

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

William Russell Ellis  
IN THE GOLDEN SANDBOX

Interviews conducted by  
Leah McGarrigle and Nadine Wilmot  
In 2003 and 2004

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William Russell Ellis, 1992  
Photo courtesy Lew Watts



## **Interview History, Russell Ellis, Jr.**

Russell Ellis, Jr. was interviewed as part of the *African American Faculty and Senior Staff Oral History Project*. This series of interviews explores the experiences of African American faculty and senior staff at UC Berkeley as part of the broader history of the University of California. Professor Ellis was a leading proponent of the series and was involved in the early stages of planning and framing, in addition to fundraising for the project.

Professor Ellis joined UC Berkeley's Department of Architecture in 1970, where he taught, researched, and innovated in the intersection of sociology and architecture. He subsequently played a significant role in university administration, serving as Vice Chancellor of Undergraduate Affairs and Faculty Equity Associate, a position for which he emerged temporarily from retirement. Ellis was raised in Los Angeles and educated at Compton High School and UCLA where he gained significant recognition as an athlete before going on to become a scholar and professor of sociology. Ellis emphasized over the course of his interview that his is a California story that reflects this state's social history and diverse population. At Berkeley, he has worked to support and grow a student population that reflects this state's diversity.

In this interview Professor Ellis reflects on UC Berkeley and the life and times that led him here. Significant themes include: a perspective on the University of California's institutional history from the vantage point of someone who worked for change from within the administration, a perspective on how and why affirmative action policies and programs were built and dismantled, gender and racial discrimination and academic culture, and curricular transformation catalyzed by the social movements of the 1960's. Professor Ellis' trajectory reflects that of a generation of African American scholars and professionals. For many in this cohort, athletic excellence and/or military service were the mechanics of mobility that allowed them to circumvent structural racism and gain access to formerly segregated institutions of higher education. Against the changing backdrop of America's racial landscape during the '60s and '70s, Ellis and his peers leapt far beyond what had been possible for their parents and previous generations and were central in efforts to create mechanisms to increase access for minorities and women who followed them in the academy.

The fourteen sessions that comprise this interview took place over the course of nine months, from May of 2003 through January of 2004. Ellis was jointly interviewed by myself and Leah McGarrigle. The first six interviews and final interview took place at Ellis' Berkeley home. Interviews seven through thirteen took place at conference rooms reserved at The Bancroft Library on UC Berkeley's campus. All interviews were recorded on minidisc and video, with the exception of the final interview which was recorded on minidisc only. The interviews were transcribed and audited and then reviewed by Professor Ellis. Significant edits incorporated into the interview upon his review are noted in the transcript with [brackets].

This series is grounded in the premise that higher education is one of the primary strategies for gaining social equality—access to employment and income—for historically disadvantaged communities. Moreover, the University, comprised of its students and faculty and administration, with all of its intellectual and financial resources operates as a critical touchstone in processes of systemic social change. Therefore the university functions not simply as an educational

institution, but also as a significant site of past, present, and future potential for imagining and crafting opportunity for ethnic and racial groups formerly excluded from higher education. This project recognizes that the University of California, as California's premier public educational institution, has historically played a significant role in the socio-economic mobility of California's residents. The story that we hope will emerge from this project is a story of California – its people and one of its most important public institutions.

This interview was conducted under the auspices of the Regional Oral History Office. The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through recorded oral memoirs the 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 Cándida Smith, Director and the administrative direction of Elaine C. Tennant, James D. Hart Director of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Nadine Wilmot, Editor/Interviewer  
Regional Oral History Office  
Berkeley, California  
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Interview 1: May 13, 2003

[begin audio file 1]

1-00:00:33

McGarrigle: Today is—

1-00:00:34

Wilmot: May 13<sup>th</sup>?

1-00:00:39

McGarrigle: Yes, 2003. We'd like to start by asking you when and where you were born.

1-00:00:41

Ellis: Okay. That's interesting. I was born in Los Angeles County Hospital, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

1-00:00:56

McGarrigle: Oh, we have a birthday coming up.

1-00:00:57

Ellis: Yes, indeed we do. Of apiece with my date and location of birth is what it says on my birth certificate. My father's race is "Ethio," foreshortened, and his employment is "odd jobs, various places." I just like that! [laughs]

1-00:01:37

McGarrigle: Did he ever tell you how that came to be? Was it something that he chose?

1-00:01:42

Ellis: No, no, that was the choice the hospital, the records folks, made in identifying him. I guess it was probably a fad or something. I forget when *The New York Times* capitalized "Negro." You remember that was an event, right? But I don't know what year it was. There might have been a fair amount of variation in how folks were identified. Anyway.

1-00:02:12

McGarrigle: Can you speak to that? I don't know that story about when *The New York Times* changed its position.

1-00:02:18

Ellis: Oh! There was a moment when *The New York Times* decided to capitalize Negro, and that became the designation for colored people, niggers, nigras, et cetera, et cetera, and it standardized what African American people were called. It's been kind of an open. If you think of what I just said, African American, that has gotten standardized by Jesse Jackson. Things led up to it. I mean, there's all kinds of struggle around "X" in the civil rights movement. But what you're called as a category of peoples—there's not an office like the French have [laughs] that says, "Here's what the names will be, and here's what the names of the groups will be." So, yes, they standardized the reference.

1-00:03:21

McGarrigle: That speaks to the kind of sway that *The New York Times* had in making a stylistic journalistic change that they then created a way for—

1-00:03:32

Ellis: Just an editorial decision to do that, and then the world followed. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of you when you said you'd gotten halfway through my dissertation, because, you know, Thurgood Marshall never changed. Until his death, he said "Negro." But the world was wandering around, especially among black people, the whole issue of what we were called was part of the political struggle, right? So one of the major issues in the late fifties and sixties was getting closer to the negative designations, embracing them, almost, like "black," and saying, "No, this is not bad. This is what we are," even though the range of people who are black is, like, from the entire spectrum, from black to white, there was a real struggle around that, and "black" won for a long time. And you'll see that because in my dissertation I think I used "Negro" a fair amount. I've revised it as part of this larger document I told you that I wanted to make sure got into the Bancroft. I changed the language to fit the times. It's an interesting account of my own life, too, and the lives of people like me. It's been this period of time, working at who we are.

1-00:05:19

Wilmot: In 1935 they said "Ethio."

1-00:05:22

Ellis: On my birth certificate. I haven't investigated to see what the variation was, but my guess is it varied by state in the United States, and probably varied within the state. [phone rings] I wasn't planning to go in that direction, that was inelegant. I'm sure it's been discussed and written about a lot, the naming, right? And yet, you know, if you've dealt with any Latinos—a recently acceptable designation—you'll remember it was Chicano and then later Mexicano and then, in my day, there were all kinds of variations. I don't even know. Oh, *vata loco*, *pachuco*. Have you ever heard *pachuco*?

1-00:06:41

McGarrigle: No.

1-00:06:41

Ellis: Oh, gosh, those were the zoot-suited Mexicanos in L.A. And they were rough. They would wear a cross right here [demonstrates], tattooed right there, with little lines at the intersection of the cross, and that was evidently a carry-over from a prison identification. Those who had fallen had the cross, and then the cross crossed out, so they were no longer—they were excommunicated, fallen from grace or something like that.

1-00:07:35

Wilmot: When was this, the *pachuco* riots?

1-00:07:39

Ellis:

Oh! The *pachuco* riots were during the war, in the forties, but the *pachucos* were a serious category of people throughout the forties. I don't know when they started, and I don't know their range. I've spoken to some folks in Texas, and evidently that was a known category in Texas, too, *pachuco*.

1-00:08:01

Wilmot:

Is that in your immediate community in growing up, people around you?

1-00:08:02

Ellis:

Oh, yes, no question.

1-00:08:04

Wilmot:

—when you were growing up?

1-00:08:05

Ellis:

Oh, yes, absolutely. Oh, absolutely, absolutely. That was interesting about California and growing up here. You don't know this yet, because I haven't told you, but during the Second World War, I lived in a town called Fontana, east of Los Angeles and close to Chino. I went to elementary school in a town called Etiwanda. Evidently it's an Indian word meaning "land of the wind" or something, which that area certainly is. And so I went to school with Italian grape workers and Mexican laborers from Chino, and it was really an interesting mix of kids. One way or another, there's always been Mexicanos in my life in California, always. I didn't have an extensive experience with Chinese until I went to college, UCLA.

1-00:09:17

Wilmot:

Do you remember any friends from that time, do you have friends from that time?

1-00:09:20

Ellis:

Oh! Well, I was an athlete a lot, so Fernando Ledesma was a friend. Yes, you did that. The kids I ran with, that's what we did practically all the time, was run, jump, throw [laughs]—you know. So, yes, it was always that. And as you went through school and ran into other kids, you played football, track, baseball. Always had a wide variety of people there. That's the good thing about sports, actually.

1-00:10:00

McGarrigle:

If we take you back, Russ, and then come forward in a little bit from when and where you were born, we started to hear your family stories on both sides of the family and your earliest memories as far back as they go, of your grandparents and other relatives. So starting on your father's side.

1-00:10:23

Ellis:

Early memories.

1-00:10:24

McGarrigle: As far back as—who do you remember? Who’s the eldest member of your family, going back in time, generation-wise?

1-00:10:32

Ellis: On my father’s side, it would be my uncle. He would be my father’s uncle, on my paternal grandmother—Cora Hickman was her name. I’ve actually put something together to give you, so you can get a picture of the tree. I have some software, and I did that, so I’ll put that together for you. I never knew her. She died before I was born.

1-00:11:17

McGarrigle: Where would she have lived? What part of the country was she from?

1-00:11:24

Ellis: She’s originally from Virginia. And then her husband, my father said, went out for a pack of cigarettes, when my father was about five, and didn’t come back. She wound up moving to Cleveland. Now, I don’t know if she met the man that she then married in Virginia or in Cleveland, but she wound up taking my father and his brother, Alexander, to Cleveland, and she married a man named Ellis. He adopted my uncle and my father. They were born with the name Minnis, M-i-n-n-i-s. It’s an interesting complication, and I’ve been working on that just to sort out how that all goes.

1-00:12:43

McGarrigle: So Hickman was her—

1-00:12:45

Ellis: Her maiden name.

1-00:12:46

McGarrigle: —maiden name.

1-00:12:47

Ellis: Minnis was her married name, and then she became Ellis. And my father was very happy to get the name, Ellis, because his full name was William Russell Minnis, so all the kids called him “Worm.” [laughs] He was happy to get rid of that WRM. But it’s an interesting kind of complication. My daughter-in-law says—her maiden name is Rivera, and she really enjoyed becoming Ellis, not that she didn’t like Rivera, but she just liked the name Ellis, and she’s fascinated to learn that you don’t go back through Ellis to find out what the family tree is about.

1-00:13:41

McGarrigle: Did she have children subsequently with—

1-00:13:43

Ellis: My son. It’s my daughter-in-law.

1-00:13:47

McGarrigle: I’m sorry, I mean your—

1-00:13:50

Ellis: Paternal grandmother?

1-00:13:52

McGarrigle: Yes. Did she—

1-00:13:53

Ellis: No, no.

1-00:13:54

McGarrigle: Okay, she had the two boys.

1-00:13:59

Ellis: Just the two boys, right.

1-00:13:54

McGarrigle: I know you said she died before you were born, but were there stories that came to you about her, other members of your family?

1-00:14:02

Ellis: Yes. Not much about her personality at all. As a matter of fact, I guess the answer is no, not about her. I have photos that I can show you. She's kind of a lantern-jawed woman, kind of hefty. My father loved her very much, and I think my father had some wounds, because she died—she moved to California, and she lived in a town named Perris, P-e-r-r-i-s. It's in Riverside County, I'm pretty sure. And she had some kind of heart condition or something, and either he or my uncle didn't get—they blame themselves for not getting the medication to her in time or something like that, and she died of some kind of heart condition.

1-00:15:10

Now, the reason I spent the Second World War years in Fontana was that my father wanted to get me out of LA during the war, and the people I stayed with in Fontana, the woman, Josephine Joiner, was a friend of my grandmother's in church. They went to a church in common. And I believe that church was St. Mark's Baptist Church in San Bernardino.

1-00:15:50

McGarrigle: What year, approximately, do you think your grandmother died?

1-00:15:57

Ellis: You know, I said that she died before I was born. I'm not sure. I have *no* memory of her at all, but I think I do have the date of her death. I'll have to check that.

1-00:16:10

McGarrigle: But your dad, he was an adult at that point.



1-00:16:12

Ellis:

Oh, yes. Yes, yes. But I'm pretty sure she died before the onset of the war, the Second World War, but I didn't know her, and I don't know any of my grandparents on any side.

1-00:16:30

McGarrigle:

Were there stories that would give you some indication of what her life was like in Virginia or those who came before her?

1-00:16:42

Ellis:

Yes. My uncle, her younger brother, James Hickman, Uncle Jimmy, a man—I don't know if you have had this experience—was a man who was always happy to see me. [laughs] Uncle Jimmy, James Hickman, James Alexander Hickman, James A. Hickman. So it's their family—they were evidently both at some point in their lives, Cora and James, in slave situations, okay? That is, they were slaves for some small part of their youth. Uncle Jimmy said to me—I talked to him about this—that the original name on the farm situation was Mars, M-a-r-s, but they chose to take a different name. I'm not sure of the basis of their selection of the Hickman name. I've done some very primitive research, and there's a *big* Mars world. There's a slave narrative of one of the Mars'. I'm reluctant to claim too much because that's part of the whole genealogical thing. You know, people look for the big stable rock of some name and say, "Oh, yeah, we're connected to that." There are a lot of Minnis', too. I've done some research on that, and that seems to be some kind of corruption of Portuguese, but quite a substantial number of them, but not entirely black. The Mars' are largely black, it looks like.

1-00:18:48

But anyway, so, early life was slave life. I've been back to Roanoke and around that part with my parents in the forties. In the late forties we took a trip east, and I drove around that part of the world. It's beautiful, very country, [laughs] very country, friendly. I remember being greeted by the extended family, the names of the people, I don't remember. I haven't collected that extensively. But I don't know how hard or comfortable anybody's life was, past my father. I know that my father was right in the heart of the Depression. The Depression hit as he was maturing, so he took the full brunt of the Depression. But I don't know what happened to his mother or I know nothing of what happened to his father.

My mother's side of the family, Martha Harris, I know a lot more about, not that I have it in my head, but I know her sister Anna. My mother was the youngest of six, so I've learned quite a bit about that side of the family, the Harris side of the family. My Aunt Anna, the next to youngest, is still alive and lives in New Jersey. She's eighty-five. Five years ago, she got West Nile virus, and I had already been visiting with her, but I went back to see her. It was unbelievable how bad this thing was. She was curled up in a ball. She's alive, she's doing quite well now. She's also someone who's very fond of me

and has always been very kind and interested in me. So I've learned a lot about that side of the family.

1-00:21:04

McGarrigle:

So to go on your mother's side—on your father's side, we went back to your grandparents. On your mother's side, do you go back to the same degree?

1-00:21:15

Ellis:

I can get back to great-great on my mother's side, as reported by Anna and documents she has, Bibles and things like that. I don't have it in my head, but I can show it to you, who's who. And they're also from Virginia. But my parents didn't meet in Virginia, they met in California. They were both migrants from Virginia to California and met here. It's very interesting. Lived very close to each other. Their families lived very close to each other in Virginia, but they didn't know each other there. Yes, I can go fairly—it's interesting how far I can go back on my mother's side. I have some satisfaction to it. Wilson was my grandfather's name, on my mother's side, Harris, Wilson Harris. The mother's name was Metra. I think I've sent you those photographs. You know, the two? He's sitting in the chair and she's standing next to him? Very bourgeois. He evidently sold insurance off the back of a horse-drawn carriage around the countryside in Virginia and was fairly successful and died in the flu epidemic of 1919.

1-00:22:44

I didn't realize—now that we have the SARS [sudden acute respiratory syndrome] epidemic, I'm getting a sense of the scale and understanding better the flu epidemic. The flu epidemic has never fit into my consciousness appropriately. I still have a kid-like view of it, when I heard about it. "How did the flu kill that many people?" But now that I see how an epidemic works when there is no cure, I get it how twenty-five million people could go very quickly. It was very sad. It was very disruptive to that side of the family. He evidently was a stable, solid, wonderful guy.

1-00:23:27

Then Metra remarried a guy who was very jealous and violent, my grandmother on my mother's side. The family would fall apart periodically when this new guy, whose name I have written, but I've forgotten, my grandmother's new husband, would get jealous and violent. And during one of those periods, a family friend brought my mother and her nephew—it's not worth going into, but—to California. It's not clear that that was something that my grandmother wanted to happen, but my mother was almost maybe abducted a little bit. So anyway, that's how she got to California.

1-00:24:22

Wilmot:

And she had six children.

1-00:24:25

Ellis: Metra, my grandmother, had six children, right. She wound up having seven, because she had another child, Florence, who I met not so long ago, with the new husband.

1-00:24:27

McGarrigle: So when she came to California, she came with the children or without them?

1-00:24:41

Ellis: No, this is my grandmother who had the seven children. My mother only had me. I'm an only child. I have an adopted brother and sister.

1-00:24:52

Wilmot: Her children came out to California without her?

1-00:24:56

Ellis: Just my mother.

1-00:24:58

Wilmot: How are you spelling Metra?

1-00:24:59

Ellis: M-e-t-r-a, Metra.

1-00:25:02

Wilmot: What do you know of who she was and her personality?

1-00:25:07

Ellis: Well, she was really quite a delightful person, evidently, very solicitous of Wilson, good mother, good cook, traditional, really very attractive. Must have been quite a thing for the two of them to have gotten together. She was really elegant, just to look at. That's what her daughter Anna, my aunt, says of her, too. A good person, friendly, had lots of friends, loved her husband and her children and her life. And then things fell apart.

1-00:25:56

Wilmot: Was it the death of Wilson that precipitated a kind of downward mobility?

1-00:26:01

Ellis: Yes, yes, yes, right.

1-00:26:04

Wilmot: Before that, it was kind of—

1-00:26:05

Ellis: Yes, they were fairly stable and the extended family worked nicely. That's the impression I've gotten since I was down talking to my aunt about it, that life was good. You know, I haven't thought of this in this sense. My Aunt Anna has two children who live in California. One, Keith Flippin—her married name is Flippin, F-l-i-p-p-i-n—Keith lives in San Leandro now, and Arthur, the oldest boy, is the head of Kaiser in San Diego, medical side of Kaiser, not

the research. Arthur has two children, a boy and a girl, who are doctors, and Keith went to Northwestern and got an MBA and has worked fairly extensively in the computer world. He's suffering, like everybody else is, from the new economy. I mention this because it's very clear, in listening to the stories, that Wilson and all that life that were happening—there was kind of a middle-class emphasis on education, mobility, and it was sustained. It was sustained on that side of the family.

1-00:27:46

Anna worked in a kitchen in a school in New Jersey for lots and lots of years. I mean, into her eighties, until she got sick, she was still doing that. Her husband, Arthur, worked for the military. I forget where he was located, where in New Jersey he was located. Stable. All the kids went to college. They had three kids. They all married. Well, the middle daughter became a radical in college. I forget where Karen went to college, but she was running around being a Panther and pretty radical. So that slowed her down on the mobility for a while, but she wound up working at—what's the big Delaware chemical company, the really big one?

1-00:28:55

Wilmot:

Dow?

1-00:28:56

Ellis:

No.

1-00:28:58

McGarrigle:

Johnson and Johnson?

1-00:28:59

Ellis:

No. Anyway, I'll remember it. She worked there for years and years until she just took early retirement. So I'm just saying that my past, on that side, had elements of the American story in it in terms of success and education and employment. On my father's side, it's much more complex. My Uncle Al, Alexander, my father's younger brother, was something of a wild man. He evidently was very hard to manage, and he fought extensively with old man Ellis. This is the guy who had adopted them. And he wound up not well. He fought people a lot. My father says as kids they had to learn to fight. In Cleveland, they had to fight to hold onto their corner where they sold newspapers, because you'd get a good corner and then you had to defend it, so he and Al had to work in tandem to fight off the people who were trying to cop their corner. I hope you remember this, down the road I'll tell you a story about my sixteenth birthday party, where I saw a side of my father I had never seen before, when a gang came to my party to turn it out, and my dad, who was only about five-nine or -ten, caused these guys that I knew to be some of the roughest people in the neighborhood to leave my party. I had such respect for him after that. But he evidently did one of his numbers on these guys. So he was evidently a rough boy, but he was a tender soul. He was such a tender soul, Russell, my father. [pause] I forgot where I was headed with that.

1-00:31:09

McGarrigle: You were talking about Al, that Al was—

1-00:31:12

Ellis: Oh, no. Okay, the whole issue of mobility and so forth is more complicated on my father's side. Uncle Jimmy, Cora's younger brother—Cora is my father's mother, right?—lived on what was known in Los Angeles as Sugar Hill. Now, every city used to have a Sugar Hill. We don't talk about it anymore. Have you ever heard this expression?

1-00:31:42

Wilmot: I've only heard it in Harlem.

1-00:31:45

Ellis: Okay. Generally, they are what used to be the homes of upper-middle-class whites that have now been taken over by upwardly-mobile black people. That's what Sugar Hill, as I've understood it, refers to. So Uncle Jimmy was always my rich uncle. Now, Uncle Jimmy actually wasn't. Well, he had a fair amount of money and a really big house, a really big house over in the "West Side," the other side of L.A.

1-00:32:27

McGarrigle: You say that like it has so much meaning.

1-00:32:29

Ellis: Well, I meant to stress that because there's a lot of stuff to go with this, because the East Side was where I was from, and the West Side of L.A. was where the people on the go and on the rise were. It's where—oh, God! I never thought of going into this. Oh, it's standard stuff. Who are the hip, the well-to-do, the smart folks? I mean, every community has that. And the West Side of L.A., over at Adams and that part of town, then, was where the aspiring black folks lived, and it was sort of special. If you were from the West Side, that was the hip place to be. Central Avenue now is celebrated and the East Side of L.A. is celebrated, but that's very late. It was not where you wanted to say you were from. And it was where I was from. Anyway, my Uncle Jimmy and his wife lived on the West Side, in a very fancy part of the West Side.

1-00:33:45

McGarrigle: What's his wife's name?

1-00:33:47

Ellis: Micheline. Yes, Micheline, Aunt Micheline.

1-00:33:49

McGarrigle: Sounds like a Louisiana name.

1-00:33:53

Ellis: You know, I don't know where Micheline is from. Was from. You guys are going to have to drag me back, because—

1-00:34:03

Wilmot:

I wanted to hear—you were telling us about Uncle Jimmy and—

1-00:34:09

Ellis:

Oh, yes. Now, what's so interesting is that Jimmy was very high status, but in fact, when he came to California I think in the twenties, he lived in Los Angeles but drove down to Dana Point to be a servant on a very large estate. So he was a servant. Not a sleeping-car porter or anything, but a servant. Now, help keep me on track. One of the ways he got his money was that he saved, and when the Japanese were moved to the camps, he got—I don't know how he got it—but he got a hotel on Gladys Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. It was so late in my life before I realized what had happened, but for years, I'd go to the hotel and there was this ship, the *Such-and-such Maru*. You know, which means "sea," right? I forget how it works in Japanese. But I was fascinated by this big boat. And you saw this if you went to Japanese places in L.A. back in the day, you'd see the big ships. Sometimes they were battleships, sometimes they were passenger ships. So that's how he made a fair amount of money, I think, through this hotel.

1-00:35:49

A funny story, I just told my daughter recently both of these stories, and they're completely out of sequence, but I want to tell you both of these stories, one about my father and one about Uncle Jimmy. Uncle Jimmy, later in his life, in his eighties, had a heart problem. It turned out that the medication they had given him was disturbing his heart, and it was heart-related medication, probably hastened his death, but it seems like normal trouble that happens in medicine all the time. But because he was a World War I veteran, he was housed in Brentwood, in a medical facility out there in Southern California, which is a fancy part of town, in those days fancier than it is now, I think, but just right close to Westwood and the UCLA campus. And I went in to see my Uncle Jimmy. I had learned, because I had called, that he was not as sick as they thought he was. I was really encouraged by that, and I went in to see him, and I said, "Uncle Jimmy! How you doin'?" I think I was already up here. "How you doin'?" [whispers] "Oh, Russ Junior, I'm okay." And the whole time was like that. There were maybe two other people on the ward. And I went back to my father, and I said, "I thought he was okay. Actually, I talked to the doctor, and the doctor said he could go home pretty soon. What was the whispering about?" And my father said, "Oh, he's always that way around white people." I only knew his personality as Uncle Jimmy, in his house and various other places. But he's an ex-slave from the South, who came to be a servant, was dutiful and careful and marshaled his funds and got this hotel, in a strange and awful way, and then built something, built some pride and had successful kids—well, one of them was—but they built what you should build! But there I saw him in that circumstance, and my father identifies what's happening, that he is reducing himself in size, to not wander into the consciousness unnecessarily of people who are white.

Well, what's interesting, my father used to come home from work, he spent probably two years at Compton College. He wanted to be an architect, which is interesting, because I wound up in the Department of Architecture, and nobody can tell me this was anywhere near a conscious decision on my part. I mean, it's just happenstance, because I never studied any architecture. But my father was interesting. I read some of his old letters. Who's the author of *To Sir, With Love*? A West Indian writer. [Edward Ricardo Braithwaite] I found some correspondence between my father and that guy. I'll find it, the name. But *To Sir, With Love*, a very important novel by a black West Indian man. And my father's agile in these letters. The account Glenn Seaborg gives of my father—Glenn Seaborg went to high school with my father, David Starr Jordan High School in Watts, L.A. was different in those days—but Seaborg's account of my father was that he was a delightful kind of loquacious guy. He was an athlete. He occupied some office in his class. He's famous for having sung at one class event, "Miss Otis Regrets She's Unable to Lunch Today." And I remember hearing my father hum that periodically.

1-00:40:49

Okay, so here's my dad. He comes back—I think something awful happened to him in the war. He never talked about it, in the Second World War. He was in the Quartermaster Corps, and he was somehow caught in the Battle of the Bulge. He spent probably ten days in a foxhole full of water, and so he had a kind of fungus on his leg. It never went away. I think he also probably got a fright there. He never talked about it. But he went inward. I remember him as friendly, gentle. I remember as a child pushing blackheads out of his nose [laughs] and just mauling him, just—he hit me once, once, [pause] which is another story.

Anyway, many years later, he comes back, and he doesn't go on to college. He marries a woman who is very strong and very aggressive, my stepmother, Marjorie, and encourages him very actively to do something, like get the GI Bill. He did, and he took all kinds of classes. They never led to much. And he wound up throwing mail in the post office. You know what that is, putting them in the relevant boxes so they can be distributed to the mail carriers to put them in their bags and take them where they should go. My father never complained about his work. Once, he was tying his shoe in the morning, and he said something like, "Back into the rat race," he said. I took note of that because he never complained. He would complain about encounters with people and how much he didn't like authority, and everybody said, "Ellis, you should be a supervisor." He said, "I don't want to be a supervisor and have to handle all that guff." So he was self-limiting in terms of any mobility in the post office.

1-00:43:09

I had one particularly—I had several good years in track in high school. In college, I blossomed and had quite a lot of success as a runner. So one day he wanted to take me, to show me off, at the post office. So I went with him. So

he took me where the mail throwers were, and those are practically all black guys and so forth, and they were all saluting me and congratulating me on something I had done the prior weekend or something like that. And then he took me to see his supervisor, who was a white guy, and my father became an Uncle Tom. He pulled himself down [pantomimes posture] into a small size. He lowered his voice. He was deferential to a fault, by my lights. It's the funniest thing. I didn't—he wasn't reduced in my eyes by that. I don't know why that is. But I was astonished. So it was the Uncle Jimmy thing. I was so astonished to see him. Because my father would come home raging about how, "Well, that peckerwood. If that peckerwood ever says to me anything like that again, I'm gonna tell that sonofabitch—I'm gonna tell—!" That's how he would render his encounters with the authorities when he came home. [laughs] So I believed him! I said, "Damn, my dad's bad!" [laughs] No. No. No.

1-00:45:01

I think both those stories, those encounters had a big effect on me in the conduct of my own life and some choices I made, even to entertain occupying a position like vice chancellor. Tien said to me at one point, Chancellor [Chang-Lin] Tien, that he was doing this because it was important for Chinese people to know they could be more than number two, that they could also be number one. Because he felt the Chinese always wanted to stay just a little bit lower than the top, in the larger white world. Part of that was my motivation, too, for even thinking about the job. Now, I had to have it be offered, and I had to have learned something to know that I was relevant, because I had no background in administration. But I did learn something about how decisions are made, and I realized that I could do that, as I sat around working with Mac Laetsch.

I saw him the other day and told him that you might be talking to him.

1-00:46:17

McGarrigle: Oh, good.

1-00:46:18

Ellis: He couldn't remember—what was your maiden name?

1-00:46:20

McGarrigle: Kalish. He wouldn't probably remember me. It's Laetsch's sons Krishan and John.

1-00:46:24

Ellis: Yes, right.

1-00:46:25

McGarrigle: And I'd see him coming and going on his way.

1-00:46:27

Ellis: Do you have a philosopher in your family?



1-00:46:31  
McGarrigle: Kalish? No.

1-00:46:34  
Ellis: Donald Kalish?

1-00:46:35  
McGarrigle: No. I do have a Donald Kalish, but it's not the same one.

1-00:46:37  
Ellis: Oh, okay. You've had that question asked before, huh?

1-00:46:40  
McGarrigle: For the sculptor who I'm going to tell you about.

1-00:46:41  
Ellis: Oh, okay.

1-00:46:42  
McGarrigle: Uncle Jimmy—?

1-00:46:44  
Ellis: So, now I've told those stories. [laughs]

1-00:46:48  
Wilmot: Do you know what Uncle Jimmy's service was in World War I?

1-00:46:51  
Ellis: No. I have a photograph of him in his outfit. I don't know where he spent his time at all. I hadn't thought even to do that research. I've lost track of his son, Rudolph, who was an engineer and moved to, I think, New York. We were in touch for a long time. He was the kind of guy who would have that record. I'll have to find Rudolph.

1-00:47:17  
McGarrigle: I wanted to ask you also if you knew what kinds of tasks he did on the estate.

1-00:47:22  
Ellis: I think it was indoor. Yes, it was cleaning and stuff like that.

1-00:47:29  
Wilmot: Did you ever go see him there?

1-00:47:31  
Ellis: No, he actually got started there before I was in the picture, before I was born. My father said he did it for a long time, and before the highway system was developed, he would drive down there. I think he was in residence for several days and then came back to his family on weekends or something like that.

- 1-00:48:03  
Wil0mot: When watching your uncle and your father kind of render themselves this way when around white people, did you feel like this was a conspiracy, that they kind of looked at you, winked, and said, “This is just how you do right now?”
- 1-00:48:21  
Ellis: No.
- 1-00:48:23  
Wilmot: There was no—
- 1-00:48:25  
Ellis: No. No, I don’t think either of them was self-aware. I don’t think my father saw himself as doing that, but I know he did.
- 1-00:48:29  
Wilmot: How did this contrast with what *you* knew at that time, when you were a young person, about being around white people?
- 1-00:48:37  
Ellis: Well, [pause] that’s interesting you ask, because my father’s high school experience was integrated. It’s interesting because I learned in the sandwich line at the Faculty Club, from Glenn Seaborg, when I was an assistant professor—he hails me from behind, “You must be Russ Junior.” [laughs] And I turn around. It’s him. “How did you know my name?” And then he told me. As a matter of fact, he said, “Your dad was just up for a reunion of the Class of whatever.” I said, “WHAT?” And I went back to my father, and I said, “Pop, you never told me any of this.” He said, “It’s true. I didn’t.” [laughs] He was going to reunions of the Class of ’28 or whatever it was. It was funny stuff. What was your question?
- 1-00:49:36  
Wilmot: My question was—this may be a question that just doesn’t have an answer at this moment, but how did this contrast with—you’re from a different generation.
- 1-00:49:47  
Ellis: Oh, I see, uh-huh.
- 1-00:49:48  
Wilmot: How did this contrast with your understanding what it was like to be—how one was around white people.
- 1-00:49:54  
Ellis: It’s interesting. I never felt—this is funny. I don’t know what to do with this. Obviously, I felt the problem of discrimination, of the larger world’s reduced expectations of people who looked like me. I got called “nigger” by kids in Etiwanda, Fontana. Fontana is a terrible, terrible place. It’s a Klan-ridden place to this day. And even when I came back to town and went to Enterprise Junior High School—not so much at Compton—and residential segregation

was really quite pronounced, and so my antennae are still very good for “Do I belong here?” Okay. Now, the thing is you learn—all kinds of groups of people learn about that. Women learn about that, just about making your way in the world, right? Like, “Is this a safe place to be?” et cetera, et cetera. And it was a lot like that. But I don’t ever remember feeling like I should pull myself into a smaller size. I think that’s the work that the prior generations did, to build a platform from which you can say, “Well, screw you people. I don’t care that you don’t like me or don’t like people who look like me. I get to be here.”

1-00:51:37

But I did choose—I did find myself attracted to worlds where they cared less—show biz, academia, and certain kinds of politics, civil rights kinds of politics—where people went out of their way not to care, sometimes self-consciously. And also probably I’m from a generation that pushed it just a little harder to pretend it wasn’t so. *Let’s Pretend*. You’re too young, both of you, for that show, that was a very popular kids’ show, *Let’s Pretend*. You’re both too young. So I was really aware, all the time, of the mosaic of race and so forth, but I never felt, and I was never under any pressure from the world that I could accept or felt I needed to accept, to reduce my size. Also, I didn’t face any mortal danger the way my father did or Uncle Jimmy did.

There was one event in Fontana, right near the end of the war. I lived in a black enclave, and the sheriff used to come up every now and again and patrol and check us all out and make sure everything was okay. That is, that we were all under control. But near the end of the war, a black family moved into a house on the other side of a dividing street. Baseline was the name of the street. It’s still there. The story of their death, this black family, their deaths, is that a heater had blown up, had malfunctioned and blown up. *Nobody* in my community believed that. *Nobody* believed. *Everybody* believed they had been killed because they’d moved into a part of the area where blacks weren’t supposed to live. I remember being dimly aware of the news, because I remember we were busy reading the newspaper about this, about what actually happened and so forth. But I never felt that was any danger to me, so my behavior—there was no one I knew who was going to die, or nobody’s house was going to be destroyed, or nobody’s job was going to be wiped out.

1-00:54:36

However, I did learn something. I took a friend of mine, a white friend of mine, Bob Kardon, someone I referred you to, out to look at this little place in Fontana, where I lived. I thought of it as a farm, which it was. We raised just about everything we ate during the war. Not salt and pepper or anything like that, but—and Bob’s response to it was kind of, “Well, that’s kind of a nice little middle-class scene there.” It was interesting. I had not thought of it that way. I thought of the pigs, the cows, the damned labor of weeding and irrigating and just the awfulness of working on the farm, and the pig slop and

all this kind of stuff. But he was right. It was a nice little postage stamp of the effort of bourgeois life.

But let me just finish. The other thing, however, that really struck me was that later on, was understanding maybe why Uncle Eddie left me in the car when he went into the shops. His name was Eddie Joiner, J-o-i-n-e-r, and he was a carpenter. He was from Louisiana. How 'bout that?! [laughs] He was a *very* competent man. He fixed the well for the community; he could do a cesspool by himself; he could dig it and set it up; he built barns. He was so competent. He was a deacon in the church and so forth. But Fontana was a place where, like Berkeley was up until the late fifties, believe it or not, where black people could only go to the swimming pool on the day they cleaned it out, which was generally a Thursday. And there was kind of an informal seating code in the movie theater. It was not official, but black folks sat in the back. And I think Uncle Eddie left me in the car because I think he was passing, for some merchants and for some other people in town, where he did business. I think they didn't know that he was Negro. And when I show his photo to people, they very often say, "What? He's black?" I never thought of that, because that was the way the world was. But he probably did some work protecting the scene by having this divided identity, so he'd go out and get work. He was in a union, and the unions weren't really open. That's one of the things he advised me to do as I was getting to be into my—I think I was twelve, and he said, "Well, what you need to do is get ready to get in a union." So he protected, I think, us from a lot of stuff.

1-00:58:34

Wilmot:

I want to stop there for a minute, just to change discs and also for you to take a break.

[begin audio file 2]

2-00:00:06

Ellis:

You were responding to how I saw race inscribed on the bodies of my uncle and my father, the way they retracted in the circumstance. But it's what people do. In that one scene in *Grease*, the musical, where the boy hero, in front of his teenaged buddies, all of a sudden becomes this ass, this nasty teenage boy. He can't show the tender loving side of him in this context, right, so he becomes this awful person in relation to the guys that require that he be that way. It's not quite the same with my uncle and my father's story, but it's certainly a relational self that they become, that surprised me, was a surprise to me.

I'm fascinated that I chose to begin with race, the birth certificate story. I never thought I would start that way. It's absolutely relevant, and it is profoundly important. They say that in terms of recognition of others, the first thing you notice is gender, and at least in the United States of America, race

has got to be second. It's got to be just right up there. I don't know what the data are, though.

2-00:01:47

But in high school, I was invited to the home of a guy who was also a half-miler. His name was Ford Simms, and his father I think was a dean or something at Compton High School. He invited me over and so forth, and I happily bounced over to his house. And felt, when I entered the house, like I was on another planet. The family lived in Compton, which was segregated in those days. Black people couldn't live in Compton until, I think the early sixties, late fifties. And I realized I had never—I was sixteen—I had never been in a white person's house. Now, feeling like I was on another planet probably wasn't related to race as much as it was to class. Just how they had things arrayed, where the doilies were, what the drapes were like. There was no plastic on anything. [laughs] And no plastic covering of the precious couches or chairs. There was a ceremonial room that obviously wasn't used as much as some other places, but it was available for sitting on. And it was just a whole different view of how things were put together in a dwelling. But I remember thinking, "Now, what was that?" And what I went away with was a racialized rendition of my experience. And, in fact, it was the first time I had ever been in a white person's house.

2-00:03:47

McGarrigle:

What was your reaction with him?

2-00:03:51

Ellis:

We were friends, we were competitors, but friends. I liked his father, his father liked me. Already in high school, I grew very quickly as a runner in my last two years, and Compton is only two years of high school. There was a whole system of what they called junior high school, it went from sixth grade to tenth grade, but a huge system, and they all fed Compton High School, which was one of the reasons it was such a powerhouse. But it was on the same campus as Compton Junior College, and we actually went to classes by the bell, the same way the college students did. It was a very interesting and different experience. So we were all kind of tied together and happy. It was okay, and we were friendly, and I had lots of friends of various sorts, various ethnicities, and it was a perfectly friendly and okay thing to do. Now, he would have had to have gone much further to get to my house because I lived some distance away, over on Central Avenue, away from Compton. But it was okay. I don't think I went more than once, and it was kind of a whim. I didn't go for dinner or anything like that. But that was an interesting experience for me to have that as a marker. It's a marker for me. [laughs] It seems silly, doesn't it?

2-00:05:26

McGarrigle:

No.

2-00:05:27

Ellis:

But when I was vice chancellor, I would tell people, “Now, don’t be too hard on the students for not taking advantage of this diversity because I’m not hearing many stories from your kids about people who don’t look like them who come home for dinner.” I didn’t say white, black, or whatever. I would say, “Who don’t look like them.” Because nobody has anybody over for dinner very much in their ordinary lives, who aren’t the same ethnicity. It’s not even awful. What’s the big deal? Well, the big deal is, what are these expectations you’re laying on the kids, that they’ll be different? They try like crazy to be different. They’re idealistic and they experiment and all kinds of stuff, but they don’t have great role models at home. They don’t have a lot of experience of all kinds of different people coming home for dinner. I choose dinner because that’s an important time. Now, obviously a lot of people have events and parties that are related to work and this kind of stuff, where they do get [different kinds of people] together, and we’re all very self-conscious about that now. I think we try to do that. That’s an evolution of the United States I do like, just the effort. It’s such an American thing to do. “We’re gonna do it! We’re gonna make these TV commercials because we want to make money! We’re gonna put all these people doing things together they never do together! We’re gonna try to create that world by making it part of your ordinary, everyday perception.” But that’s a tough one, going into people’s homes and being part of it.

2-00:07:10

Wilmot:

I don’t think people realize how entrenched segregation—segregation is the wrong word, but—

2-00:07:15

Ellis:

It’s habitual. It’s just habit.

2-00:07:19

McGarrigle:

Were there stories that you were thinking about your father and your uncle and that generation and then your relative protection, the way you describe it, from some of the harsher, more violent indignities of race discrimination in the United States? Were there stories, either explicit or implied, that you understood, either local or regional, about what was happening race-wise?

2-00:07:47

Ellis:

You know, I heard—yes, there were thousands of them. I have not *clung* to them. My father evidently *saw* a lynching in Virginia. I mean, he saw someone hanging from a tree. And everybody in my life who is black, who had any age on them, had stories to tell, *everybody*. Enterprising black farmers in the South with land, who somehow magically wound up without that land, as the land became important and valuable, and whoever it was in city governments started fiddling with the records and this, that, and the other. My stepmother, Marjorie, if you look at her oral history, you see a fair amount of bitterness there. In fact, she doesn’t struggle with her racism. [laughs] You know, we all have something, right? I have to work on all kinds of things all

the time, and catch myself out, and I don't think I'm that different from anybody else, right? Pick a topic. Pick a group. [laughs] It's a constant struggle to keep yourself open to the *person* who's there. But she's so angry, partly because of her experience of the South, and her experience of the arbitrariness of racism. She's very angry. She graduated from Hunter College in I think '44 or '45. I forget the date. And she came out here. I think she got a Rosie the Riveter job, which wasn't bad, it was a good paying job. But after that, she worked as a domestic. She had a bachelor's degree in biology.

She was very important to me. We fought like crazy. She was my stepmother, and my father was my hero, so when I went to live with them, I evidently said in front of them, "Now, what room is *she* going to stay in?" [laughs]

2-00:10:31

McGarrigle:

One of the things that I really got from her oral history is the fatigue that happens to people, and not just from her oral history but other places as well, just the absolute psychic toll. And in some ways she talked about that in relationship to your father, and she talks about—

2-00:10:54

Ellis:

He's a very bright guy.

2-00:10:56

McGarrigle:

—how well he did on an exam he took when he was in the service.

2-00:10:58

Ellis:

Right, right.

2-00:11:01

McGarrigle:

—the score, and his extreme intellect.

2-00:11:01

Ellis:

Right.

2-00:11:02

McGarrigle:

There are other words for it, but I'm just thinking of fatigue.

2-00:11:07

Ellis:

Yes.

2-00:11:11

Wilmot:

She speaks of his unreached potential.

2-00:11:15

Ellis:

Oh, there's no question about it. I think something *happened* to him. I think the war—you know, the war was liberating for him, too, like it was for a lot of blacks. Both wars were, you know, the first and the second. It was also liberating because they got to see other possibilities.

2-00:11:40

McGarrigle:

That's what I wanted to know, where he might have been.

2-00:11:42

Ellis: Yes, yes. I don't know. But just to go back to your question about the stories, it's interesting that they fuse in my mind. But there was a display in New York of photographs of lynchings.

2-00:12:09

McGarrigle: You shared that book with me. [*Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photograph in America*, ed. James Allen]

2-00:12:13

Ellis: Did I?

2-00:12:16

McGarrigle: Mm-hm.

2-00:12:16

Ellis: That struck me. It was like this vortex of all the stories I've heard, and everything, and it all kind of went into that book. I remember showing it to Troy [Duster] and Thelton [Henderson] right away, and then I told you I called Leon Litwack, who wrote the introduction to it, and had spoken around the country on it. I talked to him about it. One of the pictures he paints is chilling. Leon was speaking in Los Angeles on the whole lynching thing and this display. And he's speaking at a big bookstore—it wasn't big enough, black bookstore in L.A., I forget the name of it, but it was near USC [University of Southern California]—and they had to repair to a much larger room. Because he said that the people with that book cupped in their hand, a sixty-dollar book, went around the block. It was *documentation*. It was somehow like, "Goddamn it, yes! And now it's official." Not that Ida B. Wells didn't write *The Red Tide* and all of that. There was a struggle around this issue. But it was something about it being pictured in there. People would say, "Don't say it didn't happen." It was something like that.

2-00:13:48

And I think that I've handled a lot—since most of these stories aren't my direct experience, they're things that I heard from people—what I've done with them is to refer them to my own life, to understand that progress has been made. Martin Luther King [Jr.] said at some point, "You don't have to love me, but it would be good if I could keep you from hitting me." You know, that's progress! [laughs] We can do without the love, and we can do without the hitting. Let's move. Let's move along here. Don't kill me, you know? But I know for sure—I am not sure what I didn't get that I cared about, because I was black. I couldn't tell you what I didn't get that I might have cared about, because I was black.

I've had some very concrete experiences. I remember the guy who recruited me to UCLA, who convinced me—he ran the half-mile at UCLA—and he came to me, and I'd just had a real dramatic episode at the Compton Invitational Meet. I'd already signed up to join the Navy as a senior, and he was interested in my interest in going to college on a track scholarship. I did



go to UCLA, and he was a graduate student and, I think, an assistant coach. He really thought I was the cat's meow, as a person, not just as a runner. So he wanted me to go to the Campus Crusade for Christ with him. I said, "Well, it's not real high on my list, but I like you and if you want to go—." And then he came back ashen, because they wouldn't have me because I was a black. Now, I lost nothing. [laughs] I learned a lot, and it was nice having him there as a witness. In other words, he got the experience, and so for me, it was reinforcing that Jack knew that that stuff existed, right? Because he was taken completely by surprise. "This is Christian!" he was thinking, you know? "How could they do this??" Well, they could do that, and they did, and that is one of the places where the world was segregated.

2-00:16:51  
Wilmot:

You already knew.

2-00:16:54  
Ellis:

No, I didn't know before that. I didn't know anything about the Campus Crusade for Christ. That was just new. I wasn't surprised. I was a little astonished because I thought Westwood's a new world. You know, Westwood is not Compton. Now, Westwood was not so mystified because Kenny Washington and Jackie Robinson, Woody Strode, were all athletes there. There was a tradition. The old mayor of L.A., Tom Bradley, was a quarter-miler at UCLA. That's the race I ran. And there were other—it was a place where black athletes had gone, and also black scholars had gone. But it was very far away from my experience of Compton. I didn't know what they did over there. It turns out it was good that I lived in an insular world because, in fact, I couldn't rent an apartment in Westwood. Nobody could who was dark. I had an anthropology professor, Council Taylor, a very famous name, who was very light-skinned and could rent, but nobody knew—he was West Indian and nobody knew he was black.

2-00:18:13  
Wilmot:

Where did you stay, now?

2-00:18:14  
Ellis:

This takes us far away from things. We'll come back to it, for sure. But I stayed for a year in the co-op, Robeson Hall, Twin Pines, which of course has a whole socialist backdrop to it and a year in Sigma Alpha Mu, a Jewish fraternity, about which I have things to say, sooner or later.

2-00:18:44  
Wilmot:

Let's get to that later on. I want to—

2-00:18:46  
Ellis:

Oh, no, no, I understand, I understand. But on the issue of experiences, I think I haven't been collecting them, but I walk around with stories and with images I've seen, stories I've heard from my father, from my father's friends, sitting around listening to them talk. There was a period after I came back from Fontana to live where my father was—he was seeing his old friends from the

Army, and they would talk about their experiences in the Army. I'd hear stories about my uncle and his battle with authority. My Uncle Al had real problems taking any orders from anybody.

2-00:19:35

McGarrigle: To what do you attribute that? There's a personality, but do you have other thoughts?

2-00:19:46

Ellis: I just don't know. It could be easily, if you think about it, from a parent's standpoint, that his dad was gone when he was three. He was raised by his mom, and then he goes to a new town and there's a new man who is the father and is the authority, and my father says they had trouble getting along. It was probably just normal stuff—impulse control or something like that. But he was, yes, he was a fighter.

2-00:20:23

McGarrigle: I interrupted you. You were talking about the stories that your father told.

2-00:20:28

Ellis: Well, yes. I'll probably come back to some of these, but what I lived with was the residue of the Dust Bowl, for example. My father, when he came to California—there was an expression among black people—they called Southern California heaven. That was a joke among black folks—you know, folks going to "Heb'n." Because it was so unlike the South, so open. The stories my father tells of going to David Starr Jordan High School. Now it's one of the toughest black schools in Southern California. Well, not then. I looked at Glenn Seaborg's copies of stuff from the yearbook, and God, when you look at who's in the photos, Manuel Hernandez, and all these people in their ties and so forth, going off to become things, it turns out, doctors and so forth, and interacting with the other kids. And Watts wasn't integrated, but it wasn't so radically segregated.

2-00:21:52

The Dust Bowl was the big change because the Okies and the Arkies and all those folks who got displaced came here and brought the South with them. Everybody I know who's black who was around here dates the big shift to the Dust Bowl, because, as James Baldwin says, "The white man invented 'nigger' so he'd know where the bottom was." And know that wasn't him. You had a whole issue of invidious distinctions and who's who, and how you're going to come West and have those folks be above you and you're dirt poor and so forth. That's a very primitive sociological statement I just made, but it was something like that dynamic that everybody said was at work, and that's where the shift came. And then you got this roiling geographic, amoeba-like change. Those people lived over here for a while, and then these people would move. Southern California is amazing in terms of invasion and succession, as it used to be called, as new folks came in.

2-00:23:10

But one of my best friends was an Okie, Art [A.], and—let me tell you an interesting story about Artie. He was a real country boy. He was born in California. His folks were from, I think, Oklahoma. Funny guy, different kind of guy. He was white. We got along really beautifully, just as silly people. We were *silly* in high school. I didn't spend any time in his world, nor he in mine except around school and around running. He ran the two-mile. But we were really friends. And I would—we'd—we were just stupid. We'd walk by a girl and he'd say, "Hey, I think she loves me." [laughs] And then we'd do something with that. We made up language.

2-00:24:19

When I got to UCLA, there were two events that really blew my mind. I was better prepared for UCLA than either Artie or Ruth. Ruth was the girl who—the teacher would come into class and say, "Okay, fifteen, twenty-five, nine, sixty-seven divided by two. What is that?" And Ruth would give the answer. [laughs] Whereas, if I pronounced Spanish correctly, someone would slap me upside the head after class. It's true, black folks don't have a monopoly on that. But there was a little control, if you thought you were too smart, if you got too fancy and started sucking up to the teacher and being smart, it's true, it doesn't work in lots of groups, lots of different groups. But—I said to them, [the track coaches at UCLA] "You need to get Artie [A.] here. He's a fighter. He's got the endurance. He's a great guy." Art lasted about eight months and so did Ruth G. And it was *social!*

2-00:25:37

McGarrigle:

You're talking about the transition to UCLA.

2-00:25:42

Ellis:

That's absolutely right. And I could see it. I fit in better. Because of my background with Marjorie and my father and the worlds I lived in, I fit in better at UCLA than they did. Now, I had the hook of track, and I had the hook of star status, which doesn't hurt. You know what I'm talking about. I even had that in high school, because I didn't have to fight, and I didn't have to be a member of a gang. I was exempted from lots of—because I brought—

2-00:26:21

Wilmot:

On the strength of your running?

2-00:26:22

Ellis:

Yes, I brought fame to the school and I was black, and so I got exempted from a lot of trouble, and then I was recruited to UCLA, and I did exceptionally well my senior year in high school, and then went into UCLA and was kind of blazing fast. And so I had good stuff with me, which maybe they didn't have. But I could see, to the extent that I could—I saw Artie a lot, Ruth less so—but there's no reason anyone like Ruth should not have succeeded at UCLA, but she didn't fit. And it really—I could see it, and I was surprised, but it was about—it looked like it was about class, social class. I haven't tried to analyze it, but I remember going through that experience. And then that fed back into

an estimation of who I was. Like, “Who am I?” Which has a lot of other elements to it because things that would get me in trouble at Compton, polysyllabic excesses just saying fancy things, or wandering around a point, or something like that, people would say “What the hell you talkin’ about?” They were *valued* at UCLA. I mean, these kind of abstract fiddlings were valued. I got points for those. [laughs delightedly]

2-00:28:04

McGarrigle: You got rewarded.

2-00:28:06

Ellis: I got rewarded for that. That was very interesting.

2-00:28:09

McGarrigle: Now, at Compton, you’re talking about the students who had these reactions, which would be, if someone came off as too smart, but how about the teachers? I know this is a lot more in the future, in terms of we’ve skipped and we’ll come back to early education, but the message from the teachers about who could be smart, since we’re on the topic.

2-00:28:30

Ellis: Oh, that’s interesting. In general, I felt that I got a fair shake at Compton High School. There was one particular episode where this teacher in an English class used the expression, “like a nigger in a woodpile.” And I’m sitting there, and I’m thinking, “Well, wait a minute! This isn’t okay.” So I went home, and I told—I thought I told both of my parents, but Marjorie is the one who came, and we protested in common, and the teacher was chastened. I mean, he seemed genuinely not to realize what he had done, which was interesting. He was using an expression. And so, he was pretty alert to me and gave me a wide berth.

I often think of Tien’s story, where he came and he went to this community college in Tennessee, and the professor kept calling him, “Hey, Chinaman,” the professor would say to him, and somebody told him, “You shouldn’t let him do that.” So he went to the professor and said, “Please don’t call me Chinaman.” He said, “Okay, I won’t call you anything.” So he didn’t call on him or ever relate to him or acknowledge him. That was the way Tien’s instructor handled that. That’s why Tien, I think, resonated so much to the whole issue of race when he was here. He comes from a high-born situation in Wuhan Province. His dad was Chang Kai-shek’s banker, and he comes to this place, and he’s a “Chinaman.”

2-00:30:31

Wilmot: The absurdity of this place.

2-00:30:32

Ellis: [laughs] Right! Right. Anyway—

2-00:30:34

Wilmot: I have another question for you.

2-00:30:36

Ellis: Okay, go ahead.

2-00:30:37

Wilmot: You said you would use this language around talking around Art A. and Ruth G., “And I told them to—,” and it sounded like you were instrumental in getting them into UCLA?

Ellis:

Well, Artie, I was instrumental in getting to UCLA. I was, yes. I was looking forward to being with him again. He was a good runner, he would fill out the team, and so forth. But, it didn't work. See, he also didn't have what I had, because even then—UCLA was more selective than USC, for sure. You had to have—I had to go to a semester of community college to take a couple of electives and get my GPA up, which I did radically. I mean, I had never done that before, but I was really highly motivated. But when I went to UCLA, there were a lot of other black athletes there, so I had that support world as well. And we hung out in front of Kerckhoff Hall. There was a place to be, as kind of a base from which you could roam to do other things, so I had athletics as a base, and that included seniors and freshmen and so forth. And Artie didn't have that. I could see that Artie didn't have that. And Artie didn't have any ready moves to get into a world, and he wasn't going to be a fraternity boy. It was very stark for me to watch him not thrive.

2-00:32:21

McGarrigle: Do you know what happened to him?

2-00:32:24

Ellis: I don't. I don't, and I don't know why I don't. There was another guy I went to high school with, Steve Chafee, who's a professor at Stanford, and I saw him walking with Todd Gitlin, who is now no longer at Berkeley, he's at NYU, with Troy actually, they are colleagues there. And I recognized Steve. Steve was a runner. He was not a very fancy runner. But Steve wound up in Stanford, in communications, and we got together and talked about old times. I don't know what the difference was between Steve and Art. I don't know where Ford Simms went, the guy I told you the story about, partly because our lives went in such different ways. I know about Artie only because I know about Artie, because I watched it happen.

2-00:33:21

Wilmot: It struck me when you said you were instrumental in getting other students there. I thought, “Whoa! How many students were you—?”

2-00:33:27

Ellis: I just called their attention to this guy, and he would have had the GPA to be relevant. I mean, the Master Plan says you have to have a C, I think, as a minimum. It used to. But also special-action admissions. They've had it forever, for athletes and other categories of people—alumni kids and this, that, and the other. So Artie—it wasn't like any big thing. They wanted to have a track team. They were building, UCLA had made a decision to build. We had never beaten USC in track or practically anything else. And our group, our cohort was the first track team to win the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association], and we got Rafer Johnson, and we got Bob Seaman and Don Vick. We put together quite a world of "we." The alumni of the university and the athletic director and so forth put this thing together, and I was part of it, and got four free years of college.

2-00:34:41  
Wilmot:

I hear that.

2-00:34:42  
Ellis:

[laughs]

2-00:34:43  
Wilmot:

I have a question for you.

2-00:34:44  
Ellis:

Okay.

2-00:34:44  
Wilmot:

I think at this point—actually, there's a big question I want to go back to. It has to do with your parents and how they met and then journeyed to L.A.

2-00:34:51  
Ellis:

Okay.

2-00:34:51  
Wilmot:

But I'm almost thinking that we should save that for our next time.

2-00:34:55  
Ellis:

Fine.

2-00:34:55  
Wilmot:

Because I feel like that's a sizeable—

2-00:34:57  
Ellis:

Feel free to guide me. I can go on.

2-00:35:00  
McGarrigle:

You're doing everything you should be doing.

2-00:35:03  
Ellis:

Okay.

2-00:35:04  
McGarrigle:

And nothing you shouldn't be doing.

2-00:35:06

Ellis: Okay. [laughs] It's noon now, so.

[end of session]

Interview 2: May 30, 2003

[begin audio file 3]

3-00:00:01

McGarrigle: Okay, May 30<sup>th</sup>, Interview 2 with Russ Ellis.

3-00:00:07

Ellis: I wanted to begin. You asked me how I felt about the last interview. As I mentioned, I felt a lack of focus. Anyway, this whole issue of my having a beginning, middle, and end sense, obviously, teaching gives you that. You feel you have a responsibility to start, to get somewhere, and then come to some conclusions. But my ex-wife and I, in the seventies, I think it was, yes, told the kids that we were going to go down the street to a political meeting. Did I tell you this already?

3-00:00:00

McGarrigle: Did you leave them alone?

3-00:01:07

Ellis: Yes, right, right. I told you that already. And we left them alone. Maybe I told you off camera.

3-00:01:15

McGarrigle: It may have been off tape.

3-00:01:17

Ellis: Yes, I did tell you. Anyway, we came back. You don't remember this story? Anyway, they got very upset because we had left them alone. Now you remember?

3-00:01:32

Wilmot: Yes. I don't think it was ever on tape.

3-00:01:36

Ellis: No? How—David—they must have been seven and eight or eight and nine, I can't remember, maybe younger. I don't know. Anyway, but the point of the story is, I think it's just an independently interesting story, and not take up a whole lot of tape. So we say we're going to go, and they're very upset, they don't want to be left alone. And we're going to go for a finite amount of time, we'll be back. They threatened to do all kinds of terrible things, and David's going to throw a chair through the window, and so forth. They were very upset. We went anyway, and we came back on time, and we found them in this room where the TV was, but the TV was off, which was pretty nice. You know, like, whoa! Or pretty interesting. And their eyes were red rimmed and so forth, and they clearly had been crying. But they were cross-legged, facing each other. Judith, my ex-wife, went in to find out what took place because I had been kind of the bad guy, insisting that we would go. Zoë reported that first they were really upset, and they were frightened and so forth, and then they sat down and they cried, and they cried some more, and then they started talking to each other, David and Zoë did, and they talked, and they talked



around in circles and all kinds of stuff, “not in a straight line, the way you have to with Dad.” [laughter] Such a thing to hear! It was instructive, though, you know, this kind of logos, the male going someplace and staying rational. I never think of myself that way.

3-00:03:32

McGarrigle: They were zeroing in on the message to be linear?

3-00:03:41

Ellis: Yes.

3-00:03:43

McGarrigle: That’s not somewhat moderated by a sociologist’s viewpoint?

3-00:03:47

Ellis: I don’t know. I don’t think so.

3-00:03:51

McGarrigle: I mean, is it more male than—

3-00:03:54

Ellis: I think it’s more male than female, for sure. I mean, I think that—you know, men are always saying, “What’s your point?” or “Well then, do these things to fix it,” rather than letting stuff stay open. This is a much-discussed thing on gender.

3-00:04:09

McGarrigle: We talked about Deborah Tannen a little bit.

3-00:04:13

Ellis: Right, right, right.

3-00:04:14

McGarrigle: *And You Just Don’t Understand*. [*You Just Don’t Understand: Women And Men In Conversation*. New York: Ballantine, 1991]

3-00:04:15

Ellis: Right, right.

3-00:04:16

McGarrigle: But how do you—just because we’re talking about it—how do you think of it in terms of your professional orientation when you’re looking at people and you’re not necessarily—you’re being analytical, but in a way that doesn’t require necessarily a linear way of thinking.

3-00:04:37

Ellis: No. Well, let’s see. Of course, it requires *it*. That is, to impart to other people what you think you know that is a trained orientation to the phenomenal world—you know, stuff and people and relationships—you’ve got to have a way of saying it concretely so that people can capture it and then learn and then build on that. The university is nothing if it’s not a repository of methods

of both study and methods of imparting what you know. Just to give you an example, from the way I said it, of what you do. And so you simply have to structure your way of talking. I never had much of a reputation for being a well-structured lecturer because I didn't enjoy that way of doing things, and got dinged by students often for precisely the thing that made me an interesting lecturer, like, "Okay, today we're going to talk about orange marbles," and then I'd throw them on the floor [laughs], and "See that one over there, and its relationship to this one over there is like that." Well, that's a funny way to lecture, but a student once summarized my way of lecturing as that, just throwing stuff out there and then wandering among the pieces, and it would be different colored marbles, different lectures. Sometimes that's good for insight, but it's not very good for structured note-taking and memory and what's going to be on the final and these sorts of things, and I was never particularly good at that.

3-00:06:40

I was sort of good at walking around an example or something, like, I once came into the classroom through a window. Now, the point of it was to talk about what doors are for and what windows are for. I mean, this is a taken-for-granted world. You open a door and so forth, and you only ever go out of a window in an emergency, either a major emergency or you lost your key or whatever. And I'm talking to architecture students and trying to get them to think about what people do, rather than just the forms, and how they look and relate to each other, like "what is this thing?" Those are very useful lessons. Then I'd walk around it, give lots of examples, and people could relate to it. Anyway, I don't want to spend too much time here today.

But in talking about the last interview, I think what I missed was some sense that I was delivering a story or a piece of a story or some stream in things, but I will get really a lot better at this as we go along.

3-00:08:08

Wilmot:

You can always take your time and pause. Yes.

3-00:08:11

Ellis:

Okay, thank you. That's helpful.

3-00:08:15

Wilmot:

Just from listening to your story, I wanted to ask you—I have to ask this question now. Why did you decide to name Zoë and David, Zoë and David?

3-00:08:29

Ellis:

Ah! Judith Ellis, who lives in Berkeley, and I were married for twenty-seven years, and she wanted to name her son David, so our son is named David because she always wanted to name her son David. She has a cousin David, who is just very, very dear to her. She's slightly younger than me, but was a child of the blitz in London. She's an English Jew. The kids were sent out of London during the blitz to live in these safe places, so there were kid camps

with hundreds and hundreds of English kids, very young children, without their mommies and daddies, and synthetic milk and fake eggs, and loneliness and fear. And I'm saying way more than I think she would want to. She's much more private about this stuff. But I'm just going to go ahead and talk, and we can take this stuff out.

3-00:09:57

David went with her. David Barnett is his name. They were their sustenance, they were their mutual sustenance. And I think between King David and Cousin David, the name David came. And then I added Henderson to go with Thelton, as his godfather, but also my stepmother, Marjorie, she's got a Henderson in the stream of names behind her. So that's where David came. Zoë was my doing. I had wanted to name my daughter Alexandra. I just liked the name. I liked the idea of a girl named Alex. I had an uncle Al, Alexander. I don't know if I ever thought of him concretely in this connection, though. Anyway, I just liked that name. Now, that child miscarried at five months, quite late. It was a very unhappy event. And so when we got pregnant with Zoë, I just was looking around for names, so I just explored names and came upon that name, which is the name of a couple of Byzantine queens or something, among other things, among other people with that name, who weren't very nice, actually. [laughs] They were rapacious, awful people. But I loved the idea of life, Zoë, zoo. And her mother said at Zoë's wedding, where everyone who spoke alluded to Zoë's energy, "Perhaps we should have named her Pacifica." [laughs] Because she's so energetic. She's a really quite a package. Anyway, that's how that happened.

3-00:12:23

Wilmot:

Now I'm going to kind of—we were hoping with this interview today to kind of focus on your early life.

3-00:12:30

Ellis:

Fine. That's fine.

3-00:12:30

Wilmot:

And so I'm going to ask us to time travel a little, and I wanted to know a little bit more about the push-and-pull factors—I'm asking about your parents now—the push-and-pull factors that brought them from Virginia to L.A.

3-00:12:46

Ellis:

Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, let me start—

3-00:12:52

Wilmot:

As far as you know.

3-00:12:55

Ellis:

Right. I can give you—it's interesting, I was feeling strange about this. I didn't do a lot of homework getting ready for today, even though you had alerted me to this, because I figured I could go back and fill in some details

one way or another, and I mailed you the family lineage stuff. It never got to you?

3-00:13:34

Wilmot: We actually didn't get it, though.

3-00:13:36

Ellis: Okay. Well, maybe I'll make copies and give it to you before you go. I'm not involved in my family history, that is, personally engaged in all that, except to the extent that since my granddaughter's birth, I figured, "Well, let's try to put this together, see how all this comes in," partly because Isabella, I call her Global Girl now, she has such amazing tendrils coming from the globe, arriving in her. [laughs] I love that about America, too. So much comes down into each individual, you, me, you—oh, my goodness! Look at the three of us! We're a mess! [laughs heartily] Just an American mess, it's so interesting.

Anyway, so here's what I know. I'll start with my mother's side. And I won't go very far back, but what the pushes were—

3-00:14:45

Wilmot: Right, because we talked a lot earlier about both sides of your family—.

3-00:14:50

Ellis: —A Harris on my mother's side. Her father's name was Wilson Harris, and her mother's name was Metra, M-e-t-r-a.

3-00:15:03

Wilmot: We did talk about Metra.

3-00:15:04

Ellis: Did we on camera? Did we record that? Okay. They lived in—where did they live? They lived in Virginia, in the environs of Roanoke. Now, this is, for me, just a gross location. I can get you more details because my auntie, her sister had a little oral history done of her, a tiny little thing that an undergraduate did out of Rutgers [University], and I have it somewhere. She talks about where her people come from. And I would love to have that as part of the record somewhere. Just as a black person, these things are so shredded, you know. I'd just love to have that documented as part of where I come from, to the extent that I have it organized.

Wilson Harris evidently sold insurance off the back of a horse-drawn carriage in the countryside of Virginia. He was evidently fairly good at it and made money and sustained a family of six children, and Metra didn't work, and then he died in the flu epidemic of 1919. Metra remarried, and I have it written down. I forget the guy's name. This guy was somewhat volatile evidently and [pause] periodically was given to violence. When those things would happen, when he would get upset—and jealous of Wilson's name, that is, competitive with the ex-husband—would set him off, evidently. He would get violent. The family would kind of do a temporary disintegration. They'd go live with Aunt

So-and-so and Uncle So-and-so, the kids, and Metra would stay with him to try to calm him down.

3-00:17:35

One time, a particularly bad episode, Martha, my mother, and Sammy Langhorn, her nephew, the son of an older daughter, went together to stay with someone. I'm not sure why Sammy went. But the person they stayed with basically took off and went to California with them. It was a woman who lived in Virginia. According to my father, without Metra's permission. Now, I'll check with my Aunt Anna to see what the details of that were—I don't know how important it is to get into it. But that's how Martha got here.

3-00:18:47

Wilmot:

When she was how old?

3-00:18:50

Ellis:

She was in her teens. I think something like sixteen or something like that. My father's route was—I can't talk too much about the pushes. I can talk about what were the pulls. Well, maybe this is a push. In fact, I think I talked about this already. James Minnis, M-i-n-n-i-s, is my paternal grandfather. Gee, how close! Thurmond, West Virginia, I discovered from my father's military records, is where my father was born. And so they were living somewhere around there. I don't know quite where. I've gone online to look at Thurmond. It's very interesting railroad stuff, a lot of black workers, very interesting. There's some stuff there. Maybe I'll check it out.

3-00:20:05

McGarrigle:

You said that like it was surprising. It wasn't something you knew until they—

3-00:20:09

Ellis:

—No, right. I mean within a year. I've gotten so busy, trying to put this stuff together recently. So I just recently looked closely at his discharge papers, actually, my father's discharge papers, and I saw this Thurmond, West Virginia. "Whoa! What's that?" I thought he was from Virginia, and in fact, the family—his mother and father were from Virginia, and I have that all. Yes, they were both from Virginia, Minnis and Cora. So when my father was about five and my Uncle Al was about three or something like that, James Minnis—and I'm tentative about that name, I've got to clarify it—"went out for a pack of cigarettes." I think this is how my father characterized it to me, and I've kept the language—and didn't quite make it back home. And so Cora had no husband, and the kids were fatherless, and I don't know how they ate or survived during that time, but she ultimately left, and they moved to Cleveland, which is interesting. And in Cleveland, she met this guy Ellis. I have his first name somewhere, but I've forgotten it. Then she married Ellis, and then Ellis adopted the kids formally, Al and Russell.

3-00:22:01

And as I mentioned to you, not on tape, I think, my father was very happy to have the name change because in school, his initials were William Russell Minnis, M-i-n-n-i-s, William Russell Minnis, and so the kids called him Worm. [chuckles] So when he got WRE, they couldn't call him Worm anymore, so he was happy with that name. I don't know how my Dad got from Cleveland to L.A. I think I have that recorded somewhere. I'll look into that. But he came in '21, '22, something like that. He was born in 1910, so he was youngish. Anyway, he came to L.A., happily because L.A. was a great place to be in the twenties. L.A. became a difficult place to be after the Dust Bowl because the South came to California. But he was the first one to say to me, black folks used to talk about California is "Heb'n, Heb'n," that was so different, so open, possibilities so good, up until then.

3-00:23:54

McGarrigle:

Did they come as a foursome then, as far as you know, Russ?

3-00:23:57

Ellis:

Yes. Wait a minute. No, I don't think Ellis came. I think he may have died or something, because Cora, my grandmother, was living in Perris, P-e-r-r-i-s in Southern California—it's outside of Riverside—and died there of some problem with her heart. And I know both my father and my uncle feel some guilt about not having gotten her her medicine in time or something like that. But Ellis was not with her, so I don't actually remember what happened to the relationship. I think he might have been a bit older than Cora.

Anyway, so somewhere out there in that part of the world, in Southern California, my father and my mother met. I don't know the accident of their getting together. What I know is that it wasn't a comfortable thing for the woman who brought her out—I'm amazed I can't remember her name—and she tried to interfere with the relationship between my father and my mother, the woman who absconded with Martha and Sammy. I do know that my father fell absolutely, completely, and totally in love with my mother. It's really quite astonishing.

3-00:25:54

When she died, in 1956, at a fairly young age, I flew back to see her at Albert Einstein Hospital. Before I left—I don't know why I even thought to ask, because, in retrospect, I don't think of myself as being that kind of sensitive—but I asked my father if there was any message he wanted to send to my mother, and he said, "Just tell her I love her." It's amazing! [claps hands once] Because *she* abandoned *him*. She went off with—I use the image from *Porgy and Bess*, and I think it's a good one—the guy she ran off with was a trumpet player in Hollywood, a short little brother, a funny little guy, Bobby. I actually met him. You know, it was kind of like Sportin' Life, [sings]: "There's a boat that's leavin' soo-oon for New York." And she goes off with Bobby. And I remember, I remember before the Second World War, we were living together in L.A., the three of us, and I remember him crying in another room. I

remember the sound of his weeping coming through the wall. It's just an autonomous memory that hangs there, of the sound of him. He was very much in love with her. And she was ultimately, I think, kind of an adventurer, a very sunny person, *very* sunny person. She wound up quite a profound alcoholic, and so was the guy she ran off with. I talked to my aunt about that. Anyway, that's how they got together, in Southern California. They were married—I sent you photographs online. There's one very Hollywood shot with him, with his collar turned up, very fashionable.

3-00:28:44  
Wilmot:

And she was beautiful.

3-00:28:45  
Ellis:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. She was an athlete. She played softball and ran, was quite a jock, a tomboy, according to my auntie.

3-00:28:54  
Wilmot:

Do you know why the woman who brought her into California had objections to your parents' being together?

3-00:29:02  
Ellis:

She was young. I think my father was maybe four or so years older than she was, and she was just puritanical and careful and so forth, and she suspected they were having sex. And she did some extraordinary things, like, she would come back from a date, and she'd make her sit in very hot water full of mustard and Epson salts, figuring that would somehow dissolve whatever you know, you know.

Yes, that was pretty bad, pretty bad. And so in a way, my father sort of saved her from that awfulness, too, so their marriage was escape from her capture by this woman, as my father tells the story.

3-00:29:52  
Wilmot:

They were together for how many years?

3-00:29:54  
Ellis:

Hmmm. She was already pregnant with me when they got married, which, of course, in those days was something. And the auntie was right, there was something going on! That was 1935. I went to Fontana probably in '41, and I lived with—and she went off with Bobby—[pause]—no, let's see. Well, this is really dim for me. I remember a moment, standing with her in the middle of the street, and I think I remember the pause was about the discovery of the news—maybe it was Pearl Harbor, I don't know—but some really big bad news, and everybody was very frightened. And I remember being in church with her around this kind of scary time, but I just don't have a firm sense of the date. But your question was about when they got together, right?

3-00:31:34  
Wilmot:

My question was how long were they together?

3-00:31:35

Ellis: I'd say from '35 to '40, to be safe.

3-00:31:40

Wilmot: Five years?

3-00:31:41

Ellis: Yes, five years.

3-00:31:42

Wilmot: So you were a five-year-old.

3-00:31:43

Ellis: Five-year-old, right, basically, right.

3-00:31:46

Wilmot: Do you have any stories about either of their lives, their young lives in Los Angeles before they got married?

3-00:32:02

Ellis: No. Well some of my father, yes, sure I do, nothing about my mother. My father—[pause]. He told stories—one story that stands out for me was from—he lived in Watts, actually, for some appreciable amount of time, and graduated from David Starr Jordan High School. I mentioned the connection with Glenn Seaborg, who was in his graduating class, or at least they knew each other and were friends, and were part of the same track team, and Glenn Seaborg gave me these clippings from the annual, the school yearbook, that's got my father's picture in it and some characterizations of him. My dad was very much a jock-oriented guy, and he loved to play baseball. I was just looking at the stuff online. I have some jpeg images. He was a busy guy, my dad, in school. He was in lots of clubs and lots of sports.

He told me that he and Al, in Watts, used to have to defend a corner where they sold newspapers. It's kind of like some of the homeless here. You know, you wonder, 'How come the same guys are there?' Well, they've got a deal—I mean, they've got something working that—you know, they defend those corners. We came out of the show *Surface Transit*, starring Sarah Jones last night and I thought about that because she does this homeless woman moving in, and in the end talks about, "and you people walk by me, and I don't exist." So everybody coming out of the theater was just pouring money on these two homeless guys, you know? [laughs] But, those corners aren't just magically occupied by one person, at Whole Foods or anywhere.

3-00:34:37

Wilmot: Territory.

3-00:34:38

Ellis: There's a negotiation, and sometimes it's not very friendly. As you guys know, some of those folks on the Avenue, Telegraph, are pros. They pull in three hundred dollars a day, some of them. My father said that selling



newspapers on a street corner, you had to defend your turf. He and Al were very good at setting up guys who tried to take over their corner, by setting them up to beat them up. One would hide, and just become available after the confrontation would happen. Al would come out fighting, hit the guy in the back of the head. My dad talked about some tricks that you would use. Like, if a big bully would come after you or something, you'd back up against the building. You'd try to get something with a good, grainy surface and let the guy throw a punch, and he'd hit the wall. I mean, I'm listening to my very gentle daddy telling me these stories about that time. [laughs] But that always got my attention. I never had to do anything like that. I had to fight in school, but I never had to do anything like that, and I never had to go really earn my keep. I had to work in various places, but I never had to do that.

3-00:35:50

What else, about the early years of my father? He was a baseball player, and he barnstormed. You get a bunch of guys—barnstorm. You get a bunch of guys, and you go around and you play other teams. Sometimes it's just for room and board, but you just travel around, and you play. This was in the days of the Negro Leagues, but my father said that he traveled through South America playing baseball with a bunch of guys and got to Cuba and other places.

3-00:37:01

Wilmot:

Wow.

3-00:37:02

Ellis:

Yes, he was—

3-00:37:02

McGarrigle:

How old would he have been, Russ? Or about what years do you think that was?

3-00:37:07

Ellis:

I've never asked him, but I remember going to one of his games before the war, and when he came back from the hospital, he worked in the post office, and he continued to play ball in the post office league, softball. He was good! He would play first base, he would play catcher, and those guys were good! I mean, it was really aggressive stuff. He at that point only had one lung. This was from the war and his TB, which I think probably is something that came out of the connection with Martha and illness in the family in Virginia, I think. But, yes, he was a good baseball player, and I remember going to a few games before the war and before I was shipped off to Fontana, before the family fell apart. He was a first baseman. It would be the years in California most likely. I never thought to get much detail on it. I'm kind of sad. I have to figure out what the dickens happened to this tape. I have a tape I did with him. It's not very long, but I tried to ask him some questions. He was fairly taciturn after the war. I think I mentioned, I think he must have had some really bad experiences, like a lot of vets, and he got so the only time he would talk was

when he was loaded, when he got drunk. And then it was not all that worth listening to, just kind of repetitious stuff.

3-00:38:55

McGarrigle: I wonder how that travel would have influenced him. Do you have any indications about that?

3-00:39:03

Ellis: You know, I can—

3-00:39:04

McGarrigle: He had been overseas before, but South America, Cuba.

3-00:39:09

Ellis: Yes. I don't know about those specific things. He never told me stories about it other than the mad rush of doing it. Some of it had to have been during the Depression, I think, I think. But I think that he became sort of cosmopolitan in the sense that he had a broader perspective than a lot of guys he knew on what the world was about and what was in the world. He had a bigger picture of things, I think. That's interesting. I don't know. It's all surmise on my part, what difference it made. I think the war made a big difference, and I used to sit and listen to his buddies come back and sit around the house and talk about things that happened in Germany, a bunch of them stealing a streetcar in Germany and going for a ride, and the women stuff and all that kind of stuff.

3-00:40:32

Wilmot: I have a question.

3-00:40:36

Ellis: Sure.

3-00:40:37

Wilmot: When your parents, in their young married life, in those five years—first, do you know where you lived, where your family lived?

3-00:40:47

Ellis: I can find an address. Yes, I *can* find an address. It was in the 50-something, 52<sup>nd</sup> Street in Los Angeles, and probably we lived in a couple of places before their relationship fell apart. I remember living in what I think was a single-family dwelling, kind of a wood slat, bungalow thing in L.A., with a palm tree. I think I even have a photograph of that neighborhood, because I do remember jumping off the garage with an umbrella. [laughs] Trying to parachute. I really remember that, probably because I hurt myself, but I don't remember hurting myself. I also remember when we were living in what I think was a single-family dwelling, as opposed to an apartment, because I think the tears and so forth was in an apartment, when I heard my father crying. And there was another scene that's important. It's about me singing a song, so I don't forget it, in another place. Oh! Yes, there are several images.

3-00:42:31

But my father worked in an apple butter factory, and I remember—this is so powerful. I remember one day being in front of the house and greeting him as he was coming home, and he had the most wonderful walk. Oh, God, I'm getting Total Information Awareness stuff there now, trying to capture walks. He had such a wonderful way of walking, and it was so much my dad. It was a signature thing. I could see him coming down the sidewalk toward the house, and that was a pretty happy thing, to see my dad coming. He was a very tender guy, very loving guy.

3-00:43:20

McGarrigle: If you describe more the walk, what is the walk?

3-00:43:25

Ellis: Could I do it, you mean?

3-00:43:27

McGarrigle: Do it or describe it.

3-00:43:32

Ellis: Oh. A saunter, a saunter.

3-00:43:34

McGarrigle: A way of being in the world?

3-00:43:37

Ellis: Yes, it was a saunter. It was probably stylish. That is to say, it wasn't just the way he was built—it was that, too—but it was a black thing, I think. I think he had his signature walk. It's something you had. It's a black thing. You walk a way. There's a way you walk that's identified with you. He drove a car in what was a stylish way of another generation, which is very different from anything you'd see now. [gets up and demonstrates] Like that. Like that. There's the road, and here is the body.

3-00:45:00

Wilmot: Yes.

3-00:45:03

Ellis: But you never did this. [demonstrates] I use that stuff in my lecturing, actually. I'd talk about the concentric circles. I have this whole issue about style, and I actually started a course at Pitzer, in the Claremont Colleges, called The Sociology of Style. The whole idea is, people start designing the first thing they have, which is themselves. And then they bring in designers. Sometimes when they have a little money to allow them to do that, but elocution lessons. In other words, but you start with the meager stuff you have, which is just yourself: how you talk, what the words are, how you gesticulate, how you walk, how you sit down, how you get up. All of that stuff is *adornment* that brings you *distinction*. And ultimately, of course, as it radiates out, it's *culture*. And then kids get it. They see it, and they copy it. So, I'm getting lost.

But one of my favorite, favorite scenes of all time is my father playing catch with me, and just the way he threw the ball, such an elaborate and such an elegantly wonderful thing. You see it throughout baseball now, but he had his own very easy way of throwing a ball. Or he'd catch it and do a variety of things before he let go of it. Just gorgeous stuff. Anyway, there was a signature walk.

3-00:47:05

Wilmot:

I have a question about your mother at that time, did she have the opportunity to be a young wife who stayed at home, or was she working?

3-00:47:14

Ellis:

I do have a picture of being with her. I have a couple—one, pleasant, one, not so pleasant. The pleasant one was sitting at the table at breakfast with her busily doing something in the kitchen. I think it was just the two of us, although there's lurking in my mind a third kid—a second kid. I know for sure she had no other kids that were around us. I don't know if she had other kids. She had a hysterectomy when I was born, and that's documented. After I was born. But she would make something they called Cambric tea. It was hot water and condensed milk and sugar.

3-00:48:23

Wilmot:

Oh, yeah!

3-00:48:24

Ellis:

You had that? [laughs]

3-00:48:26

Wilmot:

No, but it sounds so tasty.

3-00:48:28

Ellis:

Well, I loved it as a kid. It's funny I remember the name of it. But I remember her serving me that, and I remember sitting in front of it, really happily anticipating that. Probably happened more than once. So, that's a scene I have of her. Another scene I have of her is part of a series of events. I don't know the location, but I'm in a back yard or something, and I had a habit, throughout my youth in Fontana and later, of liking to shout and test my voice. In Fontana I used to climb up in this eucalyptus tree and make the sound of birds, trying to get into my very top register. It was funny. Isn't that funny? If an adult did that. But I was in that back yard, and I think one of the sounds I tried out was "shit," the word, "shit." And I'm pretty sure she—although it's not reliable because someone might have been taking care of me—washed my mouth out with soap. I remember that was not pleasant. That was not pleasant. But I also have that period and that setting associated with someone who was taking care of me during the day. And they would make scrambled eggs for me, which I did not like. Whoever did it mixed relish in with it, and then I would eat it. [laughs] It's funny.

3-00:50:40

Wilmot:

Do you think, then, that your mother was working? You've answered this—.

3-00:50:45

Ellis:

You know, I'm so screwed up on that topic. I think the trauma of the disintegration of my family was such that, despite a lot of years of therapy and so forth, I haven't been able to capture the memory from the time. Here's what appears to have happened in the early years of my life: she got sick. I have photographs of her in the hospital in San Fernando Valley, which is interesting because my father wound up there after the war with tuberculosis. She had had tuberculosis, after I was born, and she was in the hospital for a year and a half. So I spent some appreciable amount of my very beginning months, maybe a year, a year and a half, without her, and I have no idea who took care of me. I have no idea. And I don't ever remember talking to my father about that, which is strange. That is, you'd think that he and I would have had occasion to fill in how that worked. When I was about three, evidently, he said, she was out of hospital, and she went to work for a wealthy lady as a maid or somesuch, or helper, on a trip across the country, so she was away from me on that job, which did make money evidently, for another period of time. And this is post-Depression, so the common story of an orphanage, or a version of it. I was never in an orphanage, but I do remember staying in a household with some people who were new to me. It was very pleasant. I don't know what the age was. And I remember going to church with them.

3-00:53:36

A song rings out from that time, and it was Ella Fitzgerald, "A Tisket, a Tasket, my Little Yellow Basket." But I have not been able to place that, those people or that time in any decent sequence. That might have been that he was working and she was off, and this was a safe place to put me. And then the other scene I mentioned, about a song. We were living in—it seemed to be—I know it was a two-story affair because you had to go up a set of stairs to get to where I slept, and then there was a living room kind of arrangement downstairs, and I remember enjoying the sounds of the party that was happening downstairs. There was a party. And going out and asking if I could sing. They said yes, and I sang, "Paper Doll," which was a Mills Brothers song which I think was a hit at the time, which may be one way of dating this stuff. That's a terrible song. Do you know the lyrics of it?

3-00:55:17

Wilmot:

Not at all. I don't know the song.

3-00:55:19

Ellis:

Anyway, it ends, of course, "I would rather have a paper doll to call my own than have a fickle-minded, real-life girl." That song was a very big hit in the United States then. [sings]

*I'd rather have a paper doll that I could call my own,  
 a doll that other fellows cannot steal,  
 and then those flirty, flirty guys  
 with their flirty, flirty eyes  
 would have to flirt with dollies that are real.  
 When I come home at night, she'll be there waiting.  
 She'll be the truest gal in all the world.  
 I'd rather have a paper doll to call my own  
 than have a fickle-minded, real-life girl.*

Anyway, that was a big hit, and then the Mills Brothers were big, and they'd break into a little rap on that, which is very interesting because that tradition has continued. [sings] "I'll tell you, boy, it's tough to be alone and it's tough to love a gal who's not your own," et cetera. So that's a scene I remember.

3-00:56:46

It's interesting, these song modes, because I continued to be interested in singing and song and music, and that became a very big feature of my life, a very important, sustaining feature of my life. So that's what I remember. Now, you asked me about my father's youth, and I got you to Jordan High School and to barnstorming, and I have to think of some other things he told me, but I don't have a lot. I don't have a lot.

3-00:57:24

Wilmot:

There's a question that I'm wondering if you can—actually, Leah, I was going to check with you. Do you have any questions?

3-00:57:30

McGarrigle:

No, just soon we'll have to change the tape, about five minutes. That's all, I wanted to remind us.

3-00:57:36

Wilmot:

The question I have for you is about—I'm wondering if you can kind of walk me through—there's something that's been confusing me, about where you lived when, because you reference Fontana, and then there's—

3-00:57:48

Ellis:

Sure.

3-00:57:48

Wilmot:

And so if you could just—the logistics of that would be wonderful.

3-00:57:51

Ellis:

From my birth in L.A. County Hospital through the time I went to Fontana in '41, let's say, let's say after Pearl Harbor, I lived in various places in Los Angeles, mainly South Central Los Angeles. Central Avenue vicinity, which was where black people in those days were concentrated. I lived somewhere near 52<sup>nd</sup> and Central for a while. I don't know—in the scenes I've given to you, I think some of them happened around 52<sup>nd</sup> and Central. I could do some

homework to find out where I went to school. I remember in elementary school or kindergarten at some point, when I was living with my parents, somewhere in there, going to school where the teacher called me William because my first name—no, she called me Bill because my first name was William. And still is. [laughs] I remember relenting and finding it interesting that she called me that. I never did anything about it. But then, when my mother left, I lived in a place I've *really* got pinned down. I didn't live with him, but he was rooming right up the street from the family I was staying with. It was a cul-de-sac, 41<sup>st</sup> Place and Central Avenue. He was rooming just up the street with a woman who was the aunt of my stepmother.

3-01:00:05

Wilmot: Okay.

3-01:00:07

Ellis: He met Marjorie through Aunt Virginia.

3-01:00:10

Wilmot: Your father did.

3-01:00:12

Ellis: Yes, through his rooming in with Aunt Virginia.

3-01:00:16

Wilmot: And then?

3-01:00:19

Ellis: And then I moved to Fontana, California, in what was the black enclave in that part of the world, too. Very severely segregated. That was a very severe situation. I wasn't aware of segregation in Los Angeles. I was too young. Everybody around me was black. I say I never went to segregated schools, but I may have gone to a segregated school somewhere in my first five years. It had to have been kindergarten I went to school in L.A. But that would be it. Then I went to Fontana, and I've carefully worked out precisely where. I have a photo of where I lived, the farm I lived on. I can tell you very specifically where. I went to Etiwanda Elementary School, and I lived there until I came back to Los Angeles. We moved way out in the south, 132<sup>nd</sup> Street and Central Avenue, that part of town, and lived with a couple. Dorothy Broussard, who lived with the Joiners, who had the Fontana farm, Eddie and Josephine, and Vernon Henry.

3-01:02:12

There's a whole story there which I can't tell, either—I mean, not that I'm not going to tell, not allowed to or I'm shy to—but I can't sort it out. There were three Broussards who lived with the Joiners, and they were from Chicago, from a disintegrated family. Dorothy, Dot, she was called. Beautiful, beautiful. And she married the brother of my best friend. Should I stop?

3-01:02:42

McGarrigle: Let's stop for a minute.

3-01:02:44

Ellis: Okay.

[begin audio file 4]

4-00:00:00

Ellis: So I moved to Fontana. That is the issue.

4-00:00:06

McGarrigle: Now, this is around the time, around '41, you said, after Pearl Harbor, and where was your father then? Was he already in the service?

4-00:00:16

Ellis: Yes. This is a good segue. I'll just take us to Fontana, which is a very important period of my life, extremely important, and this might be the best way to get there, if this is what the two of you—

4-00:00:32

McGarrigle: What we planned for today, yes.

4-00:00:36

Ellis: Okay. When I was living at 41<sup>st</sup> Place and Central Avenue, a time that was actually fairly pleasant for me, my father was rooming, as I said, with Aunt Virginia, up the street, maybe three doors up, three houses up from the family he had put me with. When my mother left the marriage, she left me with some people, and I have [mental] pictures of that, too. Very strange and complex. I think, as I reflect on it now, the household that I was in was that of a prostitute. There were a bunch of kids, and I remember we were very inventive sexually, and I remember there were playing cards with nude pictures on them and so forth, so I got quite an interesting early introduction, an interesting exploration. I don't know how long I was there. I remember somebody putting a piece of toast on a chair at breakfast—it wasn't my mother and father's household—and my sort of inadvertently sitting on the toast and getting reprimanded for that. Isn't that funny, that that would pop up? Getting reprimanded for sitting on somebody's toast that they put on the chair.

4-00:02:23

My father found me—this is his account, not my experience—and had me stay with some other people at the end of this cul-de-sac on 41<sup>st</sup> Place. There were other kids there, too, a boy and a girl, roughly my age, I think. A standout experience for me, some standout experiences for me from that time in that house is listening to the radio. That was interesting. *Let's Pretend* was the name of the show, and *Grand Central Station* and *Buster Brown*. Was *Buster Brown* a show or just a commercial?

4-00:03:35

McGarrigle: It sounds like a commercial.



4-00:03:38

Ellis:

“I’m Buster Brown.” Oh, no. “Arf, arf.” “That’s my dog, Tige. He lives in a shoe. I’m Buster Brown. Look for me in there, too. Buster Brown shoes.” I remember the commercials. I remember the rap of *Grand Central Station*, *Superman*, all the shows, *Red Ryder*, and *Little Beaver*. That was where I think my mind first was captured by the fantasy world of the radio in that place. I remember we had blackouts, and I remember sitting on the front porch with the other kids. Everybody’s curtains were down, and all the lights were off, and then the searchlights sweeping the sky. That was fun.

4-00:04:35

McGarrigle:

Did rationing come into your experience?

4-00:04:40

Ellis:

I don’t remember rationing in Los Angeles, I remember it in Fontana. I’m sure it did happen, but I don’t remember it. I never remember being hungry, ever in my life. Anyway, that was an oddly pleasant time, and I think I mentioned to you that one day my father, around Easter, took me to get my haircut in a barbershop around the corner. I wasn’t aware of this but he talked to me about it later—there was a layer of dirt on my scalp that outraged him. These people were not taking care of me. And that’s when he determined to—I guess he had already been drafted, told he was going to be going off to war, and he sent me out to live on this farm in Fontana. And the woman, Josephine Joiner, who was part of the couple of Eddie Joiner and Josephine Joiner—she was in the church that my grandmother went to. So I don’t know how that worked, because I know the church the Joiners went to in San Bernardino. It was St. Marks’ Baptist Church, and we went there forever. Eddie was a deacon in there, and that was BYPU, the boring-ass Baptist Youth something Union—oh, no, Baptist Young People’s Union, it was. Oh, God. Sunday school, basically.

4-00:07:04

So that’s where the Joiners went to church. I don’t know if Cora came up from Perris to go to that church? It seems unlikely, but back in the day, who knows? I mean, maybe there weren’t a lot of black people in Perris, and there weren’t churches or something she could go to. And you know how people travel to worship. I learned from something that the Berkeley Community Fund that there are, like, 120 places of worship in Berkeley. You don’t think of a place ten and a half square miles, and as secular as we seem to be. But there are groups of five and ten, and they come back into town. They don’t even live here. Worship is a funny thing.

So, Cora and Josephine knew each other, and that’s how my father knew that they were there and learned that there was a possibility that I could go live there, and that’s where he deposited me. Another image that made me very happy—it’s, like, as big as anything that happened to me—is when my father was rooming with Virginia. We were going to go fishing! And I got—oh, I got poles, and I got all outfitted and went out on a boat, fishing with my father.

Now, that was a big event. I don't think I slept for two days in advance of that, anticipating the joy of going fishing with my dad. He worked the graveyard shift in San Pedro [PEE-dro], we called it. Still do, San Pedro. In the shipping yards, before he was drafted. So he slept during the day and worked at night, so even though he was just a few doors down, I didn't see him very much.

4-00:09:03

McGarrigle:

What was his position in the shipping yards? Do you know?

4-00:09:06

Ellis:

Oh, I'm sure it was just rough labor, yes, right. So he shipped me up to Fontana. I have a last scene from the cul-de-sac. It was one summer that seemed to last a year. I remember I didn't have to—I was just free to play. It was the last free-to-play summer in my life. Not that life got terrible after that, but it was endless wonderfulness, playing with the other kids in the cul-de-sac. I remember one particularly awful moment in it, but it kind of reminds me of that summer. I don't know if it was summer, I know it was hot. You know, L.A. is often hot. But I had no shoes on, and it was hot enough that the asphalt was soft. I headed out across the cul-de-sac to go join some other kids, and I wasn't sure I was going to make it across alive because with each step—it didn't matter how quickly I got my feet up, it got hotter and hotter till it got scary hot. I remember that so concretely. It was such an important memory for me. Oh, my God! [laughs] But it's funny because it's an anchor experience of what was just the greatest time.

4-00:10:53

As a matter of fact, you know what? In a way, that particular summer is how I think of my life in California. I've been struggling with what I would call my life in summary, and I think I told you this, one of the things I've lit on is "Black Boy in the Golden Sandbox." This state of California has been just a place of possibilities for me. I've thought of many things to do, tried lots of things. In some ways, I've never settled on anything. You know, that is simply a fact, that I've not actually been anything. Probably I've been a professor, as a person, more than I've been anything else. People have always said that of me. They still do. They say, "You're a professor?" You know, if I'm getting a cup of coffee or I'm someplace. "You must be a professor." But I never—I never really was anything. [laughs] That sounds awful, the way I put it. What I mean is that I have been entranced by the possibilities that arrive in front of me as I live in this place.

I remember Judith and I were in—this might have been, oh, it was in '65—we were visiting her folks in London. We went on a tour, and where did I wind up? Where did we wind up? Some small public university. This would be '65, because I was going to go—we had finished all our work except our dissertations, and when we got back to California, I was going to be teaching in Riverside, UC Riverside. I remember the experience of England as this stratified place. I got a full sense of social class. You know, you have to go away. There are money differentials here, differentials, but—in the East you

get old money, differentials that matter a lot. This out here, San Francisco, is probably more dramatically stratified with older money and the symbols of class and so forth than Southern California, but it ain't Europe [laughs], England, where social classes have become gene pools. You know, the Cockneys have been there for long and they've been inbreeding, and that stuff is locked. They feel locked, to get out of there.

