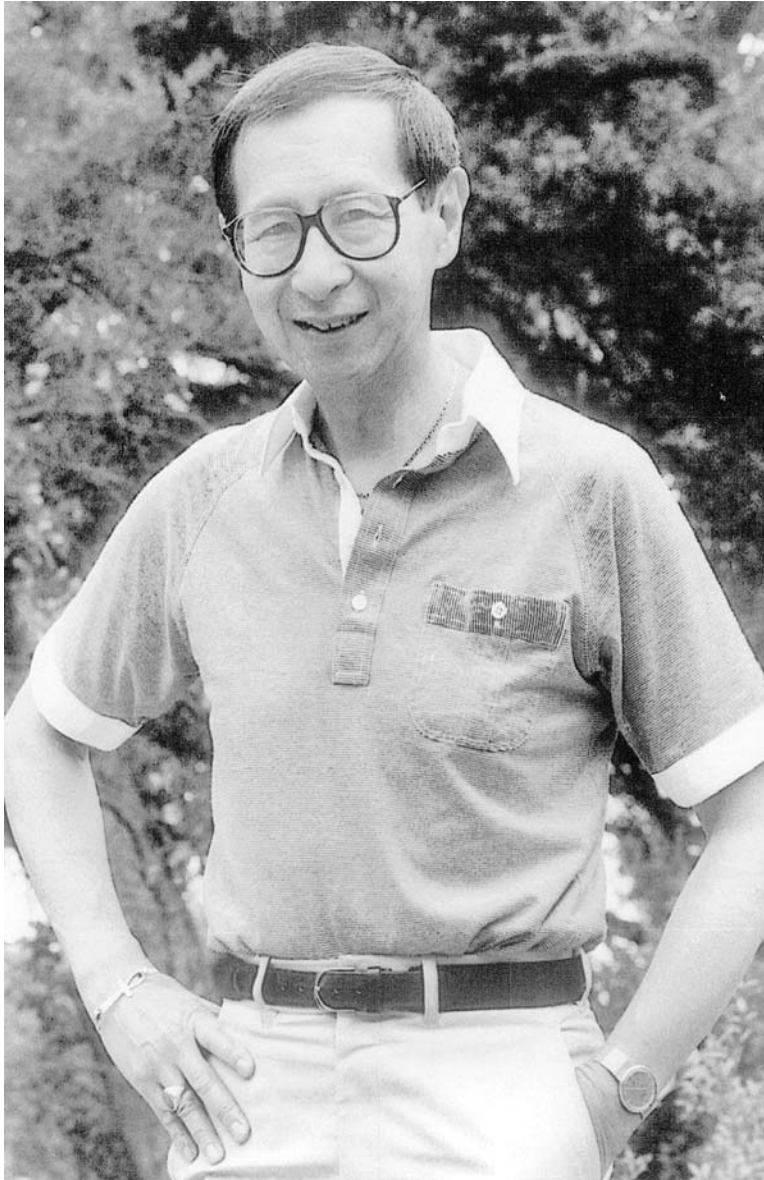
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Dr. Herbert H. Wong
(Photo courtesy of the Wong family)

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INTERVIEW HISTORY—Herbert H. Wong

Ralph Gleason wrote in a 1964 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “if you don’t think one man can be a group, you don’t know Herb Wong.” Dr. Wong at the time was principal of Chabot Elementary School in Berkeley, an author of several published books on the environment and a leader in science education, a disc jockey on the FM jazz station, KJAZ, and “the most rabid Woody Herman fan outside the Herman family,” according to Gleason, in a reference to Herb Wong’s lifelong passion for jazz that has made him one of the reigning jazz experts in the world.

The genesis of the passion was a box of recordings Dr. Wong found at around age 10. Born to a wealthy Chinese family in Oakland in 1926, Dr. Wong is the grandson of a woman who at one time owned most of Jack London Square and reigned over a large and colorful family. Dr. Wong devoted his young years to the study of natural science and eventually jazz, haunting jazz clubs in Stockton and the Bay Area and taking in performances by Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Louis Jordan, Count Basie, and Nat King Cole, among others.

In his career as a teacher and administrator in Berkeley and Oakland schools, Dr. Wong established a unique combination of science and jazz in the curriculum by bringing jazz into the elementary classroom, hiring jazz performers to teach everything from gym to kindergarten in order to get them onto the faculty and expose the students to their music. As part of the program Dr. Wong created the Washington Environmental Yard and taught environmental concepts through music. The music program was unique: so well connected was the jazz buff that he could call legendary jazz players—Duke Ellington and Oscar Peterson among them—and persuade them to perform in the schools.

Dr. Wong joined KJAZ radio in 1959, hosting shows until the station closed down in 1996. Jazz critic, adjudicator, lecturer, record producer (he was president of Palo Alto Records and Black Hawk Records), he has written for *Down Beat* and *Jazz Educators Journal* among other publications.

Dr. Wong has written hundreds of album liner notes, and he writes as he speaks, succinctly and directly. On Herbie Hancock: “Speaking of developmental influences on Herbie Hancock, aside from Gil and Miles, there is Bill Evans, who was the first pianist Hancock could truly identify with. When he started in jazz, George Shearing and Bud Powell were his forces of effect, and Hancock possessed a more emphatic harmonic approach before his melodic approach was secure. Hancock’s melodies are simple and he tries to get novel relationships between chords, each succession of chords presents an increment of surprise. There is no establishment of a strong tonal center. And in the way the chords follow each other, there is sufficient space and freedom between chordal relationships so that soloists can feel free to comment comfortably and in the way they feel. . . . The real Herbie Hancock is neither a pipe dream nor a prisoner. He is here for you to listen to, to dig.”

In addition to the oral history interviews, which were conducted in the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California, the transcription of a brief conversation between Dr. Wong and instrumentalist/composer Peter Apfelbaum has been added to the text. Apfelbaum now lives

in New York and records and performs with his band The New York Hieroglyphics, which was formed thirty years ago when he and most of the band were at Berkeley High School.

Herbert Wong at eighty still speaks the language of jazz—even his phone message says “dig you later.” He is currently consulting on a major entertainment resort and producing jazz events and recordings and he continues to teach, write and keep an expert ear to the ground for new talent.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs The Bancroft Library’s materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Candida Smith, ROHO director, and the administrative direction of Charles Faulhaber, director of The Bancroft Library.

Caroline Crawford
Music Historian
Regional Oral History Office

January, 2009
Berkeley, California

Interview 1: February 25, 1998

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

- Crawford: Let's start by my asking you when and where you were born, and then we'll talk about your illustrious grandparents.
- Wong: Okay. I was born in Oakland, California on March 18, 1926.
- Crawford: You're a fourth-generation Californian, which not too many people can claim to be.
- Wong: Yes. I mentioned that I was born in Oakland. It was in my grandmother's home at 135 Eighth Street, right across from a beautiful city park. It was an entire block worth of public parkland, which is significant to me as I move along.
- You want me to talk about my grandparents or do you want to talk about the environment there?
- Crawford: I'd like to talk about them. When they came, and what their history was.
- Wong: Let me see if I can retro with this. My maternal grandfather was the so-called mayor of Chicago's Chinatown. As I recall from my mother's sharing with me, he was also popularly known as "the Potato King." Apparently he was the person who initiated and developed a small agro industry that dealt with potatoes. I'm not aware of its distribution or extent; I just know that that was how it was referred to in conversations that my mother had with me.
- I can't remember his name. I know that his last name had to be Moy. [spells] There were and there are plenty of citizens there with the surname Moy. When you look at a Chicago telephone book you'll see that it is just replete with Moys. They're not out here in the Bay Area, however.
- Anyway, I'm not aware of when he came over. I don't know too much about my mother's side, actually, because the contact was remote.
- I believe that there was one trip when I was a child—I know there was a trip to Chicago, because I've seen old movies of that in the past, a film of a train that my mother and dad and my Uncle Worley, who was holding me, traveled on. He is the youngest of the brothers, the youngest brother of my dad, whose name is Worley K. Wong.
- Crawford: He was the architect?
- Wong: Yes. I remember seeing this film. I've also seen still photographs from the trip where he was holding me; he had white pants and a white shirt on. I remember the caption, "On the Way to Chicago." So I know it was to visit my mother's

relatives, because she had a lot of relatives there. So that's the only remembrance I have of that side.

Crawford: You naturally knew your paternal grandparents better because they were here.

Wong: My paternal grandmother, because my paternal grandfather had passed away before I was born. He died, I think, in his forties, maybe thirties, but he died—

Crawford: Did his people come for the railroad?

Wong: That's my great-grandfather. I do know something about them, too.

But my paternal grandfather was a politician, I understood. High-stakes gambler and real estate mogul. I recall seeing black-and-white photographs—and I wish I had them—where he was amongst many, many people, and they were all very well dressed with suits, with these collars that were flared out.

Crawford: Wing collars.

Wong: Yes, wing collars. Yes. And some had bow ties and formal trappings. He was always nattily dressed, and I always wondered—”Gosh, I wish I had known this man,” a very handsome looking man, so I can understand why my dad was a looker. [laughs] Yes. My grandfather had, I believe, come to this country from China, but I'm not positive of that.

I know my paternal grandmother was born in San Francisco. Her name was Lym Young Wong, because she came from a family named Lym. Huge family.

And that's another whole remembrance, by the way. In fact, I remember this author friend of mine in Berkeley saying of this segment, “It's fascinating. You must chat about that some time, get that down.” He said, “You're probably one of the few people who remember that.” I said, “Well, there's a few of my cousins who do.” And I don't know when to get into that.

Crawford: This is a good place.

Wong: She had four brothers and one sister, and I was told that she and her youngest brother used to take one of these pull wagons, and haul chickens and parts of pigs to the market, and that they would walk miles and miles with that wagon just to sell at the markets.

Crawford: Where would that have been?

Wong: On Minnesota Street in Potrero Hill in San Francisco. It was an industrial area which is all built up now, but then, there were only two houses, and they lived next to what was the car barn for the municipal streetcars, the “Market

Streetcars,” where there must have been a hundred or more cars. We used to play hide-and-seek in those. It was great.

It was always wonderful for us to go from Oakland, take the ferry boat, come to San Francisco, and go see my great-grandma, because these two homes housed all of the Lym family, other than one or two other brothers. There were only two residences, and next to them was a cork manufacturer that made rubber corks and natural corks. I don't know why I remember this.

It was an isolated area. You'd have to drive into this winding dirt road to get to these two homes and this car barn and these small adjacent businesses. They were manufacturers and businesses that had a lot of trucks, Lady's Choice Products and Fleischmann's Yeast, as I remember. My great-grandmother lived there. She lived to maybe eighty-nine or ninety years old, and I heard of her death when I was in the service.

Crawford: What do you remember of her?

Wong: Oh, I remember a lot about her. Her name was Foon Chin. What a wonderful person! Gosh. She was always dressed, no matter what the occasion was, in silk Chinese garb—two-piece outfits—and had one of these hats that went around her head with little sparkles. Just lovely. And she was so gentle and kind. She was a marvelous cook, and now, in retrospect, I understand why my grandmother was such a fabulous cook. She must have learned a lot from great-grandmother.

Crawford: That was your father's mother, of course.

Wong: Yes, I'm still talking about my father's side.

Crawford: What had been their business?

Wong: Well, it's interesting. My great-grandmother had many dozens of chickens all over the back. I mean, she must have had a hundred or more chickens, and their eggs were sold. I used to be fascinated by all the chickens and all these other barnyard denizens out there—geese and things. I always thought she was so fascinating, because she would go out there and they all flocked next to her. I thought, “Wow, how does she do that? She's like a magnet.” They knew that she must have been their feeder and benefactor.

Anyway, I haven't thought about this for, I don't know, fifty years. [laughs]

Crawford: Good.

Wong: I've got to get this in, because I may forget to do this. I remember seeing my first sparrow hawks, a natural predator of chickens lurking in the vicinity, and different family members said, “Oh, you'd better look out—those are chicken

hawks.” I said, “Chicken hawks?” “Yes, they're hawks and they go after chickens.” Of course, later on, when I became an amateur ornithologist before I became more professional, I knew that those were what we now call kestrels. So that was my first exposure to predatory birds.

Crawford: A very important memory.

Wong: Yes. So I saw the interrelationship between prey and predator.

It was such a fascinating family. And maybe that had a lot to do with my understanding of why my parents were consistently sharing their values about education. There was no question in my mind that we were expected to do top quality work in school, whatever the school was. In fact, it became frustrating, and I'll get to that.

Of my grandmother's five brothers—the oldest one was head of the steamship lines in San Francisco. He handled all the comings and goings of the Japanese steamships that came, which were really passenger ships that took citizens of the United States as tourists over to Japan and China. So they had the steamship lines that did that, and he managed traffic and scheduling for a lot of freighters. He did that from his home. I always used to see him in his home office. That was Uncle Sing. [laughs] We used to call him Uncle Sing because his given name was Sing Lym—

Crawford: So he would have been a great-uncle?

Wong: Yes. The next brother was Arthur, and Arthur I saw only once or twice, because by the time I was of any age of understanding—five or six years old—I knew that he was an air force colonel in China, an aviator. In fact, I found out that he was the first aviator on a biplane that flew over the San Francisco Bay. That's the story; that's what I heard. Anyway, he was one heck of a pilot and was very active with the Flying Tigers. So that's an important part of the story, because when the war came, he became part of that arm of the kind of a rebel air force that was assisting the United States. He had a lot of children who are living here. No, you know, I've reversed it. Uncle Bob was number two, and then Arthur, followed by Uncles Wing and Wah.

Crawford: Okay.

Wong: So Wing adopted the butcher dimension of business and actually had a butcher shop in San Francisco's Chinatown. I used to pop by and say, “Hi Uncle,” and he'd have chickens and everything. It was, I think, on Washington Street, right off Grant Avenue.

Crawford: Did you like to go to Chinatown?

- Wong: Oh, I loved it. I loved it. I have a whole thing about that place from various aspects. Don't forget to ask me about what I did at the point when Barbra Streisand's manager found out I was kind of an amateur standup comedian. Make sure to ask me about it, because that's a very interesting thing which would have turned my career into something else.
- Crawford: You could have been a comedian.
- Wong: Yes, because in that little episode I was slated to go to New York.
- Anyway, that was Wing's thing—[laughs]—Wing's thing. Wing Lym, and he in turn had a bunch of children. All these people had.
- Crawford: Big families.
- Wong: Yes, big families. Yes.
- Crawford: And the fourth one?
- Wong: The fourth one was Wah Lym. Uncle Wah was a U.C. graduate in mechanical engineering. There was no work available, so he pursued the butcher shop business with Uncle Wing and wound up in liquor sales.
- Crawford: Was it a close family—you saw your uncles and your great-uncles?
- Wong: Yes. Wing had a house with his family, and then next to it was a second house, and Uncle Sing and Uncle Wah and my great-grandmother and Uncle Wah's family were all in that house, and Uncle Sing's family was there. He must have had—I think it was four or five daughters.
- Crawford: You had a big, secure clan, didn't you?
- Wong: Oh, yes, and they were all there, you see. I used to find that that was a great place to visit, because the great-uncles had children that were my age, and they were fun to be with. It was camaraderie. There's Richard Lym and Raymond Lym, sons of Wah and Wing, and we used to play with them. My brother and I used to go over there and have a ball with them. We'd generate all kinds of games with these corks. We had all kinds of games with those.
- Crawford: Did everybody speak English?
- Wong: Everybody spoke English.
- Crawford: Your great-grandmother spoke English, too?
- Wong: Yes.

- Crawford: Those were hard times for Chinese people.
- Wong: Yes. They were not accepted and were excluded from public education.
- Crawford: And from ownership of property?
- Wong: Yes, except they did own those two homes.
- Crawford: How did they get by?
- Wong: I don't know.
- Crawford: Owning real estate entitled them to citizenship?
- Wong: Yes.
- Crawford: Please tell me the story of your very colorful grandmother.
- Wong: Oh, my grandmother. I guess my first remembrances about her were when I was three or four years old. My dad was always away, because he was studying here at Stanford. So I saw my mother more, and I saw my grandmother a lot. My grandmother was the matriarch. Hers was a big house, the grandest house in Oakland Chinatown.
- First off, Grandma was one fabulous cook. Her home was like an open house for anybody, every day. She cooked with the kind of skill that—today you would name her a master chef. She had no recipes. Recipes did not exist in those days. I keep telling my wife about that.
- I say to her, “They don't measure things,” because she watches me occasionally and she says, “Well, I want you to season that. What do you do, anyway?”
- I say, “Oh, I don't know. I just do things I watched my grandma do.”
- She says, “Well, what about how many teaspoons—”
- I say, “Nothing is measured. It's just part of an artistry. It's like jazz,” I say. “You know, you just improvise, swing with it.” [laughter]
- So, anyway, my grandma had a huge dining room table, and I remember there was another table off the kitchen that was more comfortable from the standpoint of interfacing with people, just a little more crowded.
- It was a home with three floors, and my mom and dad and I had the very, very large front room with the large windows that overlooked the park. That large room also had a smaller adjoining room where my crib was and where my

baby bed was as I was growing up. That was next to a couple of windows, because I always heard the neighbors. A friend of mine named Raymond—his folks were always spanking him. [laughter] I used to hear him scream and hear his parents saying he was such a naughty boy.

Anyway, Grandma also paid attention to rituals dealing with her parents in the living room, which was a two-part living room measuring at least thirty-five or forty feet by twenty-five, maybe. It must have been eighty or ninety feet long—the living room.

Crawford: This was an old Victorian, no doubt.

Wong: Yes. It was a very old house, built from scratch. She had it built.

Crawford: Your grandmother had it built?

Wong: Yes, my grandmother had it built. Obviously, that was when she was very wealthy.

Crawford: Well, she was a real estate tycoon. We were talking about that.

Wong: That's right.

Crawford: How did that happen?

Wong: I really don't know the genesis of it. But I learned some things about it. I'll put it very frankly. It was very clear in the family that I was the favorite grandson. I was the oldest, I was the first grandson of her children, and she had a tremendous fondness for my dad. But everybody—cousins, you know, uncles, everybody—understood that Grandma was always my advocate. [laughs]

Crawford: And what an advocate!

Wong: Yes. She had an area in the farthest section at the back of the living room where there was a table and there were these beautiful pictures of her mother and her father, all these—to me—ancient Chinese trappings, colorful trappings, and incense sticks, and josh sticks, and so on.

Crawford: Was she religious?

Wong: Yes, that was her religion. It had to be. What she did was she had these little square things about five-by-five, and inset there was gold leaf with an ideogram that was stylized. She would fold these like children would fold paper animals or something, but they looked like a boat, that's it, with two corners.

So she would make a huge under layer made up of these little square things, there must have been maybe fifty of them, and that became the container for all these things that she folded and put in there to look like boats. She would bow three times, looking at the pictures—three times—and she'd ask me to do it, too. I didn't know what was going on, so I would take it and I would do what she did. Then she would go into the dining room, and the dining room had a fireplace, and she would then burn the paper ensemble.

I asked her, "Why do you do this?"

She said, "When I do this, I'm supplying my ancestors with the money for their needs." Wow.

Anyway, that's the only quasi-religious dimension that I ever detected of hers, and she couldn't really explain it very well to me. Everybody understood that she did this ritual.

She spent a lot of time every day on the phone, and from what I heard her talking about, it dealt with her businesses. They were these lotteries, these gambling houses or casinos that she owned.

I think I've told you that she had all this property: three blocks of frontage property right in the middle of Grant Avenue in San Francisco. Just think what that must be worth today. Whew! Both sides of the street.

Crawford: In what is North Beach today?

Wong: Yes, between North Beach and maybe Washington or Jackson Street. And then she had the Pierce Building and the Lathrop Building in downtown Oakland, and then what is part of Alta Bates Hospital here on Ashby Avenue in Berkeley, and apartments off Lake Merritt. She had piles of them there.

Crawford: So she had made revenue from these gambling houses and purchased, saved, and purchased.

Wong: Yes.

Crawford: Her husband was no longer living at that point?

Wong: No. During her eulogy they said that she has got to be one of the pioneering women libbers, because she, as a teenager, created this empire and raised these children. And she couldn't read or write English. How did she do it? I don't know.

Crawford: She couldn't go to public school because of the Exclusion Acts.

Wong: Yes. And she used to tell me that she and her family were pelted in Chinatown—what was to be Chinatown—in that period when there was conflict between Irishmen and [Chinese]. It is in the California history books.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Crawford: Does that have to do with the Tongs and Triads and so on?

Wong: Those days were a little later, because, as I mentioned to you, I thought I was witnessing some spin off of the Tongs on a couple of occasions. When I was five or six years old, I witnessed everybody by the windows with weapons.

Crawford: What do you remember?

Wong: My grandmother's basement was stocked with a gallery of firearms, and I never understood why. They always told me, “Don't touch any of this,” you know, blah, blah, blah. So there must have been something going on, that since she was a female tycoon and had a lot to do, I'm sure, with the Tongs.

Crawford: What about the family associations?

Wong: Oh, yes, they were very active in them, particularly the Wong Association.

Crawford: Tell me about that.

Wong: What I know about it is that that was probably the most powerful family-based association. There are branches all over, which I didn't know about at the time, but [I realized that] later on in the post-mid-1930s when we moved into Stockton, California, where I stayed for five years. During that time, I noticed that my dad was the presiding officer of the Wong Family Association in Stockton, and that's when I figured out that there were branches.

But about my grandma, every day there was a man who would walk up the block with a five-tier carrier of dinner meals for us, and our house was second from the end of the block across from the park. The park was called Madison Square, I think. So it was between Oak and Madison Streets on Eighth Street, where the streetcar ran.

I've got to mention one other thing. Our next-door neighbor on our right side—oh, this is great—was a Japanese medical doctor: Dr. Fujimori. Dr. Fujimori had an old Franklin car, which all medical doctors had, and he had this little ramp next to it. I used to try to hang onto the ramps until he would say “Come into the car with me.” He introduced me to sashimi and Japanese foods, which I'd never had before, because he had it in his house. He was not our doctor, but he was just our good friend and neighbor, and he always

welcomed my brother and I into his home. And we got interested in medicine early on, by the way.

Crawford: Because of him?

Wong: Yes. We were curious about it. But that's another story.

Crawford: Who was your doctor? Who was the family doctor?

Wong: I don't remember. I know I had a nana. She was there full time. She had a white uniform—she was Caucasian—white hair, with glasses. There are pictures of Nana holding me as a baby, among other pictures. I remember her very well with fondness.

Crawford: You told me the other day that your paternal great-grandfather was a cowboy who was all dressed up in buckskins.

Wong: Oh yes.

Crawford: And your grandmother was a libber—what a combination!

Wong: Yes! [laughs] Yes, I know that about my great-grandfather only by indirect information from my Uncle Worley, who told me that. And he had a picture, by the way. He had a picture of him with buckskin on.

He says, “Dig this, will ya'?”

And I looked, and I said, “Unbelievable. This is out of sight. What is this?”

He says, “He was a cowboy. And he was carousing with the Indian chicks.”
[laughter]

He said, “Oh yeah, don't think that all the Chinese who came over here were working on the railroad putting spikes down. No way,” he said, “This guy was quite a Lothario.”

Crawford: He was, was he?

Wong: Yes! [laughter]

Crawford: But you don't know what his business was exactly?

Wong: He had told me his grandfather went to Utah, and then he went to Iowa or Kansas. It was one of those Midwestern plain-like states. He was a merchant. He finally got to the West Coast and settled in the Bay Area, and that's all that I can recall. But he was traveling. He said he definitely was not somebody who was just settling down somewhere and being a laborer. He was an

entrepreneurial person, and I guess by osmosis, as I look back, all my grandparents were in business. Because what else could you be into?

Crawford: You mentioned that your grandmother always bought your uncles new cars at Christmas.

Wong: That's right.

Crawford: There would be a new Cadillac right outside the window.

Wong: That's right. My grandmother had a cream-colored Cadillac or La Salle with black trimming on top, and there was a tan uniform, cap and black boots on the chauffeur, who stood by the limo to open and close the doors. Wow. I thought he was a soldier, but I found out he was a chauffeur. There were special seats outfitted for my brother and me in this Cadillac, which we would term as a type of limousine today. I don't think that that word was in usage in those days. I was about five years old.

My personal delight was that on every Christmas morning I would climb over the backside of the couch and peer through the window to see this year's three new cars. They were for my dad, whose name was Henry, and for my older uncle, whose name was William or Willie, and for the second uncle, Worley. All three of them had new cars. An annual event.

Crawford: Did she live in great luxury, your grandmother?

Wong: I didn't view it as such. I took everything for granted, that that's the way we were. I mean, we had anything we wanted, but I don't feel that she flaunted any of her finances on things that she didn't need to. We had the nana, and we had a gentleman named Tom who was always dressed in overalls. He had a little house in the back, wow.

Tom handled all the cars. He did all the maintenance work on all the cars. Then, also, he tended the garden. So those were his jobs. He was there for many years, as I recall.

What's interesting is I knew that we were something special. There are a couple of things in my childhood that indicated that. I said, "We must be a little different from all our neighbors." One was that the driveway for the cars next to the house, to the left, was narrow; it was just wide enough to have the cars go in, and when you passed the house and reached the end of it, there was a turntable. I was so fascinated because I'd never seen that before. The car would hit the big turntable area and would turn around so it could face the street with maximum safety and vision for the driver, because you couldn't do it any other way.

I thought it was fascinating to the extent that I was really into automobiles. If I wanted a present, I always asked for an automobile toy. So they got me and my brother these toys that you could actually pump with your pedals and make them move like a mini-car. [laughs] I would drive it to this turntable and have it turn around and come back out—there was a lot of dramatic play going on there.

Okay, so there was Tom. Then there was an Afro-American lady, and I can't remember her name. She was our baker and pastry maker. She baked our fresh bread every day, and to this day, I don't think I've ever tasted anything better than her chocolate cupcakes. They were the greatest—just absolutely the greatest.

Crawford: What was her name?

Wong: I can't remember her name. I can't remember her name. Damn. And there's nobody alive that I can ask. One of my uncles by marriage might remember.

Crawford: Is that house still there, by the way?

Wong: No. [laughs] I'll tell you what's there. It was sad. They wiped out the entire block and put a BART station there.

Crawford: Which BART station is that?

Wong: That's the one in Oakland, in the East Bay on Eighth Street, right off Oak Street. That was really sad. Of course, they then had to replace the park that was across from it, because that had become part of the BART facility. They took over the property one block west, and there's a city park there now. It's not like the one before, because there were some trees that I loved climbing. I just loved that park.

Crawford: That's what started your interest in science, no doubt.

Wong: Yes—I noticed the magnolias. I loved to watch the magnolias and the seeds and the fruits.

Crawford: Were they like what we call tulip trees or were they the big southern ones?

Wong: The big southern ones. Huge, big magnolias. That's why I have one in my current backyard. But anyway, that was an area that I recalled in the new book that is just out. I have the announcement and invitation for you. It is a play environment. So that's a whole different area.

Crawford: How did your father and mother, Henry Wong and Julia Moy Wong, meet?

- Wong: At Ling Nam University, a highly regarded university in China. I believe it's near what was known at that time as Tientsin, but it's now Beijing. They met there when he was sent by my grandma to get his Chinese university education.
- Crawford: She expected two degrees, one from each country, didn't she?
- Wong: Yes. I think I mentioned that, as I understood it, that was a given: the expectation that to be fully educated you needed to be educated in both an American and a Chinese university and graduate from them, and hopefully with honors. [laughs] Hopefully with honors. Pressure, pressure, pressure! Anyway, my mother was the valedictorian, and my dad was known as the playboy of the campus. [laughs]
- Crawford: Wonder where he got that?
- Wong: Yeah, wonder where he got that. Well, he and his cars and golfing and everything else—he was really one of those people that we read about in history. He was into all kinds of sports. He was a great outdoors sportsman, by the way, and when he became older, he just carried the sports thing into outdoor sports. But he was an excellent basketball player, and excellent baseball player, a rower. And a skater—an ice skater—and my mother was a very good ice skater as well, because those lakes did freeze over.
- When I was at age five, they took me to China for a vacation, and I spent my kindergarten there. Those memories are crystal clear. I remember a lot.
- Crawford: What were they doing then? Your parents.
- Wong: My parents just wanted to take a vacation. You know, they were able to, so they did.
- Crawford: And a whole year?
- Wong: Yes.
- Crawford: Where did you live?
- Wong: We lived in my grandma's house at the time, and then when we went to China, we lived for a little while in Shanghai and Tientsin because that's where my mother had two sisters and two brothers.
- All of them were in China. They had all gone over there to get their education. They never came back, although the uncle, my mother's older of the two brothers, is still alive. Just a few months ago in December, he went back because his family is there, although he has a son here. He came back here only about five years ago, and I had not seen him since I was a little child.

That was Uncle Edward. He earned a masters degree in mathematics from Yale University.

But we stayed with Aunt Marian—there's Aunt Lillian, Aunt Marian, and then there's my mother. That was the way it was in her family. And there was Uncle Edward, and, you know, I can't remember the other uncle's name, but I just remember his Chinese name, Uncle Don.

So we stayed at Marian's home in Shanghai. She was a socialite and very active in the affairs of Shanghai.

I had a wonderful time there as a little tot, and I had my first experience of these vendors that would station themselves in an empty lot and would cook what we would view today as dim sum and some noodles. It was right next to her apartment, because I remember we climbed the stairs. It was a beautiful place. I don't remember what university her husband was in, but he was a professor. A professor and a businessman. His name was Sidney.

Anyway, then we went to Tientsin and to Aunt Lillian's home. She was a university English professor. Now that was very memorable because it was by a university and there was a lake there. My mom and dad—I remember this—went to a costume kind of a masquerade thing, they all had to be in costumes, and they skated. I was watching them.

Then I was taken to my kindergarten every morning by a rickshaw driver. He would bring his rickshaw and wait for my aunt or my mother to open the door to take me out to the rickshaw to go to school. What's special about this rickshaw, I've got to tell you, is that on most rickshaws you just had the seat and had no perks in it. Well, I'm calling them perks because it was a perk as I viewed it. There was a little pedal thing that stuck out so that you could push it and make it ring like a bell.

So we had been moving around with rickshaws, and I noticed that some of them had bells and some of them did not. In fact, there was only one that had a bell. So when it was decided I would go to school, they asked me if there was anything else I needed, and I said, "I want a rickshaw with a bell." [laughter] So they found this man who came every morning to pick me up for school.

Crawford: Oh, that's a great memory.

Wong: Yes, I was five years old. They took me to school, and I have to describe a little bit about this: I was dressed every morning differently from the other kids, and I felt really sensitive about it, because they were in Chinese clothing and I had this Western garb on every day that was totally matching, from cap to coat to sweater to my little pants and my socks.

- Crawford: You really stood out.
- Wong: [Emphatic sigh] [laughter]
- Crawford: Why did your parents insist on that?
- Wong: I don't know, but that's how they outfitted me.
- Crawford: Did the kids make fun of you?
- Wong: No, they just commented. They didn't make fun. No.
- Crawford: You were obviously speaking their language.
- Wong: I was speaking Mandarin. I learned Mandarin, which I can't speak today because of the forgetting curve and disuse, but I was speaking fluently both Cantonese and Mandarin. My mother and everybody else in the family over there used both dialects.
- Crawford: Tell me about their American educations. Where did they get their United States' degrees?
- Wong: My dad went to Stanford and was an x-ray medical doctor.
- Crawford: X-ray? He was a radiologist?
- Wong: Yes. But he never practiced. I knew as I became older that that was one of the biggest disappointments of his life. I should finish [talking about] my dad, and then I'll come to my mother.
- My dad, being the oldest, was obligated to oversee my grandmother's enterprises, and so he was recruited without compromise to take care of all her properties and all her businesses and all the gambling casinos and real estate and whatever the hell else she had. I mentioned to you that she owned all the property that currently is Jack London Square in the city of Oakland—from Seventh Street all the way down to the estuary. That was a heck of a lot of property. Just think of what it would mean today—billions.
- Crawford: So he took that on in the 1930s?
- Wong: We're talking about the '30s into the '40s.
- Crawford: What happened during the Depression?
- Wong: We went through the Depression, and my grandmother lost a lot, which I mentioned to you. Because she did not have the facility of reading or writing, she was taken advantage of, and people sucked money out of her business and

pocketed it without her knowing about it. She was really ripped off in a very major fashion. But she did hold all of these other properties, and that's why, I guess, because she felt not totally adequate, because people were ripping her off, she had to have her son take care of her, because he was a sharp cookie and she figured that he should do it.

So his brothers continued with the pursuits of their careers and professions, while he had to give up his. He never wore the mantle of doctor because he didn't practice and he didn't want to use it. And I understood that.

Crawford: He was sad that he didn't practice?

Wong: Yes. And I think my mother was very conscious of that as well. So anyway, my dad then became a full-blown business person. I think he had an undergraduate major in economics, so he was really into business anyway.

Crawford: Who had wanted him to do medicine?

Wong: Himself.

Crawford: You lived all this time with your grandmother?

Wong: Yes, I was ten years old when we moved from 135 Eighth Street two blocks up to 132 Tenth Street; it was also between Oak and Madison, but just exactly two blocks up. I guess my mom felt that we needed to be our own individual family unit, that it was enough years there with Grandma and everybody else shuttling through there like Grand Central Station. I think it was 1934.

Crawford: So it wasn't too much time before you went to Stockton. What was the reason for the move?

Wong: When my dad found that he couldn't keep making these commute trips between Stockton and Oakland, we decided to move. He had a whole nest of businesses, casinos, and he started to make Stockton his headquarters, because they were going to also expand and open casinos in Lodi. Just before he passed away, he had made preliminary plans to have these casinos in Las Vegas—because he had them in Fresno, Bakersfield, Seattle, Lodi, Stockton, Oakland, San Francisco, and I don't know where else.

Crawford: Fresno, you said.

Wong: Yes.

Crawford: Were these for Chinese clientele primarily?

Wong: Yes.

Crawford: And what did they play in these casinos?

Wong: More stuff than they have in Las Vegas today. It's true. There are more games that they created.

One was about equivalent to Keno today. It's an adaptation of the Chinese lottery. It's purely a Chinese invention, because what is today in your little ticket that has numerals were Chinese ideograms which were used, not literally, but phonetically to make phrases. When people bought a ticket, they didn't just buy it because of isolated words or concepts, they strung words together to make a statement, which is much more poetic and romantic than today—which is just picking numbers, by the way. [laughs] I just wanted to say that, because every time I see these people I say, “Oh, you callous people. You don't know what this really was.” Then they had Pai Gow, which they have right here in Emeryville in these casinos. It's played with little dominoes.

They use the same technique for lottery. I remember there was a big wire basket and they had these ping pong balls and the word would fall out, you know, the word instead of the number. They did that several times a day. Two to three times a day they would have this drawing or whatever it was.

Crawford: Did you go to the casinos?

Wong: Yes. This is interesting, because no minors were allowed.

My mother, when we were in Stockton, developed two careers, because she had never worked before other than having a Chinese language school in Oakland in the house next door to the one that we were renting. She used it for a Chinese language school for all the Chinese-Americans kids. She and a friend of hers became teachers there. But that was the first job that she had ever had in her life. Then she became the principal of the Chinese language school in Stockton, and then she became an Occidental Life Insurance Company agent.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Wong: Well, this will be easy to edit. We'll just let it fly through things—because I do that all the time, myself. Every other day I'm transcribing or taping somebody.

Crawford: That's true. Was your mother working full time?

Wong: She was working in a full-time independent kind of way—of course, on her own time—as a life insurance agent for the C.C. Wing Agency of Occidental Life, which later became TransAmerica.

That came about because Mr. Wing came into Stockton knowing that my mom was there, and my mom was a very prominent person in the Chinese community. She was a giver. She contributed an awful lot, and she was a marvelous organizer. I must bring you a picture of her. She was quite an elegant lady. She also was always dressed to the nines. She had many of her Chinese-flavored outfits. She designed those and had them made in Hong Kong with the fabric that she wanted, and then she would have them sent back here.

Crawford: Did that come from your grandmother?

Wong: No, she started to do that increasingly, while she dressed in Western garb, because she was a Chinese-American. She wasn't wholly into Chinese fashion and attire. But she got into that more because she was involved with Chiang Kai-shek and was drumming up funds for his campaigns in China.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek was a friend of my mom's, and when they had this incredible jade exhibit which had heretofore never come to this country, she was very much involved with the exhibiting of those treasures. I remember that very well, because the exhibit came to Stockton.

When she was asked by Mr. Wing for a referral to somebody who might be a high-potential insurance agent, she said, "Why not me?"

He said, "Oh, I didn't think of that. I didn't think you would want to do that." So she became the first leading woman producer in the history of the company, the first one in the Millionaires Club, and on and on and on—the place was loaded with trophies.

Crawford: Your house?

Wong: Yes. It was just loaded. We had to get rid of them when she passed away, because there was nothing we could do with them.

Crawford: You said that when your father was at Stanford, you didn't see him all that much.

Wong: No. I saw him more in Stockton, of course, but his hours were always so weird because these gambling things went to midnight and one o'clock in the morning. So I didn't see him that often, but I saw him more often than when he was out here in Oakland.

I was going to tell you more about the gambling joints, but that brought me to thinking about my mom.

My mom was the hostess of the On Lock Sam restaurant, which was the Chinese restaurant, a *haute cuisine* restaurant in Stockton Chinatown.

- Crawford: Was that a large Chinese community?
- Wong: It was pretty sizeable. Yes. And that's why she got involved with everything. She was president of Chinese community organizations.
- Crawford: What were your parents' birthdates?
- Wong: 1905. They were born on the same day. April 17. It's unbelievable.
- Crawford: That's perhaps one reason they got together, isn't it?
- Wong: It could have been. They must have had a conversation about it. [laughter] Well, On Lock Sam restaurant was on the second floor. Great memories, by the way. Great memories! But anyway, right downstairs was the headquarters gambling casino club that my dad had, so he was there most of the time.
- There was a guy behind a cage-like thing serving as a gatekeeper, because you couldn't come in unless you had entry—you know, it wasn't just open to anybody to come into this club. And here are these two little dinky boys, you know, and we would look up at this guy and say, "I gotta see my dad." He'd press the buzzer and we could go in and everybody knew that we were Henry's kids, and they'd say, "Oh, your dad's in there." So we'd go in there.
- And, I've got to tell you, I didn't understand all this at the time, but I ultimately worked in that restaurant upstairs for two and a half dollars a night because I wanted the money to buy jazz records. Before that I'd go to visit my dad to get fifty cents for dinner—dinner was thirty-five cents. You would get roast pork, mashed potatoes or rice, with a glass of orange juice on the corner at Lee's Restaurant. We didn't go upstairs to eat.
- Crawford: Oh, you didn't get to eat upstairs?
- Wong: Well, we did once in a while when my mom and dad were there. But he would give us fifty cents, and we wouldn't eat at all; we would save to buy records.
- Crawford: Let's talk about that—I know you started studying classical piano very early.
- Wong: I started out here, and then, when I was in Stockton, I caught the jazz bug. I was still taking piano lessons. My brother was too; he didn't like them, but he had to take them. I was eleven years old, and a box—it was a big box—came, addressed to the gentleman from whom my parents had purchased the home at 329 West Poplar Street in Stockton. Incidentally, the house is still there. It was a two-level house with a basement with a garage that we used as a target-practice place, where we created things for our own amusement.
- Crawford: Because your parents were very busy in those years.

Wong: Very busy, oh yes, very busy. And they were night people, so my brother and I became night people, partially because of the jazz, and partially because that was what was happening. You know, nobody was around, so we'd stay up late. And then the other dominant force was that we had to do homework for our American school and our Chinese school. So, whereas our American-born, Caucasian friends would be playing baseball or having some other recreational outlet, we went to Chinese school until nine o'clock at night.

Crawford: Every day?

Wong: Every day, five to nine. I'd get off school at four o'clock or three-thirty or whatever and I'd begin my Chinese schooling at five o'clock at night. Oh man. And then we would have dinner, and then we would do the homework for both school curricula, which would take us 'til about two o'clock in the morning. Then, of course, that's when I heard the remotes of the broadcasts of the big bands from the Rose Room or the Blue Room or the Hotel Pennsylvania with Artie Shaw.

Crawford: So you were listening to the radio?

Wong: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

Crawford: You must have been a good student.

Wong: Yeah, we were A students. We had to be. Whenever there was something like a B-minus—oh, we wouldn't hear the last of it. “What do you mean you got a B-minus?! What is this? Have you been goofing off or what?” [laughter] Oh yeah.

But to finish the box thing. The box came full of records. My brother said, “Oh, what the hell. Let's open it up.” So we opened it up, and it had all these wonderful 78s with Count Basie, Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. We said, “Hey, wow.” So we put one on our record player, and he said, “Hey, listen to this, will ya?”

That's when I asked my mom to get me a jazz piano teacher. After some travail, they found somebody in a cocktail lounge, and the gentleman's name was Joe Mello. Joe was a very amiable, jolly gentleman, rather heavy and with glasses, and his fingers were fatter than usual because he was a fat man, but he was really great.

The first thing he showed me was “Bye Bye Blues.” He said, “Now I'm going to teach you the chord changes to this thing.” So I learned them, and I played “Bye Bye Blues” until I wanted to say goodbye forever to that tune. [laughter] Anyway, long story short, about six or seven months after that, I told my mother that I would like her to tell Mr. Mello that I didn't need him any longer. She didn't understand why, and I just said, “Well, I don't think I can

learn much more from him. I've learned the chord progressions, I think I know how to improvise, and I've got it down, Mom, so cool it, you know, just have him split and I'm moving on."

So I then started to amass a collection, but we didn't know what it was going to be, because we were just absolutely obsessed with it.

I was in the sixth grade, I believe, when I moved to Stockton—fifth or sixth. High fifth, they used to call it, low fifth and high fifth, yes. Anyway, by the time this record thing occurred and I got into jazz music, I was reading what I could find, and I didn't find literature on jazz. There was no literature on jazz. There was a magazine which is still celebrated today—I became a contributing editor in some future time—and that was *Down Beat* magazine. *Down Beat* magazine was my bible.

In class when they had free reading time, we were supposed to go up and pick up one of the periodicals the teacher had for us, so I would go up, [laughs] and I would pick up the biggest magazine I could find—it was *Boys Life*, it was huge—and I would put the smaller *Down Beat* magazine inside the *Boys Life* magazine and would be totally engrossed in what I was reading.

Well, during one of these free reading periods, I didn't notice it but the teacher had come around the back of me and noticed that I had this magazine inside of the bigger magazine. So I said to myself, "Oh gosh, he's going to call on me first to share. I know it. So, look, I've gotta be honest; I've got to tell him what I'm thinking about, what I'm reading about."

So he said, "Well, Herbert, you're first." I started talking about Billie Holiday, because that's what I was reading about, it was a report of one of her gigs. So I talked, and then we always had a question and answer period, and this one kid raised his hand and said, "Well, who is this Billy guy and so on?"

I said, "No, it's a she. It's Billie Holiday. She's a singer."

And then, "Who's this guy named Bird?" [laughs]

"Well," I said, "it's not a real bird," I said. "It's just a nickname for a saxophone player."

"Then there was this duke, Duke Ellington," he says. "Is he a royal person or something like that?"

I said, "Yes, he's of the jazz royalty."

"Oh, we don't understand what you're saying, Herb." Or Herbert at the time—or they called me Herbie, then.

I found out later that this teacher was a very tolerant person who was interested in music. It was Weber School in Stockton, and it was only two and half blocks from our home.

We were only the second Chinese-American family in that entire sector of the city, and when we moved in with our moving van and our car—cars, we had two cars—over two hundred people lined up and were ogling in silence at what was being moved out of the moving van into the home. Nobody said anything; they just stood there and watched us.

Crawford: Because you were unusual?

Wong: Yes. Because we were unusual. They wanted to see what this family was like. Nobody spoke to us for a long while.

Crawford: Was that discrimination?

Wong: That was discrimination. Oh yeah. Oh, definitely. They were just standing there, talking to each other, and we were wondering what the hell was going on.

Crawford: Nobody greeted you or invited you over?

Wong: Nobody greeted us. No.

Crawford: Did you feel lonely being without your extended family?