Anyway, I remember thinking at the time what an amazing fact it was, the possibility of mobility of people like me in the United States. I remember concretely thinking that, and I've always understood immigrants in that respect. That's what we are. We are a place—even with our madness and our color consciousness and so forth, it's a place of possibility, and I think, now that I see it, probably I'm a certain kind of *American* in the sense that I was born into this place, and there it was to play with. I've been called nigger, I've been hit, I've been denied, I've been discriminated against, but the fact of the matter is, there was always an escape hatch out there. [laughs] If there was trouble over there, get around it, do this. Show biz and academia, of course, were particularly entrancing because those are the places where people officially didn't care about that stuff as much, about your color or whatever.

4-00:15:46

McGarrigle: I'm not sure where to go with that Russ, to explore now and in the future—want to explore

4-00:15:48

Ellis: So don't!

4-00:15:48

McGarrigle: —what the escape hatch is for you because that's not an obvious escape hatch for everybody—

4-00:16:00

Ellis: No, I know that.

4-00:16:01

McGarrigle: —too, so what are the skills did you use to navigate other, and I think that's—

Ellis: —Let's come back to it. Let's come back to it. I think it is worth exploring. I am one person, and my strategies and my tactics in effect—I haven't felt at all guileful about, “Now, how do I live this life, and how do I get around this and do that?”

4-00:16:23

McGarrigle: No, I didn't mean it in that sense.

4-00:16:25

Ellis: I didn't think you did.

4-00:16:26

McGarrigle:

More in terms of—I don't even know how to name it. It's survival, it's intellect, it's instinct, it's opportunity, it's creating opportunity because opportunity doesn't necessarily come packaged. It's your talent that you bring, it's what you make, how you direct yourself. It's a lot of different things.

4-00:16:50

Ellis:

Yes. And you know what? One of my colleagues at Cal, a black professor, was born in the South. He wasn't that old when he came here, but I know, from talking to him, that his experience of race and class and so forth is such that he would never be comfortable stepping too far away from the setup that he was trained to be part of. There are just things that he wouldn't do that were never a problem for me. Not that that makes me wonderful, it's just that I could slop over into something in devil-may-care ways that he wouldn't, just because of the more highly structured caution that he got through his experiences with coming to his maturity in the South. I'm very aware of that. As a matter of fact, on the racial front, in my life that's been a big dividing line. There are people who ultimately—I'll say this, I'm not sure I'm going to want to have it on the record—ultimately are comfortable with black people, not white people. I knew that was true in a lot of my family. Certainly Marjorie, my stepmother. My father, in important respects. But I somehow—[pause]—it's weird. It actually ties Thelton and Troy and me together in the sense that it's been, if not easy, readily possible to slop over into a lot of worlds you weren't born into. I don't know what that's about, and I do want to come back to it. It's very important for me to say this. Assuming we're going to last and these nuclear weapons aren't going to blow us all up, I really want that to be on the record, who was I in this state? Who was I, in this state, in contrast to Troy, say, in Chicago? Or Thelton. Or of any number of people I know who were from the same kind of background.

Anyway, the way I got there was thinking of that one summer, that endless summer. It still makes me smile, remembering how it just would never end. It was just all play. [laughs] New configurations of games and kids and—you know.

4-00:20:25

McGarrigle:

When you start your life in Fontana, then, are you enrolled in first grade?

4-00:20:32

Ellis:

Probably.

4-00:20:35

McGarrigle:

Probably?

4-00:20:36

Ellis:

Probably.

4-00:20:38

McGarrigle:

Do you walk to school from the farm, or do you take a bus?

4-00:20:39

Ellis: It's a long walk to get to a bus, a *long* walk to get to a bus.

4-00:20:44

McGarrigle: And you go with other children—

4-00:20:46

Ellis: Yes, right.

4-00:20:48

McGarrigle: —from the family?

4-00:20:49

Ellis: No, not from the family, other children my same age. No, other children of different ages. In the household, let's see, there were—now, Dorothy, where had Dorothy gone? Because Dorothy maybe was living there when I first got there. But then her brothers, Joe, who was quite a bit older than me, and then Walter, who was closest to me and very important in my life, were in this very small place.

4-00:21:36

McGarrigle: There's no relation to Al Broussard, is there, that you know of?

4-00:21:46

Ellis: I don't know. You know, this is a big name, Broussard. It's a big name.

4-00:21:48

McGarrigle: Okay.

4-00:21:46

Ellis: My guess, it's probably New Orleans—

4-00:21:53

McGarrigle: Because he's from Louisiana.

4-00:21:55

Ellis: Yes. My guess is that's where it comes from. The Joiners are from Louisiana, too, so maybe—I don't know how that connection worked. But Joe was sullen, older, did not talk much, a bright guy, as I recall. I mean, I always remember looking up to him as the big smart guy who had things to say on topics that were different from Eddie and Josephine, who didn't talk much at all and just came to—she was about Jesus all the time. And Eddie didn't say much. He worked. He was just a working animal.

4-00:22:55

McGarrigle: Did they have their own children, Russ?

4-00:23:01

Ellis: There was a picture of a son, their son, in the little highly formal living room that you never could use. And he died in his twenties. I never learned what of, or anything.

4-00:23:22

McGarrigle: So you essentially go to a farm situation, where you're the youngest child but there are other Broussard children?

4-00:23:29

Ellis: Yes, yes, two guys.

4-00:23:31

McGarrigle: And Dorothy.

4-00:23:34

Ellis: But Dorothy, I don't remember living with Dorothy. I remember visiting the farm and Dorothy being there, and she was around, but I don't know where she had gone to. She basically married the older brother of my best friend. My best friend was Billy Henry, who's—I talked about his birthday, June 21<sup>st</sup>. Mine's June 16<sup>th</sup>, and Billy Henry's is June 21<sup>st</sup>. I still remember. He lived a long way—I had to walk through a lot of scary bushes, across a long field. If I stayed too long, I'd have to take the shortcut home in the dusk or something. Funny things would go running around in the dark. There were lots of things, rattlesnakes and coyotes and badgers and so forth. I wasn't appropriately afraid, but big bushes in the dark could take funny shapes. But I would go to Billy's house, Billy Henry. He was my friend.

4-00:24:35

His older brother, Vernon, married Dorothy, right. And we lived with Vernon and Dorothy in Los Angeles. There's Marjorie, Russell Senior, and Russell Junior went to live with Vernon and Dorothy in that same area, around 132<sup>nd</sup> and Central. They lived, Vernon and Dorothy, lived in a place called George Washington Carver Manor, and Billy lived with them. They hadn't had children by then—and I'll come back to Fontana, I promise—and then we lived with them in the tiny house, Marjorie, Russell, and Russ Junior, until our place was finished, and we would go visit our place. It was being finished, nearby in George Washington Carver Manor Annex, so that's where I lived through high school.

So anyway, Fontana. I think when I first went to live there, the farm was about twenty acres. As I mentioned, it was a black enclave, severely enforced de facto segregation. It wasn't de jure, I don't think they could, even then, have gotten away with it. I don't know. But I loved my school life, had a great time at Etiwanda Elementary School, just a *great* time. Very caring teachers. I remember, like, on Thanksgiving or around in there, we'd become Pilgrims and we'd construct houses and butcher paper to make the walls, and we'd make candles and bring in soap and extract candles out of—I forget how. But I had a great time. That was a very good experience. And lots of stagecraft. Again, I remember singing there at Etiwanda. I sang "O, Holy Night," and I began to have a voice around there, around Etiwanda. Well, around that time—and Bobby Breen—you both are too young to remember that name, but

he was in the movies, and he was a boy singer, on the water a lot, boats. I think it was Italian movies he made. A lot of people admired Bobby Breen.

4-00:27:36

McGarrigle: Did you have an awareness of yourself as a student at that time, the kind of student you were?

4-00:27:44

Ellis: Whether I was good or not?

4-00:27:45

McGarrigle: Yes. I'm thinking you were a good student.

4-00:27:51

Ellis: I had a permanent problem that plagued me at Etiwanda. I couldn't shut up. I was always talking. That would get me in a lot of trouble. Teachers were exasperated with me a lot because I was always talking. An indelible memory for me is the long walk home when they kept me after school for talking, when the teacher kept me after school. "Okay, Russell, I have warned you. Now you go blah blah, and you're going to stay after and read!" or write something, you know, I had some kind of punishment. Then I had to walk home. And I looked at it recently. It was probably a five-mile walk. There was one very bad moment in the walk because there were these massive power lines, and sometimes it would be foggy out there, and you know how the fog gets on those power lines and they crackle and hiss. I'd run under those. I'd get up my courage and run under those. They were like big monsters. But I'd walk across—I'd always take a shortcut. In country reckoning, if there's not a fence and you're trying to get there [demonstrates], you go there [demonstrates a different direction]. You don't follow the grid. I'd walk through grape vineyards, Virginia Dare, a big wine producer, grape producer. There were orange groves, lots of orange groves in that part of the world. I would eat grapes. One day I ate something that was basically, that was a green, very hot pepper I ate, which I remember burned my lips awfully.

4-00:30:23

But one of the walks had a magical end to it. I had some money in my pocket, like fifteen cents or something, for some reason. I have no idea why. I got to about a mile away from the house. There was an airfield. The remnants of it are still there. It's a tiny little airfield. And then there was a store right there. I think the street is Baseline, and Baseline is still there. I didn't spend a lot of time in that part of town. Landon, we called it, L-a-n-d-o-n. Rockville was our name for it because it was the bottom of what I learned was an alluvial fan. There used to be a glacier that came down and ground the rocks, so a lot of the houses were made of those rocks. But I went into that store. It was a very hot day. I had walked a long, long time to get back to the house. And I went into the store, and I took out a nickel, and I bought a bag of Fritos. There are three culinary moments in my life that are really, really big. That was one of them.

That was one of the best-tasting things I've ever had [laughs], a whole bag of Fritos. Ah. So, anyway.

4-00:32:19

McGarrigle: So you were there for your elementary school years, you're in Fontana, then.

4-00:32:25

Ellis: Yes, I think I made it through the fifth grade.

4-00:32:29

Wilmot: Before going back to Los Angeles?

4-00:32:33

Ellis: Yes, right.

4-00:32:34

Wilmot: Now, I may have missed this. You said housing certainly was *de facto*—*de jure*—well, it was *de facto* segregation, segregated. Education?

4-00:32:45

Ellis: No.

4-00:32:47

Wilmot: Elementary school?

4-00:32:49

Ellis: No, no, no. Etiwanda, there was everybody. There were Mexican kids; they called themselves *Mexicanos*, and they called everybody else *Americanos*. There were some Irish kids. I don't know what their families did. There were Italians. One of my friend's last name was Pizzuto. I remember thinking Phil Rizzuto was, what, second base for the Dodgers, I think. And I remember thinking what the connection was between those names. But at school I had all kinds of friends. I went home—we dispersed to segregated living conditions. The *Mexicanos* went back to Chino, where they went, and the Italian kids, their families worked in the vineyards and in the orange groves. And maybe the other kids' families worked at Kaiser Steel, which was a big employer, big, big employer. And Kaiser Steel was put there—I always related to the searchlights that I saw, that we celebrated, and enjoyed during blackouts because evidently it was not a good economic decision to put Kaiser Steel where it was, but there was government intervention because they thought the distance from the coastline would protect the industry from Japanese subs that might be able to launch missiles at it. And there were Japanese subs that made it along the coast of California during the Second World War.

4-00:34:48

Wilmot: Were there any Japanese-Americans in—not Etiwanda, but in Fontana?

4-00:35:00

Ellis: Not that I remember, not that I remember.



4-00:35:05

McGarrigle: You described the Joiners a little bit, Josephine as being very church-going and her husband as being very hard-laboring.

4-00:35:18

Ellis: Yes.

4-00:35:19

McGarrigle: How would you describe that household?

4-00:35:21

Ellis: The household was workmanlike. It was well organized. She cooked all the time. She was always putting up jams and foodstuffs from the garden, always cooking. Dinner was always tasty to me. Another one of my culinary experiences was tasting tender meat. I think it was lamb. I still love lamb. I'm still looking for that experience. Because the meat was never tender in Fontana, but we, even I, killed so many animals that we ate and froze. But we killed our pigs and put the meat in the freezer. We killed some calves and put that meat in the freezer. Then we raised our own vegetables, almost the whole time I was there, or the whole time I was there—corn and peas and stuff like that.

4-00:36:39

Wilmot: When you say it was a twenty-acre farm, was this the kind of farm that what you raised there was the business of the farm, or was it what you raised there fed the family?

4-00:36:48

Ellis: Eddie Joiner sold some of the livestock at auction in Chino. I never paid that much attention to what he did with the produce we generated that was beyond what we could consume. I would imagine, especially during the war, it was pretty dear and important to other people. But everybody else in the neighborhood was doing the same thing. He was, as it turned out, especially efficient at doing this kind of work. For a while, we had turkeys, we had cattle. I'd say at one point, when the farm was twenty acres, we may have had ten cows. And then he would sell the calves. We would slaughter some. My guess is that some of what we slaughtered, he sold and gave to other people. He was a carpenter, and he built things for money in the town and on other projects. Did I mention to you his leaving me in the car?

4-00:38:08

Wilmot: Yes.

4-00:38:09

Ellis: Right. And I have a feeling—he was in the union, and his union work as a carpenter was mysterious and over there someplace else. My guess is that he wasn't black in that work. That's my guess. But the household was full of intention. There was a piano.

4-00:38:32

Wilmot: Full of intention.

4-00:38:33

Ellis: There was a piano. I took piano lessons from Mrs. Muton, Muton [now pronouncing it as a French name], who lived next door, in a house made entirely of this alluvial rock. Mrs. Muton lived alone. I *hated* going there for lessons. I think it was my father's idea that I take these lessons and I didn't enjoy it. But Mrs. Muton had a nice, mysterious pond in front of her house, that had all kinds of frogs and other things in it, and that was kind of fun to go to. The Joiners didn't talk very much. Hardly at all. They hardly talked to each other. And when they did talk, it was about business. It was never exchange of stories or sentiments or recounting anything. When it was time to eat, she would lean out of the back door, out of the kitchen and say, "BOY!" And that was Eddie's name. And that was time to come eat. She called him "boy." There was some inflection in there, "Boy-uh!" And he would get up in the morning, and he'd put on—it didn't matter what the weather was—he would put on long-johns, BVDs, up his arms, down to the ankles. And then he'd put on a pair of pants over those, and then coveralls, into which the hammers and his tools of work would fit. And he'd go out, and he'd milk the cows, he'd fix the fences, he'd feed the hogs, he'd feed the—because we had turkeys for a while, I remember.

4-00:40:59

McGarrigle: Did they own the farm, Russ?

4-00:41:02

Ellis: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

4-00:41:03

McGarrigle: Was that unusual, to own that kind of acreage?

4-00:41:05

Ellis: I now know it wasn't. I couldn't tell you what other people did, concretely, but there were some sort-of friends of mine across the back fence, and their folks owned their property as well. Nobody seemed to have tended their homestead as well as Eddie. I don't know when I first became aware of that, but yes, people owned their stuff. I was back there, not recently, and discovered that it's now changed. There are apartment complexes and all kinds of stuff there in that part of the world. She was indoors most of the time. Sometimes she'd come out to do something. But if she was going to cook a chicken—at first she would kill the chicken, and then later that became my job, to kill the chicken. And I wasn't very good at wringing the chicken's neck. That's a technique. Are you guys aware of the technique?

4-00:42:24

Wilmot: No!

4-00:42:25

Ellis: You basically swing it around and snap it in a certain way. Then it falls down and runs around and you go get it.

4-00:42:31

McGarrigle: Where's it's head?

4-00:42:32

Ellis: Well, no, you have the head in your hand when you do it right. That's the country people that actually—[demonstrates]—the head's in your hand, the chicken's out there, running around. I had a much more humane way. I'd put my foot on its head and pulled. That's the way I actually killed them. Simply the truth. [laughter] And I wore brogans, you know that fold-over brads kind of shoe. You know, the kind of shoe. Eddie had a very nice garage made of this alluvial stone that he'd put up, in which I had quite a magical moment, and he'd work in there. There were tools in there. My dog, Rex, whose name became "Fechiltuchi"—that's how Rex's name transmogrified to Fechiltuchi. He was my really good friend, Rex.

4-00:43:55

Wilmot: Did he come back to L.A. with you?

4-00:43:58

Ellis: No. He didn't belong to me, he belonged to the farm. There was a schedule of crops, and Eddie would experiment. I know we had peanuts one time. I don't remember that it worked out particularly well, but I don't know. I remember digging them up.

4-00:44:26

McGarrigle: Did he have hired labor?

4-00:44:27

Ellis: I don't ever remember hired labor. I don't ever remember Walter or Joe doing any work, either. They weren't there the whole time I was there. No, I don't ever remember anybody hired coming in.

4-00:44:47

McGarrigle: Did you have visits from your father during the years you were there?

4-00:44:50

Ellis: Periodically, yes. I would guess maybe once on furlough from overseas. I don't know the facts of that. He might have been just here, and then on his way to hospital, but I think he actually came back to the States and then went back overseas, yes. Maybe two visits. One of them was very important because the Joiners hit me a lot. It was country stuff. But, I mean, there was a reason to hit every day, practically. She used a switch, which would be some nice stable, big twig off a tree or something like that. I would often have overalls on but no shirt, so I would have to put my arms down in my coveralls to keep the switch from getting the flesh on my arms. He was much rougher. One time my father had come to see me, and I saw him up the long driveway

to the entrance to the farm from where I was working, and was dashing off to see my father, and Eddie hit me with whatever he had in his hand. It was a stick of some sort, because I wasn't free to go. My father reprimanded him there. That was a nice heroic intervention for me. "Don't you *ever* hit my boy!" which of course, he continued to do after my father left.

4-00:46:47

McGarrigle:

Did you stay in contact with the Joiners after you went to live with your father?

4-00:46:54

Ellis:

No. I went to visit with one of my third very-best friends. Thelton and Troy are my main buddies. There's another friend named Bob Kardon—I've given you his name, he lives in Santa Cruz—I took him out there to see how I lived, in my youth. It was very interesting to see his perspective. He's the one who said, "Gee, this is a very middle-class scene." But it was a tiny little postage-stamp scene, but when Bob looked at it, there was dichondra, the tiny little postage-stamp front lawn. It was made of dichondra. There were these—a little wall of cypresses, not very tall. And he's right. I never would have thought of that. I didn't know how to think of that. But I went to visit, and Eddie had sold off—I remember he had sold off a part of the property, about ten acres, to someone else—actually, some kind of distant relative of Josephine's, I think. No, it wasn't. Some funny guy from San Antonio, Texas. Fun guy, interesting guy. Was it San Antonio? Maybe. Eddie had had a stroke. He used to roll his own cigarettes. He would roll his cigarettes in one hand. That was weird. He had papers and a little oval tin of tobacco. I don't remember the name of the tobacco. It was a very famous tobacco. And he just poured that stuff in there and rolled it and smoked these cigarettes. He smoked a lot of cigarettes. Anyway, he'd had a stroke. And I'm sure, the diet. We ate a lot of pork, a lot of beef. We ate vegetables, too, but—what was the question?

4-00:48:58

McGarrigle:

Have you stayed in contact with them?

4-00:49:00

Ellis:

Oh, I went to visit him. Josephine had died, and he had married a younger woman, Eddie. She appeared to be half his age. I don't know how old Eddie would have been. I was in probably my twenties, thirties maybe even. No. I don't know. I can't remember. And he'd had a stroke. He spoke haltingly. It's funny. He was happy to see me, and he got this big laugh going, and through very difficult speech, the first thing he thought to tell his bride was, "I used to beat that boy! [laughs]" [laughs] And I remember taking it as just a fact, but it was a bit alien. Yes, indeed, he used to beat me. Why is that such a delight? Why would that be the first story you would tell your bride? That was so funny.

- 4-00:50:17  
McGarrigle: We could come back to your elementary school later, but I'm wondering, since we're at this point, how did you get rejoined with your father?
- 4-00:50:26  
Ellis: Mmm, '46 or something, '45? I've never been responsible for these dates. I could get them. I don't think they're that important.
- 4-00:50:39  
McGarrigle: Is there a period of time in which you know your father will be coming, or is it a surprise?
- 4-00:50:44  
Ellis: No, it's a complete surprise. I'm sitting in class, at Etiwanda Elementary School. Maybe I know something, but he arrives at the back of the classroom, and oh! [Long pause] Somebody tells me that he's there. I remember the kids in the class saying [weeps] my feet never touched the ground. [weeps] I felt a little bit like he was my escape from prison. That's why. I was happy to see him, but there was also an element of escape from prison. The Joiners were very severe. Anyway, so he came in. He ah, he saved me. He was my hero. My hero came and saved me.
- 4-00:52:57  
McGarrigle: Do you leave at that point? Do you leave school?
- 4-00:53:01  
Ellis: No. Oh, yes, yes, he took me out of school that day. I went back to school subsequently.
- 4-00:53:06  
McGarrigle: But you leave the Joiners from then on?
- 4-00:53:08  
Ellis: Not that day.
- 4-00:53:10  
McGarrigle: No. He prepares something.
- 4-00:53:11  
Ellis: Well, no. He goes to a hospital. So I'm there a long time.
- 4-00:53:19  
McGarrigle: So you're there a long time after that.
- 4-00:53:21  
Ellis: Yes, right.
- 4-00:53:22  
McGarrigle: Another eighteen months.
- 4-00:53:23  
Ellis: Right, but I know I'm going to escape.

4-00:53:26

McGarrigle: Oh, good.

4-00:53:27

Ellis: [laughs] You know, it never occurred to me that I might have worried at some level that he would die, until I met a guy who worked for me, who was my same age, Kurt Lauridsen. And we talked about that, being a child of a dad who had been taken away to this, this scary place and might not come back. [weeps] I don't ever remember admitting those feelings to myself or that thought to myself: 'My dad might die.' But it had to be there. [blows nose] It had to have been there. No, but it establishes a relationship with Marjorie, so she came into my life, and she was very good. A good correspondent. I don't remember writing to her, but I just remember her being careful and thoughtful and caring. I didn't know what to do with her. I wound up being really very competitive with her, when we first lived together. But before when my dad was in the hospital, I think that's when I wrote all those letters, those miserable letters. Oh! I should give those to you guys.

4-00:54:50

Wilmot: You said you might.

4-00:54:52

Ellis: I will. I will. I think I have them all in one place.

4-00:54:56

Wilmot: I've got a question. We're moving toward closing for today. And I have one more question.

4-00:55:04

Ellis: That's a good idea. Sure.

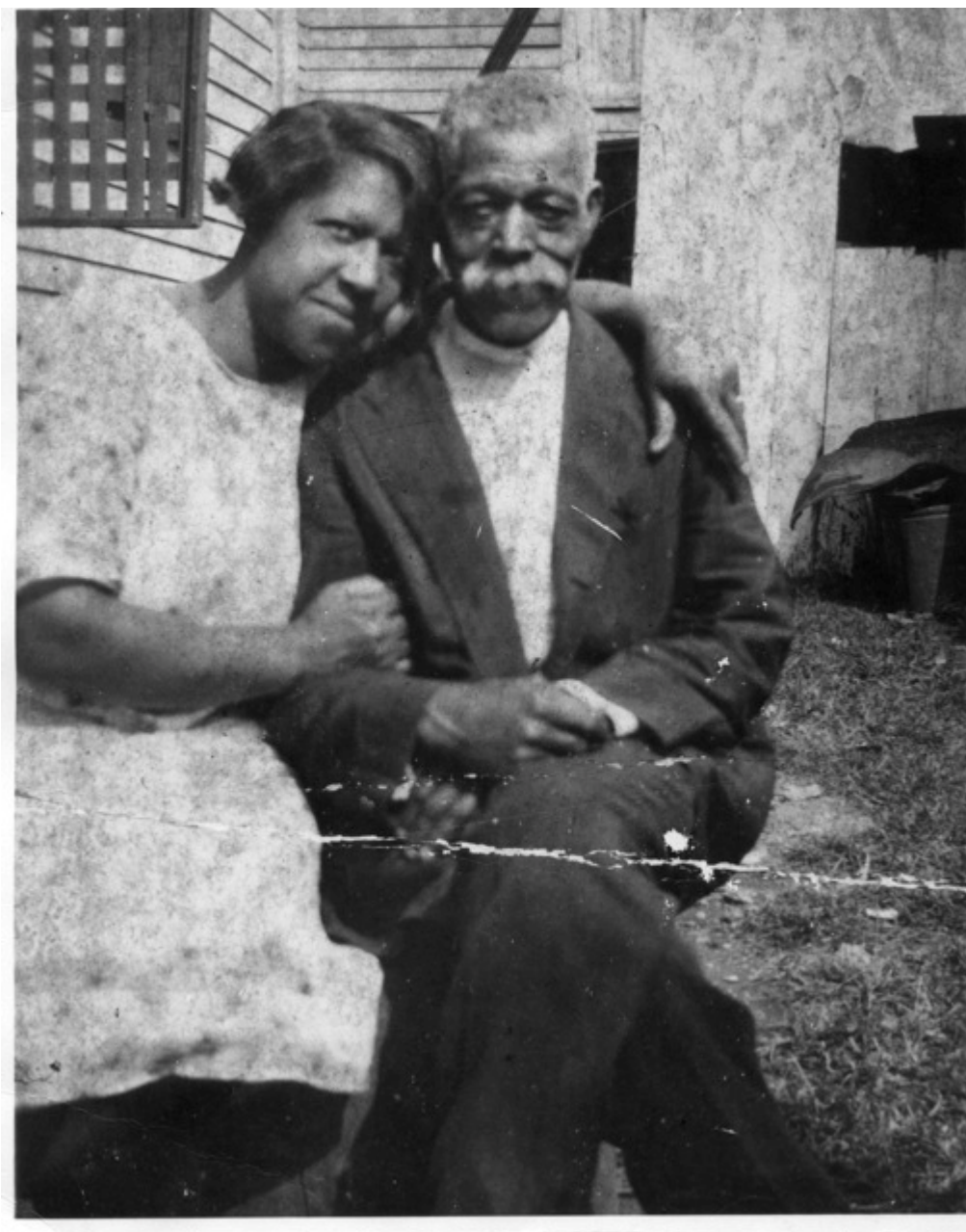
4-00:55:05

Wilmot: Which is, so, which one of your parents has blue eyes?

4-00:55:09

Ellis: Neither, as far as I know. Mine are hazel.

**[end of session]**

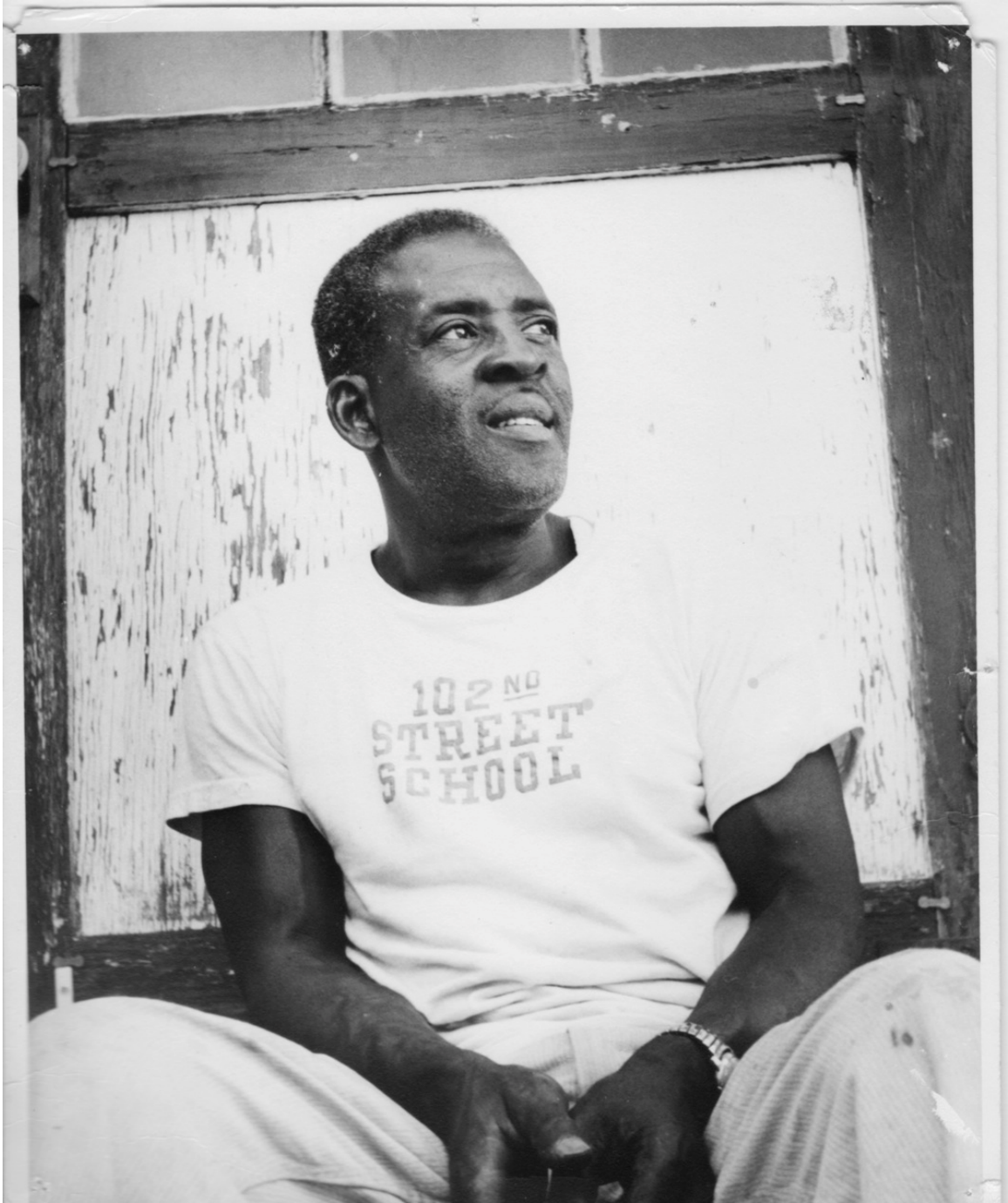


Paternal Grandmother Cora Hickman with second husband "Old Man Ellis"



Paternal grandfather James Minnis circa 1900-1910





Russ Ellis Senior



Step-Mother Marjorie signing her oral history into The Bancroft Library

Interview 3: June 3, 2003

[begin audio file 5]

5-00:00:05

Wilmot: June 3rd, Russ Ellis, interview three.

5-00:00:09

McGarrigle: We wanted today to pick up with childhood and elementary school, and work through high school, and then focus next time more on athletics and college. Not that we are limited to that but that was our timeframe for today.

5-00:00:28

Ellis: Okay.

5-00:00:42

Wilmot: Okay. Let me just get my notes. [flips through pages] Well, the things that I was hoping to get to today, and maybe we can start here, is when you came back from Fontana, if you can kind of give me the sense of the geography of L.A.

5-00:01:14

Ellis: Of L.A.!

5-00:01:15.

Wilmot: Yes. I know I'm asking you—that would be when you were a small boy, and so on one hand, I'm asking you to use your small-boy eyes—

5-00:01:25

Ellis: Yes, yes.

5-00:01:26

Wilmot: —and also I'm asking you to think about it now, as an adult and sociologist, someone with a sociology background. Both of those.

5-00:01:33

Ellis: Yes, yes.

5-00:01:35

Wilmot: It's a huge question.

5-00:01:42

Ellis: Yes. I want to spend a little time back in Fontana before I do that, if that's okay.

5-00:01:49

Wilmot: Of course.

5-00:01:50

Ellis: There's one story that is closed to canned, but I want to tell the story. It's formative for me. Indeed, Fontana is one phase of my life that is very important. All the animals, the hogs, the chicken, the cattle, for a while the turkeys, the buzzards, the coyotes. This makes me a Californian in a very

special way. Certain nights in this place where I lived, it sounded like a *million* coyotes howling in the night. Very few people have that as part of their makeup, that I meet. It was just so important, and so mysterious.

5-00:03:06

McGarrigle: When you think about that period, are there smells? I mean, that's like so many smells associated with what you've just spoken.

5-00:03:15

Ellis: Oh, yes, the chaparral, that Uncle Eddie called the coal-oil weed because it burned so quickly. Yes, the definite smell. The smell of dead things is routine in the country. There's a smashed chick. Eddie would go to the hatchery and get the gunk from the hatchery, which would be eggs that hadn't quite made it, cross-billed chicks—have you ever seen that? These are chicks that are born with their bill like this [demonstrates], so they are going to starve. The production of stuff in the country setting is not very nice to animals. He would bring that stuff back in barrels and feed it to the hogs, so you would hear the little chicks peeping and then you would hear them go squirt! from the hogs chomping down on them. I mean, you know, all of that stuff is so normal in farm life.

5-00:04:29

McGarrigle: Did that become normal to you, Russ?

5-00:04:32

Ellis: I took it for granted.

5-00:04:35

McGarrigle: You did. So in some way, it did become normal.

5-00:04:37

Ellis: Yes, yes, I took it for granted. Sometimes I'll go someplace and there might be a dead animal. I get the smell, if it hasn't been picked up or something like this, and it's for me the same as light rain on undisturbed soil, that delicate smell that you get. Well, this is the smell of animal feces, of dead animals, all the things. Hair! Animals rubbing themselves against things, that has a smell, animal hair. And I'm very nose-oriented. I'm a very nose-oriented person, and sound-oriented because you listen for stuff, too, in ways that you do in the city, but you do different things in the city.

5-00:05:37

They're tremendously formative, and there are all kinds of people still around the world, certainly in the United States fewer, who know about that and know the hard work that goes with it, and know that intersection between wallowing in that stuff and sweating in that stuff and struggling with that stuff, and then cleaning up for a meal. That is a *major* transition. Or the transition of daylight you can work in and then dusk and darkness, which you can no longer work in. Those define days. It's a very concrete and very

interesting kind of thing. It's one of my fascinations with pigs also, that they have a certain kind of integrity that is admirable. There's another thing that—

5-00:06:42

Wilmot:

What do you mean when you say that?

5-00:06:44

Ellis:

Oh, when they're hungry, they really let you know. Have you ever heard a hungry pig or a hog? I mean, they *really* let you know they're hungry. It's so big, the sound. When they stop, when they come to a halt because of heat or fatigue or it's just time to stop, they really cut out. They just go KA-PONG in the mud or the what, the shade. They just go. You can disturb them, but they're circumspect. They just stop.

There was a complication for me—not a complication, it was interesting. But in the city, animal sexuality, except now on the nature shows, you kind of don't look at. But Uncle Eddie used to guarantee that there would be pigs. He would get in the corral with the pigs, and he would take the hog's penis and make sure it got into the sow's vagina. I never figured this out, that they would put up with this, but they did. And the starkness of the scene! Someday you have to look at a photograph of a hog's penis. It's a corkscrew, and it's this strange—and I'm outside the corral, looking at Uncle Eddie doing this, and not knowing why he was doing it but taking it for granted. Later I realized that he wasn't leaving the appearance of piglets to chance. That's what he was doing. He was guaranteeing that would happen.

5-00:08:22

I told this story in my seminar that was conducted when I was being considered for a position here at Cal. People were kind of astonished. I was contrasting country life and urban life and suburban life, and the different kinds of environments. But for me it was so amazing in a way, and then so normal in a way. The taken-for-granted aspect of what happens in that kind of world. And then fattening pigs up, getting them really big. Do you know they can get to 800 pounds? They can get really huge. And then putting them in a trailer and taking them off to auction in Chino and sitting in the Chino auction, watching all these animals. That is part of me that I begin with, that I value a lot. Although I felt abused, and I felt I was in prison much of the time, I was very happy to have the animals, to have the openness, and I feel like I've benefited tremendously from that period of my life, that I wasn't on the streets of L.A., doing other kinds of things. I was out seeing big clouds and big weather and all this kind of stuff.

5-00:09:59

There's one thing, too, I wanted to tell you. It's just a story that I love. It took me a long time to reflect on this. I was getting some psychotherapy in my thirties. I think this is when this thing hit me. You remember I mentioned everybody made some structure or other out of this alluvial stone, this rolled stone?

5-00:10:37

McGarrigle: Yes.

5-00:10:39

Ellis: Well, the garage right near the house is where Uncle Eddie did a lot of his carpentry work. I would often go out there and sit in my dog's bed with him while Uncle Eddie worked. This one day—my dog Fetchiltuchi, whose name was Rex but became Fetchiltuchi. It was a kind of rainy day, and Eddie was working. Taciturn man, with very little to say. I'm sitting in Rex's box, singing, to my dog, and Eddie's working away. And at the end of that work session, he turns to me and he hands me a little wheelbarrow. I mean, this beautiful little wooden wheelbarrow that he'd made *for me*. It was like, "What??" It didn't make any sense at all.

5-00:11:56

So probably thirty years later, I'm going through a tough period in my life, and I have a dream. In this dream, I'm flying, and it was a very important kind of intersection for me in my life. I'm zooming way into the sky, above the clouds, and then behind and over mountains, and then I come down to water, and I come to the surface of the water, and I'm cleaving the surface of the water and back up. And I'm holding onto the handle of the wheelbarrow.

5-00:12:57

McGarrigle: Mmm!

5-00:12:58

Ellis: Isn't that great? It was such a great thing, that one little act of care from people who didn't show their care was so important to me. I told that story at a graduation ceremony for disabled students at Cal, and it was so amazing because of the dream and the liberation of the flying. It was just a very important thing for them to hear. There's something that I take away from that experience of being there, very cold, very violent environment. But walking away with that. It's very important. Yes, a very important part of me.

5-00:13:40

Wilmot: It also kind of illuminates a little bit his response to you that time when you came to visit many years later.

5-00:13:47

Ellis: Yes, yes. [cross-talk]. Right. [laughs] Right.

5-00:13:48

Wilmot: "I used to beat him," it kind of adds more nuance to—

5-00:13:51

Ellis: He *cared* for me.

5-00:13:59

Wilmot: —texture there.

5-00:14:00

Ellis:

He cared. Just he didn't know how to do it. It wasn't in the repertoire, in either of their repertoires. Once Mama Joiner was in the kitchen, as she often was, doing something or other, and I was in there, and she turned and looked at me, and I said, "Oh, Mama, when you turned and looked at me, your eyes are just like Bossy's," the cow. And there is a languidness to a cow's eyes when they turn. It is so beautiful, you can't believe it. She was so angry at me because I told her she looked like a cow, and I remember—I don't have a lot of regret. I'm sorry she misunderstood. But the totality of the misunderstanding was so hurtful to me. Because it was beautiful, the way she turned. But they didn't—they were—they were heavy-duty Christians of a country sort. Didn't have a whole lot of range emotionally.

5-00:15:14

Wilmot:

Did you call them by Eddie and Mama?

5-00:15:19

Ellis:

Oh, Uncle Eddie and Mama Joiner, right, right. Anyway, getting back on track to the schooling stuff...

5-00:15:35

McGarrigle:

Did you get to tell the story that you wanted to, Russ?

5-00:15:38

Ellis:

Yes, I wanted to tell that particular story, yes. I like that. It's an important story. You also asked me last time what kind of student I was. And I was—I say of my granddaughter, Isabella Ellis, who will be three in October, that she is "scientifically naughty." She watches the TV here, and I say, "Isabella, would you just stay on the rug here? We don't want you too close to the thing." And she is just an absolute genius at tweaking that—see, you know. And you don't want to be rigid about stuff like that. And there are hundreds of things she does, which are always testing the rules. That is who I have been. And I was that in school. I was always talking, always testing the limits. But I didn't feel that's what I was doing, but I know that's what I was doing.

5-00:16:58

McGarrigle:

It must have been hard if the household was such a quiet and forbidding place for language, and here you come into the world with all kinds of ability around language.

5-00:17:15

Ellis:

They never suppressed my speech. The only thing that I—my limits were the constraints of work. Even then, I would screw up. I told you this already, watering the cow, the trough, fill the cow's barrel. Well, Uncle Eddie was the one who maintained the well in Fontana, and water was dear, and the whole little black enclave there of these plots depended on this one well that he maintained. And so I had the job, which wasn't very complex, of filling this barrel that the cows drank out of. Well, then, I'd go off and play, and I'd come back and half the yard would be covered with water because I forgot.

5-00:18:11

McGarrigle: But you were how old at that point?

5-00:18:14

Ellis: Probably seven or eight or something like that. It doesn't matter. I mean, I had a job to do, and so that could get me a whipping or something like that. Or watering the corn, okay? There'd be these rows of corn, say from this end of the house to the back fence, say, okay? My job—no, from the front of the house to the back fence—my job was to irrigate the corn, three rows at a time, because then you'd bank the rows you'd finished, and then you'd open three more, and you blocked the water, and so, the water goes down at a certain pace and sinks in, and waters the roots of the corn. What I figured out is that if I did one row at a time, the water would come rushing out of the standpipe and down to the row and to the end of the corn, and it would all be nice and wet, so I clearly had done it, but I could do three rows twice as fast, one at a time. Of course, the corn wouldn't grow. [laughs] But I had done my job. No matter how often I got smacked for doing that, I tried to sneak and speed it up so that I could then go play and not be trapped all day watering the corn.

5-00:19:52

And weeding and digging and so forth, in the heat, and having a job that wouldn't go away. In farm work, the job is there, and you have to do the job. The only—I thought about American society in this respect—when we had the work done on this room, we had to put a footing right here [indicates location], for earthquake reasons, and so we took the window out. This floor was out. And the workers dug a very large hole right here, probably six feet deep—it's quite a big one—for concrete support here, because this was a load-bearing wall and lots of other changes were made. Our contractor, Adlai Leiby, who is the son of my neighbor at the time, had a Mexican crew. That was the last time I've ever seen people who worked as hard as I remember working, and I realized no American is going to work like that. People don't want to work; it's too hard. This is part of the succession process, I think, in immigration, because those guys worked so hard that I just—images were going off in my mind, memories of working that hard. This is really hard work, living in the country. Anyway, all kinds of other things come up. You see why there's this bias for boys in families in rural settings and why they try to keep them close in, because you got a labor force. You've got to have somebody in the house cooking and so forth, but there was a funny thing there.

5-00:21:56

McGarrigle: Is Mama Joiner making pies and—

5-00:22:01

Ellis: Yes. She's putting up plums and vegetables. Yes, she's putting jars of things away. She's working all the time. She isn't ever not working. This is the truth. And feeding everybody, morning, noon, and dinnertime. And she had to cook things that Uncle Eddie could eat because he didn't have any teeth when I was



there. He had false teeth and would take them out, and of course his face would collapse, which I thought was funny. And so he would cut everything up into these fine little things and make this pie of everything. We might have pork chops and potatoes and this, that, and the other. It would all wind up this mush in the middle of his plate, which she would then smash down and make into a circle and then cut little pieces out and then mush it. He had no teeth to chew. That was funny, I think, to watch.

5-00:23:16

My stepmother Marjorie remembers a grandmother—it's in the oral history—who got the opportunity to gum the meat before other people ate it. In other words [laughs heartily], she gummed the juices out of it, and then it got cut up and distributed. [laughs] That's love, that's also survival and division of labor, and how you keep everybody going. Just some scenes from that life, just some scenes from that life.

5-00:23:59

School. Again, Etiwanda Elementary School. Actually, I got some maps for you, to show you where that was. [opens map] Here's Kaiser Steel. I lived up around here [indicates location]. It's changed so much, I don't know quite—see, you remember when I said I walked from Etiwanda back home? Okay, here's the scale. This is a half mile, so when I was kept after school, I would walk from here—okay, now, this is a mile and a half, this scale, so this equals a mile and a half. I'd walk from here over here to there, and we lived up in there, so that's about five miles. You remember the Frito story? One of my best meals ever? That store was just down this airport. This is all changed. Here's a country club now, and here's another country club. Up in here, where I was—you see there's no housing on this. And that's that alluvial fan.

5-00:25:31

Wilmot: Is this now kind of suburb?

5-00:25:33

Ellis: It's gotten kind of fancy, yes. And I'm told by a friend of mine that I just spoke to on the phone a couple of weeks ago that this whole area has gotten really quite upscale.

5-00:25:45

Wilmot: Right by Etiwanda Avenue?

5-00:25:46

Ellis: Yes, yes, right. But that's the town of Etiwanda. But this was the big street, Highland. That was our big road.

5-00:25:55

McGarrigle: It was a great idea to bring out the maps.

5-00:26:00

Ellis: Oh, yes, okay. These are all off the computer. I was just trying to locate where I was. And we can be more specific about it. I can get more details.

5-00:26:13

Wilmot:

This is very detailed. You described this time in your life with such care and attention for the sensual experience of being there that I would love to see the sculpture that you made from that.

5-00:26:27

Ellis:

Okay, okay, all right. Yes, thanks for the language, “sensual.” That is very important.

5-00:26:36

Wilmot:

Yes.

5-00:26:38

Ellis:

That’s very important.

5-00:26:38

Wilmot:

That’s something that I’ve noticed many times in the way that you convey your experiences, from being a small person.

5-00:26:44

Ellis:

Yes. And animals are good for that, because animals don’t have any guile. They do what they do. I mean, unless they’re trained not to. And so when you’re in the country, you watch animals. You watch animals fight and kill each other. You watch hawks capture snakes. It’s very different from this kind of life, where you see birds and maybe some squirrels, a random possum, and then everything else domesticated, cats and dogs, unless you go to the zoo.

5-00:27:31

McGarrigle:

Yes.

5-00:27:31

Wilmot:

And then you see unhappy animals.

5-00:27:34

Ellis:

Well, they may be content, but they’re obviously not doing what they did when they were in nature. But that was good. The country was very good as a sensual locus. I occupied my body in ways differently than I would, I think, if I just lived in the city. Even running, even running.

5-00:28:00

Wilmot:

From that starting point, how would you start—tell me if it’s too soon to go there, but from that starting point, then how do you come back to the city?

5-00:28:12

Ellis:

I had a lot of preparation, as you remember. That is, my father comes back, and then he goes to the hospital, and so then I’m writing to him with great longing to escape and knowing that I’m going to be liberated, not thinking that he was in any danger that he could die from, and I don’t think he was, but he was in the hospital for a long time. And then one day, the day arrives that I go back. They come and get me. I have no memory of either being taken there or leaving. I’m astonished that I could want so very much to capture memories of

that and be unable to. My mother's leaving—the one thing I do remember about things falling apart was that there was a very bright light that I associated with fear or just major unhappiness or something, a big round light that when I closed my eyes was there night after night after night, and over the years it got smaller and smaller until it went away. But I had this thing that was just glaring at me, that was actually quite frightening for years. It kind of sits there instead of memories of things falling apart and my leaving to go to Fontana. I remember nothing about packing up and going and arriving. Weird. And I don't have any memories of going back to L.A., but I went back and lived with my father and Marjorie. That's what I called her then.

5-00:30:14

McGarrigle: Did you—

5-00:30:16

Ellis: She had wanted me to call her Mom. She declared that about five years ago, and I do. It's not always easy. We had a very volatile relationship at the beginning, and for a long time, until I grew up and realized that she wasn't going to change. It's kind of like a relationship. You don't go into a relationship planning to change someone. You better not! [laughs] You better take what's there. Well, I was a kid, right? My first thing when we got back was, "Where do we stay?" Where did we stay? Was it with Vernon and Dorothy? I don't think that's where we first stayed, but I remember asking her—no, my father—what room *she* was going to sleep in, because obviously my father and I were going to be in the same room, and then where would she be? They had to break it to me that I was going to be sleeping in a separate room.

5-00:31:30

McGarrigle: You were about eleven at this time?

5-00:31:32

Ellis: Twelve. Yes, twelve. That's a bit late for all that, huh?

But anyway, so...Oh, God, I had very—I don't know where my temper came from, but we had a tough time. We had a tough time for a while. The transition? I had had a chance to spend a couple of times with my father in L.A. before he went to the hospital, and there's one scene I remember—"scene"! We're in a room together, and there's a turntable. Turntables show up. They do. And he is playing Debussy's *Claire de Lune*. And he had aspirations for me. He even shared with me a vision, I think, of me walking up some big important stairway, outdoor marble stairs. I think he gave me this picture of myself. But he had pretensions. He had notions of mobility and class and all this other stuff. That's what Marjorie was, I think. Graduated from Hunter [College], articulate, educated, aggressive about life, not taking stuff, pushing hard in the world. And I think he thought she would be "good for me." And he was right. She was. She was.

5-00:33:20

McGarrigle: Do you remember the first time you met her?

5-00:33:21

Ellis: When was the first time I met her? I think I may have met her briefly before he went to war, because, see, he met her at Aunt Virginia's house. Marjorie's mother, Lillian, had a sister, Virginia, and Virginia lived just two doors down from this family where my father put me, at the cul-de-sac near Central Avenue and 41<sup>st</sup> Place. He met Marjorie at Virginia's house. That's where they met. He was rooming there, and I think I met her once there, and I certainly did again see her there after he came back and was in the hospital. [sighs softly] I'm wanting to tell too much of my story. Let me go ahead to the school thing. Very, very interesting transition. Okay? Can I go?

5-00:34:35

Wilmot: Yes.

5-00:34:38

Ellis: Okay. [chuckles] I'm living at—you remember Carver Manor, George Washington Carver Manor and George Washington Carver Manor Annex. Well, in both of those situations, I'm on the west side of Central Avenue at 132<sup>nd</sup> Street, roughly, okay? That's El Segundo. But you don't need that detail right now. The schools were strangely arranged there in that part of Southern California at the time. There were these junior high schools that went from, like, the sixth grade or the fifth grade to the tenth grade, Bellflower, and several others in the area. There were about six of them or seven of them. Yes. And then—no, I've got that wrong. But anyway, that was a common pattern of class arrangement at the time in many of the high schools—junior high schools, I'm sorry, junior high school. And then everybody from these junior high schools went to Compton High School, which was the eleventh and twelfth grade, but it was also the same campus where Compton Junior College was, so it was a mixture of the last two years of high school and two years of community college—junior college, we called it then. Now, we didn't go to the same classes with the junior college students, but we were all on the same bell system. It was a very kind of adult setting, actually, a lot of autonomy, a lot of not monitoring, which we'd get ordinarily in that transition. But I remember liking that a lot.

5-00:37:17

Well, anyway, one of the more difficult periods for me, though, was right after I got to Los Angeles, and I went to what was then a new junior high school. Enterprise, it was called. It changed a lot over the years. But I almost wept because all my friends lived on the other side of Central Avenue. Not all my friends, but a lot of them. And they went to what was about a 90 percent or 98 percent black school called Willowbrook, and that was the hip, good school to go to and so forth. I went to Enterprise and probably there were thirteen black students there at the time I went.

5-00:38:23

Wilmot: And this is starting in what grade?

5-00:38:26

Ellis: I think I'm in the sixth grade by then.

5-00:38:29

Wilmot: So this is your first year back.

5-00:38:31

Ellis: Yes, right.

5-00:38:32

Wilmot: You have friends at this point already.

5-00:38:34

Ellis: Yes, there were lots of kids in the neighborhood, further up, where Dorothy and Vernon lived. There were kids on that street, and you know how kids are. I was athletically inclined, and everybody played sports, so you show up, you find your place, and if you got anything, you get to play, and that's your introduction. I did have some problems. [laughs] Two quick stories. One was when I went to Enterprise and got dressed for gym, changed into my gym clothes for the first time. You remember I told you how I dressed, with the coveralls?

5-00:39:21

McGarrigle: Yes.

5-00:39:22

Ellis: And I had long johns under them and these brogans, right? So I went into the gym, and everybody's undressing. The first time I undressed, these guys looked at me. [laughs] First off, I've gone on coveralls and then these brogans, which were these real heavy-duty shoes. And then they see the long johns, and people start laughing, and they're practically falling out of the window, you know? [laughs] Of course, I'm humiliated, and it took me a while to understand what happened to me. Until I lean on Marjorie to get me some jeans, and she doesn't get me Levis, which is the ones you had to have. And there's a whole thing you did with them. You'd cut off the belt loops, and you let them hang off your butt the way kids do now. It's a funny thing to see that come back. And we actually were supposed to show your underwear. Generally, you did that only when you were with each other and you kind of pulled them back up when you got near adults, but not necessarily. And then you never clean them, so you can stand them up in a corner, they'd be so caked with dirt. But that thing about these guys falling down, laughing at me. So until I got my jeans, I would peel my clothes off, just trying to hide what the layers were and so forth.

5-00:40:54

Wilmot: Did you earn a nickname for yourself with those long johns?

5-00:40:56

Ellis:

Lips. No, just Lips was my nickname when I got to L.A. And everybody had a nickname. There was Pig; there was Frog; there was Vine, who was a guy who drank a lot of wine. This wasn't till later, in high school. You had to have a nickname. You couldn't survive without a nickname. You couldn't survive *with* one sometimes, but they decided. That was my nickname.

It was interesting, because it was like my—I got in trouble speaking too clearly and articulating and being maybe a little big foggy in my concepts. I'd do these *very* elaborate statements of things. One of my friends said to me at one point, "You know, Russ, I asked you the directions to the grocery store, and you say, 'Well, it depends how you think about it.'" [laughs] That was their characterization of me. That would get me in trouble sometimes in high school and junior high school. People would say, "What's wrong with you, boy? Can't you talk straight?" They loved it in college. I had a great time in college, as soon as I learned how to *be* in college, at UCLA, this handicap was a real benefit.

5-00:42:21

McGarrigle:

You were a pre-philosopher.

5-00:42:24

Ellis:

Oh, yes, no question.

5-00:42:25

McGarrigle:

Or you were a philosopher.

5-00:42:26

Ellis:

And my lips were something of ridicule. Not ridicule. Anything that stood out, they'd call you. Frog looked like a frog. He was a long jumper, broad jump we called it in those days. And he was built very much like a frog. Pig was a sprinter, and I swear to God, he looked very much like a pig. There was a guy they called Hump. You know why?

5-00:42:53

Wilmot:

No.

5-00:42:54

Ellis:

Well, it was probably scoliosis or something. But it was just BING—what stands out. Name it. That's you. I have a friend, a Jewish friend from New York, up the street. I won't say his name, but his name was Runt. [laughs] That's what it was, you know? And you couldn't fight it, you just surrendered to it. And in a way, it was kind of okay because it located you. You had your location.

5-00:43:26

Wilmot:

Yeah.

5-00:43:28

Ellis:

It's painful, but everybody knows who's being discussed, and you have a place. One time, a little later in my schooling I got in a little trouble because after you played baseball or football or whatever you did in the park or on the rock-strewn field, there would be a time of just kind of talk and coming down on somebody or something like that, or there would be some kind of intersection where there was another kind of competition, which was woofing and capping, playing the dozens, or something like that. As you know, it's much written about and highly structured, at the time. This would be the forties, right? When someone first turned the cap on me, they said, "Hey, hey, Lips, how's Marjie?" or "How's your mama?" And then the presumption of calling her by her first name. Then you'd say something, "Didn't I see Marjie at the"—you know. And then there'd be something.

5-00:44:43

My first experience with that, and when I realized I was being ridiculed and she was being ridiculed, I went home and I got this .22 that my father [laughter] had brought back. It was disabled, but they didn't know that, that it had been plugged or something, that he had brought back from the war. He brought me back several kind of interesting martial souvenirs. And I was walking toward the guys who had talked about Marjie with this .22, and a bunch of people came, and in a friendly way kind of restrained me and so forth. They found that funny also, that I would—that's my reaction. But I never got good at it, at the dozens and woofing and capping.

But what I did do that got me in trouble is that I would actually go get actual information. There was a famous basketball player, Woodrow Salsbury, Woody Salsbury, he was out of Compton. He played in the pros, too. I think he was in Philadelphia for a while. Woody said something about Marjie. And I said, "Your mother was arrested at the 120<sup>th</sup> Street market for stealing beans." And he was going to take me out, because the truth, that's out of bounds. If you can't enter the suppleness and play in there, then don't play. And there's another rule: If you grin, you're in. That is, if you laugh at something, if you suffer, because she caps on you and I crack up, you can turn on me. Like, you know, "Hey, motherfucker, what's—?" "Your mama—!" and so forth. We didn't say "motherfucker" as freely in those days. But I did it on purpose. If I had anything on anybody, I would say, "Well, okay, how 'bout this?" [laughs] And then people left me alone. So I guess what I'm saying is that there was a whole social world I had to learn. Talking about geography, there was a whole social world, the geography of the social world, and how you'd be in that world that I had to learn, and how to place yourself in it. Sports, hugely important, social agility in the schoolyard, in the group sessions. Bill Cosby does a wonderful thing on this, a skit he has called "The Regular Way." Have you guys seen it?

5-00:47:34

Wilmot:

No.

5-00:47:35

Ellis:

Well, sex was hugely important, and whether you had pubic hair—this is not new, we know this from kid culture and so forth—but things like whether you had pubic hair, the size of your penis, whether you had sexual experience, and what you had to say about it, and how cool you were. Well, Cosby's skit ends where this guy's been bragging, and the last question as he's walking away is, "So how did you do it, man?" He said, "Oh, the regular way," which is just—he has no idea what he's talking about. He had no sexual experience. He's made all these—done all these bragging things and so forth, and someone asked for some detail, and he escapes, saying, "The regular way," not knowing what he's talking about. It's a very funny skit. But that was very important stuff, and there were guys who had actually done it, we thought.

5-00:48:38

Wilmot:

They said.

5-00:48:40

Ellis:

And many people said that they had and so forth and so on. And that wasn't anything I dealt with in the country, because the people who might be involved that way weren't around my school in Etiwanda, and not around my life that much. Walter brought some of it to the house, and Joe Broussard, nothing at all. I don't know what world Joe lived in, even. So that was kind of a shock because you had to develop capacities. You either had to have something to say or you had nothing to say on those topics. Generally what you do is you don't have anything to say, unless you want to be a player in that, and then you want to pretend and try to pull it off.

5-00:49:32

McGarrigle:

Were your father and Marjorie giving you information—

5-00:49:37

Ellis:

No.

5-00:49:38

McGarrigle:

—and preparing you in any way?

5-00:49:39

Ellis:

No. I felt like my father would have if I had asked him, and I felt—it's interesting you ask. I felt very comfortable with his manhood, and I think I leaned on the fact of his experience in the world. If I needed to ask him some stuff, I could. But I had learned to enjoy, in the country, a radical separation between kid world and adult world. Seen but not heard? You know that whole thing about kids, in the country context? It works both ways. It's wonderful to be invisible, as a kid. And I'm amazed that it looks like a lot of young people don't particularly value that anymore. I thought it was great. And so I didn't do a whole lot of intruding into my parents' worlds for advice or information in certain kinds of ways; others, I did. Class? I remember it being okay. I remember it being okay. It wasn't awful. Languages were fun to do. I still now—yes, I still now remember—I think I may have been at Compton, or it



could have been my last year at Enterprise, but I learned Shylock's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*. Until age got me, I could do it automatically, just because I had had memorized it and so I had it available to me.

5-00:51:53

McGarrigle: Was it part of a production?

5-00:51:54

Ellis: Yes, [recites] "Signor Antonio, many a time and oft. In the Rialto have you rated me."

Yes, yes, it was part of a production. I was Shylock.

5-00:52:03

McGarrigle: And you had to try out for that?

5-00:52:05

Ellis: I think I was given it. I think I was assigned it.

5-00:52:09

McGarrigle: But you were liking theater?

5-00:52:11

Ellis: Yes, yes. I was open to it. That interests me, just to say it here, that I was open to a lot of things, and other students like me, who were, in those days "Negro" students—some were open to it, yes, yes.

5-00:52:33

McGarrigle: At Enterprise you were one of only a handful—

5-00:52:37

Ellis: Yes, thirteen. That was the first year I was there. They grew rapidly after that. I don't know how they tweaked the boundaries or what happened, but racially I was less lonely by the time I got out, which was, what, five years later, four years.

5-00:52:54

McGarrigle: Do you have memories of what that first year was like, where you're in a real minority?

5-00:52:59

Ellis: I remember a guy called me a nigger behind me, and I turned around and punched him in the head. I remember that. I remember the big guys, the intimidating big guys. The world was really stratified. Interesting to remember that, how stratified the world is. That came in handy when I had kids because I gave a piece of advice to my son once when he was being intimidated by someone, Billy, and Billy was bigger than him, and he'd get David in a corner. David was kind of a star with the saxophone early on. Billy was getting him because, you know, "You think you're cute." And David was small until he was some time out of high school. I said to him, "The next time

Billy touches you, you just say, at the top of your lungs, ‘Hey, Billy, take your hands off me! Leave me alone, man! I’m not trying to make any trouble!’ And that will let everybody know that Billy’s jacking you up, messing with you.” And it worked, because people looked at Billy and saw that he was messing with David. That made Billy glow in the dark and put him on other folks’ agenda, so Billy left David alone.

5-00:54:27

Wilmot:

It’s surprising you didn’t tell him about the .22.

5-00:54:30

Ellis:

[laughs] No, that’s not a solution I would recommend. As a matter of fact, David had to remind me, there was a fight. We [Julie Shearer and Russ] were dating, and I was spending the night here, and there was a big fuss out front, and it was a fight. It was three guys on another guy. Oh, they were doing terrible things. And I went downstairs in my socks and shoes and I’d sit there and yell, “Hey, what’s going on?” Which generally, in a bourgeois neighborhood, is enough to slow things down. Indeed, they did stop, and they didn’t give me—they didn’t let me know that my presence had started anything. They sauntered away, but they stopped fighting, and let the guy go. And I told my son that. He said, “Pop, don’t do that. These days, they will shoot you just because you’re there.” You know. So, that was a silly thing I did. It was high drama. I knew the gun couldn’t shoot. It was a junior high school solution, the kind of solution you work up in front of a mirror in the bathroom with the door closed, when you’re getting back at the bully. [laughs]

5-00:55:50

Wilmot:

It’s a serious solution, because it’s decisive, and it’s conclusive.

5-00:55:55

Ellis:

Oh, yes.

5-00:55:57

Wilmot:

It ends the conversation.

5-00:55:58

Ellis:

[laughs] Right!

5-00:56:03

Wilmot:

Were you popular in high school? In the kind of high school you’re talking about, which was pre-high school, extended middle school?

5-00:56:11

Ellis:

Here’s what happened. Here’s what happened. A really great question, for all kinds of reasons. You know, we study freshmen, we ask freshmen at Cal every year a set of questions, and their two biggest fears is they will fail academically or they will be unpopular. Interesting. Just far and away the biggest issues on their mind. Won’t get along with their roommates. I was shy and small. And one day, after a period of time watching some guy—I forget who the guy was—I realized I didn’t want to be shy and invisible and small

anymore, so I copied him. Then I wasn't shy anymore. That is to say, in order to copy him, I had to be more outgoing and joke a lot and have things to say. So it was an almost conscious event, very quick, and it worked. That is, I had things to say, people were interested and said things back to me, and then I'd get in conversations, I'd get in arguments. So life changed. Life changed.

5-00:58:02

Then, as I got fast, which I didn't really do—I was always athletic, or at least I intruded myself in the athletic world. I wanted to play baseball because my dad had been a baseball player. When I got to high school, I remember—and I tell you, one of the worst feelings in the world is getting hit with a baseball. [laughs] And I wasn't courageous, and I wasn't particularly good, and I remember deciding not to try out for the baseball team a second time.

5-00:58:39

McGarrigle: You were using hardballs at that point.

5-00:58:41

Ellis: Oh, yes, yes, sure.

5-00:58:43

McGarrigle: Did they modify that on and off in athletics with young people?

5-00:58:47

Ellis: Yes, yes.

5-00:58:47

Wilmot: Where did you get hit?

5-00:58:49

Ellis: Everywhere, in the mouth, in the elbow. I think I still have a chipped bone in my elbow from just not getting away from a pitch in time. It's painful. Also you need real agility to field the ground ball, to chase down a fly. It's a something to do successfully.

[short discussion about recording logistics]

5-00:59:27

Ellis: There was a convergence of finding your own set of friends, finding your place, which is true everywhere, right? A big college can be as small as the world of friends you make. That can be a coffee shop and a table at a coffee shop. I found a set of friends, gradually. I developed some competence with girls. Nothing radical, but I began to not go after the most popular girls. There were a whole lot of other girls besides those that everybody wanted. And that was interesting. It was interesting because as soon as you paid attention to them, then other people found them interesting, and so I lost some girlfriends in junior high school because I had paid attention to them. Not that I was important, but just it changed the landscape. It's very interesting. And I think I'm a born sociologist, so I noticed all this stuff, how it all played out and all.

5-01:00:43

McGarrigle: Are there parties at that point?

5-01:00:48

Ellis: There are, yes. Yes, there were parties. There are summers. There are still summers, and nobody particularly that I knew was working then, so there were a lot of people sitting around. I remember I smoked my first cigarette at one of these summer parties. I think we were playing cards or something like that. No drinking. Dances. Dances, right. [chuckles] Oh, gosh. Oh, gee.

01:01:31

Wilmot: Let's start on dances.

01:01:33

Ellis: Okay.

[begin audio file 6]

6-00:00:17

Ellis: David, my son, said that when he went to Berklee College of Music from here, went to Boston, said it was a very different place. His first experience of social class for real. And also ethnic divisions. But serious. But he said one of the great benefits of being there was that he could be any combination of people back in Berkeley that he chose, and they thought it was him, in Boston. In other words, he could borrow. He could borrow stylistically from friends, phrases, quips, mannerisms, and they would think, "Oh, gee, how clever David is." David knew that he was—

6-00:01:14

McGarrigle: Experimenting.

6-00:01:15

Ellis: Yes, he was trying out new forms of self in a new setting, using the palette that he had from people he knew back here.

6-00:01:25

McGarrigle: Sometimes people change their names at that point.

6-00:01:27

Ellis: Sure, sure, sure.

6-00:01:29

McGarrigle: The social life that we were talking about at Enterprise, is that an integrated social life?

6-00:01:41

Ellis: No, no, no, no, no. Only at school and friends around the school—there was a true ease across race lines, if you wanted interracial friendships. I don't recall any enforcement of separation at school, and I had lots of friends who were girls who were not black, but it all stayed at school, and lots of friends who were boys who were not black. I told you the first venture into a white

household was Ford Simms, who ran the half-mile at Compton. But when you went home, residential segregation was pretty severe.

The one thing that was always fascinating to me is that in practically every block in southeast L.A., there was, like, one Mexican family, but they didn't participate in the life of the neighborhood. I don't know how they did it, but they got together someplace else, I guess. But around Watts and southeast L.A., where I was, there were very often *Mexicano* households. But there was a separation in our lives, even if there was common geography sometimes. But no, not a lot of common socializing.

6-00:03:27

McGarrigle: So these parties and the girls you meet there are—

6-00:03:30

Ellis: All black.

6-00:03:32

McGarrigle: —are all black.

6-00:03:34

Ellis: Yes. And dancing was important. I was not a great dancer. I got good later by specializing in a couple of things. There was one dance called the Texas Hop, and there are many people my age who will remember that. It was a form of jitterbug kind of thing. There's not a lot of underlying variation in a lot of these dances. But I just wasn't good at it. A couple of my friends also weren't very good at it, so we did something called the Ballroom, which was a three-step thing. You know, dah, dah, dah, tchoom, dah, dah, dah, tchoom, dah, dah, dah. So we cut things in half. And then we specialized in gliding, being smooth and cool. Well, there was value to that, too, but there wasn't the heat of some of the other stuff, the Texas Hop. And then there was a whole other realm, which was just the slow dancing, what we called in those days "scrunching." Scrunching was pressing your genitals against the woman in a very slow dance, and visibly revealing that you're doing that. You had to be subtle. You couldn't be grotesque about it. It's a very interesting black-white issue because there was—I remember this all the way through college and much of the rest of my life, that a lot of us who are black thought that whites really get kind of carried away with the booty moving. It was, like, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no." [laughter] You can do it, but that's too much. You got to pull back. And there is a style of dancing, especially black women, that is so goddamned stately, it's devastating. It's sensual, it's gorgeous, and it is so underplayed you could die from it. I've just always loved that.

6-00:05:54

But the guys were looking—the guys were highly motivated, and so parties were a lot about seeing how far you could get and so forth. It was a different era. It wasn't like it is today. There was much less sexual activity than people claim there was. But the parties were great fun. They were great fun. I was

okay, but I wasn't a great party animal. I *became* a great party animal in college, but I wasn't particularly good in high school, partly because my identity was so much about athletics. As I got better and better and got famous, or infamous, I was exempted from lots of things. I didn't have to fight any more, which was interesting, because I was bringing fame to Compton. Not at Enterprise, I never got to that status, but Compton, because my last two years, I got really fast, really fast, and just all of a sudden I blossomed. Then I became kind of a treasure, and I was good for the identity of Compton High School, and so they took care of me, and I didn't have to gang-bang, as they came to call it, which is not about rape or anything but about gang fighting. That's what the kids called it, in later years. They didn't call it that when I was [there].

6-00:07:29

McGarrigle:

Where did the parties take place, Russ? Were they in someone's home?

6-00:07:33

Ellis:

Very often in somebody's home, very often monitored by an adult, permitted by an adult. Sometimes we would go to somebody's house and have a sort of smallish party in the daytime, when both parents were away. It's the funniest thing, my mother, Marjorie, will not believe me. She absolutely will not believe me, but there was a time when my mother and my father were both working nights, and I would have a party at our house, and it would be a great party because my father had lots of LPs—not LPs, 78s. There were lots of records, and they had a great radio and so forth. And then I'd shoo everybody out at a certain time, and then clean up so totally that they couldn't tell. And she doesn't believe me to this day. People came from far and wide to party at our house on Bellhaven, in Carver Manor Annex. Yes. We'd play music and have illicitly, wonderfully romantic dances and things like that, yes.

6-00:09:05

Wilmot:

I have a question.

6-00:09:07

Ellis:

Yes, go ahead.

6-00:09:09

Wilmot:

I'm going back to the middle school.

6-00:09:13

Ellis:

At Enterprise.

6-00:09:16

Wilmot:

You said that you were one of thirteen other black students and that changed rapidly, the school grew. I was wondering what was the ethnicity of the other students?

6-00:09:32

Ellis:

Largely white. I would guess 70, 80 percent white. I don't remember any Asians. The rest would be *Mexicanos*. I say it that way because that's the way

Mexicans referred to themselves then. It was *Mexicanos* and *Americanos*. I was an *Americano*. I might have been something else in Spanish that I didn't hear, but I never remember any epithets that I had to deal with, you know what I mean, to be angry about or understood from Mexicans. But Mexicans—my whole school life, I've had Spanish-speaking people around me. I've always had them. It wasn't always comfortable. At Etiwanda there was a lot of friction. The first time I was ever in love was with a Mexican girl. Olivia was her name. Oh, God, it was one of the most shocking things that ever happened to me. She had a sidekick named Lupe, Guadalupe. Lupe was fat, and Olivia was like an angel. I used to just look at her in the schoolyard and just wonder, "Ah, gee, that's just amazing." She must have noticed, so one day we were playing, and she comes over to me, and we do the hand twirling? [laughter] What? Where did that come from? I nearly died from that.

6-00:11:29

But one of the guys saw. A big, tough *Mexicano* guy saw that, and he was very upset. He came and spat in my face. It was really humiliating, but I couldn't do anything about it. I'd have been killed by him and all the other guys. But he let me know, "You just stay over there." I could still talk to Olivia, and Lupe knew—[chuckles]—I think we rode the school bus part of the way, too, for a while. Anyway, mainly black and Mexican.

6-00:12:14

Wilmot:

And when you say white, is it useful to differentiate any further?

6-00:12:20

Ellis:

Yes.

6-00:12:22

Wilmot:

Or is it true to that social situation to differentiate any further?

6-00:12:29

Ellis:

I'll tell you what I didn't know then, that I came to know, and that is that a lot of these were children of Dust Bowl families, that they were not—you remember I told the story of Artie [A.]?

6-00:12:44

Wilmot:

Yes.

6-00:12:45

Ellis:

By the way, I don't know that Artie is dead, and I realized I said this stuff using his name, and I probably want to double back and excise his name.

6-00:12:56

Wilmot:

No problem.

6-00:12:57

Ellis:

I took it for granted then, but a lot of the white girls came to school with their hair in rollers. They were working on their hair, getting it curled and done, and that was a very normal thing.

6-00:13:21

McGarrigle:

And that would be for going out that evening, or for church?

6-00:13:25

Ellis:

I have no idea, but it was very common, very common. I have some photos from Enterprise, class photos. I don't have a yearbook, unfortunately. I'm sad about that. I'll drag them out at some point. There will be a photo time, and I'll drag those out. But yes, that tells you a little bit, right? Because you wouldn't get that in Palo Alto in the forties, either, or probably not here. But they were very comfortable in slippers and things. It was like they just walked out of their bedrooms, a lot of the kids, and it was okay. It was okay. I thought it was interesting. Black girls didn't do that. They didn't have their hair in rollers. If they did anything with their hair, they did it at home and then they'd just have their hair—it could have been pressed or whatever, but they didn't wear the accoutrements of processing your hair to school.

The guys—I don't remember much that gave away or communicated much in the way of class issues, issues of class. Compton was quite a well-established little town, lots of trees, well-kept bungalows and so forth. As I say, there were no black people living there. They could not live there when I first went to Compton High School, and if they did, it was way on the outskirts. It was a problem being in Compton after dusk if you were black. I first went in '50—when did I first go?—'51 I guess, '51 is when I first went. It was a covenant that was attached to the land tract. It had been a ranch of some sort or some kind of large unit of land, and there was a restrictive covenant against selling to blacks attached to it, and Compton was in there, and it turned out to be convenient for white folks. Anyway, what am I talking about? What are you asking? You asked me about differentiations among the whites.

6-00:16:06

Wilmot:

I'm trying to understand if they were all from the South or—

6-00:16:08

Ellis:

You know, it's interesting. After my elaborate claims of my genetic capacity for sociologizing, I don't remember much in the way of differentiation.

6-00:16:24

Wilmot:

That's why I asked also if it was true to that social situation to differentiate.

6-00:16:28

Ellis:

But I know there were. There's a guy, Steve Chaffee [pronounced CHAY-fee] that I think I mentioned already, that I saw here several years ago with Todd Gitlin, walking down Bowditch. I saw this face. I know Todd Gitlin, who's no longer here, he's at NYU now—and I see this face coming toward me, and I'm transfixed, and I say, "Steven?" He says, "Russ?" Sixth grade. The white kid I knew. Professor in Communications, chair of the department, at Stanford. And Ford Simms. There was something a little bit elevated about his household, too, and him. His dad was—what was his dad? His dad was a dean or something, Mr. Simms, or assistant coach, or both. So I was aware a little



bit. But the world of white people was so far away from me experientially that I just took the kids as they came to school and as I was friendly with them at school. I guess I didn't pay a whole lot of attention.

6-00:17:46

McGarrigle: Was there socializing around church? Like, we talked about the dances and the parties that happened in private homes. Was there any social life around church?

6-00:17:58

Ellis: My parents—when I was in Fontana, every Sunday we went to St. Marks Baptist Church. That was a very important center for me, as much as I disliked all-day Jesus, you know? I learned a lot.

6-00:18:16

McGarrigle: A lot of religious education, or was it social?

6-00:18:20

Ellis: I know a lot about church. Anytime you see anything about black church, about Baptists especially, I've had the experience. My folks didn't go to church. It's funny, later on, they founded a church. I forget which denomination it is. But it had airs. It had people like Marjorie and my father in it, dual income, with education and so forth, and I remember the choir and the organist and so forth, and the selection of material being somewhat away from the shouting and the heated blue-note rhythmic stuff of Baptist church. But then, Uncle Eddie and Mama Joiner didn't go to the Holiness church, where we lived. They went across town to a higher-class church, the Baptist church. You know what Holinesses are, these are people who dance like this. [pantomimes] Someone would get on the piano and DONG-dong, DONG-dong-dong-dong-DONG-dong-dong-dong-dong. And he would get [stomps foot several times] dancing like this, and they'd get really—they'd get—it's trance dancing. And then us kids would go look at this through the windows, and they would be falling on the floor and rolling around on the floor, feeling the spirit in *really* big ways. They were kind of not okay. It's clear that they weren't okay. By the Joiners. So Marjorie and Russell I think, mainly through her, were the leaders in setting up a church. She would be so angry with me for not remembering. I can't remember the name of it or the denomination. [Redeemer Presbyterian Church] She talks about it all the time. She's still active.

6-00:20:43

Wilmot: We can learn that, I think, from her oral history

6-00:20:46

Ellis: Yes, right. It's just age. But I was out of the house by then, so I didn't go. So I didn't go to church after Fontana, and as a matter of fact, became an atheist right away in college.

6-00:21:06

Wilmot:

Did you choose to raise your children with any kind of faith?

6-00:21:09

Ellis:

No, no, I didn't raise them with anything. I tried to talk to them about the issue, that the idea of God is probably permanently part of being human, and one of its functions is helping you get through life. One of the functions of the idea of God, or of God, is to get you through life and explain things, something to hold onto. There are other ways you can do that. Religion is also about community. But no, neither of them has religion. My daughter, Zoë—she's the most interested in finding something like that. As a matter of fact, she and her husband, Luke, joined the chorus at Glide, in the city. That's a kind of very playful and energetic churching that she really enjoys. She's a good singer, and she enjoys being in that chorus as well. But no, no church, no church.

6-00:22:26

Wilmot:

I have another question for you which goes back a bit. I think in a lot of ways you already answered this question, so you can just dispense with it, as you wish, but it was a question of when Leah asked you if you learned about sex and sexuality from your parents, and then that kind of brought back for me this idea that sexuality is very mediated by your peers in high school, which then you talked about that. I was just wondering if you remember that interaction with your peers, or if you didn't learn about it from your parents, where did you learn about it, and what are the good things you learned and bad things—

6-00:23:08

Ellis:

That's a good question. It's a good question for a couple of reasons. One is that sex has been so hugely important to me. It's kind of messed with my life in the sense of deflecting me from things I should have been doing, other things I should have been doing. I even remember telling lies under trees. You know, kids sitting around telling lies. Later in my life, as an adult, some of us would joke about telling lies, getting together and telling lies. Boys used to sit around and talk about stuff they knew nothing about, with great authority. It was a question of who could communicate with the greatest authority, things about sex and so forth. I was radically split. I got to the point that I could write love letters for other people if they wanted help, because I had this whole romantic side of me and a burgeoning poetic side. But I got probably my sex education from the farm animals. If you hang around the persistence of a dog, you kind of get the point that something important is happening there, and you see everything: the chickens, the cows—well, not the cows because we didn't have any bulls, we just had cows. We didn't have any bulls. But pigs and—and I said animals have no guile. That's also interesting.

6-00:25:23

For me, what I finally took away with me to junior high school and high school was an attitude toward sexuality that came from the farm, and then this

other romantic side. I don't know where that came from. Maybe Walter Broussard taught me that, that you had to speak pretty, that you had to say sweet, lovely things. So there was always, for me, a radical disjunction between the talk and what actually happens. There was no mystery for me about what penises and vaginas were for. I was not confused at all about that. It got a little confusing because it's all mediated by moves. There were these guys at these parties, and these guys were not, in my reckoning, all that cool. In the old days, you'd see Satchmo still—"still," he's dead—but he has—do you recognize this move, Louis Armstrong, a little handkerchief in his hand? Well, that survived into my high school years. It was a cool thing to do. You had a handkerchief. And guys used to, at a party—they'd, like, be standing around, hitting on a woman, [whispers] "Look here, sugar." I couldn't do that. I didn't know how. I was lame.

6-00:27:49

McGarrigle: Thelton talked about it.

6-00:27:50

Ellis: Did he? [laughs] Okay. We were lame.

6-00:27:53

McGarrigle: And athletics, and the role.

6-00:27:55

Ellis: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, right. I remember one day I was at a party, and I said, "I'm gonna find out what this son of a bitch is saying, what he's whispering in this woman's ear that's making her kind of interested in him rather than me." And it went something like, "Say, look here. I mean, say, look here. Uh. I mean, you know. Me and you. What's happenin'?" [laughter] So I'd go away thinking, "Gee—." At first I was disappointed in the women. [laughs] Like, wait a minute!! [laughs] Wait a minute!! That's all???? He didn't say anything. But I was doing things like asking—there was one woman I was really interested in at Compton, and I asked her if she would go with me, and she said no. [laughs] She was really interesting. But she was going with a guy who no longer went to Compton High School, had a job, and had a car. He would have been a senior. Many years later, I went back and I saw a lot of those guys still hitting on the young ladies on the front steps of Compton High School. They hadn't gone far. They had gotten a car, and they'd gotten a job, but they hadn't gone anywhere else.

6-00:29:27

But I felt very hard done by and very disappointed at what it took. Now, there was a moment. My stepmother, Marjorie, insisted that I have a sixteenth birthday party. She has ideas about how things should go. Sweet sixteen is I think for girls or something. I don't know. But anyway, we did. We had this party. This was the party where my dad confronted these guys who tried to turn out the party, which is to break it up, a weird kind of pleasure, but—and I ran around to every woman at the party, whispering nonsense, and I got more

dates and more interest. I mean, it worked! [laughs] People who I thought came to the party because they should but weren't interested in me, I just said stupid things, just made up things to say. And so I learned from that party that it's not about logic or having interesting conversations necessarily, it's an expression of interest that's important, and style of approach. And then there's a whole bunch of literature about this in—I forget. There's a very nice piece on the feminization of black men, where the insurance—that is, the woman who can get employed in the South and in the city, in times when the black man can't—she's got the resources, and so the men develop a very kind of oily way of getting in to get access. It's almost a reversal of roles. There's a black comedienne, a woman—my kids laugh at this one, too, because they recognize it—where she does a skit where the guy says [whispers], “Hey, look here, sister. I mean, you and me could make it together.” She says, “You got a job??” [laughs] That's her reaction to it, “You got a job? We can talk if you got a job.”

6-00:31:50

But you learn—what do you learn? What do you learn? I guess you learn, this is what you learn as you grow up as a person—how do you relate to people. That's all it was. I had a very old-fashioned notion. It's taken me a long time—I had to be a father to get over that. I had this notion of this radical difference in the interests of women in things romantic. For ages, I thought they weren't interested and had to be caused to be interested, not tricked, but you had to win their interest. Watching the girls around my daughter, I realized, “Oh, God. Is that ever not true!” I mean, girls, that's all they talk about is guys and this sort of thing. I just had never thought about that that way. It's weird. I don't know why. Because I, in fact, especially in college—well, college was different. College was very different. But I've never gotten over it. I still live with the notion that there's this radical separation, and women are over there and kind of up there and have to be not captured exactly, but brought to you, convinced.

There was a party I went to. I joined a black fraternity for a while in college, and we partied all the time. That's all this fraternity ever did. The most improbable guy came to that party with the most desired woman. This is Kappa Alpha Psi, and everybody was black at these parties. Nobody could believe that this guy brought this woman to this party. So finally I asked him, “Hey, Al, how did you get her to come to the party?” He said, “I asked her.” [laughs] Nobody had asked her, because everybody had made the same assumption, that she was not achievable, that she was “over there.”

6-00:34:24

Anyway, that's much wandering. But I like the realm of the wandering that I'm doing because it's a very important part of my formulation, how I got to be, and I know for sure with Thelton and Troy, that that is part of a major struggle, transitional struggle, because you can be a failure in high school at a lot of things, but you can cover your incapacities by being good at something

else, and then people don't really quite look at these other things. Thelton was an athlete; I was an athlete; Troy was a star student from a very distinguished family and quite an interesting family, too. I think they had some traditions in the household—and he's the baby, so he had the advantage of all these brothers and sisters who went before him, so he learned stuff. But the girls, and what to do with your maleness. That was one of the biggest problems to solve.

6-00:35:38

Wilmot: High school is hard.

6-00:35:40

Ellis: Yes.

6-00:35:45

McGarrigle: Were there friendships with the white girls who were your friends at Enterprise? Did that last through high school?

6-00:35:51

Ellis: Through high school, but never sexualized, never romanticized. Very intense friendships, though. I had some very good friends. There was Ginger. What was her last—I forget Ginger's last name, but she signs the back of one of the photographs—I think I still have it—it's "From one Linsheid prisoner to another," and that was the English teacher, Mr. Linsheid. But it was a celebration of our common agony at having to work hard and sit there. But it was a very friendly thing to have said. It was quite real, and it was quite a friendship.

6-00:36:37

Now, leaping ahead a minute or two in time, my fortunes romantically were completely reversed at UCLA. I was a star athlete. The fuzzy, stylistic stuff in my talk, my incapacity at "Say, look here, sugar. I mean, you know," were no longer problems. I still had something left over of that, "I mean, you know," since I knew what it was about and I'd learned that it almost didn't matter what you said as long as you cared and were sweet and not jagged around the edges. Topically there were things that I was studying—I wasn't much of a student, but I talked a lot, and the things I talked about and the way I talked about them in college were benefits, where they had been not beneficial in high school.

6-00:38:10

McGarrigle: We want to start a week from today with UCLA, but I don't want to leave uncovered you—I don't want to beat this, but I don't want to not explore how you're developing intellectually through high school. Because you're doing theater, you're a lover of language, and you're a philosopher and an emerging poet, and a romantic. [laughter]

6-00:38:36

Ellis: Well, thank you for that.

6-00:38:39

McGarrigle: And—

6-00:38:41

Ellis: Well, thank you for that, about the only time on earth that I will actually get all those accolades. But yes, there are things happening. There are things happening.

6-00:38:45

McGarrigle: And you have this English teacher who you and Ginger agree sometimes was a negative experience, but you continue to love language and literature?

6-00:38:55

Ellis: Solidarity behind it, right.

6-00:38:57

McGarrigle: Are there teachers who influenced you positively, and who were the teachers? And are you studying foreign language, is another question. Are you studying Spanish?

6-00:39:07

Ellis: Spanish and some French, right.

6-00:39:09

McGarrigle: Are you—agile with foreign language?

6-00:39:15

Ellis: No. I'm agile with sounds. I can make the sound of any language. I can't do a Cockney accent. I can't adjust my English to sound like an Indian speaking English, as some people do. I just can't. There might be some disinclination also because there's a mockery when you do that. But I can very quickly make good sounds that impress speakers of another language, when they tell me how to say something, I can say it fairly well. My first wife and I honeymooned in Paris in '61, and I really enjoyed French as a sound, as a set of sounds. And at that time, I could dash out and say just about anything. I mean, I could say lots of things, but I had a funny ear, because I could not find the correct breaks in hearing a response. *Pas trop mal*, or something like that—that's not a good example. I might hear as "*PAH-tro*." But she didn't have that problem. She didn't have the courage to speak, but she had a good ear, so we were a great team in Paris in '61. I'd speak, and she would hear, tell me in English what they said in return.

6-00:41:06

So I always had a good ear and a good set of pipes for sounds, but I never mastered a language. I spent a lot of time in Italy, and I know what the problem is. It's kind of like the problem my son has had with his saxophone. He could hear so much more than he could do that he was disheartened. It's not that I could hear so much more than I could do and understand it; it's just that language has been my thing. I have gone so many places with my mouth, talking, relating and so forth, and then to go into a place where language is so

important, like Italy, and not to have it is so disheartening. It's so disheartening. I'm so impressed with people who go and have the language they have and live with that. But there's an arrogance, there's something in there. And there's also the actor and the pretentiousness. I can't act if I can't speak. I can't dance if I can't speak. And so coming back every summer from Italy—I loved Italy and the Italians—but coming back and knowing I could go into a shop and kibitz and fiddle, I would come back and I just thought I could just *fly* because I was home where I had language back. That's very important to me, very important. And I don't know why. It's one of my regrets that I never—I'm surprised that I got to be sixty-seven without actually having another language available to me.

6-00:42:50

But I studied Spanish in high school and was put in a Spanish class—well, I think I lasted a day because the teacher asked me something, and I was completely unprepared, and they shifted me someplace else. I studied French for the language exam when I got my PhD. That was enjoyable, but that was about reading and writing.

The other part, about my intellectual interests and capacities. I had my best experiences in two classes, but they were very good, in high school. I was a C student through high school. I don't remember doing any homework. And what you will discern when you go back over these tapes is that I seem to have all my life surrendered memories of where I was. I don't hold onto much, unless they're really high-drama things. I just don't remember studying. I didn't remember studying in college, except there's a librarian here who was at UCLA in the reserve book room, when I was an undergraduate, and I was talking to her one day, and I said that about myself. She says, "Oh, no, that's not true. You were in the reserve book room all the time." When she told me that, I said, "Oh, yes, actually I did, I guess." But most of my intellectual stuff was conversations with people and topics of interest and speculative stuff and opinions and arguments.

6-00:45:05

McGarrigle: Hypothetically or really, what would that have been about, topically?

6-00:45:12

Ellis: Oh, um—[long pause]—one very popular one, of course, is: What happens after you die? That's always interesting. [chuckles]

6-00:45:49

McGarrigle: What age is this happening?

6-00:45:51

Ellis: Sixteen, seventeen.

6-00:45:57

McGarrigle: That's deep for a sixteen- and seventeen-year-old boys. We just talked about another major topic for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.

6-00:46:07

Ellis: Right. Well, I was interested in that. I was actually reading some Buddhism in the last year and a half of high school, actually.

6-00:46:15

McGarrigle: Did you come to that on your own or were you introduced [to that?]?

6-00:46:17

Ellis: I don't know how I got to that, but yes, yes. And I had a couple of friends, three friends—I had one guy in high school, John Mayshack. Did I mention him last time?

6-00:46:37

Wilmot: No.

6-00:46:38

Ellis: He lived not so far from me. Very important person in my life. I think John's father probably was a Party member. He was a black guy. Probably a member of the Communist Party or somehow involved in far Left politics, although his father was not around a lot and actually would leave the house for long periods of time, and John would be there alone. John taught me ultimately how to run distances. We'd walk together back from Compton High School, and then after a while we would run, and then he would push it, and I'd learn from his pushing that not only was I fast, because I was a good sprinter, but I had endurance. I would never beat him home, but I learned about endurance. I learned about getting to that point beyond which you can't go and continuing to go. You know, second wind, whatever you call it. It's a real thing. That was really important learning for me.

6-00:47:53

And John was an intellectual. He's a jazz enthusiast. I think he smoked dope back in that day, which was really dangerous. You could go to prison for that. They found seeds. They vacuumed seeds up in the car George Jackson was in. That's why he was in the joint. So it was really dangerous back in the day. But he had lots of thoughts. I can't tell you what, but he was just an interesting guy to be around and talk to, just an interesting guy. I think Walter Broussard was very important to me, too. I can't take you back to conversations, but I think he had a big mind, and I would listen to him in Fontana, in this very small place, and he'd talk about things. He would spin stories and fantasies that interested me. But academically, formally my best experiences were in a geometry class because I completely "got it" and was good at it. I think I probably got a B or B-plus or something like that, without hardly trying. And then English, not English literature but just the English grammar and how English works—I lost it, but I was amazed that I understood it so well—you know, the conjugations of this and the functions of this word and that. So that was interesting to me. And then I had friends, a few friends that I'm going to go see pretty soon, and we were playful. We were playful intellectually. But they also had other things. They were athletic and so we fit in lots of other



ways. There was not just the nerd place and then everything else. Purcell Daniels and Roderick Luke were important to me.

6-00:49:59

McGarrigle: You're going to go visit them somewhere out in California?

6-00:50:01

Ellis: In La Verne, California, very near Etiwanda, is where Purcell lives, and Roderick lives in Bodfish, which is in the mountains fifty miles east of Bakersfield. He's a medical technician. I just spoke to him not long ago.

When I got fast near the end of—right at the end of my high school years and took second in the state meet, in the half mile, a guy came to me at the Compton Invitational, which was in those days a very big meet, at my high school, but a big invitational to pros around the world. There were no pros then, but athletes around the world came to the Compton Invitational. And this guy came to me and asked if I'd be interested in going to UCLA. I said, "I'm already signed up for the Navy." He said, "That's okay. Don't worry about it." I had written to the track coach up here at Cal. I had wanted to come to Cal. But he never responded to me. [He said] that I had to go to Compton Junior College for a semester to fill in some courses and bring my grades up. And I got straight A's. I couldn't believe it. It was like I was another person. I was highly motivated. I got straight A's. I took chemistry, math, and English and so forth. I couldn't believe it. I could hardly believe myself.

6-00:51:58

Wilmot: You were on your way to the Navy?

6-00:52:01

Ellis: I had signed up. Roderick, Purcell and I had agreed that we would all join the military, get the GI Bill, and come back and go to college. That was a pact we decided in the car one night, late night. We were graduating from high school. "What are we going to do?" So they did. They went away, and I went to college.

6-00:52:24

Wilmot: There's something I want to ask you about—I'm not sure if we should save it for next time—which is this language you used around "getting fast" or "I got fast" or "I became fast." I'm just, like, wondering, what does that mean? I'm not sure if we shouldn't save that for next time.

6-00:52:44

McGarrigle: Maybe we should start there and start with—

6-00:52:47

Ellis: Okay, sure.

6-00:52:50

McGarrigle: We haven't covered your track career at all, so we could start with track in high school.

6-00:52:52

Ellis: Sure, that would be fine.

6-00:52:54

McGarrigle: And then move to the junior college and the UCLA transition.

6-00:52:58

Ellis: I can tell you in advance, though, that this had to do with my body. This thing, this instrument just changed, just changed. It was magic. It was magic. It was a wonderful magic. I was always fast. I was always quick. And I was always tenacious as a runner. I was always tenacious. But then, after a while, I got different, really different. Then I shifted into a whole new mode.

6-00:53:40

Wilmot: Was this longer legs, lungs—

6-00:53:44

Ellis: I have no idea. Just all of a sudden, I got “gooder.” Intellectually—Marjorie always had books around the house, and I remember one summer—it might have been my junior year—there was a book on Leeuwenhoek, one of the—was he Dutch biologist? Was he Dutch? L-e-e-u-w-e-n-h-o-e-k or something like that. He’s very fundamental in biology. I read the whole thing. I read this major piece, and I was drawn to it. It was in Marjorie’s library. She was a biology major at Hunter. And so I read it, and I was fascinated by it and I think very much influenced by kind of the whole history of science aspect that there was, how thinking went and how discoveries went and all. Nobody asked me to do that. It wasn’t a requirement. If you ask me what else I remember of my high school studies that struck me, that stayed with me, I couldn’t tell you. Those letters that I gave you. This is a marvel for me. How do you get from there to a professor at UC Berkeley? How does that happen? In what amazing cauldron do we stir up stuff to get this little nub of a sad being to that? And then how do you get someone who doesn’t remember anything about what they studied in high school to college? Well, I went in on my athleticism, and then when I got there—and it’s still happening—when I got there, I discovered that my incapacities or things that made me not wonderful, not stellar as a person and—

6-00:56:18

Wilmot: Socially.

6-00:56:19

Ellis: —socially, were valued, and it didn’t matter how much I weighed or what my boxing skills were, I could argue, and did, till four in the morning, and nobody ever wanted to fight. It was no longer—it was a completely different world.

At Enterprise, there was a big guy from a gang family, Gordon Chappelle and his sister, Golden Chappelle. I think I mentioned last time. Anyway, the Chappelles were a complicated family. Golden was very pretty. Black family. And Gordon and his brothers were tough. They were big, fighter guys. I’m a

mere—maybe I played on the B football team by that time, but I’m a nothing, I’m more outspoken. But I remember Gordon Chappelle and I got in an argument. He was a big guy. And the argument was which direction the coliseum went lengthwise. And he said north-south to someone. I said, “No, it’s east-west.” And so we argued about it, trying to locate stuff on the map. Somehow, at a certain moment, I decisively won the argument, and we had bet a nickel or something like that. I said, “Hey, man, give me my nickel.” He said, “Take it.” [laughs] That was how things were set up. And, of course, that was the end of the argument. He had lost, but he had won the larger thing, was it ain’t about whether or not you won this; it’s about who’s still “the man.”

6-00:58:35

I didn’t feel particularly demeaned by the loss. It was a little bit hard, in front of others, to be faced down like that, but it was so obvious that I’m not going to be engaging Gordon Chappelle in a boxing match, because fighting was stratified, too. If there was going to be a fight and everybody was going to gather around the place where there’s going to be a fight, it generally was between people who were roughly equally matched. It’s funny how that worked. I had a few fights, and they were kind of like what you would guess. Your knees are shaking, and you can barely stand up, and your mouth is dry, and you swing from twelve feet away and miss by fifteen feet, until finally somebody gets hit or hurt or you get locked in an embrace and then people end it or something.

6-00:59:34

McGarrigle: Why don’t we end there?

6-00:59:36

Wilmot: Okay.

[end of session]

Interview 4: June 10, 2003

[begin audio file 7]

7-00:00:07

Wilmot: June 10<sup>th</sup>, Interview 4, Russ Ellis.

I guess we wanted to start this morning with high school, and I wanted to pose the question about you—could you tell me a little bit about your development as an athlete, from high school? The high school era.

7-00:01:00

Ellis: Yes. I think I may have talked a little bit about the dominance of sports in my life with my friends wherever I lived, in Fontana and in Los Angeles. One of the things that would get me whippings in Fontana would be playing football or baseball or something on this rock-strewn field, or out doing something—winding up with a snotty nose, freezing to death, the dim light, past the time I'm supposed to be home. But it was just kid's stuff.

7-00:01:59

McGarrigle: And you're by yourself then, or you had a friend whose house you—

7-00:02:03

Ellis: Oh, no, just kids. The kids streamed from wherever they lived to the spot, and we all played. Whenever I see third world footage of kids playing soccer or whatever, that reminds me of my youth in Fontana. The sports were so huge. It's what you did, you know? My running, my alertness to my running, happened in two ways. One was a practice I made, which was very strange. In Fontana there was this Cojon Pass. There's a mountain pass called the Cojon Pass, and people—I actually don't know what the truth is about this, but it would get very windy at certain times of the year. Our place was on the outer edge of the community. After us was the fields and then the mountains, and the wind would come down through there, and I would run down this paved road, sometimes losing control. That is, the wind would be so strong that I in fact was in peril. But I remember getting the sense of that kind of speed. It was interesting, trying to get your legs under control. Interesting.

7-00:03:40

This happened to me later, when I was a sophomore in college, in a race. I had the same experience, and I'll tell you about that another time. But my first sense of my speed as a runner came when I was racing around a corral somewhere in Fontana. I guess a kid who was officially the fast kid, the fastest—and I didn't beat him in the race, but it was almost a choice, like I knew my place or something, and so I just ran up to him and then stayed where I was supposed to be. I think some horses do that, in horse races. I'm not a horse race fan, but it looks to me that there are some dominance issues working in horse racing, there's just animal dominance. Some horses say, "Okay, I won't be beating this guy." [laughs]

7-00:04:43

McGarrigle:

But if you can you explore that more, your reference to knowing your place, what that meant. Can you elaborate on that?

7-00:04:50

Ellis:

I don't even remember his name, I remember what he looked like, but he was officially the fastest guy. It was sort of like, I shouldn't beat him. Not that anything would happen, it was just pecking order stuff. But I remember being aware that when I called on the reserve to go after him, it was there. That's what was interesting, and that's what's interesting about having a body altogether, especially one that's growing, is that you discover new things about it. This is hugely important in my life. Just, my body grew. That's the big story. I got bigger. I was little. My son has gone through the same thing. He was tiny through high school, almost, and then he shaved his head and became Dave Ellis, the saxophone player. He reports going to a Berkeley High reunion and going up to somebody and saying, "Al, wow! It's so nice to see you!" And the guy said, "Pardon me, but who are you?" [laughs] He's 6' 2" by this time, this huge guy. The guy didn't even recognize him.

7-00:06:09

Well, in my sixteenth year, maybe earlier, fifteenth year, when I came back to L.A., I grew. I grew. I was always athletic. When I came back to [George Washington] Carver, lived in Carver Manor and Carver Manor Annex, there was a field that I and my friends played in, various fields, football, baseball. Didn't do much running informally, all the running happened basically in school, around tracks, after I got back to L.A. Oh no, actually I learned a lot about my endurance from a friend when we ran home from Compton High School, right. John Mayshack.

7-00:06:55

So through the tenth grade, I ran and was active in sports, and was undistinguished, just one of the guys. Then I moved, graduated, and went to Compton High School, which I mentioned to you. This was in an area with a tremendous sports tradition. Anybody you know, of a certain age, knows that Compton High School just generated athletes like crazy all over the place. Every sport was really big. I had wanted to be a baseball player. I think I mentioned this last time. And went out for the sport, and went out my first year at Compton. I'm not sure if I got cut from the team or not. I think I probably did. But I wasn't very good. I understood the game, but I didn't have the spirit for it. There's a kind of courage you have to have in baseball. You go after things, you don't wait for the stuff to come to you. I didn't have it. The reflexes, I didn't have. I didn't have them in basketball, either. I didn't understand basketball. Football and track, I understood.

7-00:08:34

I remember going to—I had my glove, and I was headed across the street in the middle of the campus of Compton JC [Junior College] and Compton High School, on my way to the gym to go out for the baseball team again, and I

decided against it. I paused in the middle of the street. I remember that really clearly. It was a moment of decision. I love those kinds of things. I turned around, and I didn't go out for the baseball team. But I did go out for cross-country, which is a four-mile run, in high school. Now, how I decided to do that, I just don't know. I think by that time I had already learned, from this friend down the street, John Mayshack, that I had endurance because we walked together from school to home, and then later we would run, and then I learned something about my endurance there, too. Not my speed, but my endurance.

7-00:09:45

We won—I think I took eighth in the conference meet, the California Interscholastic Federation, CIF, which was the other league outside the city league in L.A. Thelton was in the city league, Jefferson. They were the big powerhouses in the city, the league. You know how cross-country is scored: the team that gets the highest placers, and when you add up their scores, and it's the lowest number, wins the meet, and we won the CIF, and so I was on a winning team, which felt good. That was affirmation of running.

7-00:10:30

McGarrigle: And you're young at this point. This is freshman year?

7-00:10:33

Ellis: No, no, no. By this time, I would be a junior in high school, but Compton only had the junior and senior years. I had spent my first two years of high school at Enterprise Junior High School.

7-00:10:45

McGarrigle: That's right. You told us.

7-00:10:47

Ellis: Which went down to the sixth grade, which was a funny, funny arrangement. Now—then I get lost in time. I don't even remember what my junior year at Compton was like in terms of my abilities. I was good, I was running, and I was doing well, but I don't have a recollection particularly of that. But I think in the summer between my junior year and my senior year is when I had this "thing" happen to my body. I just—not only did I grow, something else happened. Like, I became a different animal. I just went up a notch qualitatively. I don't mean good quality, just a qualitative shift in how I occupied my body. It was weird. I grew several inches, I think maybe as many as six, in a very short period, put on a little weight. I shed my skin. It was weird. I get kind of reddish when I get tan, and my dad did, too. He got very dark, kind of reddish. He always said that was Indian stuff, that every black family has got some Indian [voice trails off; unintelligible]. From my fingertips to my toes that one summer, it was like these great patches of skin just started—just falling off! It was really weird. I've often thought of it in snake terms, like, you know, this is molting. But, boy, I changed that summer. It was something. After that, I was different also. It was magic. It was magic.

7-00:12:47

I had a very good high school coach. My high school coach was much better than my college coach, and I'm probably going to stand with that in the final edition of this. Ernest Hartman at Compton High School was talking about Norwegian and Finnish training methods, and in those days, the Finns were the great distance runners, and they were also doing interval training. You would run a fast 400 meters, not all out, but fast, and then you would jog a lap, and then you'd run a fast 400 again. They called it, in I forget what language, *farlek*.

7-00:13:36

McGarrigle: How do you spell that?

7-00:13:38

Ellis: *F-a-r-t-l-e-k*, I believe. So this is what I was doing in high school.

7-00:13:46

McGarrigle: And what's the style of imparting this knowledge to you?

7-00:13:50

Ellis: Oh, Ernest Hartman was the funniest guy. Big, languorous guy. "Okay, Ellis, you're sucking hind tit," by which he meant that I'm behaving like a runt pig who can't nudge in there and is not working hard to get it done, and only gets the little tit at the back, out of which not much milk is coming. And I understood the reference, coming from the farm. And he meant, "You're not puttin' out." He would just stand around, and he watched everything. He was kind of all-knowing. He was watching what people were doing, the high jumpers and all. He understood the difference in the requirements of the different athletes and their training.

7-00:14:39

And "Ducky" Drake at UCLA—I'm not the only one, I know I'm not the only one who felt this way—didn't understand those differences. He had been for long years the trainer, that is, the guy who worries about injuries and your conditioning and this kind of stuff, and became the track coach. UCLA had had no particular tradition of winning. We had never beaten USC, for example, in track. And we never did. Our team came the closest. It came down to the relay, and then—et cetera. But Ernest Hartman was great. I felt supported by him. And he made decisions. He had ideas about what you should do, how you should run a race. It was interesting. Quiet. Big man. Quiet. Very assertive. You know, I compare him to Phil Hardyman in The Berkeley High Music Program.

7-00:15:46

McGarrigle: He was a very nurturing man.

7-00:15:47

Ellis: Very nurturing man. I used to watch him with David—oh, not David, I was watching David, my son. But I watched Phil with the kids in these fifth-grade classes, right on through high school, and Phil—these kids were, like goofy

kids—you know, big teeth and—but in the music, he treated them like adults. So when it was in the music—he could get these kids to swing, and they were in the music. And there, they were more like equals. It was magic. I think Ernest Hartman was a little bit like that. He wanted to treat us like adults or something, even though we weren't. [laughs]

7-00:16:36

McGarrigle: I knew Phil Hardymon. I was thinking of “respect” as you’re talking.

7-00:16:40

Ellis: Yes, exactly.

7-00:16:42

McGarrigle: There was never any patronizing.

7-00:16:43

Ellis: Exactly. And, you know, kids don’t get a lot of that, you know? But real deference and real respect. *True* respect and deference. They will get stylized respect, “You’re a big man, Joey.” [laughs] “It’s time for you to take care of yourself, Joey.” But Phil Hardymon really respected the kids in their making of music, and it was really interesting. He never leaned on them to dress up or to wear anything, but he expected them to come together when it was time to make music. I remember he stopped David one time. Interesting, I’m overlaying these things. And David was doing part of the soli. This is plural of solo, in Italian. It’s when the sax section or some such all play a common line. Right. Yes. And he stopped him. Actually, I don’t know if David told me this or I was there. I think David may have told me. But he said, “No personality. Get that personality out of your music. This is the place where you’re just another horn, and you want to be part of ‘the entity.’” He didn’t talk like that, but he made it very clear. And my son was very sensitive to this kind of stuff. You know, remembers it forever. “Here’s the time you do that, and here’s the time you do something else.”

7-00:18:13

But anyway, Ernest Hartman was a great coach. I got very fast, and I could feel myself getting fast. It’s a wonderful feeling. When you’re in shape, when you have pushed yourself, you really hurt yourself—you have to learn to do that, too. You have to learn to get beyond the point of exhaustion and “I can’t do any more.” You’ve got to push way past it, and I’m sure every athlete in every field knows this, or has to learn this. But then when you are now ready to perform, sometimes I just had the experience, like, I was just the fastest thing in the world. I felt like a thoroughbred. You know how they are? Just “Let me do something!” It was just a tremendous, good feeling to be in shape, and then to know that I had become this changed animal. I’d grown up. I had grown into my body. It was a wonderful, wonderful feeling. My choices of events, I don’t know how I decided to be a half-miler. I did go out for track in my junior year, after my cross-country venture. Mmm.



7-00:20:10

Wilmot: Russ, can I ask you a question?

7-00:20:11

Ellis: Sure. I was just trying to think...Go ahead, sure, mm-hm.

7-00:20:15

Wilmot: Almost because I was just thinking about these words, “quarter mile” and “half mile” as someone who’s not a runner, and I was, like, “Okay, how does one become the one who runs the half mile, the quarter mile?” And I tried to grasp that by talking to your friends and former teammates.

7-00:20:35

Ellis: Oh. Who’d you talk to?

7-00:20:36

Wilmot: This was actually with Hal Miller. And I was like—to me, it was this magical kind of alchemy. How does one become a half-miler? He said, “Oh, it’s body type.”

7-00:20:48

Ellis: Probably.

7-00:20:49

Wilmot: “Some people are made for different things, some people are made to jump, some people...” Was that your experience, or was it different?

7-00:21:01

Ellis: From inside? You asked me from inside. Well, if you learn about yourself—and I think probably this stuff is institutionalized in sports now; they have ways, I’m sure, of finding out what you’re capable of—but what I learned, running around that corral in Fontana, was that I was faster than I understood. But that came from testing myself. Here was the fast kid, and we’re running around this corral, and I discover that on command, I can overtake someone, make a choice about what I’m going to do, in a tough situation, where it’s intense. And there’s something about the intensity of competition, especially this kind, because it’s just you and other people. There is a team aspect to it, but this is you, testing against yourself and against others. So I learned that I was fast, and I thought of myself that way. Quietly, as a little guy. I thought of myself as quick, and I tried to be a running back on the football team because I thought I was quick. I was little, and I didn’t know what the hell I was doing.

7-00:22:33

Then, through my friend, John Mayshack, as we would come back from Compton High School—it must have been in my junior year—I learned that I had endurance, and that’s a completely different learning, to keep going. Not everybody has that. And not only that, you can discover that you have—well, no, let me speak for myself—I discovered that I had endurance. And once it got into rhythm and going, behind Mayshack, because he was the one who had the knowledge to keep going, he knew to push it. I didn’t know that. I

didn't know about pushing it. And he would come to a place, or we might be going up a slight incline or something. There aren't that many between where I lived and Compton High School. For the record, I went to Compton High School and ran to where Centennial High School now is, so that will give somebody a sense of the distances we were running. But John, where I thought he might back off, because it was uphill or there was something challenging about it, he pushed it. So if I was going to respond and keep my self-respect, I had to push it, too. I couldn't fall behind. So then I learned about endurance. So in the end, I tried the endurance side of myself, after having thought of myself as kind of a sprinter person, and learned I had that as well.

7-00:24:22

So the half mile is a really good one if you've got both of those, because you've got to go out fast, you've got to maintain a pretty fast pace, and you've got to have something at the end, and that's pushing it at the end, right? That's having something left after a very exhausting and intense and physical—lots of jostling and positioning. Speeding up and slowing down takes a lot of energy, running too far on the outside means you're covering more ground, and so forth and so on, so you've got to do lots of positioning, at which I was never terribly good, but good enough, actually.

7-00:25:08

So that's how I discovered it. It was sort of like a transaction between my speed and my endurance. In my later years, I think I wished I had stayed in the half-mile rather than the quarter, although I was good in the quarter. I was good in the quarter. It wasn't an inappropriate distance for me to run. And I occasionally ran a half in college. But it was the half-mile—in those days, we called it the 880 and the 440. We've gone to international standards for a long time now, and it's 400 and 800 meters, et cetera, 1,500 meters, rather than the mile. So I discovered my niche that way. I don't know how I got down to the quarter. That might have been a decision—it was a decision I made in college, because I was recruited as a half-miler. I took second in the state meet in '53? 1953, behind Don Bowden, who went to Cal. Just a great runner, great half-miler.

7-00:26:17

McGarrigle:

You describe him as a great runner. What about him? I mean, I can imagine the speed and the time, et cetera.

7-00:26:30

Ellis:

Talent. [laughs] Talent helps. [laughs]

7-00:26:32

Wilmot:

What does that mean in running terms?

7-00:26:35

Ellis:

Just can run.

7-00:26:37

Wilmot: Can run.

7-00:26:38

Ellis: Can run. [laughter]

7-00:26:39

McGarrigle: And does that include beautiful while running?

7-00:26:43

Ellis: Don was—he wasn't gorgeous to look at, but he was okay. There was another guy ahead of him up here. Oh, I was just talking about him the other day. Was a beautiful runner. I'll remember his name later. [Lon Spurrier]

7-00:27:03

McGarrigle: You describe the physicality, so there's strategy involved.

7-00:27:09

Ellis: Yes.

7-00:27:10

McGarrigle: Decisions that are being made during the race.

7-00:27:11

Ellis: Yes. Well, Bowden—I remember in the state meet, Don did the same thing Mayshack had done to me when we were running. That is, we finished the first lap, and I wasn't ready for how much Bowden put on going into the second lap. He just [claps hands hard, once] hit it, and he put some space between him and me that I couldn't overcome. I gained on him a little bit, I think, but he just [claps more softly] blasted that second lap. I think part of the talent has to be an instinct for understanding how to get your body ready and how to be ready at the moment. For example, I'll go ahead—Rafer Johnson had some things that I used to think about and watch him, and he would go into a kind of trance in between events. I would be nervous, kind of running around, a kind of mock warm-up thing, just to handle the nervous energy. He'd become a zombie. He'd lie down, and would just kind of not be there. It's a whole different way of using your body, your energy, your psychic energy. It's more meditative. Great for a decathlete, a decathlon athlete. You know, he's got to do ten events. But it's also just good altogether, if that's how you're put together, and I don't know where he got that or learned, but it's really a great thing.

7-00:28:51

McGarrigle: Was that something that the coaches in high school and college were able to talk to you about?

7-00:28:55

Ellis: My coach didn't talk to me about that.

7-00:28:59

McGarrigle: In the high school, you mean.

7-00:29:01

Ellis: Hartman didn't.

7-00:29:02

McGarrigle: You're having to discover that on your own.

7-00:29:05

Ellis: I guess. I guess. One of my weird, weird things that I'm sure did not serve me well at all, was that I took this sort of abstinence thing from my Baptist farm background in Fontana. You know, no tea, no coffee, no alcohol. You know, general rules. I had this warped notion that you shouldn't drink water.

7-00:29:36

Wilmot: Ooh.

7-00:29:37

Ellis: Well, the opposite is true. I wound up with a kidney infection. I don't think it came from not drinking water, but I think it was exacerbated by the fact that I would push myself through three and four trials and all this kind of stuff, and stay away from water. I mean, that is bizarre. But no one ever talked to me about it, and no one ever noticed that I wasn't replacing the electrolytes. I now know. But I think that was it. God, I don't know. It's such a strange thing to have done.

7-00:30:15

Wilmot: Was that also were you just trying to not get stomach cramps while you were running?

7-00:30:19

Ellis: Et cetera. You know, a lot of those myths.

7-00:30:21

Wilmot: Yes.

7-00:30:22

Ellis: I don't ever recall water ever having been a problem, but it was just some kind of weird thing. You know, people have notions of what they need to do to take care of themselves. This was wrong. This was wrong. But anyway, what question was I answering? The distance—.

7-00:30:39

Wilmot: And also Leah also posed an interesting question about where you learned about preparation and you were saying that you kind of learned yourself.

7-00:30:47

Ellis: In truth, other things began to happen, as UCLA assembled athletes from all over the place. When I went, UCLA got several good athletes at the same time. They put on a recruiting push, I think. We had a guy who ran the mile in high school, and we were kind of the big stars on the team, a guy named Bob Seaman. You wrote to me about him. Then other people came from other

places. There was a shot-putter, Don Vick, who came from Fontana High School. I didn't know Don in Fontana. He was a good shot-putter.

7-00:31:37

Wilmot: What's that word?

7-00:31:39

Ellis: Shot-putter. He put the shot. And you know what that is, right? It's a big metal ball, weighs about sixteen pounds? And they push it out? [pantomimes] Okay? That's a shot-putter. And we wound up with a nice bunch of athletes. So they all brought their backgrounds there, so in a lot of ways, we were teaching each other. My critique of my coach is that I don't think he had a very good sense of the different needs of the differing athletes. But I'm sure that in my senior year, which wasn't my best year—my junior year was really, I think, my best year, sophomore and junior years, it's hard to say—there was a culture on the team of training and athleticism. We kind of learned from each other.

7-00:32:38

And the world was catching up. Track was very important in those days. We didn't have any headline competition in the [*Los Angeles*] *Times*, so anything that happened at [U]SC or UCLA or Occidental in track was big news, was front-page sport news. That's the stuff of stardom. So we were big. And in '56 we did the improbable; we won the NCAA, the first year that UCLA ever won the NCAA, as a team. We also won the Pac 10. It wasn't called the Pac 10, it was called the Pacific Coast Athletic Association, PCAA, I think. We won that in the same year, so that was real big news.

7-00:33:31

Wilmot: Russ, I want to backtrack just a little bit.

7-00:33:34

Ellis: Okay, all right, fine.

7-00:33:37

Wilmot: I have a question for you. When did you become first aware of running not against yourself and not against the body or bodies next to you but a time that someone else had already set? A record.

7-00:33:51

Ellis: I have to—I can tell you. I know exactly when it happened. It was 1955, and I guess I was a sophomore. It was the Compton Invitational. Very big meet. There were some things I didn't mention, but I had become sort of big in my high school and sort of carried the weight and the expectations of my high school, and that was fine, partly because I hadn't internalized it. That was nice. That was gravy. "God, you know, they like me," and so forth. I took second to a guy I think in my second year at Compton, a guy named Ty Hadley, from another school, and this was at the high school half-mile of the Compton Invitational meet. In those days, the Compton Invitational invited

people from all over the world. It was one of the biggest meets in the world. And so the world paid attention to the Compton Invitational.

7-00:35:04

Anyway, in that second year, I think it was—maybe it was the first, I can't remember—but Ty Hadley beat me. The first thing I noticed is the disappointment of my con-sociates at high school. They weren't angry at me, but it's just, they were shocked. They didn't expect me to lose, or not win, not take first. That was the first time I got a sense of carrying the expectations of others, okay? Which did not serve me well. I didn't do well with that, other people's expectations. That hurt me a lot as a runner later on. And then in my sophomore year, I went back to my town, now, my school, Compton Invitational, and I'm in the meet with—well, among other people, Jim Lea [pronounced Lee]. L-e-a is how his name was spelled. And, oh, what's his name, from Oklahoma? Ah! How could I not remember his name? He had already placed in the '52 Olympics. Jesus! I can't believe I can't remember his name. [J. W. Mashburn, Oklahoma State]

7-00:36:41

Anyway, so I'm back in my town, and I'm the kid, and there's this really intense field of runners, quarter mile. In the stands are people who have known me, and here I am, not in high school but now in a college setting, and this open invitational event. And so, talking about pushing, the gun goes off, and these guys go **POW!** And they are—they are gone! I mean, they just—it was a whole different thing! So I was forced to keep up with them. It was just self-respect, you know? I'm in this race, a very important meet, and these guys do something I'm not used to. Just—they're gone! I stay in it, and I'm having the feeling of losing control when I would run with the wind in Fontana, and I'm feeling like I'm going to split myself down the middle. My legs are going way *further* than I can control. But, but—uh! I come off the final curve, and there's more! There's stuff left! [laughs] Ah! Oh, God, it was stunning, to be in my body and realize that I still had something left. And I went after this guy from Oklahoma that placed third in the '52 Olympics, in the 400 meters. And I almost beat him. And I have a photograph of me just, just missing beating him. Bob Seaman did the same thing in the mile. Who did he run against? [Wes Santee] Boy, am I getting old! Who would have thought that I would—

7-00:38:52

McGarrigle:

We have that in the materials you gave us.

7-00:38:54

Ellis:

Okay. Yes, there's a picture of Bob Seaman just barely missing beating this really—the most famous American miler. And we're both sophomores, in college.

7-00:39:11

McGarrigle:

How old is Jim Lea and the runner from Oklahoma, relative to you?

7-00:39:14

Ellis: They're seniors, probably.

7-00:39:16

McGarrigle: So they've been out and around.

7-00:39:17

Ellis: Yes.

7-00:39:18

McGarrigle: And it sounds like you're getting initiated into a different league when you describe the way the start is. There is something—

7-00:39:25

Ellis: Yes, exactly.

7-00:39:25

McGarrigle: —very powerful about their start.

7-00:39:27

Ellis: Exactly.

7-00:39:26

McGarrigle: So it is a different technique, or is this talent? I mean, it's both.

7-00:39:32

Ellis: It's experience. Sports also grow and mature. When I played football in the B team, and I played football actually at Compton High as a B. You know, the A team and B team. The quarterback would come up behind the center, and go, "Twenty-five!" Or you go into a huddle, and they say, "Two man through the three hole," and that would say you're going this way, and the halfback is going to the left, and then you guys block this way. That was it. You listen to a football game now, on the field. Everybody's talking all the time. It's amazing. [raises voice; calls out unintelligible plays] The defense is listening and calling for adjustments; when the defense make adjustments and the quarterback sees what's happening, he changes the call; he changes when the ball is to be snapped. It is so sophisticated. [laughs] They've got photos. So, you know, stuff grows. Okay.

7-00:40:49

Well, when I was running in the fifties, I think stuff was fairly primitive. Obviously, stuff was fairly primitive. They didn't know a lot about—the quarter mile that I ran, my coach coached me to "coast" on the back straight. You go once around, right? So you go out, you go and you develop some speed, and he'd say, "Put it in overdrive." Nobody would say that today. It's almost—what you really have to—well, someone like Michael Johnson, the world record. Look at that man run. He knows what pace he can go the fastest and sustain the whole time, how fast can you run the whole time. Same thing with the mile and the two-mile. The Kenyans they don't mess around with "and now, three laps." They go **POW!** And they go off, and then everybody

is, “Omigod, what are they doing?” And what they’re doing is redefining how you run the distances, because they have a different concept of it, right?

7-00:41:58

Well, I think what happened when I was learning was probably just maturation. I was young, and most of my competition—J. W. Mashburn was the guy’s name who I almost beat, from Oklahoma—so I was used to probably a slightly slower buildup to a sprint to complete the race, and that’s not what my competitors were doing. They were trying, first off, to get one up on each other. You hurt—you really do have an effect on your opponent’s psyche by what you show them. It’s a bunch of psychological games. There’s a lot of game playing in these sports. Sometimes doing what people don’t expect can really screw them up, who were running with a different set of expectations, you know. “Where is Joe? He usually is leading at this time.” Like, he’s a frontrunner. And Joe has decided to run at the back and rely on the speed to kick at the finish, say, to change strategy. Or someone who relies on a kick at the end goes out fast. Just changing your strategy, that you may not be prepared for.

7-00:43:21

So that’s when I learned about speed, and also that was the beginning of everybody’s expectations. My fastest time in the quarter mile had been 48:05. That got me into the invitational as a local boy at UCLA, and that was not slow, but it wasn’t fast. I ran that race in 46:05, two seconds faster. That never happens. It just doesn’t happen. So all of a sudden, it was a new day. I thought of myself differently. My coach called me in, and he sat me down. That’s one thing he did good. He said, “How fast do you think you can run?” Kind of toyed with some ideas. I never got much faster, actually.

7-00:44:14

Wilmot:

How does one answer a question like that?

7-00:44:16

Ellis:

Oh, I don’t remember what I said, but I kind of understood what he was after, that is, “What do you have to say about your capacities?” And I felt good about my capacities, actually. In the end of my career, one of my regrets was that I had very clear signals from my body that there was a tremendous amount left that hadn’t been tested. I can’t tell you how these insights happen, but I had gotten sick, and we’ll get to that later, but I knew that I hadn’t used myself fully, really fully or well. It was amazing. It was sort of in that realm. But that Compton Invitational was when the world looked at me really differently, and I looked at myself differently, and my coach looked at me differently. And it paid off. I mean, we became a good team, and track and field at UCLA really took off after this cohort that I was a part of.



7-00:45:34

McGarrigle: That race that's so international that you're describing—what was that like for you? You had these runners who come from all over. Was there an awareness there? An interchange with you?

7-00:45:49

Ellis: Yes, it was a credit to me that I had been invited there. My guess is all the runners in the quarter mile were from the United States. That would be my guess.

7-00:46:02

McGarrigle: Because there were others, I know, I saw in the headlines, from Brazil and—

7-00:46:04

Ellis: Yes, right, it was a big event.

7-00:46:06

McGarrigle: So the world is coming to Compton.

7-00:46:08

Ellis: And paying attention.

7-00:46:09

McGarrigle: And paying attention. Is there an awareness among you and your teammates about this? It's a big world that's coming to L.A.

7-00:46:19

Ellis: The normal. Everybody knew how important the Compton Invitational was, yes. There was also another meet called Coliseum Relays that was big in those days. It was also an invitational meet.

7-00:46:35

McGarrigle: Are you at this point paying attention to international runners?

7-00:46:42

Ellis: Oh, yes. Well, not very much, but in '55, for a very short time, my time was one of the best times in the world, and this track and field magazine that came into existence around that time would rank folks. You can still find this stuff online, which is interesting. And so all of a sudden, I'm ranked internationally for a while, the second-fastest time for a very short while, and then I think they rate at the end of the year who had the fastest time, and I think I wound up the eighth fastest or something. So that's something that you can read about. There's your name in an international journal, *Track and Field News*, I think it was called.

7-00:47:39

Let's see, what else? Another thing that happened was the press started raising expectations. There would be things like, "Ellis to Meet Mashburn." So all of a sudden, the game changes a lot, because you're not the little sneaky kid who's going to come from behind and surprise people. You're not a kid

anymore, you're a veteran, and people come with the expectation that you'll do things.

7-00:48:14

Wilmot: How did that affect your strategy?

7-00:48:15

Ellis: It didn't affect my strategy very much, it affected my person. I really disliked carrying other people's expectations. I just didn't handle it well. Sometimes I was running not to lose, rather than running to do my best. Can you get a sense of that?

7-00:48:39

McGarrigle: Yes.

7-00:48:40

Wilmot: Yes.

7-00:48:42

McGarrigle: There's a heavy burden in those words.

7-00:48:43

Ellis: Yes, yes. And you have to learn to deal with that. I didn't crash and burn, but it interfered with my talent. I'd get very mental. There was a guy up here at Cal much later, a half-miler, Robinson. What's his name? And I remember going to a meet up here and watching this guy run, and he was just happy. He was talented, and he was just happy, and I remember thinking that I was never a happy runner. I felt sometimes like the wind, just in terms of the conditioning I was talking about. I just felt like, "God, what a great place to be, in this body!" So responsive. But I was never a happy runner, I was a grim runner. Even when I was grim, though, there were times I felt I could turn around and run backwards and beat everybody at the finish of a meet. I wouldn't do that, but I just felt so good about myself, in such great shape.

7-00:50:03

McGarrigle: Are there role models that you have at this point? You are with your teammates forging this new identity for track and field at UCLA. But are there role models outside of the school?

7-00:50:18

Ellis: There was a guy named Mal Whitfield. He is extremely important. His daughter reads the news on CNN, that woman. She's a mixed woman. I think her name is Fredricka Whitfield. She reads the news. She's got a very stable, consistent position. Mal Whitfield was a very important half-miler. Oh, God, just very important, very important model for black folks. He was just out there. He was good. He won the '48 Olympics in the half mile, and he just won everything, and he was a beautiful, elegant runner. So he was a model for me and a lot of other people. There's a funny story about him because he came to the Compton Invitational when I was a [high school] senior, and we were working out on the field, all of us—I mean, he was doing some warm-

ups or something like this. This was the day or so before the meet or the week before the meet. We were out there. That was our field, Compton High School. And I'm a half-miler, and I'm a half-miler at Compton, and I'm good. And I run up to say hello to him, and he—you know, just, "Leave me alone." He was concentrating. But I was deeply offended, and I vowed to beat him when I had the chance. And I did, later in my life, beat him. [laughs] Not in his event, though. It was in the quarter mile that I beat him. It was actually the Olympic trials in '56, I think. He'd come down to the quarter. But he was a very important model for me and a lot of other people, even people who weren't in his event.

7-00:52:10

Who else was there? I liked Jim Lea at USC. He was a pretty amazing runner. I didn't identify with the sprinters very much. There were guys in high school that I admired. As a matter of fact, I got to say nice things to one of them at an event that Hal Miller convened down in L.A., where he brought us all together. A lot of athletes, he brought together. A guy named Guy Blackburn, who went to school with Thelton, at Jefferson. Guy was a sprinter, he ran the 100-yard dash. He's great, a great athlete.

7-00:53:04

McGarrigle:

Now, I asked you this in a different context, and I know Thelton was ahead of you, but did you know him or of him?

7-00:53:09

Ellis:

Not in high school. I knew of him when I was at UCLA and he was up here, and part of what was happening was there's just a small number of black folks anywhere, so it was just kind of reputational, I'd never met him or seen him. But I was aware that Thelton Henderson was up here, and he was playing football. Who was his buddy? [Jerry Drew]

7-00:53:41

McGarrigle:

Not Donny—

7-00:53:42

Ellis:

No, no, no.

7-00:53:43

McGarrigle:

No, that's [unintelligible]. Oh, who he roomed with?

7-00:53:47

Ellis:

No, he came up with a football player from Jeff. Great running back. Anyway, so we were aware of each other. So when we met at System Development Corporation, where he got a job and I got a job afterwards—he was back from the Army, I guess, and I was just out of college. We knew of each other, by reputation.

7-00:54:18

McGarrigle:

I've got a lot more questions around the running. Some of them are logistical and practical. Like, how did you travel from your home location to meets? There was a bus, or—

7-00:54:30

Ellis:

That was very interesting. In 1952, I remember our athletes at Compton got on an airplane and flew to Tucson. It was one of these PanAm twin-tailed prop planes. We were good, and North High School, I think, in Tucson was very good. It was a very important competition, two powerhouses, and we beat them. But we flew. Fascinating. A high school flies to another state. And it was funny. That was my first concrete experience with de jure segregation. The black athletes had to sit upstairs in the theater. They had a kind of de jure segregation of races. And this came up again, by the way, in the Amateur Athletic Union, in an AAU meet. That's what they called it, AAU. In I think '55, 1955. And I saw Mal Whitfield at this convening of athletes that Hal Miller did down in L.A., because I remember that meet was in St. Louis, and so we would go out in mixed groups, mixed racial groups. But St. Louis in those days, if you went to the wrong place, they'd simply ignore you if you were black. They had separated us in the hotel or something, and I remember Mal Whitfield and maybe George Rodin, who was a West Indian distance runner, protested. And I remember a big kafuffle. They made some changes to accommodate the athletes. Anyway, what was I answering?

7-00:56:32

McGarrigle:

You were answering—

7-00:56:33

Ellis:

Oh, oh, how we traveled.

7-00:56:35

McGarrigle:

And at this point, in St. Louis, first in Arizona, you're in high school and then later—do you have a sense of what your personal reaction was to that information?

7-00:56:50

Ellis:

The experience?

7-00:56:51

McGarrigle:

Yes.

7-00:56:52

Ellis:

Kind of incredulity. I went to the movie, and I sat upstairs in the balcony. Took great delight in beating their team. [laughs]

7-00:57:14

McGarrigle:

Was there an added element of—

7-00:57:16

Ellis:

Oh, hell, yes. [laughs] You have to remember, not everybody my age who's black is this way, but—that, as you venture in the world, is one of the most salient features you carry with you, your skin color and your kinky hair and your lips. You go out, and you're used to the world having something to say or do. You know, it's a salient feature of yourself, and people are either happy to see you come or not happy to see you come. There are places you know you can't go, things you can't do. It wasn't the South, but you would plan your route to get to certain places, knowing that Glendale, for example—you don't want your car to break down in Glendale in the fifties. There were lots of funny little accidents that happened to folks who were there, who were black, who wound up in jail and didn't do well in jail. Or Inglewood, which is now mainly black and brown. There were no black people living in Inglewood when I was in high school.

7-00:58:33

McGarrigle:

I guess I'm anticipating, and I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm anticipating our future meetings, where we talk about your involvement in the civil rights movement, and I'm trying to get a sense of where you were as an athlete in your thinking as you encounter racism.

7-00:58:52

Ellis:

Yes.

7-00:58:53

McGarrigle:

And I understand that you encounter it earlier in your life, but this is a concrete example: you can't stay in a hotel or you have to sit in the balcony.

7-00:59:01

Ellis:

But I was also aware in Fontana—I didn't go to the movies very often because Mama Joiner and Uncle Eddie didn't do that kind of thing, and just periodically I'd go to something. I forget in what combination. But I was aware then, in Fontana, of race and the importance of race. I was aware that the family that moved on the wrong side of this street were blown up. They were a black family who lived in the wrong place, and people who were adults at church and other places talked about it, kind of quietly, you know, but I was aware of that. I was aware that they let black people use the pool, the Fontana pool, on Thursdays, which is the day they cleaned it out. Something that didn't change in Berkeley till the middle fifties, by the way.

7-00:59:53

Wilmot:

In '54.

7-00:59:55

Ellis:

Yes, '54. Anyway, so I'm in college in '54. So it was always salient. But while we're at this thing, I've tried not to be too planful about what I talk about, just sort of wander over things and let them seep in and then see what comes out when I talk to you, when you get here. But one thing struck me. I was talking to Julie about it on our walk yesterday. There are all these

achieved statuses: you know, professor; ascribed ones: black, husband, brother, dad, and so forth. No status experientially that I've occupied is more important than my having been a runner. And it's probably related to how it happens. You know, I tell the story of my maturation, my muscularity, my musculature, my everything. My, my—I became attractive to women as an athlete, especially in college. And all the lameness that Thelton and Troy and I talk about in high school and our lack of success, which I think—I shouldn't talk for them, but we talked about it. We weren't very good with girls in high school. But the rules are different in college. I mean, different expectations, different things were rewarded. So I become this big star. I didn't act on it very much, but boy, was it different from high school and from other times.

7-01:01:57

So I mature into this status as an athlete. My body changes, my mind changes, my preoccupations change, and all around this role as a runner. And my best rewards, my best rewards. I learned several things. People—I got deference from it. Okay, I'll stop, sure.

[begin audio file 8; preliminary discussion about recording methodology not transcribed.]

8-00:00:56

McGarrigle: We stopped at a very intense point.

8-00:01:00

Wilmot: Yes, we did.

8-00:01:02

McGarrigle: We were talking about transportation, but we were talking about a lot more.

8-00:01:09

Ellis: Right. That's funny. We got into race. And knowing your environment and all those kinds of things.

8-00:01:21

Wilmot: Yes, and you were saying that this wasn't your first awareness of race.

8-00:01:27

Ellis: No.

8-00:01:27

Wilmot: This traveling abroad, and you were also were talking about—I'm kind of retracing it—we were talking about did that give extra pleasure in the victory?

8-00:01:39

Ellis: At North High School. Yes, yes, yes. And stuff was racialized in those days in sports. For example, USC had a few black athletes, quite a few, actually, but USC was a private kind of business-class school with pretty high tuition per unit, and they would admit athletes who were black, and they often wouldn't graduate. They'd actually go to Long Beach State and graduate. But they

weren't big on the football teams back then, and throughout the country, sports was segregated. You would not have a black quarterback, for sure.

8-00:02:29

Wilmot:

Is it at the high school level you're talking about?

8-00:02:34

Ellis:

Every level, every level. Less so in high school, but the high schools tended to be more de facto segregated. You never had de jure segregation in schools in California that I'm aware of. I just think it didn't happen. It wasn't necessary. People lived where they lived, and the schools tended to serve the residents. There was probably some gerrymandering of school district lines. I don't know. I don't know what the history of California schools is. As my father describes things, and looking at Watts and David Starr Jordan High School, probably California never had the will, interest, resources, commitment to segregation to work up regulations to keep people out of places. Probably it was just *informally* managed.

8-00:03:31

Anyway, race mattered, in *really* big ways in those days, and so in sports—I still have to work on it, not mechanically rooting for the black athlete, because that's what you did. That was more important than the outcome in the old days. The Kenny Washingtons, the Jackie Robinsons and the Joe Louises and the Sugar Ray Robinsons and George Taliaferro, the running back, and oh, God, these were our heroes.

8-00:04:10

McGarrigle:

So in terms of role models—we talked about it earlier, where you go a little farther afield, into different sports, and you have this pantheon of role models to which you are relating.

8-00:04:20

Ellis:

Oh, yes, yes. Buddy Young [Scatback]. That's what Thelton was. He was a little runner. And there was a guy, a football player, named Buddy Young. There's an oral history of him I've seen, a videotaped one. Great athlete, great runner, courageous, quick, black, way ahead of his time in terms of getting access to playing time, public playing time at a time when black athletes didn't. Oh, what's his name? [sighs then laughs] The singer-scholar, left-oriented orator, driven out of the country, black—come on!—actor.

8-00:05:21

Wilmot:

Robeson?

8-00:05:23

Ellis:

Paul Robeson. It was important that he was an athlete. He was an All-American, very early. I think maybe one of the first black All-Americans. Even that kind of enterprise was somewhat segregated. What am I doing? Of course, you guys know. Look, I was born in 1935, so what kind of life did I live? My life was not miserable. I never remember being hungry. I never

faced a lynch mob. There were places that were dangerous and situations that were dangerous. There were people who didn't like me, not because of me, but because of what I looked like or the category I belong to. There were plenty of slights and so forth.

8-00:06:10

I have always felt strange about the situation of some of the kids who come to Cal, or go to advanced education, because they know about racism. "There's racism, racism!" But they don't have any scar tissue, because actually they haven't been hit. Nothing much has happened except they feel bad or there'll be something like clumsy efforts at intimacy, is what I called it. Or someone would say to a black roommate, "How do you get your hair like that?" And all of a sudden, it's a thing. But it's not just race, it's a lot of things, gender issues, but all very sensitive. But a lot of the young people don't have scar tissue. They haven't really been punched in the nose or, say, "You, get outta here. We don't rent to people who look like you!" I mean, I've had that experience. "Well, no, everyone's white here, and we kind of like to keep it that way." You go and you expect disappointment, and you get it, and then you go someplace else till you find a place to stay. You know what I mean.

8-00:07:19

My father and stepmother and I drove across country in the fifties, and I remember we got to a town, Rawlins, Wyoming, and wanted to stop and find a place to stay. We couldn't find a place to stay. And so we were driving along the street, and my father leaned out the window and hailed this black guy walking along and said, "Hey, man, we can't find a place to stay. We're passing through." And the guy said, "Oh, you know, that doctor over there—what's his name?—on..." So we went to this white family's house, and it was a local doctor, and stayed in his house. It was very comfortable. I remember the sheets were especially wonderful in that bed.

8-00:08:09

Wilmot:

And you paid him money?

8-00:08:11

Ellis:

I doubt it. I doubt it very much. He was just—the community knew, and my father knew to ask, how do you deal with a situation like this? See, my father—he knew. So he leaned out the window and said, "Hey, where do we stay? We can't find a place to stay." And the town was small enough, I guess, that folks knew. "They're good. They'll help you out." So I had lots of those little events, but I organized my life to stay away from those. Academia, show biz, and so forth—while they have plenty of racist elements in them, they were not about that. They were more rule bending, more exploratory, and I liked those worlds a lot.

8-00:09:08

Wilmot:

I want to return to your life as a runner.



8-00:09:11

Ellis: Sure.

8-00:09:12

Wilmot: One thing I noticed, though, is that your track team at UCLA is an integrated team and there's people from different backgrounds there.

8-00:09:26

Ellis: Yes, UCLA is famous, by the way, for a long tradition of black athletes, and they treated you well at school, on campus. But you couldn't rent off campus. You'd have to go fairly far afield or stay at home and commute. I have funny stories to tell about that, interesting stories, but I stayed at the co-op. See, in my undergraduate years, I lived in the co-op, which was a very interesting place, Twin Pines, which you have up here, too, Robeson Hall, a very left tradition as you know, fifty dollars a week and four hours of work a week. It's a great deal. Great place to stay. Ten o'clock in the kitchen, in the dining room, was just an amazing place. I would see—that was in '53, second half of '53, and there were a lot of foreign students. I had a roommate from Ghana for a while, Kofi Ofusu. I met some of his relatives here, and I've had a student whose uncle was Kofi. Sherman Louie was from the People's Republic of China, the best ping pong player at the co-op. And a lot of vets, a lot of military folks back in school. Anyway, so—my running.

8-00:11:17

Wilmot: You're opening up this really exciting place we want to explore.

8-00:11:21

Ellis: No, I'll go back. I'll go back to my running.

8-00:11:22

Wilmot: Yes, but we need to get back.

8-00:11:23

McGarrigle: But when you say they treated you good on campus, "they" is the administration?

8-00:11:29

Ellis: And the sports program. They were very tuned in. Remember, you guys won't remember the names of Kenny Washington, who was a football player, but these are, like, from the thirties. And Jackie Robinson went to UCLA as an undergraduate. Woody Strode, who became an actor but was a very important athlete. Tom Bradley, the mayor of L.A., ran the quarter mile there. And that was a place you could go. I was aware of the athletes who went there, but going to Westwood was like going to a foreign land in some respects. But they took care of their athletes.

8-00:12:11

McGarrigle: I'm wondering what allowed that to happen that was so different from Berkeley at the same time.

8-00:12:17

Ellis: I don't know. I imagine you've spoken to Thelton about what happened up here.

8-00:12:21

McGarrigle: How uninviting Berkeley was relatively speaking.

8-00:12:24

Ellis: Yes, yes. I just don't know.

8-00:12:26

McGarrigle: There was an individual or somehow this consciousness happened at a time when—if you look at the rest of the context we're putting it in, this was rare.

8-00:12:40

Ellis: When I was working with Mac Laetsch—I think I was working with Mac Laetsch. Oh, no, he had become Vice Chancellor for the University Affairs and was doing development work, and asked me to look into the giving patterns of African American graduates of Cal. There were these big holes. And Thelton's era—the black graduates didn't identify that much with the place at all. They didn't have a good experience. John George and Don Wilson and so forth, all those people. They were marginalized. He had some very bad experiences I'm sure he talked to you about, when he went—after he got clipped in football—went out for baseball. Did he tell you that story about going around the track?

8-00:13:36

McGarrigle: Yes.

8-00:13:38

Ellis: But on campus, black athletes are kings. [chuckles]

8-00:13:49

Wilmot: Could you speak a little bit to the kind of messages that you were receiving, that you were getting? Let me narrow that down, from administration first?

8-00:14:00

Ellis: I didn't know from administration in those days. All I knew was who I dealt with, and that was the coaching staff and then I had to go to class also, okay?

8-00:14:15

Wilmot: What kind of messages were you getting from your professors, as an athlete? Did you [cross-talk; unintelligible]?

8-00:14:20

Ellis: Well, here, I'll give you one indirect one. I took History 7A, which was your basic history and institutions requirement, right? You probably don't. You were too young. You're just young! That's your problem, you're just too young. And I remember really failing to understand Manifest Destiny. [laughs] Is it green? How much does it weigh? [laughs] I just didn't know.

8-00:15:01

Wilmot: It's actually a funny idea.

8-00:15:05

Ellis: Yeah, right, right. But I really didn't get it. And there was a lot I didn't get, at first. I did have a tutor, so they provided tutorial support.

8-00:15:21

McGarrigle: That was through the Athletic Department?

8-00:15:22

Ellis: Right, as far as I knew. And that was kind of helpful. It didn't last very long, but it was kind of helpful. And I was sure that I failed that class. I didn't get a failing grade. And the professor, I learned later, was the brother of Braven Dyer, who was a sportswriter for the *LA Times*. I think that guy passed me. Now, leaping ahead a little bit, during the track season, I would wind up on probation. I'd fall below a C average. Then I would use the off season to get myself back in good graces, so I would go below C and above C, because my identity was athletics. I didn't identify with the academic enterprise so formally in the classroom until my senior year. However, I also identified, weirdly, with a kind of bohemian world and theater arts, that hung out in a temporary building, where the artsy-craftsy folks hung out. I don't know what the hell I was doing. I liked a lot of the ladies over there a lot. But there was an ethic there that you didn't care that much about the classroom. It was strange, in the arts, kind of dance-art-graphic arts world. So I wasn't a very good student. But by staying at the co-op and other places I stayed, I was really actively engaged in "the culture" of college. I was really in it. I loved it. But that was the ungraded part. That was the other curriculum, the shadow curriculum that I think is one of the juiciest parts of going to college, what happens in the coffee shops and the arguments in the co-op dining hall late at night and all this kind of stuff.

8-00:17:50

Running. Most of the black athletes hung out in front of Kerckhoff Hall. You've noticed the wall in Sproul Plaza? It's not as black as it used to be, but that wall right in front of the Golden Bear for a long time was dominated by black students, and the black athletes would show up there a lot, but I think that's changed. But we'd stand out in front of Kerckhoff Hall. There were a small number of black students at UCLA. I don't know what percentage, but it didn't feel like a lot. And us jocks were important, and we hung out there. At the beginning of the school year or the semester, we'd go into a room in Kerckhoff Hall, and we'd be given our courses that we wanted, and we'd be given our books. There was an athletic table where you could get your meals and so forth, so we were really coddled. That never really happened up here at Cal, in the same way. I was very aware of it because it came to my attention in my administrative role. Very different experiences up here on athletics and attitude toward athletics up here.

8-00:19:08

So we were really coddled. We were really coddled. And athletics was valued. My son says, and many people at Berkeley High say—when they say, “What’s in the water in Berkeley that it turned out so many of these great jazz musicians?” One of the things that the kids say is that you were valued. You didn’t lose points for being some four-eyed trombone player. You were valued. It was a valued enterprise here. And, boy, when you’re valued, it really matters. It’s a hook. It keeps you going. Have I said this quite this way before? I don’t know. But it’s great to be admired, and it wants to generalize. So it kept me in school, and it kept me there and kept me involved in the enterprise of school, having to study, and I learned things. He said, of college. [laughs] I learned things. My philosophy class—big impact on me. Mill’s *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, had a big impact on me. It’s about rules, as I experienced it. A huge book for me. And because I was in the co-op, I wasn’t just talking to athletes, and so I was in the mix of college and learning things, people from other backgrounds. It was a magnificent time for me. I had a great time. I keep wandering away, don’t I?

8-00:21:02

Wilmot:

You’re actually right on. I have a question.

8-00:21:04

Ellis:

Sure, sure, sure.

8-00:21:07

Wilmot:

I’m wondering—you’re already kind of leading into this, but can you speak a little bit to how other students related to you as an athlete, as a student, as a person?

8-00:21:16

Ellis:

One time, I had a psychology professor call attention to the fact—he didn’t mention my name, but he said something like “certain subsidized athletes,” with derision. And it’s funny. I didn’t experience it as put-down. I said, “Oh, he’s paying attention to me.” [laughs] But UCLA was very different from up here. I mean, we were valued. They valued their jocks down there, I’ve got to tell you. And I think they still do, more than up here. You don’t get any major hero status up here for being a great athlete. The alums pay a lot of attention to you up here and down there too, of course. But I would walk across campus and I was a celebrity every day. So I had to learn celebrity skills.

8-00:22:08

McGarrigle:

So what are those skills?

8-00:22:09

Ellis:

[shouts]“Hey, man, great race! Hey, Russ!” [lowers voice] “Hey, how you doin?” You know, brief encounters, saying “Thank you.” Someone later, a woman that I liked and was talking to later—I think I was in graduate school by then, it might have been earlier than that—and she remembers how much she disliked me. She never knew me, but just my little cocky-assed walking

around the campus, like I owned everything, you know? And I had never seen myself that way. I'd just seen myself plying my way through the accolades, and doing well each week, whatever I did on the weekend at an event. God, it really felt good to be cared for, for something you were good at. That was extremely important to me. And a lot of the other athletes I know had a similar experience. Not all of them, but a lot of them did. It was a bright spot. It was a hook in that life, and I loved it, I enjoyed it, and I think I was able to translate it into other aspects of being there. I mean, I did eventually get very interested in what happened in the classroom. Really interested, later.

8-00:23:31

Wilmot:

Was there a social scene associated with the track team?

8-00:23:35

Ellis:

No. No, it was an autonomous world. It was its own world. When you were there, you were in it, but we didn't do much outside. It's like anything, like the Cal band or anything like that. When you walk around campus, these are little—those folks glow in the dark because you see them all the time and you go through struggles and pain and all that kind of stuff with them. I didn't feel that there was a social scene that transcended it. There were some things that we did. Hal Miller was a very interesting guy. I admired him. He was studying hard. I think he had come out of a very difficult first couple of years in college. I don't know what he did. Probably partied too much. But he was in a hurry to finish, and I remember he had this book he was studying, *Beowulf*, and I looked at that book and said, "What is this!?" You know, "What is this *stuff* you're reading?" But he was also a party guy. He liked to party.

8-00:24:55

There was a real issue for me there because I came from way outside the classy part of the black world. I was in very far South L.A., and the fancy people were around the West L.A., Adams area. The clubs were there. Sammy Davis hung out around that area. And the aspiring black middle class bought houses over there. Those are the people who wore the clothes and they liked all those kinds of things. I just had dinner about two months ago with a woman who was part of that, who was from up here, from Oakland. She escaped Oakland, and she said in order to get into that world down there—and also to escape her father, who was a minister—Virginia Rose is her name, and I remember that she was the beauty. Oh, God! She was just the cat's meow. She was the kind of woman who would be at the Hal Miller parties. I don't know if she ever was, but she admits that that's what she was into.

8-00:26:24

She remembers that I was different. She said, "You were always kind of marginal to that. You were different. And you talked different," she said. I didn't admire the people in the play world, in the social scene. I didn't want what they had. But I'd already gotten off on a modest little Buddhist conceit there, in my last year in high school—you know, self-abnegation, you weren't concerned about material things. I maintained it for a while. I just thought it

was shallow, what they were interested in. I liked Hal, and there was a circle of guys around that, and some of them were in sports that did that. And I joined Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, but I wore that out in a hurry, because that was *all* party, just all party.

8-00:27:23

Wilmot:

Can you talk a little bit about how that happened? Because I'm hearing you—yes, I'd love to hear a little bit about it.

8-00:27:30

Ellis:

How did I get into it?

8-00:27:31

Wilmot:

Yes. I understand Hal was your line brother, you crossed together, July 17<sup>th</sup>.

8-00:27:37

Ellis:

Oh, my goodness! Well, see, he knows a lot more. I don't remember that stuff.

8-00:27:41

Wilmot:

Okay.

8-00:27:42

Ellis:

Gosh, oh gee. Imagine him remembering that! But Esker Harris was my roommate for a while. He was from Nashville, had been a Golden Gloves boxer and was quite a good football player on the Red Sanders football teams. And remember to ask me about Esker and God. Did I tell you this story?

8-00:28:07

McGarrigle:

No, but I saw in the materials you gave me, some pictures of him.

8-00:28:10

Ellis:

Oh, is that right? Okay.

8-00:28:11

McGarrigle:

And he was your roommate.

8-00:28:12

Ellis:

Yes, he was for a while. I had several roommates at the co-op. But there's a very important story I want to tell you about Esker and the problem of God.

8-00:28:23

Wilmot:

Are you going to tell it now?

8-00:28:25

Ellis:

No, no, I want to go back to what you asked me, which was what? Which is—

8-00:28:31

Wilmot:

How did you decide to pledge Kappa Alpha Psi?

8-00:28:35

Ellis:

I think I was courted.

8-00:28:40

Wilmot: Who would you have been courted by?

8-00:28:44

Ellis: Somebody in the fraternity. I don't even remember. I don't even remember. But I remember Esker and I pledged together, Esker Harris. Did I pledge with Hal at the same time?

8-00:28:55

Wilmot: It appears so.

8-00:28:56

Ellis: Oh, okay. That's interesting. He talked to me about Kappa Alpha Psi, because he still goes to these things. I just recently discovered my little membership thing, which is kind of amazing. But I wore it out in a hurry. It was fun to go through, and the hazing was fun. They dumped us off somewhere, I think with no clothes in the middle of somewhere, and we had to save ourselves or something. I can't remember.

8-00:29:25

Wilmot: Were you there long enough to pledge another class?

8-00:29:27

Ellis: I don't think so. I might have been. I let go of things in my biographical travels, unless they really become indelibly part of me, and that didn't.

8-00:29:50

McGarrigle: Was there a way in which you were wanting to be part of the greater community and this was an all-black community? I mean, is there a sense in which you're moving in the bohemian circles, which are more integrated?

8-00:30:04

Ellis: I was having more fun in the more complexly put together worlds, yes. But I don't ever remember—the only thing I remember about what might be regarded as escaping blackness—

8-00:30:21

McGarrigle: And I didn't mean it to sound like that.

8-00:30:25

Ellis: Okay, but that's okay.

8-00:30:26

McGarrigle: I realize it probably did.

8-00:30:27

Ellis: No, no.

8-00:30:28

McGarrigle:

I'm just saying a greater world, and I'm wondering how you were experiencing that and what you were drawn to in that. I didn't mean to infer that that meant an escape from something.

8-00:30:37

Ellis:

You know, it's just fine. It's just fine. I'm really comfortable with the topic. I never felt I was fleeing anything; I always felt I was being inducted into something or making new discoveries. And the answer to the question is yes. I wandered into a lot more worlds than the black world of athletics or my close friends, who were the black athletes, and was fascinated by a lot of things that a lot of my friends weren't. Not just black athletes, but just people that I knew. I remember—I did have some notions, though. I don't know where these came from. No one ever taught me this stuff. But while I would remember liking Count Basie and other kinds of music, although I wasn't jazz oriented, I thought T-Bone Walker was *déclassé*, a big twangy, electric-sounding blues guitar. And where the hell did I get that? I was headed toward some notion, and I got—could have been Marjorie, my Mom, but I developed an interest in classical music.

8-00:32:04

And I had a '41 Ford that I'd drive in to—I loved that car—I'd sometimes drive in from back to campus, and I'd be listening to some music. God, what was his name? [Hunter Hancock] Radio station. But I would change it when I got to UCLA to a different station. This is important, a very important observation I'm about to make, because it's the difference between me and a generation—and some black kids who came to college later, who, let me just say it metaphorically, didn't change the station as they approached the campus, didn't make an adjustment to the culture of the campus or what the expectations appeared to be. And I have some—Maulana Ron Karenga is not the example, but he is—Ron Everett was his name, and we were interlocutors. [Maulana Ron Karenga was born Ron Everett.] We argued, because he had become—later on, in graduate school—we called them then black nationalists and so forth, and we used to argue on Haines Hall steps. We had arguments in auditoriums. I was chairman of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], and he was the chairman of US, which on campus was United Slaves. A very articulate guy. He's still around. He's the one who brought Kwanzaa into public consciousness here in the United States and got it institutionalized.

8-00:33:41

But he was a fulcrum for a lot of kids who came to college and didn't trade in their mode of speech or anything else, who retained the sing-song cadences and still got good grades. [laughs] You know, didn't have to make that trade. I think Thelton, Troy, and I are examples, and I'm going to edit this out, but I think of folks who went [to college] at a time when we made a deal on how we sounded that was different from how we talked in high school. I specifically remember having to give up on something. In my world, in southeast L.A., of my friends and things around high school, you had to keep



up with the latest patois. As you know, the language of poor people, but certainly black folks are so busy. The words are coming out new. People are inventing stuff every day. And if you're going to be worth anything, you got to know what the words are. And I remember being exhausted. I couldn't handle the split. I couldn't go with all the new things, like Manifest Destiny and all the polysyllabic stuff in concepts that I was supposed to know in college—which I had a penchant for anyway, but that penchant wasn't rewarded, as I've mentioned to you earlier, when I was in high school and other places.

8-00:35:26

But since I was away from my friends in Compton and away from high school, I didn't have a basis for keeping up. And I remember giving in one day. I said, "I can't do it. I can't stay aware of my language from across town in L.A. and do what I'm supposed to be doing here in terms of studying and this, that, and the other." This was a weird—it's not weird. It was a very specific moment, where I ran out of the ability, the groin muscles, to straddle those worlds. It was an interesting moment. It was a very specific moment for me. And it wasn't rejection; I just gave in. It was exhaustion. It was exhaustion. This Sarah Jones—is that her name? [Sarah Jones, *Surface Transit*]

8-00:36:19

McGarrigle:

Yes.

8-00:36:20

Ellis:

She said she had all these different people in her life in New York, different races and ethnic backgrounds and cultures, so she finally solved her problem by just becoming all of them. Kind of each situation, she learned how to sound like, be like everybody. I went the other way and said, "I can't do all that." Just too tiring." Felt inauthentic, too.

8-00:36:48

Wilmot:

Just felt inauthentic?

8-00:36:49

Ellis:

Phony.

8-00:36:53

Wilmot:

To?

8-00:36:54

Ellis:

To pretend I was keeping up with the slang of Compton and my friends. And I don't like people who do it. I get into a sound, and Julie can tell who I'm talking to on the other end of the phone. She can tell if it's a black person, especially a black man, especially somebody my age. So I do something. But I think it's—you know, America, this nation of immigrants causes everybody the problem of "what they're going to be" and "how they're going to be." It's

probably not exclusively an American problem, but it certainly is an American problem.

8-00:37:46

Wilmot: There are people who don't know that they're negotiating it, which is always interesting.

8-00:37:49

Ellis: Which is okay.

8-00:37:50

Wilmot: People always imagined that oftentimes—I wanted to just return to the bare bones of your metaphor, changing the radio dial.

8-00:37:59

Ellis: Yes.

8-00:38:00

Wilmot: That's because I'm very interested in what music would you have been listening to, and then what would you have changed it to? If you can even just approximate, I'd be happy.

8-00:38:09

Ellis: [pause] You know, age is such an awful thing.

8-00:38:23

Wilmot: But this isn't—

8-00:38:25

Ellis: No, no, no, no, but this is important because it was a station and program I used to listen to, very famous program. Began actually with a Johnny Otis tag. Johnny Otis is still alive. Went to Berkeley High. White guy. He said on this topic, Johnny Otis said—I saw him, he said, “In America, they say you're either black or white or something, so I decided to be black.” His name is John Valiotis. I met his ambassador brother in Washington, DC, at a very fancy dinner. His daddy was a grocer, a Greek grocer in Berkeley. And Johnny Otis just decided he was going to be black. So he said, “I chose black.” He's a great blues player. Well, the station I listened to—golly, Russell Ellis, this is ridiculous!—had a tag of one of his songs. But I listened to pretty funky stuff. There's a song called “Junko Partner” just to give you a flavor of where it sits in the spectrum. [sings] “Down the road, come-a Junko Partner”—means “junkie,” [heroin addict] probably—“Boy he was loaded as can be. He was knocked-out, knocked-out loaded. He was singin' this song to me.” My friends and I would run home every day and listen. We'd turn on this station—now Russell, how can you not remember the station—and listen to the various hit tunes. [Hunter Hancock was the disk jockey.] “60 Minute Man,” have you ever heard that? I didn't know what I was listening to, but there was a song, “60 Minute Man.” There was the beginnings of the group, the black group music. I also liked popular, just plain old popular music, and I used to listen to that in Fontana.

But I don't know what I would change it to. I think maybe I just turned it [the radio volume] down. I think I didn't go—because I didn't really get into classical until later. I had a roommate for a while, after I graduated. Great guy, great guy, a great musician, piano player, and he introduced me to a lot of stuff.

8-00:41:07

I'm going to go back to the running. You asked me about how I was treated by the administration, and I said basically we were coddled, I think, by the athletic program. For the black athletes, our worlds on campus were really quite secure. I didn't feel punished in the classroom by the professors or other students. There was always a "dumb jock" element in any college campus situation because very often it's true. Very often, the people who are recruited aren't particularly good students and need help and need it visibly. You can tell that they're not doing well. I did a study for [Chancellor Ira Michael] Heyman on helping them make a decision on what to do about our own athletic program. I went to Michigan and other places, Notre Dame to see how they all solved that problem very differently. It's always a problem, in a way.

8-00:42:11

So I felt very comfortable there, as a person. And it was a playground for me. Class wasn't impossible. I just didn't commit much of my identity and my energy to class until near the end of my undergraduate years. I was an athlete, and that's what I was there for. And I was a successful athlete, and people sought my company and my attention. They cared about me, and I was important. I was a bit arrogant about it. I *loved* it, I loved it, I loved it. I especially loved it when I felt good and did well and got the response from my father and from my friends and from strangers. I liked seeing myself in the newspaper. [laughs] The only equivalent experience I had of a match between what I was doing and me and what seemed to be my abilities was when I was vice chancellor. I felt that job fit me really well. I think I had what it took at the time. I wasn't afraid to make decisions. I wasn't afraid to delegate—as a matter of fact, it was the only way I could survive because I didn't understand a lot of things.

8-00:43:31

But my life was good. My life was good. And it took me places that I wouldn't have gone ordinarily. I was talking to Julie about this. Women sometimes have this experience. They get it because men are interested. They wind up going places that are really quite novel, because people are interested in them and say, "Oh, come over here." I know a white woman who wound up spending a lot of time in Chinatown. It was just the happenstance of her being interested in martial arts and so forth, and she just wound up going to places she could talk about in Chinatown that no white people ever go to, that she was there as an attractive woman going to places and doing things. I felt a little bit like that as an athlete. Nothing exotic, but I felt I had access and I did things that were different than other people did.

8-00:44:27

Wilmot:

I want to ask you especially—this is a backup question, kind of an important question that I don't think we've asked yet, but can you kind of give me a sense of what the trajectories of the people you went to high school were?

8-00:44:41

Ellis:

Yes.

8-00:44:42

Wilmot:

Did everyone go to college?

8-00:44:43

Ellis:

No. I used to talk about that. My close friends, Roderick Luke and Purcell Daniels, did wind up coming back—you know, we made this pact in the car, and they did wind up coming back and going to college. Purcell got married and had a couple of children. I think he became eventually a probation officer in Southern California. He lives in Laverne right now. Roderick became a medical technician, which he still is, up in the Sierras, outside of Bakersfield. His post office box is in Bodfish, I just learned. I'm going to have to look it up on the map, right. And I spoke to him on the phone. He has a daughter. He's separated from his wife. I think he may have a couple of kids. He's happy. He's the same guy, and so is Purcell. And they know me in ways that just shock me. You know, they say, "Well, you were always like that," when I talk to them now about something. They knew me. We knew each other well.

8-00:45:59

Wilmot:

Good friends are good for that.

8-00:46:01

Ellis:

That's right. "Why are *you* surprised? You were always that way." And Mayshack I lost. I wish—I tried to find him. Mayshack kind of shocked me, John Mayshack. He was very important to me, athletically and intellectually. But when he graduated—he might have been ahead of me one year, I think he was—he went to the Air Force. Mayshack was also important to me because he was a jazz enthusiast. I never was, even after he introduced me to a lot of stuff, but I learned things from him. He was a sincere jazz enthusiast. But he sent me a letter from somewhere in the military, asking me to go near a club where we had once gone to hear some music. I don't know how we got in, because I wasn't of age. And asked me to score some grass for him. I wrote him back a very self-righteous letter. It wasn't quite like "Your soul will burn in hell," or anything, but, "Gee whiz, are you kidding?" Because that was a no-no for me. Until later, until after I graduated from college. I think that letter alienated him. I don't know what happened.

8-00:47:25

But then I used to talk about the other thing, that there were these people who were great athletes. People would always say, "Gee, you're so good" and so forth. I'd say, "You should have seen So-and-so." Like, there was a long jumper—we call them now broad jumper—named Rollin Garrison, who was a

fantastic broad jumper, we called them. When I last saw him, he was a pretty profound alcoholic and out of it. There was another guy. I forget what his sport was, but he got killed, draining the dregs of gasoline out of the nozzle. You know, in the old days, sometimes you could go from nozzle to nozzle and just push it out and then get what was left in the hose. You probably can't do that now. They probably have some kind of vacuum arrangement, you can't do that. But you could just get what's left and then maybe get a tiny bit of gasoline to get your car from here to over there. And a cop saw him, and he got killed, and it was an innocent thing. He would have been a good athlete somewhere, probably better than me. I just remember that I didn't think of class as being an issue there. And it wasn't all social class, but there were a lot of guys who really got derailed, who could have had an even better life than I had, from high school and even junior high school. Just got lost in the mix of life and...

8-00:49:01

McGarrigle: Thelton talked about this somewhat, and his situation is different in that Jefferson was an all-black high school.

8-00:49:12

Ellis: Yes.

8-00:49:13

McGarrigle: You talked about this transition from Jefferson to a majority world for the athletes.

8-00:49:19

Ellis: Yes.

8-00:49:20

McGarrigle: Some of them made that transition, and others didn't.

8-00:49:24

Ellis: Yes.

8-00:49:25

McGarrigle: And what that meant. And then there's the whole issue also, that you talked about, in terms of maturation and physical change and so on that would impact an athlete, but in terms of the social, the cultural, and the societal, you're speaking to both, really.

8-00:49:42

Ellis: Yes. And I use the example of Artie, who was white, and Ruth, who came to UCLA, and I think, couldn't handle the social shift, so it was not just race, but there's something about going from that part of your life to the next one and in managing the change. People who marry in high school have this whole problem of different rates and directions of growth later on, trying to hold onto that wonderful connection they had but then suffering the fact that they grow, and grow in potentially different directions.

8-00:50:30

McGarrigle: I wanted to ask you more about the feeling of the team. You know, the team, track and field—

8-00:50:44

Ellis: Yes.

8-00:50:43.

McGarrigle: And you seemed to be very close, and you're consistently in the articles. You're photographed with the same group of athletes.

8-00:50:50

Ellis: Yes. Well, that is a mysterious thing. You've heard, both of you, or maybe you've had the experience, of getting into a zone. I don't know if you've ever been there. It's a transcendent time and place. You'll see it in basketball on occasion. You can roughly identify with it. It doesn't matter what the athlete is doing, the ball goes in. He can be hit in the head and fall and throw the ball skyward, and it goes in. He can go backwards and flip it up, in the heat of— and it goes in. You're just in a zone. You can have it as an individual, running, and generally you only know it when it's over because you haven't worked very hard and you've run some amazing time. And you say, "How can that be? I wasn't running."

8-00:51:58

The team phenomenon. See, in a team where there's a division of labor—let me just use football as an example, because it's a great sociological example, too, in the area of symbolic interaction. George Herbert Meade says to catch the ball, [I think] you have to have the experience of throwing the ball. You can reverse it, too, if you like. In other words, they are linked enterprises, and you see it in football all the time, right? The quarterback goes like this [pantomimes]—they practiced it, but the receiver's nowhere near where the ball's going, but they wind up in the same place. The quarterback's got to know something about what it is to catch it, and the catcher has to know something about what it is to throw it. It's a linked thing. And then when you get eleven people coordinated, and eleven people are in the zone, and they're reading each other, and they know what the other is capable of, and this stuff gets grooved and they're going, they're like an unstoppable force.

8-00:53:12

Well, in track it doesn't happen quite the same way. You see each other, you root for each other and so forth, but there's a kind of feeling that you get from watching how well somebody else does it. It's just a marginal advantage that seems to accumulate. It can go the other way. I remember we ran against Occidental one time, and we lost to them in a dual meet. Everybody kept doing something just a little short of okay, hitting that hurdle or bumping into—you know, fouling on the jump. And it was an epidemic, in reverse. And the team spirit thing that linked most people—some of it's part of culture. You can develop that in a school culture. I think that's what UCLA had that

Cal never developed quite, or a Notre Dame, obviously, but that's about something else.

8-00:54:14

McGarrigle: And what about the relay? How does that work in relay?

8-00:54:18

Ellis: In relay? That's similar—

8-00:54:22

McGarrigle: But it's not—

8-00:54:24

Ellis: But that's a lot about practice.

8-00:54:26

McGarrigle: About practice, transition, and so on.

8-00:54:30

Ellis: Yes. You know, the 1957 SC-UCLA track meet, came down to the relay, I think, and the guy that our coach chose to run the first leg tied up very badly. There was a lot of weight on him. I think our coach chose that guy, and I'm not going to say his name, because his dad worked at the post office, too, and my father told me they really kind of beat up on his dad at the post office because he lost that race for us. He really tied up. And our coach chose this guy partly because he thought that he might have the speed to do something interesting and surprising. But that was a guy who would have delivered us a steady, no-matter-what—it's raining, the lightning bolts or nuclear bombs are falling, this guy would have delivered us a 50-flat first leg, and we could have probably won from that. We didn't quite make it, and it was disappointing. It was an injury to us to see our first leg fall so far behind. You can do it, but if someone could just perform a little bit better than you expect them to on this side of the margin, on the positive side, then that builds in the next guy, and it's geometric, and you can feel it building. You can feel the stuff happening in the air. You can feel the possibility coming, and then you hop on it, and each person can hop on it successfully, and then you blast the hell out of it, and you take it. You may not even win, but you can use that energy to move forward and to be better than you would have been.

8-00:56:33

So that's how that works. It works in different ways in different contexts, but there is a real and profoundly interesting phenomenon called team. It's amazing. It's amazing. It's wonderful. It's wonderful. I imagine you can do it as warriors as well, where the outcome is awful, but it's a great drug. You want more of it. It feels so good to feel effective and it feels really great when you're effective with others and you've worked at it.

8-00:57:23

Wilmot: You talked a little bit about Hal, and I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit more about the other teammates.

8-00:57:27

Ellis:

[laughs] The other teammates! Well, the other big name at the time was Bob Seaman. He was from the Central Valley, and Rafer was from Kingsburg. Where was Bob from? Somewhere near there. [Reedley, CA] Great athlete, great, great athlete. Just a great runner, a natural distance runner, ran the mile. Stylistically Bob was very different from—well, we were different kinds of people, we didn't spend a lot of social time together. But we spent an awful lot of time together in the track enterprise. I liked him a lot. He was a good guy, a real innocent. Now, I thought Rafer was a real innocent, too, but he was a big, quiet guy. I was a junior when he came, I think. He was a big, handsome, quiet guy. People would impute all kinds of things to him because he's such a great athlete, and quiet. So his stuff was oracular, you know. He'd say, "Hello," and it was, "Ohhh." I was very close to Rafer. We liked each other a lot. He was my kind of guy, too, because I didn't—I was a great recruiter—I think I've said this already—because I didn't recruit. I would be honest with the athletes. And I did this up here, too, when I was involved with athletics for a while. I'd say, "Well, if you want that, this is not the place to come." Then you feel good about who you get because you've been honest with them. And Rafer—I know that I was important in Rafer's decision to go to UCLA.

8-00:59:40

I got some money from somewhere in the athletic program to take them out of an evening. Rafer Johnson and Leamon King. Did I talk about Leamon King? L-e-a-m-o-n K-i-n-g, from Delano. Blazing, blazing fast 100-yard dash runner. Came to Cal. I learned from Virginia Rose, actually, the woman I mentioned, that they almost got married. I had no idea that that had happened. He died recently. But tremendously fast. So I got this money. Rafer Johnson and Leamon King were coming down on a recruiting trip. We were going to try to get them to come. I got a couple of—oh, God! [laughs]—so we took them out. We had a party at my folks' house, and I had a couple of girls come, just to give it a feel of interest and decency. These were very innocent guys, but they enjoyed the company of these ladies that I brought to the party at my house, and some food. And then we went to Ciro's, C-i-r-o-s, which was a very fancy club in Hollywood, and we saw Nat King Cole that night. I remember we went in, and we didn't have on ties, so they wouldn't let us in without ties. But they said, "You can rent one," which we did, for a couple of dollars, and put on these ties.

8-01:01:28

Leamon was mortified at the embarrassment. He was just so mortified. Rafer just said—ah, it's just like water off his back—"Oh, you need a tie." Put on a tie. He laughed at stuff like that. We had a good time, and then we left, and I was taking them back to where they were staying, and the three of us are in the car, and then there's this cop light behind us, and there's a good cop and a bad cop. The bad cop is, "Out of the car! Up against the wall!" He's screaming. You know, we're gonna die. And we're up against the wall, and then the good cop comes up and says, "Sorry, but three adult males fitting



your description were just involved in a robbery,” or something like that. I’m sure it was bullshit, but—and Rafer had a bag—I think he had a comb and a toothbrush in it, in that paper bag, and he was leaning against the wall, and the bad cop wants to know what that is, and, “Drop it!” and so forth and so on. Well, Leamon’s mother had told him it was very dangerous down there. There’s the Mafia and gangs and you could die. So he just—well, you can imagine. He’s from *Delano*! You know. And, boy, he was outta there. He wasn’t having anything [to do with UCLA]—

8-01:03:03

Rafer thought it was the funniest thing. He thought it was hilarious. He almost was laughing while it was happening, while the bad cop was about to shoot us. He couldn’t believe it. But it was like an interesting movie for him or something. I never—I spent a fair amount of time with him, never saying, “You ought to come” or anything, just kind of hanging out with him. I just love the fact that he came and did so well there.

8-01:03:32

Wilmot:

And in spite of the bad cop.

8-01:03:35

Ellis:

It was amazing. It was amazing.

**[end of session]**

Interview 5: June 20, 2003

[begin audio file 9]

9-00:00:07

McGarrigle: Today we want to—

9-00:00:10

Ellis: Track and field.

9-00:00:11

McGarrigle: Yes, we want to revisit and in some ways we may go over some of the material. We may encounter some material that we covered last time, and we realize that we may do that and that works, because there's so much we want to talk to you about.

9-00:00:31

Ellis: Okay. I'm not sure how much I'll remember in terms of detail. I think I said to you last time that of all the identities aside from daddy, husband, son, and so forth, this is probably the most significant identity I ever occupied, runner. It's a strange thing to say, but it was true. And that has something to do with when it happened, in terms of my maturation, coming into my body, coming into consciousness, everything I was going through, going away to college. So much assemblage of me as a person happened through that conduit that everything that went with that is terribly indelible. So I think that's part of the reason. I think anything you really do big time in your youth is a bigger part of you, in some ways, than others.

9-00:01:28

McGarrigle: We want to revisit that for all those reasons. We started discussing the cover to the publication—[unintelligible].

9-00:01:37

Ellis: Oh, these times in which I'm being interviewed, in which I am so profoundly depressed as a person. I mean, I'm just so unhappy. My daughter, who's in Manchester, England, at the moment finishing an album with some friends over there, sent me this copy of the *New Statesman*, and it just sort of brightened my day. It was Bush as the great dictator. Sort of Charlie Chaplinesque. And I'll tell you the truth, I've been writing to lots of people that I know in European countries about my view of what's happening in the United States, and I'm being aggressive. I'm very worried. I think they've had experience with this kind of thing, and we haven't. Over and over again, Europe has had this experience. We don't know, from the inside of our society, what this kind of takeover is about.

9-00:02:40

McGarrigle: Before we leave that, if you could expand on that so that what might seem, among the three of us, like code and we understand each other is clearer to outside.

9-00:02:54

Ellis:

The academic code word, say, from a sociological or political standpoint, it would be about the challenge to legitimacy of authority in the society. Authority is always based on something, tradition—this is 101 stuff—tradition, God, a charismatic leader, that is to say, someone who has charisma, charm for a group of people and they follow because, as the Quakers say, he or she speaks to their condition, but there are reasons people obey the rules or follow someone. In our so-called legal-rational society, presumably it's the law. But we all understand, in our common language, "You can't fight city hall," it's not a question of, "What you know but who you know." We all know there's a fudge factor in this whole legal-rational thing, that people with money are less likely to go to prison for bad things than people without money, that people with money are more likely to go to college with an IQ of 89 than people without money, and so forth. We all know that.

9-00:04:31

But this last event, the election of 2000, I think may have been a general blow so that those who are disadvantaged in this system may finally be pushed over the edge, and not just them. There is something, I am certain, that's happened to the legitimacy of authority through our legal-rational assumptions, because the Supreme Court clearly was acting on bases not related to the law. And, of course, they always do; they're people. I can't imagine that Thelton hasn't confessed that there's some person in his decisions. I mean, that's got to happen to any human being. But this was so egregious.

9-00:05:21

And then what this Bush administration has made of what they have managed to take. And now it's evolving into the account that was given to explain why they were doing what they were doing, when now we all know that it was written beforehand in the [Project for the] New American Century. The plan is playing out. The corporate entanglements in government at the national level: Enron, WorldCom getting a major military contract after the biggest bankruptcy and corporate fraud in American history. Halliburton. All of this stuff unfolding. My uncle Johnny, Marjorie's brother, was in prison for I think maybe twelve, fifteen years for murder. I'd go visit him, and he would give me these accounts of prison life, like if you're cute, have a smooth skin and you can't box, you're a girl. That's the rule in prison. Another expression he told me over and over again is "Don't mean nothin'." That's when you try to read a lesson to someone. "Man, you can't do that." "Don't mean nothin'." In other words, "Don't lecture me on that."

9-00:06:55

There's a way in which the bottom can fall out of the assumptions that hold us together in some kind of public order, and if it gets beyond what the cops can handle, it's a real problem. I don't think there can be a revolution in the United States. I think the military might be—the internal arm of the military is too powerful. The internal expression of power is too powerful. I think there can be a moral breakdown. I think there could be a spiritual shift of some sort

that could make big changes, and I think that's probably the only way something really large is going to happen in the United States, is if there's a shift in consciousness. If you—you were probably alive for hippiedom—that is, what I mean by “alive,” aware of the big pulse that was happening, it was a real thing. So was the civil rights movement. It was a *real thing*. It was, like, things were *different*. There was movement. There was possibility. That was the feeling of being there. It's going to be that kind of shift of consciousness.

9-00:08:14

But right now, the Bush people and the corporate order and the religious right and the social and cultural right are dead serious, they have the power, and they're not looking back. It doesn't matter what we know, what we catch them at, they're moving globally. The feeling of helplessness is just overwhelming. The modest bit of delight I get out of this is it corresponds with what I'm telling people. My work in Italy with Giancarlo de Carlo, a wonderful, wonderful man—it turns out everybody told me in Italy who he was. He was one of the co-leaders of the resistance in Milano. A woman was the other leader, I don't know her name. And I plan to read this at some point. But they were so well organized ultimately that they drove the Nazis out of Milano before the Allies arrived, their resistance was so powerful. Now, the Nazis were injured elsewhere in the war. I wrote to him and a lot of other people involved in this European project I've been involved with over the years and said, “They're here. They have us, and there's no one to drive them out now. I don't know what's going to happen.” But I was trying to paint to them what I sense, my little canary in the mine shaft self—I think it is really, really awful. I think it's terrifyingly awful. No, it is terrifyingly awful where this can go, with people like DeLay, you know, all of them. And all the work in the shadows, the secrecy!

9-00:10:19

Just arriving here at this point—I just turned sixty-eight June 16<sup>th</sup>. I'm like everybody else I know. The New Dealers ahead of me, like my friend, Roger Montgomery, who just turned seventy-eight. This isn't where we were going! How did this happen? How can people be voting against their interests? How can they be entrapped by this idiot? Who's surrounded by smart people. Who, every time he steps out of the scripted mode, screws up. But they keep him tightly packaged and photographed and so forth, and don't let him out, and he's very good at that limited little thing he does. How can marketing be so good? And that's what it is. They're just marketing this minuscule little thing of a person. It's just so sad. Well, it's obviously complex in other kinds of ways, but I'm speaking personally about something social and political, economic. But I just find it very unhappy making.

Why don't we get back to what we were doing?

9-00:11:42

McGarrigle:

Okay, and we'll come back to that, Russ, as it comes to you.

9-00:11:47

Ellis: I want to think it through, too.

9-00:11:49

McGarrigle: In our sessions, okay?

9-00:11:55

Ellis: On tape—I've really been thinking a lot about what this oral history is, and I want to—this'll sound funny—I want to err on the side of not taking myself too seriously. That is to say, it's me in the sandbox. It's me throwing sand around in California, from youth to now, that I want to be and talk about, rather than my formal, professional stances. I must talk about that as well. I mean, that's why I'm here, really. But I don't want to—I'm not important. I've been alive during an important time. This is an amazing time, I think.

9-00:12:59

McGarrigle: Well, now, I have to remind you of something that you told me here in this very room, probably close to two years ago—I could pinpoint the date in my notes—which is that, when I went to interview Thelton, that I wasn't to accept—and I wrote this verbatim—his insistence that he, himself, wasn't important or that he was the beneficiary of good circumstance and luck.

9-00:13:29

Ellis: That is true, that he was the beneficiary.

9-00:13:33

McGarrigle: But now we're talking about you. [laughs]

9-00:13:35

Ellis: I know what you're saying. I know what you're saying.

9-00:13:37

McGarrigle: I know you know that. But periodically, I may say that, "Well, your good friend won't be happy with me if Nadine or I let that stand."

9-00:13:52

Ellis: Okay. Got it.

9-00:13:53

McGarrigle: All right. Thank you. I brought the material relating to your track period that I have, and they're photocopies, and they're not completely in chronological order, although they do start with '54. And so we wanted to take some time to look at them and talk with you, have you talk with us about things that are brought up by the material. One thing that really came at me as I reviewed them again is something you said last time, which is how the press set up rivalries, and intensified or maybe created a sort of tension and pressure that might not have existed without the intense media coverage that you were getting. The headlines are striking: "Ellis to Face [Mike] Larrabee," you know?

9-00:14:49

Ellis: [chuckles]

9-00:14:51

McGarrigle: Obviously, the Bruin rivalry with SC and so on is pronounced.

9-00:15:01

Ellis: Yes.

9-00:15:04

McGarrigle: That really struck me, the language.

9-00:15:05

Ellis: I think what I was saying last time was the effects of succeeding and becoming successful. That's what I was talking about. As you achieve, the language about you shifts from, "Oh, gee, isn't he great?" or "Wasn't that wonderful?" to "Now, given the fact that he's good, here comes a big event. Let's see how he deals with that," or "Let's see how these two deal with each other." It's a great thing to do. I mean, that's what fandom is all about. If Allen Iverson comes to the Coliseum here in Oakland, people are going to see a great athlete, right? Even though they're rooting for the Warriors, they're there to see good basketball, so that's what it is. And so what the sports press especially loves to do, now worse than ever, is to get funny things in there, like somebody was throwing darts at somebody's face on a news clipping and the word gets out, so there's some kind of tension.

9-00:16:33

That happened in my running career. And I think every athlete is tested by this. I would say I was modestly successful at handling the pressure. I think I talked last time about never quite enjoying competition. I enjoyed the wonderfulness of being in shape, of having a body that could do that. That was unbelievable. Boy, that's a great experience. You could check out, just having that, having this instrument of yourself that you can cause to do things, when it's really doing well.

9-00:17:34

McGarrigle: The articles start—well, there's high school and some information about your coach also, who you talked about last time, but then they start with this anticipation of the UCLA freshman team the year you come. And this fantastic hope that's pinned on you and your teammates.

9-00:17:55

Ellis: Oh, yes. With the cartoon?

9-00:17:59

McGarrigle: Yes, the cartoon, and articles about—and then as you compete during your freshman year, about your success. So can you recreate how you're starting to feel about this widespread attention that's occurring as the team is assembled? And also I want to ask you separately about the recruitment process. There

must have been an incredible energy around this assemblage of talent on your team that had come to UCLA.

9-00:18:31

Ellis:

I didn't perceive it that way from the inside of the experience. It's interesting, even as I was seeing these articles come up as they were coming out while I was in college. [pause] But, you know, this photo—well, as a matter of fact, I've got it for you right here. [shows photograph] Here is—at the time, Wes Santee, the fastest miler in America—and this is the Compton Invitational—and Bob Seaman comes within a whisker of beating the fastest miler in the United States. He was a sophomore. I think we were both sophomores. Same meet, this guy's got the fastest time, J. W. Mashburn, I think the fastest time in the world at the time, and I go from a fastest time, I mentioned in the last conversation, of 48:05 to 46:05, a two-second improvement in my best time! So everybody was noticing. And you can see how these [flips through photographs]—but also something larger was going on, because there was a two-miler at USC named Fernando Ledesma, who came within a hair's breadth of beating the best two-miler in the United States, at the same meet. So there was this kind of youth movement happening. And, yes, UCLA had some good folks. Now, Rafer wasn't there at the time of this, but then he was added, and that's the whole point, right? I think that cartoon has got Rafer is the oxygen that's being applied to—

9-00:20:48

McGarrigle:

Is the surgeon.

9-00:20:49

Ellis:

[laughs] Being applied to the Bruin that needs help, right? So anyway, that's a great—the times were good! And track was so important in those days. And L.A. was so rich in talent. And the high schools, and the CIF, the city league. It was just throbbing with talent. And California was throbbing with talent, so I do remember feeling like being part of something large.

9-00:21:20

McGarrigle:

How did that recruitment effort—something I read, and it was information that Nadine had from a background interview—

9-00:21:30

Ellis:

With Bob?

9-00:21:32

McGarrigle:

With Bob, that you were both aggressively recruited to UCLA, and I wondered how that happened for you.

9-00:21:40

Ellis:

Well, you know who would know about whether or not I was aggressively recruited would be Craig Dixon. I think he might have been in on that. I don't know, actually. Was he? See, that wasn't my perception that I was aggressively recruited. My experience I was, as I told you, this kid, who was

always athletic and always kind of quick, and then I had a couple of experiences where I realized I could push it and maybe get faster or do things I didn't know I could do, and then Mayshack—we'd run home and at the end I'd say, "Look at this! I can do this," and so forth and so on. But I didn't blossom until my junior year, which was the two years at Compton, and that was very fast.

9-00:22:37

McGarrigle: Did you apply to UCLA, or did UCLA—

9-00:22:40

Ellis: No, UCLA applied to me. [laughs]

9-00:22:42

McGarrigle: Okay, that's what I want to talk to you about!

9-00:22:43

Ellis: But I think not until my senior year. I didn't hear from anybody. I wrote a letter to Brutus Hamilton at Cal, who was the coach at Cal, I think at the end of my junior year, or beginning of my senior year in high school, expressing an interest in coming to Cal. I never heard back. And then it was, I think, the Compton Invitational, when I was running as a high school student, that Jack Sage, who was a half-miler—God, Jack! You should talk to Jack. Jack Sage, who was a half-miler, encountered me I think on the infield during the meet, after my race, and said—oh, it was my senior year, because I told him that I had already signed up for the Navy, and my friends, Roderick Luke and Purcell Daniels—these were my running buddies, that is, as in hang-out buddies—I remember we were up very late, sitting in a car, deciding what we were going to do after high school, and we made this pledge we were going to go to the military, get [the] GI [Bill of Rights], come back and go to college and go on from there. I'm going to go see them next week. I'll see them Sunday.

9-00:24:10

But nobody recruited me. I think I did hear from San Jose State. Bud Winter was the coach at San Jose State. But I had heard not good things about black athletes' experiences up here, living conditions, this that and the other, so that was never on my agenda. But I don't remember being recruited hard. I remember an offer coming that was really interesting and really the only serious one I had, that I took seriously. I had the courses that were relevant. I didn't have the grades, and I may have needed to take some science. Chemistry, I think I needed to take or something like that. I was really motivated. I went to Compton JC for a semester, where I got all A's, the only time in my undergraduate life I think I ever got an A. I was so motivated. But, yes, they came after me, and it was very simple. It wasn't complex at all. I don't think they spent a nickel on me. I could be forgetting, but I don't even think I visited or anything.



9-00:25:37

Wilmot:

I have a question about the coaching style that you experienced. There's always, for me, whenever I think about coaching, I then start to think about Latrell Sprewell, who came after his coach, and there's this funny thought to me. I'm wondering what kind of insight you have around the kind of psychology of the coaching at UCLA, with Ducky [Drake] and Craig Dixon.

9-00:26:07

Ellis:

Okay. I'm going to be fairly brutally honest, but I'm also going to tell you—remember the context, what it felt like then. As they say in church, I'm feeling blessed by being there. I'm not paying for going to college, among other things. I was quite aware of that. That was impressive to me, that I had a free ride. I was very naïve. There was a tremendous amount I didn't know about anything. I remember going to Ducky at one point and saying, "I think I'm being recruited by Communists." You heard it first here in this oral history interview. What had happened was that there was a group of students at UCLA who were really interested in my joining their group, I can't even remember the name. I remember the woman, Ruth Schultz, big head of red hair. She may have lived in one of the co-ops. And I remember going to a party with them. They were celebrating, oh, Shostakovich's having won some prize for his music, and they were making a fuss over the wonderful red wine. It was all very obvious, I thought. I was just an American boy, you know? I was a little bothered by it, and I just told my coach about it. I don't know what I thought he could do, but he was the closest authority I had that I could talk to in that situation. I have no idea what he ever did with that, and I was very quickly changed as a person, by living in the co-op with all these foreign students, from the People's Republic of China. Even though they may have been refuges from the Revolution, they had such a different view of life. My roommate for a while, Kofi Ofusu, from Ghana, who told me about life in the village in Ghana, and it was so fascinating to listen to his stories. And then the vets, and sitting and watching the McCarthy hearings, and hearing the interpretation of all that stuff. Boy, did I get an education fast! It's that parallel education. It's the unwritten curriculum, which great places provide, great colleges provide. I just loved being there. I just learned something every second of every day.

9-00:29:24

And then there was track. Ducky was, I think a Freemason, a Mason. I think John Wooden was [as well]. Life was fairly simple then. UCLA had never been particularly good in sports, although they had some good athletes, like Craig Dixon, for example, and I mentioned Jackie Robinson and Kenny Washington. These are iconic names for black people. They're kind of Joe Louis equivalents. But I think UCLA still—I think there was one year in living memory that Manual Arts High School had beaten UCLA in track, okay? So the expectations were low. Ducky was a trainer. He knew about muscles and warming you up and things like that. I don't know how long Ducky had been there, but I think he'd been there a very long time. He [Drake] was very close to John Wooden, the famous Johnny Wooden, of the

ten NCAA basketball championships. Well, when I got there, Wooden had lived [his office was in] in the T buildings—that is, the temp—UCLA’s version of Cal’s temporary buildings, which you don’t see anymore because [as vice chancellor] I drove the bulldozer through them, the first one, to bring down. But the military put these temporary buildings up on several campuses, and they stayed up for a while.

9-00:31:25

I think UCLA was just beginning to organize to be serious in athletics. I think that’s when we came in. I have no idea what the money situation was or how that was accomplished, but football was already moving. Red Sanders had his single wing. I just saw somebody recently who wished they had come to UCLA. And I was at Ben Tucker’s retirement from the office of the president, he’s in early academic outreach, and Ben was a runner at San Jose State. And Ray Norton, I ran into. Yes, Ray Norton, who was a runner at San Jose State, remembered those days. Could it have been him? He seems a bit too young.

9-00:32:18

Anyway, those were glorious days. UCLA had a great football team. They were just beginning to be good at basketball. Wooden had been scuttling along the bottom for ages and ages and ages, and you’d go into his office and there would be these things that later became his philosophy. “It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight of the dog,” you know, little homilies like that all over the wall. A very loving, tender man. And Johnny Moore was his star athlete, black guy, and Johnny Moore lived at the Sammy [Sigma Alpha Miu] House before I did, by the way, which is funny. You remember I talked about that. I think I talked about that on tape.

9-00:33:03

But it was a simple time, and so they’re gearing up for something larger. I deferred thoroughly to my coach. But as time went along, I lost confidence in him. There would be moments that only I know about, where I would see him [Drake], frightened by the circumstance, and then he would ask me what to do. And I’m about to vomit from nervousness. I’m getting ready for this serious competition, and he’s saying, “Russ, who do you think we should run first?” Nobody knows that but me. And then I’d pull back and give an opinion or say—I didn’t dare say, “I don’t know.” I don’t know what was wrong with me that I didn’t dare say, “I don’t know,” but I would give opinions. Sometimes it would work, sometimes it wouldn’t. But you don’t give that to me, unless I want it! There are athletes who want that, who will say, “I will feel best if you run so-and-so first.”

9-00:34:12

Other times, he’d make decisions that were dumb. The athletes—I’ll complain. I don’t know how many athletes from that era will complain, because it wasn’t the kind of thing you did. You didn’t say nasty things about your coach. But he didn’t have much of a sense of specialization in training for the various athletes. We’d joke sometimes that the shot-putters and the

milers would be doing the same thing. That got a little better, and Craig Dixon was very important here, and he came on as assistant coach and I think had a much more contemporary sense of what you do. But Ducky was such an important figure that Craig—and Craig had been his athlete, too. You couldn't possibly confront Ducky on anything like this. I didn't have a lot of confidence in him. He was a nice man. He was a genuinely nice man. I believe that. I never ever had a sense of a mean spirit from him, and that's worth a lot, right? Because in some ways you can hand yourself over to someone you know you can trust not to be mean-spirited with you, so that's not trivial.

9-00:35:40

And one time he did call me in. He was very proud of me. He was proud of me. He was on my side. He did call me in one time—it surprised me—and asked me how fast I thought I could run. And now that I am there now and in the office with him, and remembering how that went, I think he had written down a couple of times, on a piece of paper, that were pretty fast. I don't know what I did with that. But he was trying to raise my expectations. That was a good thing. That was a good thing. I liked him.

9-00:36:33

McGarrigle:

How did he get his nickname, Ducky?