Wong: Yes, but it was quickly overcome, because I got into the school thing. The reason I mentioned Lincoln School several times was that Lincoln School in Oakland was 99 percent Chinese, and here I'm in a different environment.

Crawford: That had to be hard.

Wong: It was different, yes, and, you know, we got into some physical fights when people started calling us names and using little noxious phrases as epithets. My brother, who was two and a half years younger than I am, is a real feisty, intolerant, no-holds-barred guy.

Crawford: That's Woody?

Wong: Yes. And when I was picked on, boy I'm telling you, he was in there in a scrap. He took care of them.

Crawford: He took care of both of you.

Wong: Yes. He was something else.

Crawford: How long were you in Stockton?

Wong: I stayed there five years. I couldn't stand the heat. I hated it. A hundred and twelve in the shade going to school is not a way of being conductively motivated, you know? Who wants to be in that kind of weather? So I couldn't wait to get out.

But I was making trips anyway to the Bay Area. I would get on the train. My mom didn't mind. I was twelve years old. I took a train to come out to Oakland to see my grandma and go to the T&D Theater, go to the Orpheum Theater in Oakland, go to the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco. I remember this: The T&D Theater, on Eleventh Street between Broadway and Franklin, was where bands would come to play.

I saw the Nicholas Brothers, the great tap dancers, I saw Jimmy Dorsey and his orchestra vocalists with Helen O'Connell and Bob Eberly. "Oh, god," I said, "Look at Bob Eberly's hair. What a beautiful guy." But anyway, my brother would come every once in a while because I'd infected him.

Crawford: There was much more here than in Stockton.

Wong: Oh no. There was plenty there, too. But here I would buy a seat—it was only eleven cents—and we'd go down, or I would, alone, to the front row, and they would have a cowboy movie, a cartoon, a serial, a main feature, and I'd say, "Come on!" And then they would have fifty minutes to an hour of the band, whatever the live thing was, and that's what I went for.

So I would catch these bands, and the greatest band—though I didn't know it at the time—was at the Orpheum Theater on Broadway, four blocks up. I saw the Count Basie Orchestra when they had the historically greatest Basie band. They had Lester Young on tenor saxophone.

Students in my classes say, "God, you saw Lester Young?"

I said, "Yeah, at that period. At that pivotal period—not just later."

And Jimmy Rushing, the blues singer. I didn't understand his lyrics. [singing] "Mr. Five by Five. Five feet tall and five feet wide." Okay? It was named after him. Jimmy died about ten years ago, but he was the greatest.

Crawford: So you were involved in the early blues scene here?

Wong: Well, he was a blues singer with a jazz band. Basie's band had Harry Sweets Edison, the lone survivor of that band, who I booked in last summer, 1997, in June to open up my series at Stanford Shopping Center. I told Harry I saw him when I was just a little kid at the Orpheum Theater in 1938 and he says, "No!

You can't be that old." I said, "Well, I saw you." "Wow." So, anyway, that is a magnificent memory, because the man has been touted historically.

Then I mentioned the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco. That was where Lionel Hampton's big band was. Whoo! That was great. Anyway, those were the earlier days.

Then my brother and I would go to the Oakland Civic Auditorium on Tenth Street, which was near our house when we were living there. But we went there later too—we'd come back out and go there—and there was Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five. Wow! We were nuts about Louis Jordan. We heard that he was going to be in Oakland, so we came out.

You've got to picture this. We're standing in line with a lot of black people, and finally we're by the ticket seller. He was a big, big black guy, and he looks down at these two little kids, you know, and he says, "What are you kids doing here?"

I said, "Louis Jordan! 'It's a Low Down Dirty, Dirty Shame', 'I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town', and 'Five Guys Named Moe'." And I just rattled off all these things. So we go in, and we walk in there, and—[whistles]. All these people are jitterbugging.

Crawford: Dressed up?

Wong: All dressed up in zoot suits and all this, and there's nobody in there that's not black. There's no whites in there. It's just we two non-blacks.

So we got onto the dress circle, stage right, overlooking the band; then later we migrated down to the front to the apron to look right at them. And we were in seventh heaven, because he was dressed—Louis Jordan and his band—were dressed in very big shoulder pads, a chartreuse sports jacket, a purple shirt, orange pants, and pink shoes. Then his tie was multicolored and went down from the knot to the floor, like an old Phil Silvers thing. And there we were watching this thing. "Wow! What a show!"

Then he would sing tunes that we knew all the lyrics to, but he would stretch out. We didn't understand this yet—it was a live gig, it was open, and these guys were stretching out and playing more choruses than what was on the 78 disk, which was only less than three minutes.

Crawford: A new world for you. The sense of expansion.

Wong: Yes, that was really interesting.

Crawford: And your mother and father didn't care that you were out at night like that?

Wong: Yeah, they knew that we were good kids. They really knew that.

Crawford: Did you think of becoming a jazz pianist?

Wong: I was interested in it.

Crawford: Did you have the talent?

Wong: Well, I couldn't improvise as well. I knew that. But I was interested in it.

Another one we chased around was Nat King Cole. Nat Cole had a trio in the early 1940s, and he came to Stockton and we went to see him. After that I'd go to a record shop and say, "I want to buy some King Cole Trio records."

"King who? We don't have anybody like that."

So, finally I found a store that carried the King Cole Trio records, because, you see, he was recording on what was known as the "race records." Sepia Records; it said Sepia on the seal. I befriended a lady who was in the hardware section at the department store that had a record department. That's where you went to get records. They didn't have record stores. They were in hardware stores or department stores.

So the lady let me go in the stacks, and that's how I found these records by the King Cole Trio. I explained to her about Sepia records and she said, "Oh, I wonder how we got those." "Well, nevertheless," I said, "I want them all." [laughs]

Crawford: How did you have the money to buy them?

Wong: Oh, we mowed lawns, we sold Christmas cards. After school, in the summer, we would pick tomatoes, plant celery, hoe potatoes, pick cherries, whatever. Cherries were thirty-five cents a bucket, tomatoes—we'd get a big fifty cents an hour for picking tomatoes—and likewise for planting celery root out in that 100-plus-degree sun. But every time an hour passed by, [claps] I said, "I've got another record!" Can you believe this? [laughs] I got another record.

Crawford: You knew them all by heart, I know.

Wong: Oh yeah, the game. I haven't talked about that yet. But anyway, that, and then later on I was a bus boy at On Lock Sam, as I mentioned to you, for two and a half dollars a night.

Crawford: That was a lot of records. What was the cost of a 78?

Wong: A 78 on a Blue Decca label was 37 cents, which included tax. On a Black Decca it was 55 cents. For an RCA Victor, it was 55 cents, a Blue Seal

Bluebird was 37 cents—that was a subsidiary label. Let's see, Okeh was a purple label that was 37 cents, and a regular Red Seal Columbia was 55 cents. That's what they were.

It was just last night in my class in Palo Alto that I mentioned that. I'm doing the history of drummers in the Swing Era years, and I got to George Wettling, who played with Artie Shaw, Bunny Berrigan, Eddie Condon. I told them, "The best examples are in the Commodore Jazz Classics Recordings. Now, they were really expensive—the ten-inch was a dollar twenty-five. You may not be able to appreciate that. A dollar twenty-five. And the twelve-inchers were a dollar fifty, to a dollar seventy-five, and there was only one place in the Bay Area that you could buy them. It was at Tillman Place in San Francisco."

One of the students later says, "How the hell do you remember all this?" [laughter] I said, "I don't know. I just remember."

Crawford: Define what you mean by race records, would you?

Wong: Race records were records that were designed by the record industry to cater to black Americans in the South and the Southeast, Southwest. You couldn't find them. They were for their jukeboxes. So they were records that were obscurely known by the general record-buying public of America. The record labels were designated hopefully to sell to the black audience.

Crawford: And they were cheaper?

Wong: Yes, they were 37-cent ones.

Crawford: At what point did you decide that you would come to Berkeley and decide to apply to Berkeley?

Wong: Well, that was after I was in high school. I was designated to go to Berkeley or Stanford. One of the two.

Crawford: By your parents?

Wong: That's right. There was nothing else. "That's where you're going."

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Wong: I guess it was a soft-spoken mandate. That's the way to put it. My mom had told me that my dad was a little disappointed that I'd chosen Cal instead of Stanford, because he was such a rabid Stanford fan, you won't believe. That's

all he ever talked about. I mean, the Big Game came, and just look out for him! [laughter]

So, anyway, my Uncle Worley came to Cal, and [Campanile sounds in background] got an alumni award, so I thought I might get into architecture like he did, and then he dissuaded me.

Crawford: Why?

Wong: He said, “This is a tough, tough profession. I really don't think you ought to be really serious about that.”

I said, “Really?” We had long talks about it, and he said, “I just think that it is just too rigorous.” He said, “It is really tough out there in this world of architecture. I know you've got these talents,” because I got A's in drawing and sketching and all that, and I loved it.

Crawford: And you'd done a lot of science by then, I assume.

Wong: Yes, I had a lot of science, too. I loved biology.

I forgot to tell you that when I was eleven years old—ten and a half or eleven years old—and I got turned on to the jazz thing, within six months I got turned on to the outdoor environment, because I would accompany my dad or my dad's aide—his name was Shorty. He was a Japanese man who was a great sportsman, but he was like a handyman, too. He did all kinds of things around our house in Stockton and would drive my dad around. But he was a great fisherman. That's why my dad found him as a companion.

So I would go with them, and I would get bored with just sitting, waiting for fish. I would get curious and I would start exploring by saying, “Oh, I'm going to be over there somewhere,” you know, in another part of the marsh or lake or whatever, wherever we were, because there were a lot of streams and lakes and things. We went into the Sierras, we went into all kinds of counties and lakes for black bass and trout, mainly. Mainly black bass and trout, because we would catch other species as well.

One time I saw all these frogs, which turned out to be the species Red-Legged Frog. There were just—I couldn't count that many. So I started chasing them. They would submerge themselves in this muddy area, and I would try to catch them. I would get my hands into the mud and try to find them, you know, and I had a ball. So I was really into frogs.

And I've got to tell you this anecdote! After another trip, we brought some frogs back and I was observing them at home, and my dad said, “We're going to go and get bullfrogs next time. Put up at the end of a stick a little red flag, and they'll jump at it, and you can catch them.”

So I went frogging with him. Well, I found it so fascinating, because I kept watching their habits, and watching them feed, and that lightning, darting tongue of the frogs catching insects. I wanted to find out more about them.

I knew that a sharing day was coming up, and it was my turn. I was in the sixth grade then—high sixth at Weber School. So I brought my thing to share, and it was a frog, okay? I don't remember the teacher's name. I think that's why I get a block on her, because I didn't want to remember her. You'll see why.

I said, "I want to share my frog." So I pulled out a bullfrog. This teacher shrieked and said, "Don't you dare bring a critter like that into my classroom!" She was really angry. I think she was frightened, to look back at it, she was frightened.

I said, "Well, I just thought I'd bring it to share because I went on a trip with my dad, and this is the experience that I shared, and I wanted to see if we could find out more about them."

She said, "No, I want you to take that home right away." So she was rebuffing me, you know?

I said, "No, I'm not going to do that until I do one more thing." And I ran to the cloak closet in the back of the classroom and I brought this gunnysack to the front of the classroom.

I said, "I have a frog for every one of my classmates." Then I had a special bag inside the other one, and I said, "And this one I got especially for you. It's the biggest frog I've got in my sack."

I attribute her negativism about this whole situation, about organisms, to the fact that I was forced to find out more for myself. It became a self-exploratory discovery process. I went back to the natural environment and I started really studying the frogs and reading about them.

While I was doing that, I noticed something more challenging, and that was that I would hear the sounds of birds, I would see them go by, and I couldn't figure out what they were. I couldn't figure out what they were if I heard them unless I saw them after they were singing, or saw them singing. So I thought that was really challenging, and I got turned on to birds.

Now listening to birds is like listening to solos by jazz musicians, because there's a pattern of dynamics, and you can actually sketch the flow of a bird call, just as you can with an improvisation, with notes and signs. So those two things became the two most engrossing hobbies of mine—life interests.

It was about this time that I got started writing. I became a kind of an amateur journalist, if you will. I got so interested in jazz that I noticed the church paper—I went to the Chinese Methodist Church, which was next to the Chinese Language School. A lot of my classmates were there, and they attended church, so I wanted to attend church.

I noticed that their weekly newsletter was named “Fiat Lux,” and on the back page were some things that I didn't think were very pertinent; they seemed like they were kind of castaways.

So I said to the minister, I said, “You know, I have a proposition to make. I've noticed the back page of the newsletter doesn't have too many important things on it some of the time. If you ever could give me some space on it, I could write about music.”

So, a couple of weeks later he said, “I want to talk to you. I've been thinking about your proposition. I have a plan that goes along with your proposal, and I have one for you to think about. I will give you the whole full back page to do whatever you want to write about in music if you will play piano for my Sunday school group.” I said, “You've got a deal.” [laughs]

So I did it. I had a column called “Beatin' It Out with Herb”, and looking back, I would never have guessed that I would be an international jazz critic. Never. But that's when I started writing. I was very interested in writing.

I used to tell my brother that the power of vocabulary is unmeasured. I said, “You've got to learn about it,” because all the time I kept telling him new words. Every day I'd say, “Here's another word. Now, here's the different ways you can use this word.”

He said, “Give me some words that will help me fight back people who are giving me a bad time.” He would ask me those kinds of things, you know, like words for returning insults, because he probably was getting flack. He said, “I want to say some things to them and make them stand on end or something and wonder what I'm saying.” So I would give him words like contumacious or something like that.

Crawford: By this time you were accepted in school?

Wong: Oh, yes. I was president of my class in my elementary school. Yes, I was out there. In fact, my brother was president of the student body at school.

Crawford: So the exclusion that you felt at first passed.

Wong: Oh, no, not in school. We just melded in.

Crawford: And the neighborhood as well?

- Wong: Oh, yes, yes. Across the street was Carney Campion. You hear his name once in a while on the radio because he's the general manager of the Golden Gate Bridge. He used to come over and listen to my jazz records. So he was across the street.
- Crawford: You were a disc jockey at this point, too, I think.
- Wong: Was I?
- Crawford: Yes, you were. You had something going at school.
- Wong: Let's see.
- Crawford: You even had a little contract I read about.
- Wong: Oh! I'm glad you mentioned this to me. I'd forgotten about this. Oh, yes. You asked earlier about how I got my money to buy records, and I told you some of the ways, right?
- Crawford: Yes.
- Wong: That was as enterprising as I could get until I found this one. I got a little portable sound system, and I had a little business. I hired myself out to record hops, and the deal was I could partake of the refreshments if there were any. Second, I had full control of the selection of the music; nobody tells me what to play. Third, I would dance with the girls who would allow me to dance with them. And all this was under a written contract and paid five bucks. [laughter]
- Crawford: Were you as interested in girls as you were in jazz?
- Wong: Well, I must have been somewhat, yes, you know, reaching puberty. I must have. I liked to dance. Swing, yes.
- Crawford: So you were very entrepreneurial there.
- Wong: Yes, I was entrepreneurial, yes. And so I would tank the money away to buy more records. This is crazy, isn't it? I keep buying more records.
- Crawford: Did your parents give you spending money? Was that part of the tradition?
- Wong: They gave me spending money when I wanted it, but we never asked for anything unless we were going to go to the carnival, and my dad would give me fifty cents or seventy-five cents and we'd get in for twenty-five cents and we wouldn't go on a ride, we wouldn't do any games, and we'd take the fifty cents back and buy a record. [laughter] Can you believe this?

- Crawford: Yes! One thing we should cover is your grandmother and her losses, business losses. I'm not sure when that was. You said she lost these great tracts of land.
- Wong: Yes, she lost the real estate at what is now Jack London Square in Oakland. I think it was in the early thirties.
- Crawford: How did that come about?
- Wong: I don't know. I really don't know. I just know that it was by somebody practicing illegal things and cheating her—that's the word. She was cheated out of it. She was conned. There are so many parts to this thing.
- Crawford: Did your father oversee everything until his death?
- Wong: His death.
- Crawford: And when did he die?
- Wong: 1951. He was forty-six or forty-seven—I'll have to check on it, because it's here in the Mountain View Cemetery. You know, the whole family is there.
- Crawford: And your mother moved back to this area?
- Wong: My mother moved back to Oakland, yes. She couldn't take it any longer, living in Stockton without him. So it became a second home. We had another home there which was a nicer home than the Poplar Street one. He died of coronary thrombosis. He had no early signs of anything. It was in his forties. My mom just went nuts.
- Crawford: They had been a very close couple.
- Wong: Yes.
- Crawford: And by that time, of course, you were here.
- Wong: I was out here. I was already teaching on my first assignment, on my very first job in Oakland.
- Crawford: Would you talk about Berkeley and what you studied?
- Wong: I have a lot to say about Berkeley. I love Cal, okay? There was so much more open space than there is now. I loved that, the interstitial spaces that were here that contributed to my psychological climate. I also loved the emphasis on high academics. There was always so much going on with the arts and sciences.

I remember Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond played at Wheeler Hall for fifty cents, and Cal Tjader was in that group. I don't think there were more than thirty people at Wheeler for that concert. I couldn't believe it.

Crawford: What were the politics like in the forties?

Wong: Well, I came here for three quarters, including a summer quarter at age—just sixteen and a half. I graduated high school a year ahead of my class, so I took three years instead of four.

Crawford: Did Chinese School go all the way through high school?

Wong: Yes, I had graduated from Chinese School.

Crawford: What a big burden.

Wong: A big burden.

Crawford: Did you ever rebel? Did you ever say to your folks, “I can't do this.”

Wong: No, we didn't. And at the same time, I was very active in the Hi-Y [YMCA], and the church—as I mentioned to you, I played piano at the church. And I played basketball for a Hi-Y team, the “Chi-Knights.” We would also go out to the farms on our bikes to find work, like picking cherries. You know, bike fifteen miles at a time. [laughs] Wow.

I would go down to where they employed farm hands—I was just a kid, remember this, I'm just a kid. Then I was maybe fourteen. I would sign up at this place. It was this place where you looked to find out what kind of farming was on for the day and how many people they needed, and what kind of truck was going to transport them.

So I'd go out there, and I'd find the truck to go out on a job. They'd tell you whether it was forty cents an hour or fifty cents an hour. I would hop on a truck—and I'll never forget this—I got on this truck, and there were nothing but big black guys. And here's this little Chinese-American kid here. This one was to hoe beets, I think it was. Oh man! The peat dirt out there is so bad. I mean, I was a mess. These guys would teach me how to do the work, how to handle the tool more efficiently.

But anyway, I did that I don't know how many days. I would go down there two days, three days, whatever I could take, and my body would just be so worn and tired that I would come back and show my brother. I'd say, “Look. This is what I brought back for today. Four dollars. This is great, eh?”

Anyway, there was a whirlwind of activities, and I could meet the discipline out here for academic challenges. It was, Hey, so you stay up til three o'clock, four o'clock, who cares, you know? I'm used to it. So that was fine.

Crawford: It wasn't too hard for you, then?

Wong: No. And now I don't have to go to Chinese School anymore. Hey, that was great.

Crawford: Chinese School was always in Mandarin?

Wong: No, it was Cantonese, and Mandarin was part of the curriculum.

Crawford: Did you study Chinese at UC?

Wong: I took Mandarin here. I took eight units. Obviously, it was an easy A. [laughs]

Crawford: What did you find at Berkeley? What was going on?

Wong: I found that there was more than I could ever sample. In fact, I have made this statement to people a number of times in different settings and schools and workshops and things. I said I was so enamored with what Cal offered that I was looking at a catalogue and I said, "Geez, I'll never get out of here."

And my mom and dad were always asking me, "When were you thinking of graduating?"

I said, "I don't know. And I really don't care."

They said, "What do you mean you don't care?"

I said, "I'm not in a hurry to go get whatever I'm going to wind up to be. I don't know what that is either."

And what I found at Cal was that there was so much to offer here, that it would take me over a hundred years to get all the courses I wanted. So it took me a while.

Crawford: How long?

Wong: I don't know. I got out in '49. And I had come back after World War II, like all the veterans that were here, which was a whole different scene, too. It was a different scene before I went, because already the war was going on, and there were all these V12 and V7 guys and A12 guys—all these programs—and I didn't volunteer for those, by the way, because I always wanted to be in the air force. I wanted to be a navigator in the air force because I took pre-flight aeronautics, and I wanted to be on a plane.

Crawford: And that's what you did?

Wong: No, it didn't happen. I volunteered and took a test, but one eye was 20/20 and the other was 20/25, and they turned me down. They said I could come back after I had corrected it.

It took eight months and I went to a doctor, I don't know how many times a week, but I paid him for it, and I had relaxing exercises, and I got it down to 20/20.

The induction or recruiting session where I was stationed happened to be, by the way, in Stockton, of all places. So I went back to Stockton, and my mom and I went to the airfield, wherever that was, to take my exam again. I passed, I was 20/20, far out. Man, that was beautiful.

After they told me I passed and everything, a brigadier general came into the office. It's indelible in my memory. He said something to the effect, "As of 0700 this morning, all recruiting has been suspended." So I made it and I didn't make it. I said, "Oh, hell, I'm screwed!" Because I had forsaken the aforementioned campus options for officer candidate school.

I was really disappointed—everything I was doing was to avoid getting into the infantry because I knew that I wasn't going to live through that, not a good chance. But now I had to be just another G.I. I couldn't go to officer's training on the campus and go to school like all these guys were doing. The time had lapsed, and this was my last option. I was going to be eighteen, and I was going to be drafted. And I was. I got my draft orders. So I had to leave town.

Crawford: When was that?

Wong: 1944.

Crawford: You would have been a sophomore, maybe.

Wong: Yes, I was. I was just an early sophomore, because they gave credit including the summer. So I had finished the summer, and I got drafted in August.

I said to myself, "How am I going to beat this rap?" I heard that they had an audio test, an audio discrimination test, at the reception center at Fort Ord. So on the train down to the induction center, I brought my morse code, and I kept looking at it, kept going through it.

And, by the way, I remember this—I was sitting next to a black fellow who was also drafted and was going there, and we got into a talk about Count Basie, and we went through a whole thing about "One O'Clock Jump." I don't know how that came back, but anyway, there it is. [laughs]

I went down there, and we went through whatever the rigors were—physicals and things—and I took this test as part of the routine of various kinds of exams.

Well, a couple of days afterwards, we were lined up going through—there were guys with desks and sergeants behind them—and when it was my turn, this guy looks up at me and says, “How would you like to go to school?”

I said, “School? Sure!” I said, “You bet.” I said, “I don't care what kind of school.” [laughter] That means it's going to be delaying my getting into that other thing, you see.

So he said, “You scored the highest in our audio discrimination test, so we're going to send you to radio communications school. What do you think of that?”

I said, “I love it.” Then I and ten other recruits were told that we were going to go on a train east. We didn't know where we were going; they wouldn't tell us, of course.

And at this point I need to tell you I won't forget this; it's very much in my memory. We were in this car for, I don't know, maybe a couple of days, maybe three days, and I don't know where we were, but I know it was getting hot. The train stopped at some place, and they asked me to come out of the train. They took me to another part of the train which was a cattle car, and they told me that that was where I was going to be, that I was going to sleep in the cattle car and have my food brought to the cattle car. I mean, it was really smelly, right?

I asked, “How come I'm here alone?” He says, “It's orders.”

“What are you saying?” “It's orders.”

So I was in there for maybe two or three days, and I couldn't stand it. Then I was put back on the regular train. In retrospect we might have been in some Southwestern state—Texas, maybe. My perception is that it had a connection with racial discrimination.

Finally we came to the destination, which was the state of Kansas. It was Junction City, Kansas, and we were transferred to Fort Riley, Kansas. I was assigned for the first time—I didn't even know where I was going—to the mechanized cavalry.

I said, “The mechanized cavalry? What the hell is that?” “Well, it's better than the horse cavalry. You won't have to have stable police duty, shoveling horse shit.”

I said, "Oh, all right. I'll go for the mechanized cavalry." "Well, it's tanks and trucks and weapons carriers and all that."

So that's what I did. I spent seventeen weeks at basic training there, and they made me squad leader because they knew that I had university R.O.T.C. training here at Cal. I have to thank Cal for that, too, you know, because that helped to save me from some other misery—

[End Tape 2, Side A]

Interview 2: March 4, 1998

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

Crawford: We were talking about your career at UC.

Wong: I came in 1944 and matriculated three semesters when they were on a tri-semester year basis through the summer of 1944, and then I was drafted. Remember, I talked about that.

Crawford: You did.

Wong: And throughout the campus I would say that you would see all these uniforms. This place was dotted with olive green for the army A12 program students and the V7 navy students, and I think there was a sprinkling of air force people, but mainly the army and navy, as I recall. I mean, guys all over the place here.

I think I discussed something about the liberal amount of open space that was here. It was so refreshing.

Crawford: Yes, talk about that as you see it today.

Wong: As I see it today, compared to the past, this is congestion. This is full of man-made buildings having a battle with the natural environment and parts of naturalistic environments. The two are distinguishable—those that are native plants and those that are introduced species that are not normally here but were planted by buildings and grounds or somebody—whereas in the past you could look out a window and see a completely different landscape than what we see now. I mean, I'm looking at tall, multi-level buildings—very tall buildings—as if I were in an asphalt canyon. Now, that's still a battle. I haven't visited Strawberry Canyon for a while, but I hope that's preserved with the chaparral and live oak communities.

Crawford: How did you use the spaces?

Wong: Hmm?

Crawford: How did you personally use the open space?

Wong: I used it for my personal refreshment, because the natural environment is something—I think I mentioned this when talking about my childhood—that I was connected with it. I was very conscious of the plant and animal life, and I would study outside more than I would be at the library because I could hear different things.

Crawford: You're an ornithologist.

Wong: Yes. I was very interested, and I would take walks up to Strawberry Canyon and have a pretty good idea of what my own personal census was as opposed to what the species list might be in various seasons, because it would change. Besides permanent resident species, there were the visiting summer visitants, winter visitants. So I was always excited to see what was going to arrive on this campus. And because there was such a diversity of habitats, you could see dozens of different things.

Later on, when I had my valued tutelage in a course in the zoology department in vertebrate zoology, I was very fortunate to have a Dr. Alden Miller who was one of the world's most renowned ornithologists to be my instructor. Boy, was I lucky. I find it interesting to recall, because I remember he was telling a small group of us when we were in Bay Farm Island in Alameda—I remember this distinctly—which is, of course, fully developed with homes now, but there were salt marshes and flats out there then—he said this was the Mecca for shorebirds in western America.

When we went on walks, he would imitate the calls to the accuracy level that you couldn't distinguish the authentic call from what he did with his whistles and sounds. I found out that he had, early on, a choice of two careers: one, to be an operatic singer because his pitch was perfect, absolutely right on the nose, or to be an ornithologist. He chose ornithology.

Crawford: Very, very close subjects in a way, isn't it?

Wong: Yes. This is why I remember it, because he was a musician.

Crawford: Perfect pitch for birds.

Wong: Perfect pitch, yes. I could tell he really had it. It wasn't just somebody working at it as an amateur. He was a professional. He really—

Crawford: Did he sing?

Wong: Yes, he sang. Yes. And that's why he could imitate songs and bird calls as if he were a singer.

Crawford: And so you spent a great deal of time with him and otherwise.

Wong: Well, as much as I could, because that's when I really got turned on on this campus, was through that one course in vertebrate zoology, because I had him and I had Bob Stebbins, the herpetologist of world-renowned reputation. Boy, was I lucky. I learned so much about amphibians and reptiles from him.

I must say something about Bob Stebbins. He was another remarkable man who was interested in improving elementary science education all the way up. He is the authority on herpetology in western America. His books are the

definitive major references that he's had. And I was also lucky because he was one of my doctorate committee members.

Crawford: Oh, is that right?

Wong: Then a third thing I went on to see: He was helpful to me as we collaborated on science education pilot programs when I was principal of the university laboratory school here at Washington Elementary.

Crawford: So he was a mentor for a long number of years.

Wong: Yes. He was interested, and he was developing units of courses of study for a program that was called ESS—Elementary School Science Series—that professors here on this campus were contributing to the national picture. These lab schools, of course, were the experimental testing grounds. So again, I had another interaction with him, followed by the fact that he was on the editorial committee of UC Press in their natural history series, and he was on the committee to approve the book that I co-authored with Dr. Matthew Vessel of San Jose State University, *The Natural History of Vacant Lots*. So Bob Stebbins again came into my life.

Crawford: Were you involved in politics on the campus? Or did you join a fraternity?

Wong: No, I didn't. And, you know, Chinese-Americans were not allowed to join fraternities here.

Crawford: Is that a fact?

Wong: Did you know that?

Crawford: That was written?

Wong: None of us of our ancestry were permitted to be accepted.

Crawford: Shocking.

Wong: You bet! I resented that. I resent that—

Crawford: Would you have joined?

Wong: I probably would have, because I felt that the fellowship—just as there was, you know, at YMCA or other youth organizations—I thought here would be an enrichment dimension of campus life. I was excised from that.

Crawford: Was that just accepted?

Wong: Well, they had a Chinese fraternity, but I don't remember what the name of it was, because I wasn't really very active in it because I thought it was too skewed. I think that is another topic. Sooner or later I might want to talk about that. I've never been an advocate of having a pure, isolated enclave of institutional memberships in organizations.

So, then, my activities for the rest of the years up to now has been minimal in my participation with Chinese-American organizations—only when they happen to call me for certain things to participate or contribute. But I've never really been active in it as many of my classmates up here were. They were gung ho in it. But I knew that there was this fraternity, and I said they're not really involved with the full threads of the fabric of the university life, and so to me that was a token alternative. That wasn't enough for me. So it's either all or nothing at all, just like the tune.

Crawford: And there was nothing you could do.

Wong: No, there was nothing. I wasn't empowered to do anything on that. I knew that was a fact.

Crawford: Well, so then you came back to campus after your service?

Wong: Yes, I came back. First off, when I was on campus originally, I was a pre-med because my dad wanted me to get involved with that. Then, when I came back, we discussed that just a little bit, and I said, "I don't think that's what I want to do." So I went into pre-dental, and then I found that that's not what I wanted to do. That's why I was here so long. I couldn't get out of here. I wasn't eager to get out, anyway, as I told you before.

Crawford: You weren't here long, though. You graduated in '49.

Wong: Yes, I wasn't here long, but boy did I take a lot of stuff. But I came back, you know, I came back. I was always here.

I came back to get my teaching credential. That's another whole story, which leads up to the rest of my career in a sense, because when I graduated, it was in zoology. Prior to that, as I said, pre-med, pre-dental, physiology—what was the other one? [laughs] I kept changing, because I'd say, "Oh, I really dig this. God, this is exciting." Then I'd find out something about some other whole area and say, "Oh, I want to get into that." So I'd get into that and say, "Well, I don't want to be a professional in that. I think there's something else for me, but I don't know what that is yet." But I was always—

Crawford: That's remarkable that you liked so many things.

Wong: Well, you see, that is why I think that it spurred me to explore other horizons, and I didn't know what, but fortuitously, when I got so involved with natural

history that one summer after I had—No, it was '49. That's right it was. Forty-nine, '50, right in that time. And this is very pivotal in my life stream. I said, “You know, I've been studying and working here on this campus all these years. I think I ought to do something just a little different, even though it might be still course work,” because I was eager, I was just hungry for more background.

What I did was I got—let's see—I got a Golden Gate Audubon Society Scholarship to the first of several Audubon camps. The first one organized was in California. Later they had them in Maine, they had them in different parts of the country. But the very first one was up at Donner Summit area, Soda Springs.

Crawford: Was that a course?

Wong: Yes. It was a several-week course. That was my first part of the summer, and I met there—a couple of things happened to me: One, I met these fantastic profs that were 80-90 percent graduates with doctorate degrees from Cornell University. Now, I had learned a little bit about Cornell before. I knew that that university was a center for nature education, because most of the leaders in the history of natural history and nature education come from that environment of Cornell University because of certain people that were there: E.L. Palmer, the father of nature education, or their laboratory of ornithology—Arthur H. Allen, the ornithologist.

In my studies here at Cal, I learned about some of these people over there. So, suddenly, here I meet these younger guys that were from there, and they were fabulous teachers. I found out that they were faculty members of San Jose State. I said, “Wow. How about that?” Anyway, I got so tied in with them on some of the trips, although I'd never been in that environment, that I ended up leading field trips for other campers that were there.

Then I found out that there were high school teachers, secondary school teachers, at that time junior college teachers, and elementary school teachers. I couldn't believe how turned on these elementary school teachers were. I thought, God, these other people are kind of like, “Well, it's okay,” but these people were seriously hungry and were diving into all of the activities with a verve and dedication that just knocked me out.

Okay, so that was a very good connection, which is very important for later and I'll straighten it out. But this is still from Cal, you see, so I'm still there.

Then I went to the West Coast Nature School at San Jose. I said, “Ah, I could—

Crawford: Is all this summer?

Wong: Yes, it was all the summer.

And I said, “Okay, I’m going to go there, and I’ll probably meet some of these other guys there,” which I did. That was a very exciting one, because they held them at different places on the coast—Cambrian Pines. Well, that’s where we went—that area.

I had one more. Wait a minute. I had a scholarship to take a course on natural sciences and biology at UC Santa Barbara, connected with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. I heard about a guy there that was a fabulous birder, but, at the same time, he was so good in making latex models of organisms—that is, frogs and lizards and things—I thought, I want to find out about that. So I went and took this course, and we went on some great field trips. It was marvelous. I learned a lot about the natural history of that area, and I was so turned on to that, too. I can’t remember the guy’s name.

Crawford: You were pretty much in science education at that point. You thought that’s what you wanted?

Wong: No, not yet, but when I mention about the Audubon Camp, that was my first inkling that, Gee, these people are really turned on. It’s not like the laboratory research guys on campus. This is a different breed. Then at the West Coast Nature School I also found elementary school teachers that were firebrands. I thought, Hey, there’s something going on here. Then, when I went down to Santa Barbara, the same thing happened.

When I came back to campus I thought, I’ve got to make some forays over to the school of education and find out more about what this is about.

So I went to the education department, to the library, and started looking up research things on science education. Now, I found—I really didn’t know what level, and I said, “Well, maybe I want to be a science educator as a professor of science ed.” Then I kept looking at it, and the people with the greatest need—and all the research pointed to that—were the elementary school teachers, who were the most enthusiastic, but they had the highest apprehensions because they didn’t have the substantive background to it. The greatest need was in that level.

So I said to myself, “Now, wait a minute. I’ve got this background. Now that I’ve found out about this need, maybe that’s where I ought to go.”

So I started. I stayed around campus again. I just kept staying here. I took all these courses that the school of education had for a teaching credential.

Crawford: So you came out in '49 with your teaching credential?

Wong: No.

- Crawford: Because I noticed you started teaching in '51.
- Wong: Yes, no, I did not. I stayed on campus for another year and a half or two years, taking all these courses, and I got my credential.
- Crawford: All right. Then you went to Oakland?
- Wong: Yes, and I related to Dr. John Michaelis, who passed away just a couple years ago—he's very important.
- Crawford: Would you spell his last name?
- Wong: Yes. M-I-C-H-A-E-L-I-S. John U. Michaelis—a real lighthouse guy. I mean, he didn't mince any words about any convictions or his philosophies. Yes, he was very important to me, personally and professionally.
- There was no science education in the school of education; I want to make that clear. There's no such thing. I used to talk to him about it.
- I said, “Hey, this sucks here.”
- He said, “It does?”
- I said, “Oh yes. You know that.” I said, “Look, to give a token one-afternoon workshop on science education as part of social studies, and that's the sum total of it—” I said, “How do you tolerate that?”
- He says, “I don't agree to it, but that's the way they've got it structured. There's no money for a position, there's no money for a program.”
- I said, “That's unbelievable.” Now, this is before they had the elementary science—
- Crawford: What was the focus of the department, then?
- Wong: I don't know.
- Crawford: Social studies?
- Wong: Well, they had all the subjects except elementary school science.
- Crawford: He was going to teach it?
- Wong: He was the only advocate. Well, because in the field there was very little going on; that's why there was such a tremendous need, the research showed that, hey, we need troops here.

- Crawford: The people that you met—they were angry because they hadn't had this in their certification.
- Wong: That's right. Only in certain places in the country did they have programs. There were places, but not in the state of California where I ended up.
- Crawford: When did it first appear, then?
- Wong: Much later. In fact, the very first position was my buddy that I just saw—what is it—about three weeks ago? Yes, well, I'll think about it. But that was, I think, in the sixties, maybe. In the late fifties and—no—the early sixties, I think, they started to focus on it.
- But anyway, I finished my work there. The school of education certified teachers of all levels and all special areas: special ed, speech therapy—you know, the whole gamut—and of course administration. That was very big here. Educational administration had a very big division in the department.
- Crawford: To make you a principal or a vice principal.
- Wong: Yes, yes, exactly, because they were serving the field. So, besides being a service kind of school, they had these kinds of lab schools, you see. That came a little later.
- Crawford: Like Washington Elementary.
- Wong: Yes. And that came later. I wasn't too aware of it. They had one for many, many years in Oakland. The school of education there had one relationship for many years with the Oakland Unified School District called University Elementary School that was on, I think, Telegraph Avenue.
- Crawford: The students worked in those schools and—
- Wong: Yes, the student teachers were sent there, and I wasn't familiar with it too much, but I knew classmates of mine who were graduates of University Elementary School, and they went there. They said it was a little special.
- Crawford: Where did you do your student-teaching?
- Wong: Yes. I want to tell you about this, because I want to go back to Dr. Michaelis in a minute.
- After I finished my student teaching, which was in the Oakland Unified School District, I then—I did very, very well, but I remember one incident. I just remember this. I'll never forget this. The supervisor, who was one of several supervisors of student teachers, came to me at the school where I was student teaching. She told me that she was going to come and observe me.

“Okay? That's part of the program—we want to see how you're doing in person.” So I said okay.

After I did my lesson, I remember it was a sixth grade, I remember I did a unit—it was a unit on Latin America. That's what sixth graders did. So I had integrated all kinds of stuff with it.

Crawford: Music, no doubt.

Wong: Music, wildlife, everything, and I had these bulletin boards and things, and I was doing things with kids, and my master teacher was very fond of me. She said that she thought I was the cat's meow or something, you know. I was very supported by her.

Okay, so here comes this gal from Cal. After the lesson she says, “Herb, I'd like to speak with you out in the hall.”

I said, “Sure.”

She says, “Well, that was a pretty good lesson.”

“Great,” I said. “Okay.”

And she says, “I was going to ask you something, you know, in preparation for a job. You seem to have an accent.”

I said, “What kind of accent?”

“Well, I heard your speech, and you have some kind of a Chinese accent?”

And I said to her, “I don't know what generation you represent, but I know I've been here longer than you.” And I said, “If I have an accent, then you have one.”

Crawford: Good for you.

Wong: And I never forgot that one incident.

I've gotten my credential now, okay? The State [of California] issued me a credential. Now I've got to find a job.

Over here at Sproul Hall was the career placement thing at that time. It wasn't in another building. They had an office that dealt with what which jobs were for teaching.

Well, I had an interview with whoever it was, and I was told, even before we got into the interview, she says, “Well, this won't take long because the only

jobs that would be open to you would be, well, down in Colusa or by the oil fields outside some of those small towns by Bakersfield.”

I said, “What are you talking about?” I said, “I want to teach here in the Bay Area, my home.”

“Oh, there's no way you're going to get into any Bay Area school district.”

I said, “Well, I don't understand why this is.”

“It's because of your race.”

I said, “What?”

I walked out, I got to a phone, and I called Dr. Michaelis. I said, “I want to tell you what happened here in the last few minutes.”

He says, “Come over here.”

I went over to his office. He says, “I want you to be here when I pick up the phone after you chat with me a little bit more about this.” So I told him about it, what kind of attitude that was. He called that department and got that employee fired. That's why I'll never forget him.

Crawford: I'm glad to hear about that.

Wong: Well, I don't know that this is any part of this, but you know.

Crawford: Obviously it made a big impression on you.

Wong: It made a big impression on me.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

Wong: I guess it is part of the story.

Crawford: Well, the upshot of it was that you moved right on to the Oakland Public School system.

Wong: Yes I did. I had a fifth grade at what they called at that time a “waterfront school” [Franklin Elementary School]. It was right off Foothill Boulevard, just a ten-minute walk to Lake Merritt on its south end.

Crawford: Did you get the job easily? How many applications did you submit—

Wong: No, it was no problem. I got the job.

- Crawford: It was not true what she said?
- Wong: Because I had great recommendations from, you know, my master teacher who was in the same school district and the principal that was there. I was the third Chinese-American hired in that school district. Wait, sorry—Yes.
- Crawford: And it wasn't your sense that—
- Wong: No, I was the fourth.
- Crawford: Yes?
- Wong: That I knew of. One was when I was in the first grade, [laughs] there was a teacher at Lincoln School, and there was another gentleman who was my buddy, he was in the research department. Then there was a great cousin of mine, who was a cousin of my dad's. He was there—Joseph Lee—and he became a principal, ultimately, when I was a principal also.
- Crawford: That was unusual. It was unusual to be a principal?
- Wong: Yes. You had to be pretty outstanding, there.
- Crawford: You had told me a story about how somebody came to you and said you must get your doctorate.
- Wong: Yes, well, when I was teaching, first, I had—Let me say this: within a year and a half after I was teaching, after I was a teacher, I made a lot of noise in the unified school district. I was contributing things. I presented science workshops in the summer for teachers in my second year of teaching. I was given recognition for what I was doing in my school.
- Crawford: You were doing music in the classroom.
- Wong: That and science. Science was very much a part of it, yes. Did I tell you about that one?
- Crawford: No.
- Wong: One month after I had my first teaching assignment—It was at that time a low fifth grade, so that meant that social studies was the westward movement: pioneers, and all that—Okay. So, always being an interdisciplinarian, I included all kinds of things, because that's been my life. I mean, everything is connected to everything else—dot, dot, dot, John Muir—okay? So, with an ecological perspective, I used a different approach in teaching the westward movement than was in this course of study. I mean, they had a course of study and we were supposed to follow this. Well, I looked at it and I said, “Okay, well now I'm going to do other things with it and really get these kids revved

up.” So I did the history of jazz. And so we were moving west, and it was great.

The music supervisor—I heard that morning from the principal that she was coming to visit the classes, and since I was a brand new teacher, she wanted to see what I was doing. I said to myself, “Hell, this is what I’m doing. I’m not going to change things or go and ascribe to some course of study just to make myself look good. It is whatever I am doing, and I believe in what I’m doing, and if she doesn’t dig it, well, that’s something else. We’ll address that later.”

So she came in, she saw what I was doing, and I said to myself, “Oh boy. I wonder what she’s thinking about,” because she was just standing in the back, watching. She had a smile on her face. I said, “Oh, hey!”

And then she said afterwards, she says, “That was fascinating. I’ve never seen anybody approach social studies like this. Do you mind if I ask you if I could borrow your recordings?”

I said to myself, “Conquest!” [laughter]

Well, anyway, I went on doing these kinds of things, and then I started to use the classroom differently, too. You could see my classroom, even though it was on the second floor—from the [street below], you could see it, see? And people used to say, “That’s Herb Wong’s Laundry.” That was a euphemism for having—I strung up things and I put their things on there, their work, so you could see all this. I was teaching astronomy and things like that, and I had star charts that were their own, stories of the constellations—not the traditional stories, but their own creative stories. So everything was creativity and an interdisciplinary approach to looking at ourselves as honored citizens of the planet. I did a lot of things with the home environment. I really captured the community.

Crawford: What was the makeup of this class? What kind of neighborhood was this class in?

Wong: Well, a lot of the neighborhood was one that was the lower income to lower-middle income. It was racially mixed: Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Caucasians. It was a totally racially integrated classroom, and that’s what I wanted. It was perfect.

Crawford: What grade level?

Wong: Fifth.

Crawford: Right.

Wong: Then they were reconstructing the building, and we had to leave, and we had double sessions in another building at another school. Wow. So we shared classrooms. Each teacher shared classrooms. It was really—each day I had to adjust and change the physical environment and change it back to what the other person would want. Oh, yes.

But I've got to tell you this. I was so wrapped up with what I was doing that I neglected to have more interaction with my colleagues—because I came into the office one morning and I said, “Hey, where is everybody?”

He says, “Herb, don't you know that during the break everybody has coffee and things?”

I said, “Oh, I don't have time for that. Is that where they are?”

“Oh yeah.”

I said, “Well, okay, fine.” So I went back out to my portable—they gave me a portable. I loved the portable. I could do anything I wanted with it, you know; it was great.

Another person who was very important was Mary Jefferds. Mary Jefferds was at the Audubon Camp in California. I met her there for the first time, and she was on the administrative staff, the support staff. I then found out that she got a job as the manager of the Pacific Coast Branch of the National Audubon Society, located right here on Bancroft Way where that restaurant is. What is that? I just had lunch there. In fact, I told the guy I met at the jazz ensemble—

Crawford: That had been the branch of the Audubon?

Wong: Yes. And I said, “Hey, you know what this was before?” I said, “This place was loaded with all kinds of teaching materials on nature.” Anyway, Mary turned out to be a lifetime supporter of mine, including the Natural Learning Book, including that whole project. Mary encouraged me. When she found out that I was in the Oakland School District—it was when I had this portable—she came for an open house thing. I'll never forget this. She walked in and she says, “Nobody anywhere in this country is doing what you're doing.” She says, “I can't believe this environment. It's fabulous. You've got to share this.”

And I kept getting that cry: “You've got to share this. You've got to teach other people.”

I always said, “I'm having a ball! I don't want to teach other people.” I said, “I'm having a wonderful time.”

I wish I could tell you more about that program, because, ultimately, one of the curriculum supervisors of the Oakland schools, Virginia Reid—she was

another lovely lady—she came to one of my classes to observe in my first year, and I remember this precisely because she was into language arts. She was a language arts supervisor, but she was interested in everything else, but I didn't know that. So she came with this wonderful smile, stood there and watched.

I had a lesson on books and what you do with book reports. So I gave a couple of demonstrations. One was a story about some doves. I want to show you this—[moves away from microphone a bit] I went to the front of the class and said, “Now, here's what you could do with your book report on this.” I said, “When you read something, you want to see how it can enliven your life and how you can get yourself completely into the book and what that writer was trying to communicate to you. It's not just words on a printed page.” So, I went like this, you know, [sound of either writing or wings flapping] and I made like a dove, and [makes cooing noises]. She was amazed.

I said, “Now here's another thing you can do.” I said, “I made this little thing out of papier-mâché, just newspapers.” “And,” I said, “I have all that ready if anybody wants to make one of these.” I had a turtle. It was a story about a turtle. So, you know, I used brass fasteners, made eyes for him, and then I shellacked it. It was a beautiful model.

And the supervisor says, “That's the best-looking turtle I've ever seen. Wow!” [laughter] She says, “I'd like to use it for a workshop to demonstrate what you can do with language arts.” She says, “I've got to get you involved. You've got to share this.” [laughter] So here we go again.

Crawford: You were finding that your colleagues there were people of passion [as you were].

Wong: Yes. I was turned on by them being turned on. And I don't want to do anything else. You know, my salary was like \$3400.

And, oh, I've got to tell you this. My passion was so great, it was limitless. I was impatient with having to sign up for a motion picture machine or a slide projector. I went out and I bought all my own equipment so it was right there in my classroom. I don't want to sign up for somebody, waiting for them, because when I wanted it, I wanted it. So I took my salary and I acquired all media equipment necessary.

I'll tell you how else I had to do this. Even though I came from a very wealthy family—I forgot to tell you this—my dad and my mom never showered us with money.

Crawford: No, you talked about that.

Wong: Did I?

Crawford: Yes, you said that you worked.

Wong: Okay. I told you about my newspaper route, didn't I?

Crawford: No, you didn't mention a paper route.

Wong: Okay. To feed my fish [laughs]—

Crawford: [laughs] Records.

Wong: Yes, that was that, but this was for the classroom. I then had a newspaper route for the local newspaper. At four a.m. every morning I would go to this shack somewhere and bundle newspapers—fold them up and bundle them. I would get my route, and I had a convertible, so I would toss the papers, and I would be through by about six o'clock.

Then, at six thirty, I conducted field trips. I met four or five kids from my classroom every morning, different kids, and I would take them on a field trip. It was a plan of mine. First the neighboring area of the school, then the neighborhood, and then the outer community, and the different habitats like the salt marshes or the lake or the redwood forests or whatever. I did this all before school, because everything was waking up out there, and we would want to get them at their max.

Crawford: What time did you sleep?

Wong: Did I sleep? Well, I don't know. Midnight or whatever. But I then would come back from there, and we had to wear a coat and tie, so I had to change my clothes. By eight-fifteen, you know, I'm ready. So then we would go through the rest of the day, and at the end of the day on those days when I wasn't taking a course or having a meeting, I would take more children out to more field trips. And in the evening I would have astronomy sessions for my students and their families at a local park. I would set up my telescopes. I bought telescopes, and that kind of stuff.

Crawford: Were you appreciated for that? Did some of the other faculty share your excitement?

Wong: No. They just were excited. To this day, the guy who was two doors from me is still one of my best friends. He stayed in Oakland schools and became a principal. We've been in touch ever since. He used to make fun of me and say, "Where are you going this weekend, Herb? Birding?"

Some years later—many years later—the same friend of mine calls me up and says, "Remember I used to tease you about birding? I caught the bug."
[laughs]

“Oh,” I said, “you missed out. I had all those marvelous field trips.” [laughter]

So anyway, that was a good experience in that.

Then the same lady supervisor says, “Now, look.” She sat me down in my car. I remember this. She says, “I want you to think about getting a master’s degree.”

I said, “I don’t need a master’s degree.” I said, “I’m having a ball here.”

She says, “No. You have an obligation to a lot more people than just these children here.”

Crawford: What would that have enabled you to do?

Wong: I don’t know.

She says, “You need to do that to spread yourself and be qualified for other positions and other opportunities that will be coming to you and you just don’t know about it.”

I said, “Ah, come on.” I said, “This is my opportunity right here.”

She finally convinced me, and I was thinking about it. She says, “All this fabulous stuff you’re doing here—this has got to be documented. Somebody’s got to read about this.”

So I then went down to San Jose State. I decided, okay. In the meantime, I was still taking some courses up here, not in the school of education. I was taking courses in astronomy.

Crawford: They just let you do that?

Wong: Yes. I came back and I did that at nights.

Crawford: Extension?

Wong: No, it was a regular course. Yes. So I was into that. I went to Chabot Observatory and I spent time in the programs there. But anyway, pretty soon I’m making two or three—well, usually two—two nights a week right after school, I’d take an evening course that began at seven o’clock or something like that.

And what happened? I had to have a program advisor, and the guy that I was sent to happened to be the head of the department, and he was a gentleman that I only knew of on the radio, because in my classroom we would listen to a show called something like “Signpost for Nature.” There would be this

professor from San Jose State who would send you handouts and worksheets and talk about it and so forth, and his name was Dr. Matthew F. Vessel, who was one of my dearest friends and who was the man.

So, when I met with him, he says, “We've been waiting for you. I heard about you, what you did up at the Audubon Camp. People were talking about you—my faculty members. So people I knew were encouraging you to come here. We know that Cal has what Cal has, and they don't accept some of our units.”

Crawford: For your Ph.D.?

Wong: For my administrative credential. That's where it was. I finished there, and they wanted me to document what I was doing, you know, that whole thing. So my master's thesis was on that. It was a long title. I'll have to get you the title [“The Use of an Integrated Elementary Science Program and Cooperative Procedures of Learning to Teach Natural Science, Ecological Relationships and Conservation”].

Crawford: And you did that in two years?

Wong: Yes. And I wound up teaching as a teaching assistant for him, because—oh yeah, I didn't tell you this. Because I was so into all this stuff, my classroom had terraria and aquaria, as if I was a mini Academy of Sciences. I had them wound around the room. Everybody had a lot of stuff, just like going to a museum. Well, that was expensive, you know. So I always had to figure out some way of handling that.

I asked my grandma, I said, “Listen, Grandma, do you think I can use this little room that you have that you use to store stuff in and that I can have that?”

She says, “Sure, whatever you want to do.”

So I cleaned out the room. It was maybe from there to there and about over there, that's all. So I had these—

Crawford: You lived with her at the time?

Wong: Yes. Because the school was very nearby. It was only ten minutes away.

Crawford: And where did you live here in Berkeley?

Wong: Oh, when I came to Berkeley? I lived with my grandma.

Crawford: You always lived with your grandma.

Wong: I came out from Stockton and lived with my grandma to keep her company and take care of her.

Crawford: Oh, I imagine she loved having you with her—her favorite grandson.

Wong: Yes. Upstairs in my bedroom I had bookshelves, and the bookshelves were all lined up with aquaria. I started there, and then I had this room and I had it heated, and I had a sales license. So I must have had twenty tanks in there—something like that. At least twenty tanks, maybe more.

I was breeding these fish. I was experientially learning first-hand experiences about fish, cultivating tropical fish on different temperatures, different families. This became part of what I would share with my young students, and also at San Jose State I would teach a course on aquaria and terraria. So things were opening up, you see, were expanding.

This is getting to be nuts, right? You probably don't want to hear all this, really.

Crawford: No, we can move over certain things, but this is informative.

Wong: Yes, this is pretty informative.

Crawford: And you're getting on into Berkeley.

Wong: Yes, this is the basis of this. There's no question about it. Yes.

So, maybe I can finish the Oakland school thing, because it's tied up with Berkeley.

I was asked to be on K-12 curriculum planning committees at the Oakland School Districts. Now, that was crucial, that was planning whatever curriculum. They wanted to get me involved in curriculum, because my perspective on curriculum was a little different. I had different ideas. So they pulled me out of the classroom one year, and I was called a—I don't know—a social studies and science consultant. That year, I related to eight schools.

So now I'm spreading, you see. Actually, looking back, I never thought about it, but I was planting seeds with different faculties. I would go and teach certain classes so that I was demonstrating how to teach different things for different teachers. So I was getting experience in kindergarten through eighth grade there.

I found that I needed to look ahead, and there was a professor from Cal who was the educational consultant, that was his title, an educational consultant from UC Berkeley. He was there every week on some committee or another. He became my doctoral advisor: Professor J. Cecil Parker. A real perfect guy

for me. Even his courses—people couldn't understand how nontraditional they were. He would leave you just—I didn't appreciate it much until afterwards—he left you using your own brain to think, and that's hard to do, even in this university. But he was so good with process as product.

So he had a talk with me and said, “You've got to come back on campus, work with my kids, work with whomever. You need to come back and do your terminal-degree work.”

I remember telling him—I said, “Cecil, I can't cut the mustard there.”

Crawford: Did you really believe that?

Wong: Yes, I did. It was a lofty thing to me. I said, “Geez. I could never do anything like that.”

So he was working on it, because the next thing is I get this invitation to teach at the university's summer demonstration school, which was at Whittier School.

Cecil called, and he said, “Now, I want you to take this position. It's very politically advantageous. The kids there are going to go nuts for you, and those teachers are going to learn a lot from you.”

I said, [in a reluctant voice] “Okay. I'll do it.” So I did it on conservation education. I know it was exemplary. It was a great program. I used a lot of kids that I had in Oakland to help me, too.

Crawford: How did they help?

Wong: They became little emissaries, little disciples, little kid disciples for these messages. It was wonderful.

I do want to make a mention of one other extension of this. I don't think I told you this. I would take these kids out on weekends on Easter vacation to the desert. I would take them out to the Sierra. This is overnight. We went to Pyramid Lake in Nevada, because it was a different environment. We went into the San Joaquin/Sacramento Valley refuges, to where the cranes had their courtship behavior, between Lodi and Stockton, because I knew all these haunts.

Once—I just can't believe, looking back now, that I did this—I called the Coast Guard and said, “Hey, you guys go on out to the Farallon Islands, don't you? Do you think you could take four kids and myself?” So I told him why we wanted to go there and so forth, and we went. We got in a big basket, and they had this big freight thing, and they lifted us and put us on the island.

Now, if you think back today, how could I do that? The liability insurance and all that crap—no way!

Crawford: Not with kids.

Wong: Yes. I had no insurance whatsoever, and I took them everywhere. Sometimes it was a one-day trip. You know, this is probably a model one to use. The parents said, “Anywhere that my kids want to go to learn with you, you have our blessing.” And that was it.

Crawford: Were the parents active? Did they come to school meetings?

Wong: Some of them did, some of them did not. Some of them were working people and it was very hard for them to come during the day. Well, we'd have meetings at night or open house and things like that where they came. But I went to see every family. I visited with them. I was in their homes. I chatted with them. I had meals with them—they invited me.

During August, every August, I would make an appointment with all these families. They might have been promoted to go to another class, but I would meet with these families and certain children that I thought would lose out during the three months of summer vacation. I would volunteer my time and I brought them up to snuff, so that when they began in September, they were ready, right where they ought to be.

Crawford: You don't find that kind of attention today. So when did you decide to go and jump into it?

Wong: Well, the superintendent—Dr. Stuart Phillips, another marvelous guy who was one of the Terman subjects—gifted-children research study—

Crawford: I.Q.?

Wong: Yes, I.Q. I was the vice principal through his urging. He called and he said, “Now look. Cecil Parker and I and Virginia Ried”—that's the supervisor—“We've all talked about the fact that you've got to apply for an administrative position. We need your leadership.”

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

Wong: I responded to Stuart Phillips's invitation, and, to make it official, I applied for this position for administrative evaluation. So I went, and I remember when I walked in everybody had a smile. They were all very friendly with me, because I was on so many committees with them.

I'll never forget this. Stuart says, "Here's a question for you to see what kind of problem solver you are." He says—I remember this question—he says, "Now, suppose you were principal of a school where there were quite a number of elderly teachers, veteran teachers, that are close to being on their way out, but they're not. They have not changed their ways, and you are not in agreement with their style or philosophy of education. What would you do to improve the instructional program at that school, having these people hanging on?"

I said, "I would do everything possible to have them respond to whatever motivating, catalytical things I could come up with, and since there's nothing specific, I'm not going to give you specifics, but I'm going to give you my behavioral approach. My behavioral approach is based on behavioral ethics, which, in turn, is first based on perception; and then perception deals with attitudes, because perception deals first with knowledge, intelligence, and background. So that gives me a basis for an attitude. There's a base of attitudes. Once I have the attitudes, we will then have generated a value system. Now, once we have the value system, then we have an ethic, and that's behaviorally translated."

Crawford: They liked that.

Wong: They liked that. They said, "Is that what you do?" I said, "Well, I practice that, and I could practice that with a different community of people. I try to inculcate that practice with my students, because some of their parents aren't there, but they might be there, and they'd be an influence with a faculty." They said, "Well, that's a strategy. What would you do specifically?"

I said, "I would clean house."

"How would you do that?"

I said, "I would do that first, and then otherwise I would try to find a happier place for them, because they would be unhappy in the environment that—"

Crawford: Who were you speaking of?

Wong: The theoretical teachers that should be moved out. I said, "I would move them out." I didn't know that there was a problem that they already [had] in thinking of the position for me.

Then they hit on it, they said, "Well, you are one of our youngest administrative candidates, and if you are to receive this position, you'll be a pretty young guy, you know, and you've got people twice your age on the faculty."

So, anyway, they were enthusiastic about my applying, and the superintendent met with me. He says, "I told you to throw your chips in there. There's no problem. Now, I have to attend to your one request."

And this was the request: I said, "In the event that I'm approved for a position, I must be in a vice principalship with a person who is an administrator strong in curriculum and instruction and not just in administration or else I'm not interested."

They said, "We promise you that." So they did. They got me assigned to a school which today is a very black-oriented school in East Oakland.

Crawford: Which one is that?

Wong: It was Webster School. It was a nice neighborhood. It had another resource for me which was a bonus. Right next to the school is Royal Viejo Park, managed by the Park and Recreation Department, which I explored a lot, and I said, "Oh boy, this is going to be good."

I was assigned to this lady principal, and I was enjoying her tremendously. She was a curriculum leader, no question about it. However, I only had the pleasure of working with her for two years, because she then joined the faculty at the University of the Pacific.

Crawford: At this time you were effectively out of the classroom?

Wong: Yes. Except that when I got there and I worked with the principal, she said, "I understand that you have tremendously interesting experiences with gifted children."

I said, "Yes." I said, "I've taken children who were gifted and had them stretching like crazy in all kinds of directions."

She said, "Well, would you be interested in organizing something here?"

I said, "I would like to establish a Center for the Gifted."

And that became a model for a lot of Oakland schools—what I was doing. So those were additional duties I would teach to these kids. They would come from other classes, you know, and I would do things with them. Then, when they assigned a new principal--this is not for publication—but they assigned another guy, okay?

Crawford: Right. Do you want me to turn it off?

Wong: Well, yes. [tape interruption] They assigned a gentleman to me that I was familiar with. He was excited to be with me; I wasn't that excited, because he was principal of one of the two assignments that I had as a student teacher.

He came, and in his very first faculty meeting, somebody said something about, "Oh, well, this is the way we handle this"—whatever the situation was. And he looked around, he got to the center of our faculty room, and looked at this teacher and said, "Well, that's the way you *used* to do it." I thought, "Whoa!" And everybody just froze, you know. Well, I could understand it, because he had been a major in the army. He was very militaristic.

After a few months, I said to myself, "You know, I don't need to be in a school and be subjugated under this kind of supervision by people like this."

Crawford: What was your title at this point?

Wong: Vice principal. I did a lot of curricular stuff, and he was more of an administrator. So it was a real switch. I lost the shine that I had before. Anyway, that's when I really first started to think about the doctorate. I said, "I'm going to go get myself my union card. I don't need to take this crap," you know?

Crawford: What year was that? Because I know you got your Ph.D. in '62.

Wong: Let's see, I was over at Webster School from '56 or '57, I think, so this must have been like '59 or '58, maybe '58, something like that.

Anyway, here I am. I'm back on the committee with Dr. Parker again, Cecil. I said, "Cecil, I think I want to talk to you a moment."

"Well, it's about time!" [laughter]" I reviewed the reasons with him. I said, "That's what's catapulting me to thinking about this."

He said, "Okay, fine. Come and see me on campus, and we'll work out some course work and let's get going here." So we did. I took some of his courses and I really admired what he was doing. Unfortunately, he passed away over ten years ago. But he said, "You can work on anything you want to work on, and I can find out some of the things that you've been doing that you might be interested in. I want to find something practical that people can gain from what you do. I don't want you to get into some theoretical research. You're a man of action, and I want you to get out there and have something like that." So, it was on in-service programs in elementary science and ecological planning and so on. I've forgotten right now how many school districts, but I went through all the different ways to help train teachers.

Crawford: What was the course that you had to have?

Wong: Oh, that was just research techniques and some other seminar-type things. They were small group things; they weren't big audience groups.

Crawford: Were they interesting? Were they challenging for you?

Wong: Yes. Particularly his. His were all challenging. Prior to this, I had to get an administrative credential. I left that out. I did come back to Cal for my administrative credential.

Now, this is what I found out: when I came back, I was told that since I was going to San Jose State—I told them that I would do some of the course work at San Jose State that was in my master's program, that I included some educational administration courses toward the administrative credential. I was told, "Well, we don't accept everything that the state colleges have as course work here. We have to evaluate them, and if we feel that they're up to snuff, then we'll accept them as credit towards your course work here."

I said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. I'm going to take them anyway, all right? Because I like the people that I'm dealing with down there, because it's tied in with natural science. So, since there is no comparative offering up here in this department on this campus, I have to go elsewhere."

He said, "Well, that's your choice, but that's not a streamlined way of doing it as quickly as possible."

I said, "That's not my concern. I want what I want to get out of it." So that's why I was going to both institutions. So I finally got my masters there, and I took some administrative courses and I finished up here.

Crawford: I see. So you did that in pretty short order for being part time. Were you part time?

Wong: Part time. Then when Cecil Parker and I put this program together, he said, "Look, you can't stay here forever." He said, "Why don't you take a leave of absence," which I did when I was vice principal at Santa Fe Elementary School, which is in west Oakland, 90 percent black. I learned a lot there, too. That's when I came back to Cal.

Crawford: Did you have special mentors other than the ones you mentioned?

Wong: I had Cecil, mainly, and John Michaelis. But I was also relating to Bob Stebbins again, because he was at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, and I was hanging out over there. There was one other, too. Oh, yes, of course—A. Starker Leopold.

Crawford: Oh my goodness.

Wong: Yes. He was my wildlife management professor—fishing and wildlife management. I admired him tremendously, tremendously. I mean, I look back and I had the best.

Crawford: You knew who they were. That's pretty important. Well, then, when you finished did you go to Chabot? Is that when you went to Chabot?

Wong: Right. Exactly. I forgot to tell you this. The superintendent had called me on my first administrative assignment, which was the vice principalship at Webster School. He told me, "There's going to be a new administration, and there is a wonderful new principal there as well, a lady. The place needs to be reshuffled, and I expect the two of you to do that job and to reorganize our schools."

I said, "Okay, great." Then I got the assignment to go to Santa Fe School—apparently there were problems there. I got the call and he said, "Look, this is another first aid call." He said it was this school that needed this, this, and that. "There is a very strong administrator there, but the curriculum is not where it ought to be. You're the man to go in there and put it into shape." So that was that one.

So now the third call comes after I applied for a principalship. And so the superintendent said, "Now this is a call that's a little unusual, not like the other ones, because this one also includes a personal dimension." It was because he lived in this neighborhood, and there were some serious problems at this school. And what I found out was that when parents would come up the walkway to the school, the principal would dash out the other door and disappear and wouldn't be available. He freaked out a couple of staff members, too. They had nervous breakdowns and couldn't continue the rest of the school year.

The superintendent went through the syndrome of this particular environment, and said, "Well, we have all these problems there, but it is a marvelous community, a very supportive community," and that's why I've got to do something about it, because I live in it myself. It was a high-income community—Chabot School—and had the highest number of gifted children in all of the Bay Area Schools, based on a research survey.

Crawford: And were there gifted programs in place?

Wong: They were not really operating very well. There was a district program, but they weren't really doing much about it. The superintendent knew that that was one of my specialties, because I did so much with gifted kids. I remember him saying, "One of the reasons you do so well with gifted programs is because you're gifted yourself, and I recognize that." He said, "So I'm pleading with you personally to take this assignment. I know we've been moving you around."

I said, "I know, I know. I'm your first-aid man. You have trouble there, I go there, I put out the fire, and you find another one for me."

He said, "I want you to do the district a favor, I want you to do the community a favor, and I want you to do me a professional and personal favor in taking this assignment." Well, what are you going to do, you know?

So I said, "I need something in return, and that is that I don't want to leave in two years. I have had enough of these trouble-shooting short-term things. I want to reap some of the fruit that I've put into them and helped to cultivate."

He said, "Okay. I promise you, and I'll be on call anytime you need my help, because this is very, very sensitive—

Crawford: This was what year?

Wong: This was 1962, maybe. I knew about that community. It was full of gifted people there and very concerned people, but very bright people. I said, "Hey, fine." So I took the assignment. I had heard a lot about the crap that was going on there, because we shared the school nurse services. So when I heard that that was my assignment, I said, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh," and I found out as much as I could about what was going on and all of the disasters.

My first contact with the community was like a town hall meeting, and I initiated it because I wanted the community to meet me. I didn't want them just to come to the office to say hello. So I had this clarion call to the community, and boy, did they show up. The place was packed to the rafters. I welcomed them. It was an evening, and I had two topics as my models for my philosophical thinking and my action models. I just used two examples: One was Robert Frost—and you know that one—and the other, when they walked in, I was playing Miles Davis and Gil Evans. The rest of the program I talked about Miles Davis and Gil Evans. [laughs] The focus was on my values of creativeness.

And, wow, the reception was enormous. These people, to my amazement and delight, took to me very, very promptly. And I told them, "It's an open door, but if you're going to call me with some problem, make sure that you have some ideas and strategies on how we can solve it together." Anyway, it was a wonderful community. I enjoyed it to the utmost.

I put on something that I started in my other schools, and that was science fairs. I was into science fairs. Well, when I saw what I had there as natural human resources—the two years I was there no school had ever copped that many first-place awards in the history of the school district. I think it was three years we did that. It was unbelievable.

Crawford: And didn't you also have an early morning jazz seminar of some sort?

Wong: Yes, I did. I found that the instrumental music teacher was a teacher who was at Tech High in Oakland before. A lot of the professional musicians that I know from this area were in her classes. She just stuck them with an instrument and said, "Okay, that's yours." I mean, some of these guys are still around. And I couldn't believe it was she that was the instrumental music teacher for these elementary kids.

And she knew who I was. She said, "This is a bonanza, having you here." She said, "This whole community is lit up." And they were; they really were lit up, because they found out my background: I was on KJAZ radio, I was doing this and that, you know, and they said Holy Smoke.

Crawford: I want to devote some time this morning to KJAZ, because you are the reigning expert.

Wong: Yes, I was there from the beginning to the end. Anyway, they said, "Wow, gosh, if this is going to happen here, maybe we can bring some of your postgraduates who are now professional musicians." So what I did was—before the school seminar on jazz, before the string quartets and the string instruments, it was just like what I did in my other school with my field trips. Here as the principal—a brand-new principal, this was my first principalship, and we began early morning, like six-thirty, and we would have our jazz. Then they would have their string quartets and orchestras later.

I made a pact with the teacher. She said, "I know you're a pioneer. I'm with it. Whatever you're saying, let's go." She was great. Irma was her first name. I can't remember her last name anymore.

Another great memory. I had a PTA night at Anthony Chabot School in Oakland. They were deadly. You know, nobody wanted to show up. They were just really deadly, boring.

So, what do I do? Well, I said, "I'm going to have a big band. I'm going to have a nineteen-piece big jazz band here."

And so, oh! The place was flocked out with people. A nineteen-piece big band, led by John Coppola, the trumpet player who was with Woody Herman and Stan Kenton, okay? I still use them for my current courses. We've known each other so long. He was from Oakland. I had John Handy, you know, the great alto saxophonist. Oh, this band was studded with heavies.

Crawford: And the kids played in?

Wong: Well, here's what I did. Yes. I still remember it. It was a composition-arrangement by Frank Foster called, "Tomorrow's Blues Today." Beautiful big band blues. So my idea was to look into the anatomy of the big band chart. I had the band build it up, and then we broke it down to components, so you

could see from the exoskeleton into the innards of what a big band arrangement was like. Then they could appreciate what they could hear.

Crawford: They could actually watch and see the solo entries and the dynamics?

Wong: Yes, so they could identify the dynamics. So, in a sense, it was like a profile, like an anatomy of a jazz chart. So from my elementary school experiences forward, I've been a jazz educator a long time before that term was even around. And I think this story has never really been told, even in jazz education journals or anything. This Berkeley program was kind of a combination. But I was a pioneer a long time ago.

Crawford: Was that the initial PTA meeting?

Wong: That was at a PTA meeting, and then I would have the orchestra do some other things. I had some guest soloists that also came.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

Crawford: Can we have more about KJAZ, where you started to work in 1959.

Wong: Okay. Well, in 1959 when KJAZ was born, in, I think, late August of that year, I was actually working on my thesis, my dissertation, and the station came on. This was like the tenth day or something like that. I was listening to it some more, and I said, "Gee whiz!" And I'm having a hell of a time concentrating, because as I have known it, having been born in Oakland and in the Bay Area, never has there been a station with this much jazz going on all the time. I knew all the other jazz stations by the time I was a little guy. And they were all A.M. stations, and I listened to all of them.

As a matter of fact, I listened to Pat Henry, owner of KJAZ, when he was in a station down in San Jose. It was called "Sierra Serenade." And he was also on KROW, so I used to hear him there. Well, I heard his voice on the radio.

This is a great story. Here I am, I'm typing, working on my dissertation material, and this is the second week, I think, of its existence. Jerry and I are now permanent old friends. Jerry Dean was the announcer, and he announced that there was the radio station's first listeners contest. And I figure, "I don't know how many people are listening yet, do they know about this station?" But I said, "Well, that's interesting. They're already having a contest."

He said, "The contest winner will receive fifteen free jazz albums. It's real simple. All you need to do is just send in a card with your name and address and phone number, and here's the address for KJAZ."

I thought to myself, “Ah, that's stupid,” you know? “I think I'll write him a little note instead.” I grabbed a piece of paper, and I typed up a one-pager, a short one-pager about jazz, and I sent it in.

A few days after the contest was over, Jerry said, “Now we have our first contest winner on radio KJAZ, and his name is Herb Wong. So, Herb, if you're listening out there, will you call KJAZ? Here's the number.” I called him. He said, “Oh, great, man!” Blah, blah, blah. As we announced, we were going to have the winner at the station for a few minutes just to congratulate you. When can you come up, Herb?”

So I showed up, and they said, “You've won the fifteen albums. There's Jimmy Rushing, Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington,” blah, blah, blah.

Well, I had about five or six of those albums, and when they listed all of them—he cited them over the air—I said, “Gee, I'd sure like to have those other ones.” [laughs] That's why I entered the contest.

Well, when I got there, it was like a coffeepot station; it wasn't a grandiose facility.

Crawford: I like that. [laughs] A coffeepot station.

Wong: Yeah. I thought: this is wild. It was at Telegraph and Ashby Avenue—there's some establishment there now. There was a little parking lot, and there was a restaurant which later became Tsubo Coffeehouse. It was playing jazz. It was a wine place that didn't have hard liquor; it didn't have a hard liquor license. But it was right next door to KJAZ. We shared the same building. It was a jazz club and a jazz station. That was one of the many, many headquarters we've had. We've had them in Alameda at several places.

Crawford: What was the equipment like?

Wong: It was basic. It was cool. Jerry said, “Come on up, and, as we announced in the beginning of the contest, we're going to interview the winner, and then I'll present you with the albums.”

So I showed up at the appointed time, and I didn't know what to expect, so I put on a coat and a tie, and I thought, Gee whiz, [laughs] because it was a really informal, funky joint. A real coffeepot station. [laughs]

Anyway, I was enamored by what they were doing. I could hardly do any work at home, because I couldn't believe there was a station going on all day just playing jazz. It was nuts, you know, unheard of.

Crawford: What was the commercial sponsorship like?

Wong: There were some restaurants. They were trade deals. There were a few. There was a car dealer, but mostly restaurants, it seemed to me.

Crawford: And they were paying rent and salaries?

Wong: Yes, I think they had a trade deal for the rent. Pat Henry, the owner, is a master trade artist. He actually traded for anything that we needed—clothing, cars, his vacations, you name it. He got automobiles, whatever. He was on KROW at the same time he was establishing this station.

Well, anyway, bringing us to my presence at the station—because this is interesting—every one had expected that I would be on for three or four minutes, just a short interview, and that I'd be presented with the albums, a little ritual. Well, I was there over three hours. We got into it and started asking me things about jazz and about myself, and we got into more and more.

We started talking about the music, and Jerry said, “Okay, why don't you start picking out some things, and let's talk about them.” So I grabbed things, and we talked about them.

Pretty soon, Pat Henry, the owner, calls. It was after we were on maybe half an hour. He's talking to Jerry, and he says, “Man.” He says, “This guy is fantastic. Get that guy!” Afterwards, Jerry says, “How would you like to work at the station?” He says, “Wow, man, that was Pat Henry, our owner and station manager. He's really impressed with your knowledge. My god! We've got to have you. We need you. I'll tell you what.” He says, “Why don't we do a program with you programming all the music. Of course, you haven't got your operators license yet. We'll help you apply for that. You take the test and all that stuff, and get all the paperwork done and authorization certification. In the meantime, I'll work the board, and you select all the music and make comments. Or, we can do it together and have a ball.”

So we did a six-hour show the very next week, he and I. He said, “Bring whatever you want to bring.” And we're talking on the air, and he says, “Well, we're going to invite Herb back next week.” He said, “Is there any particular direction you want to go?”

I said, “How about doing the last forty years of San Francisco Bay Area jazz?” I said, “I can handle it. I can do it. We'll do it together.” So I brought whatever I had that I thought would be good for a program, and we did this show. Wow! People were calling in.

Crawford: What did you talk about?

Wong: Oh, well, I went way back to when I used to carouse around in the Bay Area, when most of the live jazz that I saw was in motion picture theaters. Eleventh Street was the T&D Theater, between Franklin and Broadway, that was a

motion picture theater. It only cost fifteen cents to get into a movie. So it cost me fifteen cents to get in there, and I went to the bottom of the seating area in front. But I would have to wait for a while, because they would have a double feature—a serial, a cowboy movie, and cartoons. Then they would have a live presentation on the stage for nearly an hour with a band.

I'll tell you one show I remember with Jimmy Dorsey and his orchestra, with Bob Eberle singing, Helen O'Connell—a female vocalist. And on the bill was the Nicholas Brothers, those fantastic tap dancers.

I went to the Orpheum Theater, which was three and a half blocks up the street on Broadway in downtown Oakland, on the south side of Broadway. You know who I saw? I saw the Count Basie Band. The Count Basie Band with Lester Young and the All-American Rhythm Section: Freddie Green, Count Basie, Jo Jones, and Walter Page.

And Jimmy Rushing I saw for the first time. I was amazed at him. He did a tune, "Going Back to Chicago," that was longer than what I heard on the record, so I was getting an education about how you stretch out beyond the limits of a 78-RPM record. I would hear extensions, more choruses. That was really fantastic.

There was Harry Edison, you know, and all these legendary giants in this band. And I didn't realize who I was actually seeing except in retrospect. You know, I saw the best band in the world at its pinnacle.

But there were others. I went to San Francisco, to the Golden Gate Theater, and Lionel Hampton was there. At the Civic Auditorium in Oakland, my brother and I went to see Louis Jordan and his Tympani Five, and we almost didn't get in, because there was this big black guy who was at the cashier's ticket—Remember, I told you about that one.

So that was all part of that environment and activity. And Sweets Ballroom was, of course, another big one downtown. There were clubs there that I would go out there and just stand there and listen outside.

Crawford: Oh, talk about those. Did you go to Slim Jenkins?

Wong: Yes, I did. And I went to a place called Hamburger Gus's. Did I tell you about that one? This is really critical.

I think I was twelve years old, and I told my grandma that I was going to go a few blocks into Chinatown to go see some jazz. She said okay. So I got permission to go, and that was about maybe six or seven blocks from Oak and Madison Streets to Franklin Street. Franklin, between Seventh and Eighth Street, on the east side of the block. Right.

There was a place called Hamburger Gus's, and I heard that Lester Young and Billie Holiday were going to be at Hamburger Gus's, and I couldn't believe it. Hamburger Gus's? Come on.

Of course, I couldn't really get in, so I brought a little box with me, and I put it on the edge of the curb so I could stand on the box, because the doors to Hamburger Gus's were like swinging saloon doors with the bottom open and the top open. So I'm standing on the box, and I can see just the heads of Lester Young and Billie Holiday.

Lester comes out—I had met Lester before. I had been going to San Francisco in the late thirties and early forties. I had gone to San Francisco, to Jack's on and Sutter Street, and I had bumped into Lester there, because I used to just hang out outside and listen through the doors, because I loved Lester Young's tenor saxophone magic.

One of those times he came out, and he said, "Kid, you're always out here! What are you doing? Chasing me or something?" I said, "Well, in your words, 'I have eyes for your sounds.'" Because that's the phrase he used, "I have eyes."

And then he saw me outside of Hamburger Gus's. He comes out, and he has a girl on each arm. This is intermission. And he sees me there, and he drops the two ladies, comes over to me, and he says, "You are really following me around. You come with me."

He put his arm around me, took me in—maybe I was thirteen by that time, I don't know—he took me inside, and it was smoky. Oh man, I could hardly see through the density of the smoke—cigars and cigarettes—and it was noisy. There was a bar on the left. At least, it was what I thought was a bar. It was serving drinks of some sort. I don't know what they were. Maybe it was just wine, you know? Because I never thought it was a liquor-licensed bar.

So he took me all the way through this mass of people, to the front of the stage, and he said, "Now, you come with me." And then he took me over to stage left, and he got this tall stool, and he puts it over on stage left, and he lifted me up, and seated me on the stool. He said, "Now, we're going to be back on in about ten minutes. Now you sit there and dig it!" [laughter] Wow! I couldn't believe this.

Crawford: That was a dangerous neighborhood. And your grandmother didn't worry about that?

Wong: No, because it was right next to Chinatown, and she knew everybody there.

Crawford: Did she give you money ever for these things that you wanted to do?

- Wong: Yes. Every once in a while she gave me fifty cents, you know, whatever—twenty-five cents, fifty cents. If I wanted anything, she would give it to me. She loved me an awful lot.
- Anyway, that was a night that I will never, ever forget. Not too many kids could recall something like that. And that early in Lester Young's career, and I heard him at his artistic peak.
- Crawford: Was Billie Holiday there?
- Wong: Yes.
- Crawford: Was she singing, too?
- Wong: Yes, Billie Holiday was there. Wow, I saw Lady Day and Prez.
- Crawford: At her prime. Prez, that's right.
- Wong: Isn't that something else? So that was a good story.
- Crawford: You might say why she called him Prez and what their relationship was.
- Wong: Oh, yeah. They had a very warm relationship. It was her nickname for him. I've heard different reasons for it, but—
- Crawford: Were they sweethearts?
- Wong: Well, people always surmised that they were. No one has ever documented it, other than they were very, very close friends. She was promiscuous. I don't think he had too many women himself.
- Crawford: He was kind of a protector for her.
- Wong: Yes, he was. I saw her later on more times, and of course she was in a club called The Savoy in the Fillmore District, I believe. I saw her there with her gardenia and everything. That was a little later.
- Crawford: Was the Fillmore hopping in that time?
- Wong: Oh yes. The place was jumping.
- Crawford: Was it black people who went to the clubs mostly in Oakland and San Francisco?
- Wong: Oh, yes, definitely. So it's rather odd that I was in that company, right? Being a kid and being a Chinese-American. [laughs] I was gonna hear that music. I was determined.

- Crawford: What was Slim Jenkins' place like?
- Wong: Oh, it was noisy. [laughs]
- Crawford: Did you know him?
- Wong: Yes, because he was a client on KJAZ. We used to go down there, and we supported his club. Yeah, he had all kinds of people coming through there.
- Crawford: How did you support the club on KJAZ?
- Wong: Well, I mean, we promoted the club with announcements. We talked about them.
- Crawford: And did you get something in return, like a dinner or a—
- Wong: Well, I don't think I did. I don't think I did.
- Crawford: Did you have a salary yet?
- Wong: At KJAZ? Oh sure, I was paid. I traded it out for a deal that I couldn't refuse. Pat Henry—I would always remind him of this. I said, "I can't believe you offered me the deal that you did." What it was was that I would sell my own time, and I would take 50 percent of the profit—or whatever the spot was worth.
- Crawford: How do you mean, sell your own time?
- Wong: Let's take an hour that was my show. I would sell the commercial spots for that hour, because it was a commercial station.
- Crawford: So you would have to find advertisers?
- Wong: Oh, yes. I had no problem. In fact, Pat would always try to get me to accompany him in the car and go to San Francisco Chinatown and try to scare up clients.
- Crawford: And was it easy to do it in Chinatown? Did they relate?
- Wong: I got things. I got restaurants. In fact, I had the Shanghai Low account for nineteen years until they closed. And, yes, it was on my Sunday show, "Jazz Perspectives."
- Crawford: Do you have any idea what they paid?

Wong: Oh, gosh. I don't remember. But I did reasonably well. I got fifty percent No, I don't remember the spots. I don't remember. Because I would have more than one client/sponsor.

I also had the Golden Pavilion at 800 Sacramento Street, at the corner of Grant Avenue. Yes. It was hosted by Colonel Chow and their "Dinner of the Month Club," serving—Dig this, folks. Here's what I sampled in the preliminary testing dinner at the "Dinner of the Month Club," as their guest. At the table with me would be Herb Caen and a lot of other folks that were prominent. We would sample and rank these dishes, and we were the pilot testing diners. Wasn't that a privilege?

Crawford: A very sweet deal.

Wong: Yes, and all the history of each of the dishes would be recited by Colonel Chow, who was a historian, as well as an ex-U.S. Marine colonel, stationed in China, and who was a distant relative of mine.

Crawford: What kind of cuisine?

Wong: The six classic schools of Chinese cuisine. He had them all. It was the only restaurant that had them. It was fun. [laughter]

Crawford: Well, can you talk a little bit more about the places in Oakland that you—along Seventh Street and so on. Eli's Mile High was running.

Wong: Yes, there were a lot of other clubs by Slim Jenkins', as well. Linda Hopkins used to come quite often—a blues singer. And, ironically, when I became president of Palo Alto Records, she was one of my artists in my stable. I told her, "I've been watching you since I was a little kid." [laughs] Anyway, that was kind of fun.

There were a lot of blues artists, yes. Saunders King came over. Saunders King was in San Francisco at Jack's. That was his home base.

Crawford: Was T-Bone Walker playing then?

Wong: A little later. Yes. I don't remember all those people that were there. I didn't frequent it as often. I was very choosy about where I would go.

Crawford: There was jazz in most of the movie houses?

Wong: Movie theaters would present joint live entertainment and a movie fare. So, since most of the popular music of the day was via big bands, I got to hear big bands. That was great, because everybody would have comedians, or, in the case of Jimmy Dorsey, the Nicholas Brothers. My gosh! How could you get any better than that, you know? They would have comics.

Crawford: Were you aware of housing discrimination or any kind of discrimination toward the black musicians?

Wong: Only what they told me. I didn't see it, myself, until later. I didn't learn more about it until later. But I didn't feel it at the time.

Crawford: Who was there at the station?

Wong: Who was there at the station? Wow. Well, there was Jerry Dean. There was Judson Snyder, who was also the office manager—they had a shift. He lives up in Marin County now, I think, with a little newspaper. He was more of a newspaper man, but he was a jazz person, so he did one or two shows. Oh yeah—Dick Hadlock.

Dick Hadlock and I had a very interesting parallel history with each other from that point on. Dick Hadlock was a jazz historian, musician, and so he had a show that was scheduled next to mine. So I saw him more often than some of the other people. Pat, of course, was on quite a bit—Pat Henry.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

Interview 3: March 11, 1998

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

- Crawford: This morning let's finish up with KJAZ.
- Wong: Okay, where did we leave off?
- Crawford: We didn't talk very much about personnel. We talked about it right at the beginning.
- Wong: Oh, I told you how I got on, right?
- Crawford: Yes, and you told me a little bit about the physical setup and what you broadcast. That was interesting what you told me about your commercial sponsors—not all of the announcers got their own commercial sponsors. Now maybe you'll talk a little bit about the personnel and the programming.
- Wong: The people there? Well, the founder was Pat Henry. Did I mention him yet?
- Crawford: Pat Henry? Oh yes.
- Wong: I mentioned him. Okay. So I used to listen to Pat when he had a show from a station in San Jose called “Sierra Serenade.” It was late at night. So I knew that distinctive timbre, that voice of his. It was beautiful—a very, very low voice. He was a master at segueing.
- Now, I'll explain that just a little bit. I translated that into my own behavior. There were three of us who really zeroed in on the sub-art of segueing in jazz broadcasting. We listened to each other, and many times somebody would call one of the three together on this—Jerry Dean. Jerry was the first person I had met at KJAZ, because he was the interviewer for me when I won that contest. I told you about that, right?
- Crawford: Yes, you told me about that.
- Wong: So, before I actually got on the air when I was waiting for my license to come through—because I had to get a radio operator's license—I would sit in the studio when Jerry was broadcasting, and we had a marvelous time. We still talk about it. He would put something on, and it would be my turn to figure out one that would segue from that one to this one. And we would have only so much time, so I'd think of one, and then he would get excited. He'd say, “Oh yeah! Wow!”
- Crawford: Define segue, would you, as it applies.