9-00:36:37

Ellis:

I have no idea. I have no idea. I did something very strange, too. There was a young woman that I met in—gosh, she didn't go to UCLA, she went to L.A. City [College]. I was very attracted to her. She was from a large family near Watts. We got sexually involved, and she got pregnant. And so I told my parents. My parents were quite open. They'd always communicated to me that openness, not that they thought this was a good thing, but I felt okay talking to them about it. And then I talked to Craig Dixon about it. "I'm in a bind here that's consequential." Some way or other, I got the money to help this young lady get a pretty safe abortion.

9-00:38:32

Anyway, Craig helped me. And he helped me in a lot of other ways. He was very encouraging. He was young. He had a lot of experience. He was chafing under Ducky's control, and he had other notions about how things should have been done: who should have run, in what order, what training and all this kind of stuff. And I knew that was happening. And then I went to one of these wonderful dinners that they have, these athletes go back for such-and-such a night, and I stood up, and I said, "Oh, Ducky Drake is not just a great coach, he doesn't just relate to you as an athlete, he relates to you as a full human being." It was all cant. I mean, it was all canned. It's not like I didn't mean it, but I was just standing up and saying what I thought I ought to say. And later, Craig came to me and said, "Why didn't you mention me?" A very sad thing. And he was absolutely right. I had no idea why I didn't mention him and his importance to me and to other athletes on the team. He was a breath of fresh air and youth.

I'm wandering.

9-00:39:51

McGarrigle: And Craig Dixon made a reference to the style of another runner, Mal Whitfield.

9-00:39:57

Ellis: Oh, really?

9-00:39:58

McGarrigle: And he was an 800 runner as well.

9-00:40:02

Ellis: Right, right.

9-00:40:03

McGarrigle: And Jim Lea at USC.

9-00:40:06

Ellis: He talked about them both?

9-00:40:07

Wilmot: In reference to your style of running.

9-00:40:10

Ellis: No kidding!

9-00:40:12

Wilmot: Yes.

9-00:40:14

Ellis: I never would have thought of me in relation to Mal Whitfield. How interesting. That's flattering. [laughs] Yes, that's interesting. Very interesting.

9-00:40:23

McGarrigle: You talked about having, as you were maturing physically in high school, realizing that you had something extra, a kick in the run and the finish.

9-00:40:37

Ellis: Yes. There were two things. There were two things. One, reaching down and getting more. It is true. That cliché is absolutely real. And you never know how far down you can go. And some people get that. They say, "Well, you know, there is no bottom here," or "I haven't found it yet," or "That wasn't it." And there's something about learning that. Some of it's physical. They talk about second wind and all that. Some of it's just getting your body in shape, and it's getting *your* body in shape so you learn to do what your body can do, but some of it's being up against it and then reaching down and finding more. Yes, that's a huge thing.

What am I responding to?

9-00:41:34

McGarrigle:

I know exactly what I was interested in having you speak to, which was something that comes up in reference to you and running, from other people, which is your strong finish.

9-00:41:45

Ellis:

Yes, yes. No, I had a kick. I definitely—but they're not the same for me. One is hanging in, plus. That is, staying in the race, plus a little more. There's something you learn to do. Also—this is a good point, I think—I was a racer more than I was a runner. I liked racing against people. As soon as you go in lanes, and you're making judgments about where you are, and it's you in a conversation with your body and your speed, it's a different kind of event than running against some body, because, like in the half mile, if I could stay well positioned and know something about where everybody was, if I was in good shape and probably had some decent training, and knew more about electrolytes and water and all that kind of stuff, I could finish. I could stay up with practically anybody, and have some kick left. So the test there, in the race, is staying up with anybody, right? So that's the test. You remember I talked about the 400 at Compton, where I'm falling apart. My legs are going to come off. But they didn't. And when it came down to the end, there I was, gaining on the fastest guy in the country, in the world, I think, at the time. *Gaining* on him! And I came close to beating him. After barely having physically survived this race that these insane men ran, at a pace that I had no idea about, okay?

9-00:43:41

So you see the difference? One is having the capacity to stay there. Wrestlers must have this, too, with the fatigue, and boxers. I mean, to stay in, to stay in for that time when the opening is there for you, then to do that other thing that takes you over the top. It's such a good feeling! And the weird thing about it is the very best ones don't feel hard. It didn't to me. It's just like, "What?"

9-00:44:14

Wilmot:

How does that feeling of racing contrast with when you were, say, running *fartlek* in the golf course with your teammates?

9-00:44:22

Ellis:

[laughs] That's funny. Oh, gee. There was overlap. Yes, there was overlap. There was a similar thing, of pushing yourself and [claps hands once] coming at it and [claps] coming at it and saying, "No"—and then realizing that you could keep pushing yourself. It's a similar kind of experience. And we did get smarter. I think the athletes got smarter about a lot of this training, because I know I criticized Ducky about that. I said my high school coach probably was a more sophisticated coach, Ernest Hartman, than Ducky Drake. But there was a moment when Bob and I were working out together that was transcendent, and I know we both recognized it. I don't think we talked about it. It was really quite transcendent. You know, in a way, some of those moments are as valuable as the competition or achievement in the event, just going out and

being in your body, with somebody else, and having that electricity of working at it, staying at it. It's a great feeling.

9-00:45:45

Wilmot:

One of the things that I think we left off on on our last interview, we kind of closed—I had asked a question about where did the rest of your teammates come from? Who were they?

9-00:45:59

Ellis:

I have a lot of trouble with that.

9-00:46:02

Wilmot:

You talked about two of them, and then I was just wondering if there was anyone else you wanted to talk about.

9-00:46:08

Ellis:

Yes. There was a guy—gosh, Hal sent me some photos, which I already had, but I sort of didn't want to look at them. Yes, he told me that he had sent them along. Now, why wouldn't I want to look at them? I just don't know why. I remember Don Vick very much, the shot-putter. Funny guy. A funny guy, from Fontana. Bob Seaman, of course. Rafer. Hal, Hal Miller. Nick Dyer.

9-00:47:10

Wilmot:

I have another question to ask you.

9-00:47:17

Ellis:

Sure.

9-00:47:19

Wilmot:

I was just thinking about this, kind of imagining you as a young person coming to UCLA campus and just having this world be open to you, and being an athlete, a star athlete. What did your career horizon look like at that time?

9-00:47:42

Ellis:

All athletics, nothing but running. There was no professional track then, not officially. Athletes did get money for running, but it was under the table, and it was very dangerous to lose your amateur status and then be in a world of trouble. All I cared about was being an athlete, that is, running and being in shape. That's who I was. Now, that's not all I was to other people, but that was my lead identity. That's what was most important to me. And during the season, and, as you know, this is true of any athlete, you're so wiped out from doing it that you can hardly think about anything else. I mean, you're *really tired* at the end of every day if you're doing your job, because you're pushing yourself right to the edge of your capacity, to keep your instrument honed, to be ready. Now, probably they know how to do a better job of that training now than they did then, so you're not always there. And I probably needed less training, formal hard work, than I got. I probably could have gotten away with less. I think I was just kind of meant to run. And maybe I mentioned this already: UCLA was making this push, and we were succeeding. We had the

athletes. And so there was a hunger to win everything. So we'd go out to every dual meet until the—they don't do that anymore. You'll notice very often that that the athletes who get really good, get good after they're out of college, because now their focus—they can time when they're going to be in events; they can recover, their muscles. Now they know about recovery time, and the minuscule little muscle damages that happen when you run and so forth. Now, we were just trying to win everything then, and so there was some team spirit, and it was novel. UCLA had never been that good.

9-00:50:20  
Wilmot:

Did you think about how you would make money later on, professionally?

9-00:50:29  
Ellis:

Oh, no, it never crossed my mind. Never ever. Never crossed my mind. Now, I did have a life of the mind. It was college, after all, and I was going to class, so I couldn't avoid all that stuff. But I wasn't thinking ahead at all, not at all. I was interested in psychology, but then I wound up not liking the psychology they taught. UCLA was interested in experimental, very tight experimental—nothing clinical, nothing you could talk about. There were some studies of the brain in classes that I enjoyed, but I wound up going to sociology, which I found more interesting and more related to the issue of rules, how things are ordered, than psychology was. And I really enjoyed that part, so I wound up in sociology, with no notion at all of what was going to happen with that. I didn't expect to end my running career, so I thought there might be kind of a trail-off into something else. Do you know what I mean? From running, I might continue to run, and then we'll see what happens after that. But no, I didn't think about it very much, and I certainly wasn't thinking graduate school when I was running.

9-00:52:21  
Wilmot:

Part of the reason I ask is because I saw that many of your teammates—there was just such a diversity of professions that came out of that track team, from dentistry—?

9-00:52:28  
Ellis:

Where did you see that? Do I know that?

9-00:52:30  
Wilmot:

No, just from following up and talking to your teammates in background interviews.

9-00:52:34  
Ellis:

No kidding. Is that right?

9-00:52:36  
Wilmot:

Someone who became a dentist after he chose not to run in the Olympics, and become a dentist. Someone who became a criminal justice attorney.

9-00:52:49  
Ellis:

Great.

9-00:52:51

Wilmot: I believe that's Hal Miller.

9-00:52:54

Ellis: Hal, yes, right.

9-00:52:55

Wilmot: And so that's why I'm just starting to understand that where there was a group of you and you all started in this place, where running was everything, like stars in your eyes, and then you all kind of chose different professions, and I was really interested in hearing how that transition occurred.

9-00:53:13

Ellis: I don't know about other people's lives because I didn't follow people's lives that much afterwards. Rafer was very conspicuous because he was so public, and then he began to do things that were very public, like he did something with Hallmark cards and various other things that were very public, that were part of the level of his importance as an American symbol, an icon, winner of the [Olympic] decathlon and a great guy, very easy human being to put out front. Hal, I was aware of. But I didn't pay that much attention to where people went or what they did. Oh, I know. The other thing, of course, is I had this fleeting notion of being a singer, which I acted on. I told you of my Mafia manager and so forth. So I was real serious about trying to make it as a singer.

9-00:54:32

McGarrigle: We'll come back to that. How did you end up in the co-op? Did you end up in the co-op your freshman year?

9-00:54:39

Ellis: You know, I told you the time I had a roommate, Kofi Ofusu? I told you about Esker Harris from Tennessee. I told you about the Sammy House. I never told you that Morris Taft, a basketball player, was my roommate at the co-op for I think about a semester. I don't remember.

9-00:55:24

McGarrigle: It would seem not to be the automatic choice. Was it, at the time, outside the mainstream?

9-00:55:31

Ellis: No, as far as I could tell, the co-ops were—you know, here has to be part of the answer: there wasn't a very vigorous residential life at UCLA in those days. That's the answer to your question. There were no dorms to speak of. It was a commute campus more than anything. One of the reasons the fraternities and sororities dominated so totally is that they lived there. There had a been a little red schoolhouse period, when UCLA swung very far left. It was postwar, in the forties, where I think there was a student body president who wasn't from one of the fraternity houses or something like that. And then I think Rafer became student body president at some point. I'm sure he did. And there was a big push to get another Johnson. He would hate me that I can't remember his first name; he wound up teaching at MIT, Harvard for a



while, and then I think at Stanford. And he became student body president, but it was a big organization of off-campus people to get the vote in, because you're commuting, you're not engaged in the same way. So I think the co-op was probably a place for me to stay because it was there.

9-00:57:10

McGarrigle:

Okay. It wasn't a [cross-talk; unintelligible] or a dorm?

9-00:57:12

Ellis:

And they would not rent to black people off campus. You'd have to go very far away. Westwood was very discriminatory in its housing in those days.

9-00:57:23

Wilmot:

Bob Kardon told this story of meeting you in the co-op, over peanut butter and jelly, late at night.

9-00:57:36

Ellis:

Right, uh-huh, yeah. Well, the co-op was really important because of the variety of people. That was so good. And it was such an eye-opener to see the world manifested in multiple ways like that. It's a little bit like being at I House, although with a lot of Americans mixed in.

9-00:58:06

McGarrigle:

Is the co-op an instrument of the University? It's on campus.

9-00:58:11

Ellis:

No, it's subject to University regulations, but it's Twin Pines. It's a separate organization.

9-00:58:24

McGarrigle:

I'm thinking about the discrimination in housing because at Cal, the University actually—housing office posted signs that were blatantly discriminatory about housing options. I'm wondering what the situation was at UCLA.

9-00:58:46

Ellis:

I may not have been as aware as I should have been. I have the sense that things were worse up here.

Although the town is interesting because during the incarceration of the Japanese, Berkeley was very good. I mean, they worked hard to help people and to prevent certain kinds of outrages—you know, the appropriation of property. They hid people, all kinds of stuff up here. It's documented and discussed, as I understand it. But most of the people I talked to who were my contemporaries report that it was pretty nasty up here in terms of finding a place [for a black person to] stay, and expectations. And, as I told you both last time, on campus, I didn't have any problems. At UCLA and at the co-op and where I could stay, I was fine. I couldn't get a haircut, in Westwood. At one point, I went in and just sat in the barbershop and waited for a haircut. It was funny.

9-01:00:07

McGarrigle: Now, we'll get to your political activism next time—

9-01:00:15

Ellis: I think I was a graduate student at that time. But, yes, I think it was just an available option. It was fifty dollars a month and four hours of work a week. That was pretty cool. And if you were interested, it was really interesting. There were other athletes who stayed. I mentioned Morris Taft. He went—the National Invitational Tournament in basketball used to be the big thing, bigger than the NCAA for a long time. And Morris was a basketball player from L.A., and he went back to New York, and he got in a zone. I mean, the boy went out of his gourd. He couldn't miss anything. That had a big impact on Morris Taft. He was driving a nicer car shortly thereafter. [laughs] I don't know why we stopped being roommates. I think I stayed in the same room, and I rotated roommates. I can't tell. I haven't clutched those memories. I remember the people somewhat, but I don't have them organized in time. Anyway, it was an available option.

9-01:01:39

Wilmot: All right, let's just pause for a minute.

[begin audio file 10]

10-00:00:16

Ellis: Let me go back and forth in the multiple lives of the college years. I seem early on, and consistently, to have had a penchant for the bohemian. I don't know where that came from. But one temporary building, part of the campus, was a little restaurant and tended to be where the arts folks and the dancer folks and all those folks went. I tended to hang out there a little bit, and then later, when I graduated, I kind of got into a sort of beatnik mode and started hanging out with those folks. That's a whole phase.

10-00:01:46

Wilmot: What did they look like, the bohemians?

10-00:01:47

Ellis: In that period, when I finally got into it, it was Army surplus a lot, but also a lot of mascara and lot of sandals. And, you know, a pretty systematic effort not to look too tidy. [chuckles] But I seem to have wandered around in that world a fair amount. As a matter of fact, I had a girlfriend, a Jewish girlfriend. I also was very taken by the world of Jewish people at UCLA, Jew-CLA, some fraternities derisively called it. But I just enjoyed it. And also there was an openness there, a much-lamented loss in the relations between black folks and Jews over the years, since a certain phase in the civil rights movement kind of went South—so to speak! I never thought of it that way. I took that very far, very far. At a point, I had way too much Yiddish in my language. I had to stop. And then Sammy House was interesting there. It was nothing like bohemian or beatnik. They were all guys on a straight path to somewhere, pretty much. A couple of guys weren't.

10-00:03:36

Wilmot: How did you come to live there?

10-00:03:37

Ellis: It was just a free room and board pass that came up. Now, my theory is—and I think I mentioned to you before, that the Jewish fraternities wanted some athletes to crow about. Johnny Moore, the basketball player, had lived in the Sammy House before, and then I went there, and I got free room and board. Now, maybe somebody paid for it, but I didn't know anything about it. It wasn't costing me any money.

10-00:04:02

McGarrigle: Your scholarship. That covered your tuition?

10-00:04:06

Ellis: You know, I never knew a thing about a scholarship. I knew I had one. I worked. I didn't do it very often, and I had some spare change, I guess. But I remember one of my jobs was cleaning the chancellor's swimming pool.

10-00:04:29

McGarrigle: That would be work-study or work toward—

10-00:04:32

Ellis: No.

10-00:04:33

McGarrigle: A work scholarship?

10-00:04:34

Ellis: It was a different day. [laughs]

10-00:04:36

McGarrigle: I'm trying to think under what financial arrangement did you come to UCLA?

10-00:04:42

Ellis: I got a—everything was paid for.

10-00:04:45

McGarrigle: Okay, but not room and board, then.

10-00:04:47

Ellis: Everything was paid for. My parents didn't spend any money, didn't have to, and all I had was my involvement at UCLA. I never had a lot of money, but I was never hungry. I always had plenty to eat and a place to stay and a little spare change, and then I had what were kind of pretend jobs, which I pretended to do. [laughs] The Russian joke, or the Polish joke, you know. "They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work," or the other way around, I guess. But it was a full ride. It was a full ride. For example, we went to a room in Kerckhoff Hall every semester, and there were all my books and all my classes.

10-00:05:48

I remember, as vice chancellor here, there was a time when we were struggling with L&S [Letters & Sciences] to try to back off the extraordinary pressure they put on athletes to behave like all the rest of the students, knowing that that's not real. It is different. They shouldn't be taking mick courses. There aren't any hardly to take at Cal, anyway. We weren't very successful at that. [Trying, at least, to get athletes into their courses.] No special favors for athletes.

10-00:06:13

But we got special favors. I ate on campus, too, when it was important, like if there was a break time, or down time on the campus, there was food there, or big meets coming up. Really well taken care of. Not elaborately. And I know there was a sliding scale. I know some people didn't work for their pay, didn't pretend to do their jobs. I remember taking an exam for one of the basketball players, a very famous basketball player, got him a C. [laughs] Once I got the hang of things, it was kind of easy to get grades, a passing grade, especially—

10-00:07:26

McGarrigle:

You went into the exam hall as this basketball player?

10-00:07:30

Ellis:

No, no. Somehow, it wound up where I was [someone brought me the exam], and I answered the questions and sent it back to him, and it went back where it was supposed to go. I have no idea.

Look, let me tell you—I want to say more about this. It was a playground for me in terms of identity, college. It was just an exciting playground. There were all these people. My son said to me—I told you already, but when he went back to Berklee College of Music, he said, “I can borrow from all the people I know, their moves, their styles. Out here, they think it's me.” Well, it was a little reverse here. There was all this stuff to take from, all these different folks.

10-00:08:19

[As a student at UCLA] I hated the [mainstream] fraternities and sororities, and I had to remind myself, when I was vice chancellor, how much I disliked fraternities and sororities, just to keep myself in balance. Now, they think I was biased, but they were killing themselves and things were burning down, and it was a terrible phase, you may or may not recall, during the Tien administration. It was just awful. Terrible drunkenness and, oh, it was just bad. And they thought I was biased against them. I wasn't. I worked very hard against my biases, but I remember really not liking those arrogant sons of bitches at UCLA. And the co-op was right near the fraternities and sororities. But I also learned a lot about their lives and stratification and differentiation. Living at the Sammy House—I told you already, didn't I, about the effect of this in the sense that here, I'm looking at these guys who aren't going to be dating the Tri Delts, which was the premier shiksa sorority, right, gente

sorority. They're not going to be. They might think they lust after dates with them, but it's not going to be happening. And they would never think of marrying a Tri Delt, either. They're going to marry somebody Jewish, these guys in this fraternity, okay?

10-00:09:45

But all of a sudden, the world is not just white. It's Jewish, it's Catholic, it's upper-crust gentile, it's Lutheran, it's all these differentia that I would never have seen—if I hadn't been in the Sammy House—quite the same way. I'd go out to the front of Kerckhoff Hall. There would be all my buddies, black buddies, standing out, talking a bunch of shit, right in front of Kerckhoff Hall, and then I'd go over here and there'd be something else. And so when I was vice chancellor, I used to chastise folks who talked about the segregation of the students. I said, "It's no different. Now it's color coded." [laughs] But there was always this stratification and differentiation. And I saw it from the Sammy House. And then, of course, the thing about doing kind of beatnik stuff and so forth—of course, we were all much better than that, right? We were transcending all that. That was a world where different kinds of folks did come together, and you didn't worry about—of course, there was plenty of discrimination in those worlds, too. But that was the official myth we were living by, and that's what made it attractive, in a way, for me and others that I knew.

10-00:11:15

Track. I don't think track was as heavily racially identified as it is now. Most sports now have a very heavy racial identification component to them. The world changed. What do I mean? As you look through these pictures, you see a lot more variety from the sprints on up than—you see more [ethnic and racial differentiation] than than you see now. As the Mal Whitfields of the world went and coached in other countries and got protein into the bodies of some of these amazing athletes in other countries, rather than the Finns winning all the distances and the Russians, the [Czech runner] Emile Zatopeks and all those folks who trudged away forever at the same pace, the Kenyans and all these people started showing up on the scene, so things got much darker—I mean skin color—throughout track and field. But there was a wider variety of folks running and jumping and so forth in those days. Athletics also tended, for different reasons of performance, to be a place of relative integration. There's a famous story about Bear Bryant, the football coach at Alabama. The place was famously segregated, and they wouldn't have any—and football especially was very segregated. SC, while I was there, had trouble bringing in black athletes for football. They didn't treat them all that well, as I later learned. But Bear Bryant—someone brought him, at some point late in his career or middle-late in his career, a black running back and said, "You need to see him," and he let the guy scrimmage with the team. And Bear at one point is reputed to have said, "Mmm, look at that Indian run." [laughs] He adjusted his perception of the guy, pretended maybe it's an Indian rather than a black guy. He said, "I gotta have the guy on my team." As

winning at all costs got bigger and Nike has whole high school teams, with their coaches with shoe contracts, and they want victories as much as they want anything, right? They'll finance the high school team and so forth, but they want victories. Then they pay for who's gonna win. And then things got, in general, much blacker. Also I think it's just a natural progression of the sport. If you look at baseball, there aren't that many African Americans in baseball. A lot of the people who are black come from Latin America, and that's partly what's more attractive and where the money is, football and basketball. The Iversons go into basketball; they don't go into baseball. Also, baseball is not as hip.

10-00:14:41

McGarrigle:

And Nadine asked you at the outset about coaching and about Sprewell. Lots of things changed in this period. What are some of the things that changed in the relationship between athletes and coaches that allows that? You spoke to the authority figure and the respect that you had for your coaches. We're also talking professional and—

10-00:15:13

Ellis:

Sure.

10-00:15:13

McGarrigle:

So there's many—

10-00:15:14

Ellis:

I think it's—I think Muhammad Ali happened, actually. [laughs] I've never put it quite this way, but once he broke through—see, Joe Louis—the joke about Joe Louis was “He ain't be hurtin' me none.” You know, kind of not well-educated boy who was a fantastic boxer, and certainly was my hero. I remember being part of the flood of kids, even in Fontana, running out of the house when he beat—oh, I don't know, whoever it was he beat that night. God, that was huge! He was so important. What Muhammad Ali did—beside from being very, very, very, very good—was he did something that I, for some reason—[looks through photographs]—did. I'm not quite sure what my story was here. Take a look at me—when you see these pictures—that's me here, and here's me giving the finger to the camera. It's the Pac Ten team. And here I am [shows different photograph]—

10-00:16:51

Wilmot:

Oh, my goodness!

10-00:16:51

Ellis:

Here I am, doing the same thing on the NCAA photo. Now, if you go to the UCLA Hall of Fame room, you won't see either of those pictures. Now, I think Hal Miller's view is that there was no official response to our victories, because these are pictures taken with Rafer Johnson's camera. But that little—and I'm told that Ducky saw that and got very upset, and so they didn't want to use those in the Hall of Fame. They could have airbrushed the finger out, obviously, that was real. But that is me, that is a permanent feature of me. Just

mess with the rules a little bit all the time. Nothing revolutionary, but just always mess with them. I did it in elementary school, in really strange ways.

10-00:18:02

Ali did it straight up. “I’m pretty. I’m bad. I’m gonna whip your butt.” And shut up, Cosell! Shut up to the press! “No, I’m not going to fight in this war!” Do you know what I mean? Now, the times helped him do that, but he also helped the times. And then I think, as you—let me see if I can say this carefully, because I do not feel like a careful speaker in these interviews. I think that the underlying civil rights movement had a lot to do with all of it, because as the James Farmers were sitting in as long ago as 1946, after the war, before it was newsworthy, it was building in the black community, this whole sense of “this shit has got to change,” and it’s only going to change with pressure, with energy, with attacks, especially the legal attacks. *Brown v. Board of Education*. This is very big news, very big news. All the while, there are small advances underneath, in all the institutional spheres, all of them. So my mother graduates from Hunter, and she has all kinds of problems getting work other than domestic work, but she does. She gets work in the defense industry. She comes out here. She winds up doing very well in education. So there are changes all along the way. The war is over. The society is opening up like crazy. I mean, the growth is just spectacular, and there is new opportunity. I think people like my father, in the same way it happened in the First World War, came back looking at the world very differently in terms of discrimination compared to what they ran into in Germany.

10-00:20:08

So I think what happened in sports, just taking the Sprewell anchor—it was two things. One, the just sheer professionalization of everything, not just sports but nursing, you name it, everything. He realized that he had to manipulate the rules in order to make a market move for himself. I think it’s that simple. The coach was not very good. The Warriors, for all kinds of reasons, may never, ever again be any good. There’s a dumb front office. I don’t know what they think they’re doing. They don’t seem to be interested in winning. And you’re not going to spend your life in a franchise like that if you’ve got any talent, right? So I think he knew what he had to do to get out of his contract and get something decent that he wanted to do. So in that way, it’s not just angry black man, et cetera. It’s, like, you know, “I gotta get outta here.” And I’m sure there was a whole strategy laid out for that one.

10-00:21:29

Wilmot:

That’s so amazing, because I had such a different—I think I had always read it as an abusive coach—so it’s so amazing to hear that different read.

10-00:21:37

Ellis:

Oh, no, I’m sure that gave him the excuse. Was it [P. J.] Carlesimo? Was that the coach? I think it was. Anyway, I’m sure that gave him the excuse, but I am sure he had a sense of escaping that scene. There is a tradition, especially in basketball, of abusiveness in coaching. What you want is the response on the

court, you don't want love. That's why we had to get rid of our guy. He took it too far. And then you've got to remember, brand loyalty was gone then. You didn't have a Phil Rizzuto who played with the New York Yankees forever and this kind of stuff. People go where the money is. Look at Jason Kidd. It's now news, "Where will he go? If he wants to win a championship; now, such and such." And he doesn't say, "I'm going back to New Jersey next year," he says, "I'm thinking about my options," so that it's the portability of talent. No, the commodity that you have to deliver of your talent, to the highest bidder, sort of thing. And there, it's kind of the Colt .45 made all men equal or something someone said. You know, in this kind of game, they want you—if they need you and you've got it—it's what you bring that's relevant, not whether you bring gang-bangers to the party or you're too street. Nobody cares about that anymore. What they want is to win.

10-00:23:17

Well, I think Ali didn't start that, but I think what he did do was to broadcast the audacity, and he was a Southern boy, too. Remember that. Cassius Clay, who changed his name, gave a finger to the whole society, saying, "No, no! Call me by the name I choose, not the name I inherited, not my slave name." Boy, was that popular. So Kareem Abdul Jabbar, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, to where we are now. And there is a confrontational thing in all of that, that hit in sports. And then, of course, right up to San Jose State and the big Olympics protest, Tommy Smith.

10-00:24:26

McGarrigle:

Yes.

10-00:24:27

Wilmot:

Then there's this incredible absence of political voice from our athletes today.

10-00:24:42

Ellis:

It's broader than that. It's broader than just our athletes. I was talking to some folks last night about that. Oh, no, this morning. We were talking about our children and what they see, and some of the guys—we talk about politics at Sconehege [restaurant at], the old Berkeley Bowl café. One of the retired faculty that I meet with was talking about what his kids—he's in the private sector, and he's saying, "Dad, I appreciate your concern, but you got a pretty sweet deal. I don't see myself ever having a deal like your retirement, and I see things changing in the other direction, and I don't quite feel the same way about things in the private sector that you do."

10-00:25:35

Their experience is very different. The athletes and the kids are quite apolitical in some ways. Some aren't, and I think we'll see an expression of political sophistication. It'll come in new ways. Airplanes won't take off on time, and things won't work. You can't treat that much of the work force the way it's being treated now, with the level of sophistication they have about



information technology and expect it not to be used on behalf of some collective interests. You just can't. You just can't.

10-00:26:16

Wilmot: I have a question. Just to take us back to UCLA?

10-00:26:19

Ellis: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We must go back to UCLA.

10-00:26:23

Wilmot: How would you characterize your political awareness and position at that time?

10-00:26:28

Ellis: Great question. Great question. I always had an element of racial awareness, sort of. I wouldn't call it political, but some element of resistance, like "This isn't okay, and something must happen." But I hadn't found any particular place for myself in all of that. A big event was watching the McCarthy hearings in the co-op in '53, '54. And then there were some veterans around, who were coming back to school, and they had a very different take on things than some of the kids who were just out of high school. So I was listening to different stuff about what was going on in the world.

10-00:27:42

Was there a moment? I didn't know much. I attribute most of my awakening to my time at the co-op. There was a guy named Ed Thorpe. He was a graduate student in math. As a matter of fact, he went on to write that first book on how to win at blackjack, in Las Vegas, and they banned him from Vegas. Ed Thorpe. Check it out. He wrote the first book on that. I remember he and other guys, graduate school guys, I found really sophisticated about talking about the world in ways that I hadn't thought of before. It was just engaging to me. I'd say the co-op got me started, shifted my consciousness. And somewhere between being me and going around in the world and running into certain kinds of things—and, of course, college. [laughs] The classroom is pretty interesting! When it got interesting, it got really interesting. And I mentioned to you my philosophy course and [John Stuart Mill's] *On Liberty*. It just kind of gathered. I don't know that Marjorie or my father particularly contributed to any sense of resistance or upset or formal orientation to politics. I don't think so. I think it just kind of happened by being around. And certainly not in track, not too much happened there. You see a lot of different kinds of people.

10-00:29:58

You know what helps, is variety. I think it's true, diversity is a good thing, of experience and everything else, seeing the world and seeing all the different kinds of people. There are certain kinds of stories you don't buy if you've seen a wide enough perspective. The best way to buy a simple story is to be kept in one place so the world always looks the same out that way, so it's always class, it's always race, it's always the poor people, it's always the

communists, it's always the goddess. You know, a very limited, fundamentalist perspective. It's from just a limitation on what you see and what you're able to make of what you see. And that's what's great about college.

10-00:30:38

McGarrigle: Russ, there's a picture in that batch of papers there of you with a bevy—

10-00:30:46

Ellis: Of beauties?

10-00:30:47

McGarrigle: —of young women, yes. Kappa Alpha Psi photo.

10-00:30:50

Ellis: Yes. I just found my Kappa Alpha Psi, my sort of admission to that fraternity. Yes, I pledged Kappa Alpha Psi. I have no idea why. And I didn't hang in very long because they were so unserious. They did nothing but party. I mean, they just partied. But I went in with my roommate then. Esker Harris pledged, and some other people. It just seemed like the thing to do at the time. The bevy of beauties photo is just silly, just a silliness. But I was a star athlete, and as they do today, they did then. They liked to put those things together, pretty girls and the athletes; they like to make those pictures. And probably because there was no fraternity house—there were no black fraternity or sorority houses at UCLA—there were outlying areas and all the Kappas from around, from L.A. City College and, from L.A. State and so forth would party at that house and then so forth and so on, the Alphas, the same thing. It didn't describe a world, but I love the picture because it's just so ridiculous. [laughs] Don't you find it kind of funny?

10-00:32:35

McGarrigle: It looks silly to me, but formal.

10-00:32:37

Ellis: [laughs] Oh, it was a formal shot.

10-00:32:39

McGarrigle: I know, but it had other aspects of formality to it. Off tape, you mentioned that your father kept a scrapbook and it's from that that you copied these materials.

10-00:32:54

Ellis: Yes. I always thought I was special, beyond just the track thing, the whole bohemian thrust. It was uncool to be concerned about this, I thought, about collecting my own story. Like, that's really kind of low. You're not supposed to care. And I didn't do a very good job of keeping my medals. Some of my colleagues did, and kept them shiny and behind glass. I would win watches with inscriptions, I'd give them away. I regret it a little bit, not a whole lot. But I thought I was cool or something, and I was so very busy not caring about that. My father, on the other hand, did me the great service of keeping every clipping, so I am doing the same for my kids. I've got all their musical

exploits. I've got everything, David's album, current jazz album, my son's album, called *State of Mind*. It's climbing the *Jazz Week* chart. It was forty-eight two weeks ago; it's thirteen today. So Pops is on line, downloading [makes downloading noise], putting in scrapbooks, you know? [laughs] Because I know how important it really is.

10-00:34:22

McGarrigle: The saying, we become our parents—

10-00:34:25

Ellis: [laughs] I think so! I think so. I think so. And same with my daughter. She had a real big break out there for a while, with a couple of songs. Pops kept everything. But it was a world. I think UCLA also was very good at those little things. There was a little culture of care about the jocks so that the photo ops were there and the care was there, in ways that I don't think quite happened the same up here or at SC.

10-00:35:02

McGarrigle: What happens when you go home for—I mean, you're in Southern California. How often did you go home?

10-00:35:09

Ellis: Not very often.

10-00:35:11

McGarrigle: For holidays?

10-00:35:12

Ellis: No, not very often. I changed my identity as a person in college. My sophomore year, I stayed in—I think I was in the co-op. I didn't go back and stay at home. Everybody else left, so the campus was pretty empty. Actually, I got very depressed during that period. It was very strange. I was reading a story about a young Latina who killed herself recently. She wrote this quite dispassionate note to her parents, saying, "Please don't be upset. It's not really as bad as you think, it just doesn't make any sense for me to stay alive." I started composing one of those during this. I think I will always understand the darkness of depression, because I think I had a depression there, and it's so *awful*. It is so dark, it is so *terrible*. I remember that. And I got into some kind of logical thing about determinism and how little control I had over life and its outcomes or raising my arm. I remember solving the problem by saying, "I'll live with the semblance that I'm choosing to raise my arm." I remember that. But I got into a real weird place.

10-00:36:42

So I wanted to be more in the world I was being in, in college, and less in the world that I had come from. I wanted to be in that world. I think I must have gotten scared in making that transition. A story that I really like: my roommate, Esker Harris—you see him here [refers to photograph]—he's actually losing this bout in the Golden Gloves. He was my roommate, and I

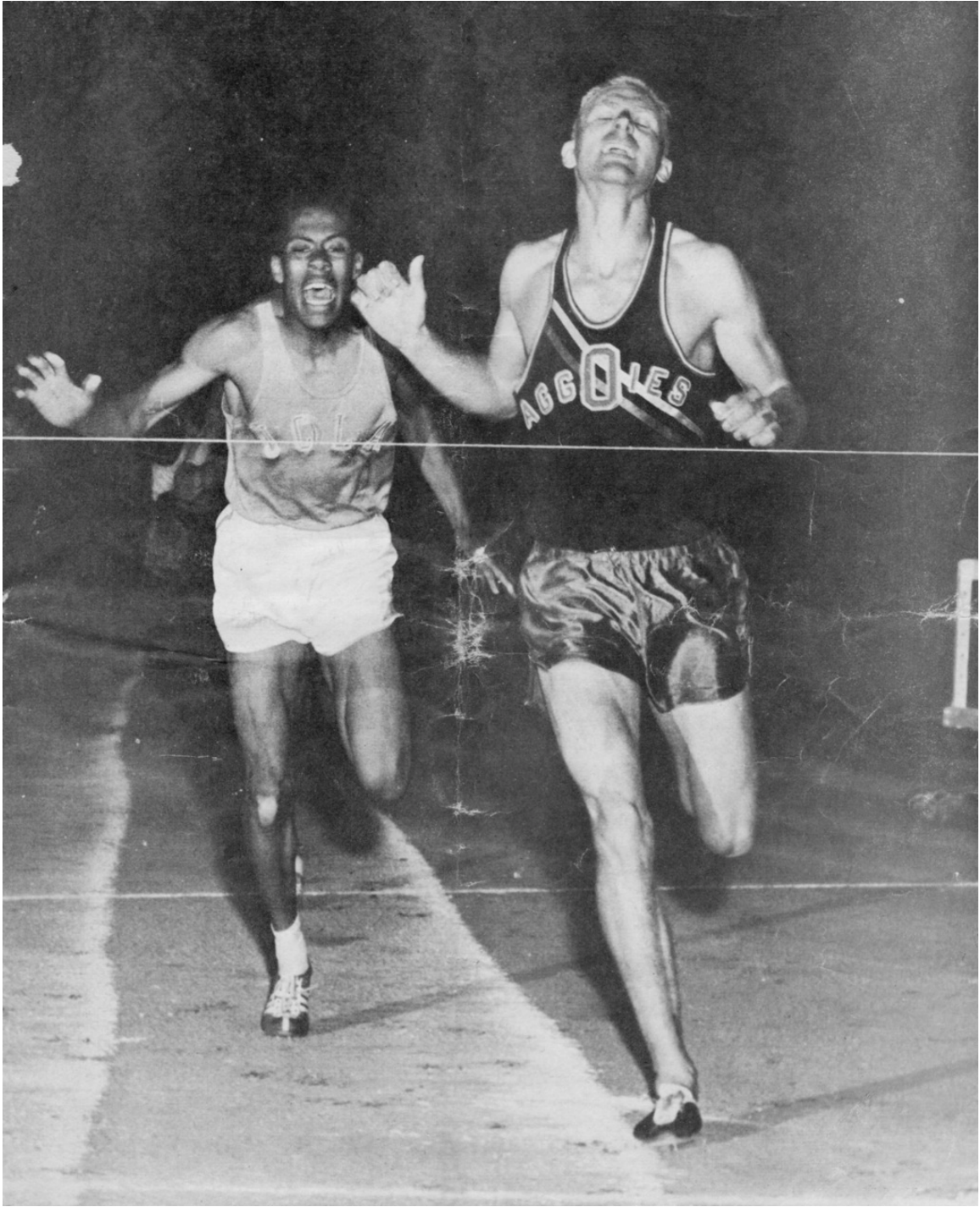
used to work out with him. He would sometimes almost hit me. He was from Knoxville, I think. I was in the upper bunk, probably my first year there. You can tell I can't remember my residential life very well. Esker was praying. He was on his knees, getting in bed in the lower bunk. And we're athletes, so we're going to bed at a reasonable time, lights out for both of us.

10-00:37:44

I said, "What are you doing?" I said to Esker. He was used to me, so he said, "What do you think I'm doing?" I said, "Well, you know, you do know that God is a banana," I said to him. Then I began to work on him every night, on the problem that proving that this person that he was praying to was there. And one night after the lights were out, he said, "Hey, Russ, you know you were saying such-and-such?" And he was about to say to me that I had convinced him, and I talked over him, because I didn't want responsibility for that. I just couldn't take that, having stolen his belief from him. He went on to become a member of the Nation of Islam. But that was toying with identity, too, because I didn't have anything that I was holding on to, either, other than the certainty of my stance that there was no God. It was all about us and what we could put together. Okay.

It sounds like I should stop now.

**[end of session]**



Russ Ellis at the 1955 Compton Invitational with J. W. Mashburn

Interview 6: July 1, 2003

[begin audio file 11]

11-00:00:15

McGarrigle: July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, Nadine Wilmot, Leah McGarrigle interviewing Russ Ellis.

11-00:00:50

Wilmot: Russ, today we wanted to begin—I wanted to ask you to tell us the story of the Olympics.

11-00:01:07

Ellis: You mean the Olympic trials.

11-00:01:11

Wilmot: Yes.

11-00:01:12

Ellis: Well, let's see, that was the '56 season, the end of the '55-'56 season, and probably, all in all, that was my best season. I was looking over the material I gave you, and a lot of things were happening. UCLA hadn't won a dual meet since 1951. That year, [1955], we beat Stanford for the first time in, I don't know, a lot of years. I also realized, looking over the material, that expectations were building pretty radically. Indeed, you guys are right. That cartoon—you guys were right—is very important, wherever it is, this one, of the Bruin barely conscious but he's getting some kind of reviving gases, one named Bob Seaman, the other, Russ Ellis, and then Ducky Drake has a hypodermic—here's a drip, Don Vick, the shot put, and the next season it's going to be a big shot, Rafer Johnson, and that's going to revive—and so it was a very exciting time there. UCLA was putting together a track team. That was great.

11-00:03:15

I think also I and a lot of my colleagues on the team—Don Vick, Bob Seaman and—did Rafer come that year? Rafer maybe came in my junior year, yes. We were just doing what we were going to do. We were part of this exciting thing, and we didn't know any boundaries, any limits. Track was big. We got lots of reinforcement on campus. What happened? I haven't tried to put that together. The major thing I remember about that '56 season was being very much in control of my powers and energies. I was in good shape, young, fairly unselfconscious. I mentioned the agony of self-awareness in the competitive arena when it becomes a staged event and the media has expectations and so forth. It didn't matter to me much during that year.

11-00:04:44

Rafer and I were the only two UCLA athletes to qualify for the Olympic trials, the '56 Olympic trials. So, we worked out together. We went just with each other. There was a park we went to, where we did wind sprints and various things. I don't remember its being really all that serious training, actually, but that seemed okay. Rafer and I got together. We ate dinner every night at

somebody's restaurant, for free, which was interesting. I mean, it's interesting in retrospect. Why were we eating for free at this restaurant?

11-00:05:45

Wilmot: You were celebrated.

11-00:05:46

Ellis: Well, yes, somebody was supporting the team and making it easy. We were getting good protein and so on. And everything was fine. I went through the heats feeling in command. I mean, sort of at will I could make sure I held my place. I think I won my heats. It didn't matter, actually. What mattered was your time, for the lane assignments. Frankly, I'm kind of dim on the final event. [pause] What happened was—you remember I described last time having this power to call on, and I gave you two examples—one, the wild race—well, my freshman year at UCLA, where this event came down to this last race, and neither of us was giving up, and it was a question of who was going to last. That's a certain kind of determination and energy you have.

11-00:07:50

The other one that brackets that is the energy to go after someone and get them, overtake them. That was one I discovered all of a sudden, out of nowhere, at the Compton relays, the Compton Invitational, early in my sophomore year.

Neither of those was available to me in the final event of the Olympic trials at the Coliseum. To cut it short, that was a really big disappointment. I don't know if I mentioned this last time, but several years after I was no longer running, I had this insight. Where do they come from, these insights, and what are their shapes? They're almost like daydreams, where you're kind of asleep behind your open eyes. It's a combination of thought and image. You learn something from it. I was daydreaming about my athletic ability. I was fairly far beyond any actual running. It was as palpable as [knocks four times] touching this table, that I hadn't used the power that was still in me to run, that I hadn't found a way to open that, to have access to it in an easy way. It was really quite extraordinary, a sort of thought that there's some little something that I could have learned, or some moment where I would have learned about using these unused resources of power, at running.

11-00:10:26

That, aside from not making the Olympics—I actually took fifth, and they took the first four to run the relay, so it was a double disappointment. But fifth is fifth; it's not third; it's not second; it's not first; it's not fourth. But not going was a really big disappointment to me that colored my life past the time I got tenure here at Berkeley. And very few people understand that, I think. Athletes, I think, understand it. Runners certainly do understand it.

11-00:11:12

I was talking to my son recently about his musicianship. He's a saxophone player, a tenor, jazz saxophone player. We were talking very seriously about my hopes for him. And I remember trying not to get him entangled in my expectations, which is, of course, almost impossible to do with your children. They're, by definition, entangled one way or another in parental expectations. But I remember the certainty with which I was trying to say to him again, "What I really care about is that you actually use what you have, that you get to use what you have." I was going to call him yesterday. His current album is doing really well, really well. He's trying not to be mesmerized by being in the top four in American radio play in jazz. He's charting like crazy. And I was going to call him to say, "What I am enjoying about this is that people are seeing your ability. You're getting to show the world what you can do. That's what's important to me." It's true, because he's a very inventive guy. It's, in a way, hoping that he gets access to *his* dynamite, to *his* power. I said to him that if he opens that cache, there is so much music in him, and I know that's true. He was very responsive to that. He said, "You couldn't have said a much better thing at this moment." Because you can get lost in this whole issue of how you're being regarded. It's the expectation issue again, right? How the world is viewing you.

11-00:13:23

McGarrigle:

Do you want to say more, Russ, about what you've since—in your contemplation about what that distance was, where you have the thought in the moment, where you understood that you hadn't utilized your complete power as a runner? Do you want to speak to that in terms of a perspective that you have on it now?

11-00:13:50

Ellis:

Well, the whole issue, thank God, has faded. I did worry for a long time that I'd go to my grave with this as my biggest wound. It's not that it's been replaced by a larger wound, but it has receded, now I'm sixty-eight. [laughs] It hasn't receded in a hurry, but it's very nice to have it kind of take its place among a variety of things I've been through. I'll tell you frankly that I am sure that, among the serious play I've done in the golden sandbox—and running, as an identity, was one of the most serious things I was involved with in California, my home state, and the place where I got to experiment and fiddle and fool around.

11-00:14:49

I think that my perception of how I occupied the role of vice chancellor has taken care of a lot of other things. You remember I said last time something like, I was never—I forget what the language was, I was sort of surprised to hear myself use it—that I was never much of anything. I never *was* anything. Well, before we stop interviewing for my oral history, I'm sure I will double back to that observation and give it clarity and shape so that I know what I'm saying. But in my own sense of myself, I was involved in so many activities in my life. Maybe I'm not unusual in this way, but I've been a busy boy, doing



lots of stuff. In retrospect, I've been able to look back at the running and say, not that I didn't go to the Olympics, but I can still find myself recorded as having the sixth or eighth fastest time in the world in one season, that I took third in the NCAA, that I have two NCAA medals, and that's an accomplishment.

And then to carry the model of my life forward, *Fly Blackbird*, [*Fly Blackbird* was a civil rights protest based musical in which I played the male romantic lead in 1960-1. Book by James Hatch and music by Clarence Jackson, it opened at the Metro Theater in Los Angeles and went on without me to win an "Obie" (Off Broadway) award in New York] my little singing career, being an academic here, at no point do I think I was ever engaged in a way that got everything I had. Which I don't take as a character flaw, I take it as a feature of my character. It's partly because I've been always spread across a broad landscape of activities. The vice chancellor job, which I didn't seek—

11-00:17:29

McGarrigle:

I'm going to stop you, Russ, because we're going to get there, but we want to stay here.

11-00:17:34

Ellis:

Okay, that's fine. Let me just say what it was. In a way, it sort of was a summary of all the things I had done, strange as that seems. That is, I called on all these other things to do that job, and they were all alive to me in very interesting ways, unself-consciously, whereas the specifics of pursuing running, which I might have done if I hadn't gotten that kidney illness—I might have kept going, and I think I probably would have been better. So many athletes, after they finish their college years, got very focused on what they were doing and did well. And indeed I came back and ran the sprints and did quite well. I surprised myself, actually, in some events, for a short while.

11-00:18:51

But my little singing career in Hollywood, after I graduated, I was unserious. That is, I don't know if I've said this, but I remember singing at a jazz club. Was it Jazz City? God, I can't remember now. But I put on my little suit, and I had a pretty damn good group behind me—Gerald Wiggins, pianist; Barney Kessel, guitar; I mean, Elliot Eisman [my manager], he was serious about me. I wasn't serious. I didn't comprehend what it is to go [claps hands once, hard], "I'm doin' it!" I wasn't hungry for it.

11-00:19:49

McGarrigle:

Describe the timing to me. In '56 is the Olympic trials.

11-00:19:55

Ellis:

Yes. I graduated in '58. My last season is '57.

11-00:20:01

McGarrigle:

Okay, so you've come back to track the year after the Olympic trials.

11-00:20:05

Ellis: Yes, yes, right. And I actually use up my eligibility, so I had no more eligibility left, but I do get very sick after I think it was the Coliseum relays that year, '57.

11-00:20:21

Wilmot: I'm sorry, Russ, what does it mean to use up your eligibility?

11-00:20:24

Ellis: When athletes come here from high school, they will have four years—let's take football—they have four years to compete. Let's imagine they get through half a season and they're injured. They have three years left. They don't get to save up the injury part of the years and add it. Athletes will change schools and so forth; they lose a year of eligibility when they change schools. It's kind of an NCAA punishment for—an effort to suppress this kind of activity, which would result in a lot of athletes dealing and swapping and so forth. So I didn't get sick and thereby not be able to finish out my years. I may have missed a meet or two or three. I don't know. But basically I was through with my running at UCLA when I got sick.

11-00:21:29

Wilmot: I understand that part of what was happening at UCLA also was that the athletic teams were banned.

11-00:21:37

Ellis: I read this. I don't remember a single thing. I just was reading this—

11-00:21:43

Wilmot: In '56 because of something the football team did.

11-00:21:46

Ellis: Yes, right!

11-00:21:47

Wilmot: An infraction.

11-00:21:48

Ellis: And we couldn't compete. I completely missed it. I didn't remember that at all. At. All. And everybody else does. Hal Miller talks about how terrible that was.

11-00:21:58

Wilmot: And all of the background interviews really spoke to just the importance—I mean, how in some ways UCLA had been kind of an underdog until this year, and then UCLA crept up and just took it from USC, who was the big champion.

11-00:22:17

Ellis: Oh, yes, yes, the NCAA and the Pacific Coast Conference championship. No, no, that was stellar stuff. The other thing I do is I give myself credit for being part of that. I was part of that wonderful flowering of UCLA. And then

UCLA, of course, became, by definition, *the* powerhouse nationally in sports in so many different ways. It became very much a sports school after that. So what I did in later years in terms of perspective is to not look at what I *didn't* do but look at what I *did* do.

11-00:22:55

McGarrigle:

And what I was thinking about, and I don't think I made it explicit, is that I wondered, later on, as you have had these moments of review but you were speaking to a particular moment, if you came to see what it was that might have held you back. I mean, you understood that you had unutilized power, and I wondered if—

11-00:23:19

Ellis:

Let's see, I think I've already spoken to this, at least in bits and pieces. If I had to summarize—[pause]—I'll try to prioritize them, although they're close. One is that—[pause]—one problem was quite a radical self-consciousness because I was really quite distracted after a while by my fame and, as I said before, the expectations that came with it. Now, I didn't think that definitively sunk me, but I think it was very important. I could stay up all night and work myself, basically, technically, into a state of shock in terms of thinking of the race and various moments in it and pumping adrenaline and not sleeping. And it would take me a race, very often the first race in a dual meet, 440, and I would be no good for that race, but once that was taken care of, I was great. And looking through this, I see that on several occasions I didn't meet expectations in my event, but then, like one at the Stanford—I think I took third or fourth in that, in the 440. But I came back from behind and won the finishing kick in the relay to win the meet, and that was the first time. [1955] That was UCLA's returning to, or coming to some prominence.

11-00:25:29

But I could have used a sports psychologist, I think, to do some imaging of things. I believe in that stuff. I tell students all the time now, "Imagine—it doesn't matter what the path is from here to there—imagine where you'd like to be, what shoes you're wearing. Give yourself a destination and color it in. Change it when you need to." I think that matters. I'm sure that matters. It's *magical* how that matters. My imaging wasn't productive. I think I would go to the crisis mode and not see myself necessarily as winning. I didn't work that way. It was more like looking out for the landmines, the perils. I don't think that's a good way to use your psyche, I don't think it's a good way to use your body, and I am now convinced that how you imagine the use of your body is actually very much connected to how you wind up using it. We are—who's Superman who fell off his horse, the actor?

11-00:26:55

Wilmot:

Christopher Reeves.

11-00:26:56

Ellis:

Yes, Reeves, Reeve. Is that what it is? He's been doing these things. He's been moving parts of his limbs and so forth that he shouldn't be able to do, given the absence of neural connections. I was listening on NPR to an interview with him, or maybe it was television, and he was just saying, "There's something going on in the human makeup that we really don't understand very well. Nobody can quite tell you how I'm able to make these moves. I shouldn't be able to." Well, that struck me. I think that we are interestingly complex combinations of—I mean, this is a ridiculous distinction—mind and body, but we're so much more than we have known.

11-00:27:49

So anyway, the other couple of things was—and I'll stand by these—one was my idiotic—it's breathtaking, over the years, when I realized that I had this notion that I had gotten from somewhere that I didn't want to burden myself with liquids. That's ridiculous. And I can even identify some races where I either did well or did very badly. In retrospect, I think, "Actually, I drank some water that time and didn't this time." It was ridiculous. I mean, it's just so unhappy to think of that, that prospect of failing to know about that. I don't remember its being an issue in training, and I know my coach never mentioned it. No one ever insisted. It wasn't part of the understanding of how the body worked or anything like that. Not that I was aware, God knows. I crowed about my high school coach, Ernest Hartman, but I don't remember that being an issue then. We just went out and ran and did what we could. Had analgesic balm on the sore muscles and stuff like that.

11-00:29:08

So that one. And I guess I'll sneak that one in there as a priority too. Even though, especially as I go back over and read the clippings and think about Ducky. Ducky cared about his athletes, and he cared about me, Ducky Drake. But I wish Craig Dixon had been my coach. I think he was young, and I think he knew a lot, and Ducky just wasn't having it, and it was appropriate. He was the head coach. He had been starving for years to have a winning team, and he had one, and he was going to have it, and it was his to have. People worked to get him athletes because they loved him, Ducky Drake.

11-00:30:00

Those would be there. I can't say that I was unsupported. That was not a problem. I had heard that San Jose State and Bud Winter wanted to get a lot of athletes, especially black athletes, up to San Jose State. I heard it wasn't a particularly supportive setting. The dormitory situation wasn't so good, San Jose wasn't so wonderful to be in, and I did hear some complaints about that when I was running, because Winter had tried to recruit me to San Jose State. But, boy, I really felt supported, as I've said before, at UCLA, so that wasn't a problem. And I had tremendous support from my family. They came to the events. They drove great distances to be there.

11-00:31:04

Wilmot: Kept all your clippings.

11-00:31:05

Ellis: Yes, yes, my dad, yes, did me the favor of keeping a scrapbook for me. So that support wasn't a problem. I was very much affirmed. UCLA was an open world for me. I wasn't locked into my athletic identity by anybody.

I had a case up here when I was faculty assistant to [Watson] Mac Laetsch, an advisee I had. I had a couple of advisees on the Joe Kapp football teams. They happened both to be young black men. I asked them if they had an image of where they think they might want to go after college, if football wasn't it. One of them, John Johnson, said he was really interested in law, so he decided, on his own, that he was going to take Latin. And his coach, a guy I actually like—I won't say his name—he went out of his gourd. He just was so upset. "Latin?!" He didn't want him to take Latin because Latin is hard, and it was the football season. John took it anyway, and he went on to law school and actually became a deputy DA, I think in St. Louis for a while, and he's now in some role in Los Angeles, I think.

11-00:32:53

Wilmot: Russ, that brings me to this question for you, which is after the Olympic trials, how did your career horizon begin to look? Or how did it change?

11-00:33:03

Ellis: Good. That's a nice transition. [pause] I continued to run, of course. There was something dark about my final year, though. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was the ineligibility issue or something. I don't know. Maybe—I don't know. I don't know what happened. I didn't stop thinking of myself as a runner after the '56 failure, but probably I was depressed or something. Probably. That period has kind of disappeared for me.

11-00:34:02

Wilmot: Do you remember graduation?

11-00:34:04

Ellis: I was too cool to graduate.

11-00:34:07

Wilmot: You were too cool to graduate?

11-00:34:08

Ellis: Yes.

11-00:34:09

Wilmot: Hmm.

11-00:34:10

Ellis: People as cool as me didn't worry about things like that.

11-00:34:13

Wilmot: And your family?

11-00:34:15

Ellis: They were outraged, but they didn't say anything until much later. They were not outraged, they were disappointed. They would not have been outraged at me, but they were *really* disappointed.

11-00:34:27

Wilmot: They really wanted to come to a ceremony.

11-00:34:28

Ellis: Well, yeah! My mother, who is really not well right now—I was just down in L.A. visiting her, and her granddaughter, who had a sojourn running Jack-in-the-Boxes, or something like that, and has just finished a term in the Army and has gotten married, and is based with her still-in-the-Army husband in Tampa, Florida, is getting her associate in arts degree from Kings University or something in Tampa. Among the things I had to do on this trip, which was a very complicated trip, is I had to drive up to Victorville, where my sister lives, the mother of Anitra, who is getting her AA, to pick her up and bring her back to L.A. so that she and my mother could get on an airplane and fly to Tampa for graduation.

11-00:35:28

Now, part of this has to do with my mother's sense of her mortality, and she's going to get all this stuff in and celebrate it all. But it's also her sense of ceremony and there should be these moments, and we should take care of them and make all the right noises, literally, and have the right cards and gifts. What sociologists call social occasions should be really clear. I think I might have said to you there's a point in the picnic where everybody is supposed to go "Whee!" [laughs] And she's really stark about that.

11-00:36:05

So here I go, I graduate, and I don't say anything about it. I'm on my way to being a beatnik by that time. I don't smoke and at that time I'm certainly not smoking marijuana. It's terribly illegal at that time, as you guys may have heard. But I'm sort of wandering in that direction. I've been hanging out with the theater arts, and dance, and philosophy crowd. That's where I'm getting my enjoyment. The old definitions that are still around campuses all over the country is that serious students don't care about grades. There's a little ethic there, you know, you can find. It's a great excuse for all of those who are afraid of the challenge, to excuse away the class work. But, of course, our conversations were better than everybody else's conversations, and we were cooler than everybody, as I recall. Yeah, I thought I was pretty clever. I thought I was pretty special.

So when I got my PhD, I graduated my ass off. [laughs] My uncle and aunt—I did what I was supposed to do. I was very sorry, partly because I hadn't thought of them in making my decision, I hadn't thought of their needs. And

going to college, in those days—and I talk about people my age. We were trying to get as far away from home as possible. Everybody I knew was saying, “Bye,” not forever to Mom and Dad, but “This is my life over here.” Kids are not like that anymore. They seem to want to stay close to family, and so forth. I just saw it as a continuing affirmation of my separation from my old life. I was reborn, to play with that image, in this whole collegiate identity. That was important.

11-00:38:16

McGarrigle: When you actually do graduate then, do you know at that point that you’re going to System Development Corporation?

11-00:38:27

Ellis: Let’s see. No. Partly because I have an unfulfilled requirement, and that is swimming, I think. I’m not a very good swimmer, and I didn’t care about it. I had done ROTC, but I had friends from that era who almost never got their degrees because they had an ROTC requirement which they didn’t fulfill. Some, they didn’t fulfill it for ideological reasons, some, like, “You gotta be kidding me.” But, in fact, they wouldn’t give you your degree without your fulfilling certain requirements.

11-00:39:13

McGarrigle: Was that nationwide then?

11-00:39:13

Ellis: I have no idea. I don’t know.

11-00:39:15

McGarrigle: What did ROTC require of you?

11-00:39:19

Ellis: I had to take some classes and march around and stuff like that, yes. Weird, huh? I don’t remember that. But I do know that some people—maybe it was an option you had? No, it wasn’t. Nobody would take it if they didn’t want it. But anyway, I had a swimming requirement that they really held firm to. And I might also—you know, I mentioned to you that during the track seasons, I’d fall below a C average and then off season I would bring my grade average above a C, so I think I also had to take an extra course to get my final GPA above a C in order to graduate, I think, so I went to summer session or something like that.

11-00:40:11

McGarrigle: Did you do the swim class in summer session, then?

11-00:40:15

Ellis: Yes, you had to take a test. You had to swim around in circles and stick your finger in your nose and whatever. I think I satisfied it by taking a swimming class. Right, yes, I think.

11-00:40:28

McGarrigle: So as a land person, that was a pretty big change of medium, to be in the water.

11-00:40:35

Ellis: No, no, it was actually okay, because as a kid I was in the water a lot in summers and stuff like that. I was never a swimmer, but hot days and so forth, I went and got really cold and turned blue, and then enjoyed eating a lot of food after that. I did a lot of water play, but I was just never a serious swimmer.

11-00:40:56

McGarrigle: To get back to Nadine's question about the career horizon, how did that transition to—

11-00:41:04

Ellis: Okay, and that's a good question. Okay. Now, let me deal with the career horizon shift. That was actually awful, because what I was going to be took up so much weird space. I would make lists. As a sophomore, I was making lists, you know. Anything I did that I was good at I would entertain as a career. Ping-pong. [laughs] Literally! My list would be ping-pong, singing, whatever—I forget. But I'd have to rearrange things and put them in a new order. [laughs] That was funny. That was so funny. But it was awful, the indecisiveness, the agony of being stranded between possibilities, among possibilities. It wasn't fun. But I didn't have any shortage of things I thought of.

11-00:42:26

Wilmot: So sometimes when you can't make up your mind about what's going to happen—

11-00:42:31

Ellis: Now?

11-00:42:32

Wilmot: No, at that time.

11-00:42:33

Ellis: Oh, then.

11-00:42:34

Wilmot: The opportunity presents itself and the choice is made for you, so how did your next step emerge for you?

11-00:42:43

Ellis: I was still having this problem as a sophomore, so I had lots of things I had to do in the meantime, right? I had to work out and run, friendships to tend, classes to go to, meals to eat, clothes—you know, I had lots of things to do in my life.



11-00:42:59

Wilmot: Right.

11-00:43:00

Ellis: While I was with the co-op, I had to do four hours a week of this, that, and the other, so my life was full of obligations. But I understand your question. I've actually thought about it, not with any organization, but when I was in Southern California this time, I visited two of my running buddies from high school, and we had a nice time together. I was looking through an old Compton yearbook, and there was a picture of John Mayshack. I meant to bring—I guess in my mind I was thinking we were at home, I knew I was coming here, but half of my mind was getting ready for the interview to be there. I had this painting that John drew that I want you to see. This is the guy I ran home with from Compton, who taught me about endurance. This is the guy, probably his dad probably was a Communist Party member drudge or something. Very articulate, interesting guy. And I think John was my first serious intellectual encounter in high school, in life, aside from Marjorie Ellis, my stepmother. You remember I mentioned the two brothers who lived on the farm, Joe Broussard and Walter Broussard?

11-00:45:00

Wilmot: Yes.

11-00:45:01

Ellis: I'm thinking probably Walter had quite an impact on me. I remember him as smart and knowing a lot of things. Maybe he was three, four, five years older than me? I can't remember. You know, age differences are so big at that age. But later he became quite competitive with me, which was strange. I didn't understand that. I guess I'm building toward my choice of careers later on, knowing what I did, knowing what I now know. I'm looking for where it came from.

I did visit my elementary school on this trip to Southern California this time. Absolutely fascinating.

11-00:46:02

Wilmot: This was in Etiwanda?

11-00:46:03

Ellis: Etiwanda, Etiwanda, right. I was so pleased at the architectural gesture of rehabilitation that's faithful to the original design, because I could—I didn't tell you this story. It was a question of appropriateness. But there was one little ramp that led out of the room and down the side of the schoolyard, where a group was approaching me. I thought I'd play a prank—it was kind of a practical joke—and then trick them. I unzipped my fly and took my penis out, and then walked by them. And they came rushing back, during which time I zipped my fly up again. They had told themselves a great story about it and rushed back, and that was the thing I was doing, okay? Well, I saw the ramp, and I remembered that mischievous thing and wondered who I was. I've

thought about it in terms of me messing with the rules all the time. I think that was kind of the—and so it was very nice to go back there and see that spot and remember what had happened there.

11-00:47:21

The door to the auditorium, the tiny little door, underneath the big marquee, Etiwanda School, I think. It's now a middle school. But I remember standing there with the other kids, getting ready to file in and go up, where I sang a solo, "O Holy Night." It's there, the door. There's an additional brick wall out there. Purcell Daniels, my friend from high school, went with me. It was very interesting because they'd just gotten a new principal, a black woman from Pomona. We had to get permission from her to go into the school. School was out.

11-00:48:06

McGarrigle:

Russ, I'm going to move you back to '58.

11-00:48:09

Ellis:

Right. Let me just finish something. But what I remember about Etiwanda was, I really got an education there. I remember that as one of the flowery spots in my growth intellectually. I think I got a big push from that elementary school. Then, coming back to graduating, I know what happened to me—and I'll let you do your question—but I know what happened to me when I graduated. I went looking for a job. I don't know how I got to System Development Corporation, but I went there, and I got the job. That's where I met Thelton [Henderson]. It was a boondoggle. I mean, it was military money. It was way too much money being wasted on something or other.

11-00:49:09

Wilmot:

Is System Development Corporation the ancestor of RAND?

11-00:49:15

Ellis:

It was connected to RAND. They had actually been part of each other. They split off, and there was cross-talk between them. I think SDC no longer exists. But what happened to me at SDC after a while, was they started taking me seriously—and I'd had that experience at a couple—I'd had a girlfriend, a sort of girlfriend, who was at UCLA in my undergraduate years. Well, actually, I have to confess, two women were very important for me, rethinking myself. One was just sort of an ad hoc encounter. I knew her for a while. But she had come to UCLA, this rare—I think then it was a Western Electric scholarship in science and philosophy or something—and she had written a high school paper on Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher.

11-00:50:16

Wilmot:

Alfred North?

11-00:50:18

Ellis:

Alfred North Whitehead. Out of high school. After a silly dalliance with her that just seemed part of going to college, some time later she wanted to get

back in touch with me, and she wanted to get to know me and talk to me, and she found me interesting, and she said that. There was great consternation for me, like “What?!” You know, “What?” But I did note that. I did note that. And then I think finally, although I didn’t go in the direction she was hoping I would go, I had a girlfriend who was somewhat older than me, she had a child, Mary Ellen McKay was her name. I learned a lot from her, just a lot from her. She was in psychotherapy, and she was talking. I mean, she was opening areas about herself that are still with me. I mean, I’m still too open, and I think it’s part Marjorie Ellis, who is kind of mechanically open; she just insists on confessing things. Even if she doesn’t want to deal with it, she feels an obligation to say, “Well, perhaps I’m being defensive,” she’ll say. Being really defensive, but my stepmother will say, “Well, perhaps it’s my problem and I’m being defensive.” Then she’ll go on and destroy you with her defensiveness.

11-00:51:56

But Mary Ellen was not mean with her openness, and I learned about openness, both intellectually and otherwise. She was writing to—oh, gosh!—Bertrand Russell, read his works and was fascinated with his works. She actually went to visit him and discovered, interestingly enough, that one of his young assistants was answering his letters. But if you follow any serious philosopher, you find out that that’s the case. They can’t function without having really smart people, who understand what they’re doing, at least *drafting* their responses. That’s the key to success, I’ve concluded.

11-00:52:43

Anyway, those are my sources. A couple of things happened. One at SDC—even though we didn’t do much of anything and I sat in the Systems Laboratory, where we looked at—have I described this already? I have described this, with the geodesic dome? The idea was to study the social effect, the performance effects of certain kinds of physical arrangements. In this case, we were looking at these three-man teams in the geodesic domes that made up the Distant Early Warning [DEW] line on the American-Canadian border. The DEW line, as it was called, was a series of little kind of radar-connected things that tracked incoming stuff from the Soviet Union, was the real issue there.

11-00:53:37

Wilmot:

You were a scientist, then.

11-00:53:39

Ellis:

Well, no, I was just doing—we were looking at the ability of teams to do their work tracking these things on these screens. There were simulated games of intrusive flights, and then the team had to process the information, get it to someone who entered it, someone who received it from out there somewhere, and then we’d put them next to each other, stand them on their heads—you know.

11-00:54:10

Wilmot: You were there for how long?

11-00:54:11

Ellis: A couple of years.

11-00:54:12

Wilmot: And as they started to take you seriously, did you think, ‘This is a career for me?’ Did you think, ‘Oh, no, this is not a career for me?’

11-00:54:18

Ellis: No. You know, what happened was there was a group there—actually, a very interesting book came out of it, written by a guy named Robert Boguslaw, B-o-g-u-s-l-a-w, I think is how you spell his name. I knew him and liked him a lot. And they were working on something called learning machines in those days. These were actually teaching machines, how kids could use and people could use computers, basically, to learn—you know, process their learning activity. There was a moment when people were vying for me to join their little sub-teams. I didn’t understand it. It happened to me another time, once I got into graduate school. I also rejected it the second time it came up. And that’s been me. I’ve been a rejectionist; I haven’t wanted to go into doors where people have their games set up. I’ve kind of enjoyed life on the margins more. That is, I’ve *enjoyed* life on the margins.

11-00:55:41

But at System Development Corporation—and Bob Boguslaw wrote a book called *The New Utopians*, and it was about the new computer world. He described folks who could go into them—you know, computers the size of this room—and could go in and fix it and not be able to tell anybody what they did. And the language world of the new utopians. It was about the new computer people, right? That new world of computing. I don’t know if I didn’t think of myself as equal to that work or if it wasn’t interesting to me. I don’t remember being enticed by it. I remember being entranced by the fact that they thought I was interesting enough to recruit. And it changed my attitude toward myself a little bit.

11-00:56:39

Wilmot: Were you pursuing your singing concurrently?

11-00:56:41

Ellis: Yes, yes, I was doing some singing, and I was thinking of myself in those terms, too.

11-00:56:46

Wilmot: What did that look like?

11-00:56:47

Ellis: Oh, I could do it on weekends, evenings and so forth. Certainly, SDC was—

11-00:56:52

Wilmot: What kind of music?

11-00:56:53

Ellis: Oh! What kind of music was it? I was going to say SDC was not competition. It's not like I spent a lot of psychic energy on the job. What was it like? Thanks for reminding me. I did think of myself as having a singing career. I wanted to be a musical comedy singer. And I took lessons of various sorts, which I haven't mentioned to you. I wasn't very serious about that, either.

You want to take a break?

11-00:57:23

Wilmot: Yes, let's take a break.

11-00:57:35

Ellis: It's a perfect break time.

[begin audio file 12]

12-00:00:23

Wilmot: I think we ended on this question of what did singing look like for you while you were working at the SDC, System Development Corporation. What kind of music were you getting into? Were you thinking of yourself as potentially a serious singer?

12-00:00:38

Ellis: Yes. I thought I'd be a pop singer of the Johnny Mathis order. We came along exactly the same time. Indeed, he had a Mafia manager, too, Helen Noga.

12-00:01:07

Wilmot: Helen?

12-00:01:08

Ellis: Helen Noga, N-o-g-a, famously entangled with the Mafia. He had been a high jumper at San Francisco State, I think. He was an athlete.

12-00:01:22

McGarrigle: When you say "famously entangled with the Mafia," how was that information—?

12-00:01:27

Ellis: Just talked up.

12-00:01:29

Wilmot: And when you said "famously entangled with the Mafia," you said, "famously entangled with the Mafia, too?"

12-00:01:35

Ellis: Also.

12-00:01:36

Wilmot: Also?

12-00:01:38

Ellis: Well, my manager, Elliot Eisman—you know he may still be alive. I have to think about what I want the record to read.

12-00:01:50

McGarrigle: Then strike it out.

12-00:01:51

Ellis: But he took me to Mickey Cohen. We went to an empty bar in Hollywood and went to the back—not the back room of the building, but deep into the bar. Nobody's there except the three of us, and Elliot Eisman is introducing me to Mickey Cohen, a Mafioso for sure. And saying, "This is my—I'm working with him. I'm interested in his getting some work," and stuff like that. And then I sort of started singing around in some places, and I didn't have it. As a matter of fact, I remember singing—[laughs]—I went to some place to audition, to see if they would be interested in me—no, Elliot took me there. Elliot paid to have a tooth fixed, he paid to get my tonsils taken out. It was a whole getting me ready for the business. I remember, he took me to this club—and I have a taste for kind of exotic show tunes. You know the song, "Ill Wind?" [sings] "Blow, ill wind, blow away. Let me rest today. You're blowin' me no good." It's a great song. I like it a lot.

12-00:03:13

But I'm sitting at the table with Elliot, and the guy who was the manager of the place, after I finish, he comes over and leans on me and bites my ear. He misunderstood what I was singing in this song [laughs], and he wanted to see what the deal was. I couldn't believe it. I didn't do anything with it. It was just like, wow! It was *very* disconcerting. But I sang a few places while I was working. [disk skips, recording is unintelligible] Claire Fisher was the pianist that played for me in one studio.

I also—I didn't mention this, but I was cultivating a different set of friends, too. They were really very important to me. Largely Jewish. I was very, very, very taken with Jewish life, people, humor, very much, I was really quite thoroughly into that. One of my friends, who wound up quite big in television, a guy named Jerry Goldstein—we still are close—tried to hook me up with some management in Hollywood, but I began to be split there, because these friends, like Bob Kardon [Campanile starts to chime deeply], Sid Gansler, Bob Rudelson, who also wound up working in Hollywood—

12-00:05:12

Wilmot: Bob Gettleson?

12-00:05:14

Ellis: R-u-d-e-l-s-o-n. He wound up married to Lelia Goldoni. I don't know if you know that name. She was quite an actress in Hollywood, did some early

[John] Cassavetes films. But that world I was in was kind of—they read a lot and talked a lot about things. It was a good world for me. And they were shading more in the direction of graduate school or thoughtful things in some measure. I mentioned Goldstein and Rudelson, who went into the show biz line. But something else happened to me then that was important, about how I saw myself.

12-00:06:22

McGarrigle:

Just thinking about the context and the civil rights movement and the liberal element, the liberal Jewish element that comes just after this period, were there other young African Americans who were involved with this group?

12-00:06:43

Ellis:

Not that I was close to. At the co-op when I was first there, there was the great ping-pong player named John Ewell, who I'm pretty sure was Communist Party connected. I didn't like John that much. He was arrogant. Very smart guy, very well read and dismissive of me. Partly, I think, the jock thing. A lot of people dismissed me, because I was very shallow, I think. I think I was very social and busy, the way I still am, but—but I remember with great delight, John Ewell being beaten by this kid from the People's Republic of China, probably from the revolution, escaping Mao and so forth, Sherman Louie, who beat John in ping-pong. That was big, Sherman Louie.

12-00:07:46

But, no, there weren't a lot, no. There weren't very many of us to go around. Something that was very useful to me when I was in administration here, all the people who remember how wonderfully integrated—"Why, I knew Chinese kids and blacks kids." I said, "No, you didn't! Everybody knew the same four." [raps table once for emphasis] "And it seemed wonderfully integrated." No, it wasn't. "Yes, you got along with me! I worked very hard to be get-along-with-able." [laughs] That was the challenge of a lot of minorities, to come and fit in. But the Jewish-black thing has a long history around left politics, and it fell apart when the civil rights movement came North, I think. It started with the black power movement, and a lot of things changed. A lot of things changed.

12-00:08:45

McGarrigle:

I was just thinking about you at that time in that world, and then the context for that. There's Hollywood, which has always had liberal Jewish—

12-00:09:03

Ellis:

Exactly, exactly, exactly. Well, I think I was playing both of those.

12-00:09:10

McGarrigle:

And TV is just taking off then. The liberal Jewish talent is just coming to Hollywood to create the early successful programs, right.

12-00:09:26

Ellis: Yes. I wasn't aware of the history of it, in what waves who was coming. And I actually wasn't that tuned into TV as an industry. I didn't pay that much attention to it. But my friend Goldstein, Jerry Goldstein knew where he was coming, from New York. He knew what Hollywood was.

12-00:09:52

McGarrigle: It was a destination.

12-00:09:53

Ellis: Yes, and he finished—he got his degree in political science, and he married early, after he graduated. There was a time when he ran out of work, and he didn't work for several years, about three years. Ruth, his wife, worked, because he couldn't afford to take a gig that would result in him being lower in the credits, so he waited three years. He sold Great Books from door to door and so forth, just waiting to get in a position where he'd get a credit above his last one, because they're merciless in Hollywood. You fall, you're gone, unless you get lucky. So I watched him a little bit, and I watched Rudelson. Rudelson was an intellectual who—I think he rewrote the script for *A Thousand Clowns*, that movie. And he struggled along. He never really broke big in the business.

12-00:11:04

McGarrigle: At this time, Russ, in terms of what's happening in the South—you know, Emmett Till and Rosa Parks are in '55, and in '57 is Little Rock—what—

12-00:11:19

Ellis: Oh, the—sorry, go ahead. No, no, you go.

12-00:11:21

McGarrigle: What's happening in terms of the consciousness of you and people you—

12-00:11:25

Ellis: Good. Very good. In this pile of materials, there's one article from the [*Los Angeles*] *Sentinel*. It's on track, and it celebrates Rafer and me as major contributors to the resurgent UCLA. The cast of it is about race. I have to tell you that the legacy of slavery and race relations in America and the community I come from is just about *race*. You could not not know the big news that had any racial implications. You could not. It was like breathing. So Rosa Parks, Emmett Till, any of this kind of stuff was news. Oh, God, just—

12-00:12:44

McGarrigle: It comes to you even when you're at UCLA and you're one of a very few number of black students. How does that—

12-00:12:53

Ellis: Well, many directions. It comes through the racial channels because everybody's buzzing about it, but it also comes from the liberal channels. UCLA actually had quite a liberal tradition, as I mentioned to you, the little red schoolhouse days, and derisively the place was called Jew-CLA by some



people, as I think I mentioned before. And I met my soon-to-be wife through an odd connection that way. When I was at SDC—just to try to tie these together because they’re relevant—she was coming here. This is 1959. I’m at SDC. Judith Fairston was her name, maiden name, was coming here on a Fulbright from the London School of Economics [LSE], to sociology. She wasn’t planning to stay. I was working at SDC and living a kind of employed but sort of bohemian life, in Beverly Glen Canyon, which was sort of a bohemian place in those days. I get a phone call one day from a guy who also lives in Beverly Glen, who worked at SDC, one of these top-ranked PhD guys. Could he get a ride home? He’d gone through the phone book and found that I lived near him. Could I give him a ride home? Joel Kibbee is his name. I visited him when I was on this trip south last week, he and his wife, Eleanor, and their daughter Regan. We had dinner together. I drove him home, and these were a couple of wild and—the popular language in those days was neurotic, and they were definitely neurotic. They were just all over the place.

12-00:15:08

Wilmot:

Eleanor—

12-00:15:09

Ellis:

Eleanor and Joel K-i-b-b-e. Now, he’s writing his memoirs now. I forget what it is, but his [actual] name is Mickey Ginsberg or something like that, his name. He’s eighty-two, I guess. And so I hung out with them for a while. We had a great time together. They were interesting, wild, different; they read stuff that I hadn’t read; they were nearby; they liked to party and all kinds of stuff. And then one day they said that a friend of theirs had asked them if they could pick up this woman that was coming from London. Their friend was Clancy Sigal. Now, he wrote a book called *Weekend in Dinlock* and another one, *Going Away*, two novels that got quite a lot of attention back in the day. He was living in London. He was an American expatriate living in London, part of the left-wing scene there. And Judith was coming here. She’d been part of that scene. Her dad, Saul Fairston, was never a Party person but kind of a fellow traveler who just collected things to believe in, a delightful guy.

12-00:16:46

Wilmot:

When you say “never a Party person,” you mean—

12-00:16:48

Ellis:

Never joined the [Communist] Party but when I went there, he knew a lot of the obvious people. And it was very different in London in ’61. I left here in ’61 to go see him and actually to marry Judith in London. When I left here, it was What’s-his-name [Frederick] Schwarz and the Christian Anti-Communist crusade. I’d go there, and then all the newspapers you couldn’t get here were there. It was amazing. It was a real eye opener for me, and part of my growth intellectually, too.

But anyway, Clancy had asked Joel and Eleanor to pick up Judith and show her around and so forth. She was staying with a family, quite a well-to-do

family, up in Pacific Palisades. I was driving an Isetta at the time. Have you ever seen one of those? It actually was a German car with an Italian name. It looked like an egg, and you opened the front and the steering wheel folded out. It had two little wheels in the back and two wheels wide in the front.

12-00:17:46

Wilmot: How do you spell Isetta?

12-00:17:47

Ellis: I-s-e-t-t-a.

12-00:17:49

Wilmot: Love it!

12-00:17:50

Ellis: Right. I saw one at the waterfront the other day here, at Cesar Chavez Park Berkeley Waterfront.

12-00:17:53

Wilmot: So you were stylish.

12-00:17:55

Ellis: Well, I had trouble getting dates in that car. [laughs heartily]

12-00:17:57

Wilmot: Really?

12-00:17:59

Ellis: Yes, it was a bit too out.

12-00:18:02

Wilmot: Seems like kind of a mod—

12-00:18:03

Ellis: Well, no, no. I was doing what I wanted to do. In other words, that was who I wanted to be. But it was not easy. [laughs] It was not easy. I don't know what I mean. I'll see what I mean later. But anyway, when I went to pick her up, she was completely familiar with the Isetta. She knew it. She'd seen it. She dearly liked it. The family was a bit astonished to see me coming, because they were entertaining an English girl. You know, the family was entertaining the Fulbright student from another country. So here I come in this car. She moved out shortly thereafter, and we started hanging out almost immediately.

12-00:18:58

Now, I don't know how much I—I'm sure I did something ridiculous, showing my Yiddish bona fides or something, some language from Hollywood, just who I was. But she was also very interesting. You've got to remember this is the folk music era; this is a major critical era, the Angries in England, the Beats here. There was a big critique of bourgeois society on both sides of the Atlantic. I was a little bit exhausted. I was something of a playboy after I—let's see, is that the right language? That would be the language for

then, but I was messing around a lot. I was no longer in college. I was no longer an athlete. I had a job, and I had [momentary pause, for emphasis] a *credit card, Diner's Club*, which was almost the death of me, the death of me. I was living a good life, but it was also getting boring. It was getting boring.

12-00:20:19

Judith was just stupendously interesting, and she was smoking cigarettes, and I remember sharing her cigarettes. I didn't pick up smoking till I was in my forties, actually. But we just had a great time, just a great time. She's fundamental to my intellectual growth. We wound up going to graduate school together, and I think she tilted me in that direction. I mean, I think my choices in life were very much—well, I know, not think, were part of being her partner and plying our way through this life as formally trained intellectuals, academics, not quite knowing what we wanted to do, other than we loved being graduate students and being part of UCLA. There was a joint anthropology-sociology department there. We had great friends. We continued a sort of bohemian life, big time, because we moved out to Malibu's only slum, I always called it. And then she became part of my circle of friends, too. That lasted a very long time. The times were hugely interesting. The times were just very interesting.

12-00:22:17

McGarrigle: When you met Judith, you were at SDC.

12-00:22:20

Ellis: Yes.

12-00:22:21

McGarrigle: So it was '59.

12-00:22:22

Ellis: Yes, right.

12-00:22:23

McGarrigle: It's in '61 that you get married.

12-00:22:25

Ellis: Yes. And I think I quit SDC. No, what I did was I managed to have them lay me off, so that I could collect unemployment and go to graduate school. That's what I did. And I was really honest with them. "Do you think you could manage to lay me off?" I said to my boss. He said, "Sure." And then I collected unemployment and went to graduate school. I was really interested. I was motivated. I had to take an extension course from a guy who clearly was not interested in what he was doing, a psych class. And then I defined myself. It was a defining moment. I said, "This man is not serious. What am I doing here?" And then I answered the question, "Well, I'm overcoming a C average graduation level thing to demonstrate to the people in the graduate school in sociology that I deserve to be there."

12-00:23:24

McGarrigle: So it's the SDC influence.

12-00:23:27

Ellis: No question about it, in part.

12-00:23:30

McGarrigle: At that time, you've met Thelton Henderson.

12-00:23:33

Ellis: I met him there, right. I met him at SDC.

12-00:23:38

McGarrigle: And how does that friendship form?

12-00:23:40

Ellis: Oh, it was a love affair. We still talk baby talk, like lovers. It was ridiculous. It's a highly stylized, exaggerated, black, baby talk. I'll only give you one example. I called him Hindromobobbus. [chuckles] Oh, I won't say what he called me. Yeah, I've had about two or three of these friendships with men that were just love affairs. Bob Kardon was kind of like that. Troy and I never had a love affair. Troy and I knew each other at UCLA. He was doing something different. His identity was very much tied up, already, in graduate sociological work. He had been a very successful undergraduate at Northwestern and from quite a distinguished family, as you guys know. But anyway, that was Thelton's and my relationship. And we went around. We played guitar together. We partied together. We hung out. Then he decided, I guess, to go law school from there. We had a falling out, but I think it was lovers who were parting. You know, you often have to have that fight to just make the parting palatable? I haven't talked to him about that, but that's the thought I've had about it. Where did *that* come from?

12-00:25:47

Thelton's and my relationship at SDC was not about my identity or his identity as an intellectual, I don't think. I think we found ourselves as really compatible in making our way through the world of the early sixties, the late fifties and so forth, and we enjoyed it. It was a nice time. It was a vigorous time. It was an open time. It was a good time to be mobile and to be black and to be out in the world, trying things and looking at new stuff. He was nice company for a couple of years. And then we just stayed in touch, which was interesting.

12-00:26:34

Wilmot: I'm wondering about that transition to graduate school. We'll probably not go too far into this today, but why sociology-anthropology?

12-00:26:43

Ellis: I think I mentioned last time or at some point, I had thought psychology, and I think I mentioned to you that there was a decisive moment early on in a philosophy class, where I read John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. I just said,

“Well, Jesus Christ, this is amazing!” The rules are problematic, it was just an eye opener. As a way of thinking about things, and it took me—I don’t know why I went to psychology with that, but then psychology at UCLA was experimental psychology—the functioning of the brain and this, that, and the other. I was more interested in what came to be called clinical [psychology] and more interested in what we can talk about, the mindedness of us and so forth, and not the physiological makeup of us. Obviously, it’s a ridiculous separation, but at the time it was a stronger separation. I learned later, for example, at UCLA, the psychology department worked very, very hard to get its building, its offices south of a road that ran through the heart of the campus, running east-west, because that’s where the real sciences were.

12-00:28:24

And then I just found sociology just more amenable to—not amenable—I found myself much more at home naturally, as a person, in sociology. I will hypothesize, and have often, that it had to do with my own marginality, that I was able to see across fences. I’d lived in a rural setting for a while, and there I was—you know, there are lots of ways in which I had—my perspectives were multiple at any one moment. I could see lots of different things. I mentioned the Sammy House. Well, I don’t want to make more of that than it actually was—that’s a real insight! White people are complexly white. It’s not that simple. You know, seeing the world from the perspective of the folks from the Sammy House. And then looking around campus and looking at the mosaic of where people hang out. I just was very excited by the study of society, ultimately, just was. Was just very interesting to me. I felt naturally good at it.

12-00:29:42

McGarrigle:

Russ, to go back to this talk about what was happening in the South and information and the way it was affecting you—we’ll talk next time more about graduate school and about your involvement in CORE and so on—can you, looking back, think about how you were preparing to do the student activism?

12-00:30:10

Ellis:

No. No, I can’t. There are some things that happened to me that I can talk about. I couldn’t get my hair cut at the barbershop in Westwood. Did I talk about this already?

12-00:30:27

McGarrigle:

You mentioned it.

12-00:30:28

Wilmot:

You mentioned it.

12-00:30:29

Ellis:

And I remember going in and sitting down and forcing them to acknowledge me. I think I even wound up in the barber chair, but I can’t finish the story. But I wanted to challenge them. And then the class at Compton High School.

You remember the guy who used the expression, “nigger in a woodpile?” I went back to Marjorie, and I said, “This is not okay,” and she came to school with me. So there’s always been some kind of something I had which was an impulse to challenge racist incidents. The guy called me a nigger in the row behind me when I first went to Enterprise Junior High School, and I remember turning around and hitting him. I had no idea how to follow it up or anything, but he was kind of stunned by it, and it came to a halt. But I’ve sort of always been on some kind of little margin of confrontation on issues of race. The Emmett Till episode was a big one, but that was so big nationally also. There were smaller events, I’m sure, that escaped my attention and the attention of those around me, but that was so egregious and so altering. But I don’t remember being aware of James Farmer’s sit-ins right after the war, in ’46 and so forth. James Farmer and CORE and those people were really at the ground level of this, of the postwar endeavor. I don’t remember being aware of that until later.

12-00:32:03

McGarrigle:

And when you say Emmett Till was altering, how did it alter?

12-00:32:08

Ellis:

Massive, massive injustice, a kind of lynching. And lynching was—you know, this was the episode of—this was the awfulness at the intersection of white racism and black life, and this was their way of resolving things definitively. This was a young guy who probably not so innocently, given the values he brought out of Chicago to the South, got himself into a position that—the problem should have been resolved differently. He should not have been murdered, and he was brutally, awfully murdered. And for some reason, I think probably his age, that caught the fancy of the press. Probably the times also. It was postwar.

12-00:32:54

My guess is that that’s—I have a picture I want to show you of my father with a bunch of his friends, I didn’t bring it today—but I think the black vets and the vets altogether were thinking of themselves differently, and thinking of the country differently. We had just defeated Hitler, right, and the Axis powers, and lots of people had died, and this was the opening of a new life for everybody. Black soldiers couldn’t get a place in Levittown, the wonderful new development. They couldn’t get loans to live there. It was segregated. I don’t remember thinking about that then, but I know, in retrospect, it was an issue. ‘What are we doing? What did we just do? What was this war about?’ And I think the Emmett Till episode and many things got elevated into a general consciousness after the war, because we did have to reexamine what we were doing. The black GIs had seen a different world, the same way they did in the First World War. They saw a different world. It wasn’t the one they had lived in. There were other kinds of freedoms, other kinds of constraints, class issues that don’t hold here quite as strongly as they do in other countries.

12-00:34:25

Anyway, I think that I was an element in the growing consciousness in the country, just me as part of America that's growing and evolving. Nothing special about me. Been hanging out on the left, and—I may have mentioned to you sitting in the co-op, watching the [Joseph] McCarthy hearings and having them interpreted by people somewhat older than me, who had had some experience. There were some vets who were back, sitting in the room, watching the television and telling me what's happening. And I'm a primitive political entity at that point. Co-op was a good place. And then the crowd that I ran with. I ran with multiple crowds, obviously. But the liberal left, the Jewish world, held the sets of values and so forth that were novel to me and interesting. That's the best I can do with it in terms of the seeds of all of this. Marjorie was certainly, as you know from reading her oral histories, very tuned in to racial issues.

12-00:35:38

Wilmot:

She seemed to be very much a race woman.

12-00:35:40

Ellis:

Oh, boy, boy, and a really angry one, too, in important ways, in ways that have been destructive in my life, like with my kids.

12-00:35:48

Wilmot:

I have a question.

12-00:35:51

Ellis:

Sure.

12-00:35:52

Wilmot:

And I'm wondering if we can close after this question, Leah. Is that all right?

12-00:35:54

McGarrigle:

Yes.

12-00:35:56

Ellis:

Yes, but let me—did I wander away from your question?

12-00:36:00

McGarrigle:

No. It's so important. We're in the West, and this is going on in the South, and it's so important to know—

12-00:36:06

Wilmot:

Your political formation.

12-00:36:12

McGarrigle:

—how these events are affecting [cross-talk; unintelligible].

12-00:36:15

Ellis:

Yes. I'm glad you asked me, raised Emmett Till—that's a very important one. It's hard—I think that might have had its influence because he was so young, and I think it maybe captured everyone's attention.

12-00:36:28

Wilmot: The image.

12-00:36:31

Ellis: Exactly. Like, What is *this*? What are we doing here?

12-00:36:33

Wilmot: It may be one of the first times that that circulated outside of the black press.

12-00:36:37

Ellis: Yes, exactly.

12-00:36:37

McGarrigle: I think his mother understood that.

12-00:36:44

Ellis: Right.

12-00:36:46

Wilmot: My last question is you raised this really interesting idea of black soldiers, African-American soldiers, going away to Europe and then returning after the war and having experienced a different society with different class and stratification, no less present, but different. And I'm wondering—you said in 1961 you went to London. You went to England. Were you there for a sizeable amount of time, and what did you experience there, and how was it different from what you knew around stratification?

12-00:37:19

Ellis: Oh. Well, it was the first time I'd been to Europe. It was the first time I had been out of the United States, really. I was astonished by the place, just physically. Everything seemed scaled down three-quarter size, physically. There was an elaborate ethnic makeup, not nearly as dramatically diverse as it is now. Judith lived in a quite genteel suburb, Hampstead Garden suburb, near Hampstead Heath, delightful place. I was there in London because her father wanted to know who this guy was who was apparently interested in marrying his daughter. The first thing he said to me when we were alone—he says, "You know, just because I've invited you, it doesn't mean you *have* to marry my daughter." [laughs] I said, "Thanks, but I probably will." It was okay. It was fraught. It was fraught. It was difficult.

12-00:39:08

My father had said that during the war, he'd spent some time in London, not a lot, and he was eating in a restaurant, and someone objected to his presence. I think it might have been an American officer. It was kind of a fanciest club, and he was there with an Englishwoman. This American had made a fuss, and someone English in the restaurant turned to him and said, "Sir, he's fighting the same enemy we are." And my father just—he loved that moment, where an American white person had been put in his place by someone in a different situation, who saw a larger world than American race relations.



12-00:40:06

So I went with a little bit of a bias in favor of the English, having remembered my father's story from that time. And then, of course, England is England. It was my first taste of social class, real. But by that time, I'm already thinking of myself as a sociologist, and it's interesting to me. I'm not bothered by it, and I'm hanging out in a world of people, of card-carrying Communist Party members in England, where it doesn't mean anything like what it would have meant in the United States, even in the post-McCarthy era. Like, you're a consort of the devil if you're as clear about that as they were there. But I loved the openness. I adored the openness, the liberal intellectual openness of London. It was like breathing in some special, new way. Who's the author of *To the Finland Station*?

12-00:41:26

McGarrigle:

It's not [Edmund] Wilson.

12-00:41:29

Ellis:

Yes, right. I read that practically on the plane back to the United States, and that had a big altering effect for me, on how I thought of myself. I didn't particularly—. There was something else going on in London that was kind of startling. You know, [Nikita] Khrushchev had basically debunked Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in, what?—1956 or something. So I'm there, and it's five years later or four and a half or so years later, but I ran into these zombies, these party members who could not psychologically survive the truth about what had taken place in the Soviet Union under Stalin. These were people who were dead, who were walking around, whose dreams of a Soviet paradise on the left and all those wonderful possibilities were basically destroyed. I can never quite forget that. And Sol knew some of these people. I didn't quite get it immediately. It took me a while to understand what was happening.

12-00:42:51

As a matter of fact, I only am fully understanding it now, as I watch New Deal people now, who are pretty much in that same state as they watch Bush and his people destroy what they've been working on since before the war, some people here, some people who have been faculty members here, who had a hoped-for notion of a caring society and so forth, and watching it being dismantled. I know some people who aren't as destroyed but are really profoundly depressed by the state of America right now. It was interesting for me, seeing that then, seeing this now.

12-00:43:37

We had a secular wedding. We did get married there, then, and we got married at something called the Hendon Registry Office. The guy who married us thought I was a GI. He was a real kind of Santa Clausy, smiley guy, very friendly, and sort of assumed that I was a GI. I explained that I wasn't. It was an eye opener. And all travel is. [laughs] When you get out of your own society and go someplace else, especially if you open yourself to

where you are. They just simply do not see things the same way we do, whoever “we” are. Italy—later I’ll talk about the impact of just long summers in Italy, on me, as someone using his mind to think about issues and people and environments. Fascinating, fascinating. I wasn’t there very long. I don’t know how long we were there, maybe a month or so. We got married, then we went to Paris on our honeymoon. The *gendarmerie* was everywhere, because the Algerian disintegration was happening, so there were submachine guns on every corner. But Paris was an awful lot of fun to be in.

12-00:45:17  
Wilmot:

It almost sounds like there’s a political awakening that’s happening concurrently with the civil rights awakening that’s actually happening on an international level.

12-00:45:26  
Ellis:

Sure. I think a lot was just in the world after the war. That’s what I think, yes.

12-00:45:32  
Wilmot:

Let’s close for today, okay?

12-00:45:34  
Ellis:

Well, no, I had all these other things I wanted to—[laughs]

12-00:45:36  
Wilmot:

Did you? We’ve got time.

12-00:45:39  
Ellis:

No, it’s okay, we can stop.

**[end of session]**

Interview 7: August 5, 2003

[begin audio file 13]

13-00:00:26

Wilmot: Russ Ellis Jr., Interview seven. Today's date is August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003. With Leah McGarrigle, Nadine Wilmot of ROHO.

13-00:00:43

Ellis: Very interesting, my reflections getting ready for this interview. I didn't really do any homework.

13-00:00:57

Wilmot: That's okay.