- Wong: Yes. Well, literally, it's a fluent transition, linking from one tune to the next tune. In this case, what I used to do a lot—and Jerry, too—if we set a mood, first off, we want to sustain that mood, rhythmic character and modulation.
- There is logic, there is a building up of sound transitions, whether it's historical, whether it's musical, whether it's just by sound, depending on what levels people listen—people listen in different levels—from a very analytical, dissecting kind of listening to nothing but pure sound and everything in between on the scale.
- So what I did was in the segue I would take a rhythmic figure that closes the first tune and select something that has an intro that has a relationship from what we just heard that closed the first tune to the second tune, to the extent that if you're not really paying extremely close attention, you won't know that it was another tune coming.
- Crawford: You mean you're looking for key?
- Wong: Well, sometimes it's modulation of keys, but other times it's just the figure or the attack—maybe a rhythmic attack—or the voicing of a tune or arrangement, and it moves right into the next one with the same sustainable stylistic feeling.
- Crawford: And this is all improvisational.
- Wong: It's all improvisational. That's the game, you see.
- Crawford: This makes it fun for you.
- Wong: Oh, I loved it. I would decide at the moment. It's totally extemporaneous whether I will do a set of three or a set of four. Or it depends on if I'm inspired that, “Oh yeah, that reminds me of maybe I could put—Yeah!”
- You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to bring you an article. I'm not sure I did. With the Jazz Buff?
- Crawford: Yes.
- Wong: Did I give you that one? It was one of the first ones—when the writer came and spent the whole evening with me.
- Crawford: Yes. And he was delighted because you were alone, I remember.
- Wong: Yes, well, he went nuts, you see. He would watch me do this thing.
- He said, “I don't have any idea how you do this, so I want to come.”

I said, “Well, come. You can just sit over there and just watch me.”

So, it would be, gosh, twenty seconds left, thirty seconds left, and I haven't finished a set yet because I'm talking with him and I'm answering the phone or something. I'd say, “Oh, hang on a minute,” and I'd think: Bang! I'll just get up, and I'll dash to some section, pull the album out, put the thing on there—

Crawford: You did that yourself?

Wong: Oh yes. There's nobody there to help engineer, because I have engineered myself, taking care of all three turntables, doing the spots—the commercial spots and the public service announcements.

Crawford: Did you read these?

Wong: Yes. They were timed precisely, you see—fifteen seconds, twenty seconds, thirty seconds—and it's paid for or it's not paid for, whatever. It's strict, very strict. And, at the same time, I'm looking at the clock, because there are certain requirements about when you should give your station break, and there—

Crawford: Those are federal requirements?

Wong: Yes, and your log tells you you've got to get these other spots in. So, while I'm trying to do a creative program in between, I'm still trying to commit something to exposing an awareness to the listener and teach them something in a subliminal way. Then, at the same time, I'm satisfying my own aesthetic standards and expectations of myself, because I don't care who else is out there; I want to be sure that I'm happy with what I'm doing. This would go on for hours.

Crawford: How many hours are we talking about here?

Wong: Oh, a three-hour show is an average.

Crawford: How many of you were there at this point?

Wong: Well, we had people who had regular shifts, and there were others who were weekends and special shifts and things like that.

I had everything. I had across the board shifts when I was going to Cal, and I've had shows from six o'clock in the morning to the time I've got to get over here to a class on campus when we had a station here, just by Ashby and Telegraph, mixed with Tsubo Coffeehouse, where there were some recordings made. The longest-running shows I had were five o'clock on Sunday afternoon because I knew that there was more of an audience there. They weren't working and busy and occupied; they were listening.

- Crawford: How big an audience?
- Wong: Oh, it was huge. I can't remember.
- Crawford: How big a broadcast area?
- Wong: Oh, it went from the north of Marin County out to the Orinda/Walnut Creek area.
- Crawford: As far as Carmel?
- Wong: No. In Carmel, we would have a Carmel station that would pick up the signal by transfer, and then they would broadcast there. So we would know that they were taking our feed off for x number of hours, and we would make sure that, depending on what the procedure was, sometimes we would announce their call letters. Other times they would say, "No, leave us ten seconds and we'll do whatever we've got to do in our local area."
- Crawford: Do you remember what the budget was?
- Wong: No, I don't. We had, on the average, about ten guys—something like that.
- Crawford: Around-the-clock broadcast?
- Wong: Yes, twenty-four hours.
- Crawford: Talk about what happened to the station. Of course, now it's no longer operating.
- Wong: Yes. Well, the station reached its end in August 1996. It had begun in August, ironically. It was August that it began in 1959. I joined the station in October [1959], right after the first contest in the broadcasting. The major broadcasting was in September. So I was there from October 1959 to August 1996.
- Crawford: The veteran, I think.
- Wong: Yes, I and Jerry Dean, the person I mentioned. We were the only ones that went from the beginning to the end. Pat Henry had sold the station, so he wasn't there for at least ten or more years—the most recent years.
- Crawford: Why did he sell?
- Wong: Oh, I don't know. He just decided to do that and he moved down to San Diego. He wanted to generate, maybe, some other station down there. He was there for a good number of years. He sold it to Ron Cowan.

Early on Ron was a salesperson at a men's clothing store called Tweeds in Alameda, right downstairs, next to the entrance of the first KJAZ studios. Ron became a successful, wealthy developer—holder of vast real estate. One of the boulevards in Alameda near the Oakland Airport was named after him a few years ago with great ceremony.

Crawford: How did the focus of your personal programming change?

Wong: It didn't change too much from the very first show that I had. I remember it clearly. I did a show on the arranger and saxophonist, Bill Holman. I don't know why I remember this. The second show was on another saxophonist who had garnered a wonderful reputation as an arranger, and that's Al Cohn, who was with, you know, Woody's Band, and Bill Holman was with Stan Kenton's band, previously. But both of these gentlemen represented what I called the natural resources for jazz composition and arranging.

So I began with that, with a profile, because I called the show "Jazz Perspectives," just as my column today in the *Jazz Education Journal* continues to be "Jazz Perspectives," because it allows me the full spectrum possible of whatever topic I want to do.

This show would sometimes have profiles that would last for five, six, eight, nine, ten installments of three hours each. And you would get in total then an incredible document if you were taping it. I have met people who would tell me, "Oh man, boy, that Ben Webster show you did. What was that? Six weeks? I got it all. Oh! Where did you find those things?"

And they're not always under Ben's name. Just like I did last night in my class, I would have things where I'd have to wrack my brain. See, I don't have a computer. I don't have to go to a database or anything. I just go, "Okay, he did a date with so-and-so probably around the late forties. Let's see. Okay, I'll go check that out." Bing! I'll go to the album, I'll pull it out, and I'll know it's the third track on the second side or the fifth track on the first side.

Crawford: You don't have an index anywhere in print?

Wong: No. It's all in my brain. So I have to take about twenty minutes, and I'll pull everything I need for the class, and it will all be in chronological order. But the thing is, yes, I did my shows chronologically, and other people like John Rogers would come in with a couple sheets of stuff, and he's got it all. And he used to ask me, he said, "I don't know how you do that. I mean, how do you do what you do?"

I said, "John, if I didn't do what I do, I wouldn't want to be here. Do you understand what I mean?" I said, "It wouldn't be a creative experience for me. It wouldn't be a real challenge. It wouldn't be filled with surprises for me or the audience."

Crawford: So you really did improvise.

Wong: Totally. And you just think about this. I think an extreme example is my Christmas jazz show, which I did for over forty years, every Christmas. Not one year is it alike from another year. They're all different. Every one of them is different. The segues are different. So it was always a refreshing thing. I've continued the Christmas show on KCSM.

I had a show that I had with Bob Houlehan for several years. What did we call it? Oh, "The Heart of Jazz"—that was my name for it—"The Heart of Jazz". People loved that show. I don't know why, but we bantered back and forth, I guess. It was an incredible challenge for me, because he was not a very imaginative segue artist programmer. So he would go left when I thought he should go more degrees to the right. It was a different kind of challenge. I would have to come up with something compensatory after he put a track on that would re-steer the set toward a particular target. It was very difficult.

Crawford: I'll bet you'd rather do it by yourself.

Wong: Yes. When I did it by myself, I was in total control. When I'm interacting with some other broadcaster, I'm at the mercy of his selection every other track.

Crawford: He was at Washington with you, wasn't he?

Wong: Yes, he was. That's another whole story, too. It's an exciting story. Yes. I just saw the both of them. He and Dick Hadlock came to my book-signing. They were the first guys. I was in between their shifts on the station. Anyway, I'll get to that later, because they became my recruits for my faculty.

Crawford: Well, maybe you'll talk about what happened to the station.

Wong: Well, the station was acquired by Mr. [Ron] Cowan. [It was in the] Bay Farm Island area, which used to be one of my bird haunts, incidentally, because it was a favored spot by tens of thousands of shore birds. Then the Utah Construction Company took it over. I noticed that, and, as a former member of the Golden Gate Audubon Society, we had a lot of campaigns to try to abate that kind of movement.

Crawford: Where is that, specifically? This area of land that you talked about.

Wong: It's right in Alameda, where the station was. [laughs] That whole area was where Bay Farm Island used to be. It's that development that's out there. It's huge and with golf courses and everything, and industrial offices.

Crawford: Do the birds have any marshland left?

- Wong: Very, very little. Only in the fringes. It was all near the Alameda Naval Air Station, too, in that area.
- Crawford: So he bought the station, and—
- Wong: Yes, and then he had the station and—I'm not sure of this—business-wise, he linked it with his other businesses, so that when he had financial problems with his other business, then this was part of the collateral. He also recently, last year, sold his home in Tiburon, which was something like a home that I've never seen in my whole life--an incredible estate—it had an amphitheater outside for performances.
- Crawford: And he lost it? Is that what you're saying?
- Wong: Yes, he lost it. He bought another home in, I think, Belvedere—smaller. This other home was tailor-made, you know. It was custom done. It had a helicopter pad, because he went to work by helicopter. When he went to Alameda, there was a pad over there, right by the radio station, by his tower of business offices—because there were several towers.
- Crawford: So, he had reverses and lost everything. Lost the station, too?
- Wong: Well, he lost the station. He didn't lose everything, because he's in reconstructed good shape again. He keeps telling me the station is going to come back.
- Crawford: Get things started again?
- Wong: The entire library is intact. No one's touching it. It's huge.
- Crawford: Who accumulated that? Pat Henry?
- Wong: Well, yes. He started it, of course, but after he left, it just continued to grow because the stations are fed by record labels. During the course of that, I have built a collection that surpasses the KJAZ collection, which is now in the library of KCSM.
- Crawford: Is that a fact? How many labels?
- Wong: Both in scope and in, of course, quality, because not everybody is touching it with their fingers and wearing it down. I mean, my collection is probably as close to mint as you can get. I have 8,000 78s, I have close to—I think the best count is that it's over 30,000, easily, on LPs, and 25,000 CDs.
- It is a logistical problem for storage and so forth. I ran out of space a long time ago. This was rebuilt. This is the second home that I thought would hold it, but I didn't know that the advent of CDs was going to start crowding into the

whole thing, and I'm not giving up my LPs, because they're worth a lot of money. And not only that, they're a very rich resource, because you can actually read the liner notes and not have to get a hand lens to try to read the small print that's in these little booklets, you see?

Crawford: I agree with you.

Wong: I mean, it's an assault on the eyes. It's like, "I don't want you to read." The boxed sets of these CDs are fantastic. It's like a tome, a whole book. They're marvelous because it's unlimited. It depends on how you want to package it. Whereas the LP is the LP, and that's it, although they had some box sets. But the print material, the annotations, they're not anything like what it is today. I mean, people are going nuts over it, because they reissue things. When they say, "The Complete blah blah blah on blah blah Label," they literally mean complete. And so the annotations are exhaustive: biographical things, interviews. I mean, there are a lot of writing opportunities, particularly in jazz CDs.

But anyway, so that's what happened to KJAZ. They did make an attempt to have listeners donate. There was a campaign. And then we did go onto a global satellite signal that went to Greenland, [and] Curacao, too—all kinds of calls we were getting—[and] Japan—and we were swinging. And then it dropped—just when we were just going up there.

Crawford: You had a ceiling? You had an amount of money that you needed? Is that it?

Wong: Yes. And then he just didn't have any more to feed the kitty, the big support staff there. We had a lot of people there.

Crawford: How many people at the end?

Wong: Probably thirty-five or forty people. Fully-employed. So that was kind of sad.

Crawford: Very sad. Will it come back?

Wong: Yes, well, in some shape or form. He says so. I don't put any hope in it, and in the meantime, you know, there will be other opportunities.

Crawford: You have KCSM, which, as you say, is an NPR affiliate.

Wong: Well, there are other things going on that would be global that are beyond KCSM.

Crawford: Well, let's get on to Washington, to your move to Berkeley and your taking over Washington Elementary, a U.C. Lab School. You were there from '65 to '76?

Wong: Yes. I already went through that about Chabot School, right?

Crawford: Yes, you did. I wanted to start here by asking you about the UC Lab Schools.

Wong: Oh, yes. Good question. And I want you to ask me that, because I want to talk about it. I think it's crucial to this whole story.

The University Laboratory Schools, with the prescribed mission by the university chancellor's office—which specifically is a one-liner as broad as daylight—”The mission of the lab schools is to contribute to education at large.” Wow! I said, “Well, what does that mean?” It means anything you want to interpret it as. [laughter] I liked that. So that attracted me to consider the invitation to assume the administration of one of the lab schools or the lab school system.

The people who invited me happened to be people I had been working with. One was Professor Lloyd Scott who was involved in supervised teaching of student teachers, and these student teachers were assigned to every school I was at in the Oakland Unified School District: the two that I was at as vice principal—Webster School and Santa Fe—and then the school where I was principal, that would be Chabot. I always had student teachers from UC Berkeley, and Professor Scott was often the professor involved with the supervisors. He mentioned to me—he said, “Hey, why don't you come back to campus, to the lab schools. There's a real need for somebody like you. We've been talking about you, and we'd like you to come up and talk about us.”

So I come back to campus, and here's Dr. Michaelis again and here's Dr. Scott. They explained to me that it would be a kind of a duality. I would be committed to the objectives of the university while I would also have to be committed to the objectives of the local school district.

I said, “This is really strange.” I said, “You mean I have two bosses?” Yes. So it happened that the people in the Berkeley Unified School District, which is obviously the district closest to Cal and would have the largest number of student teachers in the Berkeley schools—however, beyond that population were student teachers in non-lab schools in the Berkeley Unified School District—the university lab schools were committed to these things: one, curriculum research and development; two, as a service to the school of education, we would have master teachers supervising student teachers. But this was not restricted only to UC Berkeley; as it turned out, we had student teachers from Sonoma State, Holy Names, SF State—god, what else—what's that one down by the peninsula? Oh, Notre Dame. Now, that's a load. That means supervision, administration, and all that stuff.

That's just the service element. The main focus was to dig up ideas and pursue them with research and develop a curriculum. In retrospect, I was a pretty ideal guy to bring in because that's just what I do.

So the Berkeley Unified School District was represented by—and this is important, that's why I'm bringing this up—it happened to be Dr. Harold Maves, who, by the way, was just at the book signing. He and I had been acquainted when I conducted for the National Science Teachers Association as a member organization of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which had their national conference at UC Berkeley in the 1950s, I think it was—the late fifties—and I was to be the moderator or organizer for some workshops on elementary school science.

One of the people that I recruited happened to be Hal Maves, who was a sixth-grade teacher in the Richmond School District. He was very interested in science, and I even remember just what he did, but nevertheless we got acquainted then. Then the next time was when I taught at UC Berkeley. [tape end.]

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

Wong: This was 1955 or '56, the summer. I would have to look it up you need me to. I taught a class in environmental conservation for a combination fifth and sixth grade level in the demonstration school. Well, there, I bumped into Harriet Wood, who was a secretary to the principal in the summer school. I'd just met the person.

Well, now I bring it back up to 1965 when I was having these deliberations with the university and the school district. The two major recruiters for the unified school district for this crazy job were Hal Maves, who happened to be the assistant superintendent then, and Harriet Wood, who had become director of elementary education.

Crawford: It all comes around.

Wong: Can you believe that? Yeah? That's interesting, isn't it? And, oh, I must insert that I had one other contact with Harold Maves prior to 1965, and that was about 1960 or '61—somewhere in there. Berkeley Unified School District became part of my study, my dissertation. I wanted to investigate in-service training programs in various school districts. So I contacted the school district, and, of course, Harold Maves was the person I had to talk to.

So here we have these various contacts along the way, and they were very familiar with me, and they were not strangers to me. The whole community between Cal and the unified school district was a very comfortable one. The only thing I needed to know for my own satisfaction was, "Okay, what is thing going to be?"

He said, “Well, there are three university lab schools: the one at Washington School, the one at Whittier School, and the one”—at the time I believe it was Columbus School and then it later became Longfellow; they dropped Columbus.

Anyway, the other two principals were Dr. John Matlin, who became a dean of students at the school of education after he left the lab schools, and the other was Dr. Jerome Gilbert who is retired now. When he retired, that was it. He was at Whittier.

We all had different kinds of programs to meet the challenge of the mission. Now, prior to my signing an agreement, I knew that they were after me because of my science education background. They needed this. There were problems at Washington School. People were jumping ship. I was told that. There was a gentleman there that wasn't making it. I said, “Ah, I see why they're calling me for another reason now. They know my track record in Oakland as a sharp-shooter and a reconstructionist. This is the same kind of deal!” This was precisely the same thing, because this administrator just turned everybody off—the community, the faculty. The faculty was trying to find transfers to go elsewhere.

When the announcement was made that I was given the assignment, immediately there were faculty members who called me at home and said, “Wow, I just found out that you are going to be the principal. You don't know me, but I know who you are. I am so excited!” That's the kind of reaction I got.

I felt very good about that. There were still some people who didn't jump completely off the ship, that were just straddling and were staying.

Crawford: You laid down some pretty firm conditions—that you would do your jazz and your science curriculum.

Wong: Yes, I asked the question rhetorically. I said, “You know I'm going to do jazz education as one of the curriculum, research, and development areas.”

He said, “Oh, yes, yes, yes. We know you've been involved with that. We have press clippings about you.”

I said, “Okay,” because that's beside the focus on science education.

For science education, we were the AAAS pilot center for the process-approach curriculum that was funded by the National Science Foundation. We were also the pilot center for the Science Curriculum Improvement Study, also funded by NSF, which was headquartered here by the late Bob Karplus. Dr. Karplus was the director of the SCIS Research Program, and Washington School—and since Washington School was focused on science ed because of

my assignment, he was very excited about that. So it was those, and we also had the Elementary School Science Project—the ESS Project—which was initiated here on this campus. Dr. Stebbins, again, was involved. Gee, it's the same guys, you know? It was nice. Also, Dr. Aldo Leopold—the wildlife management expert.

Crawford: Did he write *Sand County Almanac*?

Wong: Oh, no, that's his dad, that's his dad.

Crawford: A wonderful book.

Wong: Oh, that's it. That's the book. That and *The Sea around Us*. But *The Environmental Ethic*, by Aldo H. Leopold, set this whole movement in this country. Oh, by the way, one of his daughters is a professor here, too. I've forgotten her first name. It's a brilliant family.

Anyway, they had those programs mainly, and the end unit was ecosystems. It began in first grade with a unit on organisms, and then, as it went on, to properties. And they were just perfect for what I was thinking about. And then it went to systems—systems and subsystems. Those were the early units, and communities. And, finally, our course into ecosystems.

Well, that's the same series of conceptual escalation, of building up this ladder of ecosystematic internalization by people that I had done in parallel with jazz education. I always thought those were the ways it worked, because I was very ecologically involved. I always saw a jazz group as an ecological group, and it was an ecosystem of its own. So I said, “Oh god, this is perfect! I'm going to reinforce the SCIS program and reflect from that program into a jazz education program.” So, to me, it was in parallel.

But now, the jazz education thing—I didn't have any funding for it. I mean, I did it on my own with my own resources in the jazz world. I had been an adjudicator of school band competitions before I came to Berkeley. One of the things I noticed was that the Berkeley High School program really needed to be shored up. So it was always a part of my consciousness—

Crawford: How were you aware of that?

Wong: Because I adjudicated the bands in competition.

Crawford: Oh, I see. So it was not high quality?

Wong: No, no. Not at all—in a variety of ways—but I mean, it just wasn't there.

Crawford: And the elementary schools were feeding into that program.

Wong: Yes, they didn't have very much going on. I mean, they didn't have any jazz. It was just your straight-ahead, prosaic instrumental music program. That's just what it was. I mean, I'm not putting it down. I'm just telling you the way I saw it.

So there was a lot of ground to nurture some kind of crop, you know. I wanted to be the person to put the seeds there and nurture them.

The setting of the lab schools was ideal. First off, the staff was an unusual staff. The staff at the lab schools was made up—the teaching staff—of those who were identified as master teachers—lab school teachers, if you will—and those that were non-lab school teachers. Now, of course, there was always some kind of funny feeling between staff members too. The lab ones had a little more steam, had an extra financial stipend for their work, and also a lot of professional growth because they were involved in all kinds of research projects—not limited to just the ones I mentioned.

We also serviced the university—the entire university, whatever the discipline was. When they needed some kind of context that dealt with young children or teachers, we were subject to cooperating with them.

There was a lady in my office who was hired by the university laboratory school budget, which they had at the School of Education, who strictly served the lab school activities. This was in addition to the unified school district support staff I had. She's still alive, too. Her name is Katherine Bailey, Kaye Bailey. I used to call her, and I'd say, “You're my booking agent. You know that, don't you?”

I think this might give an idea. We'd welcome all kinds of visitors, and they came from all over the world. This lab school was a target, a real magnet, and I still remember this figure. We had to report to the chancellor's office every year about the data concerning who visited the school, who they represented, and where they came from.

Crawford: Were they invited? Or did they read about the school?

Wong: No, they found out about it. They were not invited. They would call and say, “Can I do this? We would like to see this. Do you have that?” They came from school districts, universities, community groups, you name it.

Crawford: It was a U.N. Model School?

Wong: It was a U.N. Model School. Well, let me finish this part. The data finally came to having a figure of the number of hours of visitation, because that justified that there was a person here and a program here, and since we are serving education at large, they wanted to know. Well, the average year from the time I was there—because it escalated dramatically—was 17,000 hours,

plus. Seventeen thousand hours of visitation! I mean you look at that and say, “Wow! How did you supervise all that?” Well, it was not easy.

Crawford: Would you greet these people?

Wong: As often as I could, because they got something from me that they couldn't get from anybody else. Sometimes they specifically said, “We need to see Dr. Wong.” I was able to give them an orientation that nobody was able to because I saw the whole picture and I knew what was going on. It only took me ten or fifteen minutes, but that was very essential. So I always had Kaye program that component if possible. I wouldn't want them to leave the building without having an interaction with me if I was in town, if I wasn't in some meeting where I couldn't do that.

I think it was responsible, too, for generating a list of hopeful candidates to be on this faculty longer than the length of my arm. I would get calls from people, “How do you get aboard?” I had these convictions I would tell them: Any candidate for a lab school position met with me, and I had certain cardinal principles I wanted to get across. I could call them givens. They were requirements. If you didn't meet them up front, you might as well just leave my office.

Crawford: What were they?

Wong: One—the very first one was I'd say, “How's your health? How healthy are you? How's your stamina?” Usually they said, “I don't think anybody's ever asked me that regarding a teaching position.” I had to tell them they'd find that the company there was extraordinary; they were tireless workers.”

Crawford: Much more time demanded?

Wong: No question about it, more than the average teacher. The requirements of these special programs, for one, meant extra time and extra effort. The NSF programs were looking for teachers who were extremely sensitive and skillful in giving professional feedback so that they could reshape the lessons, the manuals, the materials, the equipment.

Crawford: Oh, I see. The NSF was giving you materials.

Wong: Oh yes, oh yes. They supplied these things, but these teachers had to spend all this time trying to find out what you do with this program, how you incorporate it into your teaching, and how you give feedback. They also had special seminars where people from these respective programs would be on site and needed to talk with them or needed to train them. They had training sessions.

Well, how are you going to get all this done? I mean, you still have your regular program.

So, in addition to that XYZ professor or team of professors was something, let's say, from psychology or from astronomy or from journalism. They needed a person or persons and I would have to think, Okay, Mrs. So-and-So would be the best candidate. Let me talk to her and see if we can fit your thing into her program as it is now.

Crawford: These were kind of like units that would be taught, monitored and then evaluated?

Wong: Yes, evaluated. My wife, by the way, was a member of the faculty. She was involved with writing things for the first-grade level, manuals for the Science Curriculum Improvement Study, and later on with math programs for Addison-Wesley. Publishers were there. They said, "Hey, where do you get people that can really give you that right upfront high quality expertise and feedback?" You go to a lab school, because you find these special kinds of individuals there who know how to do that.

Crawford: Was it a random student population?

Wong: Yes, random. And it just happened that the student population was the most pluralistic of any school in Berkeley, and it was a school during the time when they were bussing them from the hills to the flatlands and visa versa. This school was immune to that.

Crawford: Bussing started in about '68, did it?

Wong: Yes. And we didn't have to be involved with it, because we were the model for desegregation.

Crawford: Just naturally?

Wong: Naturally. It's a combination of things. One, it's located in a community that has a large number of artisans who came in all kinds of ethnic groups. Artists of all sorts: poets, dancers, writers, designers.

The second component is the university connection. Here's what happened. We would get a call from the university chancellor's office. Somebody would say, "I have a professor from"—oh, I don't know—"Argentina, and he has three children, and we have suggested that the first one to consider is the community that Washington School is in."

I'd talk to the guy and find out the ages and about them and so forth. The professor would always introduce his conversation with me saying, "I've

heard about the reputation of this school, and its multi-ethnicity, its programs. We would love to have our children there.”

So we took a lot of these people recommended by the university's chancellor's office, and they were always very interesting people. I didn't just take them over the phone.

They would come around, check it out, and see. They were always enthralled. There was unanimity in that. They would feel it. People would say to me, “As soon as you walk into the school, there's something about this school. There's some kind of feeling that I don't get when I go somewhere else.” Now, I can't explain that other than these things that were going on.

Crawford: Does the principal set the tone for a school—

Wong: Oh, there's no question about that. Yes, the principal sets the tone for the school. There's no doubt in my mind.

Crawford: You had all this National Science Foundation money. Did you apply that to music as a component?

Wong: Well, I'll tell you about it. But I want to finish. I told you that I asked them about their health. Then I mentioned about the university staff, right? Professor Scott was the administrator in charge of the lab schools, and I was associate administrator of the lab schools, so we related to all three of these that I mentioned.

I had selected Washington School because I knew that Hal was there before, Hal Maves. He was the principal of Washington School before he became assistant superintendent. Another coincidence, right? But after he left there was the person who had a problem, and I became that person's successor. Okay.

The team of lab school principals and Professor Scott would go on trips, recruiting trips. We would fly somewhere or we would drive somewhere. See, we had a thing where we would try to find out where some of the best teachers were in this country.

We would hear about them and we would call back and say, “Now, does this teacher qualify to be in the very top 5 percent of all the teachers you've ever met in your whole career?” If they said yes, I'd ask about research experience. Personality, energy level, all this other stuff, and then we would go and visit these potential candidates in their particular sites. We recruited quite a number this way. Even in other situations where there were demonstration teachers and the place was not a demonstration school. So we would have somebody from San Diego or Kansas or Reno or Arcadia, Menlo Park, and so forth.

We would decide, between the principals, what kind of match teacher ABC would be to lab school XYZ. It seems like she would be really great for this kind of project. Then fine; then we would take her or him. So that's how it was recruiting. In a sense it was skewed. Of course. It was skewed to meet the commitment that we were out to get.

Now, the buzz that these lab school teachers created spilled over to the non-lab school teachers, because they, in turn, got the vibrations and this sphere of influence, and they, in turn, grew as well. That was interesting to me. I wish we had done a study on that, because it did spin off to other people. I found out about that, and I said, "Look, would you like to visit So-and-So's room?" No problem. Bang! She's in there for two hours, three hours. Everybody else from hell and high water came in.

Oh, and I've got to tell you this one. I just remembered. I've got to tell you this one, because it's Bob Houlehan. We met at KJAZ, and then he was with outdoor billboard advertising for Foster & Kleiser. He had come from back east as a saxophone player. He had gone to Juilliard, and he came out here to play. Well, he couldn't find enough places to play, and he was very disjointed about it, chagrined, so he got this job that he hated. But we finally got him, as a broadcaster/ programmer on KJAZ. He was hanging around all the time, so finally, well, he was asked to do a show. He did some kind of an educational show, but not strictly.

Dick Hadlock, on the other hand, had a very educational show, because he is a historian and an author of jazz books, and a musician. He was a beautiful guy. He was the jazz critic for the *San Francisco Examiner* before he gave the job to Phil Elwood, and the reason for that is what I'm coming to.

I kept talking to these two guys, and I said, "Look, guys, you're both disenchanted with your gigs. You should be a teacher, because that's what you do on the air." What I did—to make a long story short—I arranged for Dick Hadlock to go to SF State in a very abbreviated program, because he already had an B.A., and I talked with the people there on field supervision in their educational department there, and made it very easy for him to make the transition and—boom boom boom—take some coursework, and he got the credential. He went to Fort Stuart out here, the Russian fort, with the Indian children. He left the whole area and went up there.

It took about four years, and I called him. Houlehan tells this story all the time to other people. I was principal at Chabot School at the time—1961 to 1964. During that time, I was turning these two guys on.

[End Tape 5, Side B]

[Begin Tape 6, Side A]

Wong: He [Houlehan] called me and he said he was in the student teaching program, the credential was for kindergarten through the eighth grade and he was thinking of maybe teaching high school. Now, this was a real strategy of mine. I said, "Well, there is some civics and U.S. history possible in some eighth-grades curriculum, in social studies."

So he then had a student teaching experience, which was split at SF State; you did one with an upper grade and one with a lower grade. So he did one, I think, with fifth grade, and he called me and he said, "Oh my god. These kids are young." I said, "Well, now, listen to me. A fifth grade also has a social studies unit on U.S. history. In the fourth grade is the unit the state of California. So fifth grade, low fifth, is the pioneer movement, and then it's modern times for U.S. history."

Finally, he was at the end of his matriculation there, and I told him, "I'm going to have vacancies at Chabot School here in Oakland. Why don't you apply, and I will make sure that you are assigned to me. It will have to be a fifth grade. It only goes up to sixth grade, and there's no U.S. history in sixth grade. That's Latin America." So he applied, and I had him assigned. This was 1965, just before I was invited to consider the lab school, and things were going very well at Chabot School. I mean, the community just adored what I was doing. Then I made the announcement that I was going to leave. This community went into uproars, by the way. They really did. They were just pleading with me, "Oh no! Don't leave us."

I called Bob up and told him. I said, "There will be some vacancies in Berkeley, and I'll call you, and I'll find a position for you." So, finally, I had him penciled in. I said, "You've got to get out of the Oakland [Unified] School District now and apply for the Berkeley School District. I'll dictate a letter to you. Send it in, it will come to me, and I'll sign it, because I'm still there." So I made sure that that was taken care of. Now I said, "Next, I'll send you the applications for the Berkeley Unified School District, and of course I will accept you, because I'll tell them that I want this man. I can get anybody I want, because that's part of this deal." So he came aboard, and he stayed until he retired.

Now, after he had his fifth grade for, I think, a couple of years, I had something fresh and exciting for him. I said, "I'd like you to be a kindergarten teacher next year." His mouth dropped, his jaw dropped. Well, what happened was I didn't like what he was doing in fifth grade. I just had this feeling that he would relate to younger children, unbeknownst to him. This intuition of mine led me to do this.

I said, "Now, here's what I've got planned for you. You know Janet Duckart out there is a master kindergarten teacher, one of the greatest kindergarten

teachers I've ever met, and is always an object of pursuit by people to come to see a kindergarten. That's where you go. She's absolutely marvelous." By the way, that's where Joshua Redman had his kindergarten experience.

So I said, "I'm going to release you for tomorrow, to start with, and I want you to go in there and stay there all day. Just be part of what's going on, and see what you can see. Be alert to what's going on. Then, if you need another day or you need a couple more days, no problem. I want to accommodate you. I want you to feel comfortable."

Crawford: What was it about Janet Duckart?

Wong: Janet Duckart. Yes, she's still there. I think this is her last year. She was a demonstration teacher in San Diego for San Diego—what—

Crawford: And she's still there thirty years later? I hope she gets a reward.

Wong: Yes, she gets it every day. She works around the clock. She knows every nuance of every kid in there. She's got radar like you wouldn't believe. She's just wonderful. It's the ambience, the interrelationship she had with the children, the building of confidence, the understanding by kids that she's there to be facilitative. She's there to help with everything from A-Z, and her program was planned to help them become more independent.

One of the first things Houlehan did was to figure out how he was going to relate to these kids. I suggested he bring his saxophone. So he brought his tenor saxophone in there, and he played for the kids, and he captured them immediately. It's a pretty exciting thing for little kids to see somebody do what he did.

That was the beginning for him, and he wouldn't trade it for anything. He talks about it in retrospect, but never in his wildest imagination would he have ever thought he was going to be a teacher of kindergarten children.

Ultimately, Dick Hadlock also had a kindergarten. There was a big piece. I wish I could find this stuff. It must be in the *Chronicle* archives. It was a huge spread about the school and had pictures of Dick Hadlock and different people. Because, you see, it was very rare anywhere to find men being teachers of kindergarten children, and here I had two of them, and both of them were jazz musicians. It was quite a spread, quite a spread. It was very extensive. They came over and talked to me a lot. I haven't thought about that piece until now.

So, that actually sparked off the other instruments I needed. Before I had reached a point where I could recruit somebody like Phil Hardyman, I started the jazz education program with Oscar Peterson.

Just prior to my arrival with my first assignment in 1965, that August I was in Chicago in the offices and studios of Mercury Records, which had a subsidiary label called Limelight, which is no longer in existence, but was a top-of-the-line double gate fold and super graphics of both sorts.

Oscar was playing at the Hickory House with Sam Jones on bass—the late Sam Jones—and the still living Louis Hayes on drums. I spoke with Oscar about doing something with children. He said, “Well, I don't know of anybody who has done that, so I don't have any model. I won't know where to start.” I told him to give me a call when he was ready.

He gave me a call and said that he was going to be in San Francisco for, I think, a week or two, at least a week, and he said, “I want to pick up on that invitation of yours about working with children and playing for children, but you're going to have to guide me, because I don't know what to do.”

This was about, oh, I don't know, maybe six, seven weeks before he was to come into the Bay Area. So it gave me a little lead time. I quickly decided to forge ahead with some of my ideas and understand how I might link up with the concepts of ecology from the Science Curriculum Improvement Study so that, first off, if anybody asked why I was doing that—I never concerned myself, but I always fortified my rationales with as much linkage systems as possible so that I got to thinking about it, and I became very glib at talking about how they were related. So it was no problem.

I started creating materials. I did some things on the background of Oscar. I did some things on the intrinsic values of music and creative music and what improvisation was, because we do that all the time, all day long. We just don't call it that, but I wanted to call it that. It isn't anything that mysterious, it's only a different context.

Crawford: You talked to the children? Or you wrote this?

Wong: I talked to my staff. You see, that was the first line of defense and offense. I pointedly related it from their work with the Science Improvement Study, because that was already what they were doing.

I said, “Now, I'm finding an environment that's not the natural environment or the physical environment that you're dealing with. It's an environment to which these same principles and concepts will apply, but it will motivate these children and open vistas for them. I said, “As you know, you knew sooner or later I was going to click off into jazz, and I've already been here two months.”

And I had told the administrators of the university and the school district at the time when I was finalizing our discussions on my assignment here. I said, “You've unleashed an agenda that's completely open for me. I want you to

know that in addition to these science education programs, I will be promptly getting into jazz education. I will test the validity of your endorsement that you're giving me now to do that." It took me only two months, and I was into it. Bang! This is 1965. This is a long time ago.

I then contacted the record labels because I needed resource material and I didn't have the money. I needed a lot of recordings to listen to. They were Oscar Peterson music, right? So I called the promotion director of Mercury Records in their San Francisco office. It was a young man who was beginning to climb in his career in the music and record industry. I told him what I was planning to do.

Crawford: You knew Oscar from a long time ago.

Wong: Oh, yes. He and I were acquainted. I did liner notes for him, we had dinners, you know. In fact, some time you should read that set of liner notes, because I talk about the two fetishes he has. One is wristwatches; two is duck dinners.

Crawford: Duck dinners? [laughter]

Wong: Yes, I put that in the liner notes—I always got him Peking duck or a Mandarin crispy duck. We went to the Golden Pavilion—Golden Pavilion—he loved that restaurant when it was there. [speaking in style of commercial announcer] "Golden Pavilion. 800 Sacramento Street, at the corner of Grant Avenue." It was one of my clients.

Crawford: One of your commercials, right? And wristwatches? He just liked to collect them?

Wong: Oh, yes. He just loved them, yes. Well, here's just a little quick preamble of how I could call this young man as a representative of this major label—how I could call him and get whatever records I wanted for all these classes.

One thing I could tell you is that annually I hosted a dinner for all the promotion guys and gals who were with record labels as a courtesy to them to thank them for their courtesies in giving me recordings to play—because, in a sense, it's for their company. Nobody had to do what I did.

I remember just a couple of years ago I happened to get on the phone with a guy who was one of these people and who is now a bigwig with Warner Brothers. He was with RCA Victor at the time. "You know, Herb, I'll never forget those dinners that you hosted for all the people who were promo guys in the Bay Area." So, you see, I generated a nice warm relationship with all of them. It didn't matter what label it was.

Wong: So this guy brings these huge boxes [laughs] over to the school, and then I wrote a press release and described this whole program of how the record

label has contributed to this. So I took care of that, again, so things were complementary, because the word would get around to other labels.

Then we did things that were interdisciplinary in the classrooms. Of course, there would be a gradient of intensity between classrooms. Those who were lab school teachers really got into it more so than the others.

Now, when I told the staff that Oscar Peterson was coming, some of them didn't know who he was. So I had all my material planned. I had new lessons, linkage lessons, concepts, references.

Crawford: All levels in the school?

Wong: Yes. I created all that stuff and gave it to them. Then, when I had everything all set, I called Mrs. Wood, director of elementary education, because she was in charge of the curriculum.

I knew she loved Oscar Peterson, so I called her and said, "Harriet, Oscar Peterson and his trio are coming to Washington School." She shrieked! [laughter] "What?! You're kidding! No!"

So, you know, they were really excited.

The classrooms were ready for him. Teachers had a whole expectancy level that they'd never had before, and some of them were really excited, because I had all these jazz people here.

Anyway, Oscar comes. I have five TV stations, I have Ralph Gleason from the *San Francisco Chronicle*? I asked Phil to come, because he was with KPFA and was going to be with the Examiner. Russ Wilson—the late Russ Wilson was the old jazz critic at the Oakland Tribune. Johnny Rodriguez was the jazz writer for the Berkeley Gazette at the time when he was still alive. I had the major people covered. So this was a real media event.

People didn't do those kinds of things. It's not so uncommon today, but it's still uncommon for what I did, to get it together and what we did before and after. I know of nobody else that did what we did with Oscar Peterson.

Here's how it happened. I had a session with Oscar, telling him what I planned to do. We were going to have two assemblies: one with kindergarten through third grade, and the other one fourth, fifth, and sixth. I said, "Here's a different level of sophistication of concept maturity," and I went through all this stuff with him.

Well, they walked into the auditorium and they approached the stage. They could see the stage, and they saw these murals, I guess they were about twelve to fifteen feet long—three of them. Oscar was in the middle, and here's Louis

Hayes and Sam Jones. They looked at me and said, “Wow! What a reception.” They'd never seen anybody do that for them. So they went on.

We did demonstrate, very specifically, the concept of systems and interaction. I would narrate some of this. While the group was playing, I'm talking to the kids for both assemblies: K-3 and 4-6. I used different levels of language, knowing what their curriculum, units of study, were. These kids up to third grade, they understood more about properties—this is hard, this is soft, this is light, this is this color, this is dark, this is light—you know, all kinds of properties, physical properties. That's part of the first grade.

So—and systems, subsystems and sub-subsystems. And interaction close up would be like three guys are close to each other—that's interaction close up. Interaction at a distance would be the group interacting with the audience at a distance. Now, they never thought of it with people and music. They'd only done it with organisms and physical stuff and science. The drum set, for instance, for Louis Hayes, is his subsystem. So, in a sense, within the group, the drums, the piano, and the bass are sub-subsystems. The kids got it. They understood it.

Crawford: What was the response?

Wong: It seemed to carry over, you see, into the classrooms later.

[End Tape 6, Side A]

[Begin Tape 6, Side B]

Wong: The other activity we had that I remember very well is that I said, “Now, interact with the kids, Oscar. What you do is ask them to compose a tune with you.”

So he would say, “Okay, somebody give me a note, somebody give me a note.” So somebody says, you know, “C.” He goes [ding], and then said, “Well, you didn't tell me which one. It could be high C, too.” [ding] “Or low C.” [ding] Then somebody else gives him one and he goes [ding]. He says, “Hear this. Now we've got these two notes, now we've got three notes. Well, let's see what we've got.” They co-composed a tune, you know?

Then he says, “Now that we have the tune, let's see what else we could do with it. Let's see what we can do with it.” So, then, he improvised on the theme, and then he did it again, and it sounded different again. So the whole thing was getting across variations. We got that across.

Crawford: Fabulous.

Wong: Yes, that was fabulous. And then he met with the teachers. The teachers asked him questions, and I provided a seminar for Oscar and the staff. That was exciting.

Crawford: That was the beginning.

Wong: That was the very beginning. People were really nuts about it. I remember all those writers—they were flipping out.

Crawford: I'd read what two of the little children said here about that. One of them said, "Jazz makes my tummy feel orange and brown." And another one said, "It makes me feel like there's a giant valentine floating in the sky."

Wong: Oh yes, those are sayings that were transcribed off the page of drawings, and they were first graders, by the way—both of those—first graders. They had crayon pictures showing the orange and brown of the tummy. I can still remember this, but I don't know where they are. I kept these things for the longest time. I wish I had them. Maybe I've got them in some box somewhere. But I can see the floating valentines, the giant valentines on this newsprint. God, that was great. In fact, I used those, too, by the way, later on to turn on Duke Ellington.

Crawford: Do you want to talk about that?

Wong: Well, I'll talk about the next one first. After Oscar Peterson, which was a trio, to expand the groups. I had all these things going like I would do on a show. I would start with a duo or something, then a trio, then a quartet, then a quintet. So it's another criteria—expansion of sound, expansion of the number of voices, increasing the interactive matrix. So now I decided to recruit Rahsaan Roland Kirk and his quintet.

Well, he was coming to San Francisco, and I got a hold of him. I don't remember how I got him, but he was going to bring his whole group over for nothing. I called his record label and I got the same kind of stuff going on, because I said, "Hey, this pattern works, let's do it."

Crawford: How much time in between the two programs?

Wong: Oh, maybe within the same school year. Yes, within the same school year. I believe I did that—yes—because I wanted the same population to get the expansion experience.

I went over to the city to pick him up from a hotel on Geary Street, about tennish, and bring him to school. This is an anecdote that I just want to get down because I remember this. I said, "Well, what would you like to eat?" I've got him sat down in the faculty lounge. He says, "Well, tell me what you have." So I recited the whole menu, all the different things. He said, "I'll take

it all.” [laughter] So I went to the cafeteria manager and said, “This gentleman wants everything, all the choices.” He ate it all! I just couldn’t believe it. Before he played! This is just a little side thing, but I’m getting to a real crucial point.

Oh, I forgot. Oh my! I forgot something about Oscar Peterson’s trio. I’m glad I thought of this, because it’s parallel to it. During Oscar’s performance, when Oscar’s trio was not doing the educational segment and the group was playing—because that’s the way I wanted to turn them on first, just go on stage and play. The lights were low, and we had some spotlights on them from the stage. A boy came up to me—I was on the stage right, by the auditorium, standing there by the wall—and a little boy came up to me and tugged at my sport jacket. He said, “Dr. Wong,” and he points up there. He said, “That’s what I want to do when I grow up.”

So I put my arm around him and I said, “Rodney, if that’s what you want to do, that’s what you’re going to do, and that’s what you’re going to be. Don’t worry about it. It will happen.” Now, he was about six years old, I think, six and half, maybe, and this was Rodney Franklin. Rodney Franklin became skilled in playing the tenor saxophone, and he also played the piano.

I fed Rodney recordings through his father. His father was a supervisor in the main post office in Berkeley, which was just two and a half, three blocks away from the school where I had a P.O. box to receive my recordings. So I would go over to see what I would have, and anything I didn’t need, I would knock on the little window area where Mr. Franklin would be, and I would say to Mr. Franklin, “Here, these are for Rodney.” So he would take them home and he would listen to them. He began to mature as a player when Phil [Hardymon] came to conduct the instrumental music.

Crawford: Do you want to talk about how Phil came on or do you want to finish this?

Wong: No, not yet. I want to finish this. Because this is a segment on its own. I can pick up on Rodney a little later—the rest of his career—because it deals with being in a band. But this was just the impetus, by witnessing the experience of Oscar Peterson’s Trio, how powerful that was, that eventually this little boy was going to be a professional jazz pianist with many, many recordings.

So back to the Rahsaan Roland Kirk thing. Now, a comparable thing happened there. Another young boy comes up to me when Rahsaan was playing with his hip whistle, manzello and saxophone and all at the same time, turning on these kids like you won’t believe. They’d never seen anybody play three horns at the same time and with all these other instruments that he’s doing things with, you know. It was an amazing visual experience, not counting anything else. By the way, Rahsaan was blind.

So it was Peter Apfelbaum who said to me, “I’d like to do that.” He pointed to when Rahsaan had three woodwinds in his mouth. The story is that when he was ultimately in eighth grade, when he was able to do more than one instrument in his mouth and do it very well, Peter then turned people upside down at the music educators’ national conference, which was held in Anaheim, I recall. Phil brought the band down there after I had made some connections with the MENC program coordinators. I knew that they would want to see this band. I said, “It’s something that you’ve never heard of in your whole life, in your whole experience. You’ve never heard kids like this play. And this was, you know, part of the early program.

Wong: I have to go.

Crawford: We haven’t talked about Duke Ellington.

Wong: No. Well, see, Ellington came after—we had Oscar Peterson, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, I had Phil Woods—Phil Woods!—and Vi Redd—an alto saxophonist with Martha Young, who was Lester Young’s cousin who played piano and lived in the neighborhood.

And Vi Redd chose the school, because she wanted her son to be there—nowhere else had anything like this. He was just a little first grader. She was already a recorded alto saxophonist. So I was very pleased to have her. And then the crowning thing, obviously, was Duke Ellington.

Crawford: Let’s stop and continue with Duke Ellington next time—

Wong: No, I think that maybe we’ll finish. No, no, that would be too long. The Ellington thing is a saga in itself. That would take all of half an hour. It’s a very, very vital part of this whole affair. He was so influential in so many different ways.

Crawford: Well, seeing all these people made it possible for the children.

Wong: Yes. And because it’s what I’m going to tell you will be multimedia, will be interdisciplinary. I mean, it was a total event. So I’ll come to that, because there’s a lot of stuff dealing with that, and some aspects of my continuing, shall I say, sacrifices to pull things off.

Crawford: Start taking money from other budgets, you mean?

Wong: No, not just that. I mean—like the Ellington thing, I footed the entire bill for that orchestra—several thousand dollars. Because nobody else in this whole damned district or anywhere else around here would give me a penny.

Crawford: Even with your track record?

Wong: Well, they weren't going to give me any money here, because, you know, jazz education was still not regarded as anything. Can you believe that? Even though I was doing these things, I was doing it within a laboratory setting. It was still enclosed, and yet, at the same time, people who found out about it got into the media and were singing and shouting hosannas.

Crawford: When Ralph Gleason and the rest of them—when they wrote something, didn't that bring in some support?

Wong: No monies. A very good example was I called my very good friend, the late Jimmy Lyons of the Monterey Jazz Festival, and that educational program was just not even beginning yet. Not even beginning yet. I would call and say, "Hey Jimmy, I know you've got this fund for just the Monterey-area kids, but do you think there's something there? I have some very gifted young kids here."

I made my proposition several times, but I never got anywhere. So that was that. I'm glad—just to mention this one little thing because I may forget about this—and that is that the link to what I just told you has another little episode, years later. Maybe three or four years later, I got a call from Jimmy, and Jimmy says, "Herb, I just heard a group that's really fantastic. Just some kids that are—well, they look like they were about junior high school age, like maybe thirteen or fourteen. I just thought you'd be interested since I think they come from Berkeley somewhere." He says, "One guy's named Peter something, and another plays fantastic piano—Rod or Rodney." [laughter]

I said, "Jimmy, these are the same kids that I pleaded with you for a modicum of support, and then he said, "Yeah." He said, "Listen, I want them down at the Monterey Jazz Festival." But that's another chapter.

[End Tape 6, Side B]

Interview 4: March 18, 1998

[Begin Tape 7, Side A]

Crawford: When you were starting at Washington Elementary, you said you were going to restructure the school. One of your concepts was team teaching. So maybe you'll talk about that.

Wong: Oh, yes. I guess I did that. Yes. Well, first I cleaned house. I think I mentioned that the auspices involved—that is, the Berkeley Unified School District and the University of California laboratory school program—both wanted a new administrator. I think I mentioned that people were jumping ship. Yes. So I became the stabilizer and somewhat of a, quote-unquote, rescuer.

This was also partially because of my track record of going in to fix something that's broken in schools. I've had two previous assignments in the Oakland schools with that very purpose. I think I explained that. Yes. So this offered a tremendous opportunity to me. It was the most open and exciting one up to that point in my career.

Crawford: How did you go about cleaning house?

Wong: First, I checked to see what had been going on. I found out some behaviors that I hadn't heard before, such as a daily bulletin that went to the staff from the principal, quoting the education code by resolution numbers and code numbers and everything. In other words, every day there was something out there for the staff to tell them what they can't do. They became prisoners, in a sense, to these daily batteries of quotations from the education code and its laws.

Then a lot of the activities that the university wanted to promote through the lab school were not happening and the school district was unhappy. So it was just a bad situation.

I went in there, and those people who had obvious problems according to their performance I helped as much as I could to sustain their assignment there. But when they didn't come up to snuff, I had to make other assignments for them. They were very comfortable with it, because they could see that where I was going was not where they were capable of going. So I had to replace them. I needed vacancies for the people that I wanted to bring in.

Crawford: Where did you move them to?

Wong: Other schools. I had the power, authority, and autonomy to do such a thing. That was part of my assignment that I could pick anybody from anywhere in the United States for any vacancy. Now that is incredible.

Crawford: That's a big job, too, of recruiting. Did you have people in mind?

Wong: Yes. In fact, I had one gal who was in Oakland. I remember observing her when I was on a special assignment, when I was a consultant on social studies and science. I remember visiting her classroom. She was a young teacher, and I knew she had something special. She was very charismatic and had a wonderful personality. Bingo. I got her, and she came right away. Boom.

Crawford: Was she musical or social sciences?

Wong: She was just a general classroom teacher, but she had all these things that I know, the attributes that—No, I wasn't looking just for music.

Crawford: How did you put the teams together? What were you looking for?

Wong: Well, [laughs] that was part of it. I think that it was an openness: people who were not so socked into certain convictions that I wouldn't be able to consider them as people who would be influencing enough to move ahead with some mission that I had.

I was also looking for people that, as I mentioned to you, had excellent health and an open perspective, attitudes that were very healthy, and an eagerness to explore and to discover. That's all part of the heuristic attitude and values of science and discovery. When you find an individual who loves to explore and to try different things, and those strategies are a part of the daily fare, that, you know, "I'm going to try something else"—It's kind of reflecting my own values, although mine were severe.

Like I said, I didn't pay any attention to rules and regulations. I've never been a yes-man, never. I refuse to do that, because I know that means I'm going to be tied to something; my hands are going to be tied, my mouth is going to be shut up. That's not me. So I tried to find people who were easy to get along with and who had good ideas. I could see in their classroom what was going on, the kind of interaction they had with children.

Crawford: How many were there?

Wong: Well, let's see. I'll have to think about it. Let's see, there's Lorna Skantze, who is currently the principal here in Berkeley of the Berkeley Arts Magnet School. There was Joyce Bjorgum [spells]. Joyce I recruited from the Mount Diablo School District, because I was a science consultant to a summer science workshop at the Mount Diablo school district. That's right. I remember her as a kind of a demonstration teacher during the summer out there. I said, "Boy, there's a crackerjack. A real crackerjack." And I liked her manners, just everything about her. So I called her, and [snaps], bingo.

See, this is a very attractive thing. Not everybody can get a position at the lab school. I mean, that's a coup for a teacher.

- Crawford: They all came if you invited them?
- Wong: No one ever refused.
- Crawford: And how did you begin to incorporate music then, once you had your staff in place?
- Wong: Well, then I brought other people.
- Crawford: Is this when Hardymon and Whittington came?
- Wong: No, not yet, because I had to get classroom teachers first. So that's why I brought Bob Houlehan.

So he was in place. George Yoshida, who was already a teacher on the staff, was a jazz drummer. Then, during the course of his employment and being a member of the faculty, he also took piano lessons from John Marabuto here in Berkeley. So he got into piano, but basically, he was a drummer.

In fact, I used to use John to tune my pianos over there at Chabot School because he has an excellent ear, perfect pitch. He was very active here in the Bay Area. Occasionally, he still plays.

- Crawford: So that was a find. You had music on the faculty.
- Wong: Yes, but mainly I had to get faculty for science, because that was the first commitment. That was a stated objective for the lab schools for my assignment there.
- Crawford: How long had this been a lab school, Washington?
- Wong: Apparently two other principals that I know of: my predecessor and Dr. Harold Maves.
- Crawford: Yes, so this was a long-standing arrangement, but you didn't find that it was very creative when you came?
- Wong: Well, when Hal was there it was a wonderful faculty. I mean, I heard nothing but the best, and I would expect that from him because I've known him. It was a marvelous relationship that he had, and things were going—then, when they promoted him to assistant superintendent, the university had to bring in yet another person who had a doctorate.

You have to have a doctorate in order to fulfill those assignments at the lab school. It means that somebody has to have experience and skills in research and curriculum development. Those are the two areas. I do remember the guy's name now whose place I took. I don't know that I'll put it in here.

Crawford: That's up to you.

Wong: No, it's not necessary. So there were those two previous administrations. It was to re-staff the staff to bring the kinds of backgrounds, skill levels, and value systems that I was looking for. I have a—what shall I call it—an impatient kind of patience, or vice versa: a patient kind of impatience. I'm always eager to get going with things and to get things done. I don't want to mess around; I don't want to waste any time. So I did the best I could to help these people who were there in residence, and then when they didn't make it, as I said, it opened up the vacancies.

Now, I was given a certain number of slots of the total number of teachers, the twenty-something teachers, that were lab school slots. There were, as I mentioned, some that were called non-lab slots. So my focus was to get as much flexibility as I could with the best staff I can get on the lab school staff, and then everybody else ought to be as good as I can get them, even though they're not demonstration teachers, although they did do some of that.

They supervised teachers from other institutions, as I mentioned, regardless of lab or not, if they had the skills. Not everybody did; like Bob Houlehan did not. I wouldn't entrust him with that assignment.

Crawford: What was his skill?

Wong: He had a love for teaching, he had a love for children, he was very enthusiastic, and he was a good motivator, but he lacked some of the things I definitely needed on the other side. So he just wasn't qualified for it. But everybody had a love for children that was there. The climate was absolutely very professional and very loving and caring.

Anyway, I was after good teachers whether they had a science background or not. It didn't matter, because if they had all these other attributes, I knew they were going to succeed, because I was going to help them. They were going to get trained; they were going to get assistance. There was so much going on there that, if you had your natural abilities and whatever acquired abilities, you were going to swing. There was no question about it. They just knew it. I don't think there was anybody that I recruited for the lab school that did not live up to my expectations. Nobody.

Crawford: Then how did you incorporate the music?

Wong: Well, the music came after science, as I mentioned. I did create teams, teaching teams, which is not unusual for the time. John Gardner at UCLA did a lot of work on this, on the UCLA lab school. I communicated with him. He was after non-graded schools and things like that.

I created multi-graded classes, K-2s, 1-3s, 3-4s, 2-3s, 1-2s, K-1s, K-1-2s—whatever. Now, what that did is philosophically we melted down the gradedness, because that's an artificial set of categories and boundaries made up by people for convenience's sake.

Crawford: Nothing to do with individuals.

Wong: Nothing to do with individual capabilities. It was only by chronological age, which to me was a severe fallacy, an antithesis of the truth. We would have a K-3 team, and all these would be various combinations of dealing with the primary classes, and then the other ones would be others. I can't remember all the different configurations, but they were such that there was more communion between teachers of like-grade ranges. It was hard for people to not think gradedness, because that is so historically pounded into people from the time they went to school.

And by the way, the staff was always looking forward to, "I wonder what Herb has up his sleeve this year." It's true. I came up with all kinds of crazy things I was thinking about. Even though there were certain things that were going on for years, I still had other things that were coming up. Whether they were processes or another offshoot of a concept, another bunch of tapestries or themes or whatever.

So these organizational schema really permitted the music to happen. I didn't just say, "Well, now we're just going to do music." That's not the way it was working. I had to see how the readiness was going to be accelerated to a point where it became right to pluck. When I had the pieces together, whether they were human resources or other resources, then I knew that I could move ahead, wherever that was. I never knew what the end result would be, it was just that I was aiming—a differentiation between objectives and goals.

Crawford: You had already worked this out in your mind that the science unit and the music unit could contribute to one another?

Wong: Yes, I did. Yes. As soon as I became immersed in the National Science Foundation Experimental Science Education Programs, I said, "Uh huh, of course." Because of my inexorable interdisciplinary perspectives, I just naturally fell right into those things.

Crawford: You used NSF funding for music?

Wong: Yes. In a way that was a totally legitimate but inventive tributary of the mainstream of the science education programs. In a sense, I was able to have transactions with other themes that I deemed parallel and enhanceful to the main job of science education.

That was the main job; there's no question about that, and I won't make any bones about it. However, the jazz thing began to take over as a very large piece of what I was doing, without devaluating anything else. I was strengthening the others by having the emergence of jazz education as a consciousness and as a curriculum.

Now, some people found it more difficult—those that didn't have musical backgrounds, obviously—so I would capitalize on those people who had those skills, because I needed to move as quickly as possible. Part of it was that I created a faculty jazz group called the Washington Wailers by virtue of finally having enough staff members that played.

Phil Hardymon was the trumpet player. He had had some physical problems previously, so he wasn't able to do as well in that. Dick Whittington was recruited after Phil.

But I should go through the Phil thing. You've seen that article in the East Bay Express, which is all on Phil, mainly.

Crawford: It calls you a visionary and calls Phil the charismatic center, I think.

Wong: Yes, whatever. He didn't understand it well, either. Only I knew what was going on. So when I read that, I said, "You haven't got it yet. No one's got it." [laughter]

Crawford: Where did he come from?

Wong: Well, he came around looking for a job. He was a substitute instrumental music teacher who happened to come by the school to take that assignment when the regular person was absent. So he made his acquaintance with me, and I found out that in the service he was an arranger and a trumpet player. Not only was he in poor financial status, he had a hard time. He said he was substituting here and there, in Berkeley and in Oakland and in whatever school district he could find. He was in Stockton. He had a daughter.

Crawford: What was his subject?

Wong: I don't remember. I think he maybe taught back there. Yes, he did some teaching in Stockton, I know that. He's not from there.

But I was impressed with his teaching when I observed his substitute teaching. I liked his attitude, and there was no question in my mind that—I can't remember who the person was who we had there before, I really can't. It's completely wiped out of my mind. I wanted somebody with that background, and suddenly he appeared—unbeknownst to me until we really got acquainted. So this was like early spring, whatever that year was. [laughs] I can't even remember the year.

Crawford: Was it your first year?

Wong: No. Maybe '67. I started there in '65. Maybe it was even '66. It could be, because I was in a hurry. [laughs] So it could be the summer of '66. It is very possible. But no later than '67, absolutely no later.

Crawford: He started on a summer program, and he wasn't convinced it was for him, apparently?

Wong: Yes. He came in, and I said, "How would you like to teach summer school. I've been thinking about it. I've been thinking about you. I've been thinking about it. So I'm going to tell you that the assignment includes exploring teaching jazz. I want to have it as part of the program. Because summer is the time when you can explore and try things," I told him.

Of course, in this environment in this lab school, [it was all about trying] things all year long. But since it was a district summer school and I was given the assignment to be the principal of the summer school, I said, "Hey, I'm hiring the cats, you know? So I want you to do the instrumental music and incorporate jazz. Go write some charts on Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, or whatever you want to do, you know? Let's just get going with some classic, traditional, modern jazz."

He said, "Well, how are we going to get away with it?"

"You will do all the classical things we've always done, the history of instrumental music. What I'm doing is to add another flavor to it, another opportunity."

He said, "Okay, well, you know what you're doing. What about the powers that be? The central administration person, the superintendents and people like that." So I tried to explain to him the rationale.

Crawford: Was it new? Had there been a summer program like that, musically?

Wong: Not with jazz. I just changed the curriculum. I didn't take it from the regular budget. They had a budget for summer school. It was the Berkeley Unified School District's regular summer school. They selected Washington School as a site for summer school and also instrumental music. So I seized the opportunity and the situation to intrude into it.

So he did create these charts, and these kids played music that were jazz arrangements in addition to the classical music that everybody expected. So when we had a program to share what the summer school was doing, I included the instrumental music program, and it had what that had. I invited the powers that be, and they were nuts about it.

- Crawford: Was that a fairly intense course?
- Wong: No. It was maybe a four-week thing. I can't remember. But it worked.
- Crawford: And these were all jazz-oriented kids?
- Wong: No, no, no. They were just children. Some of them had been. Instrumental music began in fourth grade. That's traditional.
- Crawford: Fourth grade!
- Wong: This was just instrumental music in the summer. That was the beginning. That was not part of the fabric of the regular curriculum during the regular school year, yet. I had not done that. The only thing I had done was to bring Oscar Peterson, and that was the whole school, as I explained to you.
- That was 1965. So already that was going on. Yes, there were some kids that, by the time they were fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and they were going in the summer, had had exposure to jazz, but they weren't necessarily playing it. Because Phil wasn't hired yet, you see, not in '65. So it was only in the regular classrooms that the foundation of the consciousness of creative music through jazz was begun and was inaugurated that way.
- Crawford: And the kids knew about improvisation? They had some concept?
- Wong: Everybody had some contact with it. Yes. Because of those previous experiences, both in person with the artist and other things that were going on in the classroom, which were already being tied to the Science Curriculum Program/ Study Program—the assistance system there. So that was already underway. And, see, these other ingredients were not in place. I needed to get that instrumental music thing going.
- To me, my evaluation was that it was a very successful summer session. Still, Phil was not assigned to me. There was not an opening. I just snuck him in for the summer to get him introduced to people and what he was doing.
- Crawford: And he was successful?
- Wong: Yes, I thought he was successful from the inception on something we hadn't tried before. There were no manuals. There were no—nothing was published.
- Crawford: Say something about the charts.
- Wong: A chart is a musician's nomenclature for an orchestration or arrangement. But in jazz we refer to charts more than arrangements.

[End Tape 7, Side A]

[Begin Tape 7, Side B]

Wong: I'm not sure that Phil has a pinpoint-sharp memory of what went on there, because most of the strategy was being played by yours truly.

I called people at the high school, at the performing arts—the director of performing arts. I had a lot of resistance, the usual bromides from educational administrators about budget and about this and that. I guess you would call me a disbeliever. I rarely just took an input like that and said, “Well, that's it, then. The door's closed.” I guess, personality-wise, you might characterize me as a very, very focused, relentless kind of pursuer.

So I called the director of elementary education, Harriet, my friend, and she said, “Oh yes, that was wonderful.” I told her I had to get this thing going here during the regular school year and was told that there was no budget for an instrumental music teacher. I asked, “How am I going to get my man in here? Is there some way of finding some part of one fund and part of another fund to get this going even on a part time?” She said, “Well, maybe we can find some way, but I don't know yet.”

So that's the way I opened up things, and I think eventually what happened was we got him for part of the time, and it was a very tenuous situation, very tentative, nothing glued down, but we took what we could get, whatever time we could get, whatever support we could get, both financial and otherwise. So it wasn't cemented yet. He didn't have a regular job yet. He may not have remembered that, but I know that I went through the trials of trying to get him locked in.

Finally—I don't know what month it was or whatever—I had more budgetary discussions, and I think we squeezed something out of the high school and something from the regular school budget of the district's instrumental music. Then I took some out of my funds from the lab school and called it resource or something. I didn't care what it was, but I did what I could to take care of Phil.

Crawford: And by that you got more time for him?

Wong: And I got more time for him. Then things started to happen, because I was still recruiting. Finally, I got Dick Hadlock in, too, because he was ready. And then Dick Whittington's appearance was another set of serendipitous things.

One morning I looked at my early morning data about who was there and who wasn't there that day. I noticed somebody was absent in the portable—one of my portables out there. I think it was a fourth grade. Yes, it was. I looked at the substitute information, and I saw this name: Charles Richard Whittington.

I said, “Charles Richard Whittington? I don't think this name has been here before. Geez, the only Whittington I know—” There are two of them. One is the guy who was on KSFO who was a crackerjack kind of person who talked in the morning and had some music and things, and then there is Dick who I saw recently at the Gold Nugget at 51st and Telegraph in Oakland—the jazz spa of the East Bay, if you will. It's the greatest jazz club over here. And Dick was playing there. He was at the bar, too, I remember.

I sauntered over there across the road—McKinley Avenue—to the part of the campus which was the portables. I opened the door, I looked in there—damn—it was Dick Whittington! So I went up to him, and, “Excuse me Mr. Whittington,” I said, “I'd like to see you for a moment.” I said, “I'll leave the door open so the class is still under surveillance.” [laughs] So he comes out, and I said, “Dick, what the hell are you doing here? What are you doing here?!”

He said, “I'm trying to get a teaching job. I thought that maybe this might be a way to survive. I have a wife and a family and all that.” He had a provisional credential. I told him, “We've got to get that as soon as possible, whatever we have to do. Now, the second thing is something to do with what I'm fussing around here in this school, and I want to ask you some questions. One, can you teach P.E.?” He said, “Well, I guess I can get into it.” I said, “You want a job, don't you? Okay. There's a possible future for you here, and here's how it runs down. If you take this position as a P.E. resource teacher, which releases you from a regular classroom teacher's responsibilities, which you obviously have not had a whole lot of experience in—I don't have a vacancy for you there, and, actually, you don't qualify for one of my regular teaching assignments, because your background is too shallow. You don't have what I've got to have. But for this thing you might, because what I really want you to be is a music resource teacher.”

Crawford: What was his keyboard background?

Wong: Oh, he played in L.A. with Dexter Gordon, the late Joe Gordon, the trumpet player. Oh yeah, he was a player, a serious player. I don't remember the rest of his background, but I knew who he was. He was an artist.

Crawford: And he couldn't make a living here being a player?

Wong: Oh no, most people can't in the Bay Area, because we don't have studios like L.A. or New York. That's a whole other issue, of course.

Anyway, so I then found him a slot where he could actually supplement what Phil was doing, because he's an instrumentalist. Now, he didn't have the skills of orchestration or conducting or things like that that Phil had, but I had envisioned what he could do in tandem, so he could actually help certain students with things.

Actually, he became kind of a public and private teacher of Rodney Franklin. That's how Franklin finally really accelerated in his skills on the keyboard and then went to the saxophone and to the organ and to everything else, like all these kids were unstoppable. So I've now got two key people whose concentration was on music. Now, he had to relate to other classrooms in regular music, singing or recorders or things that we use as music education programs. They were not necessarily classical; they were literature that was usually published for public schools. They weren't at all classical in the strict definition of classical. They were folk songs and popular songs from the early days of our country and some from other countries. I think that's the best way to put it—folk material from here and abroad.

Crawford: So was every student exposed to music? I read that the children, by grade three, could read and write some music.

Wong: Yes, no question about it.

Crawford: That's amazing. That's eight years old.

Wong: Yes. Rodney Franklin was writing original music at age seven, because we took his first composition and displayed it at our Creativity Fair, which I haven't talked to you about.

I must recall this. You just piqued my memory about writing music, and I mentioned Rodney Franklin. There was something else I did when I came to this school, which we started with this morning. I dismantled [laughs] among other things, all the previous separate fairs—all community and school fairs—such as art fairs, science fairs, whatever they had.

I said, “This separatism just drives me nuts. I can't handle it. It's so traditional. Every school you go to, they have a dance festival, they have an art festival, or whatever. That's not where it is.” Schools that perpetuate this, as they do today in 1998, are leaving out children who have creativeness in other areas where they don't get an opportunity to—

What I did was I started calling people—musicians, artists, dancers, visual performing artists, friends of mine—and I asked them the same question: “Tell me what you would have wanted to do if you'd had your druthers when you were like five, six, seven years old in school and you never had a chance to do. “

They were sometimes either satisfied with what they finally did, or they were disgruntled about it. Well, that was enough for me. We would have one creativity fair from then on—all the inventive potential that we have as human beings. And the greatest amounts are in the clients that you have in your classroom, especially the youngsters before they're contaminated and boxed into categories, before human beings put them into slots.

So that brings me to how to start the work. Now, Rodney Franklin would possibly have not had the opportunity to compose his first piece of music and play it on a saxophone as a seven year old if this creativity fair did not exist. I interviewed a lot of kids about what they created. There were things there that normally we don't see in school.

Now, you can say, “Well, there's arts and crafts where they can make anything,” and all this. Yes, but they did some other things. They incorporated mathematics, they incorporated science. You see, that was the thing I was doing: transdisciplinary versus interdisciplinary. The peak of human life—cultural, social life—is transdisciplinary. It is the apex of our pyramid. We are walking transdisciplinary, but we don't know that, so we get trapped. So we do all these other things, which is unfortunate.

So that was something I was getting across to the staff, and hopefully to the children and to the parents. Now, for all this, I counseled with, communicated with parents. I invited them in; they were very much a part of our school. We had a tremendous parent community reflecting all these nations and ethnic groups and all these artists that I told you about that were residing in the area.

Crawford: Did you say what the makeup—the ethnic makeup of the school was?

Wong: Well, there were thirty-some or more nations. It was the only school in the city of Berkeley before desegregation that had a natural community reflecting the United Nations.

Crawford: Did that reflect the university?

Wong: Yes it did. Yes it did. That's why there were so many independent research projects from various departments here on campus. They sought to have the sampling at Washington School. That's why. Because they can go into any classroom, it's already mixed, and your demographics are there. It's not skewed. It's great.

Oh, I just thought of something, as a matter of fact. I was in a room down on the main floor. I had changed a lot of things. [laughs] There are some other things I've just remembered that I did. I got rid of some of the dining room we had on the basement/ground floor, and made a multimedia center out of it. Then I had the cafeteria service in the auditorium by having pull-down tables to accommodate that, that flexibility. That opened up a space downstairs for the multimedia center and the kitchen, plus other small workshop-type seminar rooms that I needed for our special projects.

That's what also attracted more grant-supported projects. Like there was a literacy training program for teachers. It was a huge grant. Robert Rudell at the school of education, an international figure in research of language and English and reading, author of many books—contacted me and said, “I need

your teachers for this and that.” That was also part of it—I'm coming to something with this that deals with music. And by the way, he was so entranced with this school, he said, “Is there any way to get my daughter into the kindergarten here?”

Anyway, that was interesting. During the time we were working with him, there were a lot of research assistants, graduate students that he had, and I also siphoned some services from them. I remember distinctly there was a gal—she was tall, but I don't remember her name—she was helping me with my projects, and she and another person—Phyllis, that was her name, Phyllis was the other one of my regular staff. The two of them were in an adjoining room, and I heard this yelp. I didn't know what was going on. They burst into my other room where I was doing something else, and they said, “There's something happening here, and we want you to know about it. It's this research study that you have with David Tucker.”

Now, David Tucker was—that's another story. I'll have to get back to him. But David Tucker was a graduate student at Cal and was the assistant band director of the marching band for Cal Berkeley, okay? But he was after a Ph.D., and he was very good at math. So I asked Professor Lloyd Scott, I said, “Lloyd, I need some graduate students,” because we had this exchange of having this service. “I need some graduate students on math.”

David W. Tucker, I think it is—came into my outer office area and Kaye Bailey, our lab school coordinator, said, “Yes, we're looking for candidates.” She said that Lloyd Scott had sent him down to be interviewed. So she told me that this gentleman was outside.

He comes into my office, and he sits there and sits there, and he's smiling at me. [laughs] He kept smiling. And then he points to me and he says, “Hey, man, I know who you really are.” [laughs] “You're Jazz Man. I know.” He says, “You're Mr. Jazz.”

I said, “Wait a minute. Stand up, sir. Stand up, face the wall, and put your hands up.” [laughs] I'll never forget this. “I know who you are. You're a jazz ensemble director from Sacramento: Sacramento City College or State or one of the two. How could I forget that shape, that vision of you facing the band, since I judged you a number of times at festivals. But that's the way I usually see you.” [laughter]

Crawford: You didn't recognize his front?

Wong: Right. Well, he recognized my voice and he knew who I was, see, because he'd heard me on the station and things. So, anyway, that's how we met. I said, “Hey, let's forget this thing about you doing something as a graduate student as a math research assistant.” I said, “That's another project. I need you for something else.”

So right away we got into jazz. We had this thing set up where we had about six or seven performing events for the children, and we then created this field research project to determine how much growth and what degree of being turned on to this music the children could get before exposure to a performance event and afterwards. Pre- and post-testing is what we were doing.

We had this hypothesis which we didn't tell this gal—another research assistant who was doing the data analysis. Only Dave and I were aware of the hypothesis. We thought it was a good idea not to reveal it. So what we had in these events was—I think we had a string quartet, we had an orchestra playing classical music, we had a big band, we had a hot jazz combo, we had a Latin kind of percussion group. In other words, they were various genres of music, but making sure we had jazz in there.

Well, this gal comes in and says, “Something is wrong with this data.” She said, “There's hardly any difference in the jazz performances by these children between pre- and post-tests. It's screwy.”

“Well,” I said, “You were not aware of the hypothesis. The hypothesis was that, exposed to jazz music, young children are highly turned on and there isn't that much more to go afterwards, because they dig it so hard. You don't have to convince them of anything. You don't have to do that much more to cultivate it. It's something natural that they relate and respond to this music.” I don't know what it is at this moment, but that's what it was.

Crawford: How did you test for that?

Wong: We had questionnaire things that we used to guide teachers through different kinds of activities. I may still have some of that. I'm not sure if I have some of that around. But we were able to measure the degree of motivation, the degree of growth between pre- and post-.

Now, what was interesting to me, as an offshoot of this—because both David and I had been very interested in reading. Since more research money in this country is poured into the research on how to succeed in teaching reading than any other curriculum area, you have to say to yourself that it means that they haven't got the answers, maybe there are no real answers, but it's important as hell. It is the primary area to succeed as a human being in this society. You've got to learn how to read. So literacy is number one, and that's why there was this other project that I mentioned, teaching literacy training to teachers to teach kids. That was related. So we were very sensitized to this.

But now I'm thinking about something else. I had one other experience that led me to moving ahead with this. I was chairman of judges for the International Reno Jazz Festival for over twenty years. I don't do it any more. It's too much. I'm doing this one here in, what is it, April, May or what? The

one right here. The Pacific Coast Collegiate Jazz Festival, the biggest one here in the western states, so I'm going to do that one.

Anyway, at the Reno Jazzfest I met with a good number of the band directors during our usual luncheon break and seminar, and I asked a question. They thought I was going to give a seminar on some other topic, and I said to them, "Here's what's burning in my mind. I want to ask you guys something." Guys: there weren't very many women at that point who were jazz band directors—very, very few, not like today.

Crawford: Easier today for a soloist to make it?

Wong: No, for women to become directors of jazz ensembles—because they're into playing, and they find jobs after they find that maybe they're not destined as a professional artist, but they are a music educator. So they get into jazz programs and jazz instrumental music. Oh, you see a lot of gals today leading bands. It's fabulous.

[End Tape 7, Side B]

[Begin Tape 8, Side A]

Wong: I had this question to ask these jazz band and ensemble directors, and that was this: "Why, in over a hundred bands that have come here, are there so few Afro-Americans? Why are there so few black students in these bands? Can you folks help me with that?"

There was silence for a while, and then somebody said—And I had already had it in my mind that this was probably the reason or the rationale behind it—it's not that hard to figure out—they said, "Well, hey, they can't read the music."

Another said, "Yeah, that's right. I mean, they have such a hell of a time reading. We haven't got that much time to wait around for this to happen."

I came back, I was very excited about this, and I called—I can't remember his name now, it was Ken something at Cal. I can't remember his last name. He was a professor here at the school of education, an Afro American, and I knew he was a jazz man, because when I met him, he was relating to me right away. He'd been listening to me for a while. He knew what I was doing. I knew that he was into the music. So I called him.

I said, "Ken, I've got a burning question for you on something that I think you're going to be interested in." Because he was always interested in black kids with whatever. I said, "Dig this," and I related what happened up there and what the reason was.

I said, “Now think of this, Ken, think of this. If they can’t read the notes, can they read the words? If they can’t read the words on a printed page, can they read the notes on a printed page? Now, has anybody investigated that? To me, it is related. They have attack skills. There are symbols, there are blends. Hey, hasn’t anybody gotten into this? This deserves a grant of some sort or something. Energy. Let’s get into it.”

Well, he didn’t know of any, and I didn’t know of any. I bring you back to that scene when this research assistant burst into the room and said, “How come these kids were so turned on and with such a small gap between pre- and post-?”

I said, “Now, it fits. They overcompensate. These black kids overcompensate in their auditory ability and in the process to compensate for the fact that they can’t—not generally, I’m just talking about most of them that have problems—they have difficulty in accelerating the process of reading, that’s all. It’s reading music and reading words.

Crawford: They overcompensate?

Wong: They overcompensate their deficiency by exaggerating and really zeroing in on their auditory ability. See, they have to be hypersensitive listeners.

My corroborating evidence is thus. Let’s take some of the great jazz figures who have had such distinctive voices in their instruments. Now, there was no such thing as a program in reading jazz in the twenties and the thirties. Very few programs were around. There were private tutors, and some people passed on those skills. But of course we had orchestras and big bands, and there were a lot of territory bands in the late 1920s and early thirties in the southwest, et cetera, et cetera, and very well-schooled people—university graduates such as Jimmie Lunceford and people going to Fisk University and Howard University or whatever later.

Anyway, we had those people, but, in the main, you think of people like Ben Webster, Sonny Criss. Sonny Criss was such a great alto player in Los Angeles, and he couldn’t get a job in the studio because he couldn’t read the notes. Those people had to have compensation by listening, because that’s the way they learned.

Crawford: Ear playing? Black people have an increased capacity for ear playing?

Wong: Yes, by necessity, and with the necessity of experience, they were able to do that, because they got great experiences. The kind of experiences that most young musicians do not have and cannot have access to today.

Crawford: So you saw that at the kindergarten level, early?

Wong: Kindergarten and first grade.

Crawford: And they were playing recorders, most of them?

Wong: Oh, they were playing different things. Yes, recorders. Second grade, third grade.

Anyway, I saw a relationship between this, so I became very sensitive to the fact that black kids needed to have as rich an experience as possible. So it influenced my relationship with the teachers involved—instrumental and classroom teachers—about black kids. They were interested, because it brought a different light to it.

This would not have happened if we didn't have the personnel who were there at the time. And by these ad hoc situations like Dave Tucker coming in to ask for a part-time research assistant job, right? [laughs] We wouldn't have gotten there.

And Dave, today, may not, in looking back, have become the director of the jazz ensembles here at Cal because he was from the state of Illinois, and he went back there once in a while because he had things to take care of for his family, even though he was teaching out here in Sacramento. He was from an agricultural area, I think it was, in Illinois, and we had many, many, many meetings and lunches, more than with anybody else, because, first of all, I didn't have lunch very often and so I had some with him. We talked about this issue, about when he finished his doctorate, where was he going to go?

Well, he had this job up here as an assistant, and he said, "Hey, do you realize I have composed more music in five years than Mozart did in all his life?" I'll never forget that.

So I said, "Hang on. You should hang on here in Berkeley." I think he had an invitation for the University of Illinois for a job. I said, "I'll tell you what. Think about this. I'd come up to the campus to help with the conversations with the vice chancellor"—who had jurisdiction over this program, the jazz ensembles, because the jazz ensemble program is not part of the music department on this campus. It has nothing to do with it. They have a thing, a very negative attitude toward this program.

Crawford: All performance?

Wong: All this jazz here. We figured it was probably because it was a threat, in that—until recently, you know, there are people who have jazz backgrounds that are in there now, teaching woodwind or something like that. Bob Calonico, who was the previous jazz band director up until a couple years ago.

So I said to David, “Look, let’s think about this. I’m here with primary children. We’ve got kindergartners on up going into jazz. You pick it up on the other end, make some inroads over there and get jazz more involved, and we’ll have both ends.” I said, “Don’t leave me here. [laughs] I’ve just got this end of it, and then what happens? You need to have something going on there.” So I don’t know. Of course, he had multiple jazz ensembles. He became the most successful jazz band director in the history of the UC Jazz Ensemble, no question about it. I was his consultant to the Pacific Coast Collegiate Jazz Festival for many years, because it was he and I who were down at Cal State University, Northridge.

So that’s how I continued the relationships there, and he needed my presence with the vice chancellor whenever the students had a problem of not getting the budget and not getting the support from the university.

Crawford: What was your work day like? It sounds like a marathon.

Wong: Oh boy. It was just like it is now. It’s never stopped. My sleep pattern was four to four and a half hours each day, except one day I needed to get maybe seven. That’s it. But this is not any different from what I must have told you about my childhood.

Well, anyway, because David was there, he attracted some of the most talented kids from Berkeley High, eventually, even then. [Dr. David Tucker died several years ago]

Oh, I must tell you about Michael Wolff. Michael Wolff is a pianist/composer/arranger. I’ll start with that, and then I’ll tell you more about it later as we go. Michael was from Memphis, originally, but to make a long story short, he came here to Berkeley High. Did I tell you that he was one of the guys that came to my office sat and waited to get a rehearsal room? Oh, that part has got to be included here. He was one of at least a couple of very talented musicians at Berkeley High who didn’t have a practice room, so they came over to me, knowing that I was doing things with jazz. He would sit in the outer office and wait for me to show up. I’d see him when I came in from something, “Oh, hi Michael. Waiting for a room today?” So he’d go in, and there was a piano there. That’s where Dick Whittington taught some of the kids their lessons.

That’s Michael Wolff, and Michael really was the student leader of the jazz band. When I brought Duke Ellington to the Berkeley High campus during his visit here, I brought him in and Michael was there. Michael still recalls, he says, “Oh, yeah, that was one of the greatest meetings in my whole life, meeting Duke Ellington.” I asked the Duke beforehand, I said, “Watch the guys play, and stay for a little while,” and so he did. It was a big, big thrill.

Crawford: This was when he came to your school?

Wong: Yes, I took him from my school over there. And remember the black student union? I went through there.

Crawford: Yes, so that Berkeley High Jazz Band was in place already?

Wong: Well, they had a jazz band, not this jazz band—not the one with the kids, yet, because it's too early. But Michael was there. He was older.

Crawford: Should we talk about desegregation here? Because that happened in '68, soon after you started.

Wong: Yes, because that concert with Ellington was to celebrate desegregation. I must mention Michael Wolff later became a very prominent member of the UC Jazz Ensemble as a composer and its pianist.

I was very taken by Michael's talent, then and now. His father, I think, was a psychiatrist or something in that related field. Michael was recruited for Cal Tjader's sextet. That was his first professional association. And to this day he says, "You wrote a review for *Down Beat* magazine"—I wrote a piece on that and mentioned Michael Wolff, and he always recalls that. That's a long time ago. He was down at the Monterey Jazz Festival, and that's when I did the review. I think it was that one.

Cal just loved him. He was great—a young fellow like that who can play Latin jazz, can play straight-ahead, and be-bop, everything. He then played with Sonny Rollins, and he was with Cannonball Adderley—dig that, huh? We're talking about big leaguers. He was with Cannonball until Cannonball died, as a matter of fact. Then he went to New York and became part of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis jazz orchestra.

Then, amongst other things—and he did a lot of other things—he became a musical director for Nancy Wilson and her accompanist and conductor. He was there for quite a while with her. Then he was the musical director for the Arsenio Hall show. He finally left that, because he felt that he'd had enough of that, and he said, "I want to get back to jazz."

By the way, he had an interim career in New York City, because he has an apartment in New York, as he does in Hollywood. I think it's in Beverly Hills. Because he was a stand-up comedian in New York.

So this guy is very talented and he has, I think, four or five CDs of his own now. In an unbiased way, I have to say that he probably engendered more audience enthusiasm than any of the others who were luminaries. There's just something about Michael. Because he's funny.

Anyway, I just wanted to mention him and one other guy who also sat in the outer office with tattered jeans and [was] nearly barefoot sometimes—a very

poor kid—and he would sit there with his saxophone case. And that youngster’s name was Lenny Pickett. Lenny Pickett was a very talented young player who did not have the advantage of a Phil Hardyman, like Michael Wolff did not.

Crawford: By that you mean as a teacher?

Wong: As a teacher. No, he had other people who were still at Berkeley High. See, we had not made the change yet, because Phil had to be with me first, and then Phil had to go with the same kids. I had him take them along to the middle school.

Crawford: Longfellow?

Wong: Yes, I mean, I could have kept him—on my own decision say, “Phil, you’re assigned here.” I said, “No, you’ve got to carry this on. We’ve got to move on.”

Crawford: When desegregation happened—was this part of the change?

Wong: Yes. Well, whether it was changed—desegregation or not, he would have had to go on with them.

Crawford: Why?

Wong: Because I wanted him to continue helping those individuals.

Crawford: But the same group moved? They moved fourth through sixth up to Longfellow? And you sent Phil along?

Wong: Yes, even though the principal there didn’t know a damn thing about it. You know, none of these other lab school principals were into jazz. They had their own focus. Dr. John Matlin, who became dean of students here at the school of education, was my colleague. But he said, “I don’t know anything about that. My interests are in other areas.” I said, “So? Just let Phil do what he does.”

Crawford: He could have stayed with K-3, but you wanted him to move along?

Wong: I made the decision that he had to go on. And Whittington too. I said, “Move on, guys. The job is here. The experiment is with these kids. Move on.” That’s why later on Phil talked to me about these kids moving on, and I said, “No, you’ve got to go to Berkeley High.”

Crawford: So you promoted him—you’re the one who sent him on to Berkeley High?

- Wong: Oh sure. I talked to the district people and said, “Look, this must be a longitudinal study. You know, it began here at the lab school, it’s research-oriented. I want this longitudinal study.” Now, Phil doesn’t recall this. None of these people were aware of it.
- Crawford: Peter Apfelbaum said he was in several different schools with Phil Hardymon.
- Wong: There were three. Yes, Washington, Longfellow, Berkeley High. That’s right.
- Crawford: Do you want to talk about the approach that the two men had as teachers?
- Wong: Well, if you want that, yes. Then we’ll do desegregation, because that’s really pivotal.

Let’s see. Well, Phil was very excellent in encouraging the use of listening. Again, we’re talking about listening. They listened to a lot of this music, as well as traditional techniques in instrumental music instruction—that doesn’t change that you still have to learn your instrument—but as far as transferring it from the facility of the instrument and increasing command of the instrument—

Jazz is something else. You don’t necessarily have to have the full command to get into it. That can come along. I mean, if you master first and then get into it. There are situations like that, but it’s better that you don’t. It’s better that you grow up with it, that this is a natural extension of instrumental music, that it isn’t something foreign. It is part of what we do.

That’s the philosophy that I wanted to propagate in the classrooms as well as in the instrumental music setting with Phil. He got right to the root of it—the blues. I mean, it’s just simple. All kids can learn the use of blues and the sound of the blues.

We had a demonstration on the stage for the parents and the community. I remember it was just packed. You couldn’t get any more people in. That night I had Phil Woods. Phil Woods, alto saxophone legend, was at our school.

It was simple for me. He was out from New York playing at—I remember precisely—at Basin Street West, at the corner of Broadway and Montgomery in North Beach. And he came out with the late Gary McFarland, the wonderful arranger and performer from New York City, who at that time was a Verve recording artist.