13-00:00:58

Ellis: Oh, no, I know, I know, but it's very interesting. What struck me last night is how different each interview could be depending on the circumstances in the general environment, or my stomach, or something. That is, the selection of what goes into a particular interview, what was important in 1939 or whatever, is very dependent on current circumstances. I am a bit thrown right now by national things, a new executive order out of the White House.

13-00:01:46

Wilmot: I got your e-mail about that.

13-00:01:48

Ellis: It's very distressing. You guys are on my e-mail list. It so colors my mood, how friendly I do or do not feel toward the world, how generous I am or am not. That has a big effect on the words I use, the topics I choose. It's just interesting to me how many different oral histories a person could give if you just shifted the day of the interview by a week each, or if I went back over the same terrain, talked about Joe Smith or John Jones or Sally Snead. On Thursday, it would be one thing; on the following month, it would be different. It's just interesting, what this is that you get when you do oral history.

Okay. That's it.

13-00:02:50

McGarrigle: Okay. Also I noticed you brought in these cards, and I want to ask you about them. It looks like your son's album has been released.

13-00:02:58

Ellis: Oh, released? It just was number one on the *Jazz Week* charts, national radio play. Dave Ellis, *State of Mind*. It's really good. He played last night with a woman named Roberta Donnay at the Plush Room in San Francisco. David has been adopted by a very important producer, a man named Orrin Keepnews, who produced Bill Evans, Thelonius Monk—oh, I'm just forgetting, just a huge array of people.

- 13-00:05:01  
Wilmot: Okay. So today I think we're going to touch down and start off in graduate school.
- 13-00:05:07  
Ellis: Okay.
- 13-00:05:09  
Wilmot: So to begin, I wanted to ask you—we were hoping to talk about graduate school and your dissertation, your involvement in CORE perhaps, and *Fly, Blackbird*, as close as we can come to covering all of these topics.
- 13-00:05:25  
Ellis: Today.
- 13-00:05:26  
Wilmot: Today. We're going to try, work towards it.
- 13-00:05:30  
Ellis: All right.
- 13-00:05:32  
Wilmot: The thing I wanted to ask you to begin with was, when you came to the Sociology Department at UCLA, graduate program. It was a sociology-anthropology program?
- 13-00:05:43  
Ellis: It was a joint program then, yes, in nineteen fifty—well, let's see, I was an undergraduate in sociology, but I came back in '61, I guess.
- 13-00:05:53  
Wilmot: Okay. And can you talk a little bit about what were the dominant schools.
- 13-00:05:58  
Ellis: No, go ahead.
- 13-00:06:01  
Wilmot: You're making a face.
- 13-00:06:02  
Ellis: I was just trying to recapture the past. It's getting increasingly hard. Okay, go ahead. I wasn't sure of the date, that's all.
- 13-00:06:10  
Wilmot: I don't believe you for a second.
- 13-00:06:11  
Ellis: [laughs] Oh, yeah!
- 13-00:06:12  
Wilmot: Basically, what would you say were the dominant schools of thought at that time when you were in school, in graduate school, in sociology?

13-00:06:24

Ellis: Huh, huh, huh.

13-00:06:26

Wilmot: I understand phenomenology was just breaking—

13-00:06:29

Ellis: UCLA, Harold Garfinkel was really just bringing phenomenology into sociology. In general, let's say phenomenology is sort of a philosophy of the everyday, the taken-for-granted world. I think Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, "The rim of your glasses is farther away than the mountains." I'll leave that there. Yes. So that wasn't national then. UCLA was generating something. Harold Garfinkel founded something called ethnomethodology. That was real big. It got bigger in Europe than it ever was in the United States, particularly England.

13-00:07:33

Wilmot: Was that very important for you, as a graduate student?

13-00:07:36

Ellis: In some ways. I never became a believer. [laughs] That is, I never was fully inducted into the world of people who were committed to that as a school of thought. I never understood it well enough to be a member. The professor who was bringing Alfred Schutz and all this really interesting material into sociology wooed me—it's part of the continuing surprise of my life, I didn't know who these people were who wanted me to be part of their thing, who they thought I was—and I didn't respond fast enough to his entreaties, so he got very angry, so I didn't get along with him, Harold Garfinkel. And that matters in a small department in a burgeoning field, where not discipleship but mentorship is so very important

Go ahead.

13-00:08:54

Wilmot: From what I gather, many people—he was someone who was hard to get along with.

13-00:08:58

Ellis: He was hard to get along with, right. And also I didn't need him. The thing that I said before: in some ways, I wasn't anxious to be anything. And I think I succeeded. Well, I know. I know better. But other people came after me to try to join their schools of thought. What else was happening? Well, regular kind of survey-research-oriented social science was important nationally, and Charlie Wright—God, I'm going to forget all these people now—was at UCLA. Gosh oh gee. Here's what I experienced as important, as someone who was there: there was at Harvard Talcott Parsons, which you probably have to read in the social sciences, even today. And roughly speaking, the work was about an equilibrium model of society, a kind of homeostatic notion of how social order works.

13-00:10:27

Just as I was coming in, there was developing a conflict school that was kind of borrowing from the Frankfurt Marxist orientation, but it had its own American rendition. C. Wright Mills—oh, even in a highly secular way—this is a funny way to put it—our old president, Clark Kerr wrote about conflict theory, very interestingly, I thought. What I found most attractive—and this is a way, this is an approach to what was important—was a more anthropological approach to social life, and the understanding of social life by going out and running around among people and finding out what was important to them.

13-00:11:50

I happened to be interested in something called the sociology of knowledge, which had both radical and conservative features to it, in the sense that on the then Durkheimian side, which I won't bother to explain right now—it was a very clear orientation to understanding knowledge as a feature of one's social situation: communal life, all kinds of correlations between what people did, thought, and so forth that was related to, for example, their religion. Emile Durkheim was very famous for that work.

13-00:12:42

On the other hand, it had more radical and Marxist roots in Marx, proper. [Quoting Marx] “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, their existence that determines their consciousness,” which comes out of a Hegelian way of thinking. He says, of course, he met Hegel and found him standing on his head. Marx had a reverse notion about how things were.

13-00:13:10

I was just interested in the roiling, boiling life going on around me. I was interested in how people thought, and I was interested in investigating ideology as a feature of how people lived, finding out what they were doing and how those ideals were connected to what they were doing. So the title of my dissertation—[laughs] if I can remember!—is *Ideology and the Institutionalization of Protest*. [*Operation Bootstrap: a case study in ideology and the institutionalization of protest*] Now, institutionalization is kind of a [Max] Weberian idea, where you get movements or change and so forth, and the elements of social movements or social change, whatever, become routinized, and they become part of, well, the taken-for-granted world. They become part of the institutional world, like education, or religion, or something like that that begin, very often, in charismatic movements, and settle in, sediment. I'm borrowing from a whole different lexicon there.

13-00:14:22

I was very interested in that, and since I had been active in the civil rights movement at UCLA, in CORE, and saw from sort of the inside of my own experience and those around me, and, of course, the massive changes going on in general society—I saw what was happening—I got very interested in

somehow turning what I was going through and what I was watching into an investigation of how ideology and social movements and community and so forth kind of evolved, how they were entangled in their evolution. I wanted to write from the inside of experience.

13-00:15:16

Now, what was happening in the country at that time was a—hmm! interesting, interesting—in the social sciences, particularly sociology, which is a debunking discipline. It's always looking for the real sources of things, unlike political science, which for so long took the existing structures for granted and just tried to explain, for example, how government worked. Sociology is interested in stratification. It's interested in power. It's interested in institutions, social structure, informal organization, that is, "Yeah, we know you have bureaucracies. What really happens?" And anybody who knows anything, knows the water-cooler feature of life, that if you want to know what's happening in a hospital, find out what those nurses are talking about at the end of the hallway, what they're saying about the doctors and the hospital or the union.

13-00:16:28

McGarrigle:

You were starting to say, and you used this wonderful phrase, "roiling, boiling" that was going on around you, but then you were talking about what was happening nationally.

13-00:16:37

Ellis:

Well, in the social sciences, particularly sociology, there developed a real interest in ethnography. Sociology sort of began with an interest in close-at-hand investigations, community studies. You've heard of that. Taking the standpoint of the natural actor, going out almost as anthropologists would and trying to understand the social world from the standpoint of those who occupied it, who had to live in it, knowing it from the inside. That caught my fancy. I really was taken with the idea of the participant observer as a method of understanding the world and enjoyed, in some really unhealthy way, the abiding struggle to both participate and observe. It's a very strange way to live. In the end, I found it too painful, too hard, too disorienting.

13-00:18:28

McGarrigle:

And "in the end" occurs at what point in time, when you say "in the end"? You're referring to when?

13-00:18:38

Ellis:

Hmm. That's interesting. What do I mean? About midway into my time in the Department of Architecture, I lost my energy to sustain that role. I mean, actually I wasn't doing that much out there in the form of those kinds of investigations in architecture, but I was trying to counsel that, even to the graduate students in architecture. "Now, what you need to know is you need to know what people do. If you're going to serve them, you have to know what they do. What they say they do may or may not conform to what you

observe, so the idea is to go out, and don't worry about remembering it all. Go out and look at the clients or potential clients or communities or settings in which you'll be working, and understand what people do, and then go back to your work as professionals, not trying to remember all the elements of it, but make that part of your understanding, the way [hits desk for emphasis with each concept] color, mass, form, soils, engineering, are part of your general makeup, and blend that into your work."

13-00:20:16

Because their work is professional, in the end. So "in the end"—I'll give you an episode of "in the end." I did this elaborate investigation of the Levi Strauss organization when they were at Embarcadero Two and were thinking of moving. I had four graduate students working for me, I think, maybe three. I said, "Okay, we're going to do some interviews, and we're also going to do some observation. I want you to go out there and get in this organization and find out what's happening."

13-00:21:02

We did this thing, which I was very pleased with, and then I had to extract from it what I thought we knew that we could tell Walter, Peter [Jr.], and Bob Haas about, the acceptability of their move to their new headquarters building. They had been at 98 Battery, and then they came to Embarcadero Two. They outgrew that—you've read the article, I take it.

13-00:21:34

McGarrigle:

Yes.

13-00:21:35

Ellis:

And so I got this call. I got two calls. One was from Bob Haas, and I went up to see him. I remember we went down to that McDonald's, the very tasteful McDonald's in the Embarcadero Two building. He had heard something that I had said, and it was basically they could move, the employees are fine, they needn't worry about it. Probably what they needed to do is make sure that some of the amenities that the employees had access to in the city at lunchtime were available out on the waterfront.

13-00:22:30

I was struck by one thing. They had a guy named Grover Clark, who was a retired admiral, and his job was to make sure he knew what was happening on the ship [laughs] of Levi Strauss. Grover kind of opened doors for me, I could get into places, everybody knew who Grover was. He was very important. He borrowed the authority of the top management and could open doors and walk through walls, and I could follow him.

13-00:23:07

I had characterized what I was finding to Grover, and he told Bob Haas, and Haas called me in. He told me what he had heard and wanted to know if that was what I was seeing. I was stunned by the encounter. Nothing was lost, and nothing was added in my communication. I mean, I had never been part of



any—there were no editorial additions or deletions, no coloring. Grover Clark had listened to me and told Bob Haas what I said, so it was like listening to me in a different voice. So I said to myself, “Okay, now, what is this?” It shifted, in a way, my focus.

Well, let me tell the other story.

13-00:24:11

Wilmot: I want to understand how this story—

13-00:24:17

Ellis: Is related to “in the end.”

13-00:24:19

Wilmot: Yes.

13-00:24:20

Ellis: Okay. Let me tell the other story, and I’ll put them together.

13-00:24:22

Wilmot: Okay, because it’s such a good story.

13-00:24:25

Ellis: Yes. Well, I can tell you in advance that my work notwithstanding in architecture, and the style and the commitments, intellectual or otherwise, architecture is not a profession that has an investigative tradition. I’ll put it grossly. Architects are not interested in social sciences. They have problems to solve, and organizations are very similar. They have problems to solve, and their problem-solving abilities are a lot about communication. That’s the point of this story. I’d never seen anything like that in my life, with as little loss or addition to a communication. It was stunning, stunning.

13-00:25:35

McGarrigle: You mean the accuracy of the reporting?

13-00:25:38

Ellis: Yes, but I don’t want to say it that way. I want to say it the way I said it. Nothing was added, and nothing was lost.

13-00:25:46

McGarrigle: And in your other experience—

13-00:25:48

Ellis: Every other arena of my life! [laughs]

13-00:25:51

McGarrigle: Do you want to expand on that? Is this unique to business, or is it this individual or his relationship to you or to Haas?

13-00:26:02

Ellis:

It was an insight into the phenomenon I was working with in terms of a large organization that has stuff to get done. Now, I don't believe, by the way, that that would be typical of the communications in Levi Strauss. I think that was something that happened at a managerial level, where it was very important for them to know about making a big move, taking a whole bunch of people and putting them someplace else.

13-00:26:29

Let me tell you the other part of the story, and then maybe I can make my way back to why I think it's important. I then later, after I submitted my report, I got a call from Walter and Peter Haas. They asked me to come up to the twenty-eighth floor of Embarcadero Two, where they had a very modest office setup, adjacent offices. Serviceable, Levi's gray carpet. They underplayed stuff big time. That was part of their problem in terms of competing in the new environment, the new fashion environment. And I'll never forget the occasion because I didn't have a decent jacket, so on the way in, I stopped at one of the shops downstairs and bought kind of a nice sweater/jacket kind of thing and put it on and went up. It was only when I was getting in my car to go home, I realized I still had the swing ticket with the price on it. [laughs]

13-00:27:30

Wilmot:

After the meeting.

13-00:27:32

Ellis:

After the meeting, right. [laughs] Anyway, but Peter said—this knocked me on my butt, I have never forgotten it—he said, “We read this,” and he said, “You've given us sociology, and we were kind of looking for your expert opinion.” And that was so different from my life commitments, what I thought I was about. He was right, and there was a kind of opening there, sort of interesting. “Oh, okay! You want my expert opinion?” And I got good after that. I charged more. Believe it or not—it's a weird thing to say, but the culture of consulting at that level is if you charge little, then your product can't be worth very much. This is bizarre stuff. I didn't stay at it very long. But I probably shifted my view of myself and what I was doing, a little bit.

I had a lot of fun doing other things, the park over in the Mission District, with Joe [Esherick's] office. It was just so interesting and so much fun working with the kids. But I was doing a different thing then. I wasn't trying to understand them quite the same way I was when I was in the role of kind of a deep investigator of the workplace and why they did what they did or what they thought the meanings of their actions were and how that definition, that collective definition of things determined what they did and stratified them or contributed to the social order they lived. That took a back seat. I guess I redefined myself. The self is social. I think I became less of a social science investigator in this ethnographic mode and more someone who was looking to see how to give good advice. With some integrity, I wanted to do it with some

integrity. But it was quite a change for me, and the Levi's project was a big moment. Also I was split, because it was appropriate that I be evaluated at Berkeley by social scientists and architects, but it was an impossible situation to be in. They're very different commitments, very different commitments. A profession—

13-00:30:23

Wilmot: Than sociology—?

13-00:30:24

Ellis: Yes. Even though sociology began as a meliorist kind of enterprise, social work kind of enterprise concerned about social problems, here in the United States especially, after the Second World War, it very much wanted to live in the world of value-neutral investigation, to know things in the phenomenal world of social life and to get all the polluting materials of opinion or bias of the investigator out of there. That's why surveys were very important. They're very good at doing that, too. That was a successful venture.

13-00:31:16

Wilmot: So when you say—this was the end of my ability to do participant observation—

13-00:31:24

Ellis: My commitment.

13-00:31:26

Wilmot: Commitment. Not ability to do it.

13-00:31:27

Ellis: Yes.

13-00:31:28

Wilmot: You're thinking about that time when you crossed over into the world of consulting for Levi Strauss, and I'm wondering—or you're showing the limitations of it, actually. You're showing the limitations, where that method comes up against—

13-00:31:45

Ellis: Yes. There's some life-cycle stuff in there, too. It's a really very, very hard stance to occupy. I found myself, for example—and you'll recognize this—the oppression of the camera. Do you guys know about that? You're out. You've saved your time and your money, and you have your children and your partner and your lover, whatever, and you're out in the beauty. And what have you done? Framing the thing in your camera, to capture the image to take it back. What are you not doing when you're doing that? You are not IN IT!

13-00:32:27

Wilmot: I definitely understand.

13-00:32:29

Ellis:

You're not in it. It wasn't just what I was doing professionally or intellectually at the university, it had to do with being a preoccupied dad, a preoccupied husband, someone with more—I mean, it was a very hard stance to maintain, and also it was just fatiguing to constantly think that way. I had a bad experience, too, which is very important to talk about. It wanders way away from graduate school, by the way, but you asked, so—

13-00:33:07

McGarrigle:

Shall we do that now? [Campanile starts chiming deeply]

13-00:33:08

Ellis:

Let me just tell you very quickly. Herb Kohl. I did some consulting work for the National Institute of Education. We had experimental schools here. We had some NIE money—that was a Nixon creation. And Berkeley was going through its experimental schools phase. I was looking at two settings. One, Kilimanjaro, was a radical alternative school over here. And Jefferson, which was one of the regular schools, trying to become more experimental. In the process of doing that investigation with Len Duhl and some other people—this was in—DEEPS was the acronym of the organization—I interviewed Herb Kohl, who's a very important writer about alternative education. I interviewed several people. [A carillon concert begins outdoors. Also, voices can be heard in the background.]

13-00:34:08

I was invited to a dinner one night with Herb, by some people, and I went home and wrote it up, because Herb was very important to the whole alternative school movement here. He's still in the neighborhood. He lives on Occidental now, I think. I wrote it up, the dinner. We talked about all this stuff, and that was what I would do as an investigator. He saw it, and for all kinds of reasons—I didn't reveal anything radical or strange—but he was violated by the fact that I had objectified the event. I turned it into an object of investigation rather than just a good time. Now, Herb would perfectly understand the need to do that, and his was a naturalistic way of working as well. But it's different when it happens to you.

13-00:35:00

McGarrigle:

Were they not on notice that this was something that you were going to do later?

13-00:35:04

Ellis:

I always went in saying what I was doing. I always announced what I was doing. I didn't say, "I'm going to write these words down," but I did tell them, told him why I was interested in him. The host and hostess, Gale and Eve Bach, are very important political people here in Berkeley, and they knew what I was doing. And there was nothing terribly revelatory in what I wrote. It was just the objectification of him, and I think he didn't define himself as someone who would be a subject of investigation. I think there was some other stuff happening there, too. He helped people.

13-00:35:52

But it was very unpleasant for me, because I tried to obey all the rules of participant-observer, put everyone on notice, say how excited I was at the prospect of meeting him and that I would learn a lot and that would be part of my study and so forth, but—so those things were—that was fatiguing.

13-00:36:13

Wilmot:

I'm really fascinated by your use of this method in the work of your dissertation.

13-00:36:20

Ellis:

Uh-huh!

13-00:36:21

Wilmot:

I'm fascinated by it.

13-00:36:22

Ellis:

Oh, good! Good, good! That was hard. I loved it.

13-00:36:25

Wilmot:

Yes. The people who will be reading this later won't have read your dissertation, so I want to just start by asking you how did you form that project?

13-00:36:37

Ellis:

Okay.

13-00:36:38

Wilmot:

How did you form that project?

13-00:36:42

Ellis:

Okay. You have the background. Go ahead.

13-00:36:43

Wilmot:

Yes. That's the first question. I have a tendency to ask many questions at once, so let's take that one.

13-00:36:46

Ellis:

Okay, the first one. I've given you the background of what was going on in the country. There was an emphasis here—I didn't mention Erving Goffman, who was up here at Berkeley, who wrote the very surprising and interesting and wonderful *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which is about impression management and—many people see it as kind of a cynical view of how life is lived. He obviously was right about a lot of things, about how we get through life, how we—anyhow, never mind that.

13-00:37:25

Wilmot:

But it had some resonance for you?

13-00:37:38

Ellis: Oh, absolutely. No, absolutely. And I enjoyed being on the edges of the ethnomethodological orientation as well. What's her name? Deborah Tannen.

13-00:37:49

McGarrigle: *You Don't Understand*. [book title]

13-00:37:52

Ellis: Yes. I had a fight with my wife, Julie Shearer, because she liked that book a lot and mentioned it to me, and I did a typical kind of, "Oh, that's old stuff," because that was kind of the language analysis of the eth-heads, we called them. That's what the ethnomethodologists were called, eth-heads. [laughs] Now everybody will resonate to that. Yes, this whole analysis of language, very important stuff, what people say—

13-00:38:22

McGarrigle: And what's the argument about? What's the difference of opinion?

13-00:38:28

Ellis: Oh, that I was dismissive, that Tannen writes a book so many years after the eth-heads were already doing that, looking at how language is used and how it establishes power relations, this, that, and the other.

13-00:38:49

McGarrigle: I'm wondering a bunch of things: one, about how linguistics, since she's a linguist, plays into that; and then about the more academic people, who predate her and come along with her, like Robin Lakoff from Berkeley and her husband.

13-00:39:01

Ellis: George.

13-00:39:02

McGarrigle: Right.

13-00:39:03

Ellis: What about them?

13-00:39:04

McGarrigle: What's the relationship between the way in which you see Tannen's work as related to the earlier work, and how did what you were speaking to relate to what the linguists are—

13-00:39:20

Ellis: Um.

13-00:39:21

McGarrigle: Is there overlap?

013-00:39:25

Ellis:

Oh, absolutely. No question about it. They all have taken language as a phenomenon that reveals something about practical outcomes between individuals, between contesting groups. George has done this thing on—I forget the title of the book, but on the metaphors of power and the way the Right sees the world and the way the Left sees it. It's extremely interesting stuff. Yes, it's an altered view of language. It's a little different than the traditional linguistics, certainly.

The point of my story was that I was a bit of a insensitive, arrogant person from having been around this whole language analysis that the eth-heads were doing, and being dismissive about its sudden appearance as a best-selling book on men-women relations and so forth. It's a really interesting book, and it's very useful. It's a very useful book.

13-00:40:54

McGarrigle:

But she also is not an academic, so I'm interested in the ways that—

13-00:40:57

Ellis:

That's probably some of that, too.

13-00:40:59

McGarrigle:

It has popular appeal and a very strong popular appeal.

13-00:41:04

Ellis:

I'm sure that was part of my arrogance and insensitivity. [laughs] It was also interesting just in terms of what she talked about. [laughs] Power issues in conversation. Yes, sure, sure.

13-00:41:20

McGarrigle:

We definitely can get back to that.

13-00:41:23

Ellis:

Sure, sure.

13-00:41:23

McGarrigle:

Power in the academy, and you already spoke to the interests of sociology, and I'm interested in going back to the way—in terms of studying institutions and so on, earlier today—I'm interested later in asking you about the ways in which you experienced that from the inside, at the university.

13-00:41:43

Ellis:

Sure. You remember that question, because I'm trying to remember where I was headed.

13-00:41:48

Wilmot:

You started talking about Erving Goffman and language.

13-00:41:54

Ellis:

Oh, yes, yes, yes, okay.

13-00:41:55

Wilmot:

And you were talking about a project formation, your dissertation.

13-00:41:58

Ellis:

Okay, good.

13-00:42:00

Wilmot:

And how did you decide to do a dissertation at a community-based organization—

13-00:42:03

Ellis:

Okay, thank you.

13-00:42:04

Wilmot:

—that really focused on community development and economic development.

13-00:42:08

Ellis:

All right. Thank you. To fill in both your questions, too, about what was going on in the field, out of the pragmatist tradition in American philosophy—William James, Charles S. Pierce, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, especially—evolved in part this—oh, gosh—no, no, I was just trying to find clear words that summarize without telling you anything. There was a field called symbolic interactionism.

13-00:43:10

Wilmot:

Mm-hm.

13-00:43:11

Ellis:

Oh, you know it? Okay, fine. It was more on the side of not conflict but a less highly-structured notion than the Parsonians had of how social order was established, maintained, and so forth. It had a much more fluid kind of orientation to social life. Perfectly meaningful in light of the fact that pragmatism was anti-foundationalist as a philosophy, right? It just said, “No, let’s not look for the massive explanatory systems of the Germans or the French, let’s take what we see as we see it.” See, I think there was some convergence there with phenomenology, too, maybe too casually connected, but the whole notion of getting back to the facts, themselves, getting back to the ground of understanding.

13-00:44:18

And getting away from—and this invaded anthropology in an interesting way. Oh, boy, it’s just been so interesting! Anyway, I was alive while all this was going on, and I was relatively young. I was active. I had my own notion—just very quickly—is that when I left L.A. and went to Fontana, I went to a completely different world. I have never one day been in a segregated educational situation, not one day in my life, and I’m sixty-eight. Even though there was much residential segregation all around me and so forth.



13-00:45:00

So I think I was one of those sort of famous marginal people who was always looking over one wall or another. In Fontana I had a friend named Phil Pizzuto, P-i-z-z-u-t-o, I think. I've already told—well, anyway, then I came back to L.A., into a city, out of a landscape which just mesmerized me, with people scattered all over, I think I was just a natural sociologist. I think I got thrown up by life into a situation that I was always an observer. Being black in that era—I am absolutely confident this is the case—your antennae in those days are never down. You gotta know who regards you as a nigger who doesn't belong there. You gotta know that. I never had the problem—

[begin audio file 14]

14-00:00:23

Wilmot:

So you were having this introduction to Marxism, then, while you were in graduate school with John Horton, and I'm wondering, how did this—did a Marxist framework for you, then, did it account—were you able to situate racism and race within a Marxist framework?

14-00:00:46

Ellis:

No. What was happening to Marxism was what John Horton said. It was being routinized as a body of work to which you had to pay attention, not because of the prospect of it saving the world or even explaining racism, but the point was, sort of, as they say, you got to read Marx, Freud, and the Bible. Any educated person is going to read Shakespeare, Marx, Freud, and the Bible. I mean, there are just things you were going to read, back in the day.

14-00:02:08

I was never particularly attracted to any Marxist explanation of racism. As a matter of fact, I was not ever particularly interested in any explanation of racism. One that got my attention was the whole discussion of institutional and institutionalized racism, in contrast to the intentional actions of persons. But that interest, for me, was just part of my being a sociologist, in a way. This is important for me to say. One of the reasons I think I did a good job as vice chancellor is that I really knew that there were circumstances where you couldn't place blame. Someone always wants to find out, "Who did that?" You know, who did that? And very often nobody does X. X has happened because, for example, you've got institutionalized lousy practices in a group. They just can't change. And I remember saying of a unit or two of mine, "It needs to be shot and put out of its misery." It will *always* generate lousy personnel outcomes. There will *always* be trouble because some things are *social*; they're not individual. A lot of people look for individual agency all the time in trying to—you know. It's kind of America. "Where is the Devil in all of this?"

14-00:04:24

Anyway, institutionalized racism kind of got my attention, where things happen and the outcomes are consistently a certain kind of way, for reasons

having to do with no one's intention. Well, that's obviously got some Marxist features, where you've got class issues working or where you have contradictions that are based on issues that are irrelevant to class, like race. I mean, many Marxists or Communist Party members that I've known in my life said actually race was not what was important; the whole issue of dealing with race was to clarify the class issues, to get race out of the way so that we could look at the class issues that were interfering with social change, appropriate social change.

14-00:05:21

So the answer to your question is I never really spent any time dwelling on the connection between Marxism and racism. I never was much of a Marxist. It was a nice critical tool, a nice lens to hold over, from a critical standpoint and from a movement standpoint, and just sort of—and also I mentioned the sociology of knowledge issue. I hadn't bought into the whole Marxist schema. It's kind of a closed system, as you know. But it was just a very useful, a generative set of ideas. I read in Marx very selectively, very selectively.

So that's the answer to that question.

14-00:06:16

Wilmot:

Okay. Another question that comes from you and your discussion of when you were thinking about the institution and the genesis of the institution, that was really interesting to me, in your dissertation, was the idea that this was an institution that was being formed as part of a larger kind of utopian project.

14-00:06:42

Ellis:

Right.

14-00:06:43

Wilmot:

And I wanted to ask what potential then did you see for this institution to be utopian or different in precisely, like, its ligaments and its officers and positions.

14-00:07:01

Ellis:

Well, great. I can talk about that. As a matter of fact, I think I extend this piece, and I follow Bootstrap beyond where I end here. There's a time when they're making OJ Simpson dolls. I don't know if you've read that part. No, it's very important. They actually took off for a while. Mattel Toys made a doll that was designed by Bootstrap. It was a black doll that looked black, and then they produced an OJ Simpson superhero doll. As a matter of fact, my son had one, and he was so identified with it, he just really refused to believe any of that stuff about OJ. He hung with him because he so identified with him. And there were a lot of ideas about what was going to happen in Southeast L.A. as black people got control of their industries and then their values were expressed in the stuff that got generated in terms of products, and the products were faithful to, you know, this, that, and the other.

14-00:08:10

Just for clarification purposes, the Weberian notion of institutionalization—is about the genesis of a group, a stable kind of structure of activities in people: institutionalization. Sociologists have tended to mean something much larger when they say “institution.” They mean a set of practices around something that’s very important, like the military, education, the family, and so forth. And then within that, you see generals and priests, and you see stratification and differentiation. Okay. But those are the institutional structures that traditionally sociologists talked about. And organization takes up residence in an institutional sphere, so basically I was talking about the creation of an organization in Bootstrap, out of a movement, out of a social movement. It’s all related, since all of these are human constructs anyway, right? But the world doesn’t say, “Okay, let’s create an institution. You guys go have a movement, and that’ll create a charismatic leader and then we’ll make a church and then we’ll have churches.” Life doesn’t happen that way. This is language that’s superimposed. But I’m just trying to clarify the language that I’m using here.

14-00:09:47

So here we got an organization out of a movement, and what I love about my cumbersomely written dissertation is being on the spot to have these underground documents out of CORE, where they’re talking about what they’re trying to do. There was a conscious connection to how movement ideas and critiques of the society were going to be expressed now in these national, local organizations. It was a radical idea—well, it was supposed to be a radical idea. As soon as Bootstrap hit the ground, it was criticized, as you know, by Non-Violent Action Committee and some of the more serious Marxists as being a sellout organization, because it said, “Get a job. Get a job.” It took for granted the structure of work and work relations. So it was, like, “What are you guys doing?”

14-00:10:50

Wilmot:

Are you reproducing the—

14-00:10:51

Ellis:

Right, exactly, that’s right. That’s exactly where the language has gone. That’s exactly right. And then the Non-Violent Action Committee, which for a long time was right down the street from us, was always on the case of Lou Smith and all these guys, from a heavy Marxist standpoint, saying, “No, no, no, no, no. No, no, that’s the wrong approach.” They did come together on some things, like around the police.

14-00:11:23

McGarrigle:

What happened, Russ, that you become a leader to the point that you found the chapter of CORE that you then worked with so carefully? You described yourself as very shy, earlier. What’s the change that’s occurring? And practically and experientially, how do you become the leader of this group?

14-00:11:54

Ellis:

Ohhh, I think it was charisma, and I'll tell you what I mean, so you won't think I'm that arrogant and out of touch. I think I was relevant. Max Weber takes—who does he take it from? It's charm. One of the German poets. Oh, God, I can't remember. [Freidrich Schiller] But it's not a feature of an individual, it's a relationship of an individual to a group, charisma. So, it's sort of like when the Friends [Quakers] say So-and-so speaks to their condition? It's sort of a linkage between what someone says, or is, or a combination, and some people with the need to hear the problem explicated. It rouses them, because of what's going on with them. I think that's what happened.

14-00:13:23

McGarrigle:

Did you get the idea to start this chapter, or do people come to you?

14-00:13:28

Ellis:

No, it was kind of my idea because I had been in—it's in the dissertation. I talk about going down and being part of the CORE organization, the L.A. CORE, in the early sixties, before Watts, around '63. CORE was the place where you got a lot of interracial couples, mainly black men and white women. But it was a more open racial organization, some would say more bourgeois in its commitments, less radical in its commitments, [than the other civil rights organizations active in Los Angeles at the time, for example, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] or the Local Non-Violent Action Committee [N-VAC].] But James Farmer was steadfast, I guess out of the Fellowship of Reconciliation effort. I forget his entire history. He just died recently. But I found it very attractive. But that chapter was kind of dead. I'll tell you exactly what got me going, though. I formed the chapter because—what was the mayor's name? The black mayor of L.A.?

14-00:14:42

McGarrigle:

Bradley.

14-00:14:42

Ellis:

Tom Bradley. I didn't form it for this purpose, but I used it for this purpose. Byron Rumsford had this bill, Proposition 14, fair housing bill. We were all very interested in that passing in the state. It had come to pass that Tom Bradley's council district, and another, had very low registration, voter registration. The city council of Los Angeles had decided to eliminate one of the two council districts with the lowest registration. So we took this CORE organization that I got going because it made sense, in a way, around UCLA—we took this organization, and we did bird-dogging. Do you know what that is? That is, we couldn't go register the voters, but we could go point to where the unregistered voters were. And what we did was to go into Bradley's council district in order A) to help him survive and B) to register the voters most likely to vote for Proposition 14 and also do some advocacy on Proposition 14, the fair housing act. So that's *really* how I got started. Other

things happened. I don't know how my timing goes here, but George Wallace ran for president. He came to speak at UCLA.

14-00:16:33

Wilmot: June of 1964.

14-00:16:36

Ellis: Was it? And I led a demonstration against him, which affected a lot of people in ways that I only found out later, because in the march to his speech, and we were carrying coffins and wore black arm bands because of the girls who had been killed and so forth, a lot of people saw themselves in a historical way. It was very interesting. It wasn't so much that I then become the leader, but something else happened. And it wasn't just happening around me. The story of Ron Everett. Have I told you the story of Ron Everett?

14-00:17:21

Wilmot: I don't think so.

14-00:17:23

Ellis: Okay. As a leader of CORE—and later Watts has exploded and so forth, and the world is looking for explanations—by the way, this is often where people become charismatic. They've been standing on the corner for ten years, saying this stuff, and then all of a sudden, something happens and everybody says, "Wasn't she telling us about this?" And then they go to that person. I had been in arguments with this guy—he's a black guy, a guy I learned a lot from, a very bright guy, Ron Everett. He had been at L.A. City College, and he transferred to UCLA.

14-00:18:09

We used to argue on the steps of Haines Hall, which was the social science building then, I don't know what it is now. And we would collect a crowd. I was arguing from moderate, nonviolent, direct action standpoint, you know, sit-ins and advocacy. And he was arguing, "Enough with the white people. Black people need to get their own stuff together," and so forth. We had a debate one evening, which I lost, and it stunned me that I lost. One of my professors kind of chided me for losing. But Ron had developed a kind of Malcolm X and nationalist style of argumentation. [Loudly] "Look, I got some biscuits, and you got some butter!"—and I'm going, "Aw, c'mon." But in fact everybody liked that way of giving accounts of things at that time, and my more kind of plodding, systematic—it just wasn't interesting.

14-00:19:21

McGarrigle: There's a performance aspect also.

14-00:19:24

Ellis: No question about it, which was very important, and has not gone away and remains important. I take what's-his-name, who has made his rap CDs and he's in the movies now—c'mon.

14-00:19:39

Wilmot: Cornel West?

14-00:19:40

Ellis: Cornel West. Cornel has gone with it. And Skip Gates is kind of reviled a little bit because Skip is too straight. Anyway, this is some of that kind. Well, this guy I used to argue with went on to become Maulana Ron Karenga.

14-00:20:01

McGarrigle: Oh.

14-00:20:02

Ellis: And then he went out—he wound up in prison for his organization. They did some very strange things, torturing some of their people, but he ran US, United Slaves. What an interesting time I was part of! Think about it! At that parting, [the splintering of black activist movements into various sub-orientations,] where you got the nationalist stuff going off and some of the more traditional protest organizations. It happened all over the country, obviously.

14-00:20:33

Wilmot: Who would have sponsored a debate like that, between you two?

14-00:20:36

Ellis: What?

14-00:20:38

Wilmot: Who would sponsor a debate like that between you two?

14-00:20:39

Ellis: God, I don't remember. I don't remember. But it was packed. We were in a big auditorium, and it was packed.

14-00:20:49

McGarrigle: That's amazing.

14-00:20:50

Ellis: Yes, yes.

14-00:20:51

McGarrigle: And what's happening in Southern California at that point, with the Northern California Black Panther movement?

14-00:20:59

Ellis: Panther, I don't know too much about. Oh, God, what's the guy's name up here? He was a friend, is a friend of Thelton's. Don Warden. Remember that name, Donald Warden. Did Thelton talk about Don Warden?

14-00:21:13

McGarrigle: Yes.

14-00:21:14

Ellis: Okay. Don Warden and Ron Everett were part of the same organization for a while, called US, called US, United Slaves. Actually, Thelton went “out” for a little while. Thelton actually gave a few speeches on street corners. Did he ever talk about that?

14-00:21:37

McGarrigle: No.

14-00:21:37

Ellis: [laughs] Well, I’m not going to. But he went “out” for a little while. Yes, he went “out.” The Panther thing, I never came close to. Troy did, in interesting ways, but later. And, see, I had been with Troy at Riverside, and I knew Troy at UCLA, of course, and he came up here to Cal. We were on the faculty at Riverside. He got some racist phone calls, and he broke his contract and came up here. The next thing I know, he’s leading—

14-00:22:15

McGarrigle: Eldridge.

14-00:22:17

Ellis: What? Yes, he’s leading Cleaver down the hall of one of the auditoriums here, sponsoring 139X. That was a big surprise to me. And then he went on to do other things. He became a mediator with Huey [P. Newton] and so forth, those sorts of things. I never had anything to do with it.

14-00:22:38

Wilmot: I just need to ask two more questions about your dissertation.

14-00:22:46

Ellis: Sure.

14-00:22:48

Wilmot: The first one was the question I was trying to ask about recreating an institution that mirrors the institutions you’re actually fighting. I didn’t get a clear response from you on that.

14-00:23:06

Ellis: I didn’t respond. I got busy doing the language.

14-00:23:09

Wilmot: Yes, so that’s that first one. And then I’ll ask you the second one as soon as you answer the other one.

14-00:23:14

Ellis: Okay. Oh, okay, later.

14-00:23:18

Wilmot: Sorry!

14-00:23:19

Ellis: So the first one is basically what?

14-00:23:23

Wilmot: My first one basically is how well did Operation Bootstrap create a new—or even what it meant to you, that it was this kind of organization, when there was this kind of encompassing tapestry of utopia all around you.

14-00:23:46

Ellis: Well, it [Operation Bootstrap] was constantly fascinating, loaded with consternation for me all the time, because I was walking around, in all the various forces that had come together. I mentioned NVAC, Non-Violent Action Committee, one of the organizations there. But Ernie Smith was—he's still alive, a black nationalist. He's the guy who brought Ebonics to the Oakland schools. Somewhere, he got his PhD, I forgot. But all of these forces were at play as I'm being an investigator and a participant. So there's a moment in the dissertation where all the black organizations come together, without regard to their commitments and defining appropriate action or the angle on change or advocacy or whatever that's going to make the difference, to fight against the police. Now, the event started the career of OJ's lawyer.

14-00:25:13

Wilmot/McGarrigle: Johnny Cochran.

14-00:25:14

Ellis: Yes, Johnny Cochran was a lawyer for [Leonard] Deadwyler. This guy was driving his wife, his pregnant wife, to the hospital, and the cops chased them, and shot. It was just an awful, awful thing. [May 1966] And Johnny Cochran represented Deadwyler. But the whole issue of the cops and the cops being under control, US, Ron Karenga's group, they started following the cops around in Jeeps and tailing them, the whole issue. I, at a certain point, am asked to draft the letter that goes from this coalition to the chief of police, stating their beefs. I'm an investigator, right? I'm a participant-observer. Well, of course I wrote the letter. I drafted the letter. Of course I did it. But what was I being then? Was I a sociologist? Was I actually telling an accurate story of what happened? So that's one set of what it was for me.

14-00:26:33

McGarrigle: Now, aren't you also, at the same time, in a leadership role, though?

14-00:26:37

Ellis: By this time I have gradually moved away from campus leadership and much more into doing this, yes, yes.

14-00:26:45

McGarrigle: And in CORE you're—

14-00:26:47

Ellis: I'm sort of out of it by that time.



14-00:26:51

McGarrigle: Okay, so this is the year—we're talking later.

14-00:26:56

Ellis: We're talking after Watts, I guess. Yes, after Watts, right. So yes, yes. I'm sorry, I should be more precise, but I have not gotten through life by being precise.

14-00:27:09

McGarrigle: No, no. You don't need to be more precise. You were talking about observer and participant, and I'm thinking, "And leadership is another category."

14-00:27:15

Ellis: Yes. Well, it's funny. It's funny. I've relinquished a certain kind of leadership, but I carry around with me, I will say with some immodesty, other facts about my life, that I was on the big UCLA track team and we won the NCAA, the first ever for UCLA, and track was big in those days, in that season, and big altogether. I think I had already done some efforts at singing. I had a little singing career. Not that that got me a lot of notice. And so when Lou Smith, the real leader of Operation Bootstrap and tremendously effective, just unbelievable, almost mystically effective speaking and so forth. He always had a kind of cocked eye for me, like, "Who is this dude? Let's keep him—let's watch him." He was friendly, but who was I that I was doing this investigating, and what were my commitments, and so forth?

14-00:28:45

McGarrigle: Nadine, I took you away from—you had another question.

14-00:28:49

Ellis: I'm completely undisciplined. I just follow my nose, don't I? [laughs]

14-00:28:53

Wilmot: No, you're doing great. The thing that I had in mind to actually—you actually answered my second question, too, which was about participant observation and what it was like to be a participant observer in this 1) organization, 2) social moment, everything like that, so you actually started to answer that question.

14-00:29:11

Ellis: Yes. And I have some tapes I'd like to give to the library, and I'm hoping to give them and the tape recorder that goes with them because they're, like, real slow, three-and-a-quarter or something, half of seven-and-a-half. Of my interviews with the actors at the time, because one of the women who got involved with Bootstrap was a white woman. In my interviews with her, I asked her how she got involved, and she said, "I worked in the Police Department, and I used to listen to how they talked." We had a terrible kind of—what the hell was that police chief's name? The bastard.

14-00:29:59

McGarrigle: It predates [Rodney] King.

14-00:30:02

Ellis: Yes, yes. Anyway, not Parker, but he was a real—and they were storm troopers. He's mentioned in there.

14-00:30:09

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you also, you dedicated this to Lester Johnson?

14-00:30:12

Ellis: Yes. Lester Johnson was just a guy who hung out around Bootstrap. He came out of the murk of the extended neighborhood that Bootstrap was in. He was a delightful guy, and then he disappeared back into the murk. He may have had some trouble. I don't know. He's discussed in there somewhere. You know how you live in life and some people show up and you just notice them?

14-00:30:53

McGarrigle: Yes.

14-00:30:54

Ellis: He's just a good guy whose prospects were not good. But he came to Bootstrap to benefit from what he thought it might do and how it might benefit him.

14-00:31:09

Wilmot: One more question?

14-00:31:10

Ellis: Yes.

14-00:31:11

Wilmot: And then—actually, no, two more. So what did—this is, like, just an observation question.

14-00:31:15

Ellis: Sure.

14-00:31:17

Wilmot: You spoke about Lester Johnson and how his prospects were not good. What was it like for you? You were coming from East L.A. You were continuing your dissertation. Your prospects were better.

14-00:31:31

Ellis: Yes.

14-00:31:32

Wilmot: What was it like for you to be part of that environment and be witness to many people whose prospects were not good?

14-00:31:42

Ellis: In some respects, of course, I was paying some dues, wasn't I?

14-00:31:45

Wilmot: Yes.

14-00:31:46

Ellis:

By choosing the problem, although I had a real interest in it, but I didn't go south. Lou Smith's lower backbones were fused from a beating he took in a Freedom Ride. They beat the dickens out of him. He was in the hospital for ages, and he walked like this. [demonstrates] Angry man. But very effective man. I didn't pay those kinds of dues. One of the reasons I did the Bootstrap work was to try to tell a complex and potentially useful—don't ask me what I mean right now—story about what was effective, who was effective, what the problems were people were confronting.

14-00:32:35

One of the things that was for me was dues paying. To look at a real problem and a real set of issues, not to study alienation in the abstract or anomie in the abstract, going back to [my professor] John Horton, but looking at how the things that we conceptualize play out in the complex and integrated or not so integrated way on the ground. Also, I talk about other people getting the sense of the historicity of all of this. I was affected by that, too. I felt like I was living in a Time.

14-00:33:23

Wilmot:

You were.

14-00:33:24

Ellis:

And that just mattered to me. I didn't ever want to become a hippie. I never wanted to drop out, for example. Other people were very much struck by that. I mean, people my age, even who it spoke to them. "Yes, it's time to stop cooperating with this way of living. There is an Aquarian Age, we're in it." Okay, I respect that. Other people, the Weather Underground, everybody—bombed things. I think we all agree that the SLA, Symbionese Liberation Army, was crazy, right? I mean, their misbegotten notion of what they were doing. Marcus Foster wanted to have identification cards in the Oakland schools. So they killed him. Great! Great? Cool. [sarcastically]

14-00:34:21

Anyway, the other thing is, of course, was I think I, like a lot of other people my race and age were working at their own definitions. It was a very complicated place to be. I was married to a white woman. That was okay, but it also put you on the other side of some borders. It defined you. And as the movement got more and more into what they call nap matching—have you heard the expression?

14-00:35:09

Wilmot:

No, not at all.

14-00:35:10

Ellis:

It's just who's got the nappiest hair.

14-00:35:12

Wilmot:

Oh, blacker than thou.

14-00:35:13

Ellis:

Yes, and you start getting it. I mean, it was sad to watch it happen on campus, perfectly solid, stable, upper-middle-class black kids trying to de-skill themselves, trying to get their language bent back into shape, like they came up on the corner. Bad outcomes there in some ways. So there were these kinds of tensions. In a way, I would say everybody was working to define what this new world might become, because we were all hoping for something like an integrated society until the nationalists broke off and said, “Well, no, hold it.” And Bootstrap had to struggle with that.

14-00:35:59

The later work I’ll show you, you’ll see when I do a follow-up on a book I never finished but where I do the case study, one of the case studies of Bootstrap—they really try to hold on to this notion of black separation and the celebration of things black, in those terms then, without going all the way into the Black Muslim thing. And it’s a hard balance. But that was the struggle. It was a struggle of definitions. There was a sense of who was going to win this? Black power was a major thing. It was, like, “Oh, hold it!” That was segregationist. It was rough, it was tough. A close friend of mine who taught in the Claremont Colleges, just never recovered from that change in the movement. It was Guy Carawan, who really adapted the song, “We Shall Overcome” to movement form.

14-00:37:01

And when whites got read out of a lot of the movement and were attacked, that was so hard for a lot of people, who had staked their lives on this kind of notion of the integrated society, where we, as Rodney King says, we all get along, or more than get along.

14-00:37:23

Wilmot:

Was Guy Carawan African American?

14-00:37:25

Ellis:

No, he’s white. That was another problem. He actually ran into some people who resented his role. He’s a folk singer, great guy, great guy. Anyway, that’s a great question you asked me just now. I had never thought of it in that form. What was I doing? What were the struggles for me, being in a setting like that? I know a lot about that. Emotionally and reflectively, I can think about it, and I’ll think about it some more. I think for me it never went away. That was the thing of moving to Fontana, and having—Johnny Pizzuto.

14-00:38:22

Wilmot:

Let me ask you one final question on the dissertation, for the time being.

14-00:38:26

Ellis:

Sure, sure.

14-00:38:27

Wilmot:

And that is your committee in charge—John Horton, Jerry King, Leo Cooper, Harry Scoble, and Samuel Serace?

14-00:38:33

Ellis: Yes.

14-00:38:35

Wilmot: Were they a good committee? How did they assist you in this project and its endeavor? What did they lend to you? Did they impede you?

14-00:38:41

Ellis: Good question. Actually, the article I'm going to give you is called "One Ralph Turner Observed," and it's about the complications for me of not becoming a student of Ralph Turner's and becoming a student of John Horton's. Because I had that happen to me. In the article, I write that a student I particularly expected to work with chose someone else, for very good reasons, actually.

John was interested in movements, change. I found him an engaged intellectual. Sam Serace had written a really important piece on the zoot suit riots. Do you know? Okay. So, knew a lot about race relations and some of the events in California that surrounded them. He was also young, Sam. I found more resonance with Sam than some other people, only he was a very mellow guy. I don't know where he is or what he did.

14-00:40:17

Leo Cooper, the very famous South African sociologist, whose writings I liked very much and who just was sympathetic—he almost had to leave South Africa because of his writings, because this was in the Verwoerd era—you know, the Nazi South African era. And Jerry King was history, was an outside member, who had also written in the area. They just felt good, and they understood what I was trying to do. I got lucky also. I didn't make the mistake that a lot of graduate students do, and that's run back and forth to your committee members, trying to get them all to agree to something. What you do is you come to agreement with your chair, and then you go to the committee and see what they have to say about it. But when you go out, you've got the agreement with your chair that this is in the neighborhood of what we're supposed to be doing, so you don't get people saying, "Well, have you considered X, Y, Z?" You can say, "Yes, I have," but [it's better to say], you know, "The expert in the field that I had chosen to guide my work and I have agreed that this is what we're going to be doing." So they were all relevant. But Scoble, I don't remember that well.

14-00:42:44

Wilmot: I think we have another fifteen minutes. Do you have time for that?

14-00:42:45

Ellis: Fine. Yes.

14-00:42:52

[interview interruption]

14-00:42:53

Ellis:

No, I've just enjoyed this interview. I'm surprised not so much at the specifics of what I can remember, but recalling the texture of the times. I actually got in touch with some of the excitement of what it was like then, and realize—well, realize at some level why what I did in my dissertation is actually important to do. You know, to try to find out what people were saying or doing around the making or remaking of the world, in times of change. I hope somebody's doing that right now in the political arena in this awful time. Now, I'm not sure how I would feel about someone who was doing an ethnography in the White House. I think I'd rather have them be whistleblowers, to stop these beasts. Do you know what I mean?

14-00:44:03

McGarrigle:

Yes.

14-00:44:04

Ellis:

And that was an implied criticism of me, too, at the time, so I was negotiating this funny path between trying to understand and—but why wasn't I out doing X, in relation to the cops or poverty? Well, that was, in response to your very good question, part of the tension. Why wasn't I? Because I'd managed to construe this endeavor as a contribution. Yes.

14-00:44:35

Wilmot:

Let's close for today.

**[end of session]**

Interview 8: August 26, 2003  
 [begin audio file 15]

15-00:00:56

Wilmot: Russell Ellis Jr., August 26<sup>th</sup>, interview seven [sic; eight]. Good morning.

15-00:01:05

Ellis: Good morning.

15-00:01:08

Wilmot: Today I wanted to begin with the play, *Fly, Blackbird* you were in. You played the role of Carl when you were in graduate school.

15-00:01:18

Ellis: Yes, I did. I haven't heard that in a while. [laughs]

15-00:01:19

Wilmot: For those of us who don't know the story, I wonder if you could briefly give us a synopsis of the story, the plot of the play and talk about how it reflects the social times that it was a mirror for.

15-00:01:36

Ellis: *Fly, Blackbird*, not to be confused with *Bye Bye Birdie*, was a play written by a local playwright, Jim Hatch.

15-00:01:58

Wilmot: Hatch and Jackson—

15-00:01:59

Ellis: Jim Hatch and Clarence Jackson. It's a romance, actually. It's a simple romance between Carl and what's-her-name? God, I've forgotten her name. I have to sing the songs in my head. Basically the issue is whether romance is going to trump political commitment and social involvement. It was written around the time of the sit-ins and the lunch-counter protests. In fact, the cast of the show would use the signs, in fact, the signs from the show, protest signs, to picket Woolworth's, which was discriminating against black people in the South, and Woolworth stores had been targeted throughout the South. So it's about—God! Why don't I remember the name?

15-00:03:09

Wilmot: I think her name may have been Josie.

15-00:03:13

Ellis: Josie, right, Carl and Josie, who are a young black couple wanting to be in love, but he's kind of hotheaded and wants to do something about the state of race relations. Josie's dad wants him to be cool, slow down. "You Can Catch More Flies With Honey Than With Vinegar" is a song that he sings. To make a long story short, a not very long, two-act play even shorter, what happens is that Carl does lead a group in a protest, and all that turns out to be good. It's folks coming to consciousness and being determined to make change. It ends

with a song, “Now” which, if you were around at the time, and you weren’t, I don’t think, at the time, was kind of the theme. Now, not next week, not later, but now. Change now. It’s about protest and organization. There’s a reverie. There’s one of these dream sequences, which is—

15-00:04:58

Wilmot: Time travel.

15-00:04:59

Ellis: Yes, time travel, where Carl is living with the blandishments of Dr. Crocker. There’s a potion that Dr. Crocker, a snake-oil salesman in this dream sequence, has for black folks, to make them happy and not so irritable.

15-00:05:30

Wilmot: Not so irritable?

15-00:05:32

Ellis: [laughs] Not so irritable. It really reminds me a little bit of Randy Newman’s song, “Sail Away.” [recites] “In America, you get food to eat, don’t have to run through the jungle and scuff up your feet. You just sing about Jesus and drink wine all day. It’s great to be an American.” Anyway, so that’s what it is. That’s what it was, the show. It started out as a one-act in a small theater on Melrose, Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles gosh, I think about the time I was going to graduate school, ’61, ’2, in there, and it got a lot of notice. I sort of had not thought to be part of it. I was rethinking my life, going off to graduate school, and I had met Judith, who was there at UCLA, in graduate school, had come from London, the LSE. And I’d given up my idea of the singing career, pretty much. So this came along, and I liked the idea, and I was active on campus. I’d become active in CORE and other kinds of organizations. So it seemed like a nice intersection, as it evolved. It did very well, got a lot of notice in the *L.A. Times*, that’s kind of interesting. I think I was written up as “touchingly sincere” or something.

15-00:07:04

Wilmot: They made much note of your voice.

15-00:07:07

Ellis: Oh, is that right? I didn’t remember that. But then later it evolved into a two-act play. Then we moved to another theater over on Olympic, I think. That went quite well, quite well. We had audiences. We had theater parties all the time. We had tapped into the general sentiment, the protest sentiment in the L.A. area and lots of different organizations. We became something of a stopping-off place for groups coming through town. There was an African dance troupe that came through. You sort of had to touch bases with us for a while.

15-00:07:54

We also had people who went on to do quite a few things in theater. The guy who sings “Now” with me—his actual name is Jack Crowder, and you see



him in all kinds of movies, a tall black guy. I forget what his stage name is. George Takei, of course, who was Sulu [in *Star Trek*], who sang a song. Did I give you the record? Oh, I have the record. I should give you the record. [sings] “How come an Oriental detective is always accompanied by a gong? And temple blocks.” This is what George Takei sings. It’s really good. It was a showstopper. [laughs]

15-00:08:37

Wilmot:

It sounds like a little bit like a San Francisco Mime Troupe production.

15-00:08:40

Ellis:

Yes, it was a little bit like that. Yes, it was a little bit like that. Anyway, the cast was never political particularly other than individual action and the common picketing we did, but, in fact, we never made a political organization. In some ways, we were just young people who had varying levels of commitment to the protests of the times, the civil rights protests of the times, and people who were interested in being in show biz. But it was a very exciting time, very exciting.

15-00:09:21

Wilmot:

One of the things I’m really interested in is what did you bring—how did you interpret the character of Carl?

15-00:09:28

Ellis:

Hah! Well, what I thought—

15-00:09:34

Wilmot:

If that’s a hard question, I understand—

15-00:09:37

Ellis:

No, that’s okay, that’s okay, that’s okay. What I thought I was doing when I was acting the part was being hotheaded. “Things aren’t right. Yes, I love you, Josie, but there are other things we have to think about.” I really played it as much as a hotheaded individual as I did a representative of a period that “wasn’t taking it anymore,” you know, a time when people would run out of patience for moderation. I never tried to occupy the character thinking of the character being larger than that individual. I never thought of the character as “representing” anything; I was just trying to occupy the character and sing the songs okay, and be a leader in the context of the play, of protest, and getting others to come along. But it was a Romeo and Juliet kind of story. You know, it was really kind of a romance, and people liked that about it.

15-00:10:55

Then I got surprises. There are some scenes where—one day I just decided to make a fall, a pratfall, and it just got—you know, a flop, a silly fall-down, a pratfall. That’s show biz talk, you know. You gotta get with it. And that fall would get an amazing reaction. I couldn’t believe it. People would crack up. And the show did need a little comic relief in certain places. There’s certain kinds of things that just showed up as ways to interpret the character. I wanted

Carl to be sincere, to carry that show well with music, to sing the songs well, and to be an example of leadership.

15-00:11:54

Wilmot:

What did you bring of yourself to the role?

15-00:11:58

Ellis:

The character, actually was very much like me. I don't think Jim Hatch even knew me when he wrote the original script. Just a kid, a young black man trying to make it in the world, who runs across intolerance and has to do something, has to react to it, as opposed to a John Lewis or a Stokely Carmichael. An ordinary Negro guy. [laughs] To use the language of the times.

15-00:12:58

Wilmot:

So he's not an activist. Is that what you're saying?

15-00:13:00

Ellis:

Right. The whole point of the story is that he becomes active and takes everybody along with him as they get honest with themselves about circumstances that they confront. So it was very easy to play. I didn't think of it that way. I've never thought of it that way until you asked me this question, but it was kind of like me. The guy in the classroom using the expression "nigger in the woodpile" and I go think, 'That's not okay!' And I go tell my stepmother, and we go and we complain. It's sort of like 'That's not okay!' which then gets larger.

15-00:13:39

But, of course, the backdrop of the times, were amazing. You know, I'm glad there's so much writing, but you simply cannot reproduce experientially what something like that is to live in. You could *feel* something moving in the larger society. You really could. And you couldn't help but be affected by it. Well, you could, but you'd have to work at it because the pressures on—there was a series of them: the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the counterculture, the Aquarian Age. All of those things were substantial movements at a level of consciousness among young people.

15-00:14:38

And I'm amazed—I wonder where all that has gone, especially at a time like this, where we have such an awful set of people running the country. I always thought at the time that the folks who went through that were going to age into some kind of spiritual, in a secular sense, kind of force for good. I really did think after folks went through their baby-having and household-making period, this would be one of the good outcomes of having gone through all that, because they would know what it was to have the heart open, know about truth, know what it meant to say no to the stability—in the case of the civil rights movement—to the stability that kept people in conditions of oppression, that they would know, by reason of having broken out of suburban America,

what it is to break those bounds and realize other ways of being a parent, a lover, and so forth.

15-00:15:54

Ahhh! But it seems like it was a very small set of people who did that. I mean, looking at the country right now. But that's way too far in advance. Anyway, it was such a concrete thing, the magnetism to go to Washington. I didn't go to the March on Washington, but that had a lot to do with some domestic things between my wife and I at the time, her concerns.

15-00:16:23

McGarrigle: I understand.

15-00:16:24

Ellis: Her worries. But anyway, so...

15-00:16:29

McGarrigle: So the show goes for quite a while in the second-act incarnation.

15-00:16:36

Ellis: In the two-act incarnation, I think it goes for a year.

15-00:16:40

McGarrigle: And you're doing that more or less full time, then?

15-00:16:44

Ellis: It doesn't take that. I think we had a weekend show, and a matinee, and a Thursday, or something like that. After it got rolling, it wasn't life-consuming. As a matter of fact, in the two-act, I was a full-time graduate student by the time it got to be in two acts, so it was almost like relief for me. And when it went to New York, I knew I wasn't going with it.

15-00:17:16

Wilmot: Because?

15-00:17:18

Ellis: I'd chosen a different direction. I really was interested in graduate school. And also theater is, in some important ways, not satisfying. In both two- and one-act things, we'd rush off to Hollywood Boulevard after the show and we'd sit in clubs. Not all of us would take all of our makeup off, in order to leave hints that were just...off the stage. Well, those little gestures are easily magnified into great phoniness. I didn't want to do that.

15-00:18:08

For ages, I didn't give up the idea of musical theater. I loved the idea of singing musical theater, but I had pretty much decided—I had a relationship with a woman who's an intellectual and I had great fun with her. She was a graduate student. I was good at it. I had an angle. Once I clarified my record and was relevant to graduate school, I had sort of an angle on sociology, and it was fun for me, although I wasn't a particularly well-educated person and

never have been. It was an exciting time. It was also, by the way, an exciting time in graduate school. I mean, America was a very exciting place. [laughs] It was really a busy place.

15-00:18:57

Wilmot:

One of the things that I wanted to ask you to kind of map out for us is in graduate school, how did you make that transition from sociology of social movement to sociology of space, where you kind of made your professional debut?

15-00:19:16

Ellis:

Uh-huh.

15-00:19:17

Wilmot:

Am I correct in thinking that?

15-00:19:18

Ellis:

Yes. [pause] I think—

15-00:19:37

Wilmot:

Can I just back up? Sorry for this.

15-00:19:41

Ellis:

Sure.

15-00:19:45

Wilmot:

I didn't get to ask you one question which I thought was really important about *Fly, Blackbird*, which was just why was that experience so important for you? I've heard about it from you before, before we started our work together, and I just wanted to make that an open question.

15-00:20:00

Ellis:

It was fun. I got a chance to sing, and I recently joined a singing group here in Berkeley. I'll play you my solo there one of these days. I like to sing.

15-00:20:19

Wilmot:

Singing group here in Berkeley. What's it called?

15-00:20:20

Ellis:

The Berkeley Broadway Singers. It's an eighty-member group. I like to sing. It felt like a very apt intersection of a lot of the issues going on in my life and other people's lives. How would you go about doing something that was relevant to the times, that also reflected what you could do, what you were good at? Now, I had a reputation as an athlete. I didn't spend a lot of time wallowing in that, celebrating that, and I was often surprised by that. But I think people asked me to be in the show because I was known in Los Angeles. So, "Oh, Russ Ellis is singing!" And I made an effort at singing, so I had a little bit of something going there. Not a whole lot, but something. And I agreed with the show, the plot. I enjoyed being with the people, and it was exciting to sing to people about protest and have them affirm what you were

doing. That was really great. We had theater parties of this organization, that organization, would fill the place. They'd be with us so totally, it was almost like participating in the North in the movement in a unique kind of way, in the civil rights movement. So that was part of it.

15-00:22:02

Wilmot:

I'm sorry, now I do want to go back to the question I had.

15-00:22:06

Ellis:

That's okay, and I remember the question. It's not entirely a discontinuity. It's also not entirely a choice. You've heard me say, and I assume you were surprised to hear—I was surprised to hear myself say it—that I didn't sort of do much of anything in my academic career. Well, actually, I'm not putting myself down when I say that. It's simply the way I have lived this life, and there are many ways of plying your way through life. I was extremely interested in sociology, and I was extremely interested in the sociology of ideas, the sociology of knowledge, theories. I just was really happy doing that. I took French as one of my foreign languages, but I was never really good academically at languages. I could probably sort out a decent footnote and follow up the logic of something in French at the time. I couldn't now.

15-00:23:33

And I was busy getting educated. I didn't come loaded with the ability to write English very well. The reason I wanted you to have those letters from Fontana is I'm such a pathetic little nub of a person. No, that's how *I* feel about it, and I know people—I look at kids now, and I even know some people my age, and I look at their writings, and I see where they were, and several things happen to me. One is, boy, America is an interesting place. Because you can be mobile here, the myth is realized in its various versions, it's just enough to keep it alive for a lot of people, domestically born, foreign born who come here.

15-00:24:20

So I was in the process of getting educated as well, because as an undergraduate I didn't study that hard. I was a jock, and my identity was a jock. So I got into the idea issues and the ideas around movements, and movements as movements about ideal interests as well as material interests, right? People caring about ideas. They give material interests wings, and that's not original to me, it might be Weber: "Ideas give material interests wings." And so it was a combination of the whole social movement, sociology of knowledge interest, which is very much what I tried to do my dissertation about. I'm really pleased at my idea for my dissertation. It's kind of a clumsy thing, but I like my idea of it, trying to untangle how ideas and interests and so forth emerge and then get routinized, and so forth.

15-00:25:29

Somewhere along the way, actually after I went to Pitzer, I started hanging out with an artist, a guy named Carl Hertel, and we got interested in community

issues. It's sort of taking off from some ideas in the sociology of knowledge, and that is: where in the social relations of people do the ideas for their art, their dwellings, these other epiphenomena that look like they're important parts of how people live? Obviously, people have to dwell, and they always dwell in something, right? But then they do things to those dwellings. They do things to their own adornments. They do things to themselves stylistically. This personal style is an adornment. I taught a class at Pitzer called The Sociology of Style, which is related, I've learned, upon starting the class, to stylus, one's signature, handwriting.

15-00:26:49

I had trouble with my nouveau riche, but upper-middle-class, women students at Pitzer at the time, because I'd say, "Okay, we're going to go together to this concert, and I want you to watch such-and-such-and-such." And they had trouble because they were thoroughly trained not to stare! [laughs] So they couldn't. And I had to say, "Okay, watch the entrances and see how people enter and see where they go to sit." I did all kinds of silly things like that.

15-00:27:23

So I got interested in social location, artistic expressions, social location and ideas, which is perfectly consonant with the whole field of the sociology of knowledge. So that's how I started going that way. And then Carl Hertel and I taught a course that we called The Communal Organization of Space. It was a college course, that is, a course that any student in the Claremont colleges could take. Did I tell you this already?

15-00:27:58

Wilmot:

No.

15-00:27:59

Ellis:

So we had students from then Claremont Men's College—it's now Claremont-McKenna—from Pomona, from Scripps, from Harvey Mudd. I was also teaching a course on [the sociology of] Community at Pitzer. And so we treated ourselves as the group, that is, who are we? How do we come into existence as a community? What is a community? Okay, what will we design for who we say we are, and so forth. And we had a division of labor which involved everybody going out to get all the materials to build the whatever thing. It was a model, it wasn't a full scale. In the end, it was a mess. It was just this lump of stuff. It wasn't coherent. And we had a wonderful time responding to that fact. "That's really reflective of our process." [laughs] "It's really reflective of us and how we got here." Something I used a lot, later in my teaching, later on in my teaching, about how every built form is the result of an initial "yes" by some combination of people or organizations, and it is a reflection of the process that brings it into existence.

15-00:29:25

McGarrigle:

Now, Russ, what were the structures or were there structures in place for such courses?

15-00:29:30

Ellis: At Pitzer there were. They were kind of like DE-Cal [Democratic Education at CAL, student-initiated] courses here, but for faculty. Faculty could come together at various of the—faculty members at one campus could teach a course in the campus-wide curriculum.

15-00:29:50

McGarrigle: I'm sorry, I mean structures as in had these courses ever existed before?

15-00:29:57

Ellis: No, it was novel. This one was novel.

15-00:29:59

McGarrigle: Okay. And how did you propose them, and have them accepted?

15-00:30:04

Ellis: You just submit them to the committee that was in charge. It would be like the Academic Senate, here, the Academic Senate Committee on Courses, like that.

15-00:30:15

McGarrigle: Right. So looking back after your decade of experience at Berkeley, innovative courses and what the potential resistance can be, was there resistance to these courses that were innovating on the curriculum?

15-00:30:31

Ellis: No. You've got to remember the times, also.

15-00:30:33

McGarrigle: Okay. I just wanted to be sure that—

15-00:30:35

Ellis: Yes, the times. Pitzer didn't have departments, and so we had "clots." [This was the faculty's humorous way of acknowledging that department substitutes actually existed.] We had a sociology clot. Didn't have departments.

15-00:30:47

McGarrigle: Did you just locate yourself, or your work located you, or who you went to hang out with, or?

15-00:30:53

Ellis: Both-and. This was true at Riverside before that, too, in a very different way, but yes, the times were opening. They were opening. People were in encounter groups, asking questions about why? They were asking questions of "ought."

15-00:31:13

McGarrigle: Was there challenge from the already-existing faculty about these innovative courses, or not at all?

15-00:31:19

Ellis: No, not particularly. I got called up in front of a faculty judicial board for not wearing a tie in the Faculty Club once, and then a colleague of mine and I conducted a sit-in with students around the war, so we got in trouble like that. But no, no, there wasn't—the Claremont colleges are a kind of a genteel place. They know how to handle little deviances. The whole idea is to bring it in and civilize it. California has no private tradition to speak of, right? What do you got? You got SC [University of Southern California], Mills—

15-00:32:08

McGarrigle: Stanford.

15-00:32:10

Ellis: Stanford, and that's it, and then the Claremont colleges, in terms of quality institutions [in qualitative terms]. I would never put SC in the same category with Stanford or the Claremont colleges, but there's not much of a connection.

15-00:32:23

McGarrigle: From what I've read about Berkeley at the same time, there was a huge amount of resistance, from those who were already tenured faculty, to innovative courses.

15-00:32:36

Ellis: Let me talk about that, and sort of out of the stream, a bit. I bounce around here. I went from Riverside, which had just stopped being a citrus experiment station and becoming a general liberal arts campus, which was a wonderful time. We had great students, and I knew faculty in all kinds of departments all over the place. It was great. We were there—Judith and I were there for two years, and then we went over to Pitzer. Now, student power. You remember that? Student power, the whole issue of student power. Well, everybody's participation in the decisions that affect their lives, right? That was the big theme of the times, a kind of participatory democratic undercurrent going there, and so student power was part of that. And so that was important. So that opened up all kinds of issues, and the students would have something to say, as they sat on the various committees, about how things would go in their education as well as in their dorm life and so forth and so on.

15-00:33:44

I went from there to the State University of New York, at the campus in Old Westbury that was to have been modeled on Santa Cruz. That was the idea. Stony Brook was to be their Berkeley. It was the blandishments of Harris Wofford, who was a senator for a while out of Pennsylvania, They were starting up something innovative and interesting and different. And I had been in California all of my life, and I was interested in busting out and going someplace else, doing something different. Judith had decided that she wanted to stay home with her son, and she really wanted to do that. She didn't want to try to split teaching and researching and all this kind of stuff. She wanted to be with her boy. And so we went.



15-00:34:48

There were 200 students there, and maybe twenty faculty. A lot of faculty lived in New York and came in on Tuesday morning and left Thursday night to get back in the city to live their real lives. [laughs]

15-00:35:18

McGarrigle: Is this a job for which you applied?

15-00:35:21

Ellis: They came after me. They came after me. [Prodded by my friend Peter Orleans, who was on the faculty there.]

15-00:35:24

McGarrigle: For a position in sociology?

15-00:35:25

Ellis: Yes. They weren't emphasizing departments, either. They were being innovative, self-consciously Santa Cruz-y different, right? Not doing it the old way. The old structures were tired, enervating, not good for another possible world of ideas. So I went, and I lasted a year. Michael Novak was there. He hadn't turned into a right winger at the time. He was sort of an ethnic Pole. He was pushing ethnic issues. He's a bright guy, interesting guy. I spent time with him. Carlos Russell was there. He was a famous black intellectual at the time, kind of radical guy. He got caught taking money, teaching in the city at I think City University [of New York] as well as Old Westbury, and that got him in some trouble [for double dipping].

15-00:36:28

Anyway, it was a very interesting set of people out there. No question about it. You couldn't get more than two people in a room. There were just the hostilities, the different interpretations of this, that, and the other. God, it was a tough place to be. And the students were split. Half of them were black, Puerto Rican, et cetera, no money and with luck, 850 combined SATs, okay? And the other half were fatigued from an entire life [of hard study]—you know, suburban Virginia and so forth.

15-00:37:08

Wilmot: 850 combined?

15-00:37:10

Ellis: SAT scores, right. And the other group, white, you know, 1600s throughout, tired. Mainly their idea of going to an open, innovative place was to do some arts and writing of poetry, some music, and stay stoned. The black kids were kind of jacking up the white kids, saying, "Wait a minute! This is my big chance! Dope is going to get us in trouble! Did you see what happened at Stony Brook? You know, the big raid on Stony Brook. Big [police] raid!" [January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1986.] So there was a funny kind of dynamic there, but it was such a hothouse atmosphere that anything you did that was going to be different or interesting, it was sort of like this flower that everybody was digging around all the time to get it to grow. People had such a big

commitment and so many different ideas of social change and growth. We fell apart with the bombing of Cambodia. It was a wonderful time. It was a fantastic time, because the campus stopped, and we only focused on Nixon, that war, and we became an amazing place. It was just an amazing time. But it was very hard to be innovative there, so self-consciously.

15-00:38:38

When I got to Berkeley, I could do anything I wanted, as long as I packaged it decently. Even Yale. I taught a college course at Branford College at Yale, like once a week. That was '69, I guess, and that was the year of the big protests. The Chicago Eight came there, and then there was big riots.

15-00:39:03

McGarrigle: You're in Old Westbury in '69 to '70, and in the spring of '70 you're a fellow at Branford.

15-00:39:09

Ellis: Yes, yes, and I go up there—I take the Long Island Railroad up, and I teach a course called Subversion.

15-00:39:14

McGarrigle: Okay.

15-00:39:15

Ellis: [laughs]

15-00:39:16

McGarrigle: Okay, so that begs the question—

15-00:39:18

Ellis: The reason is that in the context of sociology and with a setup where people are familiar with the nomenclature of the social sciences, you get a bunch of books on why things are stable socially and when they're not and why they're not. You can talk about subversion and nobody—it makes perfectly good sense. “What are you talking about? What are the books, and what's the argument?” The folks look at it and say, “Ah, it makes sense.”

15-00:39:45

McGarrigle: But how do you get a course called Subversion at Yale? What's the mechanics of that?

15-00:39:53

Ellis: I've actually forgotten how I got the job. It was a college course I taught at Yale's Branford College. [I do recall submitting the course description for “Subversion” and its being accepted. Basically, it was the negative approach to discussing society's normative order.]

15-00:39:56

McGarrigle: Now we're not talking Claremont colleges.

15-00:40:01

Ellis:

No, but I'm trying to make a larger point, that in larger institutional settings, universities are conservative. They're innovative when they are, but what they do is they conserve what we know. They conserve the nomenclature of our research and our scholarship. They conserve the output. They show what the connections are between the various pieces of the vast research projects that make up the sciences—you know, scholarship and this kind of stuff. Inside that context, there are many things you can do that bear on the larger project you're involved with, so to say "subversion," it was kind of cute, obviously, but to say it, and to show what the reading list is, is a very simple issue in a world where there are sociology departments, political science departments, anthropology departments, and to show what argument you're making about social change. [laughs]

15-00:41:33

Wilmot:

How would you contrast that to the way that, say, the class featuring Eldridge Cleaver was received here at Berkeley? How do you think about the differences? Is that about packaging or—? [cross-talk]

15-00:41:53

Ellis:

139X, Eldridge Cleaver. I forget the title of it. [Social Analysis 139X: Dehumanization and Regeneration of the American Social Order, 1968]

15-00:41:56

Wilmot:

Sixty-nine.

15-00:41:58

Ellis:

169-X?

15-00:41:59

Wilmot:

Oh, no, 1969.

15-00:42:00

Ellis:

1969. I don't know what the topic of Cleaver's course was, even at that time. But yes, the larger world also was being asked to eat stuff that it hadn't tried before, was asked to think in ways and accept voices and ideas that [it] hadn't before. When I say my idea of the course called Subversion was cute, I don't mean just to demean it. That is actually a term in academia, you know? You can have a cute idea.

But it was a feature of the times. Now, what was happening *here* at the UC was that Troy—because I think he was—not I think—he *was* a member of the fellowship. He was a member of the Academic Senate, I believe, at the time. In a setting like this, that matters. I think I've told you both that. That matters. And so he had the auspices, and he steps in and provides the auspices and runs interference for a set of ideas and a voice and a person who typically had not had a place in this kind of setting, the university. Well, every place has a version of the gatekeepers. You have to. You can't let everything in. Not and have the kind of place you call the university. And the university always has

people wanting to come in with ideas outside the bounds of what is ordinarily regarded as appropriate to the setting.

15-00:43:54

And in its conserving mode, the university is also conservative. That's why librarians often have that reputation. That *is* their job. Their job is to make the ideas available, but the idea is also to control them. Physically it's about control, right? And it's about both control and access. But take the Bancroft. It's about control and *appropriate* access. Not everybody can come wandering around in these delicate items that have been conserved and preserved for so long, otherwise, there are ways in which they can be despoiled that we don't even know yet. We may have some new science of the page, of the material, in which this old crumbly page—that tells something about the people who put the thing together. You just don't know. You conserve these old bones because maybe we can find out which grains contributed to this. There's knowledge and science. And the longer you do that, the more nervous you get about everything, in a way. You want to preserve it because that's going to be something on the basis of which we can generate new knowledge next time. So that's appropriately conservative. But you can get so conservative you're fragile, you break.

15-00:45:21

McGarrigle: Along those lines, what kinds of texts did you use?

15-00:45:25

Ellis: What did I use?

15-00:45:30

McGarrigle: Yes. From what eras? What were the students reading and discussing?

15-00:45:37

Ellis: Boy, that's interesting. [pause]

15-00:45:41

McGarrigle: I can give you some examples. You gave us the names of the classes. They have them here, too. At Pitzer, the Sociology of Style, and Communal Organization in Space, and then you went on to describe the courses in New York and at Yale, where there's the Subversion—

15-00:45:58

Ellis: Yeah. There actually is—oh, there's one anthropologist who actually had written about style at the time that I taught that course. I don't remember the article. But I would use mainly articles and try to put together a syllabus. Who wrote the [*Body Ritual among the*] Nacerema? Do you remember that? [Horace Miner, 1956] It's American spelled backward, and someone has done a wonderful piece, not Clyde Kluckhohn, but—a wonderful piece describing the traits and habits of the Nacerima, the people. It's this sort of backward entry into an exotic peoples, the Americans, looking at who they are, but with fresh eyes, kind of Martian anthropologist eyes: what do they eat and so forth.

15-00:47:07

Mainly I tried to get at literatures that called into question the sort of taken-for-granted. Very often, that would be some utopian thing, for example. I don't know that I ever used [Aldous] Huxley, but it's nice to have a world that's a thoroughly constructed utopia, to cause folks to look at things in a slightly different way. I relied very much on standard texts, actually, in a lot of what I did, partly because the traditions of particularly anthropology and sociology, but sociology for me, were pretty established. You know, you could look at a Durkheim and a Weber, and you could look at the stuff that came out of that tradition and get a sense of the meaning of culture, social order, social structure.

15-00:48:15

So I often would do that. And one time, when I went to Old Westbury and everybody was super-cool, even if they hadn't read much, but everybody was very cool and they talked at a very high level of abstraction and so forth, and then I remember teaching a course—I forget what it was called, but I was hearing stuff from the students, and I said, “Okay, how many Jews are there in America? What percentage of the American population is Jewish?” “36 percent.” “Okay, what percent is Puerto Rican?” I mean, they had this ridiculous view of the world. They had no information! They were cool and so forth, and even educated, but they actually didn't have information because they hadn't read any of this stuff, and some of these people were pretty well educated.

15-00:49:27

So I gave them [Leonard] Broom and [Philip] Selznick, introductory texts in sociology. I said, “We're going to read this not because I want you to believe it all but because I want us to have a frame of reference from which we all begin, so when we say ‘social stratification,’ we'll know what we mean, we can point to that.” It seems primitive at a college level to be talking like that. I didn't have that problem at Yale. At Yale, every student in my class read everything that I assigned.

15-00:50:12

McGarrigle:

Had read it?

15-00:50:13

Ellis:

No, but many had read, and they read voraciously. They weren't as exciting as the Old Westbury students or the Berkeley students. They weren't as much fun to be with. Things weren't going off in the air. Okay. Reading. There was a lot going on at the time, and I thought about this very much. “Maybe I shouldn't do that, since I'm supposed to be an academic here.” But a lot of the writing at the time had turned in the direction of, on the one hand, something like ethnographic work, close-up investigations of, as I mentioned, I think, last time, of the unfolding order of everyday life.

15-00:51:10

McGarrigle:

Like Goffman and—

15-00:51:12

Ellis: Yes, sure. And also politically a lot of the work on poverty was ethnographic, very close up views of everyday life.

15-00:51:24

McGarrigle: Who are you thinking of? Are you thinking of, like, I don't know, *Tally's Corner* [by Elliot Liebow and Hylan Lewis]?

15-00:51:30

Ellis: Yes, *Tally's Corner* is a good example. Daniel Bell, a fairly conservative guy, was looking at the reproduction of—basically how social order gets reproduced. Books like the *Social Construction of Everyday Life*. Did you read it? I just think it's a wonderful book. I was particularly taken also with [Thomas S.] Kuhn's book on *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, out of which now we've got the everyday language of "paradigm shift," which people toss around.

15-00:52:30

McGarrigle: And, Russ, at the same time that you're teaching these courses, you're an individual from California living in New York and teaching at Yale; can you reconstruct what was happening to you there? You had already been to England, but this is a huge change geographically.

15-00:52:58

Ellis: Yes, I can tell you. I realized when I left California how much I am a child of the California landscape.

15-00:53:08

McGarrigle: Even at this point, going back—

15-00:53:11

Ellis: Yes, it was an alien landscape for me. Interesting as hell.

15-00:53:15

McGarrigle: The brick buildings, the huge lawns, or what exactly?

15-00:53:21

Ellis: The seasons.

15-00:53:26

Wilmot: And socially?

15-00:53:27

Ellis: I actually have written about this. No, I've been written about talking about this. I'll have to find it. The oldness of Europe seemed "other" to me, and appropriate. The oldness of New York or of Boston and Cambridge—you could almost see the grooves in the sidewalk worn by the boots of the Irish cops, plying their way around the city—seemed stultifying to me. I remember saying at a speech at MIT—I was on a panel there—who the hell took me out there?—and I remember saying that at any time in California, at the time, I felt as though I could take off my suit and put on a robe and sandals and go

out and try to change the world, that that was open to me as a possibility. I felt the East—I felt claustrophobic, intellectually, physically, and not desperately so. Actually, I was living in the [William Robertson] Coe Estate [Planting Fields Arboretum] in Old Westbury, very fancy digs. I wasn't in the city that much.

15-00:54:58

McGarrigle:

Would you say that again?

15-00:55:00

Ellis:

C-o-e. He was a Scottish—I forget his first name—immigrant came and was one of the robber barons. The north shore of Long Island has a lot of estates, big estates that these guys ordered out of catalogs. A 300-acre arboretum called Planting Fields. It's still there. The state took over a lot of those old estates and let the staff live there until they died, and took over a lot of these places for tax purposes. And that's where Stony Brook started. That's where they assembled the first staff and set of students and librarian and so forth, and that's where Old Westbury started, before it got sent to the new buildings in Old Westbury.

15-00:55:44

But I felt—not desperately claustrophobic, but I did feel closed in by the oldness. I found I wasn't interested in the competitiveness of the East. I remember when I went to this lecture—oh, this guy. He wrote a book. He was enamored of Joan Baez and hung out with—her guy. What was his name? Richard—the writer-journalist Baez hung out with in the late sixties. Harris, Richard Harris. This fellow wrote this book. How did he become aware of me? I don't know. He was at Claremont, visiting. He went to MIT, and he put together a symposium and invited me out to talk about Los Angeles.

15-00:56:46

And I remember an assistant professor at MIT coming to my friend Martin Diskin's house, and Martin was on the faculty at MIT, and coming to visit Martin at 7:15 in the morning. "Oh, hi, Martin." And the reason he was coming was to see who I was, was I any good, was I a threat? Had his competition invited someone who was going to make him look good? That's why he was there. And when he left, Martin said, "Well, you know what that was about." I said, "Yeah, it was obvious." Well, I didn't like that very much. But that *is* a difference between the East and the West.

15-00:57:36

This guy, Stanley Crouch, I was telling Nadine, he was part of the whole Claremont scene. I met him on Central Avenue when I was studying Operation Bootstrap. Got him invited out to Pitzer, where he taught some courses. Never looked back. I mean, he's won a Guggenheim. He's huge, as you know. He went to New York, and he called me one time. He said, "Hey, Russ! You gotta come. They think they're bad. They're not bad. Now, we can

take this thing over.” [laughs] I said, “No, Stanley, I think I’m going to stay here.” [laughs] And I did want to stay in California.

15-00:58:26

I learned something about myself in the East. We lived in the gatehouse of the Coe Estate, and it was about maybe three-quarters of a mile to the carriage house, where a lot of courses were taught, and I would trundle through these fields. And it would snow. You know, snow! That was new to me, as a routine feature of life. I’d go to work, and I’d walk back home, and this gorgeous fact would happen, is that I’d come back and see my footsteps but filled with new snow. You know that? That’s a wonderful translucence—and then I watched the seasons. All of a sudden, poetry made a different kind of sense to me. [laughs] But I didn’t have the seasons like that experientially in me. I didn’t! And so I realized that in some ways, the metaphor of the seasons and so forth had really never struck me the way it had those who had generated these ideas in the context of change.

15-00:59:41

And other things happened. Like, Mircea Eliade, E-l-i-a-d-e, is a certain kind of almost Joseph Campbell type writer on religion. He has a book called *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. It’s about archaic people’s sense of time. “It’s spring *again*.” The loop of time has not been broken. It’s a loop. And so it’s not spring 2004, it’s “spring again.” Just walking around in the seasons makes that whole idea much more alive to me, even though I don’t have seasons as part of my coming into existence. At least I’m now a better spectator of what it is to live in a seasonal world like that. I’m a Californian. I was born here. It’s hot, it’s brown, Fontana—very seldom lusciously green. There is no New England fall. There’s nothing that kind of gorgeous. It’s a different kind of beauty.

15-01:01:17

Wilmot: Let’s stop for a minute and start with something else.

15-01:01:20

McGarrigle: Because we’re only a couple of minutes away from the end of the disk, right?

[begin audio file 16]

16-00:00:10

Wilmot: Okay, Russ, I want to go back to this question of teaching innovative classes in ways that hadn’t been taught before, untraditional classes. My question around that is, where did you learn about that? Who did you learn from? Was there literature around it? Was it just common kind of discourse? Like, who were your colleagues? Who did you think with about these things, about how to structure these things?

What were your models? That’s the question.



16-00:01:06

Ellis:

Something I like, present tense, about my self and always have is my inclination to bend what's on the page or fiddle with what's taken for granted. I remember a professor of mine responding to a paper I wrote in graduate school, and he said, "Where'd you get this idea?" And it wasn't that he didn't have confidence in my ability to have ideas or anything, it's just that I had taken the occasion to superimpose something on something else and make it really different. And I'm not going to go into details, it's not even worth it. I think I've always done that. I think what happened in postwar America all over the place—and I should be a student of it, but I'm not—is, a lot of the taken-for-granted were questioned. I think I was just a child of the times. I think that's all that was going on. And then I chose to be in higher education, where a lot of that was happening.

16-00:02:58

My first job, I told you, after graduation—and I'll be quick, I promise, with this—was at Systems Development Corporation. There was a guy there named Bob Boguslaw. He's really kind of a famous name. Wrote a book then called *The New Utopians: [A Study of System Design and Social Change]*, and he would talk about these guys who would go into these vast computers and fix things and not be able to tell anybody what they did. They couldn't say. That was a time when they were doing at SDC "teaching machines." I mean, they were doing early computer stuff. They were doing stuff that we now have under our fingers all the time. Then, when I went to Pitzer—and I'll do that one very quickly—well, first you have the political critique of the country and the war and the civil rights struggles, which already opened stuff up, right?

16-00:03:58

McGarrigle:

Yes.

16-00:03:59

Ellis:

Saying, "No, no, let's not look at things like this, because indeed we've had lies coming from authority. There are documents that are lies. So let's re-look at this."

16-00:04:11

Wilmot:

Re-look at authority lines?

16-00:04:15

Ellis:

The war. That was a new experience, not new to humankind. War is nothing but sets of lies that contend with each other and get clarified and so forth. But when it got institutionalized in the form of a new campus in the Claremont colleges, which got to be for women, with an emphasis on the social sciences, then you got philosophers, political scientists, and historians and so forth, young, coming together. It was the hottest time of my life. It was so interesting. It was such an amazing, wonderful community of people at Pitzer. It was just so exciting. And they taught courses like—my wife's course was on demography, but did she call it demography? Hell, no. It was Hatched, Matched, and Dispatched. [laughs]

16-00:05:05

Wilmot: A little bit of British humor there.

16-00:05:07

Ellis: Right. Ellen Ringler taught a course in English—there was no English department, but the course was entitled, *Hell: A Survey*. [laughs] I love that stuff. People were just saying, “Okay, if I could make my own rivulet through all this stuff, look what I’d do, and where would I want to lead young people?” The most amazing thing about Pitzer is that of the three years I was there, without knowing it and without any of us intending this on the faculty, we produced about ten or twelve PhDs because the young women were watching *us*. I had a student say, “I was hoping to learn something about society, but you’re teaching sociology.” That sticks in my head. It’s a great quote. But a lot of the kids were watching us be sociologists, watching the women get pregnant, have their babies on Friday, and be back in the classroom the following Thursday, really fatigued and out of it and messed up, but the *commitment*. The young women are sitting there, watching us doing it, and they identified with us as doers of social science and wanted to become that.

16-00:06:42

Wilmot: You’re referring to faculty having their children?

16-00:06:45

Ellis: Yes, yes, yes, right, faculty, sorry. Right, right. And a lot of the couples, the faculty were married. It was also reinforced. That is, we were doing this stuff, the young women—a lot of them, not all of them—many of them were there not to be unengaged by the sophomore year.

16-00:07:07

Wilmot: That’s actually part of the lore around Pitzer College.

16-00:07:15

Ellis: Well, certainly, and around the whole Claremont setup, yes, no question. A lot of them were. Anyway, I can’t answer your question. I really think it was the times. And these are not those times. I hope something’s in the offing, but these current times, the critique, the struggle, is much more fundamental. I’m really interested in the Ten Commandments issue in Alabama. I think that’s core. Troy [Duster] asked a bunch of people, as president-elect of the American Sociological Association, he sent out an e-mail saying, “If you were saying what you thought some themes ought to be, what would you say?” And this is one that I’m interested in: the legitimacy of authority and the issue of religion, secular authority. I think we’re on the edge of a big-time thing here. I really do. And we were then, it had different qualities.

16-00:08:12

Wilmot: I want to ask you a question again about innovative classes. The class you described first, the one about kind of helping people think about themselves as

a group, bringing a mirror up to themselves—you described a group of people who are upper-middle-class—

16-00:08:31

Ellis: In Claremont.

16-00:08:33

Wilmot: In Claremont. The students, rather. Was this all women?

16-00:08:39

Ellis: Pitzer was at the time.

16-00:08:41

Wilmot: All women? What kind of support did you have or thinking did you do or models did you have in leading people through a delicate process like that, where you're saying, "Look at yourself, identify yourself, and think about who you are in relation to everybody else."

16-00:08:59

Ellis: It was completely indelicate. I was a bull in a china shop. I don't think I was as grotesque as some people who came—there was a guy who came and taught a course and told the students to go kill their parents. [chuckles] It was an amazing thing. He was a political science guy, a black guy. But he was saying, "Well, you are the enemy!"

16-00:09:39

Um, fun, energy, relevance, engagement with the task. I also failed to mention drugs. I was not a big drug taker, but I experimented with peyote and LSD [in graduate school]. I didn't handle them very well. But they were all over the place. My friend, Bob Kardon took acid before I did, and I said, "Okay, what do you bring back? What do you bring back?" He said, "Something about ought, the oughts. Things don't have to be the way they are. We're trapped in oughts." That was his first report to his friend, me.

16-00:10:19

McGarrigle: Given the level of intensity in that college environment, do you have stories of people, of the students who didn't make it so successfully, through who you knew individually, who were in your classes?

16-00:10:37

Ellis: Oh, you mean who were my students.

16-00:10:39

McGarrigle: Yes. Or students who you knew of.

16-00:10:42

Ellis: A nice intersection—very quickly, and I'll stay there very briefly—is that this guy, Carlos Castaneda was at UCLA, when anthropology and sociology were a joint department. His sojourn is one thing. But a whole group of anthropology types kind of went in the direction of an almost psychedelic

anthropology, and Carlos was in that scene at the time and a close friend of my friend, Martin Diskin's. And he came back with a set of notes that the faculty dismissed, but then he published it, and it got huge, and the faculty re-looked at his document on Don Juan and all this kind of stuff, and he wound up getting his PhD. In other words, a fairly extra-legitimate perspective got endorsed in a fairly solid academic setting. The times were such altogether that people were falling away here [in Berkeley in the 60's]. I mean, you must have gone through one of the tougher times, in terms of kids getting lost.

16-00:11:58

McGarrigle:

Yes, and I wondered how you experienced it, that level of intensity. I mean, you talked about fun and energy and excitement, but was there another side that was part of that environment?

16-00:12:10

Ellis:

Yes. Yes. Lives fell apart. People broke with their families over political ideas, over styles of living, chemical problems. I saw students fall away that way. I don't remember anyone being particularly hurt by ideas themselves. I had a colleague in graduate school, and I was leading this demonstration against—the Alabama governor.

16-00:12:50

McGarrigle:

Wallace.

16-00:12:52

Ellis:

Wallace. And she [Marlene Dixon] just was transformed. She was part of this march, and she just saw herself in history. She became a Marxist-Leninist, and she wound up doing some very strange things. I think she got injured emotionally, and she became a strange person out of that, not out of drugs or anything like that. [Dixon became the leader of the cult-like Democratic Workers Party.] But people made some big choices. It was a period of big choices. And I think very often people didn't know the meaning of the choices they were taking, especially young people.

16-00:13:28

McGarrigle:

That gets back to Nadine's question, which was here, the faculty is in a position of authority, and it was a young faculty. You were a young faculty member at that time, in your early thirties at the most.

16-00:13:38

Ellis:

Yes.

16-00:13:40

McGarrigle:

So there were some consequences for some.

16-00:13:46

Ellis:

Well, yes, there were, and you read about them. I'm fairly conservative, actually, so there weren't any major movements or chemicals or anything like that that I wanted to lead young people into. It also felt inappropriate. That wasn't my job. I could do things and know what I did, know what my

particular issue with drugs was. I don't handle the heavy psychedelics very well. Grass made me just think. I mean, I'd use up a whole day just sort of, "you know," going like this [takes deep breath]. I didn't feel very productive. It was a nice, fun drug, and helped me change my perspective, but it never seemed like a great thing for young people to get into, especially very young people. It seems to me they got lost in group stuff sometimes when they were young, going along with ideas. You know, college is a time of great conformism.

16-00:15:00

McGarrigle: Mm-hm.

16-00:15:01

Ellis: You know that. I mean, people call it PC because it's about political ideas, but it can be about white bucks [shoes] or sweaters. [laughs] At this very time when we're supposed to be struggling and breaking out, there's a great herd mentality among young people, and I don't think drugs are a particularly good thing for that, and I despise the whole fraternity beer thing. I just hate that. I just hate it, and always did.

16-00:15:31

McGarrigle: We'll have to talk more about all of that when we get to your time at Berkeley and your administrative role.

16-00:15:36

Ellis: Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God, you're right. I forgot about that.

16-00:15:39

Wilmot: You look like you're about to say something else. Otherwise, I have another question.

16-00:15:47

Ellis: Go ahead. That's all right. I have so much to say, you better go ahead.

16-00:15:51

Wilmot: No.

16-00:15:51

Ellis: [laughs] It was just about the quality of the times. I have a manuscript that I want to leave with the Bancroft. It's about me looking at people making places. [*People Marking Places: Episodes in Participants 1964-1984*. Manuscript in College of Environmental Design Library at University of California at Berkeley] You've heard me talk about this. I did look at the time through the prism of various groups of people trying to make changes in their lives. It was a very kind of mundane level. So to that extent, I should be a student of the times, but I'm not talking from that position. I'm talking from the position of me being alive through that period.

16-00:16:33

Wilmot: Participant in the times.

16-00:16:34

Ellis: Yes, I'm a living human—I don't really want to say "participant," although that's the way I talked about it at the time, just alive through those times.

16-00:16:45

Wilmot: And survived.

16-00:16:56

Ellis: Yes! Unbelievably interesting! And that's where a lot of the innovation came from. I didn't finish one thing about Berkeley. Maybe I did, but let me repeat it again. When I came here, I said, I could get away with all kinds of stuff. There wasn't the hothouse atmosphere, great expectations over your little innovation. I felt freer here than practically anyplace I'd ever been, to pursue odd ideas and do odd things.