Okay, let’s see. Oh yeah. Also with Phil was someone who is now one of the most famous Japanese-born jazz musicians in the world. It was Sadao Watanabe who was playing clarinet. Gary needed different woodwind players, so he brought the corps from New York. So Sadao was there. I went over

there, and I just said, “Hey, Phil, can you come over to my school?” He said, “Oh, yes, yes, sure.”

So I got him to come on one of the most unpredictable, one of the most boring kinds of evenings that schools have—the PTA Foundation day. Oh, god! Just boring. I’m sorry, but it is. Hardly any people would come out for those things.

So I made the announcement that our jazz program will make a demonstration of how they learned to play the blues. Whew! The place was packed. It was great. And we also had a great historical recording artist.

So I got a rhythm section together and had them, and also had Vi Redd, who was around. I think I mentioned her. She was on the program. Yes, that was great. Oh, god, that was fun. It’s too bad we didn’t tape that.

Crawford: You don’t have a tape of those?

Wong: No, we don’t have a tape. Well, anyway, Phil just had a way of scaling down the readability of the music in jazz for kids by arranging, you see, because he was such a good arranger. He would rewrite these things, where these levels of difficulty were not available commercially. He created it. That’s why everybody wants his stuff. From that, he finally saw that he was filling a need that no one else was doing very well; they couldn’t be, because his program was more successful than anybody’s. So, obviously, what he published then was valuable material. It was valid.

However, in the case of Dick, it was a different story. Dick was a professional pianist. He was not really that versed in instruction. Phil wrote for groups, and the teaching came from having some experience previously. So he was a different subspecies.

Dick learned on the job. He continued to work with young kids, which he hadn’t very much before, you see. This was new to him. So being in an elementary school, he acclimatized himself to the attention span and the kinds of interactive challenges that arise from having kids of different personalities, what discipline is, and what orderliness must command—a lot of things that were collateral to, specifically, teaching jazz.

I think the attitudes and values are very important that came out of these two gentlemen being in the atmosphere of a school that was interested in this music and that heard the music as regular assembly programs, rather than going out of the school to go listen to something on a field trip, which people did not do.

Where can you take kids, anyway, during the school day? Today you might be able to find something similar in the country; that occurs today, but, no, not thirty years ago. No way.

I can't say much more about his technique, per se, because he didn't really teach the band. He supported whatever assignments that Phil would point to him. Like, "This kid needs this," or "Work with him on this," "Rodney needs to work on the organ. Work with him on that." "Have him work with whoever was the saxophonist or the trumpeter," "Get that interaction with the piano."

The whole focus was on keyboard. Maybe it really paid off, because Peter got into the keyboard. A lot of kids got into keyboard, and they got into percussion. They got into everything. They were heading toward being complete musicians early on, these kids. It's amazing.

Crawford: I read he had a five-tone system of teaching. Do you know that technique?

Wong: No, he explains it, but there is some material on it. I think he's got some written material.

[End Tape 8, Side A]

[Begin Tape 8, Side B]

Crawford: What about segregation?

Wong: The Berkeley Unified School District Board of Education long had the goal of desegregating the district schools. So, many, many community meetings were held at school sites with the board of education and the public. This was quite a wrestling match, I think: wrestling with the ideals, the philosophies, the mechanics of people's feelings and so forth. To summarize, it was finally decided that it was to occur.

Many visits were made to Washington School, specifically, by the members of the board of education to see how a totally ethnically-melded school in its natural state was operating and what it would feel like. I recall distinctly each and every time.

Two things happened. One, I would hear the comment that, "Gosh, there is such a special feeling in this school. It's unique in this district. No other school feels like this. As soon as you just walk into the halls you feel it. You look at what's around you—see and listen to what's going on. There's nothing like this." I'd say, "Well, that's why it's a demonstration school. That's why we have so many people visiting, I suppose. I can't explain it to you."

That was one. The second thing was always by one or two people, by the same two people. "Are you sure there aren't a lot of racial conflicts in this

school?” I said, “Of course there are, just like in every other school that has a mix of children. But,” I said, “you see it at a minimum here, don’t you? And the next time I hear this question asked again, I’m going to have to believe, folks, that you really want that to happen here. Well, I’m sorry; you’re going to be disappointed.”

Crawford: When you had these parent meetings, did all the parents come?

Wong: Oh yes. Yes, but we went out to them, too. We had small group meetings here and there. But ours was pretty easy. I mean, this community was really into this school. I tell you, they were swinging. See, it has a lot to do with that environmental education thing. No question about it, it’s all related.

Crawford: Yes, we haven’t gotten to that, yet.

Wong: Yes, no, but it’s all part of this thing. Now, I just recalled something that has been published in at least three different places.

This was within the first year or two when we still had sixth graders. There were some incidents leading up to a pretty heavy and aggressive set of encounters between black kids and non-black kids in the sixth grade. I did something about this that was, I guess, historically extraordinary, because a lot of writers in these books cite this thing. They always talk about this.

I needed to diffuse these sorts of anxieties and encounters immediately, so I invited all the sixth grade kids down to what was then the cafeteria on the ground floor, because I hadn’t changed it yet. I still remember. I have visions of this. And I invited the Black Panthers to come to the school.

Now, [laughter] I did this because I looked at the Black Panthers and they have a stance of positivism in diffusing encounters between blacks and whites. I was aware of this, while everybody was aware of all those other things that they might have communicated and stood for or behaved like.

Well, we had gotten started maybe five to ten minutes, and the cafeteria doors had a window inset, so you could see—kids and everybody could see who was on the other side. They weren’t just solid doors. Well, what do you know. Appearing on the other side of the door is a Berkeley police officer.

I told him I invited the Black Panthers, and “Oh, by the way, don’t you take one half-step forward from where you are, and you take off your holster, please. I’m not going to have any arms in this mix. I want you to check your arms at the office upstairs, and then you can come back down here, and you are welcome to join us. In fact, I’d love to have you here so you can see what we’re trying to accomplish.” So he came. He did what I asked him to do. He said, “You know I have to make a report of this.” “I want you to make a report of this. I want as many people to know what we’re doing here. I mean, I’m not

advertising it, but I'm just telling you. I don't care who knows about it." The heavy problems were, indeed, diffused. The Panthers were wonderful. The kids related to them.

Crawford: What percentage were blacks in your school?

Wong: I think maybe something like 40 percent. It was healthy.

Crawford: And there would be Oakland kids as well as Berkeley? Or were they just district?

Wong: No, they were district kids. You know, the whites were maybe another—I don't know—maybe 30 percent. The other 30 percent definitely was mirroring the world.

We had, by the way, on our staff, people who could speak a total of eight foreign languages. I had a lot of overseas people coming with professors whose children did not speak English. So I would call, you know, Joan or Jack or Don or Dick or whoever to come down to the office and help me out. [laughs] That was fun.

Yes, okay, so this was a school that was not needed in the compliance to the desegregation plan of bussing from the flatlands—as they're called toward the Bay—to the hills, the Berkeley Hills, and vice versa, because we were in the middle corridor. And since this was also the model school, nobody needed to change anything. In fact, I was very adamant about that.

You must already know that I had a loud voice in the community and the school board and the administration. I never minced any words. I was polite, I was respectful, but I was always open and frank and did not camouflage my feelings or opinions, because it would take too much time to go through bullshit, and I wasn't going to do that.

I used to wear a little pin, by the way. It was this small, about the size of a dime, and it was white. I used to wear that, and sometimes people at these meetings would say—because it was so tiny, the letters—"Hey, Herb, what does that say?" And they would get real close and they would look at it and they'd crack up, because it said, "Fight bullshit." [laughter] By the way, this is another area that I constantly have to work on in the school—the spirit, the *esprit de corps*, the attitudes—all these things. I had to keep fueling them, because sometimes we had a change in personnel, and the new person had to be infected as promptly as possible as to where we are and where we're going and how we do these things. You had to be part of the comradeship.

I made a mock TV board by the mailboxes in the offices where the staff would come in to get their messages. So any message that I had, I would creatively put it there, and it was never typed. I didn't go for anything like

that. It was always personalized. I was always quite good at lettering, because I wanted to be an architect at one time. So my artistic bent comes through in different ways.

So I'd make a mock TV set with color and things, and I'd put things in there, like to keep people on their toes. "Faculty Meeting, 7:57—not 7:58—7:57," and I meant it—by the time they met it would be 8:02. So you never know.

I had little things that I would hang on people. Look at it, and it would say, "Your attitude is showing." Now, that could be minus or plus. If it's a great attitude it would be a yellow one, a sunny thing. "That's a great attitude." I tried as often as possible to put little notes in people's boxes. That's why I was there forever communicating, because I'm busy, you know.

Crawford: Was your door open? Could faculty come with problems?

Wong: Yes, people knew it was an open thing. Oh, yes. We had faculty chair people who made up the agenda for the faculty meetings who would talk to me. We had our things set up so when we went in, it was not a surprise. We knew what we were going to do, unless they brought me something else that came up. They liked it because they had a voice. They had a voice before we even got together.

Crawford: What was the upshot of the discrimination. How did it affect your school, even though you were in compliance?

Wong: Oh, I don't think it did. I don't think it did. I'll tell you what it did, though. Yes, we suddenly got a lot of requests. [laughs] Yes, yes, yes, I must talk about this in a minute.

Heretofore—that is, before desegregation—only people who had to come to the school to observe a teacher because they knew that so-and-so was really great with math or great with this or that—I had special requests, you know, once in a while. Compared to outside of the district, it was miniscule within the district.

Lab schools were like islands within this archipelago. However, because Whittier School was also in this middle thing, and they had a very good model—not as pluralistic as Washington School, but still a good model—they got and I got a lot of requests from other schools, school principals, and curriculum consultants within the district. And parent groups, too—teams, interdisciplinary teams. "We want to visit your school. We want to see how you do X, Y, and Z."

So they started to add to the load, and that was one effect. It meant that they were then curious. They were beset with the challenge of what you do with a global school. They didn't have that. How do you provide motivation and

enrichment? See, we were into that. That's our middle name. [laughs] So it was fun to do that, to see that. I remember telling a couple principals about that. Oh, yeah, gee, I forgot about this. Clifton Fadiman—you know him, right?

Crawford: Yes, of course.

Wong: He called me from Chicago. He said, "I've been hearing things about that school like I've not heard about any school. I've got to come out." I said, "Sure, come on out, do whatever you want. He said, "I'm representing *Encyclopedia Britannica* in part, and some other organs of the media, and I'm also representing myself, because I want to find out about this."

He came out and he said, "God, this place is unbelievable! I've never seen a school like this. There's so much going on indoors and outdoors and everywhere." And he did, too. He said, "I'd already got the feeling when I stepped foot in this place." He said, "Well, tell me what isn't published or"—I said, "Well, none of this stuff is really published."

He said, "Well, what are you working on now, for instance? Tell me what you're working on now." I said, "Well, I'm working on mood systems. I'm fussing around with this on my desk. I'm creating some kinds of thematic connections that have a way of reversing debilitating feelings and moods that people have. Moods are depicted in color, in sound, in shapes, in all these things that we can talk about."

I showed him a diagram. I don't know what happened to them. I used to make these diagrams. I was always translating things into some kind of a graphic, and I had these circles where they were overlapping with color. He said, "Well, what are you going to do with all this?" "Oh," I said, "it's just an idea. Every learning environment—that is, every class—establishes a network of mood systems, and mood systems have an impact on behavior, and, in turn then, there is an ethic that's built, and that will dictate some things for these children's immediate interactions with each other and their families and for their future."

And then he was fascinated by something else, aside from the music. He said, "This should have all kinds of learning materials and instruction materials coming out of this program. This place is a fountain of information and stuff. Do you work on stuff and then you move on?"

I said, "Look, it takes time to go and do something, and then, you know, beyond that, because already I'm up to here." Although, I must admit, from the SCIS material, I know that the children didn't have reading material on a primary level for these science units of study—those things that I mentioned before on ecosystems. So I did co-author a series, that series *Science Series for the Young* for Addison-Wesley's juvenile division. Those were all

commercial things that were adopted by the state and then by other states. And they're still selling, I guess, overseas. That was good to do those. Later titles were patterned after some things that were happening in the Environmental Yard.

So, anyway, he was interested in one other thing, and that is that for years I had been fussing around with what I called bipolar axes. I wish I could find that. They were just, you know, a person or persons or either this or that. Those kinds of things. So I would have these personality characteristics or behavioral characteristics organized in this system of opposing axes. He was interested in that too.

[End Tape 8, Side B]

Interview 5: March 25, 1998

[Begin Tape 9, Side A]

Crawford: Here we go. We're late, and it's March 25th, and this is interview number five with Dr. Herbert Wong. We're going to start this morning by asking Dr. Wong about his marriage.

Wong: Okay. All right. How I met my wife was serendipitous. I was visiting the university lab schools in August of 1965, I believe, and I had just come back from Chicago, as I recall, visiting a couple of record labels. I've gone through the history of how I was courted and then hired by the university lab schools. So this next step was to go with Dr. Lloyd Scott, who was going to introduce me to the various lab schools, the three of them. He was a specialist in math in the school of education. He was here for some time. Ultimately, he went into law and became an attorney.

Anyway, so he took me to Washington School. This was before the actual school year began, so teachers were working and preparing, getting their act together—their materials and classrooms. We went into the main office, and there were a lot of the teachers there. He started making introductions.

Marilyn—my wife-to-be—came up to me after I'd been introduced to a number of these teachers and she said, “Oh, I know who you are. I've heard you on the radio, and I saw you at the community theater a few months ago. You were hosting and producing a concert with the Woody Herman Band. And I also know about 'Dr. Wong's Bag'—the tune that was written for you.” I thought, “Wow.” I said to myself, “This is a hip chick.” [laughter]

Crawford: What's “Dr. Wong's Bag”?

Wong: Oh, that is a composition, big-band blues, composed by Nat Pierce, who was the chief arranger and pianist for the Woody Herman Band in the 1960s, among other years.

Crawford: Is it written down?

Wong: Well, I don't have that, but it's recorded. It was recorded and then reissued, I think, just two and a half years ago. Polygram, which purchased or acquired the original label that it was on. The bag is your thing, you know. “What's your bag?” Yes. That's when that phrase was used quite commonly.

Anyway, it's recorded on Polygram, and I did get the call from the producers there who said, “Well, you're the guy to write the liner notes for this one. We're doing a new package—compilation—of Woody Herman's period and the recordings of that era. And, oh, by the way, to motivate you,” the producer said, “it includes the tune 'Dr. Wong's Bag'. So obviously you're the one to do this.”

So anyway, that's how that came about. She mentioned that, and I just figured, well, she is into this music. There's no question about it, because these are esoteric things, you know? She mentioned enough things to give me clues that she wasn't really a complete outsider at all. And she was extremely attractive. I asked Lloyd Scott who she was. "Oh, she's one of our really outstanding teachers that did her student teaching here, and we hired her as a demonstration teacher right away."

So that's how we met. Eventually, when we were planning to wed, I had to transfer her out of the school, because the policy was you couldn't have married couples in the same building, in the same system. So she was then transferred to another lab school—Whittier School.

Crawford: And she had grown up next to Birdland? So she knew something about jazz.

Wong: Her father was a CBS sustaining singer—CBS radio. Then her mother was a ballet dancer and was with the Ziegfeld Follies. She was a prima ballerina and traveled around the world in tours—Australia and different places. I remember her talking about that. She's still alive. I think she's close to—I think she's ninety-four.

Crawford: Dancers live long. Good hearts.

Wong: Oh, she was always dancing. She's now in a facility where she's being cared for, here in Foster City. She moved down here. And, yes, she has Alzheimers, so she remembers very little. But I used to see her talk about it with her scrapbooks—a gorgeous, gorgeous girl.

Crawford: What is your wife's full name?

Wong: Oh, Marilyn Reese. Her dad's name was Claude, and it was Isaacs, but he wasn't Jewish, he was Welsh—100 percent Welsh. Apparently there were problems early on, because I asked her, "How come he changed the name?" She said, "Well, people would mistake him for Jewish and were discriminating against him, so he changed his name to Reese." So he was known as Claude Reese. He was a songwriter. In fact, I get these reports and royalty statements from ASCAP on songs that he wrote early, early on.

Crawford: Talk about the wedding, because I know that you had Woody Herman at your wedding.

Wong: Oh, yes. I did talk about Marilyn's going to New York Performing Arts School. Did I talk about that? Let me just finish that part while I'm on that about her dad and mom. She was a child going to PS 69, and then Robertson Alexander School, and then she went to the New York Performing Arts School. Finally, they came out to the Bay Area on the way to the Pasadena

Playhouse. They made a short stop here in the Bay Area and never got down there.

So her theatrical career was thwarted by her stay here, because she was destined to be a film actress. She did do some things. I've heard an old record of her being in some kind of opera and things. It's very obvious that she had the wherewithal to get into that, because, as a teacher, she is just a performer.

Crawford: Yes, that's a strong asset, isn't it, in the classroom.

Wong: Yes, she's just great.

Crawford: Does she teach still?

Wong: Oh, yes. She teaches first grade, which is the toughest grade. You must come out teaching them how to read, and she loves that challenge.

Crawford: The most important year of all.

Wong: Yes, it is. So she continues to do that, although she had other grades as well when she was with the lab schools. We would give her a K-1-2-3, all in the same room, because that was part of our experiment. She did it.

She was involved in the Science Curriculum Improvement Study. She wrote manuals for the project. She is an author of a first-grade math series for Addison-Wesley, as well as some other math publications. So she was really into that and was a co-author of an elementary school science series for Addison-Wesley.

Coincidentally, I was involved with a competing series [laughs] on exactly the same range—kindergarten through sixth grade—for what was the American Book Company in New York.

I've got to tell you this one cute little part. [laughs] When she was teaching—and still now—when she had a topic of some sort in science or something, she'd say, “Well, I want to do a unit of study on” blank—whatever it was: magnetism, weather, whatever. “And can you get me some stuff?”

I said, “Sure.” So I would get all these different books and supplements and all kinds of things, and I would put little tags on them, because I know just where she needs to go. So all she'd have to do is open it up and there it is.

So when we were writing for competing publishing houses, and after the same market, one of the biggest markets, of course, was the state of California textbook adoption. I mean, that's a lot of books. It was considered the plum of the nation—the state of California and the state of Texas—for textbook

adoptions. This would be a basic science textbook series. Thousands and thousands and thousands of copies would go out.

Anyway, so I had a house rule with her about it. I said, “Now, look. I'm not going to really help you directly with your series, but I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you tell me what unit you're working on, I'll get a stack of resources for you as usual with the little tags in there so you'll know what pages to turn to or whatever, and I'll stack them up and put them on the table, and the rest is up to you. We will have no interaction about it, because I'll probably have some of the same units.” [laughs]

Her publisher wanted her to go to Reading, Massachusetts, where the home offices of Addison-Wesley are located. American Book Company was in New York City. So we got it so that both publishers supported our trips at the same time, so that we could be together and have the whole week and a half or whatever else we needed to do. And it was great. [laughs] Anyway, no matter what else happened, that was just a lot of fun.

Well, ironically, both of our series were adopted. They used so many for one series and so many for the other series. So that was really quite an interesting time. While that happened, there was another supplemental series—two other supplemental series—that I was writing on. I was working on three projects at the same time. All three were adopted by the state of California—the basic text and two supplementary series.

Crawford: Still being used?

Wong: No, no, no. They don't keep them that long.

Crawford: How often do they turn over?

Wong: Oh, I don't know. Now it's probably five years. Just new ideas. Of course, sometimes they will readopt it if it's revised and applied again; and if it's selected, then they pick up on it again. They used to do that. They don't do that much anymore. Things have changed. The whole industry has changed drastically so that it's difficult to get that kind of coup today. But this was in the mid-1960s—post/mid 1960s. So that was a busy time.

Now back to our marriage. Didn't I tell you about Woody Herman calling me? I had no idea this was going to occur. He tried to get a hold of me, and when he got a hold of me was—I remember—on a Monday night, shortly after 9:00. He said, “This is Woody. Where in the hell have you been? I've been trying to get a hold of you. Now, tell me. What am I doing this coming week? Let's see, on Wednesday?” I said, “Well, you are at Fort Ord with a gig there for the troops.”

Crawford: Were you acting as an agent?

Wong: Yes, I was helping him. If there was something that I could point his way, you know, I'd make the connections for him or for his road manager. I told him he was in a private party, and then it got to Saturday. I said, "I don't know what the band's doing, because I'm going to be too busy. I didn't take care of Saturday night. I'm getting married."

"Oh!" Then there was a little silence there, and he said, "Wow. To Marilyn, right? Well, the band will be there. Now, you'll have to get a place that will hold about a thousand people."

Crawford: You're kidding. [laughs]

Wong: I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. I don't have any plans like that. I told you that the band is invited to wherever we're going to have the wedding. I'll let you know the details." He said, "No, what I'm telling you is that the band will be there with their instruments for you and your bride. Don't you get it, man? We're not going to miss this opportunity? No way!"

Crawford: Did you have a place at that point?

Wong: Well, we were thinking of a couple places, but not for a thousand people! I figured out what he was doing. We ended the conversation, and I was just putting on the next record—because I was on the air at KJAZ—and he called again almost immediately. He said, "Oh, by the way, Herb. I know you will call the important people in the industry to come."

So I booked the grand ballroom of the Empress of China in San Francisco Chinatown, because it does hold about a thousand people. Then I called my mom. I said, "Mom, this is what just happened." I said, "Woody just called and asked me to go get a room for a thousand people." She said, "You've got to be kidding. Well, don't worry about it. I'll take care of it. That's quite an honor to have him come and play." I said, "Well, yes. I know what he gets for each night." [laughter]

Crawford: What did he get? What was his fee?

Wong: Oh, it varied, you know. It was eight, ten, twelve thousand, whatever the particular venue.

Crawford: That's quite a gift.

Wong: Yes. So, anyway, they came, and we ordered dinner, tables for ten, banquet. We had about eight hundred some odd people.

Crawford: How did you get the word out?

Wong: I had to call. I had to call, and that's what I did. I got an invitation out really quick and put something on there about Woody Herman's band. Gosh, I wish I could find that wedding invitation.

Crawford: Well, so Marilyn was happy with that.

Wong: Oh, she was delighted. I'm sure she was excited. She said, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe this." This was the reception. That's what it was.

Crawford: And who was in the band?

Wong: I had the entire roster.

Crawford: But you said you were married in a ceremony elsewhere?

Wong: Oh, yes, it was in Berkeley, right here at Northbrae Church. We had already purchased the home that we wanted. It was in Kensington, and I had seen it several times, but they had a "Sold" sign on there or "Private" or something. Another time I thought I'd go up there and see if it was for sale, and it wasn't finished yet. That's another whole trip. Because it has a lot to do with my record collection, as I have now in the house I have.

But we were married there. It was a small wedding. And this has a lot to do with jazz, too, because I got a call from the jazz guitarist Kenny Burrell early in the week. This was the week of the wedding, a week after I spoke with Woody, you know.

So Kenny said, "Are you going to come to the club?" I said, "Geez, I can't. I'm busy planning my wedding. "Gee," he said, "I'm going to be through with my gig and back to L.A. the day before. God, that's too bad. I'd love to come." So what happens? He calls on the morning of the wedding, and he says, "Herb, you are getting married today, right? My bass player Martin Revere and I are coming for the ceremony. We'll play for you. Tell me what you would like to hear." I went through some ballads, and I got a call from him again before the wedding. [laughs] He said, "Hey! By the way, how does the wedding march go, now?" [laughter]

So I went through the theme, you know. [hums wedding march] I said, "That's all you need, because we'll be up to the altar by that time and you won't need it. [laughs] That was great, that was great.

Crawford: Do you have a picture of Woody Herman at your reception for the book?

Wong: No. We have a tape; that's what we have. He did two sets, and it was taped by friends of mine. I didn't know they were doing it. They brought a tape recorder and they taped everything. But they couldn't get my talk—because I gave kind of a presentation and explained about Woody and things and spoke

to the people who were there. We did have people from New York, I remember—from Atlantic Records, from RCA, from Columbia Records, and disc jockeys, writers, musicians. Quite a mix of people.

Crawford: Eight hundred people! Imagine knowing eight hundred people.

Wong: Yes. You know, it was funny. Marilyn tells this once in a while, and I just remembered it—there was a reception table—a couple tables—and there were a lot of people from my mother's contacts, because she was a very prominent member of the community. I haven't talked about her too much. So she had her friends out from business and her alumni association and things like that. So they came and there were people pouring through there. I think there were four people taking names by alphabet. She asked who that person was, who that person was—I said I didn't know, they all looked alike to me!

She cracked up: “You're saying that to me?”

Crawford: Oh, that's a great story. Well, then you set up housekeeping in Kensington and went back to work?

Wong: Yes.

Crawford: I had in mind to ask you this morning about one of your jazz students: Peter Apfelbaum. I was wondering if you would take him through his career with you. When he started, you discovered him at age seven, I think.

Wong: At five. Peter Apfelbaum's father gave me a phone call. I guess it was—it must be 1966, perhaps—no later than '67. It had to be somewhere '65 and '66, then, that he came.

His father called me and said, “Sir, I'm in need of assistance from you, and I want to discuss my son with you. Your school is the only school I know of that has a program in jazz that supports young budding players. I know of no other school anywhere. I said, “Why don't you have him come down and I'll check him out.” That's—just remembering when I said that, just the way that, “I want to check him out.”

So, I met Peter—this little boy with little short pants—and he brought his drum sticks and played the drums a little bit, because we had a drum set. I was really impressed. Five years old—

[End Tape 9, Side A]

[Begin Tape 9, Side B]

Wong: He came from Hillside School to Washington School.

- Crawford: He mentioned that he was playing with a group of much older kids when you took him into the school.
- Wong: Yes, that is correct. That's right. He was the youngest. I had him with a band that Phil was working with, and I introduced him to Phil, [laughs]. Phil looked at him and said, "You've got to be kidding, Herb." I said, "No, I'm not. I'm not." I said, "Just leave him in. You'll see what I mean." I mean, after all, he was just a little dinky kid, but, you know—
- Crawford: What did you look for?
- Wong: I kind of detected a natural set of tendencies that he had. He had an excellent attitude. I liked him as a person. He wasn't a dour-like kid—a kid that has one of those undesirable attitudes. I mean, I catch that real quick by talking to them. I made a practice of that. I was very good at that. I still am, I think, with people.
- Crawford: You knew he wanted music?
- Wong: Oh yeah. I mean, he was into it. You're not going to find a child with the level of achievement that he had already shown, and the potential that he had was pretty much—of course, I had to guess at it, but it was a pretty educated guess.
- Crawford: He came up through the school system, got his start with you. And he was in the Berkeley High School Jazz Band, which I understand he quit for ideological reasons.
- Wong: Hmm. Well—he had very strong views about a lot of things. I would say he was a divergent thinker—using that term—because he was himself. And that's why his music is himself. You know, there are no rules of convention that he has to ascribe to, as far as his perspective about creating something, whether it's music or something else. So if it's a philosophical regime that he was involved with, then that's how he would look at it.
- I thought he was a person that carried a constant open agenda. He would show his resourcefulness, too, in finding ways to compensate for whatever wasn't happening with him. I think he is a very effective strategist. He is able to evaluate and appraise a situation quite rapidly and decide what move he is going to make and what direction he is going to target himself to.
- Crawford: What moves somebody like that in music?
- Wong: I don't know.
- He showed leadership qualities with the kind of an initiative that he had on the stage and during rehearsals. He was very quick, he was very responsive. Other kids related to him with quiescent respect, if you will. But though it was

unsaid, it was said by behavior. He was like, "Let's follow the leader." Because he was multitalented, I think the other kids recognized his endowments.

Crawford: So he was one of the most talented that you came across?

Wong: No question about it. I think I told you that incident about Rahsaan Roland Kirk. That was Peter. That was another model incident or circumstance that revealed his willingness to try to expand and to explore, reserving a right to fail in order to succeed.

Crawford: His music is very nontraditional, isn't it?

Wong: Oh, absolutely. I would not have expected anything else from him. I don't think he and I have ever talked about how I perceived this thing. I hope someday we can do that. He doesn't know how I feel on a lot of things. He's so busy, and I'm so busy, we have a hard time getting together. Because he epitomizes the values that I placed for this mission. The crystallization of his various stages of success is equivalent to the materialization of my dreams. Peter is it. I think that his horizons are unbounded. Peter has a lot of years to go, and he's going to be an enormously important historical contributor to creative music.

Crawford: He has said that Phil Hardyman was the biggest musical mentor.

Wong: No question about that. Yes. Because he was with him every day, the close interaction. But I don't think he perceived what I was doing. Because of all these other support things that were going on—even Phil was not completely conscious of a lot of things until they just happened to happen. You know, I mentioned like having the demonstration of what the band was doing for the community. Remember, I mentioned choosing the most unlikely, the most unattractive kind of PTA event of the school year? So I made that and turned it around 180 degrees.

What was I doing there? I was supporting that jazz instrumental program, and the esteem that should be extended to the program, the kids, to Phil and the school by giving them the kind of exposure and recognition in the community that they deserved. Because, you see, Phil was not conversant with it, but I was already tied into a scene in jazz beyond Berkeley. I was the person who had the national contacts—and international contacts.

Crawford: Did that exist anywhere else?

Wong: Not that I know of. Jazz was out of fashion. It was not part of the curriculum and no one was groomed for that. Here's a huge distinction between what we were doing and what other people think about it. Even now today, it's the same thing. I keep hearing it time and again. All they think about is

instrumental music and its program to develop musicianship in young folks to become musicians. This is not what I was after. Those who finally find themselves on that trail—of course, we expect some to, and of course we've got piles of them in Berkeley—but my mission included all the children and all of the people, even though there were tangential connections to them in their extended family and community.

To find out about the positive profile about what this creative music can do for people—not just as an art form or sphere, but as people, as a social animal—what jazz has as benefits in democratic relationships, in respecting the value of freedom and liberty, respecting the joys of intuitive interactivity between people, enjoying the private thrills, if you will, of discovering something when you're creating—whether it's an improvised solo, a composition, or an arrangement or orchestration. Those are values, I think, that I don't hear too many people talk about in school music education. You can see why I was after that, because the musicians that I brought in related to the whole school and, shall we say, infected the entire staff.

Crawford: When Duke Ellington came, for instance—

Wong: Oh, that's a whole project. I want to talk about that because Duke's book, *Music Is My Mistress*, has a chapter devoted to me, but it's not faithful to exactly what happened. He didn't get back to me to get the details.

Crawford: He didn't check with you?

Wong: No, but that's okay, because it was Duke's own impressions, you see, of what his weekend was in Berkeley. It was a celebration of him and his music, but there was a lot that went with that. Now, that's one part of the story of jazz education that no one has ever done. I know this, because in the audience that night, in that absolute full house in the Berkeley Community Theater, was the late Ralph Gleason, who was with the *Chronicle* at the time; Dick Hadlock, who was writing for *Down Beat* and was the original jazz critic for the *Examiner*; and Phil Elwood was there; Russ Wilson of the *Oakland Tribune* was there; and Johnny Rodriguez of the *Berkeley Gazette*.

All these writers were there, and some other people like the record promoter and publicist for the Monterey Jazz Festival, Ernie Beyl, who worked with the late Jimmy Lyons for a good many years at the Monterey Jazz Festival—he came. I got calls from Ernie and Ralph Gleason the next morning after that event—that they would like sometime to talk about that event.

Crawford: What year was that?

Wong: I think it was '70, or it maybe it was '67. I really turned on the whole school with that one, more than I did with Oscar.

Now, it's a different thing. Oscar was in the school itself, like Rahssan and the others. Duke Ellington visited the school, but did not perform at the school. He interacted with us, but went to the Berkeley Community Theater. I mentioned about the Berkeley High School jazz band rehearsal. And I talked about his being dressed in blue, didn't I? Oh, that's so delightful. This was a takeoff from the work with Phil and Peter and Dick and so forth. I wanted to extend this thing. This was probably the best example of exceeding the perceived boundaries of the instrumental music program, quote unquote. I carried on some of the momentum, inspired momentum, from the Oscar Peterson experience to continuing with integrating other experiments I was conducting.

I referred last week to Clifton Fadiman and his asking me what I was fussing around with, and I mentioned mood systems. Well, the merge of mood systems and young children's expression in various elements of expression started to click in my imagination. So I decided to call Duke Ellington when he was in Las Vegas. He was going to be there about three to four weeks.

So I called him from school. I said, "Edward, I want to share something with you." So he said, "Okay, what do you have on your mind?" I read some of those first grade little one-liners and two-liners on newsprint with crayon graphics from after they had listened to some of his music. I tried it with the first grade, and they came up with those wonderful things like the one I mentioned to you. Giant valentines floating in the sky and that kind of stuff.

So I shared that with him, and then he said, "Wow. How old are these authors, these poets?" "Oh," I said, "Probably about the same age as when you started." He said, "Then how old was I?" That's the way he said it; he's so delightful. He said, "How old was I?" I said, "Oh, probably five or six."

I said, "Okay, now listen to my challenge. I've gone over as much of your music as possible. I can't identify all of them, but I kind of connected to the inspirational sources and what imagery you might have had that prompted you to think about a tune or a title or something. Correct me if I'm wrong. Of all the different areas in the world that you have drawn from as inspirational sources, I don't think you have included young children. Now, tell me right away if I'm goofing."

There was silence on the other end. And I'll never forget this. It was a longer silence than I thought I would ever hear from him, and then he said, "Oh my god. I think you have found a hole in my thing, and I would appreciate it, Herb, if you would help me to fill that hole up as soon as possible. Will you do that?"

I said, "Look, while you're in Las Vegas, you're not that far away from Berkeley. Do you think that you might come to school and perhaps do a concert, say, in your last week? I think you've got, what, about four or five

weeks left?" I think it was longer than three or four weeks. He had a month and a half somewhere in the Las Vegas area.

So he said, "Well, that's an interesting idea. Okay. Let's think about that." After that talk, I moved on a plan. The plan was I divided the school student body of some 500-600 kids—I don't remember the number—into teams, and these teams cut across kindergarten through sixth grade. Each team selected an Ellington or Billy Strayhorn collaborative tune or a Billy Strayhorn composition that was recorded.

Then I selected the tunes that I thought would be stimuli for children to spark their imagination, spark their curiosity, et cetera. These were my goals. I selected things, too, based on the fact that I thought the public should know about some of the most popular things that he usually put—if not whole—in a medley. That was W-H-O-L-E. [laughs]

I selected Strayhorn's "Take the A Train"—we did "Mood Indigo"—we did "El Gato"—yes, "El Gato," the cat. [laughter] I'll have to look up the rest. It's on that little navy blue/black program. I think I did another train tune. Oh, I think I did "Harlem Air Shaft" too. Yeah. I went and got these recordings and distributed them to the teachers and their classes. They were asked to play the music and see if they could generate some novel curricular activities that would integrate the themes as they perceived those musical themes and their titles into something interdisciplinary in their classroom. That was pretty open but still with some guidelines about what I was after.

Now, these teachers having the kind of initiative and ingenuity they did, I knew they'd do it, as they have for all the things that I've ever done there. Bang! But this was a little off center. Right? [laughs]

Crawford: What did you anticipate? Poetry?

Wong: Everything. Anything and everything. Yes. Just the curriculum. Again, I'm standing away from the focal point of the instrumental music program. That's not enough. We're talking about being conscious of this man and his music and everything else, and how it pervades all of life. Well, here are some good examples of what happened that I'd like to share.

I did poke into the classroom, and I would give suggestions if I saw something. "Why don't you try this?" And, "Oh, let me get you XYZ, because that might help you with what I think you're trying to do." I would do things like that because the staff did value me as a very rich resource center. That was part of my preceding background anyway, you know, in the Oakland schools, as a resource consultant. I always came back with ideas and stuff, and I'd create stuff. So this translated into what I hoped would be a significant project.

Now, here are some specific examples. Let's take, for example, "Take the A Train."

First, kindergarten: kindergarten children would be using gross body movement for their physical education relationship with creating physical movement. That's not an uncommon thing for kindergarten kids—to exercise their large muscles. So they made like trains with their bodies and moving around the room and saying choo-choo-choo or the letter "A" for "Take the A Train." Okay?

Now we go to the first grade. The first graders—they're using wooden blocks. They're building trains with their blocks—a very common first-grade activity, context—using blocks to construct, to destruct, to be conscious of structures.

Crawford: While listening?

Wong: While listening. While being aware and manipulative stuff. So that's what they were doing. I don't recall what second and third grades were doing.

Crawford: Didn't somebody do a mural?

Wong: Oh, yes. There was a mural. It might have been the second grade. I don't recall. But it was a huge, huge mural. That was a group mural by all of these teams. It was an aggregate of these teams. So finally we had this super mural of the various tunes that we chose, because I wanted Duke to see what we were doing, what we had chosen, when he came, when he finally visited. I think third grade did something with the community to find out about the train in Berkeley.

Now, the fourth graders went up to Tilden Regional Park to ride that train that they have up there. So they were physically involved with social studies, because fourth grade curriculum is social studies in California.

They went down to see the train down on Seventh Street between Harrison and Oak Street in Oakland, where there was an SP [Southern Pacific] passenger train that was left there for people to look at, and children would run in and out and climb and so forth. So we took them down there, too, so we could see the innards of a historic kind of passenger train and the engine there. So that was great, you know. And they went to see some other trains.

[End Tape 9, Side B]

[Begin Tape 10, Side A]

Wong: I have to finish up to the fifth and sixth grades, just to give you the full spectrum of one tune and how it progressed through the grades, and ad hoc innovative curricular development. [laughs]

Okay, as I said, fifth grade was always devoted to the history of our country—early history and contemporary history—so that's what fifth graders did. They looked at various aspects of the history of trains, the movement of how trains became a business and industry, and how it connected the transcontinental lines of transport, became part of the industrial revolution, et cetera.

Now we go to the sixth grade, and the sixth grade, being the most mature, looked into the scientific aspects of how trains were built. They looked into the physics of how steam engines work and created their own engines. They built some of their own engines. So that was a very fruitful focus for sixth graders. They were fascinated by it.

And that all came from “Take the A Train.” Duke never ever thought about it being used this way. Neither has anybody else, I don't think.

Crawford: Was he made aware of all the extended study?

Wong: Oh yes. He just had something about the event, about his day or the weekend there, because we connected with the UC Extension, which did a course on Duke Ellington, as well. It was part of that whole thing. It was very big. Ralph Gleason was very much involved with that one.

Anyway, during the course of all this activity, I enlisted the interest of some high school students across the street at Berkeley High to be the filmmakers. I wanted to have this documented. You know, it was 8 millimeter amateur film, because we didn't have video things there.

It was too bad we didn't have all this electronic stuff going on, because this would be monumental. I know this would have been a model to really seize upon by foundations and other people. This whole idea of mine that I'm sharing with you, and much more, is a very heavy candidate for people to support and investigate and nourish and see what we can do with this. Because what I am aware of is that jazz education today for elementary schools is still the same thing. The International Association of Jazz Educators has published a curricular course of study, and it's still reworking and rehashing—I'm sorry—the same old shit.

Dammit, I just can't believe it. It's making me upset, you know. But I don't have anybody pressing my buttons to say, “Herb, you're the guy. I mean, hey, it's been decades. You had the answers a long time ago.”

Crawford: And you can't get your thoughts in there? You do write for the IAJE newsletter.

Wong: No, I just decided I'd back out of these communities because I was getting so disturbed that I became disenchanted. I said, “I'm not going to be a party to

this and put my energies into something I know is not in the sphere or direction that it needed to go to.”

Part of it is because, you see, they don't have the sensitivity about how the concept of ecosystems work. I come from that, and that's why I have that—as you know. It's because of the pairing of these large compatible concepts that made it possible for me to think about this. How would I think about the physics of trains? Or the systems of things that work into the fourth and fifth grades. It's all part of what they were doing, because they were using concepts—it really has a lot to do with this. There were parallels.

In fact, I made charts. I would put the units here for the jazz thing, and then I put the units of study for whatever the other scientific things would be that I would find—the processes. I would put these linked bridges between them. I've never seen that. No one's ever done it before or since. I think I could become very frustrated with this. [laughs] Well, anyway, however, all this was still part of nurturing Peter and company.

I'll finish the Duke thing. So we had a document. Now I got high school students involved. Adults didn't take the reins; I wanted young folks to be involved. So they were the documenters, they were the filmmakers, and the children were the phenomenon makers.

Crawford: What were they able to get on their Super-Eight?

Wong: Oh, they got these activities, like a blue scarf dance to the “Mood Indigo.” Oh, that was lovely. I remember seeing that. And then we went to black and white and had some boys bounce a basketball on a court that looked very inner-city-like while “Harlem Air Shaft” was being played. Oh, wow. This was great.

Now, let me tell you what I finally did with this. I think I told you about how I went to the black student union and got that segment. And Duke—I brought him over there to the rehearsal at Berkeley High. When Duke Ellington arrived, I picked him up at the Oakland Airport, and the news media knew that Duke Ellington was going to arrive sometime that morning at Washington School. When I left, it was empty, but news releases were out, I guess.

By the time I brought him to the school and we got out of my car—in fact, as we approached—I couldn't believe it—the place was jammed with thousands of people, absolutely packed. I thought, “Wow! What the hell is this?” We got out of the car, and there was channels 4, 5, 7, whatever—9—I don't know. They were all there, taping what was going on. Duke was dressed very informally, because his formal stuff was not with him.

Crawford: He was always so elegant.

Wong: Yes, see, because that was being brought by the band bus later with the guys.

Anyway, he was dressed in his favorite color, as expected: blue. He had a velour outfit on—a two-piece outfit with a jacket that was also blue. So he put his jacket on his left arm, got out of the car, he looked, and he said to me, “Why, Herb, you didn't tell me I was to dress for the occasion.”

I said, “You're always elegantly dressed, simply because you are Mr. Elegance himself.” [laughs] Oh, he loves that kind of acknowledgement.

Well, we took three steps up to the yard, and we walked in. It was a sunny day, and there were all these cameras and all these signs and posters and stuff from other schools. A lot of kids from other schools came with their principals, who knew I was doing this and didn't just stay in their habitat—they brought children.

Now, this next incident is priceless. A little black girl, five years old—I didn't tell you this—she came up to Duke and yanked on his jacket that was over his left arm. She looked up at him and said, “Mr. Ellington, I know you're very old, but your music sounds so young.” Oh my. Duke looked down at her, and he said, “Darlin', you're a sweetheart.” And then he walked on and said, “Nirvana, nirvana, nirvana, nirvana, nirvana.” Five times. Wow! [laughter] And then we proceeded, and he waved to all the people, and he said, “I didn't know I was going to get this kind of reception.” I said, “Your Highness, you are HERE!”

So I brought him inside to the main building. We looked at the mural, and he was stunned. Then we had a display: a mural plus exhibits for every tune that the children studied with integrated activities, a multimedia thing that we could show him, down the hall, both sides. The whole school was Ellingtonia! We had big signs and everything, and he just couldn't believe it.

So we went across the street next, but first I had him come into the office so everybody could meet him in the school. He thanked everybody. We went across the street, and all these television stations and this huge entourage were following him. We then went up to the cafeteria at the high school where the black student union was giving him a special reception. I didn't know what it was until we got there, because I got the message. I told you about my courses conducted over there with the BSU.

I went over there. I made a pact with the principal, who was Clifford Wong at the time—that was called “Wong country.” Anyway, I told Clifford that I wanted to teach some kind of seminar for the Black Students Union about Duke Ellington, because he knew that Duke Ellington was coming since it was on his campus.

He said, “Oh, no, you don't want to do that, Herb.” He said, “They'll storm you right out of the room. They don't want to hear about Duke Ellington. You're nuts, man. You're nuts. But you're on your own—do your own thing.”

Because, you know, they had an arts-magnets kind of thing, you know, a lot of alternative things. The Black Student Union had, at that time, some opportunities, and, well, this was a period that was kind of open for unconventional things.

So I went there, and, yes, I was almost rushed out of the room, because the negative attitudes were very strong. I was very disappointed, because they said they didn't want to have anything to do with somebody like that.

Crawford: But why? I don't understand.

Wong: Well, I told them what was going to happen, and they said—and I remember these words—”Duke Ellington? Oh, man. I mean, he's an old fogey. He's yesterday.” Like that. It's pretty typical.

So I said, “Some of you jazz fans or blues fans?” Well, they raised their hands. “Oh, yeah, yeah, sure.” So I said, “Well, tell me some of your heroes.” “Well, there's Ornette, [and] 'Trane.”