16-00:17:28

Wilmot: Next time we talk, hopefully we'll be getting into Berkeley—I'm going to sit down and kind of ask you to tell me the anatomy of that freedom. That's really interesting.

16-00:17:37

Ellis: Okay, sure.

16-00:18:02

Wilmot: Okay. You did mention Carlos Castaneda, and I was wondering—when we were doing our background interviews, we talked to your former roommate, Kardon. He had such a wonderful way of speaking of you, and he also just said, "There's a funny story around when Russ met Carlos Castaneda," and I just wanted to open the floor to that story.

16-00:18:28

Ellis: Oh, sure. It's very easy to tell. It wasn't that I hadn't met Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda was a graduate student around Haines Hall at UCLA. He was an anthropology student, graduate student. We had a joint sociology-anthropology department. As I have said to you earlier, maybe even the last interview, intellectually UCLA was a very interesting place, the work of the ethnomethodologists, with the whole—if you'll just let this enter the tape without examining it—this whole phenomenological tradition that took shape under Harold Garfinkel and bled out into other areas of the social sciences.

16-00:19:28

Well, most likely what Carlos did, what happened to Carlos is that he tapped into some of that thinking, in and around sociology-anthropology, but he went off to Baja California to work with this *brujo* Don Juan and took notes, and they were to have been his notes for his dissertation, he was being an anthropologist, but he's smoking or otherwise taking this jimson weed [*Datura stramonium*], and it's affecting his consciousness, right? As the review said yesterday, "he's having conversations with the bilingual coyote." [chuckles] He learns to fly, and he's doing all these kinds of things. And also

he becomes very big and very important. Sells, what?—ten million copies of his book?

16-00:20:25

McGarrigle: About.

16-00:20:27

Ellis: Did you see the review the other day? [“Castaneda’s Lover Reflects on Shamanism and Celebrity,” Don Latin. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2003.]

16-00:20:29

McGarrigle: No, but I know.

16-00:20:30

Ellis: Just breathtaking, breathtaking! Martin Diskin and his later-to-be wife, Wilma, and Judith and I move in, not—when Wilma comes, she changed her name back to her Polish name—she comes later, but Judith and I move into an A-frame, just this thing sitting on the ground.

16-00:21:06

Wilmot: So it matches your car!

16-00:21:07

Ellis: [laughs] Right! A-frame in Malibu’s only slum is the way I like to call it. If you know where Topanga Canyon Road hits the Coast Highway, and you come towards San Francisco about 150 yards, and you turn right into a dirt road, you go down into a drained lakebed that was at the time owned by the L.A. Athletic Club, very fancy, very fancy. Judith and I moved into that place. It was a bohemian existence, for sure. And it was our choice. We liked it. We were both in graduate school at the time. Martin came in later. Another place was built there. And we had all kinds of famous parties and all kinds of stuff. We thought of ourselves like that also. We thought of ourselves as sort of out of the mainstream. It was a regular bohemian thing, right? There’s them and, of course, there’s us cool people, you know. [chuckles] [For a not so “cool” version of the scene, read Carolyne See’s *The Rest is Done with Mirrors*, Boston, Little Brown, 1970.]

16-00:22:10

Well, Martin was living there, and we all knew Carlos. I wasn’t close to him particularly. But Carlos had been away for a long time. He was closer to Martin. He used to come back to see Martin, and he came to the Gulch. That’s what we called this place, the Gulch. Martin wasn’t at home, and Carlos came to our little A-frame and knocked on the door. He had his son with him. The boy was actually the son of a couple in anthropology who blew their brains on acid, and he adopted this kid. He said, “Martin’s not there. Do you know when he’s coming back?” I said, “No, but he can’t be away very long. I think his car is still there, so he’s probably—so why don’t you come on in?”

16-00:23:08

And he said, “I can’t.” He said, “You have cats, and the kid is a witch, and it’ll really spook the cats.” My ex-wife and I are in ultimate disbelief in this kind of stuff. We said, “Aw, don’t worry about it, just come on in.” He came in, and we—Judith and I probably had a total of fifteen different cats over the period of twenty-seven years we were together. Some of them got lost in the woods. The cats went crazy in a way I had never ever seen cats go crazy. One of them was, like, literally upside down on the ceiling, fleeing something. So you had these two profound secular social science-y types with this guy saying he told us so, and we vowed to always tell that story honestly. It *really did happen!* [laughs] I have no idea what was going on. It could have been a smell, but I’ve never seen terror in cats like that before. I think that’s the story Bob wanted me to tell, because he’s like—well, no, he’s not. He’s more open to certain kinds of things. But anyway, that was the story, the Carlos Castaneda story.

16-00:24:46

The other part of Carlos is Carlos was close to Martin, but when my friend was dying of cancer, I didn’t like the way Carlos treated him. Martin had been very important to Carlos’ success and acceptance in graduate school. You should never get so big that you forget. But anyway.

16-00:25:14

McGarrigle:

Did he have a role at UCLA after he got his doctorate there?

16-00:25:18

Ellis:

Not that I’m aware of. He didn’t need a role anywhere. Judging from the review yesterday, he was not all that comfortable with himself. No, he just was rich after a certain point, rich and famous. Where are we going now?

16-00:25:44

McGarrigle:

I think we should stop soon because we’re coming so naturally to Berkeley, but you said that one year was all that you could take at Old Westbury, and I wondered what you were referring to—you did explain the environment there. Was there something specific, or was it the sum total of—

16-00:26:01

Ellis:

It was just too wild. The students took over the campus I think twice during the first part of my time there, brought it to a halt. The black and white students were having some problems around ownership and what’s appropriate behavior and who’s threatening whose relationship. It wasn’t life-threatening. As usual, everybody was screwing everybody backstage. It was a wonderful thing that way. And a lot of the kids are out here now. Gary Delgado in Oakland, a big political activist, was an Old Westbury student. Deb Levinsky, who was head of OB-GYN at Alta Bates for a long time, has a big practice out here. After those years of exploration, you get these letters, as you always do, “Had you been giving grades,”—you hear from the medical school to which they’ve applied. [laughs] It was a common joke of the kids who went through these alternative education things, and then the regular old



world wants to know, “Okay, that’s nice, your Santa Cruz evaluations, but what’s it really mean?”

16-00:27:23

McGarrigle: So they quantify it.

16-00:27:24

Ellis: Yes, yes, “Turn it into a number that we can put into our system.”

Actually, Troy has been the broker for an awful lot of stuff for me. I went to Riverside because he was there, [Aaron Cicourel was there], and Bob Nisbett was there. He’d just come down from Berkeley to chair the Department of Sociology.

16-00:27:48

Wilmot: Bob Nesbit?

16-00:27:49

Ellis: Yes, N-i-s-b-e-t-t. And so it was a nice environment. We were both finishing our dissertations, and Judith and I had serial positions in the sociology department, and very nice treatment. Bob Nisbett said to me one day, “Ellis, teach on charisma.” In other words, don’t bother with this class preparation stuff. I didn’t listen to him as much as I should have, because that’s how you got over [to the students] in those days. Now you’ve got to bring a bit more to the class to get over. But Riverside had been dynamic and interesting and fun and lots of association with faculty in various departments around political issues. There were teach-ins, and literature was hot at the time, so hot and interesting and terrifying. There was a prospect of nuclear war. You don’t remember that. I don’t remember that. I don’t want to remember. But you know what I mean. You don’t wake up with the light going off over you. It’s in there somewhere. But it was real. For my kids, too. You know, you could die. Some morning could be the day you *die* from it. But it was a very exciting time.

16-00:29:05

And then I got there with a lot of hope. I was seeking my fortune, in a way, when I went to Old Westbury, and it wasn’t there, and it wasn’t there for some other people, because the year after I left—I only lasted a year, but one of the nicer groups of people there, a guy named Byron Youtz and some other people, left almost in a caravan and went and formed Evergreen [State College] up in Washington. They tried to get me to come up there, but I was settled here. I interviewed and I got the Berkeley position, so I chose to come, partly because it fit me, this marginal play, this marginal intellectual play between architecture and sociology. I never wanted a research career in sociology.

16-00:30:04

Wilmot: We’re going to have to open on the intersection of architecture and sociology when we pick up next time. I think we’re going to close now.

16-00:30:13

Ellis: Sure.

16-00:30:14

Wilmot: Is that okay?

16-00:30:15

Ellis: Do I have anything I finally want to say?

16-00:30:18

McGarrigle: Do you?

16-00:30:20

Wilmot: Way to pose your own question to yourself!

16-00:30:25

Ellis: Right. Well, it's something I feel hanging in the air, and it comes out of your questions about innovation. Not to be too facile with it, it's that issue between biography and history. You really do live and take shape in the times. Times, obviously, take shape around agglomerations of people who do something in time, but there is this transaction that's going on that's really quite palpable. I'm sure the Chinese [government leaders] are afraid of Fulan Gong for reasons of that. Where, you get a group of people who assemble and somehow have an opening onto another perspective that's not related to corporeal things, you have a problem.

16-00:31:42

There was a moment at Old Westbury where the students had made some other big trouble, and I think the whole riots at Yale had happened, and the Academic Senate of SUNY was meeting in Buffalo, I think. I think we were meeting up there. Maybe Albany. I can't remember. Maybe it's Albany. I was, as now makes sense, our senate representative. I never thought of myself that way at Old Westbury, but indeed I did play some administrative role there, and I was the senate representative for the campus to the statewide Academic Senate. And I would drive up with Watson, who was up at—we were talking of [James] Watson and Crich, right? He was a great guy, a wild man, wild man.

16-00:32:44

While we [the senators] were up there, we were summoned by the trustees to a meeting, and they warned us about us and the students and the trouble they were making, we were making. And so you had these men, and I remember sitting on the floor and taking my shoes off, *on purpose*. There was a treasurer of Standard Oil, and he's the one that gives the speech. The speech goes, "We know the Soviet Union is behind a lot of the student protest. We're serious, and you guys better watch it. This is getting dangerous, and we really care." My radical protest was to take my shoes off, show my socks. Watson actually farted in the meeting, on purpose, in order to violate them. He was wonderful. I loved this guy. He was the most irreverent man I've ever seen in my life. But it was, like, "Whoa! There's a clash happening here, and they're actually

saying these words.” I couldn’t imagine that happening here at Berkeley that way. But now we know what’s happening backstage, [at UC] don’t we?

16-00:34:11

Wilmot: Yes.

16-00:34:12

Ellis: Big time. But it was so up front and so definite, and I got a sense at that moment that what I thought was inventive and thoughtful and here we are, doing different things with ideas, actually it was a big threat to things, to authority in the East Coast context. And it clearly was felt that way here, too, except it was hidden, we didn’t know all the things until very recently.

16-00:34:45

Wilmot: Are you referring to Clark Kerr—

16-00:34:47

Ellis: Yes, right.

16-00:34:48

Wilmot: —being investigated for Communist affiliations, by the FBI?

16-00:34:51

Ellis: Well, and the actions taken against him and who was involved and the Regental involvement. Yes, right. So what am I saying? I just want the record to record that one of the actors in that time remembers it, finally, as a time of real potential change. I didn’t know—that an Aquarian Age wasn’t happening. I didn’t know. The silly hippies? At a certain level, I didn’t know that they didn’t know something at a higher level. I didn’t. It wasn’t attractive to me as something to do. I didn’t want to be anything that radically different, but I was certainly affected by the environment of that thinking, of that music, of the poetry, of the writings.

16-00:36:03

And so you talk innovation. I may have been decent on that stage. That’s how things work, I think, that you are enlivened by a stage. Or not. Or deadened by the stage. You lose your role. When I ask myself, what was I doing here at Berkeley? I think this was a very good stage for me, and I think I was good for Berkeley and it was good for me. [laughs]

16-00:36:41

McGarrigle: Well let’s end there because that’s where we want to start, with Berkeley.

[end of session]

Interview 9: September 30, 2003  
[begin audio file 17]

17-00:00:04

Wilmot: Russ, can you say a few words, please?

17-00:00:06

Ellis: Yes, I can say a few words, actually. The problem I've had all my life is saying too many words. And my granddaughter has the same problem, and my daughter.

17-00:00:28

Wilmot: This is interview number nine with Russell Ellis, Jr., Regional Oral History Office, Nadine Wilmot and Leah McGarrigle.

17-00:00:37

Ellis: You didn't say the date.

17-00:00:41

Wilmot: No, I didn't. Oh, goodness. It is September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2003. To begin, I just wanted to check in with you and see if there is anything you remember from our last interview, which was really about a month ago. Is there anything you wanted to add on?

17-00:00:59

Ellis: Sure, several things, and I won't take a lot of time with them, but as soon as I left—you had asked me how I got to Old Westbury. I'm astonished that I didn't remember. I was at Pitzer, and I had a hankering to seek my fortune, as they used to say in the fairy tales, and I got actually a call, from a fellow who had been a graduate student ahead of me and also, I think, acting assistant professor at UCLA, named Peter Orleans, with whom I edited that book, [*Race, Change and Urban Society, Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971*] and would I be interested in coming to this experimental place. He knew I was interested in that kind of thing, and so I said, "Gee, I'd be willing to be interviewed about it," and so forth. Anyway, I wound up going. I was looking forward to being a colleague of Peter's, but Peter actually left before I got there. He had an autistic son, a young child, and I think it just wasn't working out there. So that's how I got there. I was induced by Peter Orleans.

17-00:02:30

The other thing that struck me—these things—you know, they're pillars. They're important, but you sometimes forget just how much they influence everything. It was hugely important that my wife, Judith, stopped working. It wasn't traumatic, but it was a big change because the nature of our relationship was we're marching ahead together and doing this stuff, and she actually wanted to be close to our son, David.

17-00:03:11

I just want to say a little bit about the birth of my children because they're pivotal kinds of moments. When my son got married a few years ago, Judith said something that was really wonderful. In that little talk at that moment, she talked about what it was to be the mother of this small being. She said something like, sometimes she would be so in his world as this infant, whose little organic plumbing wasn't quite together yet, that she'd look up at me and it was like I was a giant from another world. She had entered his world.

17-00:04:08

What's interesting about that is I had a tremendously indelible experience when I first saw him after he was born. We had done Lamaze, but Kaiser in Fontana, which is where we went—we were in Claremont at the time—wouldn't let me be in the room. But I saw him, and I had this amazing, almost waking daydream image, and it was a pulse of water coming up through the center of some vast ocean that was his birth and just pushing up, and then pushing waves out from that. Because of his birth, I was the first of a series of waves, but I could find myself in a series of waves, the most recent in this case, being pushed toward shore, and then ultimately my wave would break and sink into the sand and the water would come back and be part of—you know, the pulse. So it was sort of like he had just displaced me and set me a little closer to my mortality, and he was the new rendition of life. It was wonderful. It was wonderful. I've actually given that image to some people to use, just kind of literature, because it's so specific and so attached to his birth. And it changed me. It made me older and more responsible. I had work to do, tending lots of things, including my involvement in this whole process. It wasn't just getting dinner or paying rent, I was more like a man there.

17-00:06:31

Wilmot:

Can you speak to that point?

17-00:06:32

Ellis:

Oh, gee whiz. Can I speak to that?

17-00:06:36

Wilmot:

Mostly how having children changed your life, how you approached your professional career and everything.

17-00:06:43

Ellis:

Yes. It really confounded my professional life. I congratulated my daughter, Zoë, recently on the good job of juggling that she had been doing, trying to manage love, buying a house, being a singer, working on being a person in the world, dealing with—you know, et cetera, because it is juggling to live. You have all of these things in this kind of society you have to do, and you've got to pay taxes, you've got to update licenses, and stuff just comes and comes and comes.

17-00:07:50

It increased a kind of practical and emotional juggling that I had to do. How do I pay attention the way I feel I want to, and should, to the happy evolution of a household and a family, and even my citizenship as a parent. That is, facing away from the family but being a good parent in the world, as well as being a good parent? How do I do all of that? And then, how do I then do all this other stuff? On top of which, I was juggling for myself that whole emotional issue, my own abandonment by my mother, and I was vowing not to do that. Not to just not to do it, but to be the opposite of that. So it made life harder. Children made life a lot harder. Plus the fact—children make life harder. [laughs]

17-00:09:12

Wilmot:

They're a lot of work, they're exhausting.

17-00:09:16

Ellis:

It is not easy. And then Zoë was born, and then the situation at Old Westbury, as I said last time, was ridiculously volatile. The world was volatile. The bombing of Cambodia. This college came apart. Now, it came apart in a way that was consonant with my own political commitments, and I was up for alternative education, and I was up for dealing with larger issues than just multiple-choice questions on this, that and the other, preparing kids for graduate school. And I guess it was good fortune that we were in Oyster Bay and we were in the gatehouse, and so the daily life was pretty stable for us, so there weren't those kinds of urban disruptions. And Zoë was born. So then we introduced another fragile being. This time I was there, and I was standing there—

17-00:10:23

Wilmot:

What year was she born?

17-00:10:24

Ellis:

She was born in '70, in Syosset. Later on people would ask her where she was born and she'd say Siberia. [chuckles] Syosset was very surprised to see Judith and me show up.

17-00:10:36

Wilmot:

Because you were an interracial couple?

17-00:10:40

Ellis:

Yes, right. It was Long Island.

17-00:10:41

Wilmot:

You said you were standing there?

17-00:10:44

Ellis:

Oh, I was standing there when—this is a nice story that takes us a little far afield, but I won't stay there long.

17-00:10:53

Wilmot: It's an important story.

17-00:10:54

Ellis: We did do Lamaze extensively, and the hospital was ready at Syosset, so we were in there, and I'm counting the pantings and the this and that and the other, and I say to the doctor, "Gee, she's moving pretty fast." And he said, "Oh, I don't think so. The baby would already be here if she was at that level." He says, "You're a professor. What do you profess?" And I said, "Right now, Lamaze." Because I'm thinking, 'Zoë's going to be born.' He wanders away, and Zoë is born. Almost as he's leaving, she comes out. That was kind of magical. She was—I tell her she was orange with green hair. It's pretty dramatic, standing right there as she comes—and I sang her name to her. I sang, "Zo-e." And she just looked right up at me. It was a wonderful moment.

17-00:12:08

Wilmot: She recognized your voice.

17-00:12:09

Ellis: Probably. I'd never thought of that. That's probably right. That's interesting.

17-00:12:15

Wilmot: And you managed to—

17-00:12:16

Ellis: Oh, the nurse. The nurse was there. They all worked out just fine.

17-00:12:20

Wilmot: You managed the labor without—did she manage to do it naturally?

17-00:12:23

Ellis: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, yes. Yes, it worked out fine. So those were good things, and that's a couple of things I wanted to mention.

17-00:12:32

Wilmot: In 1970, you were—

17-00:12:34

Ellis: Still in—I only stayed in Old Westbury for that '69-'70 academic year, and then the politics of the place just got so crazed.

17-00:12:47

McGarrigle: I'm interested in this issue of mortality, Russ. I think it's really important for us, as interviewers, to pay attention, in different ways, to life stages.

17-00:13:03

Ellis: Yes.

17-00:13:04

McGarrigle:

And since you raised it in following David's birth and this cycle that you've described, and you described it in a very wonderful and positive way, but I wonder if there are other ways to explore it. Mortality is a pretty intense—

17-00:13:23

Ellis:

Well, actually, I'll tell you something that turned out to be very useful for me. It wasn't entirely pleasant at the time, but I took peyote in graduate school. There was a lot of psychedelic stuff among the anthropologists. I mentioned Carlos Castaneda was in graduate school in anthropology at UCLA. And there was a whole wing of anthropologists who were actually exploring the world and the peoples they were dealing with, through some of these kinds of agents that preliterate peoples often use. Not just preliterate, but tribal peoples. It was a very long voyage, this particular experience on peyote, and I wasn't very good. I'm too controlling to take the big psychedelics. That's not what you want to be, so I couldn't do that stuff very much.

17-00:14:22

But I did at one point encounter death, and it was not a fearsome thing. It was—as a matter of fact, it *wasn't* anything. I somehow was able to locate the flow of being me—me, located here, whatever this is—in something larger that was continuous. It was so convincing that I haven't quite been as afraid of death since then as I was at that time, and I've been able to locate, with some others, who maybe didn't deal with mortality in that particular way. I've been able to locate what is fearsome. It's just a lot of pain. That's what a lot of people are afraid of, a miserable death. Somebody right now is—well, that's what people are afraid of, a miserable death, a lot. Some people are afraid of the unknown and the darkness on the other side, but that's much discussed in religion and philosophy and various psychologies.

17-00:15:52

But I've always had some kind of relationship with ends. Somebody used to make fun of me because I was worried that the sun was going to be burning, our sun was going to be burning out in several billion years. It still comes up for me. Like, then God, what are we doing? I told you that I had a suicidal moment in my undergraduate years. If I didn't, I'm telling you now, I did. I even wrote a letter to my parents, saying, "Look, don't worry. It's not even that bad." I didn't send it, but I got really down. But it was about coming to a philosophical entrapment, and it was about freedom and determination, something that's no longer faddish. Nobody frets about that stuff anymore, but it was very big in my life during that period, as an undergraduate.

17-00:16:57

The whole issue was understanding emotionally whether I was determined or not, whether I was just a billiard ball on an elaborate billiard table, where you could trace the vectors and this kind of stuff and know what you were going to do and so forth, and I really got lost in that and felt trapped, and felt somewhat determined by how things were set up in the world. And then one day I just



said, “Well, I’m going to make the decision to raise my hand,” and I found that quite satisfying, that I would live with the illusion that that was my choice, since I gave myself the instructions. I was in it. And I told you about my roommate, Esker Harris, where I was talking him out of his belief. It was right in that moment, in there, I said, “Don’t do that.” No, I didn’t say that. I just didn’t do it. I didn’t give myself instructions not to do it.

17-00:18:02

McGarrigle:

And this is probably a good time to come back to where we started, how you come to Berkeley.

17-00:18:08

Ellis:

[laughs]

17-00:18:11

McGarrigle:

Since you had told us your undergraduate stories earlier.

17-00:18:13

Ellis:

Right. Just a couple of other things before we get here: how I became a sociologist. I guess I’ve always had a thing with the rules. I’ve always pushed a little bit against the rules. And when I was a kid in the country, I used to have these thoughts that were just impossible, about God, just awful thoughts, and I knew He could see me having these terrible thoughts about Him. Somewhere along the way, I gave up on the notion of God. I said, “Okay, well, later. It’s not important.” But I’ve always done this, testing the rules. I really see myself as almost compulsive about knowing what the big and the little rules are and being able to fiddle with the edges of it. And that’s where I think John Stuart Mill was so big for me, *On Liberty*. It was like, ‘Oh, my God. Human beings make the rules.’ That was the insight, that this isn’t the way it has to be, this is the way it is. And then when you look at other societies of various sorts, there are lots of ways in which people are organized that isn’t the way we’re organized. It’s what the conservatives call “the relativism of the liberals.” But, of course, it is cultural relativism, and I loved that about the social sciences, not because that was the social science orientation, but when it looked out on the world and how people had been organized over the years, there were a few things that were fairly constant, but very few that were constant. People have various ways of organizing themselves.

17-00:20:07

And that opened up the past and the future and my prospects on how society could be. That’s why I was interested in experimental education a little bit, alternative education. “Things don’t have to be this way,” was the general idea. And also made me available to other ways of thinking about what a life of someone with a PhD in sociology could be. Now, I came along in times that were very impressive, that is, impressive on oneself. Lots of people made decisions to alter their lives during this period, people quite a bit older than me.

17-00:20:50

Anyway, so going to Old Westbury was a kind of choice that played with the idea of what a life might be. Coming to Berkeley was definitely a way of playing with the idea of what a life in academia might be. And I came here feeling exploratory. I came here feeling quite powerful, not so much intellectually, but I had a lot of confidence about what was possible to do in a classroom, and with colleagues, and in a curriculum, and in a classroom. I felt quite playful, but relevant, but relevant. I felt as though I'd found a home. A set of activities that fit me. I was right in some respects, and in many others, I wasn't.

17-00:22:14

Wilmot:

That would be a big point to pick up.

17-00:22:17

Ellis:

Yes. There are no tragedies here. I didn't come here really thinking that affirmative action would be such a big feature of my life, and determine why I made decisions, or what forces would be acting on me, and this sort of thing, but you can't predict these things.

17-00:22:37

Wilmot:

Russ, what did you hear about Berkeley before you came? You came in 1970, the year after the Third World strike. I was just wondering, what had you heard about Berkeley?

17-00:22:47

Ellis:

Now, remember, Troy had come in the sixties, and I was pretty aware, because he had been at Riverside with me. I owe a lot to Troy in terms of his staying alert to my prospects along with his. And so, as I mentioned to you, I got this big surprise, where I see Troy leading Eldridge Cleaver through some auditorium, and Troy is the faculty sponsor of Sociology 139X. "X" was the extension course. I hadn't thought of Troy that way. I thought of Troy as much more measured and careful, but nothing like that. And it's hard to avoid what was happening at Berkeley because I was involved in civil rights activities. I was just in the mix, so I stayed aware.

17-00:23:51

When I got here, I found what I termed to people who were living here "participation fatigue." [laughs] You know, the expectation that students would participate in their own learning and there'd be these reconstitutions. Do you guys remember "reconstitution?" There was a whole student Left, critical orientation toward the university, saying that it was too much tied to its rooms and its structures and so forth. But the whole FSM [Free Speech Movement] had exploded into this idea that the university should be reconstituted, and become more a part of the community. It took Wurster Hall [the College of Environmental Design] years to get back all the keys that faculty gave to students, to give them free access to things, to break down the walls of the community-university separation, to open it up, to open it up, to

make it available, to have classes in people's living rooms. Gosh, you must remember that.

17-00:25:01

McGarrigle: What percentage of faculty was involved in that concept?

17-00:25:06

Ellis: Big enough.

17-00:25:08

McGarrigle: It sounds like a huge potential for tension.

17-00:25:15

Ellis: For tension?

17-00:25:16

McGarrigle: For faculty, just to make an understatement.

17-00:25:19

Ellis: Well, it was! I mean, it's a tension that started with FSM, that ended some relationships, that separated some faculty from each other forever. There are people who still don't forgive Troy for having been a spokesperson in some way for the Third World Strike people.

17-00:25:44

McGarrigle: Who would those people be, Russ? What groups would those people be?

17-00:25:53

Ellis: You're talking groups rather than names.

17-00:26:01

McGarrigle: Either or.

17-00:26:02

Ellis: I think John Searle in Philosophy. I think he was disillusioned by what he saw as the excesses of the student radicals and the faculty who were their friends. Indeed, there was a mini-boomlet—all that so many pages of stuff I sent you on the big fight a few years ago around another Third World event, and Searle joined others in trying to get a vote of no confidence against [Chancellor] Bob Berdahl because of his settlement with the Third World graduate students on some of the issues attached to their sit-in. [narrator insert: see "Ethnic Studies Agreement Faces Faculty Challenge," Daily Californian, Nov. 28 1999 and "Academic Senate Supports Berdahl," Daily Californian, Dec. 3, 1999] And that was a re-array and, in a way, a reflection of some of the old [Third World Strike] battles, those who saw Brown Shirts and Nazi tendencies in the radical students. Anytime you have a movement, you do get that, and the issue is, by logical extension, do you need to worry that they really are going to become Nazis? And the answer is yes, you always have to worry about that. And then the issue is, when do you know the Nazis are actually coming? I'm carrying it too far.

17-00:27:19

But that split between those faculty [like Searle, and those] who, for various reasons, [maintained] an obliged engagement with the people who are new to the university, haven't had access—there are faculty, like myself, to an important extent, obligated to tend to the black and brown and underclass folks who weren't routinely here, who didn't grow up with polysyllabic living rooms, and paintings, and books, and the expectation of leadership at this level. And there are all kinds of other people who are faculty, who felt the necessity of being engaged, some of them simply New Deal people who grew up with the wonderful possibilities of the New Deal. Some folks, mainly living out versions of an old or new or emergent Marxist orientation, to a society where domination by class, position in the market and so forth wouldn't determine people's prospects as much as they had.

17-00:29:17

So it's hard to characterize the groups, but Berkeley remains a wonderful place to be because so many people's actions are all tangled up in their thinking, especially in the humanities, but not only in the humanities. I've really enjoyed being here, because of these tensions actually, in some way.

I'm very depressed right now about the nation, because the hostility to the New Deal programs that has been lurking in the background is really come to the fore now. I feel our side is losing. Anyway, too far afield.

17-00:30:06

Wilmot:

I think that's a marvelous insight you had, though, that people's actions are tangled up in their thinking, and I just wanted to return—

17-00:30:14

Ellis:

Well, let me just say something, though. I think that's always true. Remember, I mentioned my interest in sociology of knowledge, how your ideas are attached to your social location, whether you want it that way or not. I think it's a question of how aware you are of the meaningful entanglement of your beliefs, your philosophical proclivities, your political actions, your votes, your choice of material in the classroom. It's a question of awareness. There's always a relationship. There's always an entanglement, but the university and the history of the university I think has allowed a lot of people to believe that you can make the separation, and there need not be a connection between what you do formally in your field and what your beliefs are.

17-00:31:22

I don't want to sound superior here, but there is some way in which you can surrender to the understanding that you're an actor in the world who is guided by prejudices. I think this is a huge insight to know that you are guided by prejudices. I don't know if I said this before, but I got something for everybody. I got some dislikes—you give me a [social] category, I can tell you what's wrong with them. And that is a struggle every day, to keep myself reflecting on my own origins in this society and who I am, what I look like—I

used to say in my classroom all the time, “My thick lips and my kinky hair and what that presents to the world, and how that creates me in terms of people’s response to me, that’s always a keel that keeps me a little straight about what I got for Mexicans [raps table], for Jews [raps table], for Chinese [raps table].” You know what I mean? Or for rich people, or irritating poor people or whatever. There’s always a moment when I say [to myself] “Hey, man, you know, you just got to be cool. Remember who you are and how you got here, and just do a little role taking. Who are they? What are they going through?”

17-00:33:05

I think a lot of folks who become faculty aren’t necessarily filtered through that experience, and this is what I know about a lot of the kids who are coming through, who are new to this. Like, when I was assistant dean in environmental design, people couldn’t figure out, “Why is Ellis taking this job?” Partly because I could see a lot of these black kids and brown kids, they were zombies. They’d come here, they had never in their lives been around so many white people. I remember somebody joking about one kid, said, “Can’t you get through a day without going to Russ Ellis’s office?” And the answer was no. The kid needed reassurances—this was a black kid—that he wasn’t falling apart, and [he needed to ask someone black] “What do I do?”

17-00:33:57

This is an intense environment, where you’re weighed in the balance at every level, everybody. It’s an intensely competitive, self-regarding environment. At Tien’s retirement party I said, “This is a place where even the winners have scar tissue.” [laughs] You know? So I got a little bit—I got lost—not lost, I mean, I feel okay. I had some cute ideas, some good ideas. I liked my ideas. I enjoyed [playing in] the sandbox of this place. But there are many things that detracted me or distracted me from doing what you sort of do when you come here, which is you become a truly significant member of your field. I think that’s the kind of place it should be also.

17-00:34:59

Wilmot:

A follow-up question for you—

17-00:35:01

Ellis:

Sure.

17-00:35:01

Wilmot:

—which is just going back to something you said a while ago. I didn’t realize that you were here in 1969.

17-00:35:08

Ellis:

I came in ’70.

17-00:35:09

Wilmot:

But I didn’t realize that you were here when you said, watching 139X, the class.

17-00:35:14

Ellis: No, I saw Troy on television leading Eldridge Cleaver up—and Judith and I were saying, “Hey, what’s Troy doing?”

17-00:35:22

Wilmot: Did you get any kind of advice from Troy or other faculty members here about what kind of sandbox you were entering? What were the dynamics?

17-00:35:33

Ellis: No. No, it was obvious. It was obvious. And that’s my own language. I don’t know anybody else who saw Berkeley that way. [laughs]

17-00:35:39

Wilmot: I appropriated it. I thought it was such a good way of actually—

17-00:35:43

Ellis: Right, and that’s why it’s not a good way to look at Berkeley, if you’re going to charge to the top of your field.

17-00:35:49

McGarrigle: There’s just this tension between this idea that you came to play and what you just described, which is an intensely competitive environment, and I’m interested in, over the course of the rest of our time together, not just today, exploring that.

17-00:36:08

Ellis: Yes.

17-00:36:09

McGarrigle: This is the first time I’ve heard you say so clearly how intensive it was in terms of the competition. It’s not that this information is surprising to me, it’s just interesting to hear you talk about it and to think about, given all the pressures and all the things that you’ve described today about what was going on, various faculty and being a minority faculty member and so on, surviving that kind of competition and succeeding in it, and that’s what I want to talk about periodically. I think it’s important not to gloss over it.

17-00:36:52

Ellis: Uh-huh, sure.

17-00:36:54

McGarrigle: I mean, you were a competitive athlete. Was there some language you applied, some of your desires in competition athletically to this other, new area, or is it completely an unrelated set of circumstances?

17-00:37:15

Ellis: I wouldn’t be able to describe to you the relationship, how competitiveness transfers to the setting. I think I am a competitive person. I’m a bit astonished, in retrospect, at how arrogant I have been, how wonderful I think I am. [laughs] No, no, no, not wonderful. That’s exactly wrong. It’s an invidious thing. I seem, as I look back over my values in music—I’ll just take an

example that's very apparent. Carolyn Crawford will understand this reference. I have no idea where this came from, but I thought T-Bone Walker's music was low class. Now, I didn't get that from anybody in my house. T. Bone Walker electrified the guitar very early and played wonderful blues. Now, how I got to a place where I was dismissive of that music—and I was growing up as it was happening—I have no idea. I sure don't feel that way now, and haven't felt that way in many of my adult years. But who was I?

17-00:38:56

Jazz. My gift to my son is the admission of while I was really into music, I had nothing going at all for jazz. And John Mayshack, my high school friend that I mentioned to you, who wanted me to listen and understand, I just thought that was just sort of a weakness. But I really didn't understand it. That's for sure, I didn't understand jazz. But also I was doing something else. I don't know what the hell I was doing.

17-00:39:33

McGarrigle:

So these students come to you and you're supporting them.

17-00:39:37

Ellis:

Yes.

17-00:39:38

McGarrigle:

You talked about the importance of supporting them and being in the role that you were in and how critical that was and how there were people who needed to see you every day, so there was a way in which they are going through this incredibly competitive experience. You are *also* going through this competitive experience.

17-00:39:56

Ellis:

Yes.

17-00:39:56

McGarrigle:

But at a faculty level.

17-00:39:57

Ellis:

Yes. I can tell you exactly what. Now, to deal with the competitive—absolutely competitive—I didn't have it right. I didn't do it right. I should have—for example, my promotion process, my elevation to professor was slow, painful a couple of times, and truncated. I kind of dropped it at the end. But yes, I cared a *lot* about having good ideas, and I listened carefully to how other colleagues and people in other places were thinking about various areas in the field I was in. I thought I had a very special angle on things.

17-00:40:49

What I did with the students a lot was almost like—I was a sociologist in some respects, on behalf of their demystifying the place. Okay. So, I had a student, a young black man, and he wrote a paper. Every faculty member has this experience all the time. You look at it and say, "*Oh, my God!* Now where

do I begin? What do I say?" What I did was I gave the paper a bad grade, lots of marginal notes, and then I—I only did this once here, at Berkeley. Staying as close as possible to what he was trying to say, I rewrote the paper and gave it to him. I didn't talk about the paper. I showed it to him, but we didn't go over it. I said, "Look at this. It's not my exact words you need to pay attention to, but when somebody asks a question to generate a paper from you, they want you to explore. They want you to take the ideas that you've gotten and use them. That's what happens here. This is not a multiple choice; this is a paper."

17-00:42:34

He was entranced. He never really quite got it, but he showed the paper, as it happens, to a bunch of other students, who said, "Aw, man, I wish somebody would do that for me." You know, this kind of stuff. But what I was trying to do, basically, was resocialize him to what you do when you're here. A lot of kids—my notes from Fontana, my letters to my father? They make me weep to think of—I know kids who were my age who were so far—who were years ahead of me at that time, that I saw later, who wrote papers at the same age I was writing that self-pitying dreck, you know? These little garbagey bits and pieces, at age eleven and so forth. People my age were writing real papers. I've seen them. And I wonder, "God, what an amazing thing that I could wind up here doing this, given how far behind I was." Some people have been in school since they're born, in a school that prepares them for something like this. So that was my idea.

17-00:43:54

My task was to say, "Okay, let me help you know what this is, what kind of place this is, what happens here." So I was competitive on their behalf, too, in some ways. And it was racial. It was racial a lot. I'm just the right age to—do you remember the old language? "Race man," out of the literature. I wasn't—nobody could call me a race man, but I am certainly locked into the kind of [equity] thing that Ward Connerly is trying to get rid of, people who think about that, who think in those categorical terms.

17-00:44:47

I will die without sensing a color-blind society. Now, it's partly because I can never be color-blind. I can be fair, I can be open, I can be generous, but it's before a prospect of an emergent world, where I know how I got here and I know who's not here, who needs help, who doesn't. The reason the world is sad [bells strike noon, Campanile carillon concert begins] right now is there is that the doors are closing. The doors are closing.

17-00:45:25

McGarrigle:

It took us out of our chronology, but I think those are really important ideas. I'd like to come back to them.

17-00:45:32

Ellis:

Okay.



- 17-00:45:33  
McGarrigle: Also your work with the students, which you just began to describe, and what that looked like over time, in your role as vice chancellor.
- 17-00:45:43  
Ellis: Sure. I have to be a little careful because this is me talking about me and my relationship. I'm not sure students would talk about me the same way at all, and I know that a lot of minority students thought my talk was too fancy and pretentious and so forth. I wasn't simply loved because I was going to be the inductor into this world.
- 17-00:46:20  
Wilmot: When you say "talk," do you mean—
- 17-00:46:22  
Ellis: The way I talk and the conceptualizing. You see, as you remember—I'm sure I said earlier, the university was heaven for me because the very indistinct kind of talk I did earlier in my life was rewarded. I mean, I loved concepts. I understood what that was about. I had a wonderful time. Even though I wasn't a particularly good student or cared that much as an undergraduate at UCLA—I was there as a jock, that's why I was there—I loved the place. I was successful in the sandbox of college. It was a place for me.
- 17-00:47:08  
Wilmot: I want to ask you about the department when you came.
- 17-00:47:11  
Ellis: To UCLA?
- 17-00:47:12  
Wilmot: No, actually.
- 17-00:47:14  
Ellis: Here. Oh, okay, Architecture, right, uh-huh.
- 17-00:47:15  
Wilmot: You were assistant professor—
- 17-00:47:17  
Ellis: Indeed.
- 17-00:47:18  
Wilmot: —of behavioral science and architecture?
- 17-00:47:20  
Ellis: Yes, I forget what the exact title is, but it's on my CV. It's there.
- 17-00:47:24  
Wilmot: And I want to just first ask you a little bit about the department here. What were the poles? What was here in the Department of Architecture when you

came? Who were the prominent personalities, if there were such? What were the schools of thought or disciplines around architecture, existing?

17-00:47:48

Ellis:

What I got inducted into was a department that was kind of famous for wandering adrift into special kinds of interests, away from *design*, right? If I were to say, “What university, in the main, did not get lost?” it would be a place like Princeton. It’s been about form, even though they have one of probably the most important sociologists ever in the field who worked there, a guy named Bob [Robert] Gutman. Berkeley was famous for its interest in social and political issues in architecture and planning. The history of a lot of this is being written right now, and I’m actually not involved in doing that, and that’s fine.

17-00:49:00

But William and Catherine Bauer Wurster, when they came to Berkeley and established the College of Environmental Design, didn’t call it planning, didn’t call it architecture, but they evolved the place, Environmental Design, that tried to generalize the phenomenon of planning the built environment, and the natural environment, and the idea that the departments of planning, landscape architecture, and, then, design, would find their linkages in one common place, and left the Naval Architecture Building over here, and they built their world over there, and it was supposed to integrate these fields.

17-00:49:55

So when I got here—God, I’m going to forget the guy’s name I replaced. He was a psychologist, Richard—oh, I’ll remember later. [Richard W. Seaton] We’ll make a note of that, okay? I need to. Anyway, I think people like Roselyn Lindheim, who was here, was probably the most influential person in my being hired. And I think also Roger Montgomery in Planning, an architect, but in Planning, maybe to a lesser extent, but certainly Roger Montgomery.

17-00:50:48

McGarrigle:

And in what way would that have been, Russ, that they knew of your work or—?

17-00:50:53

Ellis:

No, I had no work. I had no work.

17-00:50:56

McGarrigle:

How would they have known of you?

17-00:51:01

Ellis:

They hired *me*.

17-00:51:04

McGarrigle:

Because they had met you?

17-00:51:05

Ellis: Yes, from my interview. I came, and I think I recorded this, and I talked to them about life on the farm, and how Uncle Eddie worked with the pigs.

17-00:51:16

Wilmot: You didn't tell us.

17-00:51:18

Ellis: Oh, I didn't? It was strange. I had come here. I was interviewing at Santa Cruz, too. I actually wound up not interviewing at Santa Cruz, but there was an opening at Santa Cruz, and Troy had alerted me to this possibility here [at UC Berkeley]. They had seen me in a seminar. They invited me to lecture to a seminar of sociologists, criminologists, and architects and planners. It tells you how open the world was back then. It really was. It was an interesting time, very interesting time. Anyway, I gave the seminar. I have no idea how it worked out. No, I have no idea what I did. I was engaged. I mean, I did bring myself to the enterprise of talking to these people about how you could look at the environment and society. I had been thinking about this through my work with Carl Hertel back at Pitzer, the Communal Organization of Space, a collegiate course at Claremont Colleges. And I felt prepared. I felt interesting, to the enterprise, what they were trying to do. William Bill Wheaton, I understand, wasn't very—he was the dean. He wasn't very impressed, but he was always very kind to me subsequently.

17-00:52:58

Wilmot: How did you understand that? Did you hear about that?

17-00:53:03

Ellis: As you're around a while, people tell you.

17-00:53:06

Wilmot: What your hiring process was?

17-00:53:08

Ellis: Yes, right. The place actually is pretty good about not revealing too much promotion things. It's pretty secretive about the promotion process, but you hear things. Anyway, so that's how I got here. They evidently interviewed several people. Also there was a fellow, senior professor, named Jesse Reich, who was an artist who had been here since 1946, R-e-i-c-h-e-c-k, I think. Anyway, we can get the exact spelling.

17-00:53:51

And some of the other, younger folks here were interested in me. There was a bias built into the place that was a result of the importance of a man named Christopher Alexander. Very important name. Was working on something called the pattern language. He's an internationally renowned architectural theorist. And there were people around him, like Sarah Ishikawa and Sandy Hirshen, and they were already architects actively involved in trying to take social ideas into their architectural work. That was a school or an emphasis

around Chris Alexander that I think was open to me and my particular ideas, for what they were worth at the time.

17-00:55:13

The ground was really quite nicely tilled for me. The other thing that I think was important about—oh, I think Claire Cooper [Marcus] was here then. Yes, she predated me. She was in Landscape at the time, a planner, very important planner in the social area, very bold. So the setting was there. There was no question but that my race mattered. The department was concerned about affirmative action and diversifying the faculty. There was a black architect here named Ken Simmons, who was *hugely* important in Oakland. I'm sure you've run into discussions of him. He, I'm sure, was influential in the process of my getting here, in terms of there had to have been a vote at some point, the faculty. That's the way these things go.

17-00:56:29

And I think the other thing that probably made me palatable to the enterprise, which is a complex one, is that I didn't come in with an experimental emphasis or quantitative emphasis. I mentioned my interest in the whole ethnographic way of getting information and studying communities, my dissertation, right? It's the way I did things in the field, was problematic and remains problematic. How much can you borrow from anthropology in a field called sociology, which thinks of itself—thought and still does think of itself as more headed toward an experimental science, where you can know things so very concretely, in a community of knowing, where there are communal rules for what constitutes evidence and proofs and so forth.

17-00:57:36

The field had thought it wanted science; it wanted proofs of things. How do you know what kind of space makes for community? That sounds simple-minded, but that's still around as an issue. And, of course, if you're going to use social information or data, you would like to know how you're going to make a difference, how you could be confident that this difference existed or was makeable, practically, in the profession. I never thought that that would be the way to go. It just didn't make any sense to me at all that this was about proofs of anything. It was really apparent to me right away that architecture was a profession and an art and a craft, and the idea was to crowd into the thinking of the practitioners in the profession to get them thinking about other things, like what people do. [laughs]

17-00:58:41

Get them looking at people. And I would argue, after trying to drench architecture students in various kinds of readings of what they're saying—“Okay, now, when you go to the studio and you pick up your pen, I want you to forget it all.” Knowing full well they couldn't forget it, but knowing that you're not going to make a difference by remembering every piece of evidence and information and all your observations, as you try to guide your pen on the paper. It's an art. It's a creative process, and what you've got to do

is use what you know, use your exposures to information, your talent, the setting of the school you're in, the culture of the department that you're in and the tendencies of it, to make something that works for people who are not you—that is, who didn't go to that kind of church, didn't go to that kind of school, didn't dwell that way, didn't celebrate that way, didn't eat that way. That is, how do you become somebody you're not, and how do you learn who they are and what they want? And to what extent can you balance that in trying to make housing, or a house, or a church, or a school, or whatever?

17-01:00:12

And then the extra “how to,” “how do you?” How do you do that gently, without a heavy hand, without obviousness. Sandy Hirshen, who is a close friend, designed some housing out of some importantly rendered industrial kind of cardboard, and he made migrant housing out of it. That became—I don't know how he thinks about that now, but it was a very serious political problem at the time because it took for granted the position of the migrant workers, right? In other words, mobile, biodegradable housing for a mobile, biodegradable population. Sandy's values are unimpeachable, but he was trying to solve a problem, as somebody did not so many years ago for the homeless in San Francisco, right?

17-01:01:16

Wilmot:

Yes, that's what architects do.

17-01:01:17

Ellis:

Right, right. And they do. The issues—and this was a real tension forever. “I didn't say there should be prisons,” says the architect, “so what I'm going to do, in the spirit of what you say, Professor Ellis, is make it the most humane prison possible.” Well, that's even political. And there's a movie about it, and there's this black woman looking at the camera and she said—where's the prison? Pleasanton, or somewhere—she says, “How am I going to leave this and go back to my rat-infested house?”

17-01:01:51

Wilmot:

Did you assign [Michel] Foucault to your class?

17-01:01:54

Ellis:

Oh, yes, yes, yes. Seminars mainly, yes, pieces of Foucault, yes.

17-01:01:59

Wilmot:

I'm thinking of that in relation to the prison. Let's stop for one minute, okay?

17-01:02:04

Ellis:

Sure, sure.

[begin audio file 18]

18-00:00:04

Ellis:

When I came to Berkeley, there was a group of architects in town called People's Architecture, and they had a commitment to openness, to use, to

delivering environments to people who did not often have choices, to provide more choice in terms of altering environments. Much of the idea was to have impact on project housing and community projects such that they served the people better. This was all sort of reflective of what was happening at the time: SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], the Port Huron statement, participatory democracy. Every profession had experienced the critique of its failure to pay attention to ordinary people. Medicine was an early one, not so much in terms of the professional work around diagnosis, and this, that and the other, but attention to people and communities, bedside manner, and a lot of these things. Roselyn Lindheim was very big in this field, rethinking the possibilities. [She] did a children's hospital at Stanford that was very important.

18-00:01:49

People's Architecture had a few projects around town where they convinced people to take down their back fences and share a larger, more park-like space. The preamble I didn't insert here is I wasn't important in the generation of the field, and I don't think I provided, in international terms, any particular rudder in the field. I think probably—yes, the fault lines were there, because architecture always wants to run to its art more than other things. It hires people who know about structures and soils and this kind of stuff, so it would do this in terms of consultants rather than bringing people into the kitchen to design the stuff, design the meal of architecture.

18-00:03:20

But anyway, when I came along, it was happening, and it was happening internationally. It was very big. I came along at the time where this whole social emphasis was on the agenda. In case you don't know, Ralph Nader was very important here. The consumer movement was very big in reviving this whole participatory democratic theme in the country. Here were corporations designing cars that kill people, that don't serve them, and that pay no attention to the consumers and their needs. This whole consumer emphasis invaded education, planning, architecture, medicine, law. Thelton [Henderson] was in East Palo Alto—do you remember?—doing—

18-00:04:10

McGarrigle:

There was the War on Poverty.

18-00:04:11

Ellis:

Yes, the War on Poverty was related to stuff that you, I think, heard when you interviewed Norvel [Smith]. You did interview Norvel. But anybody else who was involved in the poverty program. So there was a lot of ferment.

18-00:04:31

McGarrigle:

People like Roz Lindheim and Ken Simmons were architects.

18-00:04:37

Ellis:

Trained as architects.

18-00:04:38

McGarrigle: Trained as architects, and she also did senior—she was very instrumental in getting On Lok started. And this whole adult day help movement. Were there other people who came from your vantage point in sociology who were doing what you were doing?

18-00:04:53

Ellis: Doing what I was doing?

18-00:04:55

McGarrigle: Yes.

18-00:04:56

Ellis: In the department.

18-00:05:00

McGarrigle: How did they create a position for you as a sociologist?

18-00:05:07

Ellis: It had been created before I got there, and as a matter of fact, when I arrived, the department had created and had shepherded through the university process a PhD program in architecture, and I was brought there to be one of the anchors in the social emphasis in the PhD program, which is extraordinary, a PhD program in a professional program like that.

18-00:05:41

McGarrigle: And did that exist?

18-00:05:44

Ellis: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. And we have lots of people out there. It still exists. The tradition in history is clearer, right? There's a more disciplinary history in this field that wasn't as clear, and part of my job was to help that become clearer and help design it with others. I thought we did a pretty interesting job for a while, anyway, yes. It involved much closer relationships with other departments: history, material culture and anthropology, and the folks in those areas. But that's really what I was there to do, to help with that program. That was a major part of my induction here. So the fact that I had a PhD mattered a lot, because, see, for a lot of older faculty, the professional degree was a bachelor of architecture degree, a B Arch, which was in the history of the area, a five-year degree, which gave you the professional training, then, to go out and get licensed. This was true, actually, in engineering and other places, too, that a five-year bachelor's led to a professional degree. A lot of folks who were here at the time—not a lot, but several—were B Arch folks who had been in the field a long time and had ideas and done things. That's why I was brought here.

I've forgotten where we were going with that.

18-00:07:35

McGarrigle:

I was interested, and Nadine brought this out earlier, about your coming here as a sociologist when people like Roz Lindheim, who were doing—maybe we'll call it experimental or people's architecture—already were architects, and how that came to be. But you've explained that.

18-00:07:58

Ellis:

Yes, I think I was here to help lend some academic credibility and some guidance to not only the PhD program, but Berkeley was one of the first places, if not the first, to drop the B Arch as a degree. It went to a bachelor of architecture degree, a BA in architecture, and then three levels of master's degree. B Archs who had been out in the world for a while, practicing, could come to what was called an Option One program, which was a one-year program of learning and practice and exposure, and go out with an M Arch degree, a master's of architecture. Then there was a three-year program for people with a bachelor's in anything, who had decided they wanted to become architects. That was a really interesting program. You got poets and all kinds of folks who decided they wanted to do architecture and want to take three years learning all kinds of things they hadn't been exposed to before.

18-00:09:23

Wilmot:

Also, I'm wondering, was the architecture department very collegial? How would you describe the culture of that department in terms of how colleagues related to each other?

18-00:09:34

Ellis:

It was riven. There were fights. Yes, abiding dislikes. There are people who I will not name who hadn't spoken to each other in twenty years, but that's academia. [laughs] There were folks with very, *very* strong opinions in all directions. A lot of the older faculty, and this would be true in any field, had lived life. I'll take someone like Joe Esherick, who comes from—came, he's now dead—from Philadelphia, a high-born lad, wonderfully educated for real and by life. He told me at one point that one of the most fearsome times in his life was being on an ammunition ship, a ship loaded with ammunition that was being bombarded by Japanese kamikaze planes. I asked him about his experience, and I've tried to imagine that. That must have been awful. But very broad, interesting man, such breadth, completely unhurried man, which always got my attention. How did he get like that? How can you take the world so much for granted that it's going to sit around and wait for you to finish your sentence? I was hurrying to get my sentences finished. Wonderful man. I just loved him.

18-00:11:18

Then Roz. These are people who came at an earlier period but were educated by life and practice and had chosen their values and were working their professional work in terms of values. Joe used to say things like—you know, we'd talk about postmodern architecture or something. He'd say, "Aw, somebody sneezed and everybody caught the cold." You know, "It's a fad,"



he'd say. But open people, big open people. I always felt that it would be good if there was always a cohort that came out of every field in the world, of people who got kind of big and wise and broad and flexible. We had quite a few of those.

18-00:12:15

There was a crazy guy, Don Olson. He was one of the co-architects of the building [Wurster Hall] with Esherick. Intellectual. Autodidact. But not really, because a lot of folks who went to school before me, and people my age, actually got fairly decent educations and knew some stuff but were not particularly disciplined students of things outside of their field, which is perfectly natural. But it was a great place. I enjoyed it.

18-00:12:57

Wilmot:

How would you describe the kind of political poles of the department, if there was a dynamic like that? What was the lay of the land in terms of power?

18-00:13:08

Ellis:

Um—

18-00:13:10

Wilmot:

I know I'm asking you to go back—

18-00:13:12

Ellis:

That's okay. That's okay. That's good. Let me do my—

18-00:13:18

Wilmot:

And maybe another way to ask the question is, what kinds of issues caused the department to erupt?

18-00:13:24

Ellis:

Uh-huh, uh-huh. A lot of them were curricular, how open, how flexible, should the curriculum be? Should we be in this business of—the social business? A lot of it is not related so much to the social but how tight should the curriculum be. But this was not peculiar to Berkeley. You remember Strawberry College and the experiment here? What's his name? Come on, you guys. Oh, God! Well, take note of it. It was an alternative college. It was set up here at Berkeley by—two very important faculty members. Oh, God.

18-00:14:24

Wilmot:

We'll come back to that.

18-00:14:26

Ellis:

Okay. But the times were about the openness of curriculum, so that was a big fight. I had a huge fight with someone who was my advocate, Jesse Reichel, because he said there shouldn't be grades, and I just really didn't agree with that. I thought that was part of the contract. People needed an estimation of their performance in the setting to know how they were doing and so forth, and maybe we could change the way we did it, but I thought people *did* want an evaluation of their work, and so we had a *really* big fight very early about

that. I thought that was irresponsible, and I'm one who is attracted to alternative colleges. [laughs]

18-00:15:08

Wilmot: You had also been through a certain experience at Old Westbury.

18-00:15:12

Ellis: Yes, yes, yes. And I was having students writing me letters from there, saying—

18-00:15:17

Wilmot: “Had you been giving grades...?”

Ellis: Exactly. You know, from medical school, saying, “Had you been giving grades when So-and-so was at Old Westbury, roughly where would you have located them?” Because the world wants to know.

Let's see, the conflicts. There was a big one that was on the campus as well—how much community and how much university. African American studies was just extricating itself from an entanglement in some very radical notions of what a Third World college would be like. And many people in the community felt the university had promised that there would be a place where unschooled but terribly informed people about the nature of the social order and black people and social change, would come in and educate the uneducated folks, the unwise educated folks, to what was happening in the real world, using university, as FSM themes contended, to solve problems and get out of its hermetic little bookish modes, serving the corporate world and so forth and so on. That was big everywhere—how much inside and how much outside.

18-00:16:51

A profession has special obligations, in a way, right? Because it is about service to the world, so that was a very important distinction. I mentioned Sarah Ishikawa. There was Mary Camario, who came later, but Ken Simmons [and Claude Stollen, and Sandy Hirshen] actually were part of the formation of a sub-emphasis in architecture called community design, which was a very important group of people for a while. It tended to be regarded by some of the architects as “those folks,” those political folks. But in fact, there was a lot of work that got done. You know, the Byron Rumford housing down here at Ashby and Sacramento, on the southwest corner—that was designed by a man named Jim Van. He was a lecturer, a black man who was a lecturer in the Department of Architecture, a very nice man, a very thoughtful man.

18-00:17:56

I can't say that that design particularly reflects anything that came out of the community design emphasis, but he was a very, very alert man to some of the stuff that he was seeing in the community, and relating that to who the students were, and attracting students to that kind of work, rather than their being—their working—longing to work in the corporate realm or working for

the big companies like Skidmore [Owings & Merrill]. It was déclassé for a lot of people at Berkeley to even think about working for big architectural firms. Some of them worked for small firms and had a do-good orientation to things, and also wound up making some money as well, but you weren't even supposed to aspire in some ways to that kind of thing. But that was true of a lot of lawyers, probably your era. There were a lot of folks who saw themselves as not going into the big firms but saw themselves doing some community work and—

18-00:19:05

McGarrigle: Legal aid.

18-00:19:09

Ellis: Right, right. Let's see, what else? There was a very significant gay emphasis in the faculty, in the department, and it was interesting. It was not consequential in any practical ways, but it was very clear, very prominent, and important leadership. An amazingly wonderful man, a big fan of mine, who was very supportive of me was Spiro Kostof. Oh, just—you know, just so interesting and so broad.

18-00:19:58

Wilmot: He wrote that wonderful book. [*A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*]

18-00:20:01

Ellis: Oh, yes. He's just an open maw for information on everything, with a natural proclivity to include the social and—oh, God, just a fantastic man.

18-00:20:16

Wilmot: He was a supporter of yours in which instances?

18-00:20:22

Ellis: I'm pretty sure he helped me get *Architects' People* published at Oxford [University Press]. And I think he liked my thinking. I think he found it useful, not in any documentable way, but to the extent he was paying attention to me at all. But a supporter. I always felt supported by him.

18-00:20:47

Wilmot: I have a question. You're describing a department that just sounds so kind of progressive in some ways.

18-00:20:51

Ellis: Well, it was in some ways. Partly because it didn't have certain standard biases. A friend of mine, Herb Strauss, is in chemistry, and he once described to me what happened when one of his colleagues got a Nobel Prize, and Herb was telling me some of the tension in the department about it, because some of his colleagues regarded that work as kind of hippie work, the chemistry as kind of woo-woo, hippie, fuzzy. And when disciplines—you get trained by people, and the fact of the matter is, your committee is looking over your shoulder, right?—when you're doing your work. In some ways, those eyes

never go away. [laughs] And you're always saying, "Is this any good?" And I think you're self-selected to that involvement. They work in teams! They pursue projects in teams, especially in the sciences and sometimes in the humanities, not so often. I mean in the sciences they work in teams. There's a lot of teamwork, and there are themes, there are theories, there are departures, there are rivulets of research. Some of it is backfill research, in terms of the paradigm of the work. Once you're working inside the cell and you're explaining evolution in terms of sub-cellular stuff and you're talking about the African mother, there's a whole bunch of people over here, who have been digging bones for a lot of years, who are *really irritated* by what's going on over there. Or you contend that dinosaurs were birds, and you think you have the evidence, and someone spent all their life on another track—you know, you got competition, you got issues and so forth. There are always these kinds of things.

18-00:23:17

In architecture there was nothing so big, because there is no disciplinary base in architecture. It's not like there's a natural philosophy or anything. There are some names, and human beings have *always* built, *must* build, *must make habitat*, must feed themselves, must protect themselves from the weather, and dah dah dah dah dah dah dah dah, must bring later grace or bring room for the gods or the spirits that are sustaining their safety, whatever. There's work and there's good architecture about it, churchly architecture, for sure. But we didn't have disciplinary fights there.

18-00:24:01

And when it all comes down to it, there's always the issue of building something, and the work can close back down around the building of something, which isn't so easy. It sounds facile, but it's not anymore, partly because the people who are building often are corporations and they know what they want, and they know what the square footage is, and they know how long the rugs are that have to get in the elevators, and so forth, and they use architects more for cosmetic purposes than for design purposes. But the department was riven: the Chris Alexander wing, the community design wing and so forth. There were some real tense battles there.

18-00:24:43

I didn't finish the whole gay thing. The reason it was important to me—I don't think I've ever been particularly homophobic. I've never been all that comfortable, but it was very nice to be in a department where there was this whole taken-for-granted attitude toward personal choices. It felt good to me, too. However, there wasn't a big interest in affirmative action, for example. It's one of the reasons I left. Not escaping them, but moving toward a set of activities that would be where I could get something done that made me feel better about myself in relation to doing good for black and brown and other folks who didn't have access.

18-00:25:38  
Wilmot: Can I ask you a question?

18-00:25:40  
Ellis: Sure.

18-00:25:40  
Wilmot: No, actually, you look like you're about to say something else about that.

18-00:25:42  
Ellis: No, that's all right.

18-00:25:43  
Wilmot: One is that you had said that race was a factor in your hiring and bringing you here. Did I hear you—?

18-00:25:50  
Ellis: Oh, I'm sure.

18-00:25:51  
Wilmot: Was that ever something that was communicated to you directly, indirectly, spoken, unspoken by your colleagues?

18-00:25:57  
Ellis: I don't know, but it wasn't necessary. It was the nature of the times, and I think I knew that I brought that as a value that they wanted. [chuckles]

18-00:26:06  
Wilmot: Mm-hm. You knew that was part of it.

18-00:26:08  
Ellis: Yes, right, I knew that was part of my attractiveness, that I would be diversifying the faculty, both in terms of my sociological interests and my blackness, yes.

18-00:26:20  
Wilmot: I wanted to ask you a question, which is I'm wondering if you could share with me and kind of trace out in a timeline or just trace out your experiences around being promoted and seeking tenure.

18-00:26:34  
Ellis: The tenure was easy. That was funny.

18-00:26:38  
Wilmot: What year did that happen?

18-00:26:39  
Ellis: Oh, I don't remember. It happened early. I came in '70. Maybe '73, '74. What's the date of that?

18-00:26:49  
Wilmot: This is 1971.

18-00:26:52

Wilmot:

Okay. What happened was, *Race, Change, and Urban Society* I think was out and reviewed just about the time that—oh, '71 is early, I don't know how this worked. But I did this without thinking of the department, working with Peter Orleans on this, and enjoying it. It was a very enjoyable project.

18-00:27:34

Wilmot:

I'd like to ask you more about it.

18-00:27:36

Ellis:

Okay, sure. But its appearance helped me get over, along with the other stuff that I was accumulating, in terms of articles and all. Architecture didn't have too many refereed journals. As a matter of fact, architecture at the time, except for history and other fields, didn't have any refereed journals, quite, which is an abiding problem to this day in the field, because the way architects are promoted is that they do work that gets published in places that people acknowledge commonly as good places to get published. That is, their work appears on the page, pictures of it, and gets reviewed. But sometimes, just appearing in *Architectural Record* and other journals that no longer exist was important to say happened to you, that you did this.

18-00:29:08

It's very hard to do that with the kind of work I did. It was, in fact, a problem for me, living in the interstices between the discipline and the profession that made people on the disciplinary side suspicious. "What's Ellis doing over there? That's not how we evaluate things." And made it a little bit hard for me because the architects were saying, "Well, what do we do with this stuff?" Even though they invited me to be there, it was not easy to evaluate. And I agree. I agree that it is not. But I liked living there, even with the confusion, much of the time.

18-00:29:48

My promotion was helped by the appearance of this book, plus this edited piece with Peter. And at the time, it mattered a lot, too, because there was much going on that was about race and change and urban societies, so it made me relevant to lots of themes in environmental design at that time, and planning and participation and the roiling of urban life then.

18-00:30:14

Wilmot:

This is your promotion from assistant professor which brought you into a tenure track position?

18-00:30:19

Ellis:

Yes, yes, yes. And that was not a problem. Getting to associate took a while, and it was partly because I didn't know what I was doing. I started to talk about it earlier, and we saved it for now. I had some misbegotten notion, just totally misbegotten, that I would do stuff and then they would recognize its value. [chuckles] That is *all wrong*.

18-00:30:55

McGarrigle: Is that a life lesson, or is that specifically—

18-00:31:00

Ellis: Certainly in a research university context of this sort, where you've got— Berkeley is really extraordinary, but you've got to put yourself forward, and the system expects you to do that. You say, "Here's what I've done, here's why I'm good, and here's what I want." And you do it. Now, there are some people who are just good. They are just geniuses! This is the institutional setting made for them. They don't have to advocate their math, or their philosophy, or their physics, or their whatever at all, because it is so apparent that their level of thinking and their contribution to the field is significant. They can drool in public meetings, they can not go to a faculty meeting ever, they can never serve on a committee, and be just fine. Not teach well. Because they're too important to ignore. This is the place of invention, discovery, and conservation of invention and discovery, and the record of conserving invention. So you want those people around.

18-00:32:34

I wasn't anything like that. I had what in the field they call, a couple of cute ideas, and I think I did, actually. I went off on a different track, but I was a *really* good citizen of the department. I was a busy boy. I was making seminars, and convening, and doing all kinds of stuff. Actually, a lot of times I ran to work, even while struggling with other issues. I didn't make much money—well, you don't make much money in this business at all. But buying a house, [I] got lucky. The recession of '73 was really a good thing. I bought a really big house for, like \$35,000, a double lot, about 2,000 square-foot, clinker brick craftsman thing. It's just a wonderful thing. My wife and I were so fortunate to get that. Then we had to pay for it. Then kids.

18-00:33:58

Wilmot: I want to ask you one question.

18-00:34:02

Ellis: Let me just say this about that. It's important to record, for me as much as anybody. A lot of my colleagues didn't have kids, and a lot of my colleagues' kids had grown out of their dependent relationship. Now, most of those were senior, but some of them were young colleagues who weren't going to be having kids. I used to come in confused sometimes. "How the hell do people do this? How do you do this? How do you pay attention to your mate? Your kids? Mow the lawn? How do you do all of this?" That was hard. But I found the work exciting. I had a good time. I loved working in the interstices, fiddling with this and thinking. I liked the idea of getting people to think about stuff. I used to set tasks in the classroom.

18-00:35:10

Wilmot: I want to go back to that. That's the question. But did you attribute this change of how people did that, how people from basically a different generation

managed all this to role changes that were brought on by the women's movement?

18-00:35:25

Ellis:

No, no, I didn't. I mean, yes, sure. Just as a person, I couldn't avoid it because people were very much affected by these movements around me. There were men I knew who were very much affected by the women's movement, just because they were ideologically committed to paying attention and worrying about how they were. It affected how they made decisions in their departments or whatever, sure. So it was big time. And it was Berkeley.

18-00:35:52

Wilmot:

But not because their mates were willing to support them or be stay at home wives, because that changed?

18-00:35:54

Ellis:

Sometimes, sometimes, absolutely, certainly. And it grew because now you have these couples who are both faculty materials, and the jobs aren't in the same place. One's in Chicago Circle, and one's here, and they got on airplanes and they flew. Who was going to go where, and how would the flexibility work, who did the child-rearing—all of that stuff was very important. As I got into administration and people like me were in administration and the forces kind of got more intense, the University started making adjustments to accommodate partners, in joint appointments, appointments in other departments. Yes, stuff like that.

18-00:36:46

Wilmot:

Was there ever a question of a spousal hire for Judith?

Ellis:

No. No, she wasn't interested, either.

18-00:36:53

McGarrigle:

I actually need to close soon.

18-00:36:54

Ellis:

Okay.

18-00:36:55

McGarrigle:

And I'd like to pick up with the book next time.

18-00:36:58

Ellis:

Okay.

18-00:36:59

Wilmot:

And then we have to finish the question of tenure and promotion.

18-00:37:01

Ellis:

Next time or now?



18-00:37:05

Wilmot:

I think tenure and promotion—I don't want to rush that at all. I guess I just wanted to ask, when did Judith go back to work, and how did that happen for—

18-00:37:23

Ellis:

Oh, boy. What year did she go back? I don't remember, but she got involved with a regional perinatal study that was housed at Alta Bates [Medical Center in Berkeley]. She was also doing some Lamaze work, which was really interesting. Then she did some work with Troy, actually, on his study on the social issues in the new genetics that resulted in his book, *Back Door to Eugenics*. She looked at hemophilia and sickle-cell and so forth, and did a variety of those things. She never went back to teaching, but then, the world was set up as very hard to drop out and make it back in that way.

18-00:38:37

Wilmot:

When you have children, right.

18-00:38:38

Ellis:

Yes. So that was hard. I think she always resented that. She was always a good teacher. Anyway, I can give you a rough outline now, and we can come back to the elements of my mobility at Cal. It was always problematic that I was neither fish nor fowl. I was neither fish nor fowl. I never produced the synthetic work that put things together. I had a lot of ideas, and I worked and I labored a long time over this book, *People Making Places: Episodes in Participation 1964-1984*, that covered all these projects that I'd been involved with, and I was trying to extract lessons about social, environmental, and participation on politics, and this sort of thing. I think it's very interesting. I wasn't a good writer. I didn't own the English language in my fingers in a way that I could shape that thing. I never knew about using editors. It's funny. I had a colleague who was Swedish, who's very important now. His name is Lars Lerup. He's a dean at Rice [University]. We were quite close for a long time. We had a little circle, Roger Montgomery, Lars Lerup, and I.

18-00:40:42

Wilmot:

Lars Lerup?

18-00:40:43

Ellis:

Lars L-e-r-u-p.

18-00:40:45

Wilmot:

Okay. And so when it came time to—

18-00:40:48

Ellis:

But what I was going to say about him, his original language was Swedish, and he had ideas that were, like, [makes sound like a piece of electronic equipment going haywire]. He had complicated, convoluted ideas, and he didn't have the English for them, and he used editors. I think if I had used an editor—but I didn't think that was legal, or something. But if I had used an

editor, I think I probably would have been a successful person academically, more than my meager output and so forth. I think I had good ideas.

18-00:41:33

Anyway, so I did have one denial, which shocked me. I was already—I was tenured. I was associate professor, I think, and then it was a step denial. And I hadn't wanted to go forward. My dean and my chair said, "Russ, look, you're fine, just on your work with the students and the department, so don't worry about it." And so I wrote this thing up. I did have someone who, I learned earlier but never took it too seriously—I was told very concretely—had it out for me, and that was George Maslach, who was provost. He's Christina's dad.

18-00:42:29

There were two things I did, among the various things I did or didn't do. One was I included in my bio-bib, an interview that a friend of mine did in *Playgirl*, the magazine *Playgirl*. And this is a woman who had been a writer. I'd known her. I ran in a circle with her and Rita Moreno and so forth in L.A. It was a fun time. Hollywood went through a recession, and a lot of writers got laid off, so she went to work on this thing, and I did her a favor, giving her this interview. Maslach was very upset that I included that in the materials that I had submitted.

18-00:43:22

And the other thing I did is I got arrested down at Ocean View. When I came to Berkeley, I got active in the community right away, around the school, and I had joined, at the behest of Sue Hone, actually, who was a Warren Widener, Berkeley Democratic Club type, not one of the crazies that I identified with. And I joined the then Housing Advisory and Appeals Board.

18-00:44:02

McGarrigle:

I'd actually like to stop there or soon after this, Russ, and then we'll pick up next time.

18-00:44:07

Ellis:

Okay, but just to put a caper on it, that I was told by someone very respectable and responsible, really upset Maslach and some other people in the university, that I embarrassed them, and "What's he doing down there? If he wants to do that and those things, let him do *that*." Then I made my way to full professor in a slow route, and I have learned how that happened. It was interesting, and I'll tell you about that next time.

18-00:44:40

Wilmot:

Yes, I hope so. Let's stop right there.

**[end of session]**

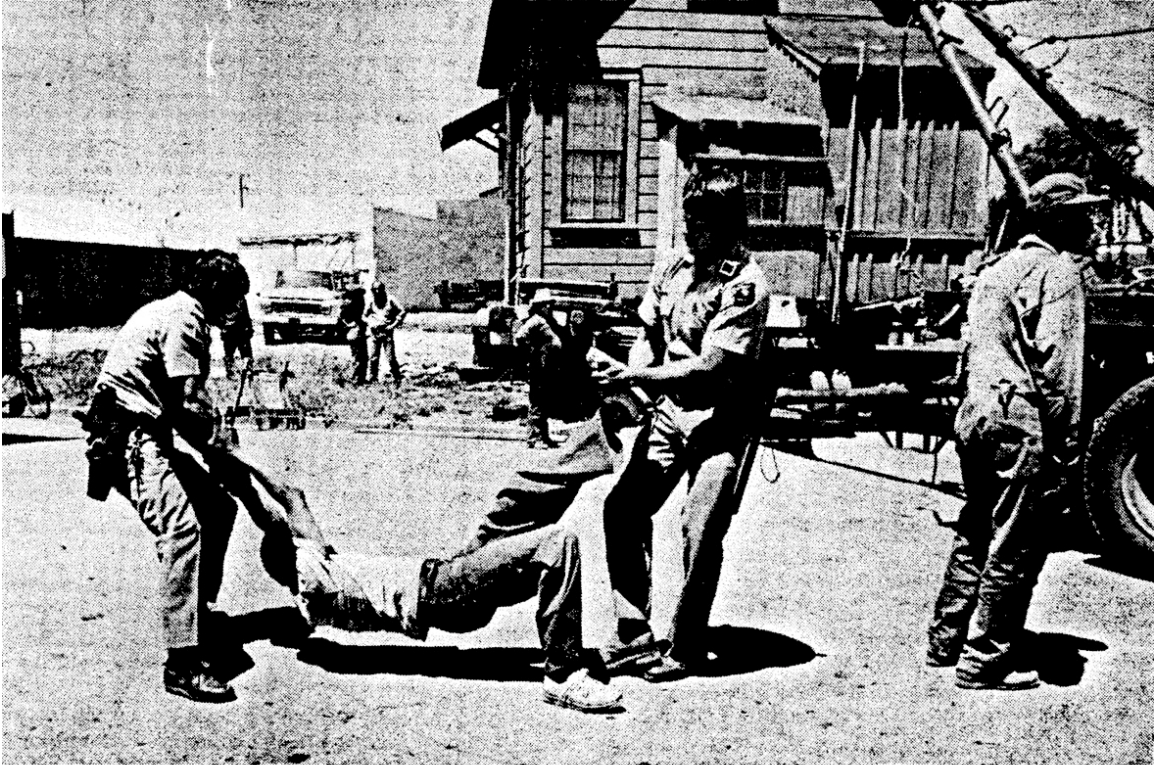


Three friends: Troy Duster, Thelton Henderson, and Russ Ellis, 1975  
Photo courtesy of Deborah Woo

# GRASS

## Berkeley's Community

DECEMBER 8 – DECEMBER 21, 1976



*This is one of the photos used by the Fukson defense to show that with a 30 to 40 foot distance between patrol wagon and house on rods, Fukson could not have kicked Patrolman Pittman against house, truck or rods. Being dragged by two unidentified officers is William R. Ellis, leader of demonstration and assistant dean of College of Environmental Design, UC; Lee Coe (not shown), author of this article, was second to be arrested.*

Oceanview Arrest



Russ Ellis with son and daughter David and Zoe, 1996  
Photo courtesy Julie Shearer

Interview 10: October 24, 2003  
 [begin audio file 19]

[There is some voice distortion or overall muddiness to the sound.]

19-00:00:11

Wilmot: Okay, October 24<sup>th</sup>, Russ Ellis, Jr., interview number ten. No, sorry, interview number eleven [sic; ten is correct], with Leah McGarrigle and Nadine Wilmot at the Regional Oral History office. We wanted to start off today with where we left off our with last interview, when we were talking about promotion and the process of achieving tenure here at Berkeley, and I wanted to ask you how that went for you, from being an assistant professor when you came in in 1970 to when you became a full professor, I believe in the late 1970s.

19-00:00:49

Ellis: I think it was later than that. It was relatively uneventful, considering how fraught the movement from assistant to associate in the UC system is for a lot of people. And what do I mean by that? I felt relevant to the departmental activities. They chose me as a sociologist to come in and help them make their way toward two things, development of an undergraduate curriculum of courses, small but a curriculum in the social areas that related to design, architecture, and so forth. And I didn't feel second-guessed about that. I didn't feel particularly confident about doing it, but I knew I had plenty of ideas. I hadn't done any curriculum design, proper, but from my Pitzer experience, from Old Westbury, I knew about how you might assemble things that would be exciting, energizing, and maybe even a little inventive.

19-00:02:34

I was there with a group of younger—well, everybody. There was an array of faculty, some architects, some not, who were enthusiastic about my having arrived, so I felt quite supported. [pause] When I think about people I know who did not achieve tenure, and think about myself, I think probably I had managed to identify as an academic in the university and had a rough sense of what the culture was about and what was rewarded, what you were supposed to do.

19-00:03:30

I didn't know nearly as much as [laughs] I thought I did. That is, in a sense I didn't know enough about the entrepreneurial side of putting yourself forward. You're supposed to make your own case, and you're supposed to keep making your own case. I have a colleague who included a table he designed for his mother in his package, and it had to be suggested to him that maybe he should not put that in his promotion package. But that was the right direction to go in. You put yourself forward.

19-00:04:09

But let's see, what happened? I wrote a few articles. Architecture didn't really have, which was part of the problem, didn't really have a set of refereed

journals the way you would get in proper disciplines, so the places where I did publish some pieces, like the *Journal of Architectural Education* and so forth—they are relevant, but in architecture, proper what you do is you do your work and then your work gets published in various magazines, and then it gets commented on, so it's the *commentary* on your work, the design world's version of a review, as an art, that matters.

19-00:05:12

So I did have the problem permanently of being marginal to the discipline of sociology, proper. I wasn't writing to sociologists. But I was hired by Architecture to help them do what they do. They are very different enterprises. However, I did a few things near the beginning, in my first few years here, that looked interesting to my colleagues on both sides of the ledger, and then also the book I had edited with Peter Orleans [*Race, Change, and Urban Society*], who was, by the way, the one who attracted me to Old Westbury. I forgot to mention that last time. Oh, did I? Okay.

19-00:05:58

Wilmot:

Did you say both sides of the ledger?

19-00:06:00

Ellis:

Yeah, yeah, that's the wrong language, but both sides—academic culture. Berkeley, and stop me if I've said this already, but Berkeley is famous for its problem of physics envy. Did I say that already? I forget who used that term. I think it originated here. But it's basically that the experimental model is the model for whatever goes on here in the University, and everybody is trying to get there. Artists—everybody is trying to turn their work in literature and architecture, trying to sublimate it to the discipline of a community of investigators like those in physics. You've got to know for sure what you know, and there has to be a community of investigators who can replicate what you do and say that what you have discovered is true because they can reproduce it.

19-00:07:05

Well, that's not how it happens in architecture. It's a completely different enterprise. It's a profession without a particular disciplinary base. It doesn't come out of philosophy. It's an oddity. And yet, because of the way academic personnel cases are handled here at Berkeley, everyone is funneled through the same process. Without going into it, it's simply the case. Basically, cases are assembled in departments, and come up through chairs and deans, go to the Academic Senate Committee on Budget and Personnel, et cetera, reviewed by the Budget Committee, and then there is some negotiation between the vice chancellor and the chancellor, if necessary, and the Budget Committee over accession to appointment, tenure, and other advancement.

19-00:08:12

What happened to me was I came in with a fair amount of energy at a good time. It was a good time to be somebody like me in the field I was in. It was

hot. People were interested. There were publishing opportunities. The book *Race, Change, and Urban Society* obviously was my civil rights side and kind of a summary of a lot of stuff that got me interested in social movements, my dissertation and so forth. I wasn't actually thinking of choosing to work in the direction of that book, but Peter and I assembled folks that we knew around a set of topics. It got published very modestly. Sage is not a big fancy place or anything like that. I mean, it's not a distinguished publishing location, but it was good at the time and interesting, and it attracted a fair amount of attention. And I think Thelton's only formally published piece is in there, right?

19-00:09:28

McGarrigle: And, Russ, what was the reaction on campus when the book came out?

19-00:09:32

Ellis: That helped me.

19-00:09:33

McGarrigle: And the reaction to the book, to the information in the book?

19-00:09:39

Ellis: Oh, it varied. It's like everything else. There's a narrow band of people who are interested in some topic.

19-00:09:47

McGarrigle: I'm thinking about the climate of the time, and trying to visualize what a book with the title *Race, Change, and Urban Society* would have meant to your colleagues on campus at that way in time.

19-00:10:07

Ellis: That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that question. Give me the book just very quickly. [turns pages] I've always thought about this, but [pause]—there are really some good people in here. Gosh! Boy, I haven't looked at this in a while. [laughs] We have some really good folks in here. Oh, yes, here we go. [turns pages] Oh, there's a methodological piece in here on [pause]—goodness gracious. Oh, Ira Katznelson, "Power in the Reformulation of Race Research." He looks at the problem of the uses of census data and who's missing in the census. Now, this is what? '73 or something like that.

19-00:12:06

McGarrigle: 1971.

19-00:12:07

Ellis: Is it '71? And as you know, that's become a huge thing. There are a few pieces like that, where some issues are joined that weren't on the public agenda at the time, and Katznelson became a fairly significant figure. There are a few pieces in there like that. But you often don't know what your colleagues think about anything because they're often not the people you're writing to. You've heard it a thousand times, that the folks in the disciplines have an audience of about eight or ten people in the world.



19-00:12:49

McGarrigle: Was it controversial? I guess is what I mean.

19-00:12:51

Ellis: No, no. No, not at all. And you got to remember the times. It was very hard to be controversial in that period. It was a very roiling, roiled time. Settling out. Things were settling down a little bit, but no, I didn't have any sense of controversy. There was deference to any kind of investigation of what was going on in cities, especially, because they were such a mess. I mean, there was so much going on. There was a lot of explosiveness obviously. So no, there was no controversy at all. Not that I'm aware of. Now, maybe you guys have talked to somebody who—. [laughs]

19-00:13:35

McGarrigle: No, I don't have a hidden agenda. I was thinking that in the time—

19-00:13:40

Ellis: Frankly, it was almost tangential. Interesting, I think substantial, in the sense that some good people are in here, writing good things.

19-00:14:00

McGarrigle: I'm seeing a lot of the interviews that I'm familiar with at this time, from this project—I understand that at one level everything was possible—

19-00:14:17

Ellis: Oh, yes, mm-hm, mm-hm.

19-00:14:18

McGarrigle: —but in terms of the way many of the African American faculty experienced their time here, there was often some subtext, and that was why I was wondering if—

19-00:14:29

Ellis: Oh, I see.

19-00:14:30

McGarrigle: —what the subtext was. I understand that on its face it wasn't a controversial book from what you said—

19-00:14:36

Ellis: I got you.

19-00:14:39

McGarrigle: —but also I'm getting a fuller picture of the university as a place that was not always so completely accepting of ideas that were challenging and race was certainly one of those ideas.

19-00:14:53

Ellis: Yes, yes. And it worked both ways, in a way. That is, sometimes it was *merely* race research, right? And “Why do you have to be doing that?” And the other, very often people expected you to be doing race-related research.

19-00:15:13

Wilmot: Yeah, a difficult catch-22.

19-00:15:14

Ellis: Yes, yes. Now, probably because I worked in a department that wasn't particularly sophisticated in this area, it didn't come up so much. And then, the part of the faculty that *was* sophisticated was the group that got me there. They were very interested in what I was doing and were pleased.

19-00:15:40

McGarrigle: Well, that's helpful to hear you explain that because it gives us a sense of your support.

19-00:15:45

Ellis: Roz Lindheim was my big supporter, Roselyn Lindheim. She did socially aware design, the early Stanford Children's Hospital, big work in New York and around the country. She and her husband, Richard, were early endorsers and supporters of Ron Dellums. Roz did the Acorn housing in Oakland. And then there was an artist named Jesse Reichek, who's a member of the faculty. And then my colleague, who's dying at this moment, Roger Montgomery in Planning, who had a lot to say in this area and was I think one of the early, one of the first officers in HUD [US Department of Housing and Urban Development] and had wound up doing some very interesting critical work on Pruitt Igoe. Roger was a big supporter of mine, and our friendship has endured, and our political connection has endured. He has always been a supporter in campus political affairs.

19-00:17:07

So these things are relevant. Your support is in part related to your membership in friendship circles. That's inevitable. That's human. And that's why the UC review process is interesting, because it's designed to try to undermine that, to try to cancel that out, which it can do sometimes; sometimes it can't. That is, your accession to tenure and higher reaches of status in the university shouldn't be related primarily or almost at all to your friendship circles, but you can't cancel that out. But this system tries to do that. Yeah.

19-00:17:56

I had no trepidation about introducing this as part of my "offering." [chuckles] As a matter of fact, I was quite pleased with it and felt that it was relevant in a college of environmental design, even though I knew that this particular direction wouldn't be related to what I was doing in architecture. But I had no anxiety—I understand your point—or difficulty at all. And I don't remember hearing a critique of my work that was related to the focus of this piece.

19-00:18:38

Wilmot: I wanted just to return, though, to this question of how the tenure process went for you.

19-00:18:45

Ellis: Yes.

19-00:18:46

Wilmot: Just to close that out. One thing that you noted is that for you it went relatively well.

19-00:18:54

Ellis: Accession to associate professor. That was easy. Full was harder, and slower.

19-00:19:02

Wilmot: Can you describe why that was harder, and how did you overcome that?

19-00:19:06

Ellis: [pause] I have said to you that I—you know, I wanted to title this *Black Boy in a Golden Sandbox* or something—I think that in retrospect—now, I'm looking back but with the purpose of answering your question—I think that I was primarily interested in causing the world to happen in interesting ways. [laughs] Making curriculum, getting people excited, making connections, brokering ideas, brokering people, making connections. It's probably why ultimately I was a half-decent administrator. But I was very thin skinned, one of those professors who would get ninety-nine laudatory student letters of evaluation but only remember the bad one.

19-00:20:43

So I only ever wanted to go forward loaded for bear. I wanted to present a case that was really solid, so that I could move forward. So among other things, the system makes you put yourself forward on a regular basis. The system here—which I think is a good idea, by the way. It's a problem if you're having babies, and the clock is still running. We changed that over the years, so that women who get pregnant and are working can get some relief from the running clock. The clock stops for some things, anyway.

19-00:21:27

I think I didn't put myself forward very much. I think that I was a slow writer, and I think that my marginality between the discipline and the profession—there's no question—hurt me. And I even understand how that works. That is, "What's that guy doing over there?" the folks in the disciplines would say. The issue is, "Wait a minute. You don't belong here or there. What are you actually doing?" And, by the way, I know I'm not the only one in environmental design who had that problem. I know there are other faculty—

19-00:22:09

Wilmot: Do you want to name them?

19-00:22:10

Ellis: In Planning. No. Because it's sensitive, I think.

19-00:22:14

McGarrigle: Can you name disciplines?

19-00:22:16

Ellis:

Planning. We have an urban planner, a guy with a firm, quite a well-known firm, and did very important work for cities and so forth, but it was very hard to locate him, and so when you put your case forward, what do you say? I was denied a merit increase—I forget where, I think I was already associate professor—which really surprised me, because I felt very productive at every level. I was teaching well, I was a good citizen of the department, the community, and I was generating enough stuff that I thought would be good. And I wasn't putting myself forward. My dean and my chair, Dean Bender and Chair Esherick, said, "Oh, Russ, it's not a problem." I think Joe said, "Just your work around the department is fine." And it went forward, and it was denied.

19-00:23:14

Wilmot:

I've heard these referred to as degradation rituals, the promotion and merit increases.

19-00:23:23

Ellis:

Yes, well, at Tien's retirement party, Chancellor Tien's retirement party, I gave a little speech. I said, "Berkeley, a place where even the winners have scar tissue." [laughs] You know, you put yourself forward and you can be found wanting. It's a tough one. You do have to put yourself forward. Pumping gas, you don't have that problem. You pump the gas or you cut fish, and you go home and you smell like gas or fish, but this one is a permanent evaluative daisy chain. Everybody's always evaluating everybody. That's what it is. Now, I grant it that. I actually grant this place that. That's what it is. I think, as I think I've said before, I think we need more institutional forms, more ways of rewarding, inspecting, taking advantage of high-mindedness than just the university, but I don't know what they are.

19-00:24:25

Wilmot:

There's a book by Robert Ibarra. I'm not sure. It's called *Beyond Affirmative Action*. He's talking about this idea of high-context, low-context education. Essentially what I'm trying to understand is, do you see any hope or wish for transforming the culture around that, these issues, around these kind of chronic systems of evaluation?

19-00:24:52

Ellis:

Make a note to ask me that later.

19-00:24:53

Wilmot:

Okay.

19-00:24:54

Ellis:

Okay? Please, please, because I'd be very interested in talking about that. Let me talk about my own process here for a bit more. I am absolutely confident that I was a valuable citizen of my department, my college, and the university, and my colleagues who were black here at UC, Berkeley. In '73, we were meeting to prod the chancellor to create an office of faculty affirmation action,

which we did, and it turned out to be very important. I didn't do it by myself, but I was a player. I'm really confident of that. I'm not apologetic about that.

19-00:25:40

McGarrigle: Russ, expand on that more. Then, Al Bowker was chancellor.

19-00:25:44

Ellis: Yes, Mike Heyman was vice chancellor at the time, right.

19-00:25:47

McGarrigle: Was that change in chancellor to Bowker in '71, was that a large part of an opening for this affirmative action progression?

19-00:26:02

Ellis: You mean when Bowker became chancellor?

19-00:26:03

McGarrigle: Right.

19-00:26:04

Ellis: I think Bowker was good, yes.

19-00:26:09

McGarrigle: What was his role?

19-00:26:11

Ellis: Oh, oh, leaping ahead. He defended the black studies program totally. I mean, he was Wonder Woman for that program, and he backed Bil Banks up. There are things that had to happen. He supported Bil Banks, who was chair at the time. And he fended off faculty who were interested in the FTEs [full-time equivalent positions] sitting over there in that program. People were criticizing it because of the low student enrollment, the low student FTE. "So why are you spending all of that kind of money over there when times are bad?" Remember, '73 is a recession. Money is tough. No, Bowker was very good at the time, I think. I think he's had other thoughts subsequently, but he was very supportive of that program.

19-00:27:19

But for me, Bowker was not particularly consequential. It was Mike Heyman who was the executive officer of the campus, who was the important person to a lot of us, and it was Mike Heyman who, as the Department of Labor was about to sue the university because of its—

19-00:27:41

Wilmot: In 1973.

19-00:27:43

Ellis: Yes, because of its—

19-00:27:45

McGarrigle: That was the HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] audit about minority hiring.

19-00:27:50

Ellis: Right, exactly. That was an occasion when, particularly with the black faculty, which was organized and caucusing regularly, had a lot to say and extracted some organizational concessions from the university. We listened to a lot of people. We had people come in from MIT and other places, where the president there would say, “I want [raps table] the best Chicana in this kind of biology in the world. Go get her and bring her here, and let’s hire her.” We couldn’t do it that way, right? We didn’t have that kind of freedom in this sort of setting.

19-00:28:29

McGarrigle: When you say “we listened to that view,” do you mean in your role as part of—

19-00:28:37

Ellis: They came and spoke on the campus. Mike brought folks here who looked to solve the problem, or didn’t have it the same way we did, and we had a variety of sessions where we looked at what the university could do to increase its— we didn’t say “diversity” so much in those days, but minority hiring. As you know, no doubt by now, given all the interviews that have taken place, we, the black faculty, pushed for a full-time position that reported to the chancellor. I now know, and it didn’t take long to understand, that reporting to the chancellor is a bad idea. You want to report in the plumbing, the work gets done, and that’s the vice chancellor, and then you want the authority of the vice chancellor, that he inherits from the chancellor, to do things, like make sure the case is fair, make sure the position isn’t written to fit a particular person, et cetera, et cetera, make sure that it’s advertised widely.

19-00:29:51

So the position of faculty assistant for faculty affirmation action was created, a half-time position reporting to the vice chancellor, and many, many people rotated through that job and learned a lot, were variously effective. I think Reginald Jones was very aggressive in that, but so was Rodney Reed. Just everybody who occupied that position. Bill Shack went from that position to become dean of the Graduate Division. Olly Wilson, Professor Olly Wilson in Music.

19-00:30:37

McGarrigle: Professor Bragg.

19-00:30:39

Ellis: Bragg. I mean, people rotated through that position, showed their stuff, became relevant to other sets of activities, made recommendations, created new support programs. The minority post-doc program. Leaping ahead, [John H.] McWhorter in linguistics was just *unseemly* in his passion to get a

minority post-doc here, coming from Stanford, and it was joint in linguistics and in African American studies. Of course, as we now know, he's become a darling of the Right and is selling lots of books and doing very well. But that program was there, and he went after it, and that's how he got here, through that program.

19-00:31:32

So a lot of very good things happened in that period, I think. And I think even with the dismal performance of the university, particularly around faculty of color over the years, I think it would have been much worse had we not created these positions and people had not been able to learn how things worked. A lot of teaching came out of that.

19-00:32:03

Wilmot:

Does a similar moment exist today here at the university?

19-00:32:06

Ellis:

Oh, it's so different. It has changed so much. I haven't seen the numbers. I'd love it if you guys ran into them. Just let me see what the numbers are.

19-00:32:18

Wilmot:

What I mean is in terms of an opportunity for creating networks, to kind of nurture and promote diversity in faculty and diversity in teaching.

19-00:32:29

Ellis:

I don't know. From what I hear, the support is not as vigorous. There was a reaction to the whole affirmative action idea in the faculty. As you know, I was the last occupant of the office of Faculty Assistant for Faculty Affirmation Action because SP 1 [Special Policy 1], the university-wide regulation that eliminated affirmative action, forced my office to change its name to Faculty Equity Associate. And so that's what we did. Now, there were some real advantages for me then because I no longer just looked at women and under-represented minority files for comparison purposes; I was prevented from discriminating by doing just that. I had to look at all files. [laughs] I learned a lot about other people's situations.

19-00:33:34

McGarrigle:

Could you expand on that?

19-00:33:36

Ellis:

Well, I'll tell you the positive part. I'm not sure—I haven't talked to any other occupant of the position about this, but the academic personnel files are closely guarded, as you would imagine they would be, necessarily. There's a great deal of confidentiality involved in all of this, but in order to learn my job, to find out what was done—and I actually never did wander into any files out of curiosity. I actually never did that. I'm a good guy that way. But I looked at similar cases sometimes that had nothing to do with the particular case I was dealing with, because I wanted to find out how other people wrote up cases.

19-00:34:35

I could look in files that were unrelated to the problem in front of me. Let's say, someone in Education or in History or something like that, a woman, a minority, and is contesting their treatment or has an issue. And so I would wander around in other write-ups, to see how things were done, and I learned a lot. One of my colleagues—well, actually, Michael Burawoy in sociology—was so instructive for me because he did not take for granted the fact that sociology was written in English, whereas many people, in critical women's theory, which can be pretty turgid, along with a lot of other areas of investigation, would say, "Well, here it is." And then people who will speak and read English but not through the filter of postmodernism or whatever would look at it and say, "What is this?"

19-00:36:00

I realized, looking at Michael's write-ups, that he behaved exactly the way the physicists and biologists worked in explaining to folks outside the discipline what this is, and how it fits, and what the language of it is, the nomenclature is, and how it works in relation to other theories or research and whatever. That was amazing to me, because I realized that one of the problems for young scholars who were taking off in the odd areas of research were speaking in a language, and no account was being given of what was being said or why it worked or why it was relevant.

19-00:36:44

McGarrigle: I'm lost a little bit, relating it to the—

19-00:36:48

Ellis: African American prospects?

19-00:36:54

McGarrigle: —the minorities and/or women who were contesting their positions.

19-00:37:01

Ellis: In particular, in some cases, coming out of African American studies, or minority scholars putting their own stuff forward, put me in a position to think through how they could have written their stuff better, to help their own colleagues make their case. Now, take me, for example. Here I am, a sociologist, right? With a PhD in the area and so forth. My chair is an architect, a very distinguished architect, Joe Esherick. My dean is an architect. I'm not talking about black so much, but I'm talking about my sophistication in putting my case forward. My colleagues in my department weren't particularly adept at helping me make my own case. They didn't have my discipline. I don't mean—

19-00:37:51

Wilmot: They didn't know your area of expertise.

Ellis:

Yes, right, right. And so what I learned, I think, more generally, that does relate to the merits of materials like this or some other material, is how do you



have to learn to talk about your work so that people who are very far away from it are helped to make your case?

19-00:38:27

McGarrigle: And so this is how you're describing Michael.

19-00:38:30

Ellis: Burawoy. He was just a great example for me of how you write a case without taking for granted that people can read English. You've got to tell them what they're reading. Now, I'll give you an example that relates to a woman, a colleague of mine who came after me. She got her PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago. She was the second sociologist to join the Department of Architecture. She's still there. There were people who did not like her work, and I think some didn't like her, I think. You know it's hard to get around that. People sometimes let those things come into play. I was asked to chair her committee inside the department.

19-00:39:33

Wilmot: Committee for?

19-00:39:34

Ellis: Promotion to tenure, actually. And I had gotten word of some people's objections to her. She had written a book on the park. Her dissertation was written on the park. Some people in planning and architecture thought that was drivel. I was aware of that, because of this rumor mill and so forth. Other people just didn't think that the way things should go. That's not what they wanted out of their sociologists. I let those people, some of them very distinguished in the College of Environmental Design, get their stuff in early, because I knew that what the university was going to listen to was the really distinguished names outside that would really value that work.

19-00:40:41

Because, as I said when I first became aware of how this thing works, it's, "Mirror, mirror on the wall." That's what the universities are doing. "Who's the fairest of them all?" It's us. We wake up every day in this place evaluating our stance inside the disciplines, as an overarching university, judging how we're doing in relation to the larger world. So what do we care about *a lot*, this world university? World opinion, inside the discipline. I knew I had guns that would kind of blow any internal criticism. And she taught. There were criticisms of her teaching. She worked well with graduate students and so forth and so on, but her book got a lot of attention outside.

19-00:41:33

McGarrigle: Are you talking about applying what you learned in the position, working with—

19-00:41:41

Ellis: I'm giving you the example of the kind of information, and what I did later, I guess maybe based on my experience in looking at some of the minority and

women cases—I didn't have a lot while I was there; I forget when I was in the office, '95 to '97 or something like that, I forget—but—

19-00:42:05

McGarrigle: But it was quite a bit later.

19-00:42:09

Ellis: Oh, no, it was a lot later.

19-00:42:10

McGarrigle: It had been established for a long time.

19-00:42:11

Ellis: What I'm doing, and you guys know that this is true of me, is I'm jumping around, but I'm really trying to reflect on my own process, based on what I learned later. At the time—what I now know that I didn't have, is an aggressive enough sense of the fact that it is a ladder that you move up. I have probably had a self-protective definition of myself from my bohemian days, my undergraduate years, but it wasn't important. "You shouldn't be doing that, anyway. You shouldn't be advancing. You shouldn't be putting yourself forward." I know it sounds silly, but I did have some of that going. It's a tricky little deal you work with yourself, 'Then why are you doing this?'

19-00:43:05

But I didn't work very hard to promote myself after tenure. I just, 'It'll come together.' And after I was full [professor], I did nothing. I did my *Architects' People* volume, which, as an edited thing, doesn't count for as much as the full book that I wished *People Making Places* had been. It was something, but I never even—there's a couple of articles that I think are interesting in this edited book with Dana Cuff [*Architects' People*] that got some decent attention and some good reviews, but I never used that because I was vice chancellor at the time, and I knew that vice chancellor was the last job I was going to have in the university. Isn't that weird? I knew that. And I knew that I didn't want to be president of any small college, et cetera. I didn't know I was going to have the benefit of the last VERIP, but I knew that I was bringing my career to a close.

19-00:44:11

Wilmot: The last VERIP?

19-00:44:11

Ellis: [Voluntary] Early Retirement Program. In the last budget downturn, there were three early retirement programs made available, and I took, as we like to call it, the last train out. And it was a good package. It was perfect for me.

So did I lose us? Are we lost? Are we lost?

19-00:44:27

Wilmot: There's one question I'm still stuck on your—you said it was harder—there's two questions I have. We've covered a lot of ground. The first one is just, you

said that in your process of getting promoted to full professor, it was more difficult than the others. This may have been embedded in your response already, but specifically what did you do to surmount whatever was challenging about that?

19-00:45:01

Ellis: Okay.

19-00:45:02

Wilmot: And did you receive some challenges from your committee? How did that work? [Carillon concert begins]

19-00:45:14

Ellis: I'll tell you what I know, and then I'll tell you what I found out later. [chuckles]

19-00:45:18

Wilmot: Okay.

19-00:45:19

Ellis: Whenever it was, whatever year it was that I was promoted to full professor, I achieved that promotion based on the materials I sent forward. [pause]

19-00:45:46

McGarrigle: You made associate in '83. [looking at bio-bibliography]

19-00:45:57

Ellis: Oh, okay. Well, there's something in there somewhere. We don't need to have it in front of me right now. What I learned later is that—

19-00:46:10

McGarrigle: [drowned out by carillon] '84.

19-00:46:11

Ellis: When was it?

19-00:46:13

McGarrigle: From '83 to '84 you're associate professor, and '84 to '85 you're professor.

19-00:46:20

Ellis: Okay, so that's when it happened. Now, that's a long time. I came in '70. That's fourteen years. That's a long time.

19-00:46:27

Wilmot: And it's very unusual. Usually it's a six-year—

19-00:46:29

Ellis: Yes. Well, no, you've got a limit on tenure. There's a six-year clock, and you're supposed to get there or go away. There isn't a formal time limit on promotion after tenure. There's some normative times, which vary from department to department. But I took a long time. Some of it was my own doing, and some of it was, like, I did have that one merit increase denied,

which set me back. They're very hard things to experience. They're tiny little slights, but they hurt a lot. But then I did finally—and what I learned is that I had to—I keep meaning to call him and tell him that I know this [chuckles]—the chair of the Budget Committee was someone in my college, and he wrote up a case. He made an argument based on my contribution, the varied array of my contributions to my department, the college, and the University. So he put me forward as almost an ad hoc case of someone who was really important to the place.

19-00:48:20

Now [name deleted]—he would hate to see this in writing, but I do want to say it, and we'll see about sealing and all that—and I have subsequently battled tooth and nail, not directly but I'm so far away from him politically, it's unbelievable. We've had—in the context of wider campus politics, we've shown up on opposite ends of issues. But that's fine, you know, it happens. But he was an advocate and understood what my contribution was, so it was the happenstance, I think, of [his] occupancy of the chairmanship of the Academic Senate Committee on Budget and Personnel that explains my advent.

19-00:49:10

I would have gotten there sooner or later, but I think I was very much helped by someone who could translate what I did to his colleagues at the Budget Committee level. There are more details to it that I don't want to go into. And I haven't seen the specific write-up of my case, but I know really concretely, for various reasons, that he was pivotal in interpreting me to the larger campus.

19-00:49:37

Wilmot:

When you were faculty assistant for affirmative action—

19-00:49:41

Ellis:

Oh, no.

19-00:49:41

Wilmot:

You never looked at your own case? Did people just not do that?

19-00:49:44

Ellis:

I don't think I would have wanted to look.

19-00:49:48

Wilmot:

Understood. Okay. The second question, follow-up—actually, there's three now, but the second question to follow up has to do with—one thing you mentioned is that in the very beginning you said, “Myself as compared to other people who did not get tenure and went away. At the time, I learned how to put myself forward.”

19-00:50:10

Ellis:

Did I say that?

19-00:50:12

Wilmot: Something like that.

19-00:50:13

Ellis: I did it enough! See, tenure wasn't a problem.

19-00:50:17

Wilmot: It was kind of an entrepreneurial kind of deal. But what I wanted to kind of come back and ask you about is, and I've been looking for some reflections on this because the whole other part of this project, the overarching project, of course, is the people who were very worthwhile and did amazing work and did not get tenure and went away, right?

19-00:50:42

Ellis: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

19-00:50:43

Wilmot: When I speak of this project, I mean, this African American faculty project. So I wanted to ask you what you thought about that or knew about that.

19-00:50:54

Ellis: People who did not make it who maybe should have?

19-00:50:57

Wilmot: Yes, and specifically faculty of color who did not make it, maybe should have. How do you account for that difference? If that's a fair question.

19-00:51:13

Ellis: Sure! It's *the* big question. [pause] Here, in outline form, is an ideal-typical route to full professor: you work in a very narrow area that is acknowledged in your discipline as something worth doing. Sometimes—what's the guy who worked on prions?—you know, people thought it was kooky work in biological research. But you're in an area, it's an acknowledged area, and you pick your problem in the area, and you do some research, and you find something that's noteworthy in the field, and you find it at a level of clarity and replicability and confidence that people say, "Ah! A finding. Interesting." Sometimes it can be a really big, really interesting one; sometimes it's small. But let's say it's small, but it's significant and interesting, it adds some knowledge and helps the field or the discipline you're in and the sub-field of the discipline you're in. And then you keep going.

19-00:53:04

Look in today's paper. This woman over at UC San Francisco, is now lengthening the life of these tiny little worms to six times their natural life expectancy. So they did something else with the P-5 gene that this *something* [*Caenorhabditis*] *elegans* has, and now it causes this thing to live, a significant little worm, because it models lots of important things evolutionarily. Okay. And people say, "Whoa! Over there is somebody." [Carillon concert ends] And then you put that forward, and your department looks at it. It's got good stuff, and then your dean says, "We got some good

stuff over here. Here it is.” And it’s reviewed. The department’s really happy with the work. The College of Engineering or whatever is happy with the work, and the Budget Committee gets it. It’s explained well, and everybody’s happy, and you get promoted. You’re in the sciences and your problem is clear, and you’ve got an angle on something you’re building, your path to full professor is very fast, because the standards are very clear.

19-00:54:17

At the time Harry Edwards went forward for tenure, someone said, “The sociology of sports is not a field in sociology.” Harry Edwards said at that time, “Wait a minute! Seventy-six million people were watching the Super Bowl. That looks like a significant cultural phenomenon to me.” Of course, he was right. But here’s a guy who’s been political, who’s big and black and political in his bigness and blackness, who’s making arguments, who’s not just didactic, investigating, but is arguing on behalf of something. You know, it’s hortatory as well as just investigative. He’s trying to change the world. He pissed a lot of people off because of how he did it and who he was, and there are all kinds of reasons people just didn’t want to deal with all of that, and denied it as a real thing. Well, he’s now created a field, all right? That’s much harder to do. That’s not an ideal-typical pathway to getting tenure and being promoted here. That’s a way, if folks aren’t looking carefully, of being driven out of town on a rail. And Mike Heyman is *still* reviled by members of this faculty for snatching the case back, preventing his denial of tenure, constituting a system-wide committee to look at his case.

19-00:55:56

Wilmot:

And Mike Heyman was vice chancellor at the time.

19-00:55:57

Ellis:

Yes, and making a decision in Harry’s favor.

19-00:56:01

Wilmot:

So that wasn’t Al Bowker. You attribute that—

19-00:56:04

Ellis:

That was under Bowker. But no, it was Heyman who did it, yes. I mean, he couldn’t have done it without Bowker’s assent. But that’s not an ideal—that’s almost the way you don’t do it. But the fact of the matter is, the outcome is extremely interesting. Here we have a whole field. All over the world, people are—look, you better believe now, with the new doping scandals and so forth—you know, as a larger social phenomenon, looking at the role of sports and money in this country? It’s a wonderful breakthrough that he provided and started “right here in River City,” at Berkeley. But that’s not the way you do it. And if it hadn’t been for Harry’s aggressiveness—he could have gone to sleep and sucked his thumb on this one, but he didn’t.

19-00:56:55

And you asked about African American studies. I remember there was a period where us black faculty were saying, “Okay, if he’s—where could he

[Edwards] go? He's not going to get over in Sociology. And we could keep him where—would he go?" And there was a period when there was talk about his going to African American studies.

19-00:57:13

McGarrigle: When you say "us black faculty," was that—

19-00:57:16

Ellis: Oh, yes, we were active.

19-00:57:17

McGarrigle: Sounds like a very cohesive unit.

19-00:57:18

Ellis: Oh, yes.

19-00:57:18

McGarrigle: Did that feel like a cohesive unit?

19-00:57:20

Ellis: Oh, yes. Not everybody was in love with Harry, but people understood the nature of the case. We were all involved in that case.

19-00:57:29

McGarrigle: Okay. I'm just looking to see what the alignments—

19-00:57:32

Ellis: What I mean when I say we were all involved, I don't mean every black faculty member was involved, because every black faculty member *wasn't* involved, and not every black faculty member was particularly sympathetic, but everybody's fate was tangled up in that, 'cause—we're all black! [laughs] It affected how the system saw things here.

19-00:57:57

Wilmot: That's why it was important.

19-00:57:59

Ellis: It was a very important case, I think. I don't think everybody would agree with me, even everybody black on the faculty at that time, but I think in general, Mike Heyman set expectations that affected the place. I remember there was a time I was asked—later, when I was faculty assistant to Mac Laetsch, to help Mac reorganize, or organize this new office, Office of Undergraduate Affairs. Before that, you know what it had been? It had just been—what was it, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs, and Norvel Smith had that.

19-00:58:46

Wilmot: EOP [Educational Opportunity Program]?

19-00:58:47

Ellis:

No, no, it was actually under the student affairs office, and Norvel Smith had occupied it. Mike Heyman reorganized the whole area into a vice chancellorship for Undergraduate Affairs. That was about eighteen units. Lawrence Hall of Science, Cowell Hospital, all reporting to one guy with no filter. It was just all going to Mac. I went to work with Heyman and then later with Mac, and my duties got expanded beyond my real interest, which was affirmative action admissions, which is why I had gone to work with them. But in reorganizing, I decided or I helped them decide on a tripartite structure.

19-00:59:29

One of the candidates was a Chicano guy here on campus that a lot of people didn't like. And everybody will know who I'm talking about. For some reasons, for a good reason, there were ways in which [he], was not effective, and people really didn't want him to have this assistant vice chancellor job under Mac. I am aware because the chancellor told me, that people said, "Here are his problems. We can't put him in that position." And Mike said to them, "I know a lot of white men with those problems. When do we do affirmative action?" Mike really changed the expectation of what we would be doing here.

19-01:00:29

Wilmot:

I want to get to that at length, but I just want to back up because there's a lot of things you mentioned and also Harry Edwards. You mentioned his aggressiveness, that he did not go to sleep—

19-01:00:41

Ellis:

He didn't suck his thumb. Right, he didn't pout.

19-01:00:44

Wilmot:

—is what made it happen? Did he have allies?

19-01:00:47

Ellis:

Yes.

19-01:00:48

Wilmot:

What did his allies look like?

19-01:00:49

Ellis:

He had allies in and out of the place. I remember talking to a guy on this campus in the life sciences. He was aware of the case, a white man, who said, "They didn't hold *me* to that standard." He said, "Here's what I got tenure with." [laughs] More than one.

19-01:01:14

Wilmot:

And how would you describe what this allies network looked like? If this is important.



19-01:01:26

Ellis: I think at the time the People's Republic of China literally had a comment on Harry's case. You think I'm kiddin'.

19-01:01:28

Wilmot: No.

19-01:01:29

Ellis: Outside, in the area of sports, around the campus, off campus, he had academic allies and political allies.

19-01:01:47

Wilmot: On this campus, would you say? Would you kind of sum it up with Michael Heyman?

19-01:01:54

Ellis: No, that's not a good summary. But what I did learn later is that, despite a lot of talk, which is accurate, of the whole community participating in faculty appointments, promotion, and tenure, if the chancellor wants something, he or she can get it if they want it badly enough. It might cost them some points with their colleagues, and they might even be removed from the office. The first vice chancellor under Heyman went to Santa Cruz, and I think lasted there as chancellor for six weeks or something like that. They just didn't fit. But there is something imperial about the chancellor's office, if you want to use it that way. No one could stay in office at Berkeley and behave like Chuck Young did at UCLA. Chuck Young just built the place and if he said it was the case, it was the case.

Wilmot:

Is there a better way to talk about when you said it's not a good summary to speak of the chancellor? Is there a better way to speak of the allies?

19-01:03:16

Ellis: That's a good question. I'll be thinking about that as you—

19-01:03:17

Wilmot: I'm asking you to, but I'm not sure if it's—

19-01:03:18

Ellis: Are you recording right now?

19-01:03:19

Wilmot: Yes. But I'm not sure if it's the most on-target question.

19-01:03:23

Ellis: Oh, it's all right.

19-01:03:23

Wilmot: I'm assuming it is, but I'm not sure it's the most relevant question.

- 19-01:03:25  
Ellis: It's all right. That's fine. That's a good question. Actually, it's an excellent question. [pause] You guys hear me come back to the times a lot, but it's true. The times condition a lot of things. The university *hates* to hear that, but—
- 19-01:03:54  
McGarrigle: We have an incomplete university outline but we have in '73 Wounded Knee, Native American Protest, Marcus Foster, SLA.
- 19-01:04:04  
Ellis: Right, right.
- 19-01:04:05  
McGarrigle: Nixon, Watergate.
- 19-01:04:07  
Ellis: Right. [laughs]
- 19-01:04:08  
McGarrigle: I know you knew all this, but I'm reminding you.
- 19-01:04:10  
Ellis: That's great. Did you do that? Is this an outline you've done?
- 19-01:04:12  
McGarrigle: I cannot take credit for this, but I do have it.
- 19-01:04:16  
Ellis: Do I get to look at it?
- 19-01:04:17  
Wilmot: Julie probably—
- 19-01:04:18  
Ellis: That would be so helpful to me.
- 19-01:04:19  
Wilmot: She probably created this.
- 19-01:04:20  
Ellis: Oh, that would be so great. Yes.
- 19-01:04:25  
McGarrigle: Certainly, Marcus Foster and what was happening at Oakland—
- 19-01:04:29  
Ellis: As you know, I was actually working in the Oakland schools when he was killed, actually.
- 19-01:04:36  
Wilmot: Okay, so you're referring to the times, so—

19-01:04:39

Ellis: No, no, just one thing. The context *matters*. We like to say here that your appointments and promotion and tenure, particularly promotions to tenure and, in general, advancement aren't dependent on budgets. Well, how can that be true?

19-01:04:56

McGarrigle: When you say "We, like to say that"—

19-01:04:58

Ellis: The University of California, particularly at Berkeley, likes to say that decisions aren't really based on things like the availability of money.

19-01:05:08

McGarrigle: Not anything so lowly as the availability of money.

19-01:05:12

Ellis: Right, filthy lucre, right, right, yes, mm-hm, mm-hm.

19-01:05:14

Wilmot: I have another follow-up question, and it has to do—

19-01:05:17

Ellis: I haven't finished answering this one.

19-01:05:19

Wilmot: Okay.

19-01:05:20

Ellis: Okay, sorry. So the times, and the fact that we did have a caucusing black faculty, the fact that we had a sympathetic and supportive vice chancellor, the fact that Bowker had announced—in effect, behaviorally—he never gave any speeches that I'm aware of that were terribly significant—that we're going to be hanging with this program, with everybody watching it *not* go away, et cetera, et cetera. That's the whole array of contextual things that I think were supportive for Harry's case.

19-01:06:01

Now, I used an extreme, atypical pathway to tenure, on purpose. There are quieter black and brown and women cases, where people did go away or, as is often the case, people were close to the standards, and there were some real procedural issues that were raised, that allowed them to get over, because—well, let's leave it that way. That is, you're expected to build a case for or against, based on information. How about outside reviews? I told you the story about the outside reviewers of [one faculty member] and how powerful their reviews were and how much that mattered. It mattered a lot.

19-01:07:06

Sometimes in the process, the reviewers that the candidate expects to be contacted don't get contacted, or what they say is misunderstood or misreported. The latter is not procedural. The former is. "Well, why didn't

you contact so-and-so, who was obviously one of the most important people in the field?” Okay. So there are little things like that that can really confound the process.

19-01:07:44

Wilmot: Okay. I’m going to stop this.

[begin audio file 20]

20-00:00:06

Wilmot: Just to pose those questions while we are on camera and recording. The first question is, in your position as faculty assistant for faculty affirmation action, did you have the opportunity to think about the way that informal discrimination operates in the interstices of this institution by having access to all of those files?

20-00:00:37

Ellis: I’m going to answer that in a fairly abstract way. Remind me: I want to talk about the guild system and the question you asked about mentorship.

20-00:01:21

McGarrigle: Exactly.

20-00:01:22

Ellis: I can’t imagine any serious senate member who’s going to like the way I’m talking about this—senate player, in the whole administrative process. But when SP 1 was enforced, and the Office of Faculty Assistant for Faculty Affirmative Action was changed to the Faculty Equity Associate’s Office, under Vice Chancellor Carol Christ, at that time, we were still sending out information on appointments that hadn’t been reprinted, that said the University of California is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer. And we got back, from some departments, real vigorous scribbling over, with comments like, “Well, thank God this is through.”

20-00:03:00

McGarrigle: Was there a preponderance of those coming from certain departments?

20-00:03:05

Ellis: You know, I never even thought to ask that question. Here’s what struck me, and the hypothesis had been lurking in my head for a long time. This is a system of referrals, where you say, “Who you got that’s good? I’m working on this problem, and here’s the equipment we got, and we’re tracking the galaxy, et cetera, and who you got?” “Joe at Harvard.” And Joe says, “I’ve got Pete, Robert, and Sam.” “Who do you think is best?” “Well, probably Sam, but he’s young.” “Well, get him to apply.” In the old days, you’d sniff Smith, Sam, Pete, and Robert—you could write the position so it never said Peter, Robert and Sam, but you could get Sam if you wanted Sam. You talk to your colleagues, and everybody’s running for a Nobel Prize or something.

Everybody's running hard. And they get the team member that helps advance the research project, okay?

20-00:04:17

And then you're going to come in and tell people, "No, you've got to be fairer than that, and you've got to announce to the whole world what you're looking for. You can't write it up so that it's favorable." I did this. Someone called me one year and said, "Hey, Russ, who you got?" And I went down that list, and I called back a half-hour later, astonished. I hadn't thought to mention one woman. It was completely extra-conscious. I had just gone down, on some assumptions, a list of men. I called back and said, "Hey, wait a minute! I can't believe I did this."

20-00:05:00

Anyway, what's introduced is a bureaucratic intervention and a bureaucratic filter that says, "And you must consider these other issues." In this kind of medieval setup, that's a violation of the very thing that had in the past made it go. I sit in a seminar room like this, and I'm reading something—you know, we're working on a book or an article or something like that, and I notice a comment by somebody at that end of the table, and I take note of that. I write that in my little book, "Mmm, interesting, interesting. That person is interesting. That was quick. That was inventive." "Hey, why don't you come talk to me?"

20-00:05:55

Okay, so then you go to mentorship. So that is kind of part of the process of a movement, and in a world university the way this is, it's a world phenomenon. It reaches to China, to Japan, to Germany, to—in math, *everywhere*, and *everybody* in the world of math knows who the three people are who are really important.

20-00:06:28

Wilmot:

So what's interesting, then, in this description of what this really is, what does mentorship actually translate into, or what does it really mean?

20-00:06:36

Ellis:

Yeah, well, you know, it kicks in where you arrive, in a way. That is to say, even if you get the kid in Uzbekistan who is the math whiz, and comes to Berkeley and is autonomously fantastic, there is still some mentorship role to be played here. How about if you don't know that, though? How about if you're the first one in your family to go to college, you're the first one certainly in your state to get a PhD, and you come, and you think it's a *job*. Now, I think this is going away, but I have to say, on the one hand, a lot of minority faculty that I knew, no matter—this is very hard to say—but no matter how hard you would try, actually wouldn't kick in to the reward structure here and do what was necessary to get it done.

20-00:07:41

McGarrigle:

The network, is that what you mean?

20-00:07:42

Ellis:

No, not just networking but the kind of work and so forth.

20-00:07:43

Wilmot:

The entrepreneurial approach?

20-00:07:46

Ellis:

No, I'm just talking about even the whole issue of production. That is, your creative work is the most important thing here. And some people never started writing. I got a call in that office from a black member of my own faculty. I hadn't met him, but he was held in very high regard as he was inducted. He called me. He wasn't getting anywhere, and people had told him to call me, as faculty equity associate. As I looked at it, it was just really sad. He hadn't done anything. He had done very few things, and he had not, indeed, packaged himself in a way that it made sense to the place. He had done some community work, which he could have teased out as an argument for some things he was doing. He didn't do it. Now, this happens without regard to gender or race or ethnicity, whatever. A lot of people don't get tenure here, by the way, you know.

20-00:08:54

Then, as a consequence, he didn't have anything to offer a mentor who might want to help him, and he had people who wanted to help him but didn't know quite how, other than to tell him what the expectations were. In a concrete discipline, you might have a little less difficulty. First off, you're going to be on a team. Other people will know what your work is about. They know why they brought you there, and your expectations are clear. In something like architecture or other humanities disciplines, it might be harder to get an account of what the expectations are, so mentoring is less distinct.

20-00:09:34

McGarrigle:

And sometimes it's because, like, in your example of the math student who comes in, is the first in his family, the first in his state.

20-00:09:42

Ellis:

The contrast between those two.

20-00:09:45

McGarrigle:

Yes.

20-00:09:46

Ellis:

Yes, right, okay.

20-00:09:47

McGarrigle:

I mean, we're talking now about faculty, and I understand that there are minority as well as non-minority faculty who don't make tenure, but in the cases of the minority faculty who do not, some of them get into the production, as you say. Would you venture to say what some of those factors are that stymie their creativity or that lead to a kind of ineffectual academic—

20-00:10:19

Ellis: [interrupts] Unsuccessful. Let's say unsuccessful.

20-00:10:21

McGarrigle: I mean, there is a lack of example, there is the—well, there are many things that we could guess at.

20-00:10:30

Ellis: Let me just be safe and use myself as a reference. I *wasn't* very successful. I became a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and I settled there, and I didn't try to push it further, partly because I got into the other work I was doing in administration, and so forth. But my problem was translating what I did into a form that could meet the critical evaluation of an array of people—in my case, various types which made what I was trying to do more difficult. But that was my slow pace. I benefited—and this is important—I benefited from my activity in my world, and a lot of minority faculty, not just minority faculty, but a lot often aren't visible, as either practical or intellectual citizens of the world they occupy. They don't give little talks or hold seminars or meet with people in a larger setting. They're not active on committees or something. Nobody knows them. And sometimes that can happen simply because they're shy, or it's an unfamiliar world; they don't know to do that. Mentoring helps you know to do that. I didn't need much mentoring. I'm just kind of a noisy guy who's always going to be trying to put something together, and that benefited me a lot, ultimately.

20-00:12:26

Wilmot: I think also, when I think about this, I think about, like, networks of people that, by their definition—I mean, people as you've said a couple of times, and I'm paraphrasing—it's actually not normal for people from different ethnic backgrounds—

20-00:12:40

Ellis: That's right.

20-00:12:41

Wilmot: —to play together.

20-00:12:40

Ellis: Right.

20-00:12:41

Wilmot: So what happens when networks are comprised of people? How open are they?

20-00:12:46

Ellis: Yes, networking. That's very important, being known outside your department, going to other seminars, but participating with others in things outside any ethnic enclave you might be part of. There's an African American historian here—I've forgotten his name, came from Santa Cruz, got his PhD here. [Tyler Stovall] God, he's interested in French history, he went to major

meetings on European history at Stanford and here, and he's known to everybody. In African American studies, but he knows all kinds of people. He's learned what the disciplinary world is about. He's known to them. They can write a letter of recommendation. They know his work—his work, in this case—and can comment on it, and it's part of a field of investigation, et cetera, et cetera.

20-00:13:46

Now, if you're that kid who's just a simple genius, you can do the work. You can drool, you can do whatever you like; they want your work and they want to see the work. "He's over here, and he's solved that problem. He graces us." You don't ever have to serve on a committee. You might have to pretend to teach a little bit these days. The days of not teaching anything are kind of over. You've got to do something. But if you've really got the goods in your field and it's really clear and exciting, you're fine.

20-00:14:15

But in other fields, where there's a larger set of issues and a disciplinary world you'd be part of, you're supposed to be part of that world. They talk about being a member of your own department, your community, the larger professional disciplinary work, and starting on step eight. You should be a world figure. It's all codified. And if you don't know anybody, that's a hard one. See, that is a very hard one.

20-00:14:49

Wilmot:

I'm also wondering how much do the networks not open—because on one hand, people don't know people, but on one hand—I mean, which you describe in some ways as being very personal networks, don't necessarily open themselves to people that are different?

20-00:15:07

Ellis:

Right. Sometimes you have to push your way in. I don't know too much about that. I sure didn't have a whole lot of black folks who went ahead of me in architecture. I mean, architecture is kind of sound asleep on issues of ethnicity. They don't care very much. And one of the reasons I left the department to go work at the university level is that I was just really frustrated. I just didn't feel I was getting anything done, particularly in the faculty affirmative action area. I wasn't making a difference, and I said, "Where can I make a difference in terms of the mobility of under-represented people and students?" And so I did go to work with Mike Heyman to do some things.

20-00:15:53

But I'm not happy with what I'm telling you, partly because I don't have it organized. What do I think are the problems? Some are self-imposed problems of lack of familiarity with how the system works and no one there to tell you, and when you've come in via a route that isn't the guild route, then you have a harder time making those connections. If there's someone who wants you on



their team, and you're a productive member of the team and you know how to do—you know lab culture, for example. You know lab culture in the field, and you're part of the whole thing. They want you to succeed, because their success is dependent on your success.

20-00:16:47

As you wander away from the sciences and engineering and into the humanities and social science and so forth, it's much more independent work, much less team related, unless it's the Survey Research Center or something like that, where there's larger structures. That's where the ORUs, organized research units, come in at the graduate level, and that's why Troy and the Institute for the Study of Social Change was a significant place on the campus for many, many, many years, because it was a place of teaching how this is done, of support, of helping to get grants in the larger world to sustain your work, and so forth. Its rays were looking out for the best interests of the graduate students of color, and women. It had relations with the faculty on campus, who cared about that in the social sciences and humanities, and was very successful in terms of the graduate students with PhDs, who are now placed in the larger world because that place was brought into existence by a group of liberal-left faculty who met in the seventies and said, "Let's take over this ORU," because it was dying, and it was a slot we could take over. So there was a system that was put in place.

20-00:18:04

Okay. Maybe I can come back to this later, but as vice chancellor, I had the opportunity to hire someone [Mary Ellen Himmel] who created the Incentive Awards Program on this campus, which is a very interesting scholarship program, undergraduate program. The students come here mainly, at the initial part of the program, from San Francisco schools, one from each. They get a full ride, five-year, four-year ride. They have to go back to their schools and induct other folks and so on. They set up a structure here that provides sustenance for the new kids who come in. It's like the Cal Band or a fraternity. There are people here who demystify it, help you know how it works.

20-00:18:52

Those are the structures that are missing [for many freshmen], and it's very hard to penetrate a department, because you don't have this demystifying supportive structure, and we never had that at the faculty level, for faculty, although we did convince the university to hold sessions, to help assistant professors learn what the expectations were. They were held centrally, however, and some in departments, and some worked and some didn't.

20-00:19:24

Now, discrimination. It is my view that it's very hard to ding somebody in this system because you don't like their race, their ethnicity, or their gender. I think it shows too much. What could happen is a lack of interest in handling the case. I don't think discrimination would enter at the level of how people

bend the case, to bend it away from the possibility of promotion. I think what would happen, and I think what I see happening, either from lack of connection, lack of connectivity of the candidate to the department and the relevant people, who can interpret the work or who have reason to care, that nothing happens. There are no advocates; there are no interpreters; there's no gossip, of the best sort.

20-00:20:30

There's a guy in chemistry dealing with enzymes, named Schultz—he's not here anymore, but I heard about him really early, when he was very young, and people said, "Nobel." Nobel Prize. And Tien managed to retain him. I remember his saying, Schultz saying—he's at Harvard or MIT now, I think, and he got, five labs and everything, but he didn't take a much bigger offer than Tien could have offered at the time, and because he got such extraordinary support from his faculty here. He could talk to them. It wasn't competitive. It wasn't lonely, as a lot of these "I got twelve labs and a bunch of people." It can be very lonely in terms of talking to your peers, because it's competitive.

20-00:21:21

Well, if you don't have any of that going, and there's no reason to be attracted to you, there's no excitement about what you're doing, and you haven't caused anybody to be excited, or they don't know how to talk to you—they think you're black and angry and don't want to get involved—you don't get advocated or supported. So I think discrimination happens that way, and I think probably more with gender than with race or ethnicity, actually. To tell you the truth, in my experience, that kind of taken-for-granted in the past, dismissive attitude toward women was much more concrete. I would sit in rooms as a black man and listen to stuff, not around disciplines, but administratively which shocked me. And I realize—

20-00:22:12

Wilmot:

Like what? No names, or names if you like.

20-00:22:15

Ellis:

[pause] Confessions of discomfort in dealing with women, men of a certain age. You get below a certain age, it's not there anymore, but the older guys who like to drink a lot of Scotch and smoke cigars and all that kind of stuff—they're comfortable with me there, but what do you do with a nice lady there? You don't curse. You make summary judgments sometimes. "That fucker? Hell, no. Did you see how he handled such-and-such project? That's a disaster. I wouldn't think of promoting him." You've got to say things more politely—younger folks don't worry about all the demeanor issues. They're also a little different. I think the world is improving that way. But I saw, I think, in effect, more gender discrimination than I saw race discrimination, as I roamed around.

20-00:23:15

Now, I had my own experiences, which are quite dramatic on occasion, but tangential. I'm with my colleague, Lars Lerup. I'm going to lunch at the Faculty Club. I'm loaded up with my lunch, and he's got his tray, and I gesture to the person who's sitting there, a couple of guys, who are white, to see if there's—if that space is taken. Those guys shoved their dishes to me, to bus. I was glad I had my Swedish colleague-friend, Lars Lerup, there, because he was, like, stunned. And I've had a few of those cases.

20-00:24:00

McGarrigle:

What year would that have been, more or less?

20-00:24:03

Ellis:

'78.

20-00:24:05

McGarrigle:

And what's the follow-up to that? Is there any conversation that takes place?

20-00:24:10

Ellis:

Oh, no. I turned to Lars and said, "Well, there's one for you." You know, it's a subtle thing. I didn't have to say anything to Lars. Lars said, "I can't believe that that happened." But it was so fully unconscious on this guy's part. He's in a real conversation, and I can only be real to this guy in relation to servicing him. It was just quite stark. Or Nelson Polsby, someone who always seemed to be quite friendly, although politically we weren't close. We spent one day—it wound up, in our last conversation, where he was invoking some line of historical research that was supposed to have shown that black people were happier under conditions of Jim Crow and slavery than they were free. Now, there is work to this effect. I hadn't read it at the time. I told this story to someone else. But the audacity of introducing that! That's very infantilizing, for him to expect me to sit for that and try to keep it inside the tight framework of, "Well, the empirical research demonstrates"—because there are *other issues* involved in raising that. Like, *it pisses me off*, you know? [laughs]

20-00:25:44

McGarrigle:

Well, how—I mean, it's amazing. How did you respond to a situation like that, to Nelson Polsby.

20-00:25:52

Ellis:

I got upset, but I kept my composure because that's part of what you do.

20-00:26:00

McGarrigle:

Is there any attempt to explain to him, or do you [cross-talk; unintelligible]?

20-00:26:04

Ellis:

Oh, no, no. That was so far out of bounds for me that, despite our cordial relations, I figured if he is out of touch enough to think that he's going to discuss with me, [pause] in a seemly way, something as problematic as that, in that setting, then I think probably it's in his interest and my interest not to

have a lot more conversations. It really upset me. Now, at the time, in fact, I didn't know that there was a line of historical research, or at least a couple of books, arguing this. No, it's real, and I'll get you the reference. It's really interesting.

20-00:27:05

Wilmot:

I know, I'm just saying—

20-00:27:06

Ellis:

Yes, right. And, you know, I'm the kind of person, a member of this game, who, had it somehow been in a different context, would have run back to all my friends, gotten the book and done some work on this and come back to the seminar with alternative interpretations, critiques of the work. But over lunch, a topic that grows out of another, more general conversation, it's like, You know what? Maybe not.

That's a patina on the larger story of the experiences of minority-ness and so forth here.

20-00:27:56

Wilmot:

Is it a patina or is it actually more fundamental?

20-00:27:58

Ellis:

Well, I don't know how fundamental it is, but the taken-for-granted part of it is fundamental. [pantomimes the person shoving the dishes on the table to him:] "There are the dishes." Polsby didn't do "Here are the dishes." I'm sure he's being provocative. I'm sure at some level he was testing what I could handle. The effect was a little different. But the variety of faculty I have known, of color, who have gone through here, have scar tissue just like everybody else.

20-00:28:39

You don't get through this place without scar tissue, because people say, "Yuck! Not only is it wrong, it's bad!" about your work, and God only knows, your identity is really tied up in your work. It's your work! Sometimes it's a team's work, and it doesn't feel quite the same. But in the humanities, social science, and other areas it's very often your work. And so you've got to "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again" or develop a counter-argument or be part of a school of thought.

20-00:29:19

You see, now, Harry Edwards is the grand old man of an area of investigation which, God knows, is central to American life. That's really interesting. His motivation was movement related and race related and sports related and all those kind of things, but he, in looking at the world of social phenomena, in this particular kind of society, hit on something that was very important, and he was the biggest name at the biggest place and so forth, and he got over, fortunately, and he's vindicated. He's vindicated, and the field is vindicated.

- 20-00:30:08  
McGarrigle: I'd like to continue with this next time, and also with committees and some of the other things that we talked about.
- 20-00:30:15  
Ellis: Oh, God, I really go around in circles. Did I get you guys—
- 20-00:30:19  
McGarrigle: No, you don't go round in circles—
- 20-00:30:19  
Wilmot: You were very, very productive today. I think we moved very quickly and very well. Can I ask one more question before we close?
- 20-00:30:26  
McGarrigle: Yes, mm-hm.
- 20-00:30:28  
Wilmot: This is this question, which follows on—I asked it earlier, and I think it's a good time to ask it now.
- 20-00:30:32  
Ellis: Okay, okay.
- 20-00:30:33  
Wilmot: It has to do, again, with the reward system here. I was wondering, do you see any hope or wish or merit in the transformation of that reward system?
- 20-00:30:46  
Ellis: Okay. If you haven't seen it, there's a report out of the Office of the President—
- 20-00:30:59  
Wilmot: I'm sorry, I also mean culture. It's actually a reward system and culture.
- 20-00:31:03  
Ellis: Yes, yes, yes. There's a report out of the Office of the President, and Karl Pister, who is our dean of engineering here, the first and most serious affirmative action program in the university, by the way—
- 20-00:31:17  
Wilmot: Now over at the Center for Studies in Higher Education.
- 20-00:31:21  
Ellis: Yes, and was chancellor of Santa Cruz and so forth. Pister chaired this multi-campus committee, and it looked at the reward structure. Have you seen it? It's a very important thing to look at, because it talks about community service; it talks about a broader array of rewards for involvement in the university.

20-00:31:48

Wilmot:

I'm really glad you raised that, and where is your faith when you think about that?

20-00:31:51

Ellis:

I think it's a great report. It's a very hard thing to get a research university system to agree to, Berkeley in particular, because they're committed to fields of research. It's very hard to make room for research-based interventions in education, in southeast Los Angeles, and include the merits of the faculty's inventiveness in getting the program, and then coming out with some kind of evaluative structure. The fact of the matter is, when you do something like that in fields that have practical application, which a place like this is kind of hostile to, even with an engineering department, how you say how important it is that this person did that, how unique that contribution is to get this program into Compton, to actually get a set of people introducing this kind of work, and comparing it with that. And then having an evaluation structure, which you then relate to the literature, when the whole issue of the literature is problematic, where the discipline may be under question. "Is there a field of African American studies?"

20-00:33:23

Wilmot:

We'll start there.

20-00:33:25

Ellis:

Right, okay. Yes, sure, it's inevitable. It changed while I watched. Things are better in very important ways. There *are* African American Studies departments, and you know, Harvard has undergone some big changes, but they did it the way big privates do it. They say, "Give me the best people. Here's the money. Go do it." We can't do that here. This is a state organization. But we do have an African American Studies department, one that was retained by someone who cared to do that, and they set up faculty who gradually became part of the academic structure.

20-00:34:16

Now, the world is clearly changing. My guess is you're going to see fewer and fewer people of color coming in through special programs. You get the folks who are now much more educated come up the disciplinary routes, even when the disciplines have changed, who are black or brown or women or whatever, so the world is sending people who know what's here when they get here. They're already networked, maybe not in greater numbers, but yes.

20-00:34:54

Wilmot:

Russ, one part of what I'm thinking about is race and African American studies, and the other part of it is quite simply the reward system, and a culture that's based in a Baconian kind of—.

20-00:35:06

Ellis:

Yes, that's not going to change very much. No, no, it may. But it's going to change slowly, and in a place like Berkeley, UCLA, San Diego, Santa

Barbara, increasingly, it just will have to relate to a larger world of standards of the community of investigators. People have to be able to agree, “What is this?” And the longer we’re around and interested in topics that relate to the prospects of people of color and so forth, the more it will be comprehensible what this comes to. That’s why I used the Harry Edwards case, because you don’t have to know anything about the field to imagine that there are people all over the world who understand what’s at issue in the sociology of sport.

20-00:36:21

Wilmot:

And that it has value.

20-00:36:22

Ellis:

Right, and how it ties to economy, how it ties to media, et cetera, et cetera, okay? It’s a huge thing. It’s amazing. How could you *not* look at it?

20-00:36:34

Wilmot:

Are you saying, then, that it’s a question of bringing these issues to a kind of universal relevance?

20-00:36:40

Ellis:

To the attention and relevance of the array of people doing work, who will know how to estimate the quality of that work. Let me just give a quick one. In the past, you could have a group of black scholars who met to talk about what they were doing, and meet and share their work and so forth. I’m just going to take that example. By the way, while there are examples of it, I’m speaking generally here. And then they agree to go away and do this work and so forth, and when you go up for promotion, you can say, and you must include in your evaluation, a letter or a review by so-and-so, who’s part of my sub-professional world. Okay? And so you have a letter from someone.

20-00:37:51

That’s the beginnings of networking and connectedness to a larger disciplinary or professional world that helps you get interpreted, okay? But it’s just the beginnings. A lot of other people will say, “Why is this person talking about black alienation? What is any of this about? I never heard about this.” Might even be a social psychologist, who doesn’t know about the work, doesn’t know that that’s what your colleagues are pursuing, never heard of diasporic work. Having Margaret Wilkerson at Ford [Foundation] and—everybody knows now about the black diaspora. I mean, a lot of people know, and know that this is a significant array of work. It’s positioned; it’s supported; there are research funds for it; there are research reports. A lot of people don’t know that there’s still an ongoing fight between the old-fashioned black studies people and the diaspora-oriented people right here on campus right now. But you’ve expanded the realm of people who know and understand what the work is.

20-00:38:56

Now, that sounds a little bit like changing the lenses so that people see the work as good, rather than as marginal, and that’s not what I mean. Once

something is intruded into the consciousness of this community of investigators, then they know how to use their standards to evaluate it. The sociology of sport, as an example, has a whole array of meetings and people and this and that and the other, so the standards have shifted, not the standards of evaluation, but what's included among the standards of what is relevant work to do—and this is a big one—what aspect of the phenomenal world, and I use that term advisedly is part of what we do here.

20-00:39:53

McGarrigle: And I want you to articulate your idea because we need to stop.

Ellis:

Okay, but let me just—I want to give you this last one. Rod Park, when he was trying to reorganize the biological sciences—you know, it's now the whole inside-the-cell, outside-the-cell—he said he was going to try to get to some of the younger faculty, who would be more sympathetic. And he said when he got there, he found that they were young fogies who had already been gotten to and didn't want to change. But Berkeley did change, and a lot of the rest of the world has changed its organization, reflecting what Berkeley does.

20-00:40:26

McGarrigle: Okay.

20-00:40:30

Ellis: Bye! [chuckles]

**[end of session]**



Interview 11: November, 7, 2003

[begin audio file 21]

21-00:00:03

Wilmot: November 7. Russ Ellis, Jr. Here with Leah McGarrigle and Nadine Wilmot at ROHO. This is interview number 11.

21-00:00:16

Ellis: No, it's not. It's interview number 7. [playfully]

21-00:00:21

Wilmot: Right. All right, well, let's see, to begin. Today we wanted to talk to you about affirmative action. I wanted to ask you when did you first become involved in affirmative action, creating or working with affirmative action policy?

21-00:00:41

Ellis: On campus?

21-00:00:41

Wilmot: Yes, on campus.

21-00:00:48

Ellis: Well, I think I mentioned maybe last time, my first campus involvement had to do with the black faculty caucus that was using the occasion of the Department of Labor's threat to the University. Using that occasion to try to move the University to take more aggressive action on faculty appointment, promotion and tenure cases that involved underrepresented faculty. This had to do with how positions were announced, written up, the review process and departments by deans, by the academic senate committee on budget and personnel, et cetera. In my Department of Architecture, I sat on the department's affirmative action committee, and worked fairly consistently to try to monitor and make possible minority appointments in the department and University-wide. Now I wasn't too active University-wide except through the black faculty caucus.

21-00:02:50

Wilmot: In the '70s?

21-00:02:51

Ellis: Yes, in the 70s, but I was active as assistant dean of the College of Environmental Design, also looking at undergraduate and graduate admissions. I sat on the Department of Architecture's PhD committee. I may even have chaired it at some point, I don't remember. I tried to stay attentive to affirmative action policy and admissions, et cetera, there too. So pretty much from the beginning of my participation here I was involved not so much in the making of policy but its execution at the local level in the department and the college.

21-00:03:43

McGarrigle:

Russ, in the Department of Architecture the affirmative action committee, how did that come into being? Did that pre-date you or did that help once you got here? Just wondering what that early—

21-00:03:57

Ellis:

I'm pretty sure that there was some version of a minority admission's admissions committee, I know that to be the case. I don't know if that was called affirmative action admissions at the time. But you know, EOP, other earlier labels. I still know students who came in who were in programs before I got there who came in on EOP admissions. The affirmative action committees inside the department and the college I think post-date my arrival but I don't really remember.

21-00:04:47

McGarrigle:

I'm wondering what the evolution looks like when you get there. You know, when you get there, is it an already clearly defined committee that's been undertaking some work on a routine basis or what does it look like?

21-00:05:00

Ellis:

No, it sort of gathered steam as the University gets more active. We did have a quite a progressive wing of our faculty as I've mentioned before: Roslyn Lindheim, Sandy Hirshen, Sarah Ishikawa, gosh, who else? The community design group in architecture, single faculty like Ken Simmons, the architect Claude Stoller. There were people who were either active or sympathetic. Jesse Reichel. And in [the department of City and Regional] Planning too, but it was, if my recollection serves me right, more a matter of the culture of the department than it was of specific structures that were set up, but I could even be wrong there.

21-00:06:16

Wilmot:

I have a question, Russ. In 1973, you served on the Chancellor's Committee on Affirmative Action according to your bio-bib.

21-00:06:28

Ellis:

I probably did, then.

21-00:06:30

Wilmot:

What kinds of, I'm just wondering, when people serve on these different committees—the chancellor's committee, academic senate, committee on status of ethnic minorities and women, these kinds of things—are these actually the sites of the creation of policy, and what goes on in these committees? Is that where the story of affirmative action actually happens or not?

21-00:07:00

Ellis:

No, typically—I'm trying to remember what the '73 committee might be. You might want to show me my own bio-bib so I'll know. Because you see there are committees that are sort of special purpose committees structured to review issues that show the leadership of the chancellor or the dean,

something like that. Famously, for example, Karl Pister in Engineering was one of the aggressive affirmative action advocates on the campus for ages in a department where they were measuring noses because everyone had a 4.0 or 4.5 or 9, whatever. But he was very clear, very aggressive, and exercised leadership. Sometimes it's just leadership on the part of someone in the high administrative position. So special committees are formed. And usually, these things then descend into senate activities. The vice chancellor typically will be the aggressor. He, or she, is the executive of the campus and lobbies people to do things. Lobbies the senate leadership, we need to do something about this. The senate may then meet and agree to form committees or groups. It's seldom that clear. It's very seldom that clear.

I mentioned Al Bowker last time and his support of African American studies and so forth. There was an interesting convergence, leaping a little ahead, around the issue of the low student FTE in African American Studies department classes. In a down time in budgeting, the faculty looking at the money, very special kinds of money that comes from the state, being spent over there on not very many students, and wanting to get that money over here. Bowker defending it, but then the issue of student enrollment in African American studies classes becoming a long-term issue where, for example, some faculty in the department, and Ron Takaki, certainly I'll give him credit, lobbied heavily for making those courses a requirement. So that the general student body could be made aware of the ethnic issues. Well, the cynical faculty who were looking at this enterprise over there saw that as an artificial way of bumping up the student FTE in the [African American Studies] department. It may or may not have been, but you can see the politics of that.

Now, that lasted a long time, that issue. The issue evolved and when I wound up later on a senate committee on women and ethnic minorities, that was an issue. And then later when I was on the senate Committee on Committees—if I haven't mentioned it already, have I discussed it? It's a wonderful story. It came to a head in a good way that resulted in the American Cultures program. So, well, this is easy to discuss. Anyone who is interested in the topic, reading my oral history or anybody else's can patch together a very interesting story on all of this. It's often less specific than a committee does something and then X happens. Very often issues are ignited by a case. A woman in the math department or a study on the low number of women in the sciences or the low number of women faculty on the campus altogether, okay? So it's almost never a simple linear connection. It's a moving mosaic where certain kinds of issues grow. My instinct tells me that to the degree that you have organized instituted committees and structures to do things, the problems have already settled and you're headed—the issue has cooled off. And I'll stop talking about that because I don't know what I mean right now.

What was this one? What am I looking at?

- 21-00:12:36  
Wilmot: This is your bio-bib.
- 21-00:12:38  
Ellis: I know but the '73 committee, which—?
- 21-00:12:43  
McGarrigle: I'm missing '73 on my file. I have '72 and then I jumped to '74.
- 21-00:12:47  
Ellis: This is '72, this is '74 so I'm missing '73. Courses taught, courses—you were pointing me to an affirmative action committee?
- 21-00:12:57  
Wilmot: Yes, I believe it's on there. It should be in that—strange that I don't have it either.
- 21-00:13:12  
Ellis: Oh, chancellor's advisory committee on affirmative action. Oh my God, that's so long ago because I was also on the chancellor's advisory committee on health and medical sciences. That helps me. That committee is actually more memorable than the whole affirmative action committee. Wow, I don't even remember that.
- 21-00:13:36  
Wilmot: Well, that's the answer to the question. I'm glad to know, that's the answer to the question.
- 21-00:13:44  
Ellis: Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Affirmative Action. I'd have to look at the—but that's the committee of the administration—not of the senate. Right. It advises the chancellor. I'm sure it was related to the labor suit and so forth, because Mike Heyman was vice chancellor then. He would have assembled that group. You know, it's interesting just talking about my own trajectory that in 1972 I would be doing that.
- 21-00:14:23  
Wilmot: Two years after you—
- 21-00:14:24  
Ellis: Well, yeah. I shouldn't have been doing that. I mean in retrospect it's really clear. Actually people tried to tell me, I realized, "Don't do too much of that stuff." That's very interesting.
- 21-00:14:40  
Wilmot: That is interesting.
- 21-00:14:41  
Ellis: Well, it's interesting because it does explain something about the pace of my mobility as an academic, I was too busy doing other stuff.

21-00:14:50

McGarrigle:

Russ, maybe just to state the obvious but can you finish that thought why people told you not to do that and why in retrospect you should not have been doing that.

21-00:15:01

Ellis:

Because if you want to be mobile and be successful in your creative work as a member of the faculty, which is the reason you're here in the first place, you should spend your time doing your creative work, whatever it is, and less time doing citizenship work like community service, University service, right? But I really didn't feel that the choice was that simple. I'll speak for me and some black faculty that I know because I know this best. It felt almost disloyal to disengage from the overarching struggle to improve the prospects of black people. There's something wrong with you if you don't stay involved. I still feel that way although I do know that the world has changed.

21-00:16:36

Wilmot:

Are you speaking in terms of interior censure or are you speaking in terms about what people will think of you?

21-00:16:43

Ellis:

I am talking about personal biography and social context and relations within the group. You see it clearly, just to be perfectly straight about it in terms of the overarching response of African American faculty to Wardell Connerly and to McWhorter and others who for various reasons step outside of the group, and take the position of the [white] majority against those who are working specifically for the prospects of, in this case, African American people. So it's multiple. It's how you got to be a person, it's how I arrived here. There is no question but that an array of people who were black and sympathetic whites and others took my race, my ethnicity, and all those things into consideration, and they were an advantage for me in my getting my position. That was a less fraught time, so it wasn't as costly to the overall system that I got a position here, as it came to be seen later, but I come in and I'm in debt. Not to the people so much, but to the idea, the whole goal of effecting change. What I hold against McWhorter is that he perfectly clearly—and everybody knows—took advantage of the affirmative action post-doc to get here [Cal], and he turned on the whole thing. He did nothing to help anybody's prospects who was black or brown or anything. Now he's the darling of the Right that's critical of affirmative action. That makes me so angry, and I asked him about it.

21-00:19:06

Wilmot:

What did he say?

21-00:19:08

Ellis:

He "had an insight." He "didn't understand" earlier, but now he did. But he was *unseemly* in his desire to get the post-doc. He got his PhD at Stanford and many of us here worked on his behalf to get him here. He got a joint appointment in Linguistics and African American studies. He got a full

position in [the Linguistics department], which was our whole goal, to get minority faculty not necessarily in split appointments that were unrelated to their interests. McWhorter was not actually committed or interested in African American issues. He was interested in linguistics. But he took advantage of the opportunity to get here, to get regularized, and then to get a full and later tenured position in linguistics. So it's just really distressing to have him become the darling of the anti-affirmative action world. It just makes me so crazy. But anyway, obviously if I'm using those standards to talk about him, I'm using those standards to talk about myself. So the issue is it's not easy to just waltz in and then stop paying attention to what got you here, or what helped get you here.

It sounds in some of these interviews like I demean myself. I think I was a player who belonged somewhere in the realm of work that I was doing. I think I got distracted but I'm not apologetic for the distraction of doing the social and cultural politics of higher education and trying to change it. I had good support, I really enjoyed working with Mike Heyman, and we can talk about that more later. And other people here. Tien was great. Mac Leatsch.

21-00:21:14  
Wilmot:

I just wanted to pick up on something you said. You said when I came here it was less—to paraphrase—it was less fraught. It cost the system less. I wanted to ask what you're comparing it to in terms of now and is it more fraught and in what ways did it cost the system to hire faculty of color?

21-00:21:41  
Ellis:

It's really easy. I'm not sure when the sea change [in applications to Cal] happened, but the manifestation of the pressure from the outside world affected higher education at every level: students, staff, and faculty. I would say it was manifested by the Asian admissions crisis. There was a moment—well, let me choose my language carefully here.

When I joined this faculty in 1970—and you guys or somebody should do this, look at what happened in 1970—a very large number of people came in that year, and several black faculty—Bill Shack came, I came, maybe Barbara Christian came. A lot of folks came, but so did Carol Christ. There was an infusion of money from the state. The campus was building. The system was building. Admissions, under the guidance of the master plan, was doing what it should do, what it said it was going to do. The first 50 percent of all admittees came in on numbers. That was simple. Numbers. Then the next 50 percent—and that language was very carefully chosen—in the main satisfied the requirements of the master plan. Students had to have around a B average [to be eligible for admission to any UC campus]. By the time of the Asian admission crisis, under I forget what year the big tension happened, but it was in the '80s. Without anybody quite noticing, the pressure on admissions had gone crazy. There were no spaces. People wanted to be here [at Berkeley]. We were doing redirection, I guess that had already started. That is, you would

apply to Cal and Cal couldn't take you, but you could be admitted to the University but you'd go to Riverside, or you'd go to Santa Cruz, or you'd go to Santa Barbara or something like that. It was called redirection. And our fidelity to EOP, which had more to do with economic background of your parents, of you, what your family income was, and whether or not there had been someone in your family who'd had higher education. That is, if you didn't have parents who'd had higher education, if you came from a low economic background, if you came from an underrepresented minority group and so forth, you got favored attention. You weren't redirected. That didn't mean necessarily that you were admitted, but that meant that we would look at your application at Cal and look at it carefully for the prospects that you could be here.

The elements of the Asian admissions crisis—just to announce what it came to, there was a lot to it—but an administrative decision was made not to include Asians anymore in the EOP category because they were not underrepresented. There was a very large number and quite a large percentage of those students, however, who were from low-income backgrounds and whose parents hadn't gone on to higher education. So when that policy was put into effect, all of a sudden a very large number of Asians got redirected. Particularly Chinese. We had to re-inspect our admissions criteria, like “leadership” and all these kinds of things, because in arguing against this change they said, “Wait a minute, this is based on some model of life that we don't live. We like our kids to stay close to home. We don't want them to go to Irvine.” Anyway, it set up a whole set of other beats. I'm not doing it justice right now, but all of a sudden without anyone quite noticing, the admissions issue became really big. Everybody wanted to be in and everybody wanted to be at Berkeley, too. The same thing happened with faculty.

Meanwhile, state resources that come to the University were falling. Soft money became a more significant feature—that is, one time or two time or other kinds of money that weren't part of the structured budget—became a more routine feature of how you survived here, particularly in engineering and the sciences. But in the humanities and other places, other departments, money is not as available. So [in retrospect] when I came, there wasn't as much pressure on the hiring process, so there were fewer people who felt as though they lost out.

21-00:28:06

McGarrigle:

That makes me think of something else that I want to ask you, Russ. We can talk about it now or later, which is the [*Regents of University of California vs.*] *Bakke* case in terms of people who felt left out. Because we're talking about prospective faculty who may have felt—what was your involvement with the *Bakke* case and how would you describe its effect on all of these other things that we're talking about?

21-00:28:37

Ellis:

Well, I frankly paid very little attention to Bakke. Not because it was unimportant, but because—other things were more important, and that was how things were going inside the University. Inside UC Berkeley, in this case. So, while I didn't pay attention to Bakke so much, a lot of us were wondering how the [UC] general counsel was handling this case. Was the University taking a strong [enough] position. That is, you know, [we were] trying to monitor how the University was managing this case. There was a lot of concern about that. Was there some lack of enthusiasm? We knew, a lot of us that cared, that there was a lot of quiet distress about affirmative action in the community, the academic community.

21-00:30:08

McGarrigle:

What do you think your conclusion and that of your like-minded colleagues was about the University and the Regents and their enthusiasm and dedication?

21-00:30:18

Ellis:

My recollection, in summary, would be that they didn't put up a strong case. but I couldn't describe that to you legally but just in terms of watching the unfolding of Bakke. I'm not sure if that's true, but that's how I wound up feeling. Anyway, let's go back to your question. The opponents of affirmative action, to the extent that they get new policies effective or new case laws, set up road blocks that have to be dealt with. So when I say I wasn't paying attention to Bakke so much, I was anticipating the worst, and then trying to think with others what does that mean for what we would do? How does this impact the prospects of admitting minority students at each level? At the graduate and undergraduate level? So it was more a problem-solving problem for me.

I personally felt that there would be an end to affirmative action. That was my feeling. It came out of the civil rights movement not as something that a lot of movement people felt was the great solution to anything. It was almost like, okay, here we are, and here's what we got. Let me say these words to you out loud: it is not simply wonderful to say "You have equal opportunity to come to this University," and then announce it to everybody through outreach, if somebody over here has been kept under a rock for generations and can't even read the announcement. So the system, the national rule, is not [limited to] simple equal opportunity. So if you're a woman, a Jew, Chinese or so forth, we will let you in, which had been the historic triumph of equal opportunity, right? That we will let you in. That there will not be a quota [limiting Jews, for example]. That was great, wonderful.

But affirmative action has to be the next step—I'm sorry to be so primitive about it, but I want to hear myself say this and have it on paper—when you announce: "Here is the University and you are welcome to come here and apply and you will be admitted. Your race, your class, your ethnicity, your religion will not be held against you." Then, there's also an obligation to take



affirmative action to [educate prospective students]. “Here’s the meaning of a University. Here’s what happens over there, here’s what the departments are. Here’s what they mean by a discipline. Here’s what a bachelor’s degree is. Here’s what you have to do to be *ready* to get there.” Once you did that, if you took *affirmative action* to prepare people to understand in which direction the University went, what was involved in getting there, helping them to prepare when they arrived at the door for admission, and took affirmative action when they got to the door to help them in—then that was fairer, because you’re making up for a historic disadvantage.

Now, that’s how I saw it, and that’s how I came at it. That’s kind of the momentum, the emotional and political and academic, that I and others came at affirmative action with here. I think that’s what we were doing. I think that’s why it had such power. It wasn’t passive; it was active. So with Bakke and others, you began to get roadblocks. There are some real tensions in affirmative action. The beneficiaries of equal opportunity were not happy with this sort of thing. The historic Left marriage between blacks and the Jewish community around equal opportunity [suffered]. Affirmative action set up real tensions in that, and real hostilities, and real problems across the country. It was difficult. Anyway, that’s how I saw it, and I think that’s how a lot of my colleagues across the board saw it.

21-00:35:46

McGarrigle:

And the tensions were—in the civil rights movement, there was real partnership between Jewish leftists and African Americans—so this tension that evolves then in post ‘70s is around affirmative action and specifically the tension is? Can you explain what the significance of the tension is? That spots were being held, what is the perception?

21-00:36:18

Ellis:

Well, I think the way it took place, I don’t think it was simple. Practically speaking, the tension was, I could arrive at the door as an applicant for a position and several other people could arrive at the door. And I would be admitted because my performance in terms of all the gatekeeping requirements would be equal enough to others that I was favored because of my ethnicity and race. That’s the problem for those who don’t get in. I think that was part of it, that at various levels certain faculty as well, at various levels, a lot of people were alienated by that fact.

21-00:37:41

McGarrigle:

You’re competing for—

21-00:37:43

Ellis:

Yes, it’s more *noblesse oblige*, or do good work when it’s equal opportunity and we’re holding hands and I’m helping you. It’s another thing when I come to the door *with* you and things are structured in a way that the disadvantage that I represent as part of a group is taken into consideration and I’m admitted [and you’re not].

21-00:38:08

Wilmot:

With that disadvantage codified then whiteness is also codified in a new way.

21-00:38:14

Ellis:

In effect, nobody was talking like that at the time, but yes, sure. Let's see, I want to do other things with this. There are other things happening.

My father was a lovely man. He had some funny things about him that weren't so wonderful, but he was a gentle man. I think that when I finally did get around when I was around twelve to living with him and benefited from living with him that he contributed to my personality in a way that I like. The picture of my daddy makes me happy even though he was a mess at the end, and his life was very complicated, too. But if we'd need a screw or something he'd say, "Go down to the Jew, it's Sunday, he'll be open." [laughter] And in that statement was a lot of bias. A lot of anti-Semitism, taken for granted casual background. I never thought about it very much. "Oh yeah, go to the Jew, the Jew will be open." South Central Los Angeles, okay? Empirically, a lot of the stores in South Central Los Angeles, furniture, this that and the other, were run by Jews and a lot of them were exploitative. This happened in many cities in the United States.

What began to happen, as black folks got more aggressive—well, many things happened. The movement came North, right? We all know about that. I was present [in 1964] when James Baldwin was talking about this stuff, and it was very uncomfortable. I mean, not just—I use Baldwin because he's a conspicuous example—but he's talking about the exploitative Jews in the [black] ghetto. And then, "I'm sorry, we gotta talk about that, too [laughter]. We've got to talk about that too, and this is part of pulling the covers. No, it ain't just happening in the South—this shit's in the North as well. Yes, it's nice that you [liberal-left Jews and other whites] came down there and you can help. We appreciate the help. Now we gotta pay some attention to what's happening up here. The discrimination is up here too, and then some."

All of a sudden a lot of things started happening in the movement, in the civil rights organizations, looking at the leadership. "Now why is he out front? Why is Dan Freed out front? Ain't this about black people?" And as you know, there was a time when there was an accommodation in many of the civil rights organizations where whites actually kind of disappeared, and went back and did their work in the back room. And the black folks were in front room, *literally*. Oh wait, let me just tell you about the interaction here.

What I'm thinking is—and I'm sure this is the case—is, this tension built from various quarters. To the extent that there was tension around race and affirmative action in unions, or in civil service jobs, or in corporations even, it wasn't simply that people in those settings were upset. Veterans got advantages. They got twenty extra points on the post office exam because they fought for their country. I mean, that's preferential, right? But it's for

something that's a disadvantage and an advantage for service. But what was happening was that a larger set of issues that were developing in the mosaic of America that came to bear in various places including higher education. That's what I want to say. It wasn't—and the other thing that was happening, I heard this as vice chancellor. People would say, "Well, you know, I really wish your people well but I want my kid in this college." They really meant it, they said, "Hey, I got no problems with race."

Okay, what I think was happening, and I think the sea change in admissions and the pressure that you asked me about, how all of a sudden [scarce] positions mattered. All of a sudden a lot of people understood that their prospects, and the prospects of their children related very heavily to higher education. Getting jobs, getting training for what I think people suspected was almost on an instinct level, it didn't even matter how educated they were, that the world was changing. They needed to be there, and their kids needed to be there because they needed to be ready for the next world that was coming. I know that sounds kind of magical and not filled out. I am *certain* I'm right, that it was—and I say this and some people I've worked with don't like to hear me say this—but I say racism is part of the furniture. That's not special. If you want to explain what was happening that all of a sudden this stuff came, got so large, it was people that people understood. Some explicitly, and a lot of people on just sensing level, that this is where the action was. This is where they have to have their kids. I don't just mean this place, but higher education and as you can see, look at what's happening. Look at the costs, look at who's likely to be getting access to higher education in the next years. I mean, it's changed.

21-00:45:00  
Wilmot:

Russ, following up on that, can I just jump ahead of it and ask you how—

21-00:45:04  
Ellis:

Sure, I still haven't gotten some of the things you asked, but yes.

21-00:45:06  
Wilmot:

Yes, well okay. I hope we remember them, but just to jump ahead and ask how did those issues that you just described, those tensions, issues of scarcity, you know, trying to position your children for the future unfolding. How did those unfold the ending of affirmative action, the dismantling of affirmative action in the 1990s like SP 1 and SP 2 and [Proposition] 209? How did you experience those events?

21-00:45:42  
Ellis:

That gives me the opportunity to do a little quick answer to your original question [about how I got involved with the chancellor's activities]. My department, architecture, made several good-faith efforts to hire African American and Latino faculty and women. As I stayed more actively involved and worked on behalf of that enterprise, getting more folks in—it's a big department. I became frustrated. It wasn't that my colleagues weren't

interested. It's just that they were more interested in other things, and weren't interested in all the hand-holding that was involved in getting these affirmative action [faculty] appointments realized. I got to a point, actually, where I shifted my attention personally and volunteered myself to the chancellor to work on behalf of undergraduate admissions and affirmative action. It was a change in my sense of how I could be effective. It's a big move away from helping my department tone up and so forth, to looking at these bigger issues.

21-00:47:19  
Wilmot:

Was this in 1982?

21-00:47:20  
Ellis:

Yes, it might have been '81 but I think it was '82. Then I became a Faculty Assistant to the Chancellor, actually for a year. That devolved into Faculty Assistant for the Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, which was a new position that Heyman had created at his reorganization. There's a lot of detail in there. [long pause]

Speaking locally, and as me here rather than trying to be a historian of the whole phenomenon, it's really my impression that the demise of affirmative action was part of a larger program of response to the whole civil rights movement and the New Deal. I know this sounds vague. I think, for example, of Tom Sowell, the black economist at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, was constantly attacking us for Berkeley's affirmative action. He would write things, even—I wrote to him early in my tenure as vice chancellor—he's writing these articles saying things like, "Only 29 percent of African American students admitted ever graduated." The figure was wrong. It was—I knew where he got it and I knew why, and I wrote to him elaborately to tell him why it was wrong. The next week he wrote that only 29 percent of African American students, undergraduates, ever graduated. He was going to be saying that, and I was so irritated until I looked at what the Hoover Institution is doing. The Hoover Institution in general is about what we're seeing right now, a real shift away from the New Deal. So in a way, affirmative action seemed to me—and I don't know how clever I was about this then, but I think I and my colleagues had been thinking about this for awhile—this is part of a larger reaction to the welfare state and the change away from it. It's now succeeding and it's now part of a plan, as you now know, from the whole neo-con orientation. I would say that the big change, the decisive change came with the wave of students who—there was a big demographic surge of applicants. I think that was a big issue. All of a sudden you had to make space for more people, and that put a lot more pressure on the admissions issue. Economically, there were a lot of changes. For example, among the graduate students there were fewer and fewer positions out there. It's interesting.

21-00:51:30  
Wilmot:

Once they received their degrees.

21-00:51:33

Ellis:

Right, and fewer faculty positions. It was a real squeeze. The State was contributing less to the central [UC] coffer. When I came in '70, I think 70 percent of the budget was from the state. I can't imagine there's more than thirty-five or so now. So what I think happened, was that there was a larger program [already] underway of just reviewing and dealing with some of these welfare notions. But I think the decisive moment for us came with Connerly because he was black. He's very smart and he's determined. He's tenacious. He gave a lot of people, as this pressure grew, cover, because he was a black man doing this work. You know, I mentioned to you when I was in the Faculty Assistant for Faculty Affirmative Action Office, which was changed to Faculty Equity Associate, and then I would get these notes back from the bottom of the forms that said "UC Berkeley"—we hadn't changed the forms yet—"is an equal opportunity affirmative action employer." You know, affirmative action would be scratched out and there'd be an editorial comment from the department. Sometimes it was clearly a faculty member. They didn't come out of hiding to say, God damn it it's about time and take a position against affirmative action. But they were really happy that someone had, and Wardell really afforded those people an opportunity. The passive, quiet ones who were hostile. Never mind the active ones. And now we have a new Regent, what's his name, Moores, the guy from San Diego, conducting his own studies on race discrimination, admissions, outside the frame of the Regents. And Ward legitimated something that was developing anyway. So I think that was really a decisive thing. It would have happened anyway, sooner or later, but I think people flooded in behind him.

21-00:54:10

McGarrigle:

I wondered how you were thinking about how the strategy, as we reflect back, has changed. You know, we now read a lot about the strategy in *Brown v. Board of Education* and what was the strategy. If people reflect back, how could it have been done differently? Reflecting back on this era that we're talking about, affirmative action and your time here, your participation. What are your thoughts on strategy?

21-00:54:39

Ellis:

Well, you know, as I was learning my job as vice chancellor, which was fun, I really enjoyed that job. I'm glad I'm not in it, I'd be dead. But I would have these insights. I would make up little aphorisms that would summarize my insights. This one won't sound important but it really is, and it's, "Nothing gets done unless somebody does it." Basically, that says ultimately, somebody's got to take responsibility for moving something. It's amazing how well-meaning organizations and units of organizations will say okay, now we're working on X and everybody agrees and they put it over there, but nobody is assigned the job of doing it. It has to be moved. The other one, you know the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure?" Do you remember that? Mine was, "An ounce of position is a worth a pound of policy." [laughter]

21-00:55:56

Wilmot: Excellent.

21-00:55:58

Ellis: I think so too. It doesn't sound very nice, but I was explicit, I'd say something like this. "Okay, I'm vice chancellor for all the students and I will give a special hearing to underrepresented minority people." Of course I would. Why do you want me there? That's my job. To be alert and sensitive to the issues of everybody, but to pay special attention to underrepresented people on whom I could have some effect, or not, whom I could help or whatever. If I'm white and I'm vice chancellor I don't say, you know, "I'm here. I'm vice chancellor for everybody, but I'm going to pay special attention to white people," partly because that's not the problem. But I felt I had to be explicit about that. I'm in a position to help. So, the strategy, get as many people as possible spread across as many positions as possible, because then the system becomes important as the tool of advancement and so forth. It's not that you can go in there and sneak and so forth but you can educate. People would come to me and say, "Hey Russ, they're discriminating against me. There's racist stuff going on over there."

21-00:57:37

Wilmot: Faculty members?

21-00:57:38

Ellis: Staff, let's say. Faculty too, but particularly with staff. I'd say, you know, "Okay are you going to go with this? Are you going to push this case? And they'd say, "Well, I'm thinking about it." So I'd say, "Okay, let me tell you. If you're going to claim race discrimination, plan to have a red X in your forehead for the rest of your employed life." It just is that way. It's the same with sex discrimination. Same with whistle-blowing. If you're going to do that in any system, it's going to follow you. It may not be in your file, but people say oh, that's the person who's pleading special whatever. It may be true that they're discriminating. And even if its discovered that it's true, you're still marked for using that as a device for advancement or to keep from getting fired, or to get a raise in pay, and so forth. That, I believe, is still the case. Now, the criteria that define the red mark may vary from situation to situation. But then I was also in a position to say, "Hey Joe, you come to work black. Joe, you go to lunch black. Joe, you go home black." You know what I'm talking about? You arrive with black people; you go to lunch with black people; you go home with black people. And none of those black people I see are actually in a position to determine your mobility. Did you know that we have a cross-training program through our affirmative action office where you could actually get part of your income paid to go be an intern in financial aid and learn something about financial aid. Once you have that on your resume, people say, "Oh, not only does Joe do X, but Joe's had some exposure to financial aid through this program. Hey, we've got an opening, let's try Joe. We can meet our affirmative action goals, and also we've got somebody's who's prepared. We don't have to hire a new person." Now Joe, nobody you

came with, no one you went to lunch with, and nobody you went home with is in a position to help you do that. You've got to talk to other people. Now, I'm using this example because it's real, but that's why an ounce of position is worth a pound of policy. You can tell people how the system works, what their prospects are, how to advance their prospects, and then they can educate others.

21-01:00:17

Wilmot: How can you change the system?

21-01:00:19

Ellis: Well, what I'm saying in this case is, take the maximum opportunity to disperse good folks throughout the system, and in the important places. Dan Boggan and I did amazing stuff, and none of it's written down. It wasn't illegal. He was Vice Chancellor of Business Administrative Services at the same time I was here. We didn't do anything illegal. He'd say, "Hey Russ." I'd say, "Yeah?" and he'd say, "[hypothetical proposal noise]" "I think so, let's do that." [laughter]

21-01:00:52

Wilmot: What kind of things?

21-01:00:53

Ellis: Well, let's put money into such-and-such.

21-01:00:57

McGarrigle: Did people come to you with cases of discrimination that were so egregious that you had a different response, which was, we need to take this up, we need to make some noise?

21-01:01:09

Ellis: Oh, yes.

21-01:01:10

McGarrigle: There's going to be a red X, and I'm warning you, I'm advising you there's going to be a red X, but this is the next step.

21-01:01:18

Wilmot: And this is as faculty equity associate or—?

21-01:01:21

Ellis: Well, that would [depend on] the case. I'll tell you what. The one that was the most egregious case, which I'm not going to talk about by name—it's an academic personnel case—it had to do with a dean who was tremendously threatened by a minority woman, just tremendously threatened.

21-01:01:45

Wilmot: Felt threatened by her or—?

21-01:01:47

Ellis:

Just [felt threatened] as a person. The dean was not bad, technically. I mean, if you look at the policies. And the department was nice and all kinds of stuff. But [the dean] was driven crazy by the faculty member's accusation of discrimination. The faculty member wasn't even pointing at the dean, but the dean got very upset. It was like, "I'm being accused of being illiberal!" And went crazy, and started doing really weird things. This was when I was on recall, okay? So no skin off my nose but I was in a position, because I could read the files, and because I could talk to the vice chancellor—I reported to the vice chancellor—I could go in and say, "Hey, here's what's happening. You need, when you go, when you look at this case, and when you talk to the budget committee, you need to look at X, Y, Z. Look at this stuff on file, and so forth." Yes, sure. There were a couple of cases like that.

21-01:03:19

Wilmot:

Was an element of that job of being faculty equity associate, protecting the institution in terms of discrimination lawsuits, et cetera?

21-01:03:44

Ellis:

Well, yes, in this sense: the University is a kind of place—I mean, we don't cut and process fish here. I'm being silly. And there are people who—not just minorities like me. It's protecting the institution in how it defines itself, what it sees itself as being about: a generator of knowledge and a repository of knowledge, with a community of investigators who can make judgments about the adequacy of research, the adequacy of those who are conducting it, and so forth. That's the kind of place it is. And every institutional sphere—business, education, the military, the church—they all have these things, right? The University is a particular kind of one, but there are structures, there are people at the top and the middle, and then there's the flock, those who are inducted and those who are educated to the myths of whatever it is, the army, the church, the University. There are people who, in a place like this, often want to be rewarded for things that aren't related to what the place thinks it's about. "Hey, I've taught my courses faithfully, I've sat on a lot of committees, and such and such. Why am I not being promoted? Why am I not getting tenure?" That does come up, and in that respect the office of—someone comes in with the case and the faculty equity associate's office—I don't know if it still exists. I don't know what shape it's in right now—but you have to say, "You don't have a case," or you can say, "You do have a case." That is, your case has merit in relation to what the place says it's about. So yes, there's inevitably a protective side of every one of these places for advancement is helped or hindered.

21-01:06:17

Wilmot:

Did you relate to the ombudsperson's office at all, or staff?

21-01:06:22

Ellis:

Yes. Mm-hm. Boy, we had some doozies. [chuckles] That office didn't, well, let's see—yes, because the faculty system of appointment, promotion, tenure,



et cetera, doesn't handle odd behavior very well. The system's not set up for that. So, if a faculty member engages in sexual harassment, we've gotten better at [handling] it, but it's still a funny thing. It's hard to handle. The senate's structure is not all that good at dealing with it. It gets handled in an ad hoc way in the administration. And then what do you do with the personnel file? Where, if someone is truly is the best on the globe at what they do, and they keep feeling up, or phoning in the night, romantically, which happened to a young woman in the English Department. She fell in love with this faculty member, but she went crazy in love. She was very, very good [academically]. So how do you relate this stuff, that the ombudsperson might get, to their academic work? The system wants to reward people for getting the place's name in lights. That's what the system wants to do. So, it gets very, very murky. These things always bump into each other. The academic personnel process doesn't know what to do with them very well. So you need these special little places, and even if the faculty equity associate's office didn't [handle] that, because it's in the interstices, people would wind up going over there and saying, "Can you help me?"

21-01:08:52

McGarrigle:

But don't you eventually end up with a set of standards of which we haven't placed down but was probably painfully won in terms of sexual harassment, what is acceptable? Where it's actually articulated, so that there's a standard that theoretically is applied across the board, whether it's a star who's violated the standard, or whether it's someone who's not a star, and could possibly be on their way out regardless of their behavior.

21-01:09:29

Ellis:

I think so, but I think maybe the first of those issues came up when I entered graduate school and the policies kind of got really developed and articulated after I retired—it's a very slow process.

21-01:09:43

McGarrigle:

Right, and we should talk about it next time. It's a very recent process. Mary Ann Mason was involved with that, and Jewelle Gibbs was involved in that. These women of the faculty.

21-01:10:03

Wilmot:

Do you want to talk about that now or next time?

21-01:10:05

McGarrigle:

I think next time.

21-01:10:07

Wilmot:

I wanted to return to this question that Leah asked about strategy. How did you kind of rethink, having lived through these thirty years of affirmative action being in place and then being dismantled, what did you think in terms of strategy or rethinking strategy when it came to affirmative action efforts, in spirit, mostly, not so much in terms of implementation? That didn't make sense.

21-01:10:37

Ellis:

No, it did. I understand. [long pause] Well, you occupy in the space you have, and you push it, so the issue becomes how do you push the space that's remaining. Jim Lehrer said to Chancellor Tien, I believe—[chuckling] I can't tell this story, I'm going to tell this story—Tien had talked about how he was *still*, despite SP 1 and 2 and 209, how he was *still* determined to do affirmative action. And I know Tien was actually committed because we were on the senate committee on women and ethnic minorities together, and might have even been on the Committee on Committees together. He was very aggressive when we were doing p-values and all these other kind of devices to measure how departments were performing on affirmative action. Tien wanted—he was interested in big signs or something that showed where people were in '73 and where they were now in '83. He was really—I loved that about him. But Jim Lehrer I think it was said, when Tien said he was going to do this, “Well, pardon me Chancellor, but as I understand 209, you're not free to do what you were doing in the past. How do propose to do this?” Tien said, [“Tricks.”] [laughing] It was amazing. It didn't stick, it was Teflon. He said the word “tricks” on national television. It had a little to do with his familiarity with the word, but I don't know. Tien was a funny guy.

But you can't [“trick.”] Because you'll get caught, especially with all the lamps shining on you. You've got to say, “Okay what world do we have to work in?” And obviously, we were pushed back to outreach, and you'll see an efflorescence of outreach programs. Then you pump the money into those until you can't—talk about the budget cut, the outreach programs that the UC office of president cut 74 percent in this last budget cut, partly because they are ephemera anyway. What exactly are they and where is the money needed? But, certainly one of the things you've got to do is you've really got to get busy, helping high school students understand what the A to F requirements are. You've got to get out there doing that stuff. So that was part of my thinking. I didn't think that it was a case of how could we preserve what we already had. The issue was keeping the pressure on because it's a political process too, on departments to give the fairest possible shake they can to underrepresented students, given the limits they had.

Then making sure the vast array of folks out there understood what the new conditions were, trying to get the University to emulate the University of Texas, for example, getting policies in place. I wasn't here for that but there was talk of that, paying more attention to individual high schools, and admitting by high school and so forth, which we never did. Looking carefully at the review process of the admission packet. Nobody that we compare ourselves to really admits [students] simply by numbers. I mean, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, they don't do that. They care about that and if they admit a “boondocker,” which is a category they have at Harvard, you got to get the Shah's son, and Dick Cheney would be a boondocker. He was at Yale, right? He comes from Cheyenne, Wyoming. And the local banker said, “This is a good kid,” and he went to Yale and he flunked out.

But, if you're going to be a world institution, you've got to have your students come from the world to you. That's who we compare ourselves to. Well then, if we're going to be that, then we've got to review our applications not just in terms of numbers, because numbers don't tell us everything we want to know about who we're admitting. We're looking for leadership qualities. We're looking for creativity, insight; we're looking at a lot of different kinds of things. So looking at the admissions packets themselves, and the process of reviewing them is important.

When Bob Laird became director of admissions—with my approval, very much so, I was still in office at the time—I knew that he understood the whole system very well. He had been in the Office of Relations with Schools for years and years. You know what that is? Where they go out to the high schools and talk to them about what's involved in getting admitted, and helping students understand how to get here. He understood how the University worked. He's written a book [*The Case for Affirmative Action in University Admissions*, Berkeley: Bay Tree Publishing, 2005.] I haven't seen, showing his unhappiness [with] how things worked here, and how all of a sudden he became the enemy for the Left and other folks.

But that was basically it. It's an ongoing, what-do-we-do-now kind of thing. Working with students, one of the very interesting tools that wound up being available to me was the Incentive Awards program. Are you aware of this program? It's really interesting what happened there. The founder, Cable Car Clothiers, gave us an anonymous gift. It was the gift of the yearly salary of a woman who worked for him, and he was chair at that time of English Speaking Union. She was the development officer for the English Speaking Union under him. I think she was too big for that job. She's a very ambitious woman.

21-01:18:15

McGarrigle: What is the English Speaking Union?

21-01:18:19

Ellis: It's an Anglophile organization.

21-01:18:45

Wilmot: She became too big for her job and left her job?

21-01:18:47

Ellis: Well, yes. Now, she didn't leave, but he offered her to us. And I was in a situation where the possibility of his donation came to our attention. I held up my hand and said I'd love to work with her. We set up this program, the Incentive Awards program.

21-01:19:06

McGarrigle: What's her name?

- 21-01:19:07  
Ellis: Maryellen Himmel.
- 21-01:19:09  
McGarrigle: Yes, now Bill Coblenz was involved with that.
- 21-01:19:12  
Ellis: Yes, yes, the whole world was involved. [laughs]
- 21-01:19:14  
McGarrigle: Okay, he spoke about it in his oral history.
- 21-01:19:17  
Ellis: Oh, is that right? She's amazing, and she's very big. I had to defend her because she just came in here, tromping through everything.
- 21-01:19:29  
McGarrigle: So she becomes a university employee?
- 21-01:19:31  
Ellis: Yes, working for me. I set up my *own* development unit inside my office which was quite novel. That had not happened before.
- 21-01:19:41  
McGarrigle: Is this funded by Cable Car Clothiers' donation?
- 21-01:19:44  
Ellis: Yes, by this person.
- 21-01:19:48  
McGarrigle: And this donation is big enough that it goes on year after year?
- 21-01:19:51  
Ellis: All it really does is, for I think two years, pay for her salary. Then we picked it up at our discretion. Well, she comes in and she's wild, she just is raising money, she designs this program. The fellow had gone to Balboa [High School], I think. I can't remember his name; he wanted to be anonymous. He's now dead and he's no longer anonymous. But I sort of canceled him out so I never remember his name. So she worked for a couple of years and she got it going. His idea was, 'In San Francisco, when I first was coming here in 1906 or something, you know, there were students from all the San Francisco high schools going to Cal. Now, only Lowell is sending students. So, why can't we have a program where we really do outreach and work with the students?' So what she did was design a program which offered a full ride to a student from each of the public high schools in San Francisco who had overcome real problems and held up their grades and really needed the help, and was recommended by the school. So as it turned out, each school would submit five names that fit these criteria. Then we empaneled a group, she did, in San Francisco, and with staff here and so forth to go over these things and we would admit these students.

We're talking about kids with *real* problems—some wards of the court from age fourteen to the time they graduated from high school. You could not believe the things that these kids overcame, and still did well. Then we set them up in a group here and their obligation was to go back to their school every year and talk to the students about it, what happens here and why they should consider coming. They formed a group. We surrounded them with support so each new wave that came in became part of that. We've had a mentor from their high school. We began to evolve something like the band or fraternity, Cal band or fraternity, where there's somebody there to demystify it for you, to walk you around. That sucker is so good. And not only that, she's now expanded it so it goes into the high schools, into the junior high schools. It's in Southern California. I think she's raised about sixty million dollars or something.

21-01:22:40

Wilmot:

Where is she now?

21-01:22:42

Ellis:

She still works in Undergraduate Affairs. She's just *unbelievably* successful. One of the reasons she's successful is she—and it got her in a lot of trouble and raised a lot of resentment, I had to protect her a lot—is that she didn't obey the rules. They weren't hard rules, but there's a kind of genteel decorum about how you do this. So if you look at some of the fundraising units in engineering, law, and so forth, they're very careful and there's a gentility about it. She was all over the place. [laughs] She was just all over the place.

21-01:23:27

Wilmot:

Was there something that you're thinking about in particular?

21-01:23:31

Ellis:

She just didn't obey the rules. You're not supposed to go over into somebody's territory. If the campus has a campaign—and the business school is doing something and Robert Haas is in their thing, you don't go call Robert Haas and say, "Hey, can you give me some money"? [laughter]

21-01:23:51

Wilmot:

Yes, I understand what you mean.

21-01:23:54

Ellis:

She actually—as a fundraiser, she didn't understand that. A lot of people here don't like that, but that's the way it works and almost the way it has to work. She stepped on a lot of toes. I'm happy to say that, and I'm pleased and proud to have her read me saying this about her.

I read her a long story one time about the cuckoo bird and how it propagates. You guys know this story, right? It's a very interesting evolutionary thing. The cuckoo bird doesn't make it's own nest. What it does is, it flies in, it looks around and it finds a nest that's not occupied and it goes and lays its eggs. Then, the two sparrows come back and then they keep it warm and they

lay their eggs in there too because its disguised to look roughly like their egg. Then, evolutionarily, it's programmed to hatch first. And it hatches first and it's got a little hook on its—thing and it pushes the other eggs or even the chicks out of nest. Then the sparrows kill themselves feeding this one chick. I told her the story of the cuckoo bird [laughter]. "You're in danger of being perceived as a cuckoo bird. You're coming in here, you're pushing everybody out." People were feeling crowded out. She's a delightful person, very successful. She just lost her man of many years, Walter [Menrath] who taught at CCAC. But now she's part of the system.

Now, what I want to say about that in terms of shifted strategies. I hadn't thought of it this way, but we would have our award ceremonies in the city, and the kids, the winners would come up and what would you have up there? You'd have a couple of Russians, I was always surprised by this but there are a lot of disadvantaged Russians who are here. You know, really good students, not well situated in terms of the economy. Obviously, Asians of various sorts. So you'd have a couple of Russians, maybe six Asians, three black kids, and three Latinos onstage. The audience would never, ever—I never ever—heard a complaint about affirmative action from anybody involved. We had people throughout the Bay Area contributing—some very famous—what's his name? Venture capitalist, Stanford graduate. He said, "I love this program. It's a perfect Berkeley program." He gave big money to this program because he thought this is where it should happen, and this is perfect for it. Really great support. I've never heard it criticized because of the rainbow up there, because it was defined as opportunity, and people working hard, and overcoming difficulties to get opportunity. So otherwise conservative people were perfectly willing to pay for realized opportunity. If you would have called it or ever said the words affirmative action about it, they would have withdrawn their money in support.

It's very interesting. We never manipulated that at all, and Maryellen didn't set it up even, to avoid the word affirmative action. It's because the way it got started it was defined as people who overcame their obstacles to do well. And boy, you wouldn't believe some of these stories! We had gangsters, you know, out of San Francisco who are now surgeons. I mean, it is so damn successful. That's another strategy, and it's caught on. I mean, she's gone statewide and I just had lunch with Winston Doby last week talking about some other possibilities. He was saying "Yeah, that's statewide now." She's done all kinds of things.

So things evolved. Now that had to do with a person with a lot of energy and insight. When I first met her, I wouldn't have expected what she generated, but it was spectacular. It is spectacular, and she's a leader. That often comes into it. So the answer to your question is, some of these things evolved in settings because of the happenstance of who was encountered. She arrived.

If she had gone to another place and someone had been interested, they would have used her very differently. She would have been just as good but done something differently. Now that doesn't define system. It doesn't save America. It hasn't had a great impact on admissions, but it has had some. I bet if you look at minority admissions I bet you'll see the Incentive Award Program here has had some minimal effect.

And also, you know, the other thing, in effect, that it helped with—I just learned from one of my colleagues who's teaching a course in African American studies that there's something called Black Wednesday. The students go to Sproul steps and they wear t-shirts that have 0.03 or something like that which represents what percentage of the student body they represent. These black students, the black students here. And as you know, in any one year Berkeley might reject five thousand straight A students. Sounds weird, doesn't it? Sounds like a lot, but yes. We have twenty-nine thousand applications or something like that for admission at the freshman level. You get that many straight-A students. You might wind up with under a thousand [A students] in any one year, in the past. All the underrepresented students admitted in the first class would be—I can't give you a number but let's say 5 percent of the admitted class. Every one of those families with a straight A student that didn't get into Cal blamed it on affirmative action. Now that's where it got to, okay? And that's what Wardell really manipulated well, the massive resentment.

Right now the resentment is slowly—and I predicted this—turning [against] Asians. “Well, never mind the numbers. Do we want a place that's all Asian?” You know, even though the argument was meritocracy and numbers, very slowly you're seeing the resentment grow, because they want their kids here. You know, that's the thing! They want their kids here! The Incentive Awards program avoided that problem, because no one could disagree with what was being done there. It's too American. These are people, many of them immigrants but not all, all of whom have done extraordinary things.

21-01:31:59

McGarrigle:

Well, it's the antithesis of what you mentioned earlier, which is the New Deal and the welfare state.

21-01:32:04

Ellis:

And it's closer to equal opportunity in a way, too. It looks more like equal opportunity. They worked hard and they got there. But, the fact of the matter is they did have some preparation for understanding that there was a there to go to, and what was there once they got there and why what they were good at mattered. There's a guy, Abel Valenzuela. I had to say to him one day—he was picketing the chancellor's office, and me and everything. He was an Incentive Awards recipient. Abel was just a ridiculously obvious leader. He had it. People wanted to get behind him and follow him. He was smart and articulate. We were at some place and I could tell he was having trouble with

being who he was, and me being the vice chancellor, and I said to him, I pulled him aside and said, “Hey, you don’t owe me anything. You get to be like that. I occupy an office. If my office is a problem, if the University is a problem, you do what you do. You go ahead and be you.” What I was trying to tell him was, what you have is valued here. Go ahead and be that.

21-01:33:38

Wilmot: Go ahead and protest.

21-01:33:39

Ellis: Yeah, yeah! Sit in! I might have to arrest you [laughter] but that’s okay.

You know, the other thing that happened one day—and then I will stop here, I know I’ve used up my time—the Filipina who was murdered in the student union building.

21-01:34:04

Wilmot: Was she a student?

21-01:34:05

Ellis: Yes, she was. We never found the person who killed her. It was very strange. But that turned into a whole other thing where I had to take on—the ASUC was talking about it, it was student-run and so forth. I went over there, with Dan [Boggan] and Francisco Hernandez, and it was hell. The homeless were sleeping there]. Crazy people were going into the toilets with knives and guns. God it was horrible, the worst ever. But that was a very important case. The Filipino students got organized around it. They wanted an accounting and so forth. Once they asked me to come speak to them. I spoke to them in Dwinelle. I think it was room 120. It was a big room. And there were a lot of students in there. It occurred to me to say, because I don’t think they had seen themselves altogether in one place in that number, but in the course of my talking I said, “You know that nobody has more right to be here than you do.” There was this amazing silence inside the room, just the insight that whatever they actually felt like, literally, that was true. That nobody had a greater claim on being students here than they did. It’s a public institution. It doesn’t matter that some of the kids’ parents, or grandparents or great-grandparents graduated from here. They may feel more entitled because they’re more familiar with everything, and the code and the culture, but in fact, it’s a state-run institution.

The insight for me was the problem of feeling that home. And it was my *position* that was speaking and that they heard. It may have been facilitated by my lips and hair and skin color, but it was my position, the vice chancellor was saying that. That’s other strategies you can use, because that spreads. That word spreads, but it only spreads if you have people to carry the word. They say, Well what is the meaning of membership *over there*? What do you do *over there*? How can you feel so comfortable being *over there*, you know?” Those are all *real* things.



When Wardell and others say, “Well, let them go to such and such, community college.” That’s fine but in fact this is a different place. Your life chances are very much affected by how quickly you learn what [different] is.

You remember I told you last time about this young woman from Compton? Maybe I didn’t, but she’s *brilliant*. She just couldn’t do anything that didn’t turn into an A at Compton High School. Our recruits went out there, she came here. Then she was in the Summerbridge program. I remember folks talking about her. She was saying, “I got to go out here and get me some money so I can get my nails done,” and so forth and so on. She would go talk up the money. She didn’t prostitute herself, but she would go out and hit on some guy, and a perfectly reasonable situation at home there to go hit on a brother and say, “Look, I need some help with XYZ.” Now, I would imagine in the long run, as she gets enculturated to academic culture, that will become an issue for her and others, but never mind.

In talking to her, and listening to her talk around Summerbridge issues, she said at one point, people came to her and said, “Well, you know, you can go to Cal.” She said, “What’s Cal?” Then they explained to her what Cal was, and how it was part of the system. It was like UCLA but up here. She said, “But I can go to Compton JC. It’s just around the corner.” She truly, truly, truly, truly had no concept of the difference. Truly. She’s here. She—I don’t know what happened to her. She may not have done well, she may have gone back, or gone back to community college, I don’t know. But she knows the difference. She can tell people the difference. Sometimes good, sometimes bad.

One of my *favorite* students, a young black man, I think out of Locke High School, very rough high school in L.A. I’m so happy he came to Cal. I love this kid. And I kept track of him. I saw him at least once every semester. At the end of it I said, “So, how was it?” He said, “I hated every minute.” I said, “Why?” He said, “I couldn’t fail, and that meant I had to work *all the time*. I never had any fun.” [weeps] That’s a sad story. But I bet his life—I bet he’s improved in terms of how he functions in the world, and what his opportunities are. That’s part of it too, right?

21-01:39:54

McGarrigle:

Did you relate to that personally, Russ? [also weeping]

21-01:39:56

Ellis:

Oh, yes. But see, the world wasn’t that hard when I went through. It wasn’t as hard. It was ’58. You could fall over and flop around the edges and be on probation and do this and the other, and you could recover. You could even go way back in community college, and get back in. You can do it here, but it’s not the same. It’s much harder. But I’m glad that kid came.

21-01:40:34

McGarrigle:

Well, let’s close there for today.