So I said to them, “Well, thanks for telling me who you're interested in. Let me ask you something, now.” This is how I won them over. I said, “Well, where do you think Ornette [Coleman] came from? Where do you think McCoy [Tyner] came from? Where do you think [John] Coltrane came from, anyway?” I said, “Let me tell you, they came from Duke. They came from Louis Armstrong.”

I went back there several times. I told the principal, “I almost got the bum's rush, but I told them I was going to bring them in recordings, and they're welcoming me next week, as well. So I'm going to come back. So give me a record player.”

So I brought LPs. I brought 'Trane, I brought Ornette, I brought Elvin Jones. I brought a lot of their heroes. Then I played Duke. And I started to shrink the gap. I did that for about four or five weeks. I had a good number of sessions. I felt good about it, and I knew they felt good.

So, anyway, let's return to our storyline of Duke going to Berkeley High and going to the Black Students Union special reception. We walked up there, and it was like, you know, the Super Bowl or something. They were hurraing and everything, and they screamed together at somebody's signal—they orchestrated them—“Duke Ellington, we love you madly!” Wow. That was his phrase, you know, so he was so taken by them.

He said, “Well, I love you all madly, too.” He was telling me, “So these are the kids you were telling me that were rebellious and everything? You're a magician, Herb.” It seemed like they were regarding him as God walking on earth.

So then we went over there to the high school jazz band rehearsal, and they were just thrilled to have him there. And Michael Wolff—I mentioned him—he was there. So from there, then, I showed him the auditorium, the community theater, and then I drove him to the Shattuck Hotel, where he was going to stay.

Crawford: Excuse me. Did the band play some of his music?

Wong: Oh, yes, they played. He heard them. He complimented them. You know, just his presence did something for them, I guess, inspired them. But it wasn't in the shape that it was to become, not then. This is still early.

I had him in a lovely room nearby at the Shattuck Hotel, and I said, "You know, Duke, you've got a long night ahead of you, and I know you're going to need some rest." So, [laughs] he said, "Okay, I will, but I need you to go and get me something to eat. I'd like a hamburger with a lot of ketchup, a pickle, and some French fries. And get me a coke. That's all I need."

So I went out and got it and brought it back. I had a key, so I went in, and [laughs] he had a stocking cap on his head, and he was lying down. I've got to describe this, my version of it. He had a terry cloth robe—blue, of course—over him, and he had blue slippers on, and his feet were elevated at the foot of the bed.

He said, "Did you bring me my hamburger?" I said, "Oh, I've got everything you wanted." And so he ate it, and then he said, "Now, you have to perform another duty for me."

I said, "Yes, I know where it is." It's on the floor by the wall, and it's this big kind of carrying chest, and it's filled with pills and capsules. It's his medicines, you know.

Crawford: What kind of medicine?

Wong: I mean, there are dozens of different things, all colors. So he said, "Okay, now, here's what I want you to do. Give me two of the whatchacallits over there. They're red and white. And then give me those and those. Now bring me my Coke," and he took them all. And that was it.

I had invited the superintendent, who did not show up. However, Dr. Josiah Williams, who was the president of the board of education at the time, and I think he was at the Pacific School of Religion, appeared and was genuinely impressed and made cogent remarks. He was African American. I told Duke when I picked him up to go to the community theater, "Well, the band's already there. Your son has taken care of everything." Mercer [Ellington]. He was like the road manager; he took care of the band. Also, he played trumpet only in the sections, but never any solos. Okay.

And Duke said to me, “Now I have another favor to ask of you. Did you notice there were some cars outside the stage door across the street?” This is early, you know. “Did you notice that there were women sitting in them? Well, you've got to do me a favor. When I'm through with the concert tonight, I've got to get to that airport, you know. Not with my band. They go on their own. You've got to get me there. And I will encounter what I perceive to be some problems with those women out there.”

Crawford: They were waiting for him?

Wong: Yeah, they were waiting for him. So I had rushed him into the stage area without them being able to get out of the car. They didn't know when he was going to come. They didn't know how we were going to come.

Crawford: Did he know them?

Wong: Oh, I think he knew some of them. I sensed that. He said, “You have got to sneak me out and drive me to the airport and evade all those women.” There were probably four or five that I knew of, that I was aware of. Anyway, so that was part of it, kind of a preamble.

Now, I told him, “The orchestra will not be invited to the stage until we have shared our gift to you and the orchestra. It's a surprise to you, Edward, a surprise. So I want you to sit in a special chair with me on stage left.”

We both had a stool, and we looked up to this giant screen that I had. Well, I had more than one screen. I had a multimedia presentation: the film that these high school kids did, we played his music, we had stereopticons—you know, the old-fashioned things. What do you call those? Those old pictures on both sides of the film.

So now there are three screens up there. I had it all coordinated. Here's “Take the A Train” and here are some funky old trains, here are trains, here are people—Oh! He was looking at this and he said—because multimedia wasn't that much in vogue, yet. And we were doing all this stuff.

Crawford: And the fact that the kids did it.

Wong: The kids did it, you know? And their sayings, and their everything. It was so fully child-oriented, and that's where I come from, you know, child-orientation, child-centered, child-articulated.

Anyway, Johnny Hodges—I remember him saying, “How come we're not playing yet?” And later he says, “Whoa,” he said, “I'm gonna really play tonight.” He got stimulated by viewing the children's activities with music of Duke's orchestra.

When Duke was looking up at all this, he said to me, “How old are these children, now?”

I said, “Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.” We discussed one thing which he never was able to do, and I’m so disappointed, because he passed away by the time he was thinking about getting to it—and that was that he was never commissioned to do a work in tribute to children as of this experience. He wanted to do a piece. Damn!

Crawford: When was he commissioned by Grace Cathedral to do that piece? Was it right around that time?

Wong: Gosh, I don’t remember. The seventies. He was so busy, see, but he wanted to do it, and I kept telling him about the children of the world. He liked those ideas and what they said because it was stimulating.

When he asked about the children who wrote the poetry that I mentioned to him, I said that, “It’s like you, and it’s like [Thelonious] Monk, and it’s like you and all your friends that are the creative ones of the Pantheon. You never carried what was the increasingly heavier and heavier luggage that most adults carry through their lives, wiping out the beauty of their childhood culture.” I said, “You have carried the values and behavior of the childhood culture all your life.”

Crawford: Did you talk to the audience at all?

Wong: Oh, yes, I did. What I did was to use the desegregation of the Berkeley schools—as the first school district over 200,000 to do that—as a theme.

You see, the theme was “The Magic of Berkeley’s Children and Duke Ellington.” I felt this way there would be a duality of emphases, and also I thought the community would really come out. I was trying to draw the community out. If they weren’t into Duke Ellington, they wanted to see something else about children and about desegregation.

The president of the board of education gave a nice talk after mine, and I gave a welcome and reiterated the concept of why this was [we were doing this] and what was happening in the background, too, a little bit, so they could appreciate what we were trying to do. I said, “This is not just another concert. This is more than that.”

Crawford: Good response?

Wong: Tremendous. Yes. I mentioned to you that Ralph Gleason and Ernie Beyl called me the next day. Ernie was very entrepreneurial, because he was in—and he still is in—public relations.

He said, “Herb, I was just talking to Ralph, and we said that was the most impressive thing we have ever seen. It wasn't adults, you know, it was kids. We have no doubt that if you were to leave this school and take this whole show on tour, it would be one of the most wondrous things ever in culture, in history.”

Crawford: Did Ellington get paid for the concert?

Wong: Yes, he did. I paid for it, personally. I did not have any financial subsidies from anybody in the Berkeley community.

Crawford: How much did the tickets help?

Wong: They were two and a half dollars. I'll tell you why I did that. I had a heck of a time scaling the house. I said to myself, “There's no way I could scale the house, per se, because I want families to come. I want families to come and celebrate the kids so they can see other families and other kids, and also the desegregation is for families.” So I said to myself, “The hell with it, I'll just make it two and a half dollars for every seat in the house.” I told Duke what I was doing, and he said, “Well, that's kind of unheard of, but I understand where you're coming from, so we'll make sure that you don't lose any money.”

Crawford: You did, though, didn't you?

Wong: No, we gained about a thousand-something, and I took every penny of whatever went over the expenses and gave it for scholarships.

Crawford: Do you remember what his fee was?

Wong: It was nominal. It was very small. He might have said, “Okay, we've got something. I don't want to make it so it's completely *pro bono*, but I want to support it.” I think it was—I don't know—seven thousand, maybe.

Crawford: What a grand thing to do.

[End Tape 10, Side A]

[Begin Tape 10, Side B]

Crawford: Did you get the families to come to the concert?

Wong: Oh, the families came. In fact, when I came out to [do] my introduction—I said, “This is the most beautiful sight that I have ever seen from this stage—and I have emceed a lot of concerts on this stage, from this stage—because it is a sea of the most polychromatic rainbow that ever has come to this auditorium—all ages, all colors. This show also has a beautiful purpose to it, and everything that you're going to experience tonight is going to be

beautiful.” So that's all we did. I wanted to pay homage to their support that evening.

I did not, however, make any comment, but the Reverend Josiah Williams made a comment that the superintendent of schools was not present. That was a real low blow that he wanted to make.

Crawford: Why? Why wasn't he there?

Wong: I don't know. I never have known. I thought, “I don't want to ask the guy. I won't grace the thing with a question.” I'd never gotten any message about it or explanation—nothing.

Crawford: He pointed it out.

Wong: Dr. Williams pointed it out, and good for him, you know. He belonged there. He was such a strong spokesperson in the community about racial equality. That was a heavy time. And his daughter was in our school, and so he was a staunch supporter of what I was doing all the time.

Crawford: What was your connection to Ellington?

Wong: My connection with him? Oh, gee, I don't know. We just became friends early. I first saw him when I was a kid. Duke Ellington I saw at age eleven and a half on Main Street in downtown Stockton. I think the theater was named Central Theater. His band was appearing there. Herb Jeffries was the vocalist. Yes, I certainly remember that.

Crawford: And then—but how did you meet him?

Wong: I waited for him for an autograph, because my brother and I were autograph hounds—strictly jazz. [laughs] Nothing else. So through the years I would remind him, “Do you remember that little boy you wrote something for in Stockton?” “Oh!” He said, “Are you the little boy?”

Also, when I came back from the war, I attended a lot of Ellington things and so we became very, very good friends.

Crawford: Extraordinary.

Well, I wanted to ask you about your theories about jazz and science, relating to birds in particular. You saw bird songs as improv, and I thought that was an interesting concept.

Wong: Yes, I was entranced with teaching about bird life as part of my science education curriculum. I used to bring in jazz records to show them about solos and how they were parallel to certain songs that the birds made. And calls.

Calls, songs, and notes are three major categories of bird voices. I took these three major elements and established some interrelationships.

I would go to the board and put on a chart, but usually I just went to the board because I liked to do things in action—in vivo, if you will. [laughs] So, to teach my students—they were usually fifth and sixth graders because they could go to field trips with me independently—I would go to the board and sketch, diagrammatically, a pattern that a song of a bird species would have.

I'll give you one. Let's see. How about the song sparrow? That would be good. [imitates bird call] Okay, there's a pattern. Doo-doo-doo-dee-eee [scratchy noise] and then a trill—trrrrrrrr. Well, I would sketch these markings. I'd say, "Notice when he does that. Now let's play another song sparrow at another time." And it was a variation on that. Not quite the same, but certainly identifiable as a song sparrow. We know it's a song sparrow, because it has a basic pattern, but sometimes another song sparrow will add a note or two or might change something in it. I don't know if the bird is improvising, but I look at it and I say, "Hey, that's different."

Then I would play a jazz theme—somebody who had done a solo—and I played the same artist doing the same tune at another time when it was different. I would go to the board and show graphically the two variations of the melodic line.

At first it was a way to appreciate the fact that there are patterns, and, second, that there is a way of learning by internalizing patterns, by the schema of these respective organisms, really—the human animal and the feathered animal. So the fascination with different bird songs and calls is [comparable] to the kind of sounds that jazz musicians would make on horns or on a trap set, on drums. Anyway—

Crawford: I like that concept. That's in line with what you said, that jazz and science evolved from experimentation.

Wong: And history. They both have rich historical antecedents. The bird life is evolutionary, if you are a proponent of evolution as the basis for life—because now we have different viewpoints—and for the jazz musicians it would be the evolution of styles. So there are two lines that we may be able to make connections.

I had a second offshoot kind of a thing with theater. This is where I'm going to need your help—getting a children's book agent. I'll tell you a little bit about it real quick. I knew for years there were no children's books on jazz. Now there are a lot of them. If they say "juvenile" I read them, and I say, "They haven't got it. This is not where it is." Why? Because they just give them a lot of information. They don't understand the nature of childhood development and

the network between the cognitive and the affective domains. And I've been trying to do that.

So I said, "I've got to capture their attention first. You don't have to get a stick and knock them on the head to get their attention—use something else. What do kids like? Well, they like animals. Okay. They like nicknames. They like sounds. They like a lot of these things."

So what I decided to do—I have it all mapped out now. I haven't written the book, because I'm not sure just how to approach it. Here's how I've done it. My working title is *Digging Jazz is Fun*. Or *The Joy of Jazz* or something. I don't know. But I like *Digging Jazz is Fun*.

So I go through some things about why it's fun—there are festivals, there's color, there is a lot of conviviality and stuff like that, and they're everywhere from deserts and mountain tops to all kinds of environments. You find them everywhere.

Then I come to the corollary. No, I talk about nicknames—nicknames on tunes, funny names, places and tunes, and musicians names. Why don't other musics have as many as these? Well, let's take a look.

In jazz we have a category of people that they have the highest esteem for. So we have people with names with king, duke, earl, queen, empress, lady, president—it goes on. I've got the complete list. And, not accidentally, they are some of the most important figures in jazz.

Then we have the second of the three categories that I have. It is those that are named after animals: bird, hawk, mule—it goes on. I have a list like this. So you can see that the graphics will come out, too. Johnny Hodges—Rabbit, you know. There are so many. Coleman Hawkins, Hawk.

So I would have the biographies tied in with something that pulls them in, both graphically, hopefully, and the story of the nickname. Because there are reasons for nicknames.

And then the last group is a catchall—what in adult language are the idiosyncrasies of certain musicians, or the shortening of their name, but you just hear them and you know who they are—like Sassy [Sarah Vaughan], Hamp [Lionel Hampton], 'Trane [John Coltrane], [Thelonious] Monk, Miles [Davis]. So I've done all of that.

I just know that this is a manuscript that, if worked with and published, would go. This is the kind of book that the schools would use as a supplement, parents would buy it if they were urged to find something like this for their children—it also could spawn a wonderful CD and maybe some film thing.

But anyway, the book needs to come out first. So I'm going to ask you to help me.

Crawford: Good session.

Wong: This was a good one.

[End Tape 10, Side B]

Interview 6: April 1, 1998

[Begin Tape 11, Side A]

Crawford: This is our sixth interview, and I want to start by reading something about Dr. Herbert Wong which appeared in the *Examiner* by Dwight Chapin. The article is entitled, "Give Me Doctor Jazz," and it begins, "One of these days Dr. Herb Wong is going to meet himself coming and going." [laughter] So I thought today we would focus on the highlights of the eighties and the nineties when, first of all, you taught a great deal, then you went into record production. I'll just open it for you to say what have been the highlights of those years.

Wong: Oh, that was after Huxley College at Western Washington University. I came back for a year and a half or two, whatever it was, [after] teaching at the College of Natural Resources at U.C. Berkeley. I came back. That's right. Yes. And I've already shared my story, about how I finally left?

Crawford: You said you'd been commuting from Washington.

Wong: Yes, and they were interested in my being interested in a university administrative position, but I was not interested in that, and I thought I'd better get back here.

The energy of the music pulled me back. There was music up there, and I did get somewhat involved, but trying to keep a low profile was difficult. I had no idea how radiative my reputation had been, even up in the Northwest. You know, when they found out I was there, then, my gosh, I had all kinds of calls to adjudicate this or go to a recording session, write the liner notes for somebody, you know, book this concert for us or whatever. Wow.

And I thought, there is so much more than I have to do down in the Bay Area, maybe I'll just have to forgo my tentative thoughts about maybe staying up there. I thought it was so beautiful. Of course, I couldn't stand that much rain, as I've mentioned before. So I finally left, and I came back to Berkeley.

So I came back and taught at Cal. Then there was a friend of mine who was in the record business, and he was interested in my joining him in a new jazz record label. Well, I worked with him on it for some time, and then it didn't pan out. So that was disappointing.

Crawford: Was that the Palo Alto company?

Wong: No, this was yet another label that just didn't get far enough for me. So I started to think about, what am I going to do next? Because I opted to leave the campus and school district, as you know.

So I started to conduct workshops on creativity, innovations, time management, things like that, just freelancing for a while.

Then I got a call, again, to commercial real estate, and they said they had interviewed over a hundred-some-odd people, “But you're it. You've got something good that a lot of candidates don't have, and we think you'll be very successful.”

Well, I did that for a few months. I learned a lot about it, but I just didn't like what I called the “barracuda atmosphere” of commercial real estate. Everyone was just out there, just going like crazy. They were making tons of money, just tons. I decided that really wasn't what I wanted to do.

So I got this call from somebody from this band called Full Faith and Credit, in 1981, I think. The gentleman said, “Listen, Herb, we'd like you to write some liner notes for a band. For Full Faith and Credit, and I'm the baritone player, but I also handle some administrative things. So we decided to call you because the person who wrote the original notes—he was with the *San Francisco Chronicle*—didn't satisfy our expectations. So we figured you're a big-band expert, and we'll call you.”

I said, “I don't write for religious bands.” [laughs] Because I'd never heard of Full Faith and Credit. He said, “No, it's not a religious band. It's a regular jazz band. Friday, we're going to be playing on the tenth floor of the San Francisco Stock Exchange Club. It's a private party, but we'd like you to come and check us out so you can see and hear what we're up to.” I thought I'd better put a coat and tie on for this thing. It sounded like it was kind of fancy. So I went there, and I didn't know it was some commercial real estate brokers who had a big party for their clients and things, and they hired this big band.

I listened to the band, I looked at it, and I recognized some of the guys. Some of the guys I had even adjudicated when they were in high school and college, so I knew that they were good players. Then a guy did an alto solo—went up to the band, did it, and then left the bandstand. He came down, and he sought me out. His name was Paul Robertson.

I said, “I know some of the guys, but who are these people?” He said, “Well, you see the fifth trumpet player there? He's the chairman of the board and CEO of BMC. Full Faith and Credit is part of the creative arts division of Benham Management Corporation that manages the Capital Preservation Fund, a money market fund.” And at that point in 1981, money markets was not a common concept or nomenclature that was familiar to people.

He said, “The guy who is leading the band, he's vice president in charge of legal affairs, and he also plays bass and flugelhorn. Why don't you drop by my office in the near future and we can talk about it, because we really want you to do these notes.”

So I dropped by the Benham Management Corporation, and I said, “What about this record you guys apparently recorded?” I was told they spent

\$45,000 on it. “I see. And so what label is it for? I don't write for non-labels. Now, what the hell label is it?” “Oh, we don't have a label. We don't know what to do with it yet, but we thought we'd better get the notes and everything together, and the graphics.”

Jim Benham was not in, yet. Incidentally, he just retired on December 31, 1997. James Benham is a genius, you know. He and Paul Robertson, who was the State of California's attorney general, or deputy attorney general, and a lawyer; he was a lawyer. And the two of them created the mechanism. It took them years to figure out how they could have this idea that Jim had when Jim was with, I think it was, Dean Witter or Merrill Lynch. He had proposed this idea, and they thought he was nuts—about a money market fund. So he kept working at it and sacrificing a lot of things, and the two put together how it legally became a vehicle.

Crawford: The first one?

Wong: Yes, the first one. Absolutely. Now, come to find out, after talking to Paul more, Jim is a flugelhornist, a trumpeter, as I saw him, but he's also this guy, you know. And then, of course, Paul, while he was president of the founding corporation, he was a jazz alto player.

Crawford: Good?

Wong: Oh, yes. Very good. I said, “Well, what about this jazz band?” He said, “Well, the jazz band is a promotional vehicle. It represents us and has a connection with us, since we're all into jazz. The vice president plays bass and everything else, and we've got a lot of jazz people here, and then we augment it with guys around town. Jim is in Atlanta, and he'll be coming back. He really wants to talk to us.”

So the appointment was made, I came to see Jim, and asked Jim about a label. He said they needed a name of some sort, and I said, “Why don't you call it Palo Alto Records? There was a cover piece in *Time* magazine a few months ago. So people are aware of Palo Alto. And it's just like Concord Jazz Records. Nobody had heard of Concord, either. Concord Jazz put Concord on the map in a lot of ways. There's very definite feelings about what Palo Alto stands for, and I can tell that you're into quality. Palo Alto is quality.

He said, “I like it.” Then he said, “But what do we do next?” [laughs]

Crawford: So you're already beginning to be a manager?

Wong: Yes. I said, “Give me a sheet of paper, Jim, and I'll give you a sketch of the concepts and what's needed.” I took the sheet, I drew a big circle—which is very much like me, anyway, because it's all ecosystematic, right?—so I drew these radii, and I remember precisely that there were fifteen of them. And on

these lines I drew different things about manufacturing, you know, sales and marketing, promotion, radio promotion, jazz analysis, critics and so forth, distribution and publicity, and all that stuff. I said, "Distribution is the most critical. You can have the best product possible, and if you haven't got—"

Crawford: Like books.

Wong: Yes, like books. In fact, I said it was like the book industry. The record industry is a reflection of the old, traditional, outmoded practices that continue in the book industry, such as you buy it on consignment, and then if you don't sell it you have all these returns coming in to the publisher. I explained to him about the dilemmas.

He said, "Why don't you go down to L.A. with Paul Robertson and check out [distributors]." Well, we went down there. On the way back on the plane, he said, "Gee, you've got to give away all those percentages to all these people? Well, we'll do it ourselves or we'll have our own label. Let's go back and talk to Jim."

So we talked to him about it, and Jim said he talked to the board, and the board approved a go-ahead on doing our own label. He said, "Could you give it maybe a couple of days or two days and a half or something and we'll pay you for being a consultant?" So I did.

What I did was I set up the promotion, the publicity, the sales, and the marketing for this record that they had. And I'd written in liner notes. By then, I'd written all the liner notes.

Paul had a quartet album that I didn't know about, and he had a master tape of his quartet. And so I wrote the notes for him.

Crawford: And that was good? The quality?

Wong: Oh, it was good. You know, it wasn't the greatest. He isn't the greatest alto player in the world. I know a lot of people who would shred him to pieces, but—

Crawford: Palo Alto Records was the label that you chose?

Wong: Palo Alto Records. Palo Alto Jazz Records.

Okay. So now we have two items, and they said, "See what you can do with these." Well, they hired the band director of Full Faith and Credit, who was a former high school jazz band director, but they hired him to conduct their band, this vanity band.

Crawford: Vanity band?

Wong: I call it a vanity band. Yes. So they got him to be working on the record label. Of course, he didn't know anything about it. Then they gave the label a half-time secretary. That's all there was.

All right. So picture this. I didn't want to be involved with the record label, because I'm just a consultant. I had to set up these deals, like I would have to generate distribution by contacting the independent distributors, which is a lot, but that's the only thing they could do it.

Well, let me tell you how this happened. You know those magic tablets where you write and then you lift it up and then it's gone and then you write again? Okay. I used a magic tablet. I had this fellow take care of calling the distributor, and then I would have my magic tablet. I would work with him a little bit. I'd say, "Now, here's how it's going to go down, and you just look at my magic tablet for the cue to go with the questions that I've got outlined for you. You ask the questions, and when he responds, I'll quickly write a response for you to respond to him." [laughs] That's the way we did it. It was nuts.

Crawford: Why didn't you make the calls yourself?

Wong: Because I didn't want to be involved with that, because I was known in the industry, and I didn't want to be connected with this outfit yet. I was still very cautious about it until I could see that, okay, the distribution was set up. You know, then I would get on the phone. I'd say, "Hey, I'm helping these guys."

Once I got into the act myself, I knew they weren't going to play any games, because they knew I know the games, right? Because there are a lot of games played by distributors in the record industry. A lot of guys—

Oh, I forgot to mention one key thing. Jim asked me to tell him about the record industry, something about it. I said, "Well, it's filled with rip-off artists, up and down the industry."

He said, "Well, we stand for integrity, quality, and innovation here at Benham Management Corporation. So that applies to the record label. Can you use those ideals for your relationships in dealing, representing us? It seems like there's a niche that we can fill—you know, people who are honest."

I got on the phone and I did all this radio promotion, calling these radio stations about the album and so forth and following up. I did all that kind of work, and the result was we did sell a good number of these albums, both titles, but mainly the big band, Full Faith and Credit. It did rather well. It was awarded the recognition in *Down Beat* magazine as "talent deserving wider recognition."

Jim then asked me to spend more time with them. I said he'd have to supply me with some basic things that they didn't have going on right then, he looked at my list, which said that I needed somebody to handle sales and marketing. I needed somebody to handle promotion. That was obvious to anybody who's in business. And I needed an assistant and technician to handle a lot of the mastering and so forth. I said, "You're going to have to have four or five titles on at least three releases a year."

Then I went through the concept of what kind of albums, what kind of artists: a balance of new emergent artists, those that are veteran, established ones, something that has more of a contemporary feel without forsaking the ideals of what we believe in, and something that was vocal as well as instrumental, to tell the industry that this is not a vanity label. It is a contender in the business.

So they went along with that, and after a little while they decided to make me corporate vice president of Benham Management Corporation, and president of Palo Alto Jazz Records. [laughs] Wow, yeah. With a healthy salary.

Then my staff, I think, exploded into something like seven or eight people, and we had our own offices. They rented or leased more property on Page Mill Plaza.

Crawford: You were producing other groups.

Wong: I had five title releases for the first one, including Full Faith and Credit. But Full Faith and Credit, to me, was just to take care of the company, but everything else—it would carry Full Faith and Credit with the other titles.

So the first titles: We had hired Pepper Adams, the baritone saxophonist—a real coup getting him—an excellent album. I did that in New Jersey with Billy Hart on drums and Jimmy Rowles on piano. I forgot who the bass player was. I think it was George Mraz. Oh, he was wonderful. I can't remember this. This was a long time ago. This was 1982. I have a whole catalog.

But, anyway, he was one of them. I think clarinetist Buddy DeFranco and vibist Terry Gibbs—it was their first album with me. We did several. That was a live date down at Carmellos in North Hollywood. Yes, that was a live date. Smokin'. Oh, that was great.

Crawford: You got those reviewed?

Wong: Oh, I had no problems with that. First, I got a lot of publicity. Some appeared in *Billboard*, *Art and Artists*, *Radio and Records*, and all the jazz magazines. Wow. Everybody hopped on them. For national I picked people like Dan Morgenstern, Ira Gitler, guys who are internationally known and are very prolific in their writings, and also they have experience in production.

You know, Ira Gitler was a producer for Prestige Records and an author of hundreds of album notes, and worked in the record label. That's how he started. So I found people like that. Dan Morgenstern was director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University. I got them to write some of our liner notes. I wrote a lot of them, at least half of them.

I got Leonard Feather, the granddaddy of them all. In fact, Leonard and I produced an album together with Linda Hopkins, the blues singer—great. You know, she appeared on the Johnny Carson Show seventy-three times. So Leonard got in some of his own compositions—he had written over 200 blues.

He came early on, just as Stanley Dance did, from London. He lives down in Mission Viejo, down near San Diego. Stanley Dance, also a Britisher. Yes. Some of the greatest writers and critics have been Britishers, not Americans.

Crawford: They do love jazz. Marian McPartland. How did she connect with jazz?

Wong: Oh yes. Oh, well, originally because of her husband.

Crawford: Yes, but she is a wonderful player in her own right.

Wong: Yes. She wasn't a modernist until she got heavily into it. She was also playing a lot of retro classical stuff. Now we look at it as retro, but it was genuine then.

Anyway, the first contingent of albums in the first release received a lot of excitement in the record world. People wrote a lot of articles all over the place about the label. They quoted me all over the place, because I already had, preceding me, a track record in writing and in radio. So I was not a stranger, in other words, and they knew it at Benham Management.

[End Tape 11, Side A]

[Begin Tape 11, Side B]

Wong: I wanted to propel an image as quickly as possible reflecting innovation, quality, and integrity. So, in the graphics themselves for the LPs—because CDs came along a little later—there were double-gate photo albums, beautifully done. It cost a lot of money. Extensive scholarly liner notes, and whenever we could do a double-gate photo, I did that. Some of them were not double-gate photos. And I got some, I think, very exciting graphics on there with a small community of designers in San Francisco and in Palo Alto that had a sensitivity to jazz and its ethic.

Just getting graphic designers who don't have a sensitivity to it doesn't work as well, because there are things that they're not thinking about. I needed to get people who were jazz freaks. Everybody in the company, from the secretary

and receptionist on up, had to be involved as a jazz person or else they were not a serious candidate for me. Because, if somebody becomes part of the label, if I mention so-and-so and you have to ask who it is, well, there's something wrong. Okay? Unless it's a new person, then I always took care of everybody.

I think it's important to note that Diane Reeves, the vocalist, had her first recordings with me, and today she is an international star, a very popular artist, very successful. We did a lot of records, and she's obviously made it big currently, but her first three albums were on Palo Alto.

And a gentleman that just passed away a couple months ago is George Howard, a contemporary artist who played soprano saxophone and was part of the band with Grover Washington before he came to us. We did several albums of his, and they were right up there in the charts and very commercially successful.

And I guess you know as far as smooth jazz and fusion, George Howard became a very big star. I knew he was going to. He knocked on the doors of thirty-some-odd record labels; all of them turned him down except me. I heard his tape, and I knew there was something distinctive about it. If the song is not distinctive, then that voice is nobody, it's anonymous.

Crawford: What are you looking for?

Wong: Oh, something that tweaks my ear so that I know it's like nobody else. That's hard to come by. We have no shortage in comprehensive musicianship, no shortage of guys who can play rings around anybody, but then you can put ten of these guys together and you can't tell one from the other. To me, it's immaterial how well they play. Technical command is not the only ingredient in jazz. You've got to have your own signature. Within two bars, if I can't tell who it is, the guy hasn't got it, and that's what I try to look for. These are difficult ingredients to put together—

Crawford: So you can see somebody who's just starting out, and you can know?

Wong: Yes, you can tell.

Crawford: Did you ever record anybody from the Berkeley days?

Wong: No. They weren't old enough, yet. They weren't old enough, yet, unfortunately. Yes, otherwise I would have. Sure. I would put them on. If I had a label now, I'd put them on. No question about it.

Crawford: Who would be recording for you?

Wong: Oh, I don't know—people who are already on some independent labels, and I'd wrest them away from them. I have a list that I would probably consider. But, you know, most of my getting small label and independent labels or self-produced things out—you have to have a calling card, and a calling card is no longer a business card or a cassette. It doesn't work anymore. It's got to be at least a CD format or an associated form.

Crawford: You eventually left Palo Alto.

Wong: When I left, we had five titles, it was five or more on the top fifteen of *Billboard*. No label had that domination. I got calls from major labels, friends of mine saying, “Herb, I can't believe it man. I can't believe it. How do you do it?” You can take a look and you can see that I had a big band. It was Maynard Ferguson who was on the chart there. There was a wonderful vocal jazz group called Rare Silk, and they were on there. George Howard was on there, to be more of a contemporary fusion artist. Today you call it “smooth music.” I don't like that word, though; it sounds like a drink. Diane Reeves was on the charts, I believe. Maybe Phil Woods was on the chart. We had Phil Woods, and I had Elvin Jones, you know.

Crawford: How lucrative was that?

Wong: It was for a while, but it didn't live up to the expectations of a money market fund. You know, they wanted big bucks. So I left, and they wanted to go entirely commercial and forget about jazz of the real tradition like Phil Woods or McCoy Tyner.

Crawford: They wanted to go what—more contemporary?

Wong: Oh, yes, yes. Just, “Let's go just make money.” But I'm not interested in just making money. I'm sorry. You know. I'm not emblazoned with a dollar sign. If the artfulness of the business is not there, then the value of the art form will evaporate very shortly and will become like any other business where you're just making money. The aesthetics of the product will disappear or erode.

So they got rid of the whole record label other than the fusion stuff. So we all left. We went to do something else. Within two and a half months, I was sought by another record label that was being birthed, and that was Blackhawk Records, which I named, and which, unfortunately, somebody else has taken illegally, now, and is using, including my label. I'm very pissed off about it.

Crawford: You can get it back?

Wong: Well, no. They got it through abandonment by the person—anyway, it also has a great logo. I mean, it's just outstanding. And Blackhawk I had kept in the recesses of my memory for a long time, kept it under closed storage

because I have such a personal relationship to the old Blackhawk Club at Turk and Hyde Streets in San Francisco, because that was *the* jazz club. No club could match the Blackhawk in the West.

Crawford: Talk about that.

Wong: At the corner of Turk and Hyde Street, where the Weiss brothers had this club. And that was in the 1940s when Chet Baker came up with Gerry Mulligan in the birthing days of the Cool movement in Los Angeles. And Dave Brubeck was playing after he played at The Cellar and a bunch of other small little places, too.

But the real club was the Blackhawk, and it became the home of Brubeck and [Paul] Desmond. Miles Davis recorded there. You know, he had a lot of nights there, and it was one of his favorite clubs. So all the major people—Monk, you know, Dizzy. I mean, it's just legendary. Everybody came through there. Billie Holiday. Wow. That was the club, you know.

The original Jazztet—the Art Farmer/Benny Golson Jazztet. I remember seeing them when McCoy Tyner was just 21 or 22 years old. He was the pianist. I saw a lot of things there.

It was a very smoky club. [laughs] It used to drive me out of my mind. My throat would get sore, and after one set I would have to go out and get some fresh air. It was just terrible.

It was kind of interesting. I would arrive at some gig and walk in, and the guys in the back behind the bar would say, “Well! Here comes the most inexpensive jazz critic for a drink.” And so they would slide this glass of ginger ale in front of me, because that's all I ever had. Ralph Gleason had to have milk for his stomach. So he didn't drink, then. But Russ Wilson and Phil Elwood were heavy drinkers—Russ Wilson from the *Oakland Tribune*. Very interesting. Jimmy Lyons used to come in. You know, everybody used to come in. This was the club. I don't think there's ever been another club like this.

Crawford: When did it close up?

Wong: I don't remember now. In the 1970s maybe? Perhaps the early seventies. I can't remember.

I have a part in a video with Grover Sales and Jimmy Lyons, the three of us, and we are photographed or videotaped, filmed, at various places in San Francisco. It's a great segment. We go to North Beach, and we say, “There's the El Matador, across the street there used to be the Jazz Workshop and Basin Street West, but down the street a ways there was Mr. D's.” And following that one, next door, was the Sugar Hill. All in one street, you know?

Then we all went to where now there is a parking lot at the time that this was filmed, with a chain link fence around it. This is the old Blackhawk site. It was really sad.

Crawford: Why did it go out of business?

Wong: Oh, the owners just gave up on it and did other things. One of the brothers was the founder of Fantasy Records. Max Weiss. He had a distributing company, a record distributor. He had Coronet Records, which is an old 78 green-and-white little label. It had a few titles on it. In fact, it was on Coronet that the first Dave Brubeck Trio was produced. It's right there. Yes.

And then it was one of the sales people—what's his name? He's a big filmmaker at Fantasy. He took over Fantasy and became a multimillionaire. [Saul Zaentz] They do everything, everything. But it's a film production company, you know, because they did the Mozart thing and Cuckoo's Nest, and—

Crawford: What happened to the Blackhawk Label?

Wong: Oh, well, that label was headquartered in San Francisco, and, again, I was asked overnight to come up with a business plan, kind of a release schedule for what artists and when and my projections and all this stuff, you know, data.

So there was some unfinished business at Palo Alto Records. I had produced a lot of my albums that we released. So I knew about those, of course, since I was the producer. They included people like the trumpeter Tom Harrell, who today is heralded as one of the great trumpet player living legends, today—Tom Harrell and I were good friends from the time he was a teenager here in Los Altos.

That's another long story. Yes. I had done an album with him, I had done an album with the trombonist Jimmy Knepper, who gained fame with Charles Mingus and was also a Californian at one time, but a New Yorker for many years. So I did an album with them, and then I did one with Chico Freeman.

It was a dynamite thing that I was working on. I hadn't finished that one on Palo Alto Records because I wanted to do one with Chico doing things with Duke Ellington's music, and that was something I started back then. We did some records with him, previously.

So there was a backlog, in other words, of Palo Alto material that I then released on Blackhawk records, and that was—

Crawford: Oh, you could take that with you? That was okay with them?

Wong: Well, no. I contacted the musicians who had rights to the master tapes.

Crawford: The legal work must be tremendous.

Wong: Yes. I took care of that, because I never want to rip any of my friends off, and all musicians were my friends. I had to say that, because they weren't just a candidate out there on business. So I had a personal thing about all these people, that they were going to be taken care of at Palo Alto Records in their contract. It was not unfair to the record label, not at all. I'm just saying that all fairness possible was given to the artist.

So when the dissolution of Palo Alto Records happened, of course, these musicians were aware that their records weren't coming out. I said, "You just hang on to it. I made sure that you have rights to it. I'll be contacting you. I don't know when, but I will be."

And, so, within two and a half months, I was with another label, and I contacted them and I said, "Here's what I would like you to do. I want you to call the people who have Palo Alto Records now." They were a couple of guys who were with me before down in L.A. who had added some new titles and things, but they were all commercial, as I mentioned to you. They were all commercial artists. They didn't care about these other things that I had done, anyway. They were sitting there as things they wanted to sell. Perfect. So I asked the respective musicians, the artists, to call them and offer them certain amounts of money to see if they could get the master. I said, "I think you can buy it for, you know, twenty-five cents on the dollar or fifteen cents on the dollar for this one." Whatever.

So I guided them, and in the meantime they got them. They got them back. Then I gave them a new contract from this new label, Blackhawk. But Blackhawk made out, too, you see, because they didn't have to spend the money to create them. So it was fair to both sides.

I released Jimmy Knepper's CD album and Tom Harrell's. And some of the Palo Alto artists that I had before, I brought them on this label, like Maynard Ferguson, Phil Woods, Sheila Jordan, the vocalist.

We did some dynamite products. Even today people contact me. I get a call or an inquiry once a month, at least, from somebody somewhere in the world looking for those Blackhawk titles, because they were gone. They came and they were gone.

Now, this guy who picked up all the LPs in the warehouse that were abandoned, because the CEO, you see, was an unethical dishonest person—that's why I left and advised other people to jump ship at the time when I could see that the guy was really wacky. You know, we don't need to deal with this company.

Crawford: What was happening?

Wong: He was doing some very unethical things that I didn't want to be any part of. He was using money from one place to another and that kind of thing. I found out that he did some of these kinds of practices. When he had this chain of record stores, retail, that you probably recall called Odyssey Records? That was the guy.

Crawford: What was the connection?

Wong: He was the CEO for them. I didn't know how flagrant those practices were until some people started telling me about it. He was touting his background and all that, and of course he had a lot of background. There's no question about it, but I didn't know he was going to continue to be unethical. So I warned a lot of the artists. I said, "Don't sign this contract. Just forget it, and I'll take that master and get it placed in some other record label." So I did that, too.

But in the meantime, I did put out some absolutely dynamite products. He'd say, "Whew, this is class." Because it's the same as before with Palo Alto Records. But, artistic-wise, I really got the combination of four or five CDs out.

You know, I had Stan Getz. I signed a contract with him. He had not done a quartet record for, I don't know, half a dozen years, and he was living right near me. Of course we were friends. So he said, "Herb, come on, do a record for me." I said, "Yeah? You cost so much." He was the most expensive artist on the entire label.

Crawford: What does that mean? The deal that he would strike? Or that you had to pay him to record?

Wong: Oh, yes. To pay him to record. You know, his attorney and I had to strike the contract together. He said, "Well, Stan will only record for this and this. He'll have to have this." I said, "Okay. I've got to have him. And he wants to deal. Let's make some sort of compromise." Nevertheless, he was still ranking way above any other artist.

But the album is gorgeous. It's hysterically gorgeous. And Stan told me, he said, "You know, I don't listen to my records after I do them." Because he did over two hundred of them. He said, "There's something about this one, Herb." He said, "Every time I listen to it, I hear something new. I discover something new."

Crawford: Isn't that great.

Wong: But I said there was something about it, and I need to tell his story. I said, “I’ll record you after you have your quartet with you for at least two or three weeks so that I know that they’re very, very into the music, and that it’s not just a studio date where you go in and *ad hoc* and just do it.” So they were at Stanford in residence: Kenny Barron on piano, George Mraz on bass and Victor Lewis on drums. I recorded them at Music Annex in Menlo Park, great studios.

This is the story I have to tell. Stan did—this was his very first CD. He’d never done a CD session. So it had to be longer than his usual. And he was—oh, he was exquisite. There were some originals from Kenny Barron, which became the title of the CD, *Voyage*. That’s the title. It’s beautiful. Of course, Stanley always likes standards, and I love standards, so he played “I Thought about You.” Ah! [laughter] It will just disarm you.

There were some things that—he said they were transcendental—that happened between him and Kenny. They have a kind of a rapport that was just unbelievable. You can’t describe it in words. When he was about through, he said, “Well, what about it, Herb? You got enough?” I said, “No, no, I need another one from you. It’s a CD, man. I need an extra cut.” So he did that and when he came into the control room he was sweating like mad. He said, “Now listen, I’ve got to tell you something. I had to concentrate so hard and so intensely on every detail out there while we were recording. I’ve done over two hundred recordings, and you know that, but I’ve never done one with this kind of focus on it.”

I said, “Why?” He said, “Now, come on. “I’m off the sauce and I’m not smoking anything and not taking anything, so all my wits are together, and so for the first time I used all of them. Don’t you put this in the liner notes,” he said to me. [laughter] “That’s why I’m sweating like I am.” But he said, “I’m really happy with it.” Anyway, so we finished that one.

Crawford: Did you like the LP format better?

Wong: I liked the LP because you had something that you could really hang onto with your two hands. You can read all that you need to read without getting a hand lens and without having your eyesight assaulted. You know, now it’s as if “I don’t really want you to read this.”

But, you know, people are more aware of it today. But, again, you see, I see companies doing CDs with the booklets where the graphic artist is so into the graphics that it obscures the readability of the text. That is stupid. I’ve had some of my notes turn out that way, and I’ll call a label and say, “I can’t believe the color that this guy used in there. You can hardly see the words.”

Crawford: Often they’ll print on a white negative background and you can’t make it out.

Wong: Yes, or a certain combination of colors. You know, like dark purple, and you'll have some white color for the words, and then a font that is so stylized that I can't figure it out. It's very bad.

Anyway, we did a whole slew of CDs before that one. So there were hosannahs being shouted all over the industry about it, and it got to this point where music and program directors of radio stations would call me and say, "Herb, man, it's unbelievable. I mean, the product you're putting out: it looks great, it sounds great. It's just great."

Crawford: And did you oversee every detail?

Wong: Oh, I was very involved. Yes. I titled the albums, as I did in Palo Alto Records. I gave the titles to practically every one of them, or I would approve of it. I had a way of titling things, tunes and albums, that made sense, because I envisioned—I was art director at Palo Alto Jazz Records, and I would get the message between the title, the feeling, the graphics, the photos, the notes, so that it had a unified message.

That's why I found out that if I worked with a designer that understood this music, I could communicate with that person better. I usually sketched out some ideas myself, the basic conceptual ideas of what I was looking for, and then I gave it to the graphic designer, and they would come back with two or three renderings and see where I would go from there.

But, anyway, the label left a very, very positive impression, and obviously a lasting impression, because people constantly called looking for it. It was just going like great guns, and then it just disappeared that second year. Because of poor business practices, it went under.

Crawford: You moved from Kensington when you were at Palo Alto Records.

Wong: It was three and a half years into Palo Alto Records, and I was commuting—

[End Tape 11, Side B]

[Begin Tape 12, Side A]

Crawford: How was that for your daughters? We really didn't talk about their educations and their exposure to jazz and so on.

Wong: Well, I mentioned to you that when they were both born, the first sound they heard—the first music—was jazz. I read within the last month something saying that there was a relationship between the sounds that they hear when the mother is pregnant. They had an influence on them, and also the very first ones that they hear as human beings. I thought, Hey, hey, hey, maybe I hit on the right stride there.

Crawford: Where were they educated?

Wong: My older one is Kira Lyn. She went to school in Albany near Kensington, because we thought that the Albany schools were better. So she went to preschool. We got her involved with all kinds of things—gymnastics, dance, you know, like a lot of parents do. We got them immersed in the arts.

Crawford: When were they born?

Wong: Gee, I don't remember.

Crawford: How old are they today?

Wong: Well, twenty-four for my older one—twenty-five in June.

Crawford: And do you have a musician?

Wong: Kira played flute and alto saxophone. She played in the orchestras in school. When we moved from Kensington, she was ten years old, so she went to Encinal Elementary School in Menlo Park. Then, through eighth grade—when they had an eighth grade configuration, they don't now—she went to Menlo-Atherton High School.

But while she was in Encinal for seventh and eighth grade—when she graduated, she was named the flute concertmistress of the flute group, and was cited as the outstanding young musician in her class in Menlo Park, and was playing flute with private lessons from a teacher who was jazz-oriented, and her husband is a director of the jazz band at Gunn High School who I've related to many years. And he became her instructor, too.

Crawford: Were they exposed to jazz at home all the time?

Wong: All the time. They went to festivals with me and whatever concerts I could bring them with me.

Crawford: If you went to Monterey, they went, too?

Wong: Yes. They came to Monterey. They slept early because they were so young, but now, of course, it's different. They really want to go.

Kira continued with her flute and then adopted the saxophone. I told her that either clarinet or flute would bring her into playing an alto sax. So she was lent an alto saxophone by Richie Cole, the bebop saxophonist, because he heard that she was going to learn the saxophone. So she learned playing his saxophone.

Then, a little later when she was, I believe, a junior in high school, Stan Getz gifted her with a brand new alto saxophone that he brought all the way back from Boston from his favorite maker. He came to my birthday party, and I opened the door, and there's Stan, and he says, "Well, happy birthday. I didn't bring you anything because you've got everything you need." I said, "Oh, you brought your horn?" And he said, "Well, this is a special thing that I brought today, and it's for your daughter, Kira."

He said, "Well, find her, and we're going to sit down, and I'm going to show her a few things." [laughter] And so he did. And he brought this letter that he wrote. It's a beautiful letter—which I reproduced, by the way, when I wrote a memorial cover article in memory of Stan Getz. It's a very good article. A personal article. I've done several memorial things with people who I have a very deep relationship with. The other was Art Pepper. I did a tribute to him. We did a lot of things for him.

So, anyway, Stan came and said, "I know you've got Richie Cole's alto. Give that back to him. You can have this one now. This is really special." [laughter]

Crawford: Competing for Kira.

Wong: Yes, isn't that something? Anyway, he always had an open agenda for her. He said, "Any time she needs my help, any time she wants to come over, the door is open." Not too many kids can get that. Now, Stan lived within five minutes of us.

Crawford: So, did she do it?

Wong: A couple of times, yes. Anyway, she went on to play saxophone with the jazz ensemble in the high school, and of course they did all these concerts and things all over. Then they went to Europe, and I went with them. In fact, Marilyn and I went on this tour with her, because she'd never been out of the country, and we thought, "Oh, you know, we want to see all our old friends, anyway."

I suggested the contractor for the high school band for the tour—the tour manager who created the tour. He also was from my past. He was director of the Chaffey College jazz ensemble and the Chaffey College Jazz Festival where I was a judge many times. So, again, I knew these people were reliable, and he was contracted to set up the tour to Europe for the high school band. So we were all friends, you know.

We went there with a lot of other parents, who, by the way, we just got together just three weeks ago when the current Menlo-Atherton high school jazz band had their annual concert dance, and the jazz band played to drum up funds for their trip this summer to Europe. So one of the people who was on

our trip, one of the parents, organized it. It was a dinner at her house, and all the parents who were on that trip that I was just talking about got together.

Crawford: Did she play in college?

Wong: No, she did not. She got so serious with her other work. And I also understood that, too. Until just two years ago, just after she'd graduated, the program at Cal Poly was not a good one. The jazz ensemble did not have a person who was really turned on to it. Now they do. The person there now came from UC Santa Cruz. I don't know him, but the program is cooking now.

Unfortunately, there wasn't one for her that was amenable. So she concentrated on her studies to be a graphic designer, and she played her flute whenever she needed to remove herself from the stresses. She said, "It's a great equalizer for me."

But she played in Paris, in Montreux, Switzerland, at the North Sea Jazz Festival at the Hague in Holland. She played all over the place: Germany, Switzerland—

Crawford: And your other daughter plays as well?

Wong: The other daughter plays the flute. Oh, she went, too, a year ago. She went with her high school jazz band in addition. They're five years apart, so they weren't there at the same time.

Kamberly went to Europe, and she was also the jazz singer for the group. She sang. And I should mention that Kamberly started singing with the Menlo-Atherton High School Jazz Band when she was in seventh and eighth grade, because she always showed great promise, and the high school could see that her ability level fit them, even at a younger age.

She's in college now. She sings. I feed her things to consider. Just the other morning she was singing "Empty Bed Blues" by Bessie Smith. She had all those inflections. She sang some things out of Billie Holiday's songbook.

Crawford: I want to talk some now about honors, because I know that you were inducted into the IAJE Hall of Fame with Maynard Ferguson and Max Roach. Talk a little bit about the honors you have received. [Dr. Wong also received the 2008 jazz award from the Jazz Journalists Association.] Which have meant the most to you?

Wong: Meant the most to me? Well, really, I think before I got my music ones, if I may now drift back into science and all that.

When I was just starting out, I got a California Conservation Education award in my first, I guess, first couple years of teaching. I had done some innovative

things in that area and was exhibiting things I had in professional conferences. That attention was already given to what I was doing. I was told that by the time I was in my third year of teaching that I already was getting a threshold national reputation as a science educator. I didn't know that, you know. And the district started to use me for different things beyond the classroom. And then the National Science Teacher Association, I remember. The American Association for the Advancement of Science. All these organizations started to call me for feedback, alternative teaching devices and resources. Anyway, so that was a nice threshold.

Then, later on when I really got into environmental education, I was the Environmental Educator of the Year in this region, for what I was doing at Washington School. Then I got something else, too. Oh, that's how I got my first music one. It was a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship award.

Crawford: Those are difficult to get.

Wong: Yes, they are. I did something with Count Basie in Berkeley. I did a thing on his music and had Basie's Band translate some of the ideas that I had with what he was doing with that band at the time.

Crawford: Where did you perform?

Wong: Where did we perform? I think it was the Community Theater in Berkeley. It was just a one-shot deal, but I did a lot of research on it.

Crawford: And you applied for that to get a funding grant for the performance?

Wong: Yes, so I could carry that out. So that was a nice little taste of what that was about. Yes, it was difficult. Then, let's see. It's hard for me to remember all these awards. I know I have a summary list.

Crawford: You did some things for the Smithsonian, didn't you?

Wong: Oh yes, I did a thing for them. Oh, yes, yes. This was very important, this Designer Research Award. National Endowment for the Arts. This one is connected with the Washington Environmental Yard. 1983.

Crawford: You're talking now about WEY?

Wong: Yes, yes. Project WEY. Yes. Our award was on a research-level work that we did when we received grants from the State Department of Education in California through the license-plate renewal program for ecological destinations, and we got grants from that. We also got grants from a national level and county level—everywhere we could get it from.

Crawford: It was really famous, wasn't it? What is the current status?

- Wong: Oh, the current status—my successors reclaimed a good part of what is now turned back into a ball-playing area, and then they put a lawn in there. A lawn is a climax level in ecological succession, and has to be managed as a monoculture by human beings, not allowed to grow as it will.
- Crawford: Totally artificial.
- Wong: Yes, totally artificial, and people don't realize that. That's what a lawn is. That's why you cut it. That's why you do all those damn things you've got to do to it. Anyway, that's what it looks like now, today.
- Crawford: How many environmental yards did your project spawn, though?
- Wong: We don't know the count, but according to Robin, they're all over the world.
- Crawford: I wouldn't be surprised. I think the book is one of your biggest projects, isn't it?
- Wong: Yes. It took about ten years, actually. And, after initial interest by the Sierra Club, we left them because their editorial assistance was very valuable at the time, but they wanted to go in a different direction.
- Crawford: That's interesting politically. What different direction?
- Wong: Oh, I guess they wanted to do the book in a different way wherein we couldn't include a lot of the children's input, and we thought that was really critical.
- Crawford: So they were going to be your publisher?
- Wong: Yes, they were, but they didn't want to emphasize that as much. We just didn't agree.

And then we had some other assistance and consultation outside, just from friends of ours who have published and we thought we ought to go somewhere else and have what we wanted to do and more amenable to the prospective publishers and editors. So that's what we did.

Then we went to Addison-Wesley, to the innovative publishing division whose vice president is currently a student in my jazz class and was very helpful to me in other areas of publishing with Addison-Wesley publishing company and my science books. So we were familiar with him, and he was familiar with the project. But his plans at the time did not allow room for us to be part of their roster, because they had a lot of projects. So we finally decided to try some other places.

Robin knew somebody in England, because that's where he's from, in London. And we finally gave up on that, and he came up with the idea and said, “Why

don't I use my own publishing company? We're willing to do that." So we went with MIG.

Crawford: It's very beautiful, graphically. Is that the book that you're proudest of, would you say?

Wong: Well, I think because of the graphics and things, and because of the kids and so forth, I would say—I haven't even thought about it, but now that you've asked, I guess, yes, that would be the thing I'm most proud of. The project itself took so long, and doing it took so long—we're talking about twenty-five years, here, in total. I hadn't even thought of that, but that is true.

Crawford: I like the book that UC Press did for you, too.

Wong: Oh yes. *The Natural History of Vacant Lots*. I liked it. Yes, I do like that. That represented a vanguard idea, and, again, it was like this one with the Environmental Yard in that it was unconventional. That title is unconventional when you look at the other titles, generally speaking, of the UC Press. They kept saying—the advisory board, the editorial boards—"I don't see how this thing could sell. If it's amphibians, it's amphibians—everybody knows what that is. If it's birds, it's birds. If it's—" You know.

Crawford: Did it sell well?

Wong: Well, I don't know. I guess. I'm still getting royalties. I know the reception was excellent.

It was, by the way, the fiftieth title in the history of UC Press's Natural History Series. So it had a special promotional oomph behind it, and it had a reception that also celebrated its fiftieth year, so this was very special to the Press, and, at the Press, they had an event. That was nice, you know. It was also like a crowning project for my co-author, Dr. Matthew Vessel, who was one of my closest friends. I couldn't have done it with anybody else but him, because of his personality and his knowledge. He is a beautiful guy. And that relationship was a very long one, too, before this book.

Crawford: Well, let's talk about some of these other awards.

Wong: Okay, let's see. Oh right, the Teacher of the Year Award. What's not on here, I think, may be like a more recent award by the Chinese Historical Society of America. What is not here is my recognition as a historical contributor to the arts and the first Chinese-American jazz broadcaster and producer. That presentation was just in November or December, just these past few months ago.

Then there was something about the Pacific Rim, and I was honored in the Gallery of Tributes. “Outstanding” something or another “from the Pacific Rim.”

Crawford: The Jazz Alliance?

Wong: Oh, the Jazz Alliance is a brainchild of mine. When I first started thinking about these courses with the administrator—his name was Henry Page. I told Henry, “Henry, I think that teaching courses in jazz the way I’m thinking about it means that I will potentially hang on to a lot of students that will stay with me, because as I move on from one course to the next, if they’re interested, if they’re dedicated, they’ll be with me. I’ll just keep my finger on the pulse and see how the classes are going from one class to the next, and then from one year to the next, and I’ll get some kind of a cue, and then I’ll just lay it out to them and see what happens. Maybe I’ll do one preliminary year.”

So I did that. The third year I tossed out a written survey to see how people would respond if we were to commit ourselves to organizing a jazz society of some sort, what sort of skills would they bring along to it, and what were their backgrounds, and all of that. And it seemed like it was something that I wanted to keep alive, the whole idea.

So, finally, it was hatched five years ago this past August. I did that by just saying to the class, “Some of you remember that I asked about that, and some of you are brand new. What do you think about this concept?” Well, everybody was very enthusiastic about it.

Crawford: Who are your students?

Wong: The students are my adult school class and people from the community, like the former vice president of Addison-Wesley. People like that. There are a lot of interesting people in these classes. I’ve got a lot of Hewlett Packard heavies in there, because we’re in the Silicon Valley. I’ve got people from San Jose, Cupertino, Santa Clara, Los Gatos, Los Altos, all the way down to Carmel Valley—although she doesn’t come up anymore since her husband died. But I’ve had people from Vallejo, San Francisco, East Bay, you know, from all kinds of places. They come every Tuesday night. They’re nuts! Nuts.

They know they can’t get it anywhere else—I got feedback just recently from them. I don’t do that as a regular practice. All the other classes do it; I don’t. I just don’t. It’s just another thing to do. But this one I had to do, because the certification of the program in general was being renewed and each instructor had to submit evaluations from the students.

It was really interesting to me. It wasn’t a form that I created, it was just a form that the state created. The feedback was incredible. It was things like,

“This is rare,” “One of a kind,” “Herb is a walking encyclopedia,” “Just an incredible authority. And there were anecdotes. “Always gives us an opportunity to ask questions.” “He even does *this* for us.” “He even does *that*.” You know, things like that.

Crawford: How much time do you talk and how much time do you listen?

Wong: Oh, well, we listen to records. I don't know. I can't give a percentage. It all depends on what the topic is, because like this last topic, the evolution of drummers in the Swing Era, I had to do things from the 1920s, thirties, the forties, and this is before LPs. So all of them were two minutes-something long, and that took a lot of time. I would have less listening, then, because they're shorter. I would have more talk, more discussion, whereas, this next quarter coming up, there will still be a lot of things that were reissued from the 78s, no question, because bebop—we're still in the phase before LPs and before CDs. But I will be moving into the fifties and sixties, so I'll be playing a piece with more listening time.

Crawford: It's sequential. It goes from fall to summer.

Wong: Yes. I just go like that. So, if you want the whole trip, you just keep coming from one quarter to the next. [To date, the spring of 2008, sixty different classes have been presented, and 2008 is the twentieth anniversary of this unconventional jazz history curriculum]

[End Tape 12, Side A]

[Begin Tape 12, Side B]

Crawford: What about the concerts you produced for Palo Alto Jazz Alliance?

Wong: The newsletter describes the criteria, our objectives, what our mission is. I must bring you that, because those reflect a lot of my thinking for this organization, because it is totally educationally-oriented, both for the members and for the destination of the revenue that we generate. That's why I give so much time to it. I give a lot of time to this darn thing because I produce all the concerts, and I've been doing them since we began.

Crawford: Talk about your concerts.

Wong: Well, ironically, I began with a jazz guitar summit back then, whatever that year was that we started.

Crawford: Was it '93?

Wong: I can't remember. What's five years ago, six years ago? Six years ago this August. This May, on May 23 this year, I'm bringing guitars back, but I'm

calling it Jazz Guitar Madness. This is going to be much different, because as I have learned and grown myself in producing these things to see what kind of response I can get from people, there are certain elements that I am trying to include in my productions to insure the broadest view of whatever the topic is—whether it's piano or whatever or style or a composer, whatever—and also what is most entertaining.

So I try to do all this together, and also for the audience to grow and learn and expand their baseline of jazz. So this time, at the Jazz Guitar Madness, I'm opening with a five-jazz-guitar ensemble—yes. And then following it up with a gentleman named Mark Elf, who is a super New York guitarist whose album, CD, today is number one on the charts. And, incidentally, I wrote the liner notes for that one, too. He is the guitar player with the Heath Brothers Band in New York. So I have him coming out.

And, of course, you know, when somebody like that comes out, I have to find other gigs for him to defray the transportation expenses, because the budget that is allotted to me is embarrassingly small, but the Jazz Alliance doesn't give me anything more. It is a real strain and a challenge, and for every concert I have given, that includes whatever expenses for the artist and their transportation or whatever else. It's about \$2,000.

With a modest budget, it's unbelievable who I've gotten here. I've had Bud Shank, Walter Norris—incredible, from Germany—I had the late Shorty Rogers, Bill Perkins, Pete and Conte Candoli. I don't know, you just go on. It's just amazing. I'll tell you how I describe it to these people. Most of these people owe me something that I haven't called on yet as a return.

Crawford: Because you've gotten gigs or you've kept in touch?

Wong: Yes, yes. My wife has called me a national help center. [laughter] So that's what I've been doing. People have called on me for years and years and years and I help them. So I have a “deal” with them, and “Oh sure! We'll do that for you.” You know.

I told them it's not for me, it's for kids. This is where the money's going: jazz scholarships and camps and instruments and music and instruction and all that. That's where all the money goes to. Otherwise it would be inconsistent with my whole regime of philosophy and behavior.

But, anyway, I guess you want to finish that guitar agenda. I'm also having Bruce Forman, who is the greatest guitar player around here and is an international recording artist. He'll be going to Sweden and joining a faculty, so I wanted to get him before he leaves the country. I wrote a letter of recommendation for him, but it's just “To Whom It May Concern” so he can use it everywhere. I've known him since he was fifteen years old. I've been a real supporter of his.

Anyway, I'm having the director of the Jazz Guitar Ensemble, Morris Acevedo. He's going to be coming from University of North Texas. Then I'm having Randy Vincent, who is on the faculty at Sonoma State University and is a part of BeBop and Beyond and a lot of other jazz groups, a marvelous teacher and a great guitar player. He's going to do some duos with this sensational ten-year-old named Julian Lage from Santa Rosa. Julian has already been on stage with Carlos Santana, Pat Metheny, Huey Lewis—kid just turned ten, and he's as sophisticated as any—another find. So I'm going to present him as I presented Taylor Eigsti in the last concert as a thirteen-year-old jazz pianist. Then I'm going to close with an all-out, no-holds barred jazz guitar jam session. Isn't that going to be fun? Oh, it's going to be a blast. Anyway, that gives you an example of what I do there.

Crawford: You're running this organization?

Wong: No. I don't run it. There's a board of directors. The board made of volunteers. I mean, everybody is very dedicated to it. It's a lot of work, a lot of time. No, I don't run anything, I just help, but I try to lead the way in some dimensions.

Crawford: Master consultant.

Wong: Yes. Well, I try to lead the way by things that I'm inspired about that I can inspire them with, by virtue of what I share with them. That's my motto, in a sense, of how I try to do it. My students say, "You know what's so enjoyable about coming to your classes? You're so damned fired up about what you're into, so it just rubs off on us. I mean, you talk about a particular track or a musician and you get so excited about it, and you understand, you back it up. You know why, and you tell us why, and you show us why." I guess that's what it's about, being a master teacher, you inspire others to leap.

Crawford: Master teacher. That could be the title of our book.

Wong: We'll see.

Crawford: Do you want to talk about the June program?

Wong: Oh, the Stanford Shopping Center Series, yet another one of my series. I've done a series for different people, different places—different places in California, different places in other states. Some time, I should talk to you about the Walt Disney World thing I did for five years. That was significant.

Crawford: Let's talk about that now.

Wong: Well, the Walt Disney World thing is interesting. Walt Disney World has a lot of top executives, if you will believe this, who are all former jazz educators, like the senior vice president in charge of creative entertainment—he was a jazz band director of Long Beach City College. Oh, his immediate

administrator that he supervises is the former director of the army air field band of Washington, D.C.

These people are involved in music and in entertainment. They create these programs and so forth, but because they are former educators, they are quick learners. Second, they have the values of education in their mind as part of their experience. So when they do things, it fits the Disney thing of sharing and teaching the people who come to Disney activities.

Now, what we did that I'm referring to is that we decided to bring high school and college students to Disney World and have them compete by sending in tapes to be judged, and after adjudicating, we selected those that we would invite. All expenses are paid, and they stay a week, almost a week, at Disney World, and they perform at Disney World at various venues. At EPCOT Center they would play to a quarter of a million people.

Crawford: How long has this been going on?

Wong: Well, that program lasted about six years, but I was there almost the entire time, as a consultant to them. I worked with a colleague of mine, J. Richard Dunscomb, who currently is the director of jazz studies at Florida International University in Miami, who at the time was the Princeton University director of bands and was the president of IAJE after I finished my term of office. He was president elect. So we were really doing things together.

We talked about this idea. Our partnership had worked very well for Disney World, so the two of us talked to friends that we all knew from the other environments and created this thing for the summer.

It was great. These band directors and their vocal jazz groups and instrumental jazz ensembles would come to Disney World, be introduced to Disney's training program, and be introduced to a quarter of a million people in their performances.

It did a lot for IAJE, because at that time it was NAJE, the National Association of Jazz Educators. We always made sure that that was right there in a big poster, you know, so they could see that we were connected, and they wanted that connection. Well, that was very successful, and I had a good time doing that because we were able to select really outstanding kids. Many of them have been employees for years now at Disney World.

Crawford: Oh, they went to Disney World as a result of the concerts?

Wong: Oh, sure, because they would recruit these kids. And those bands are recruited, by the way. Every year they go to different cities and recruit, and kids who are interested are informed about it through whatever their

institutions and they come for auditions. If they pass auditions, they go to a performing arts program, now expanded to a full entertainment arts program at Disney World, and they stay there. They get—I think it's about five hundred dollars a week. No, three hundred something dollars a week, and then they have to pay for their accommodations. I saw the arithmetic just three days ago, and they net around two hundred dollars a week.

Crawford: Can they live on that?

Wong: They live on that. They earn three hundred something, so they take lodging and whatever that is out, and they still have about two hundred. But they get training like you wouldn't believe—everything, the whole business, from production to publicity to everything. I wish I would have gotten that kind of opportunity. You select a thematic major out of that. So these kids are ready for other Disney Worlds or anybody else's world—it's not just bands, you see, because it's productions, events. This is a big program now. It's metamorphosing into something much bigger.

But that was there, and they had a series of festivals there. They had festivals also at the American Pavilion. They had Wynton Marsalis, Louie Bellson—a whole bunch of other people. Anyway, that's still jazz education, you see.

Crawford: Was the CD-ROM project part of that?

Wong: Oh, that was another offshoot. Yes, I did CD-ROM projects when it was still, I think, in its earlier days, which is only a couple of years ago [laughs]—three years ago, maybe. So that was accidental and serendipitous.

I was asked by somebody to go and contact this guy in Fremont, so I did. I called because I heard or saw some kind of ad that said that there was a CD-ROM on the history and origin of jazz. I called this guy—someone gave me the number to call—and I said, “I understand you've got this CD-ROM.”

He said, “Oh yes, we've got a lot of other stuff.” He went through a whole bunch of other things that had nothing to do with jazz—*The Sound of Music* and things with Vivaldi and operas and all kinds of CD-ROM titles. He wanted to find out a little bit about me, but he didn't take but a couple, three minutes. He wanted to see me. He said, “Can you come in within the hour?”

So I didn't know what it was about, but I went to his office in Fremont. The guy showed me all these CD-ROM boxes and things, and he said, “Look, I'm planning on doing this CD-ROM on Duke Ellington, and I've got a guy who says he knows a lot about Duke Ellington, and he's going to be our writer and so forth.” I said, “I knew Duke Ellington very well.” I went through my whole Ellington trip, and the guy went nuts, absolutely bananas.

He said, "Do you know some other people out there?" I said, "Well, do you know about the drummer Max Roach?" He said, "Oh, you know Max Roach?" This guy's just getting into me, you see? So he finally got in and saw that I was very connected, and that he had finally found somebody that was very connected to the business.

Then he said, "I'm also planning to do some legends of jazz. You know, a lot of people who are going to buy these CD-ROMs are not necessarily die-hard jazz fans, but they buy a computer or they have a CD-ROM for it and so forth, and they want to play some CD-ROM things, and they'll know a name like Duke Ellington." I said, "Or like Basie, or Billie Holiday?" He said, "Can you supply me with the text? You know, that intellectual property?"

So that's what I did. I interviewed Dave Brubeck. He talked about Ellington, Basie. I interviewed Shorty Rogers so he could talk about different people.

So, anyway, I was responsible for getting the story line. They're essentially extensive liner notes on a CD-ROM disc, rather than a CD, per se. But it would have highlights and things, and I had suggestions and references and things like that. And the narration was given by me, so my voice is on there along with the recordings.

I went to New York with the guy to try to find sources of videos and film footage. So I knew these people, and I introduced him to them, and that's how we finally got some of these programs done.

They could have been much better. They didn't put enough money into them, I don't think. But, then again, looking back on it now, it was fine, that was a good experience for me, and it was also very good for me from the point of view that I started to get a whole bunch of gigs talking about jazz CD-ROMs at national conventions and conferences, because apparently I was one of the very few using that medium. It's commonplace today.

Crawford: What is the title of the CD-ROM?

Wong: As I said, it was Count Basie. Billie Holiday and oh, Louis Armstrong! Oh, yes, that was the first one we did. Yes, that one a lot of people heard. They liked that one. So I spent a lot of time putting those pieces together, the writing.

Crawford: Where do you want to direct your energies now?

Wong: Well, there is a project looming that I'm hoping will materialize. It's a hyper-ambitious project of many components. They may start with one or two components, but if you want to hear about that, it will take quite a while to explain the components. Hopefully it will integrate all the things that I've been involved with in jazz and be put in one place.

Crawford: What's the format?

Wong: Well, let me see. It's a global satellite television network, plus the first jazz theme park in the world. I can't tell you who is sponsoring it, because it has to be funded first, so there's no sponsor until that's done. That's what's being worked on. I'm going to be the executive vice president of it.

There is a visionary who got a hold of me by virtue of somebody else who knew both of us several years ago, and we've been working on this for years, because it's so ambitious and unheard of that it's unbelievable, because we're talking about an amphitheater, we're talking about a theme park that has a cavalcade on the history of jazz expressed in different multimedia forms. It will have an international jazz museum, and it will have the history of jazz.

There will be restaurants that reflect the particular subcultures of those years in New Orleans, Kansas City, L.A., New York, and also the music of those vintage years will be played, so you'll get it all. And there will be an amusement park, as well, for families with rides that will have jazz legends connected with them for identification. There's just going to be so much stuff there, it's unbelievable.

Crawford: Are you designing this?

Wong: No, we've been designing it, working on the program, the input, the content—I'm the content person for that. And I'm also the person that they discovered after one in-person meeting in Colorado, preceded by one phone call, conference call, here at home that without me they could not pull this off, because I'm just connected with every phase of their overall plan, which I didn't initiate.

This entertainment destination resort will be called "Music City—Illinois," embracing eight different musical genres.

Crawford: Well, we can really call this session, "Dr. Herbert Wong Coming and Going" couldn't we? Well, how much time are you spending on this project?

Wong: Oh, I don't know. It's off and on. You know, I've already figured out a candidate list of seventy artists that I would want to go after, and we've worked out all the business plans. [A major announcement about the jazz theme park will be made in September].

Crawford: You have turned eighty since we began working on the oral history. Can you give me a brief summary here?

Wong: I'd say my reward is in the satisfaction I've had helping people grow in music and helping increase the esteem audiences have for this creative music.

[End of Interview]

Conversation between Herb Wong and Peter Apfelbaum

August 10, 2007

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

Wong: Do you remember when you landed at Washington School?

Apfelbaum: I do. It would be 1967, forty years ago, and I would be 7. I was in the second grade and it was really thrilling for me for a variety of reasons. Some of which only sunk in later.

I got to play with bigger kids for the first time. I had done my best to play the drums and fooled around with other instruments. But it was my first experience playing with older musicians. I thought I could keep a beat but to keep up with a keyboard player and horns was a challenge. [material deleted]

I was wondering—I was going to Hillside, and I know that I went to Washington not as a student but just when there were jazz classes and band rehearsals. Wasn't it Peter Magadini who recommended me to Phil Hardyman?

Wong: That was part of it. I was using Phil as an adjunct. His input was instrumental, but that's how you "infiltrated," so having that access you were free to develop with Phil. I told Phil you were a very young musician. Phil said, "We'll fold him in."

Apfelbaum: Nice.

Wong: He was always open to suggestion. "Whatever you have in mind I want to consider seriously." He wasn't fully employed and I'd had him in summer school.

Apfelbaum: Was he teaching elsewhere?

Wong: Here and there. I said, "That's a waste. We've got to find more for you." I explained my mission to turn everyone on to jazz music, just as today.

What we wanted to do was bring Phil in with more time. After the summer experience at Washington School, which was highlighted by his creating arrangements on jazz classics—Monk and others, Bill Evans—that was successful and I invited district moguls to come down and they were turned on.

I thought, the green light is on—let's move! So we got Hardyman's funding from the performing arts high school, and some I took from the U.C. laboratory school fund, and that's how we got our man.

Apfelbaum: That took some doing!

Wong: I was highly motivated to get something going.

Apfelbaum: So you used unconventional means, to put it mildly. Even having a seven-year-old be welcome sitting in where he could participate with ten- and eleven-year-olds. That probably had a lasting impact, contributing to my confidence. I don't remember being bullied or made to feel young. Of course I met Rodney Franklin, who I played with for the rest of my school years.

Wong: My wife Marilyn was Rodney's first-grade teacher, and she told me about him so I was prompted [to bring him in]. All that was going on when you were a little kid!

I wanted to ask you about your performing at the Monterey Jazz Festival.

Apfelbaum: I remember that perfectly because there was somebody in the audience who had a lot to drink, and we thought it was comical when we encountered an admirer who had a lot to drink. But it was satisfying for us, one thrill of many—and on tape the guy who was so juiced was particularly impressed with Harold Foreman. He kept saying, "Bass player—who is your daddy?" His way of making a high compliment.

Wong: As I recall you brought the group to Washington School, too. Was that the Environmental Yard festival? Rodney played sax. The reporter from the *Chronicle* and *Tribune* approached me, trying to figure out what science concepts were being promoted, and said: "What is going on?" I said, "Look man, its bebop—with environment and music—natural partners."

Apfelbaum: That makes sense—an opportunity to take part in creating a playground. Take conventional concepts of the playground and adapt them to fresh [ideas] integrated with jazz.

Wong: The collaboration between disciplines—I was challenged to move along. I brought a big band with ad hoc compositions by Bob Dorough. Herbie Steward, tenor player from Woody Herman's "Four Brothers." Bob composed a "pollution blues" for kids to sing. So that was beautiful. The concept of natural learning.

When you got to high school you became more active as a composer and leader. I won't forget seeing you at the California Theater—you were behind the popcorn concession, and you said, "I want studio time for the band and I'm trying to earn money."

I said, "How much?" You said, "Six hundred," and later I brought you six hundred dollars.

Apfelbaum: Shortly after that we went to Bear West Studios and we recorded. You made that happen. Benny Green played piano, and the drummer was Anne Pope, who lives in New York now. Still playing drums but doing drum programming and technical stuff. Tony Jones, with the Hieroglyphics band many years, [was] at

IAJE this year. I often think of several kids I met as a young teenager that I'm still playing with now.

Wong: Can you focus on the process of composing? Your literature is unique. What is the creative juice you have to draw on? What mission?

Apfelbaum: Most of what I write stems from the fact I started as a drummer. The natural default way I write is to give melody to instruments so that it creates layers—melody to bass, melody pattern to guitars, and something else to horns, so not necessarily a melody and bass line, per se. If I'm challenging myself to do something difficult it's because I've got glimmers of ideas of musical shapes and things that have imagery in my head.

The sound isn't there yet, it's difficult to write down, but I can't replicate it on the piano and have to think hard about it, and I don't know where it comes from. But the tools come from Duke, Mingus, Bartók, Stravinsky. The blues is always there—it's essential, a big part of the grammar. A lot of different things are in there, and I love all kinds of music, but at the root of it all, it goes back to my being a drummer.

Wong: What about the stimulation of players in your ensemble?

Apfelbaum: It is an interesting process. Often I come to rehearsal with things set in my mind. I show the drummer examples of various things they can do. I'm constantly surprised and pleased by what they can do. Dafnis Prieto, the Cuban drummer, is really wonderful because he absorbs what I give him. I say, "You can do this." He says: "I know." [laughter]

I can give Peck [Allmond] a wide space—I don't know if he'll play flute, or multiple instruments. As a band leader, I have to give space and it's different every time we play.

Wong: I admire him so much.

Apfelbaum: Peck has started playing African thumb piano—kalimba, and has formed Kalimba Kollektive. He plays trumpet sax, trombone, flute, and he recently got into sousaphone, tuba. The group is starting to get some attention. It is still difficult in New York for an unconventional group to break through. He is marginalized within jazz, so Peck's group isn't playing the Iridium or the Village Vanguard, but manages to play downtown.

Wong: A shining example of what I'm driving at here: Did you have a formal agenda—historically relating to the Duke in having small groups, contributing to the body of his music, reflecting on the Duke as a composer himself?

Apfelbaum: I do see that. We have common ways of thinking, my colleagues and I. In a lot of our experiences together I've been composer and leader, and because of that

we've come to think in similar ways. I take that as a natural thing, an outgrowth of spending time together. It's like using the same slang, listening to the same music, the way Dafnis and his friends did in Cuba. I didn't set out with any agenda, but it evolves.

Wong: Any bicoastal activities with the New York band that out here you muster the group as well?

Apfelbaum: I'm trying to lobby to get BART to run to NY.

That happened in two stages. Summer, '78, was the first time I went to New York. The Hieroglyphics Ensemble had already started. The first rehearsal was in fall, '77. I'd gotten very interested in writing—I wanted to continue performances in New York—wanted to meet my heroes—those I'd heard on record.

I'd made lasting musical friendships, went to Europe with Karl Berger and the Woodstock Workshop Orchestra with Lee Konitz, got to play with Don Cherry for the first time. I later played a lot with him.

I met a lot of musicians who were heroes to me but I didn't work steadily, and didn't find a way to make a living. I had odd jobs, went to hear music, and I did have a great experience meeting Warren Smith, who played with Mingus and Max Roach. Smith had a loft and encouraged young musicians to come play in the loft, but my pieces weren't written out well.

So maybe by '81 I was back in the Bay Area, and realized that as a composer I had in my backyard a group of people of like mind, willing and available to work. I came back and rekindled Hieroglyphics. I went to New York and settled in Brooklyn in the winter of '98.

Wong: Who were your heroes?

Apfelbaum: Cecil Taylor, partly for his unorthodox style of piano playing, but also one of most harmonically advanced musicians. I'd go hear him play an intense program, which he'd repeat the next night. I got a lot of harmonic training from him.

People like Dexter Gordon, whose sound and approach I always liked on tenor.

A drummer named Beaver Harris, who was not well known, who passed away in the 1980s. I'm indebted to him. We met in '76 in a Bennington workshop and he was generous enough to let me stay with him in '78, Beaver and Glo. Beaver influenced me more than I realized at the time. In retrospect, he was so pan-stylistic.

Don Cherry, Ornette, Louis Hayes, who played with Dexter, I loved his feel. And Art Blakey.

- Wong: I'm not surprised at your citations. They all feed into your totality. Your work reflects these influences, they contribute to your building up of whatever you are working on.
- Apfelbaum: Ahmad Jamal said, "It's a misperception that those who improvise do it from scratch. A great architect can't throw together wood that's sound. They have to know what they are doing. Have to have a foundation."
- Wong: Lee Konitz gave a concert at Stanford this month and the previous morning we had a two-hour chat—we've known each other fifty years. At the concert he asked how many people in the audience were my students. A lot of hands. Lee is an example of an excellent creative musician, which leads me to ask: what does creativity mean to you? A word, phrase, process?
- Apfelbaum: I think it's ideas. Almost everything in our daily lives is creating something in some aspect without thinking about it. It could be deciding what I'd wear: This shirt and pants look kind of good together. Those kinds of ideas--that's what creativity is to me. It could be a person who doesn't think of himself or herself as a performer but is making creative choices. A gardener decides to put tomatoes here or [there], or decorate a house with plants. I have a lot of plants in New York because I want to retain some nature in all that urbanness.
- There are people now who relate to jazz in a more stylistic way—it's because it's more repertoire music; there are musicians who perform it who aren't idea people.
- The ideas I have seem to come from nowhere—and at the most inconvenient times! I'm lucky in that that keeps me going and days sometimes go by where I don't play, where I'll sometimes be going out the door and I hear an idea and I'm cursing it—I think, MAN, why did this come now. It takes over and I have to write it down. Sometimes ideas come that I think are banal but the good ones I try to write down and turn into pieces. Where they come from I've no idea!
- Wong: I think that is shared by ideational thinkers. People enjoy external stimuli for creative output. I'm thinking of guitarist Jim Hall, who puts paintings on his piano. "I'm interested in visual arts, and I get ideas from that."
- Apfelbaum: I've heard musicians say they are inspired by other disciplines. By nature, or the inner city. I think for me, on a subconscious level, I'm influenced by weather or emotions. But more stimuli, too many ideas, and I wouldn't be able to get them out. As it is, I'd have to live to ninety-four to write down all ideas I have right now!
- Wong: Do you know about [a professor] from the University of Minnesota who looked into environmental activities as a pivot to creative expression? Like geographies of the mind. In music, an anthropology of space, as an architect's anthropology of space in his design, music has a concept of space. Ahmad Jamal said, "Space is as important as the notes."

Apfelbaum: One thing I tell my students: “Put more rests in.”

I’m not teaching as much as before. I have several private students, one of whom is a young drummer from the Bay Area, now in New York. Charles Ferguson.

In the early 2000s I taught at Long Island University, where Pete Yellin was. Pete was the head of the jazz department. The campus is in Brooklyn. I taught in the dance department, Rhythm Training for Dancers. It was kind of fun. I got to work with college age students in a music appreciation class. “Check it out, listen to the bass, become aware of the rhythm.”

Wong: What recordings loom as the models, if you had to peel off something and say, “This interpretation of this tune is representative of some important things I did.”

Apfelbaum: The last CD with the New York Hieroglyphics, *It is Written*. It was done independently and licensed to a German company out of Munich. We did it in fall, 2005, and it came out in fall 2006—that’s the most up-to-date statement by me and the band. Most evolved, most varied, the best.

Wong: How many recordings have you done?

Apfelbaum: Not as many as I would have liked. The first was *Pillars*, which we did on our own--we pressed only 500. It was called *Jewish Matador*. My father, not my mother, is Jewish. Tony Jones wrote “Jewish Matador, Retired,” a simple poetic tune, and so I used that.

It was in 1979—I had graduated but was playing with a lot of musicians from high school. It was recorded in San Francisco at Bear West, who sent it out with the help of Rick Ballard Taylor, a distributor. I took copies to Europe and we sold them ourselves.

The next recording was 1981, the one that you made happen—that’s never gotten released in any form.

Then not until Don Cherry hired the band in the late 80s to back him up, an album for A and M, 1989, called *Multikulti*. We signed with Antilles/Island, our first major recording, which was *Signs of Life*. Then *Jodoji Brightness*, ’91, then *Luminous Charms* in ’96. We have gone through so much material that I’d like to record more frequently—there are about five, six out there.

Wong: What about the Grammy nomination?

Apfelbaum: That was for *Candles and Stones*, in ’91. We won the *Down Beat* poll for “big band deserving wider recognition.” But also I was going to say that looking at plaque the word “jazz” is not on the plaque. I do really appreciate it when what I’m doing doesn’t have the label “jazz.” Not being pigeonholed in any way. We got “best arrangement on an instrumental.”

Wong: Duke and Max Roach felt that way too. Well, what are your new horizons?

Apfelbaum: At the moment I'm having my saxophone overhauled. I haven't done that since 1990. When I get it out this week I plan to do some serious shedding. In October/November, dates with Dafnis, the great quintet which he writes for, some dates around New York and a recording session in the beginning of October, musically rhythmic and harmonically challenging. Then I get the horn out ...

Further down the line I'm writing a piece for Hieroglyphics, with a grant from Chamber Music America, in partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation, a grant they give away every year for new works. I applied a couple of years ago, didn't get it, so I applied again. The grant pays me to write and the band to perform and rehearse. Spring and summer next year, in New York and here.

Wong: When are you going back to New York?

Apfelbaum: I'm going back home at the end of the month.

We just played here with Patrice Blanchard, they were at IAJE in January, and other people: Ambrose Akinmusire—A Berkeley kid whose father is Nigerian. He's about 24, been at the Monk Insitute in L.A. and now lives in New York.

Ambrose on trumpet, Jeff Kressman on trombone, and his daughter Natalie, she's sixteen. She played with the NY Hieroglyphics last year at Monterey. So two trombones. Will Bernard, guitar, Dezon Claiborne, drummer. So a septet. We just played at Stanford and Freight and Salvage.

Then I decided I wanted to take a break. Of course musicians always say that when they have no work. But I have some things in August.

Wong: Do you occasionally revisit the high school?

Apfelbaum: I do. Occasionally. I played there several years ago when Charles Hamilton was out, and I subbed and helped lead the band. Another time I worked with the sax sectionals. Last year I was commissioned to write a piece for them by the parents group, which is really strong, thank goodness. They raised funds to travel to Europe, Japan. A group of parents got some money and commissioned me. That was performed in March, 2006, at Yoshi's and I got to work with them two weeks.

I wrote the piece as if writing for Hieroglyphics— I didn't dumb it down at all. I had to expand it because the ensemble is bigger than mine. Five trumpets, four trombones—but the approach was pretty much as if working with my group. And they rose to the occasion. It was a nice chance for me. Now the New York group is playing it. For me this was another step in the creative process. Another chance to write for a group no less professional.

Julian Pollock in New York is a pianist, and I think going to do big things. They keep on coming—they are an inspiration.

Wong: This is the whole saga from Berkeley High to the future.

Apfelbaum: I'm obviously proud of it, and it's fun to be able to think that I'm still in contact with some of my childhood friends because of our common interests.

When the program started, in the 60s, 70s, in the formative years of the program, we had certain connections to certain aesthetics that we carry with us today. Whereas kids today are playing charts and can see live music, and so much literature, instrumental material, so they don't have the experience of NOT being good players.

When we started we had, thanks to you, guidance from Hardyman and Whittington, but learned largely by ear and really learned to make musical choices that way. Now it's so easy to get information from so many sources. They don't have to sift through it, and some of the original feeling can be lost.

Wong: You perceive the same dilemma on jazz radio. In the overall recording industry, decision-makers are without experience. They have archives but don't REALLY understand. Unfortunately, you find only an island here or there whose representatives know the complete spectrum. Well, what did it mean to you to know that at Washington there were musicians?

Apfelbaum: I wasn't really aware.

Wong: In conjunction with what Phil was doing, there was a group called Washington Wailers. We had Bob Houlehan, George Yoshida, Dick Hadlock, Manny Funk. All these people.

Phil played a little trumpet, Dick Whittington as well, came in as a physical education teacher, and didn't know much. Were you aware that Lenny Pickett and Michael Wolff used to sit in the outer office with their instruments waiting for a practice space at the school? Every day.

They are all famous now. But they didn't press, just sat and waited. And the facilities were used for private lessons by Bill Bell, who you studied with in the 70s.

It was a mandate for me—I enjoyed it. But people don't understand what that all meant.

Apfelbaum: Are you still writing the online column?

Wong: Not online but still writing for the Jazz Education Journal—some thirty years. Artists and record labels send CDs, about 200 a month.

I put them in five categories. One, I turn them over, look at personnel, instruments. I know I don't want to spend time with those. El dumpo group.

At the other end, the ASAP ones. Piles three and four, postponed until more time. Many times I find surprises. There are so many self-produced materials I have to be honest, particularly with women singers. I try to be polite and helpful to those that are not favorable.

Apfelbaum: That can be difficult to hear that. Somebody has to say that.

Wong: Some musicians who have sent me their CD for my possible review will call and inquire about my comments regarding their CD and I respond by asking their name and checking my log. I say: "I found your name—it's opposite the numeral 197. The caller says: "197? What does it Mean?" I say: "It means there are 196 in front of yours. But because you called, now I'm alerted, I'll get to you before 197. [laughter]Well, that's all for now. Thank you.

Apfelbaum: Thank you, Dr. Wong.

[End of interview]