[interview interruption]

21-01:40:40

Ellis:

Well, I just think that he had a problem of—God, what’s his name?—he had a heroic notion of how you survive here. He didn’t know about working in groups. He was kind of tending a little towards middle class. We had a problem here for a while, especially with middle class black students. They had a heroic image of how you work here. It’s just you and a lamp over your shoulder in your room while you’re doing the work. They didn’t want to go to those EOP, AA study sessions where they had math graduate students helping the kids in groups, because they didn’t *see* themselves in that way. You try to say, but wait a minute, upper middle-class white kids were working in groups; you know, the Chinese kids work in groups [laughs]; you *gotta* work in a group. Sometimes it was hard breaking into the groups. They didn’t have the social skills to do that and they didn’t want to be identified very often as EOP or AA—because they weren’t EOP, but they didn’t want to identify. I think he had a little bit of that problem so he was a heroic worker. He had to go and struggle with his math and his chemistry. But he was so honest. But he also was honest with himself. He never cut corners. He did the work. A lot of students don’t do that, as you know.

21-01:42:19

McGarrigle:

Did you follow him after he left?

21-01:42:22

Ellis:

I asked him to stay in touch with me but no, he’s not one who did. Many students did, for a while. Anyway, I didn’t expect to get there.

But I have a lot of confidence in the other story, the other issue about changing strategies. The thing is, you got to change with what you are confronted with and hope that the larger world is working with you.

Last night, on the podium, there were all these black lawyers in the audience. I said, damn, you know. Who was it that said the world—it was Fletcher, [William A. Fletcher, Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit] said, “The world has changed.” No, Thelton! Times they *are* a-changing. And listening to the numbers of how many blacks there were on the federal bench when he first came in. I mean, man, things have changed. Some things haven’t.

21-01:43:18

Wilmot:

This was an event for Judge Thelton Henderson?

21-01:43:22

Ellis:

Yes, right. But there were two occasions last night where now the Chief Justice of the ninth district, Marilyn Patel, was there and the woman introducing her talked to the audience about the situation of women in 1971 I think, when she first joined the bench or whatever.

21-01:43:49

McGarrigle: She came on with Thelton in 1980.

21-01:43:51

Ellis: 1980, but she was just running down the statistics.

21-01:44:02

McGarrigle: When they did this, there were how many African American law students in the Bay Area? Well, there were two at Boalt.

21-01:44:08

Ellis: Like eleven, or something like that. [laughs]

21-01:44:11

Wilmot: What year?

21-01:44:11

McGarrigle: Late fifties.

Wilmot: Should we close now?

[end of session]

Interview 12: November, 14, 2003  
 [begin audio file 23]

23-00:00:11

McGarrigle: We are Leah McGarrigle and Nadine Wilmot on November 14, 2003 with Russ Ellis. Interview 12.

Wilmot: We are recording.

23-00:01:01

Ellis: Thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me some hooks in the form of guiding questions. It's very useful to me. It's also, just for the record, for you oral historian types, oral history types, the questions have caused me to examine what my goals are in this process. I was behaving like a good student without doing the homework. I was fretting over the undone homework and I realize it's not what I want. I just want to talk about what it's been like to be here to the extent that I can bring it forward in our sessions. Having questions is very helpful in that process.

23-00:01:56

Wilmot: I think that's actually what we like as well. I don't think the idea is to send you out to do homework.

23-00:02:03

Ellis: Sure. In particular, though, for close students of this phenomenon, what I have been able to think about that's useful to me is not answering the specifics of questions, but taking the question you posed and saying, well, what's the arc of a response that comes out of me because of how I was here. I have gone over my bio-bibs and I can't remember. Oh gee, I did that? I literally can't remember what committees were about. I can see I was on way too many committees. But my bio-bib did predict my trajectory in this place. I did get into administration. It all came in handy.

Affirmative action. Last time I talked about the Department of Architecture, and probably what I didn't say is that all departments—I did talk about this—were confronted with the job of reporting centrally through their chairs and deans to the administration, what measures they were taking to diversify their faculties. So that was very definitely a case of the overall institution of UC Berkeley being confronted with goals that had come out of the civil rights movement and come out of the larger society, and as I said last time, were relatively unquestioned. There was lack of cooperation in many circles, not out of hostility to the idea so much as the inertia of old habits, what it is to be a university, what mobility in the university is, how you attract and select your trainees, how the faculty come to be, which is not through the mechanism of an affirmative action program but something fairly well known but not quite so formal. There was an institutional commitment, I think, as I've said before, supported in some specific ways by Bowker, Chancellor Bowker, and then much more specifically by his vice chancellor and later Chancellor Mike

Heyman. There was true leadership campus-wide exercised by Heyman to do affirmative action. Now I have learned from someone who interviewed Mike Heyman, a man who was here from an internship from the U.S. State Department, that Mike Heyman said when asked, “So what is your position on affirmative action?” Heyman said “I didn’t give a damn about affirmative action.” He said, “I wanted to see some black and brown kids who hadn’t had access to the University get access.”

23-00:05:21

McGarrigle: Now, is that inconsistent?

23-00:05:24

Ellis: Well, I think if you remember, he’s a lawyer, and an academic. What he means is that he had not bought into the structure of argumentation that’s affirmative action. You know, David Gardner actually was quite hostile to the idea, but he knew that practically it was very important for a state-financed institution like the University of California to provide access. He was not that friendly to the idea of affirmative action. So you could hover somewhere between those things.

23-00:06:02

McGarrigle: I’m not through with Troy’s new book, but I am into it and that’s something for us to talk about further maybe next time. [*Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society, University of California Press, 2003.*]

23-00:06:11

Ellis: Yes, that’s a good idea. That’ll motivate me to finish the book also.

23-00:06:18

McGarrigle: There’s just so much implicit in that policy-wise, personal-wise, institutionally.

23-00:06:24

Ellis: Yes. Do you remember I said last time that I was working with my little aphorisms that I developed here? One was, “An ounce of position is worth a pound of policy.” When you’re in strategic locations in the institution and you know how things work, without being illegal, you can make sure that attention is paid to the issues that matter to you. That’s why you want people in high positions. That’s why you want a chancellor that’s favorable at a policy level to the issues you’re concerned about. Whatever they are. Physics rather than agronomy, you know? Anyway, I’m wandering. This is not what I want to do.

Shortly after Mike Heyman became chancellor, and because he was who he was, I was running out of any hope of making important differences, I felt, in my department in the arena of affirmative action. I volunteered, I went to him to say, “I’d like to work with you to do some broad scale work, maybe working with the schools and communities to talk about how they could better prepare students to come to the University of California, Berkeley and talk to our staff through you about how we could do more work to welcome them,”

and so forth. Just to articulate the activities inside and outside around issues of affirmative action admissions at the undergraduate level. Completely different from working at the faculty appointment level, which I seem to have—I got depressed with that one. It wasn't working in my department. As I said last time, it had nothing to do with hostilities of my colleagues, just when it came right down to it, we weren't adding faculty of color and the faculty who were coming, weren't, for various reasons, succeeding.

So my first year, I think was '81, I worked with Mike. I was faculty assistant to him. That's what my little card said, Faculty Assistant to the Chancellor. I think it said Special Assistant to the Chancellor. Soon thereafter, Mike Heyman reorganized the administration and created a Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs. Mac Laetsch was the first occupant of that office and for reasons that I have articulated already, using the Grace Massey example, it's always better to report down the line. You don't want to just report to the top person because the top person only knows what his organization can tell him. He might be wise in the ways of the culture of the place—you know, federal government, state government, the university, this campus—but no chancellor's ever going to say, "Do X." The chancellor's going to say, "What is this? How does this run into other things? Have we done this before? Who are the people who are asking? Orient me to this."

So that was a very good move, to go work with the new vice chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs. Partly because, while I was faculty assistant to the vice chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs and the idea was, without doubt, that I'd be working on undergraduate admissions around affirmative action issues, trying to bring more underrepresented students into the University. No question that that's why I was there. Other things came up, like, because I was in a position and had some instincts for working in administration that I didn't know I had, I was used more broadly than that by Mac Laetsch.

23-00:10:48

McGarrigle:

Now, instincts refers to? Can you elaborate on those instincts? It may come so naturally to you that it's not obvious to elaborate?

23-00:10:59

Ellis:

Yes, I did say that with great ease, didn't I? There's an obliqueness in academia that calls money an honorarium [laughter] rather than money. You know, et cetera. I'm being silly.

23-00:11:31

McGarrigle:

That doesn't sound silly.

23-00:11:33

Ellis:

But there's communication via indirection. It doesn't have to be really exaggerated indirection. You don't just say, "Hey, we need to do this and do that." You need to find out who you're talking to, you need to have a sense of whose other interests you're stepping on when you propose an idea. You have

to worry about the whole issue of credit, because this is a culture of mobility where a lot of the people who aren't faculty nonetheless are emulating faculty in terms of their concern about their status and their smarts and so forth. It's a very interesting place that way. So you try to move quickly to get something done, but you worry a lot about other people's interests, and not just their material interests or their ideal interests. You worry about their personal interests, you know? You want to give credit.

Mac will say, I'm sure, because he originated the notion, that once we got going looking at our programs and how we could facilitate affirmative action admissions process, is that a lot of the people who have said well, this is impossible, once the chancellor said, "Okay we're doing this," and the vice chancellor was in that position, hovering over—his span of control is quite broad, the vice chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, so a lot of pieces of the institution under his authority—a lot of people once they saw it moving, that it had the validation from the top, all of a sudden started wanting credit for the progress that was being made. You want people to want to get credit, and you want to give them the credit, you know? That's the slow thing, and people will stumble over each other, getting credit. This isn't just a put-down. This I learned in administration. People really are interested in meaningful work. The way the surveys say, from my experience in administration, people would like money. There's no question about it. Money's nice, but people really will kill for meaningful work. When you give it to them, it's very hard to take it away from them. If you give up a bunch of stuff, then it's gone for a long time, because you've given people authority over an arena of work. I can give you some examples. I'd have to think of them. I think that was my strongest suit, that I gave work away to do, and tried to do what I was good at, which was more brokering and cajoling and running around. Stuff like that.

23-00:14:46

McGarrigle:

So delegating was not difficult for you?

23-00:14:48

Ellis:

Not at all. Not at all. Maybe I've mentioned already that there were some advantages to being a sociologist because a sociologist can see how a lot of things happen not because of individual agency but because of how structures are set up, or whether there was good or bad culture in a place. You can have units, I think I've said this already, that should go away. The problem is only going to go away if the unit goes away because it's spoiled. That happens. There's no question that happens, but in the regular world of things, people want to blame somebody for doing such-and-such. Well, you have to do that. There's accountability. You have to say, "It's so-and-so's unit in trouble again."

But no, I had no trouble delegating. The reason why I had no difficulty delegating is that I realized, especially once I was in the vice chancellor's office, that things didn't get done overnight anyway. That you try something

and see what happens, see who handles stuff well, see which analysts really do write the good reports, right? That know how to write a report that you can then take to the vice chancellor, his cabinet, or the chancellor's cabinet, you know, whatever, and people say, "Oh this is interesting." Not "We'll do it," but "This is interesting." Analysts are hugely important in this institution. These are the people who write up the ideas. They're tremendously important.

Let me go back a little bit. I'm wandering away. Working with Mac, holding some meetings, learning some things, watching the big folks make decisions. I hope I'm not repeating myself. I was encouraged by sitting in the rooms with the decision-makers and saying to myself, "Oh, well I could do this." In other words, I could be confident at sitting with others, sharing what I know, and coming to some decision, or advocating something versus something else. In other words, the veil, the mystifying veil of administration, is lifted by being behind it. And what do you see there? People. Smart people, informed people, but people. People who are sometimes clever about what they think and do and recommend, and people who are kind of flawed. People who let things get in the way, people who have issues with others that get in the way of clear thought. I had that problem later with a couple of colleagues.

So, that was a great experience for me. Mac was very good because he gave me a bunch of responsibilities that weren't directly in the path of student affirmative action but helped me get a sense of how things were put together. When I—first time, it might have been the second year I was working with Mac. He had to rethink his structure. He had seventeen units. For example, the Lawrence Hall of Science and Cowell Hospital, which is up here. Units that size reporting directly to him. Seventeen units reporting directly to him. I was given the assignment to sit with his senior staff and come up with a recommendation for reorganization of Undergraduate Affairs, which I did. Which was absolutely fascinating. It's one of the most interesting things I ever did was to sit with these folks and talk about who does what, and what can go with what, and who's the strong manager, who's not a strong manager. And then rearrange these units and then make a set of recommendations. You never come with just one. You give choices.

23-00:19:20

McGarrigle:

And what kind of relationships did you have with some of the senior staff, Russ?

23-00:19:23

Ellis:

Well, let's see, I don't know why exactly, but I think through my general activity on the campus, like around affirmative action and student issues, assistant dean of environmental design, just being me and active in these things on my bio-bib, I knew a lot of people like Kurt Lauridsen [Director, Student Learning Center], Austin Frank in student information. Just a lot of folks I kind of had known by my activity on campus. For various reasons, they trusted me, and I didn't get the assignment to do this until I was working with



Mac for some time. So they already had a chance to sniff me to see what I was after. And the fact of the matter was, I wasn't ambitious. I really loved doing a good job, I mean, I really get off on doing a good job, but I didn't want to be vice chancellor. Once I was vice chancellor, I didn't want to be chancellor or president of a small college or anything like that. When I became assistant dean, people pulled me aside and said, "Hey, psst, fella, this isn't what you think it is. You're not going to go from assistant dean to dean and you shouldn't be doing this." But I was doing it because I wanted to do it at that time, in that context with that group of students and try to be useful. Not that I'm a saint, but I know that about myself. I think people realized that I wasn't after anything. I tried to be supportive, and I also asked people for advice.

I called a big, fancy meeting one time of student deans on Mac's behalf to pursue some issue. And then life came along and did something else. The day came for the meeting, and I wasn't ready. So I asked Jim Brown, who was then director of student health services. He has since died. But I said, "Hey man, what'll I do?" He said, "Call it off." He said, "People will be happy to have the meeting called off." [laughter] That was an insight for me, because I was feeling like I'm a failure, you know, set up this up whole thing, built up the expectations. He said no, people always love the time they have when a meeting is called off. Well, that was helpful and I went to people for advice on how to do things. I genuinely did, so I think they realized that I was willing to show my vulnerabilities and weaknesses. I also shared inside dope, sometimes to a fault. But it was learning. There was a man who was going to suffer from a reorganization, and I left a meeting here—and I'm now working backstage, I'm working behind a veil of administration where people make plans that other people don't know about, or make proposals to think about—I walked out of the meeting in the chancellor's office and I walked towards Sproul Plaza to go to lunch, and I ran into a man who was part of the planned reorganization, and I said, "Hey, I hear you're going to such-and-such." He said, "Well, you know more than I do." It was just chilling. I was a failure at the Janus face of administration. I was early in it. So, you know me, I'm like this, I talk and I think I do okay in the world by saying more than less about things that matter. So after we passed, I turned around and went right back and I told Mac what I'd done. He said, "Oh, worse things have happened," and went on with his business, which is really interesting to me. You know? In other words, you better learn to deal with that.

Later, when Sally Maine was murdered, it was almost my first month or something in office, and I had a meeting with my senior staff, and I just break into tears. Just, as a parent, I was so—she was the young lady at Iceland who was found murdered in the bay. I identified as a parent with something like that. It was a topic of the senior staff meeting. I tend to cry anyway, but Jane Moorman [Director, Student Counseling Center] pulled me aside. She was director of the student counseling services on campus. She said, "You're going to have to toughen up." She didn't mean freeze up or shut down. She said, "If you're going to let stuff like this affect you like that, you're not going

to last very long in the job.” I never made a decision to toughen up but one of the things I did notice was that the kind of stuff that used to penetrate my thin skin and then last with me all night—you know how something happens and it’s bedtime, and you say, “I know what it was. It was that slight from so-and-so who said to me—how can they say something like that? What a clumsy thing to say.” I use to look for those things. They weren’t there. I mean, it didn’t mean it didn’t happen to me, these slights. Some of them were hard. I had some tough times, but I wasn’t nearly as vulnerable after about a year or so of slights. Anyway, boy, I’m not doing much better even with all this guidance.

23-00:25:57

Wilmot:

I think you’re doing great.

23-00:25:59

Ellis:

What happened with affirmative action was that during this period as faculty assistant to Mac, I learned the ropes. We had a lot going. I worked through relationships with people. I had worked with Francisco Hernandez, now Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at UC Santa Cruz. And we sort of did the hard work, representing Mac. Francisco and I were, in my reckoning, were the real active leaders in convening the relevant staff to think through what we were going to do. No, not to plan it uniquely but to coordinate the activities in various groups, like the office of relations with schools, which had people all over the place doing recruiting, doing outreach, trying to find the students. Where are they? Do they know which way Berkeley is? Do they know where it is? Are they interested? Can we cause them to be interested? Most of the students are in Los Angeles. UCLA has L.A. covered. What do we do there?

23-00:27:17

McGarrigle:

Russ, I want to go back to something that you said earlier, which is that in some ways there was disappointment within your department in terms of affirmative action hires, or bringing in people of color, and there were reasons specific to the department for that. I wondered if we could explore that, what does that look like? Is that a lack of mentorship for people who come in? You are someone who it sounds like is going out and seeking advice. For example, you’re asking, I think you said Jim Brown, what to do about this meeting. And you’re getting this advice, which is critical, but you’re seeking it. For the people who aren’t able to go out and seek advice, who aren’t familiar with what they find when they get here, what kinds of systems are in place or not in place, or not in play?

23-00:28:18

Ellis:

That was very important. The university did discover that, the administration did discover that. And after awhile, the academic senate started holding sessions for new faculty, for new assistant professors: what goes on here; what happens when you come to a department; what are they looking for; how much time should you pay attending to things like senate committees; and what is it to be mobile here, to be a citizen here; what do we mean by shared

governance and so forth. Trying to orient the faculty to what happens here—now not all faculty took advantage of that—but a lot of these programs, even though they weren't color coded, were started because very often faculty who were new to the university setting—didn't come out of any advanced education tradition and didn't know how things worked—didn't know how things worked. And behaved inappropriately. Not badly, but—for example, didn't understand the production, the creative work expectations.

My problem I think was, as I mentioned last time, is not that I didn't understand them. I probably didn't understand self-advocacy. And I think I was probably a slow writer and a slow assembler of my stuff, and I was too busy. I didn't have the gene of solitude. I have it, but I didn't go away to corners and only pursue *x*. I was a busy player in my sandbox, another sandbox, California. But a lot of people didn't know. And I don't know what that was about, but I think it was partly, in my department of architecture, which is an improbable locus altogether for sociologists, but okay with me, I liked it, I was happy to be there, to be trundling along that margin. But I would look at some of the younger architects who would come in, one Chicano guy in particular, whom I liked. He was kind of glum, a little bit extra-social, not anti-social, but he wasn't a big party guy. He kind of kept his own counsel. Taught his classes, but didn't seem ever to actually hear the recommendations on having something to show until it was too late. And I have great confidence that a lot of people, including me, we told him what the expectations were. But he had other habits of work, and it was almost like going to work for him. And he did a good job of going to work and doing his job here, but not the part that actually is the most important here, just to say it straight up, it's the creative work that gets the place's name in lights and advances knowledge and makes Berkeley Berkeley.

23-00:32:07

McGarrigle:

Well, related to that is another question, which is, a large part of getting the name in lights is getting signed on to research projects that are ongoing. Junior people come in and they are invited to participate in research.

23-00:32:26

Ellis:

Yes.

23-00:32:27

McGarrigle:

And that's opportunity.

23-00:32:29

Ellis:

Yes.

23-00:32:29

McGarrigle:

How did you witness that for yourself and others?

23-00:32:36

Ellis:

Well, it's harder in—I'm probably not a good person to ask, partly because of where I was located. I was in a professional school, which is not easy to

explain to the larger campus. The law school is, for example, a professional school, it's kind of its own thing. But when these appointments go out of architecture for review, or even planning to some extent, certainly landscape architecture—and let's say it's [professor x], who's working with Chris Alexander on *The Pattern Language*. That's a good example, without betraying a whole helluva lot. Then, when the book, *The Pattern Language*, by Christopher Alexander and a lot of other people, including [professor x], goes forward, the book attracts tremendous attention and is important. And it gets to the senate committee on budget and personnel, they want to know how to use a magic marker to locate X's contribution. In physics or engineering or chemistry, big team projects, that's easier to do. You see three-page research papers with twenty names on them, right? And the lead author is obviously the lead author. I don't believe that anyone says, because the system is set up and understood, what was *Shomo Goens* contribution there. Maybe they know informally that he ran the *distillation fergitz* that did the *nervinak*, you know [laughing a bit at the made up name and contribution]. Maybe they know, but that is credit that is institutionalized. That's a paper at a certain level that is acknowledged in the world of chemistry or physics, or whatever.

It's much harder to do in the humanities and the professions and so forth. It's not institutionalized, and it's often just the skill of the chair or the dean, that causes those in the wider University to say, "Oh, I see why this person is important in what they did," because the interpreter does a good job. In architecture sometimes, for example, depending on who is the chair, they may not actually know how audiences [outside the department] see things. Very dependent on the dean. The dean may be good or not so good at interpreting to the larger campus. But a lot of these things, outside the framework of disciplines that work in teams, and engineering and the sciences—some of the sciences, most of the sciences—they do work in teams. It's the only way they'll get their work done. And one of the burdens of affirmative action is very often that who you want on your team that runs that machine may not be black or brown or a woman, and you're going to get that person on that machine, because you're running *hard* for the breakthrough and the acknowledgment that goes with the breakthrough. So that's one of the things that affirmative action interfered with, the ease of just, "Hey Joe, who you got?" You know. And then finding a way, not so awfully, but finding a way to get the job description written so that it fits the person you want.

23-00:36:17

Wilmot:

That's interesting. Russ, when you said that, the first way I heard it was that the machine that is actually the affirmative action—

23-00:36:27

Ellis:

Oh, no, no.

23-00:36:29

Wilmot:

Which is this whole interesting question of, okay, so who do you want on your affirmative action are people who can actually make things happen, which is an interesting way to misunderstand.

23-00:36:35

Ellis:

No, no, no, this is research. Uh-huh, I see. No, but that's interesting. Sure, sure. Let's see, did I do that? Ah, sure. Later, when I was vice chancellor and we took a huge budget cut in the eighties. That was the last big downturn. As one of the better things I did, I think, I said to myself, "Okay, now what do we do? Let's go into computing. Let's see if we can't develop some efficiencies around that." So I over-cut about a percent and a half more than I had to cut, in permanent money, that is money that is coming out of the pipeline, state money, to get hardware, software, and training for my staff. So I took four hundred people into computers really fast. And I announced it to everybody, I think I got a lot of attention, because I also was doing some reorganizing. And I chose a guy—I asked around and said, "Who's good at this?" And Pat Hayashi, who was Associate Vice Chancellor for Admissions and Enrollment at the time, and my senior leader in Undergraduate Affairs, told me about a guy named Tim Heidinger, who worked for him, said, "He's done some very good things." I said, "Okay, I want him, for the duration." And Tim Heidinger was a people person. He knew about hardware and software, but he wasn't mesmerized by it. And with my permission, he'd go and—realizing that some people had lots of power sitting around on their computers, he'd use a big hunk of their server, and say, "Russ wants this." And then get a bunch of servers doing things that solved problems. Whenever there would be reluctance, he'd say, "Well, this is what the vice chancellor wants." He would help people solve problems.

I learned so much just from watching him, because it highlighted the people who loved to assemble bunches of stuff and then have dominion over a bunch of things and say, "We did good because we bought a lot of computers," without knowing what the hell they were doing, and not realizing that you don't slice it just by the units you have. Once you've got that data, there are all kinds of other lines you can draw that link things up and answer questions. That's a case where the team thing in administration is really important. He was great. Tim was just great. But I was talking about research.

23-00:39:29

Wilmot:

I understood that now. Russ, I have a question for you, which is just to return to the report you made to Mac Laetsch and just kind of—I'm not sure if that story is finished. What I was trying to understand—

23-00:39:43

Ellis:

On reorganization?

23-00:39:42

Wilmot:

Reorganization. If it's important, what were there main recommendations that you made? Was your report adopted, implemented?

23-00:39:59

Ellis:

Well, basically, by the time it was realized, the participants in it, we had all agreed on what we thought the best thing was to recommend. So the major actors, with me sitting as chair, had already come to conclusions. Those would have been Kurt Lauridsen, Jim Brown [James Brown, Director, Cowell Hospital], Jane Moorman, et cetera.

23-00:40:26

McGarrigle:

So the process fulfilled the end—

23-00:40:28

Ellis:

Yeah, which you really would like in a good committee. Committees do two things. They come up with options for decision-makers. And at the very top [of administration] that's what people really are. They're leaders and decision-makers. And actually leader is a subset of decision-maker, is a subcategory of decision-maker. That's something I learned. But, you want to get decision-makers the best information for making decisions. And that's one thing committees do, and the other thing committees do is educate the people [on them] to what the issues are. Sometimes you will make a committee simply because you want to give people who have no idea, for example what affirmative action is, and why it matters. Language. It's a seminar. When we say affirmative-action admissions, what are we talking about? And let's include a couple of people who haven't a clue, but who are strategically located and don't have to be convinced necessarily, but have to know what's happening. And that's just education. That's all it is. It's a classroom set up to educate those to what's happening.

Same would be true with computers as well. What does it mean to take the division into computing? I didn't know. I've got to tell you, I didn't know. So one of the things that was there was a cheap classroom for me. You guys go tell me, "What do I mean?" This was my idea. Every year, you better have something you're telling your staff, in my case four hundred people, what is it we're doing next year? And this is one of the things I was saying we were doing. Is this legit? Does it have any meaning? Could somebody help me? It feels right.

23-00:42:30

McGarrigle:

Then how do you interact with four hundred people?

23-00:42:31

Ellis:

Well, you walk around a lot. You visit. You hope that your staff meeting material will get out to them. You give them awards for doing good things. You show up.

23-00:43:01

McGarrigle: Where are they located, the four hundred people?

23-00:43:03

Ellis: In my case, in seventeen different units: financial aid, student services, career planning and placement center, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

23-00:43:09

McGarrigle: All over. You said earlier that you weren't ambitious, but what was the experience of functioning at this high level and behind the veil, like? Was there a change for you?

23-00:43:40

Ellis: It was absolutely wonderful. A sociologist couldn't have a better practical situation to be in. What's a simple notion in sociology? Formal versus informal systems, right? Rod Park, funny man. We were always doing org charts, right? One time I think the org chart was in pencil and posted in—the re-org was posted in the building, the elevator over at University Hall. We had moved into University Hall, the president had moved out, the president's function had moved out, and we were going through seismic renovation in the chancellor's office. The building, California Hall, was being seismically upgraded. And I think this is where this took place. Someone with the authority of the chancellor had put up the current version of the org chart, tentative, in the elevator, so people could see it or something like that. And Rod Park says, "That's what it looks like before the ball is snapped." Taking it as a football game and here's the X's and O's, but then when the ball is snapped it's a whole different thing. So the formal structure is what's written, and then the ball is snapped. And then people go crazy, they do their jobs or they don't. I don't understand war at all. I just don't understand war at all. Because you've got to be organized, and yet it's so chaotic when it's real.

But anyway, administration is not that bad. It was a great job for me. I was really happy doing the job, being involved in the process. I felt good and I felt effective. I always had an idea about what to do with something. I don't know that I was always good, but it was just interesting. It was just interesting to me. I felt a little bit of guilt about that. And my son, when they were offering me the position and I was agonizing over whether I wanted to do it—I was vice chancellor—I was then provost or something—

23-00:46:30

Wilmot: I understand. I'm interested in the dimensions of your agony.

23-00:46:27

Ellis: Well, what is this? This is a major pathway over there. The other stuff I was doing wasn't a life commitment. It was working on some specific things that I had a set of values around, and along the way I had learned other things about how the institution worked. And that was just interesting as hell. God, look at this university, how it works. This is so interesting. But I'd never thought of

myself as a sort of career person doing major administrative work. And I was also frightened. I wasn't sure that I could do the big job.

23-00:47:10

Wilmot:

Why did you decide to take it?

23-00:47:15

Ellis:

Well, my son was living with me at the time. And I asked him—my wife and I had separated and I was living behind campus up here on Panoramic [Way] in Mike Smith's house, our campus counsel. And David was living with me and I said, "So what do you think? I've been offered this job." And he was very brusque with me. This is before he went off to accept his scholarship at the Berklee College of Music. He said, "Oh, come on. You're just afraid you'll never get back to the faculty stuff." But he sort of said it in an exasperated way like, "You *know* you're interested." That was very important for me to hear. Because he's known me since he was zero. So he heard. And I've benefited from that a lot. I was afraid. I was afraid of failure.

I watched Mac [Laetsch] in the job, and it took me a while to learn to do the job differently than Mac did. Mac met with way more people than I did, in his office. His calendar was packed every day. And I thought it had to be that way. I learned that. I didn't realize until later, until I realized that I was the boss, that I could determine what my calendar was like, to the extent that the chancellor didn't have something that he wanted me to do, or there weren't emergencies or other things that called me up. So that I could then design my days to fit what I thought I was doing. But this image that people often use, one of my colleagues, Spiro Kostoff, a student described his lectures as like drinking from a fire hydrant. Now, that's an image that's been around a long time, just so much coming at you, you drown. But that's certainly the way the job is at that level, here at Berkeley. Here at Berkeley, if you're chancellor or vice chancellor, the stuff is coming at you relentlessly, relentlessly. And it never stops. And Rod Park was helpful, too. He said, "Don't plan to ever finish your work. You cannot think of it that way. If you think you're going to finish your work, you're going to be in a lot of trouble. All you can do is get in a stream every day and think about what you're doing, what you've got planned. Try to get people helping you think ahead so that you're ready for things that you've planned, or ready for things that could come up, ready for surprises like budget cuts, fiscal crises."

But I had watched from underneath when I was doing this other work. But I realized you could get things done, and also I could do some role taking. In other words, without going into a whole lot of detail, I was a student of George Herbert Mead, a pragmatist sociologist who later was—he was the fundament of an area in sociology later called symbolic interaction. He does have the notion of, in order to throw the ball, you have to have the experience of catching the ball. In other words, to do a good job, you've got to be in both positions imaginatively. You've got to carry both those experiences. In any



good team, that's true. The quarterback, for example, knows what the guard is likely to do, and how well. If things aren't loaded with surprises, he knows where to put the ball if there's a mad last-minute emergency, and knows Jerry Rice will be there to get it, and Jerry Rice knows, and they've got signals or just instincts. But you're part of something larger. And you take the role of the other in order to do your role. So, by working underneath, I was in position to do role taking. I knew what kinds of things the chancellors and the vice chancellors and others had to deal with. I very often, in trying to package something for Mac or Mike, or whomever, I'd take their position. What do I think would be the best thing to get?

One of the better examples of that is my recommendation to Mike [Heyman] on funding the athletic study table. I'm very proud of that. I went to Notre Dame, University of Michigan, because it's technically very similar—they're one of our competitors—and the University of Washington, and we had data on UCLA, and I've been to UCLA as an athlete. And I wrote a report on what I thought he should do. And it gave him options. But he moved. He moved very fast. And I knew that he would, once he saw my little ethnographies that I collected at these other places. He could see what he was confronting. Notre Dame is nothing but a study table for athletes. It's a university, but they don't have to have special study. Everybody lives on campus. All eight thousand students. And the football coach is king. The president and the football coach are best friends. If one of their stars is not doing badly, things get taken care of. At the University of Michigan, they surveyed the faculty on how the athletes are doing. Imagine doing that at Berkeley, asking faculty how is our athlete doing in your class, right? I don't think so. The athletic director spoke to the academic senate twice a year. One of the reasons is, the University of Michigan athletic program—the administration has a catheter running right into the budget of the athletic program. And it's not trivial. It's not the same here.

23-00:53:47

McGarrigle:

Now, why is it so obvious that at Berkeley that would never happen, that there would never be a survey to the faculty about how the athletes are doing?

23-00:53:57

Ellis:

Because that's the way it is. [laughing]

23-00:53:59

Wilmot:

That's such an interesting question that I should pose to the current FAR.

23-00:54:03

Ellis:

Who's the current Faculty Athletic Rep?

23-00:54:05

Wilmot:

Professor [William] Lester.

23-00:54:07

Ellis:

Oh, Bill. Oh, that was a very big issue. We'll get back to that some day. That was a big one. I'm glad you mentioned that, maybe we'll come back to that. You should make a note of that. But that's a great question. It's the nature of the place. Let me see if I can give you an example that will help. When Bruce Snyder, who had the last best successful year Cal had in football, went to Arizona State, it was a decision that came late. Our big alums knew that there was tension there. They were working on trying to keep him. We went to the Citrus Bowl and won. It was very dramatic. We had a ten-two season, ten wins, two losses. I don't think we've been as good since then. And Snyder decided to go to Arizona State. Bill Walsh had left the 49ers and had gone back to Stanford, like God to descending to Earth. He didn't do very well, but he made a *lot* of money. Major shoe contracts, just so much money. Stanford just did it. They're bringing the big man back and so forth.

Our alums wanted to raise, and could raise, a lot of money to keep Bruce Snyder here. [Chancellor] Tien said no. The money would not have come out of the university's budget, the alums could have raised that money, and they would have, certainly. But Tien said, "I can't afford, at Cal, to have a football coach making that much money." And he was really talking about the warping of the values of the place. And that was really true. He really meant that. Even though he was "rah rah" in his Cal stuff, on the sidelines of the football team. I even had to pull his coat and say, "Hey man, you're looking like a cute Chinese mascot down there." One on one, I could talk to him like that. He said, "I know, but I have to do that. That's important here that I do that." But he did not believe that you translated that into money and resources, even if they didn't impact the budget. You just could not afford to do that, because of the nature of the place. That wasn't what Berkeley was. And that's where just about everybody is. Nobody wants to—except periodically a group of alums get tired of not winning and they want to get something done. But when Heyman was asked at one point, why he didn't put more emphasis on athletics, he said, "Actually, I've got a lot more alums who care about our academic excellence than I do [alums who care] about our athletic excellence."

23-00:57:45

Wilmot:

Can you talk about alums? I don't want to lop this line of inquiry, do you want to go further?

23-00:57:51

McGarrigle:

I just wanted at some point to talk about the Haas family and their contributions to the University, and their enthusiasm.

23-00:58:02

Ellis:

I can make it simple for you.

23-00:58:09

Wilmot:

That actually is in keeping with my question, which is just I want to hear more about the University alums as stakeholders. And then I want to ask you about the alumni report that you did for Mac Laetsch. We just put three things at you at once.

23-00:58:28

Ellis:

That's okay, that's okay. You'll just have to remind me. The Haas family frets about this place in all its aspects.

23-00:58:32

McGarrigle:

I'm not suggesting otherwise. I just wanted you to speak—there's a natural segue way to talking about their multifaceted support of the University.

23-00:58:46

Ellis:

Part of the family is also supportive of Stanford. Part of the family identifies with Stanford as much as with Cal.

23-00:58:55

McGarrigle:

Did you have an opportunity to meet with any of the members of the family in your various roles?

23-00:59:01

Ellis:

Oh, gosh, yeah. Yes. Around athletic issues. [pause]

Just part of being in the administration. In the press box at the football games. Various other places. Various meetings. Bear Backers. There's a big club in the city where they always—where the CEO level of the alumni meet and complain about—or not—

23-01:00:16

McGarrigle:

About the wellbeing of the teams—

23-01:00:16

Ellis:

Various sports, yeah, right, right.

23-01:00:11

McGarrigle:

And they would include you in those meetings?

23-01:00:20

Ellis:

Yeah. It was something the office had a responsibility to be a part of, and I was an occupant of the office.

23-01:00:30

McGarrigle:

It just occurred to me that you had your consulting work with Levi Strauss, and we can talk about that later.

23-01:00:36

Ellis:

Well, that was very important because I learned a lot more there, through Howard Friedman, who married into the family, and was a colleague of mine in Architecture, he encouraged them to employ me as a consultant in their

consideration of the decision to move from Embarcadero Center to the waterfront, where they are now. I spent time, not a lot of time, but some significant time with Walter, Peter Haas, and quite a bit of time with Bob, who at that time was—I call him the crown prince—but he was on his way to becoming CEO, but wasn't at the time. Great guy, I really enjoyed him a lot. So, I learned a little bit about family values and so forth. Very interesting family.

[begin audio file 24]

24-00:00:07

Ellis:

I met the Haases through Howard Friedman. It was a very important part of my work in my department, too, because all of a sudden I got a big contract to work for a big corporation, and to advise them in what in the field of architecture is called programming. In other words, how do you relate the activities of a building to the physical differentiation of the building, either proposed or whatever. They were just contemplating a move, and Howard said I'd be good to go in and help them think about whether or not to move 98 Battery—I mean, from Embarcadero Two. They'd grown very fast, really fast. I've written a piece about this. It's *Levi's Plaza*. That tells the story, so I'm not going to go over that. But I assembled three of my best graduate students and we did kind of an anthropological investigation of what happened at that place.

I didn't know how to charge. When you work with a big corporation, they expect you to charge big money. One of the reasons they hire each other is, they know how to treat each other. "This is going to be very expensive, and my man will talk to your man." [laughing] And I charged multiple thousand dollars, but nothing outrageous. And I had my students wander through the organization and ask some questions. It was a good adventure, and we found out that in fact the employees were comfortable with a move away from the city to the waterfront, where they did wind up going. But they were concerned about the ability to buy a thimble at lunchtime. So, it did result ultimately in Levi's lobbying the city to get bus routes adjusted, to move some retail and things like that to go with the new structures, and so forth. Working with Bob was extremely interesting. I got a call, an emergency call, from a retired admiral that worked with him. Grover Clark was his name. And that was an insight for me. Grover Clark's job was to be aware of what was going on in the ship of the organization. I don't mean espionage, but the state of things. That was his job. Did we talk about this?

24-00:03:11

Wilmot:

I think you mentioned someone who verbatim carried your message to Bob Haas.

24-00:03:14

Ellis:

That's right, that's exactly right. The accuracy of communication. So that was how I knew Bob, through that. And he was a fun guy. I learned some other

things also about how private they are. They can be friendly, but as soon as you wander into certain topics, things chill down.

24-00:03:44

McGarrigle: And topics such as?

24-00:03:46

Ellis: I'm trying to remember. I did something that was dumb in my conversation with him, and he was quite okay about it, but he stopped talking. I forget what it was. It's the ethnographer in me, you always push the envelope a little bit, how far can I go to learn things? Sometimes you want to know things that aren't related to your job, just because you're nosy. I thought that was a deeply, not educated, but experienced family, in occupying their status in the city. Late developing city, didn't have a chance to develop really sophisticated anti-semitic institutions, you know. Crocker was a thug. There wasn't like some long distinguished tradition or something or other. And [the Haases] they were kind of patrician, I thought, that family. So, it was just interesting to watch them and to watch Bob. I'm very impressed with him. And his wife had been a student of Thelton's at Stanford, so there was also another connection there.

24-00:05:11

McGarrigle: They are known as being a progressive employer. Were there discussions at any point about their interest in being a progressive employer?

24-00:05:21

Ellis: Not in those terms. They were very nervous all the time about labor relations, and some of their outlying companies and practices, in the factories in Texas and this, that, and the other. Whether they were doing the right thing. In what I did, and what I was able to see, they had very specific values that were quite good. Howard helped them have these values, but in rethinking the new set of buildings, they didn't give lots of corner offices to the big folks and so forth. They gave 50 percent of the glazing to the folks who were there eight hours a day. That's big time, to do that. I'm talking about the window space. And they made these little living room type places in the floors of the new buildings, with incandescent lights and places you could make tea, and couches, to get a sense of comfort and awayness. Now, the employees knew better than to go to the one on the floor where they worked, because they didn't want to seem to be not working. They'd go to a different floor and hang out. But these wonderful little places that were made available in the new building. They were good.

24-00:06:47

Wilmot: That's an interesting contradiction—

24-00:06:53

Ellis: I know, I know. When I went through the budget problem here, I had Caroline Mann, who was my budget person in Undergraduate Affairs. I said, "Okay, we're going to tell people the truth about this, and this budget's going to

everybody.” I’ve told you this already, but I’ll tell you again. So I had her to do this budget where we showed all our money in every possible way, partly because the myths abroad were that all this money was going to wasted things, and there was a secret pile of huge amounts of money that people always think the administration has. At a certain point, I said, “And now, I’m going to pass this out in Sproul Plaza.” Now, there was a moment where Francisco [Hernandez] and I had to deal with a student protest, a pretty dramatic event. And the issue of the budget came up and there was a meeting in Barrows Hall. Some pretty radical kids were accusing us of something or other, I’ve forgotten. But I took the budget and I passed it out, and I said, “Here, you know anybody who knows how to read budgets? Here’s what we have.” I went to my senior staff at a senior staff meeting and I said, “Let everybody see this.” And they said, “No.” And the reason is, they felt letting everybody see the details of the budget that I had released limited their flexibility. Now, if you’ve ever administered, you know what they’re talking about. And it takes some courage to say, “Here’s what we got.” Because having your flexibility, it’s gold. And gold is gold.

24-00:08:50

Wilmot:

You mean then you can move piles of money from different places?

24-00:08:54

Ellis:

That’s right, that’s right. There’s always a reason to have some mystery in the budget, I guess, for people who are pressed right up against it. I didn’t care. I didn’t feel that—I didn’t think there was any reason to hide much of anything.

And why did I need Haas to talk about that? Who knows the connection? [pause] Oh yeah, it was about the top saying, “We’re going to give all these goodies to the employees.” But then the guys and women who are responsible for turning out twenty thousand 501 jeans a day or something like that, they might be happy that the employees are happy, but they don’t want to see people sloughing off. There was a point where we were considering some cubicles, very nice rosewood cubicles, in one of the new spaces, and the proposal was for a certain height. I think this might have been an adjustment in Embarcadero Two, I don’t remember. I remember the employees saying, “No, that’s too high. We need to be able to see over the top to see if the boss is coming.” [laughter]

In other words, we need to have eye contact where we can see what’s going on in this landscape architecture thing of the cubicles. Because some people would arrive in Embarcadero Two by the mailboxes at 7:00 in the morning, a famous guy, and watch everybody come in, make sure who was coming in on time. He didn’t care whether you were exempt or non-exempt, whether you punched the clock or not. He wanted to know who was there, and he ran a very tight ship, very tight ship.

So you get that tension always between management and their liberal ideas, and then what's possible, given the fact that people have production goals and guidelines. One of the things I learned, for example, at Levi's, is, they did have a very non-pretentious Levi's gray appointments culture working there. On the top floor of Embarcadero Two, Peter and Walter had adjacent offices, each of which was smaller than this room, and next to each other. And some of the people below them had larger, more gracious, elaborate things. But it was serviceable, Levi's gray carpet, and when I talked to the managers and people who were out there competing with the other folks, they said, "We got no budgets, we got no pop and sizzle, we don't have the glamor stuff to go out and compete with the people who are intruding on our terrain." Now, I reported that in my report. And I don't think I changed it, but I think our report had some impact on that. I took their saying, "Levi's is people," well, a lot of people said "Yes, well, Levi's is 40,000 people," or "Levi's is those favored people over there." It was a lightening rod for employee resentment, their slogan, "Levi's is people," which I think they've changed. Okay, I'm wandering. They were great people to work with. I enjoyed them. They are a huge corporation, and huge corporations have to do things. I see they are in the news now about something or other, questionable practices.

24-00:13:05

McGarrigle:

Oh, they closed their US manufacturing lines. One last question on that: Was it noticed at the University that you were consulting for Levi?

24-00:13:18

Ellis:

You mean did anyone ever ask me to use my connection in any way?

24-00:13:22

McGarrigle:

Or anything else that flows from that. Was it remarked upon?

24-00:13:25

Ellis:

I was astonished at how little attention anybody ever paid to that. Now, I went to lots of things. There were scholarships that they contributed to. And I know even recently, Bob Haas said to Charles Faulhaber, "Oh, Russ. Yeah, Russ and I worked together. We had a great time." Sort of identified our connection, which of course was interesting to Charles, that he would say that. So, it was a kind of a background connection, but no one that I was aware of ever tried to exploit that connection, and I never made a lot of noise about it. I enjoyed it; it made my life more interesting to know something about them and what they did, and all that. But they're such a part of the place anyway that they didn't need me for anything. Howard was my fan, he thought I was pretty cool. And they took his word for it. And my product was okay, it was okay. What I gave them was okay, it was useful. There was one moment, it's a funny story. Did I tell you the new sweater story?

24-00:14:38

Wilmot:

I don't think I've heard the new sweater story. I did hear a few other stories about Levi Strauss.

24-00:14:43

Ellis: Walter and Peter wanted to see me to talk to me about my final report. And the great line, which I'll repeat anyway, is, "You gave us sociology and we're kind of interested in your expert opinion." Gong! Boy, as I said before, what a thing for someone who identifies as a sociologist to hear. But in a world of law, where they talked about errors and omissions, and people are hiring you as an expert, that's what they want. And they assume you have insurance to take care of errors and omissions. But I'd never had that experience before, that was interesting. But I went in without the right clothing.

24-00:15:34

Wilmot: That's a report I would love to see, I must say.

24-00:15:36

Ellis: Well, it's around, it's around. I could find it somewhere. I left home, I didn't have decent clothing. So I went into a clothing store at the base of Embarcadero Two, and bought a quite nice sweater. Did I tell you this one?

24-00:15:58

Wilmot: I think you did.

24-00:16:00

McGarrigle: And had the tags—?

24-00:16:09

Ellis: [laughter] I just think that is so ridiculous. And I'm being so professional, you know. Big swing ticket. And it wasn't even a Levi's product.

24-00:16:24

McGarrigle: Even though they were more of an informal corporate environment than say, others, your preparation for going there in terms of clothing was quite different from what it was day to day in the academic environment—

24-00:16:38

Ellis: Oh, for sure. Well, Irving Goffman said—he's a sociologist, he's dead now, he was here at Berkeley, very important man—he said, "If a man goes to a dinner party with a five day growth of beard, it may be an insult to the host and hostess, but it is definitely an insult to the occasion." I know about that. That is, I'm being asked there as a professional. I would not think of wandering in in academically acceptable clothing, and wander over there and make a presentation. Not only is it an insult to the occasion of the meeting, but it borders on inappropriate. Like, what?! "What are we paying for here?" Not everybody worries about that, but that, I think, was a strong suit of mine, having a sense of appropriateness, both here and in settings like that that. Anyway, that was my relationship with them. I enjoyed it. I think it was very productive and for some reason, I hang back and I worry about—I think about that period—and I suspect that Bob Haas learned some things. And the organization learned some things, I couldn't trace it. But there was a big firm that did the furniture and other stuff, and I remember their sitting and taking credit for the building and all that. But I remember one of their—God, I can't



remember the name of the firm, very big firm that worked with them [Gensler Architects]—

24-00:18:26

Wilmot:

HOK?

24-00:18:28

Ellis:

No, no. A little classier than HOK. And one of their architects, I think their lead architect, said, “Levi’s is very hard to deal with. If you work with Standard Oil or something, and an employee at a certain level goes and out gets hit by a truck, you get an employee to plug into that place.” The building reflects that in a way. Not that it’s a file cabinet, but you know what you’re dealing with. Whereas Levi’s had all these weird things they wanted to do, these little living room type things, and putting the employees on the outer edges with the views, and so forth. You would never build a corporate building from scratch that way. You would think of the hierarchy and the roles, and in general make a building around this in an old fashioned corporation, not the Silicon Valley stuff where they are after new things about interaction and so forth. But among their research people and their teams, they are interested—they know better. They know if they’re going to get ahead, their people have to be talking with each other, if they’re going to generate anything.

24-00:19:42

McGarrigle:

Russ, this is for fun, but it’s also serious. What is the acceptable attire for a male member of the faculty or administration here, in that it differs from what one wears in a professional San Francisco downtown environment? I mean it’s not a suit, but how does it differ in terms of slacks and jacket. I’m just thinking tweed, but that doesn’t mean that that’s the answer.

24-00:20:16

Ellis:

But you know tweed is not the standard here. But people would often see me in tweed, which I bought a lot of after I was in administration, partly because you never know who you are going to run into. When you’re in administration, you’ve got roles you’re going to play that you can’t anticipate. Someone comes in that’s very unhappy and is expecting to see a leader of the University and expecting someone to look like that. Now that’s put fairly primitively. But I paid attention to that. Didn’t mean I wore a tie every day, but most days I did. I never knew when I was going to have to represent the chancellor, as vice chancellor. When he was too busy, or there was something I’d have to go to. I might have to leave the office and go to Chinatown. Well, I’m going to Chinatown and I’m going to go with an open shirt? I *don’t* think so.

24-00:21:22

McGarrigle:

Because?

24-00:21:23

Ellis:

I mean to a meeting of significant people?

24-00:21:30

McGarrigle: San Francisco leaders?

24-00:21:32

Ellis: Yeah, sure, sure. It didn't happen this way, but after Tienanmen Square, there was a meeting in the City of some of the student protesters who had come to San Francisco and were telling the world about what had happened there. And I went—Mike Heyman couldn't go—I went, and there was a very tight order of seating, and I was seated in a place, and among people, of ages and things that was pretty high. I was Heyman's representative there. Well, I was in pretty clean shape when I went to that, because, well, I had a little sense of some of the culture through other things I've done in the City. But also you pay attention to that, it's respect for the occasion and the traditions. Whereas, if what you're doing is you're going from Wurster Hall to the faculty club, *maybe* you need to wear pants, you know. [laughs] I don't think I've seen anybody go to lunch in shorts, in the faculty club, but it's not a very tight code. Women's faculty club, tighter.

24-00:22:50

Wilmot: Really?

24-00:22:55

Ellis: Yeah, but that's about something else, right? I mean I don't have to go into that. It's genteel, the food is better. The whole setting calls for—some delicacies that the faculty club don't.

24-00:23:17

Wilmot: There are two things that I wanted to return to. I want to just ask you to choose which one you want to go first. The first one is the question of alumni, and relating to alumni as a whole as stakeholders in the University. And the second one is actually just, you wanted to finish your arc of affirmative action.

24-00:23:43

Ellis: Alumni. Alumni, wonderfully, amazingly important. There was a figure that was bandied about somewhere around—I think Mac may have generated this one, he was Vice Chancellor for University Relations, Mac Laetsch—that there are 300,000 living Cal alumni. Isn't that amazing? Think about it for a short while, it's not so amazing, given how long people live and how long the University has been around. And a high percentage of them go on to play significant roles in the larger society, of doing things, exercising leadership in business—in all the institutional spheres—in business, education, military—all of these and so forth. They're very important. And they care about the place, the same way the Stanford alums—or any top-tiered research university alums care about their membership and all. I had a lot of difficulty with that world. Not anything that was painful to anybody, but I'm not an alum of Cal. I went to UCLA for all my degrees. I didn't ultimately identify with UCLA beyond my wonderful undergraduate and graduate years, for reasons I don't quite understand. But I wasn't a Cal alum. While I really adore the place, I think it's very special and extremely interesting, and it's a true world

institution also, it really is. I don't have a lot of stories to tell the way Thelton would—not all good. But you know I don't have stories to tell. Most of my stories—although Westwood was completely segregated, I could not live in Westwood as a black person when I was an undergraduate—my experiences weren't bad as a student. Partly because they had such a solid tradition of black athletes there that when I was on campus, and wandering around Westwood, going to shops and restaurants, I was *king*. I was really very important. But then my identity was an athletic identity. But I didn't have any of those traditions from here.

24-00:26:47

Wilmot: Are you part of UCLA's alumni?

24-00:26:52

Ellis: No, I'm not. And I haven't given to them [as I have here]. It's very strange. I've recently been talking to people, going back and visiting people I knew from the old days. The alumni. The alumni are just extremely interesting—

24-00:27:15

Wilmot: How much sway do they have? Here.

24-00:27:19

Ellis: They're very important. They don't have as much influence through athletics as people say. You can't ignore the athletically inclined alums. You can't ignore them, they're important. Everybody cares, it's a kind of cement, a social and cultural cement that you want. It's never quite overdone. Cal never is so good that you lose perspective. Although we'd love the opportunity to lose perspective here, you know, in football, basketball, something like that. I think Mike is right. If I was just to summarize my experience here, most people identify with Cal the academic institution. And care most about that part. And I told you about the pace of the fundraising for The Bancroft Library Renovation Project? And we've got most of the money now we need.

24-00:28:20

Wilmot: 15 out of 20 million.

24-00:28:22

Ellis: 15 out of 20. And I'll bet, because Mac Laetsch is leading this campaign with Mike Heyman, as I guess, chair of the campaign. I bet they could quadruple that if they wanted to extend the campaign, and rethink the case statement. Partly because people value the place so much, and The Bancroft has got a glow to it. And as I said, even people I encounter don't even know why, "Oh yeah, The Bancroft." Double take like, "Yes, The Bancroft. At UC Berkeley." I mentioned the other day in front of the lawyer's club for a very good reason, that Thelton Henderson's oral history will be presented here at The Bancroft Library of the University of California, knowing doggone well that will redound to your benefit, his benefit, The Bancroft's benefit, and that it's an important event for them to know about.

24-00:29:20

Wilmot:

Russ, you're a member of the Friends of The Bancroft. When did you join and why did you join that committee?

24-00:29:32

Ellis:

I joined because I was asked. And Charles [Faulhaber] wanted me to be there looking out for the interests of ROHO, and that had to do with my connection with Julie and my past involvement with getting Mike to fund the seven oral histories that she did with the administration during the anti-apartheid demonstration years. Mike Heyman gave money for that and so I had had a relationship going, and I gave a fair amount of money for Thelton's oral history. I cared about this and then recently have had some ideas, I sat on ROHO's advisory board I think for a little while, can't remember, played some kind of role there. It was just because I was asked and I value the place, I think it's a good thing.

24-00:30:50

McGarrigle:

This is a good place to also talk about your involvement with this project.

24-00:30:59

Ellis:

This one?

24-00:31:02

Wilmot:

The African American Faculty and Senior Staff Oral History Project.

24-00:31:08

Ellis:

Well, when some people ask me what I'm doing on the Council of the Friends. My just deceased colleague and friend Roger Montgomery said, "What are you doing on that?" He said "Those are just money people," or something like that. And I told him why I was involved and why I cared. And one of the things I said to him was, I was interested in darkening up the holdings of The Bancroft. Spreading the array of groups in the history of the West they were interested in. I was interested in the Faculty Project, not just black faculty, but certainly black faculty. And when Richard [Candida Smith] acceded to the job, his very sharp adventuresomeness in terms of getting resources and framing stuff up, caused it to happen very fast. And I recognized an effective administrator. I think he scared a lot of people and he's changed a lot of things and all, and that's always a problem when you come in and make change. But he was committed to the idea. And I think it's just a great idea. I think there are a lot of other things we should be doing. I just got the new website on the photographs of California Chinese history. Have you seen that? It's amazing. Thousands and thousands. A wonderful catalog of photographs, getting the history of the place.

I want to get Leon Litwack's library at least partially here, and I'm using that as a tool. I'm talking to Mac and to Charles about it. Leon Litwack has got the best library on African American history, probably in the world, that's outside of a major library. He knows it, Leon does, and Leon would like to have it acknowledged and somehow housed here. So we're trying to find a way to

acknowledge him, to make that library available, to be attractive to researchers that are concerned about that. And that will empower me and others to go to black alums and faculty and say, “Here are some things that are happening. Here’s this project that we’re working on. Here’s this library. Here’s some other things connected with The Bancroft. That we’re becoming more and more a part of the history of the university, the documented history of the university, and, of course, The West.” I think I mentioned to you that I’d done this research for Mac early on when he was Vice Chancellor for University Relations, running the development office and other things after he left the vice chancellor’s office. And I found that the pre-World War II African Americans were much more sympathetic to giving to the University than post-war.

24-00:34:48

Wilmot:

That’s fascinating.

24-00:34:53

Ellis:

The folks who came probably had more scar tissue, by which I mean, handled discrimination better. I think there actually is a generational watershed. I don’t know what to say about it. Last time I said, about the people who said, “We wish your people well, Vice Chancellor Ellis, but I want my kid at Berkeley,” and when people talk about racism, I think racism is part of the furniture. I don’t ever remember being alive where there wasn’t racism that had consequences for me, and others I know who look like me. So I have these antennae. I’ve had them since I was a kid in Fontana, knowing where I was all the time. Never not knowing where I was and what threat I confronted. Was I in the wrong place among the wrong white people? Would there be consequences? Don’t go there, choose your path. Nothing like the South, but Fontana was the South in some ways, and so was L.A. when I came back in some ways. I encountered racism here all the time. Very often it wasn’t, “Nigger, get out of here,” kind of stuff, it was lack of attention, and not acknowledging your presence or your importance, or something like that, and having to be pushy. But it never felt life-threatening to me, and I can’t attribute my lack of speedy mobility here to racism. I don’t think I can, the way I see my own time here, it had to do with my own choices rather than—

24-00:36:52

Wilmot:

Russ, are there others in your life who do attribute it to racism?

24-00:36:54

Ellis:

Yes, a lot of folks have come through who do feel that way, and sometimes it—

24-00:37:00

Wilmot:

—in your life who attribute your trajectory to racism.

24-00:37:03

Ellis:

Oh, and the slowness or the speed or whatever of the progress. Other people around me who would—

24-00:37:08

Wilmot: Who are close to you.

24-00:37:09

Ellis: No, no. No. [pause] That's a great question. I have had people tell me what they thought did interfere with my mobility. Getting arrested in Ocean View as part of the protest against tearing down the houses down there. Lying down in front of the bulldozers. Someone said the provost really didn't like that, and said, "Well, if that's what Ellis wants to be doing, let's let him just do that." But that was about activism, and a sense of what you should be doing here. What am I answering?

24-00:38:04

Wilmot: I'm sorry, I derailed the line of what you were saying. The question I asked you was, were there others in your life who attributed the slowness in your trajectory to racism. And you said no.

24-00:38:17

Ellis: I don't think so. But I don't know what others are saying. I can't imagine. I feel pretty alert. I think I talked to you last time about why I think I did get promoted to full professor. I think it had to do with my overall citizenship, combined with the other things I did, with just enough of the work that was relevant and all. I think I was a special case, and as I said, I think my race and ethnicity probably was a plus, all the way through. If I had to add it all up and divide by something, I'd say if I'd been a white male, I may not have moved as successfully given everything, as I said. Maybe not, maybe I would have moved faster. [laughs] I don't know.

24-00:39:22

McGarrigle: I want to wrap up too, but I wanted to ask you if the fact that you didn't have the experiences as an undergrad and a graduate student at Berkeley, which you referred to in terms of not having a tradition at Berkeley, your tradition was at UCLA, was that—is there a flip side to that, in that you didn't have the baggage at Berkeley? Do you think that facilitated your success here as a member of the faculty and administration? I'm just thinking, you referred to Thelton's time here; it wasn't all rosy.

24-00:39:55

Ellis: No, no, no. I wouldn't—I wanted to come here.

24-00:40:02

McGarrigle: As an undergrad.

24-00:40:03

Ellis: I did. I wrote to the track coach, and he didn't respond to me, and I went to UCLA.

24-00:40:12

McGarrigle: And you wanted to come here because—?

24-00:40:13

Ellis:

I just liked the idea of Cal. From a distance. I don't know why I thought I knew about it, but I wanted to come here and be a part of this team, be part of this place. But the John Georges and Harry [Bremonds] and the Thelton Hendersons, the folks who were black here, I don't envy their experience at all. Everybody had their successes, and so forth, and it's a good degree, but there was a kind of—I have to work at the language. I didn't go through it, so I can't say what it was, but my impression is—it was a kind of soft rejection that may have had some class issues mixed in with it. I just felt that—I'm glad I went to UCLA rather than here as an undergraduate. Now, lots of people survived just nicely, but the stories I've heard, it was hard, the finding of accommodations and all that stuff.

24-00:41:32

Wilmot:

Up until the 1950s. I have a question also. These experiences were reflected in some way in your saying these experiences were reflected in the alumni, the black alumni report that you conducted, in terms of who was giving, one generation having more scar tissue than the other.

24-00:41:57

Ellis:

Right. I think that the wonderfully, rapidly growing America, post-war America, was about a lot of things. I mean, the engine was going, was revving up. The University was blossoming. It was a wonderful time. There was a lot that wasn't articulated. It was like a teenager growing at different rates, one tooth longer than the other, but it was a very hopeful time. But a lot of institutions hadn't changed. I felt I had a lot of air to breathe in Westwood, even though—at UCLA, even with the absolute completely stark racism—I couldn't get my hair cut in the barber shop in Westwood. One day I just went in and I sat there. [laughs] Nothing happened—as a matter of fact, I went and sat in one of the barber chairs just to piss them off. But I felt I had that elbow room. It felt a bit darker here to me. I don't know quite what I mean. But a lot of the post-war alums didn't identify so deeply with the place, and weren't so anxious to give.

Now, I spent time with the black alumni club here. A lot of them love the place, and work hard to do—good by and benefit from their involvement in it, but they didn't give a lot of money. Some of the pre-war black alums did. And then the sixties and seventies hit, and then everything got all scrambled. You didn't have the whole rah-rah identification the way you did when—

24-00:43:51

Wilmot:

That's such an interesting time you're talking about, it's precisely that shift in consciousness and awareness, and I haven't really thought to think that how it would affect the whole alumni—

24-00:44:03

Ellis:

That's very important.

24-00:44:05

Wilmot: —relationship to this institution.

24-00:44:07

Ellis: Well, what you want to do is take a look at the classes of x and y and z, '40, '50, '60, '70, and look at who's giving. Probably some of the returned veterans, see, you've got a lot of vets, right, coming back, just waves of vets coming back, and a lot of them have good experiences, and this is their window on the world, new world. The only other thing I do want to mention, and this is from the inside I can report to you on the outside, it did matter that I was a known athlete. I got lots of deference, and winks and nods and so forth, because I'd been a pretty successful athlete.

24-00:44:58

McGarrigle: It mattered in your role as an administrator; is that what you mean?

24-00:45:01

Ellis: Altogether, with alums and others—they're my age, they knew about me, and so forth. It came up the other night [at Thelton Henderson's Award celebration]. Did you notice how much athletics came up at that thing the other night? Part of that was the mobility route, especially for black men. But it's valued altogether, especially alums. "Did you do that?" Even women's crew, here, is probably as important as—[laughs]

24-00:45:26

Wilmot: I remember actually last week I was speaking with David Blackwell, and he brought up this story of how the first time he saw you was at a meet.

24-00:45:38

Ellis: Oh, really? He never told me that.

24-00:45:40

Wilmot: He described you so beautifully.

24-00:45:42

Ellis: Oh, no kidding!

24-00:45:45

Wilmot: —a beautiful description, and I'll tell you about it.

24-00:45:46

Ellis: Oh, okay, great.

24-00:45:49

Wilmot: Shall we close for today?

[end of session]



Interview 13: December 5, 2003  
 [begin audio file 25]

25-00:00:12

Ellis:

This is a little segment related to an episode we just went through, where an authoritative officer in the library walked through the space we're working in, and I said to him, "Well, you have jurisdiction." And he said, "Well, but I don't like to do that." And I'm mentioning to my interviewers that that's the kind of thing I talked about a lot in my role as a sociologist in the Department of Architecture, and that's the interaction of authoritative social structures and architectural space. Very interesting phenomenon. And who has the legal right, the legal, say, jurisdiction, to be in spaces. Who can penetrate them.

I was just going to tell one general story that everybody who's been in university administration will recognize. It was Vice Chancellor Rod Park, who did something that was legit, but surprising. And that is, in anything that was in his domain, and as *the* vice chancellor, very little was outside his domain, his span of control. He didn't respect closed doors. He would go in, and then you were expected to realize that it was the vice chancellor and it was interesting that he'd come into your space, and important, and that your activities had to defer, were expected to defer, to whatever he had on his mind. Now, I think if you had said, any of us had said, "Hey, Rod, hold on a sec," he probably would have. But most people found a way to just let him get his work done. Think about it, it's a very interesting way of getting work done. It obviates a lot of meetings, gets stuff off of his mind right away, keeps his work list short. He hands it to you—we do this with e-mail now in a way—we distribute our thoughts, our comments and so forth around to a lot of people and then we know we've done it, and then it's their turn to respond. He did it with his body.

25-00:02:47

Wilmot:

Which is so different from now, with the politics of the "cc" and the "blind cc," the ways with e-mail.

25-00:02:54

Ellis:

Oh, no, you need to know, and this is not trivial actually, that e-mail displaced—not formally, but dramatically—the blue copies, the blue administrative memo which had to be sent if there was action to be taken or communication to be made. It went out with copies and it went out to the archive, the chancellor's archive, or whoever's archive, but everyone had to be on notice, it had to be responded to, it was a lot of blue paper. When I first had an e-mail setup in Undergraduate Affairs, one of the first things I found useful was that people would say, "Do we have money for x?" I could write back and say, "No" or "Not yet" or "I don't know" or "Maybe." And that would be the end of it until further notice. As opposed to, the person actually having to write up a formal proposal, or put it on the agenda of a meeting. I can't tell you what a wonderful set of shortcuts at that time, e-mail produced in contrast to the lack of e-mail.

25-00:04:22

Wilmot: See, this is fascinating. I think you're uncovering this major thread of institutional history, which is how e-mail has transformed this communication.

25-00:04:38

Ellis: There's no question about it. And someone has to do the study. What I'm hearing from the people that I do talk to, or part of what we did, is that it's resulted in everybody working harder.

25-00:04:45

McGarrigle: Because?

25-00:04:48

Ellis: More work comes in.

25-00:04:51

Wilmot: Because it comes instantaneously?

25-00:04:54

Ellis: Yeah, right.

25-00:04:57

Wilmot: What I always think is interesting is how who you "cc" kind of weights the e-mail.

25-00:05:02

Ellis: That's always been true, on paper or not.

25-00:05:09

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you something about Rod Park. I've heard from various sources, and I'm going to paraphrase, I'm not quoting anyone, but I'm paraphrasing. I've heard from various people who say Michael Heyman as chancellor would give away—what's the expression?

25-00:05:26

Ellis: The store?

25-00:05:29

Wilmot: The store. And then Rod Park would come and take half of it back?

25-00:05:32

Ellis: That sounds right.

25-00:05:35

Wilmot: And that was their operating style—

25-00:05:37

Ellis: I don't know that that was their style—that was the way it worked out. Mike Heyman is a political person, and was a political chancellor. And I'll say in broad strokes that he would make a lot of back-door deals. Nothing awful, but sometimes, in order to get something done, people would want something.

That's always true. But a certain kind of bargaining you don't expect in the university. Or at least, it's unseemly. And that's nonsense, because people bargain all the time. All the time in the university, at every level. But Michael would very often sit in a room with somebody, a senate member, a high senate member who might want something for him or herself, and Mike is mainly interested in the senate ratifying something, or giving him cover for something. I think Mike would sometimes "buy that person off," or "buy them in." And sometimes he'd go too far and Rod would say, "Nah, we can't do that, because that's politically impossible or we don't have the money for it." I'm not going to give any examples. I would agree with that general assessment of that working team, that Rod was—Rod was very effective. I'd say he was very rough. He didn't play. He was a tough guy. And he could be very hard on the fragile egos of some of these faculty. But he was very good at getting things done. And Mike was good at big ideas, I think.

25-00:08:01

Wilmot:

I want to shift now, just to try and follow our outline that we encouraged you last two weeks ago. To begin, there's a story you had said you would tell us about the story of the American Cultures requirement and being on the Committee on Committees of the [UCB] academic senate. So I just wanted to ask you about that story. I'm asking you to tell us what the story is, and what was interesting and important about it?

25-00:08:25

Ellis:

Okay. In a way, it's an episode inside the larger story of American Cultures. But I think it's worth noting for the record and for the history that gets written of that program, which I think is a distinguished program. I don't know how it's doing right now, but it's one of those programs that seems to have survived in the interim with some very good faculty who loved teaching the courses and still do, I think.

Let me remember. The names of things are very important here. Whatever year it was that I was elected to the Committee on Committees, the academic senate Committee on Committees, is the effective date of this story. And there's all kinds of buildup on the front end of this, which is the history of the Ethnic Studies requirement. Have the two of you heard about this? And have you talked to people about the Ethnic Studies requirement? Okay, so. I'm trying to remember, I think it was in my second stint as Faculty Assistant to The Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, faculty assistant to Mac Laetsch, that somebody decided to put me up for election as a member of the senate Committee on Committees.

25-00:10:58

Wilmot:

Do you know who that was?

25-00:11:04

Ellis:

Oh, yeah. It was Rod Park and Mac Laetsch. Probably Mike was involved, in some kind of small discussion, they decided to put me forward. Made sense in

terms of ethnic representation, and I'd been kind of, well, obviously too much of a good citizen on senate work and all that kind of stuff. And so, what they did was to make phone calls. I think Rod probably made a couple of calls and Mac made a couple, I don't remember. But you have to be put forward, your name has to be put forward by some people. All I remember is that Bud Cheit, the dean of the School of Business, was one of the names that had nominated me. So then if you get the right nomination, or some combination, your name is there, and then there are other candidates, also nominees, and it goes out to the senate for a vote. I had a nice panel of recommenders, or nominators. But then I remember Rod, who always talked his thinking out loud, saying, "Well, we have to bullet vote this one."

25-00:12:35

Wilmot:

What does that mean?

25-00:12:40

Ellis:

Well, the thing is, in the way the Senate voted, if you just voted for one candidate, and you got everybody just to vote for that one candidate, then that candidate got all ones, which is the best, and you didn't get this distribution from one, two, three, four, five, or however many people were running for the position. So you increased the probability. If you got a lot of people all to say, "My first choice is Ellis," then you did better than people voting multiple, like one, twos, and three. I thought that was kind of interesting. "Gee, I didn't know you did that." Anyway, I got elected.

25-00:13:33

McGarrigle:

Russ, do people get that far in the process and then not make it?

25-00:13:36

Ellis:

Yes, oh yes. Well, very often, at least in the period during which I was on campus, there were consequences to the votes. Very often—[the Department of] Spanish and Portuguese for example. They just happened to be a very conservative department, and there were names that you knew what they were hoping for, in terms of issues having to do with affirmative action, or the weapons labs, or any number of issues that the campus was concerned with. Who was in favor of student support, which is expensive, very expensive, and a lot of really focused professors here are concerned about what the research university does. And it's not that they wish students ill, but it's not their notion that we should be spending a lot of money on psychotherapy or this, that, and the other for students. That should somehow be handled differently. Anyway, those are issues that are embedded in knowing who's being put forward for various communities. It's almost always a vote with political consequences, who sits on certain senate committees, committee on courses, things like that.

25-00:15:23

Wilmot:

What was your running platform? I'm imagining you as a political candidate, which may be inaccurate.

25-00:15:29

Ellis: I don't even remember what I said. I think I did have to say something.

25-00:15:34

Wilmot: Okay. For people who are reading this, what is the significance of the Committee on Committees?

25-00:15:38

Ellis: It makes decisions on who sits on the academic senate committees. It's what the United States, the Bush administration was really hoping for with the Council in Iraq, that they could appoint the people that they had chosen, and then those people could make the appointments, and then they would be tied to American strings. There's no person with strings in the back here, but the idea basically is that the Committee on Committees gets a panel talking to each other and their various connections on the campus, who would be good, and in a deliberative process in the Committee on Committees meetings, makes decisions about who should be approached to serve on various committees. Then that job [of contacting the recommended people] is given to one member or the other. Okay, and I'll now take it to my story.

It was my first year and my first event on the Committee on Committees, and—what the dickens was the name of this group?— it was a special group of the graduate council or something? I'll remember later, I'm sorry. [Academic Senate Committee on Educational Policy] But it was the Ethnic Studies requirement that had been kind of masticated down into an acceptable form, I forget what the language was. And then the senate was going to take a look, or a special committee was going to take a look at what was to be done with this issue. It's what Ethnic Studies had become—I'm astonished that I can't remember the name of the thing that got handed to the committee to then outfit with members. [The time line is spelled out in the preface to the report to the Academic Senate by its special committee on education and ethnicity, William Simmons, Chair. March, 1989, page 4.]

We went around the room. In retrospect, for some reason that's not clear to me, some members of the committee that I thought would have been very alert to this, would have followed it for a long time and cared about it, maybe conservative members of the committee, didn't seem to. It seemed to have been taken as something that the freshman could handle. And of course, I was relevant, right? I'd been wallowing around in these kinds of issues. In some ways, that's why I was there. Black member of the faculty, been around, been tested, and there I am on the committee, and that's what I should do. So after the deliberations, I was to take this list of names, and I'll mention two, and then call them in this order, the order of preference of the committee, the person they wanted most, and second, third. Until I came up with someone who was willing to serve, and then come back and report to the Committee on Committees that they were willing to serve, and then the committee would make a decision.

The committee's top choice was Bob Bellah, Sociology. Do you know that name? And so I was a good committee member. I called Bob and I described to him what this special committee on education and ethnicity, or something like that was, to do. So Bob said, "Oh, Russ, I'm just going into a really big project, a writing project. Tell me something about this. What do you think?" I said, "Well,"—now I didn't do this first thing with guile, I didn't, what I'm about to tell you I did not do with guile. Although he wasn't my first choice. I said, "Well, you know the history of this thing. It could be a bit contentious and I think what the agenda is, to go through and see what kind of recommendations this committee would make on funding for this program, and it could take a fair amount of work, I think." And he said, "No, I don't think—that sounds like something I'd love to do, but I can't do right now given my commitments, my research commitments." I said, "I'm sorry, Bob, but I understand."

And then I called my choice, Bill Simmons in anthropology. And Bill Simmons and I still joke about this. He went away to Brown, I guess, later. Bill had been chair of Anthropology, which is *famously* one of the most difficult departments on campus to manage, for all kinds of reasons, and had done a very good job. And I knew Bill informally, and liked his values and everything. I called him and said, "Hey Bill, there's this job. Senate committee on education and ethnicity"—yeah, I think I'm right—"and your name came up in the Committee on Committees," you know, laying it on. And he said, "Ah, Russ, you know I've got a lot of things I'm doing. What's it like?" I said, "Piece of cake." [laughter] I said, "You could probably find a little money and hire graduate students." So he says, "Do you think that's true, that I could get some support?" I said, "I'm certain of that." I took his name back, he was appointed as chair of this committee, and the rest is history. [laughs delightedly]

[narrator insert: Bill Simmons' report does an excellent job of describing that history. For an especially interesting discussion of that period and activities leading up to the American Cultures program, see American Cultures Requirement: After Ten Years U.C. Berkeley: Lectures, Events and History on Videotape Media Resource Center, Moffit Library, U.C. Berkeley.]

He did a *fantastic* job. And someone has to write the story of how Bill Simmons handled that, with all the faculty coming in with opinions on how—various things—"What is this? Is this really an ethnic thing? Is it anti-Semitic?" David Vogel [Business] and Aaron Wildowsky [Political Science] and various other people came in and said, "Okay, how about this course?" And actually their courses were fine. They were in the history of—comparative studies of three American ethnic types and their prospects, and so forth. It was a great thing. But there were other things that Bill did. He held these open meetings in the faculty club, which were sort of open seminars on faculty members' views of this program. And it was very interesting to go to.

My experience of this campus, in administration—and I want to be careful with my generalization—but very large numbers of faculty in the sciences and engineering actually don't understand why there is the rest of the campus. They just don't know. "What do you do in Comp. Lit?" and stuff like that. A lot of them know that stuff has been around a long time and it's necessary, but it's not the "real" stuff. The real stuff is empirical and experimental, and that's how we know stuff, and that's why we have a place like this university. But some of the people who came from the sciences embarrassed themselves in front of senior members of the history department, for example. And I watched some of this happen. I think Bob Middlekauff was one, where someone from the math department started declaring some historical facts, and I watched Bob's face crumple as he realized how ignorant that person was of history, and you know, the whole thing. I would say that Bill knew what he was doing. That he knew that if he had a forum where the most distinguished—that attracted, and he was able to attract very distinguished members of the faculty across a broad spectrum—that folks would benefit from this colloquy, this discussion, this examination of this enterprise, especially as the enterprise got reframed along the way. That is, 'What is it we're after?' I think Bill knew that he would come out with a product that would be very good, very interesting, and serve multiple interests, not just Ethnic Studies Department or anything like that. I just thought he did a spectacular job.

He did a very good job, but it hinged on this funny little moment, I'm not sure what would have happened if I'd been honest about how big I thought the job was. And our joke is, "Ah, it's a piece of cake." [laughs] And it took up the next five years of his life, or however long it was he was involved. He built a whole stream right in the middle of the institution, which is very, very interesting and exciting.

25-00:26:21

Wilmot:

What about him enabled him to do that? What about him and his position in this institution enabled him to do that?

25-00:26:30

Ellis:

I think he was like anybody, and I would include myself a little bit, as improbable as it seems that I would say something like that—I mean not that I'm not arrogant, but—a lot of people are really a bit too deferential to what they think are the rules and the structure. Of the university, or any organizational setting. And maybe it was that Bill was an anthropologist and a sociologist, and you just know that things aren't like that. Things get done because people do them and things that get done have to be conceived, and they have to be funded, and the conception and the execution are *connected*. That is, in conceiving, you also conceive the execution, and you have to think of who would be involved, and where are the resources? Who cares? From whose stream of activities does this benefit anyways? In other words,

sometimes you choose things ahead of time thinking, ‘This may have—a wind may come up that will move my boat.’

Sometimes you already know that somebody over there is working on something, like American Studies. I think Bill, who was I think—didn’t he chair that group for a while, American Studies? But I think there are multiple sources of push and pull, even in anthropology, certainly sociology, political science to our surprise, but that was good. People who had things they wanted to do and say, and this was a setting in which they could. And from the standpoint of senate and courses, and the value of the courses, this was completely legitimate. And inside of the University’s definition of itself. So I think Bill was able to be successful because he kept everything inside the University’s definition of itself. And he had a sense of the possible. An open-ended sense of the possible, so that he put together something that could grow, could expand and contract.

25-00:29:09  
Wilmot:

You mention the evolution of this concept and how the different stakeholders came together in that colloquy, and kind of decided—I want to know, what were the different phases of that evolution and—?

25-00:29:33  
Ellis:

There are better people than me to ask that. I would imagine—I just don’t have the memory. I was here for most of it, but not all of it. I wasn’t here for the Third World Strike and the generation of the Third World College idea. A lot of this goes all the way back to those issues, and what should we be studying about the world, and why aren’t these issues inside the University. I was at this event last night, which was a joint production of the Aurora Theater and oh gosh, I forget, the Department of Music? It was the *Play of Daniel*. And I sat next to a woman who was in FSM, and we were talking about theater at the University. My wife’s play, we were talking about collaboration with the Zellerbach. And she was talking like from late sixties, early seventies. You know, there’s very little Third World stuff in there. Tickets are forty dollars, you know, or so forth. She’s talking about Cal Performances, which is the collaboration we’re hoping for with the Aurora Theater. That harkens back to a time when that was the pressure, and that same thing through another route, through the institutionalized structures of Ethnic Studies, African American Studies, and so forth. That came through into this program that Bill put together. As a matter fact, it was the driving force of it. Actually, when the meeting ended where the senate decided to approve the American Cultures requirement, which was a high drama event, I remember a bunch of students cheering and marching out, and I think ahead of them, or somehow among them was Ron Takaki, and Ron, I think—and I don’t know if he’s done his oral history—but I am sure Ron would identify himself with the origins of this idea.



25-00:32:02

Wilmot:

How did the dimensions of this whole conversation about what's the range of knowledge that should be here at the University in Ethnic Studies, American Cultures, how did these dimensions come up again in 1998, when, as I understand, you took a stand around American Cultures—no, Ethnic Studies, and FTE, is that correct?

25-00:32:29

Ellis:

No, what I did—and I'm sorry for the nine hundred pages of e-mail I sent you, but I thought that record was important to keep. What happened in this last event was that a group of graduate students, minority students in the Ethnic Studies program, were demanding money and space and faculty in kind of a research program, from the University for Ethnic Studies at the graduate level. This is a very rough summary. And engaged in some sit-in activity to get it. The conflict between the University and this group of students got pretty intense. The police were involved, and ultimately the chancellor had to come in and make some final decisions about what to give or not give in this set of demands. And he gave a lot. He gave time, space, and money to this group of students. And I never was involved in the content. What happened was—and I was already retired by then—is that a group of faculty, in mainly political science, called a faculty meeting which was essentially intended to censure the chancellor for his decision, for what he gave, to say that he did not have the authority, that this was a larger senate issue, he'd given away too much and to censure him for what he had given. So I was asked to come in and I wasn't asked so much to come in and help defend the chancellor, but to defend the decision, is the way I would put it, though it's a hard distinction to make. And I hadn't planned to come in and play any prominent role, but I was certainly willing to participate. I thought it was a gratuitous move, and the students had been characterized as behaving like Brown Shirts, which some of them did.

25-00:35:19

Wilmot:

What does that mean?

25-00:35:20

Ellis:

Mussolini—the thugs that supported Mussolini in the Second World War, the fascists, thugs. A lot of the behavior, as often happens, is not behavior that we value at the campus, that's not how we think you do things here. Takeovers, and threats, and yelling, and stuff like that. But so be it, the world seems not to behave the way we always want it here at the University. Anyway, so I came back to participate in organizing a response that would come up at the meeting that was being called by this number, I forget how many faculty are involved, are needed—it's not very many, fewer than ten can call a special meeting.

25-00:36:12

McGarrigle:

So when you come back in that capacity, are you a consultant?

25-00:36:15

Ellis:

No, no, no, just a faculty member. Just a member of the senate. That's all.

25-00:36:20

McGarrigle: But you're retired.

25-00:36:22

Ellis: But I'm still a member of the senate. Not a very consequential member of the senate anymore, but you are never not a member of the senate, I think unless you go join another senate some place. So that's how I came back, emeritus senate member. And it turned out I was, by default, I wound up organizing and leading the effort to basically defeat the censure motion. So that's the role that I played in that episode that you're talking about. It was one of the highlights of my time here. It was amazing, it was just amazing. Of all the things that have happened, and I've been part of lots of movement things, and surprising changes, but this thing grew so fast, and it was so unorganized. Everything led to this senate meeting, and it was almost like some kind of union struggle or something. How many votes do we have over here? It's all on record, it's all on record. And I think it's one of the most interesting things that ever happened to me at the University, to watch how things played out. We not only defeated the censure, but there was a second motion to commend the chancellor for his decision, and that won also. I did not expect that. And I was kind of the leader, but I wouldn't have thought to even make the motion. Because I wouldn't have thought it was possible—oh, don't ask me, oh god, he's in Conservation of Natural Resources, great guy, very well organized guy. [Professor Jeffrey Rom, Department of Environmental Science Policy and Management]

25-00:38:20

Wilmot: Who was leading the opposition [to the Chancellor's action]? I understand the opposition consisted of—

25-00:38:31

Ellis: Jack Citrin in Political Science. Oh, what's his name, the philosopher who got off the liberal bandwagon in FSM—

25-00:38:42

Wilmot: Searle?

25-00:38:43

Ellis: Yeah, [John] Searle. John Cummins called me one day, worried actually. Do you know who he is? He's the assistant chancellor, he's kind of the person who gets things done for the chancellor, who reports directly to the chancellor. Searle had walked by him in front of the chancellor's office one day and said, "Hey John, you guys doing your homework? I hope so because *we* are." [laughter] I think that kind of spooked John, so he called me and said, "What are we doing?!" I said, "Well, a lot of people are interested and this is going pretty good."

There's another thing that happened that kind of surprised me. As a sociologist, it shouldn't have. But here I come walking back in, in this non-official position. Here's an episode, ad hoc—well, not ad hoc, it happens all

the time at Cal, this kind of stuff—so I'm needing all kinds of information from the senate office, from this place, that place, and so forth. And then it turns out that I'm getting very good cooperation, because I know and have worked with a lot of these people, in good ways. So they treated me as someone they had enjoyed working with and respected. I had a leg up. The opposition did not have the advantage I had. So I got lots of information, cooperation, and so forth that made my work quite easy, doing this.

So it was a dramatic vote against those seeking censure of the chancellor. And not only that, there were very many young professors in the room, who were watching with very big eyes, to watch this happen. And one young lady, a new professor in the English department, was trying to help the process along, and said, "I know exactly what they're talking about," and then she mentioned a particular professor and how dishonest he was in some senate committee process that she had been part of, and she says, "This [motion to censure] looks very much like that." And she had to be stopped because in the context of the senate, you are not supposed to identify people by name like that in these kinds of conversations. But I was very proud of the faculty. It was a legit process. It really was. Everybody worked hard for that day, and our side won. I don't know the meaning of the outcome. There was some peace, and some time to work things out. And as usual, the peace that follows these kinds of things is much less dramatic than the intersection when they come into existence, or their existence is either confirmed or denied. The world hasn't ended. There are some people who have benefited who cared about this program, and others have gone away.

25-00:42:37

McGarrigle: Has the chancellor been censured in other circumstances?

25-00:42:39

Ellis: Not that I'm aware of.

25-00:42:41

McGarrigle: What would the fallout have been had he been censured?

25-00:42:48

Ellis: Well, if you think about the fact that a large number of faculty would have said, "You did something that you didn't have the right to do, and we don't like it." The number of the votes would have meant that he was on thin ice. That gives him—effectively it's like any other large, especially public, office, when that happens to you the scope of your activities narrows.

25-00:43:23

McGarrigle: Loss of confidence, to say the least.

25-00:43:25

Ellis: Confidence is a good word, especially if it's examined closely, because people say, "I have no guarantee that what this guy is saying to me is going to come to fruition. He's very weak right now. Let's not commit anything right now."

Let's listen and go to the meeting, and so forth, but he might not be here next year."

25-00:43:50

McGarrigle: So for those along that line, for those faculty members who did come out publicly for censure, were there consequences following?

25-00:43:58

Ellis: For those faculty? Oh, no.

25-00:43:59

McGarrigle: Who came out publicly against—?

25-00:44:05

Ellis: No, no, no. No, something like that would happen informally.

25-00:44:11

McGarrigle: Well, that's what I mean.

25-00:44:13

Ellis: No, no, no. As a matter of fact, one of the most active people is in a very high administrative position right now. Bob Price, Political Science. Bob surprised me. I thought we were kind of friendly, and our kids had been friendly for a long time. But I was doing something on recall as faculty assistant for faculty affirmative action, right at the moment that SP 1 and 2 passed and went to 209, and the name of the office had to change on my watch, which was very interesting. And Carol Christ had asked me to chair a committee, and Bob was on it, and he walked into the room, and he said to me, "Oh, so you've come back to watch your empire crumble." And it was a complete surprise to me, that he saw things that way. And then, like an idiot—actually, I was hurt. But I said to Citrin, "Hey, what's this? Bob Price said to me such-and-such." And Jack said, "Oh, that wasn't a very nice thing to say," and that was the end of it. But in fact it was the beginning of a level of coldness, I think, that I don't remember creating, but I do think that what happened, and what I didn't realize, that the degree to which I supported affirmative action, and those people who supported affirmative action and so forth, alienated a lot of people who hadn't been clear to me that it did. That is, a lot of academic members of this community probably went with affirmative action without deciding that they were for it. They sort of let it be, rather than get in its way. But maybe thought it was something that could happen in time, if we didn't look it directly in the eye, or something like that. But came, collectively, this quiet group, to be hostile. I'm still a little bit confused, and this is something to say on this tape for history purposes. I'm really a bit confused by some of the hostility, because I don't recall that, as an institution, we did a whole lot of things that violated our local community here.

25-00:47:02

Wilmot: What do you—violating our local community?

25-00:47:05

Ellis: Well, I mean some of the faculty actors who wound up upset about affirmative action. I don't know what we did that was so angering. That'll get a lot of reactions.

25-00:47:19

McGarrigle: Earlier you said that Bud Cheit was one of the people who put you up for the Committee on Committees? Is that right?

25-00:47:28

Ellis: Yes, he was. He was one of the people that Rod or Mac or Mike got to put me up.

25-00:47:35

McGarrigle: I wondered if you had an existing relationship.

25-00:47:38

Ellis: I knew Bud, Bud knew me. Just through the life of the campus. We were friendly, but I didn't know him that way. But he probably thought I was relevant enough for all the reasons that I mentioned. I like him, he's a good guy. I was proud to be advocated by him, nominated by him, nice to be next to his name.

25-00:48:04

McGarrigle: Did you know Mitch Breitweiser through this process of getting the American Cultures requirement put through? I think at one point he was also acting director of—

25-00:48:16

Ellis: I met Mitch after he was—I really met him, to know him, to talk to him and be a social friend, after he was the director of the [American Cultures] program, not before.

25-00:48:32

McGarrigle: And did you have conversations about the history of the program, or where it was at that point?

25-00:48:37

Ellis: Mitch and I talked about everything.

25-00:48:42

McGarrigle: What's your take on his approach to directing the program?

25-00:48:44

Ellis: Well, I completely admired him. I think that he is such a scholar, such an easy scholar, and someone whose life commitments and involvements caused him to understand all the issues he was involved with. I thought he was damn near a perfect person to be running the program. Maybe a bit too honest. Bill Simmons could be strategically quiet when he knew someone was not enthusiastic about something. Mitch, I think, probably would get noisier, would get more talkative if he had someone hostile to some part of his

program. In the room with him or something. I think he's a brilliant man. I was just so interested that he chose to do it.

25-00:50:01

McGarrigle: Does that replace teaching duties for a period of time, then?

25-00:50:10

Ellis: Yeah, I think you get relief. You may get a semester course relief, something like that. Maybe you teach a course a semester, something like that.

25-00:50:18

McGarrigle: Does it rotate, that duty?

25-00:50:26

Ellis: All duties like that rotate, always. In the ORUs [Operating Research Unit], the centers, everywhere. Chairs, deans. It's codified. Now that was a new one, but you never expect people to stay in more than five to eight years. Harry Specht over in Social Welfare was the dean for a very long time.

25-00:51:00

McGarrigle: Oh, in Social Welfare. Yeah, he was.

25-00:51:01

Ellis: But that's just one of those happenstances.

25-00:51:06

McGarrigle: As you know, I'm interviewing Jewelle [Taylor Gibbs].

25-00:51:11

Ellis: Uh-huh. I liked Harry a lot. So that's the story, and I realize as I talk, how general I keep, but that's just what you get when you get me. [laughing]

25-00:51:25

Wilmot: That's your prerogative.

25-00:51:32

Ellis: I don't mean avoiding names and dates and so forth, I mean I just talk on a very general surface, I realize, in telling the story. But there's a lot you can fill in. Not you, but I mean there's a lot that whoever goes through this stuff, trying to understand what happened, if someone wants to understand American Cultures, I don't think I'm fundamental at all, but I showed up at an intersection that I find almost cute.

25-00:52:05

McGarrigle: You said that you witnessed the high drama. Would you elaborate on that at all?

25-00:52:10

Ellis: How did I say that? In connection with what?

25-00:52:13

McGarrigle: With American Cultures. With some of the senate meetings.

25-00:52:18

Ellis: Oh, it's always about resources: Should we be spending this money, this way, now?

25-00:52:22

Wilmot: And what's the enterprise of—

25-00:52:22

Ellis: What are we doing around here? Why would we spend this kind of money on this when we need it for that? And can we afford—should the faculty be using its time for these kinds of things? Kind of basic questions, and they *are* important questions. They are resource questions. They are intellectual commitment questions. They are research questions. There was a period when we argued about the weapons labs like this. We would have senate meetings, and there was a whole group saying, “Secrecy is absolutely anathema to the enterprise called the university. Why should we—?” And then other people would say, “No. We need to keep this kind of activity connected to the public realm, where it can be observed and kept safe.”

25-00:53:24

Wilmot: We have a question about this. How would something like the Saragoza affair kind of drop into this pond, or this community, with the different threads that you've identified here? How would that be interpreted? [Alex Saragoza was accused of inventing grades of two UC Berkeley athletes.]

25-00:53:50

Ellis: You know, timing is a lot.

25-00:53:56

Wilmot: And that was in 1999.

25-00:54:02

Ellis: Yeah, timing is a lot. And I think Alex's mistake and the publicness of it, was taken by some members of our community as kind of like: “So there you go. You see how terrible it is,” that's what I'm saying, those who are hostile to affirmative action and the outreach and so forth. They celebrated this, because first off, the scope of the problems entailed—here's a couple of football players I think, and here's a man who has gone from the fields of Dinuba or some place, as a picker of vegetables, a migrant family. Alex tells the story of himself that he comes to tell his dad who works the fields that he has gotten a scholarship to college, and his dad says, “What? You're going to go to school some *more*?” That's a powerful story for me. I tell it all the time. “What? You're going to go to school some *more*?” I mean just how much school can you go to, you know! And Alex went on and became, in my mind, one of the best, most responsible members of this community. I thought he was a really effective human being who understood what the place was about and so forth. He's still here, he's not gone. And then he goes on to become vice president for outreach of the University. And I still have his daddy's voice in the back saying, of California “What? You're going to go to school some *more*?”

And here is Alex, vice president of something for the whole system, so he mattered to me. The Chicano/Mexicano, you know, guy from nowhere who's mobile in this California system, and there he is, doing this work on what was left, but at a very high level, of what we had all worked for. Now it's outreach, but it covers the whole system. And then he falls. And it's almost like an arm reaches out of the balloon of what we've all put together and sticks a pin in it. Even though Winston Doby, who's somebody I know from UCLA—I know him because he was a freshman on the track team when I was a senior. Winston Doby, vice chancellor of student affairs at UCLA—now has that position—I think is a wise, smart, and experienced and effective human being, but they cut that budget in outreach there something like 80 percent this last year.

25-00:57:32

Wilmot:

He's at UCLA, you said.

25-00:57:35

Ellis:

No, no, no, he replaced Saragoza [as Vice President for Outreach at UC Office of the President]. I'm sure this story made it easier to attack the budget. I'm sure of it. Although outreach budgets are never at the heart of any university budget for real.

By the way, I learned something. The American Studies program had this panel that I told you about, that you've got to get a copy of the tape—

25-00:58:12

Wilmot:

American Cultures?

25-00:58:18

Ellis:

Yeah, they had a panel, and I was on it. And Rod Park was on it. And a couple of other people. Did Bill Simmons get back for that? I don't think Bill got back for that. It was a very interesting panel on the history of the program, and given the work the two of you have been doing, I think you'd really enjoy seeing that panel. But what was interesting to me in the story that I just told you, is that Rod Park told a story that I didn't realize. You know, if you wake up sometimes and realize that people are talking about music you've never heard of, and it was hot while you were conscious, but you were too busy doing something else. Anyway, Rod Park said, well, you know, the Berkeley campus had basically killed the education and ethnicity idea on campus, that the senate, through some backdoor process, our senate had said, "We don't want to bother with this." Rod Park and Mike Heyman went to systemwide, to their colleagues, the chancellors, and said, "Why don't we have a systemwide issue on education and ethnicity?" So, it came back to the campus after having been killed through the office of the president, and the council of chancellors. So all of a sudden the campuses were asked to investigate this, so that was why it was on the agenda. That's interesting to me, that I was a) unaware of that—I don't know what I was doing—but that that's how it had come back on the agenda of the campus. So he told that story on this tape, which is



extremely interesting, in a coherent way that I hadn't understood. It's amazing how ignorant I could be of so much and still manage to get things done and survive. Maybe that's why I don't understand the anger. We have to move?

[For an especially interesting discussion of that period and activities leading up to the American Cultures program, see American Cultures Requirement: After Ten Years U.C. Berkeley: Lectures, Events and History on Videotape Media Resource Center, Moffit Library, UC Berkeley.]

25-01:00:40  
Wilmot:

Not right away, but we do need to move, and I will be glad to move to a new room. There are a couple big stories I want to ask you to tell. You've referenced before the story of Black Studies, which you weren't central to, but you were certainly on campus and watched the formation of the department. I wanted to ask if you could tell me that story from your perspective, how Black Studies came into being. The role of the administration—

25-01:01:18  
Ellis:

You know, I can't very well.

25-01:01:16  
Wilmot:

Can I ask you specific questions?

25-01:01:18  
Ellis:

Sure, go ahead.

25-01:01:20  
Wilmot:

When Bil [William] Banks came on board, were you aware of kind of what unfolded at the Black Studies Department at that time?

25-01:01:43  
Ellis:

Yes, from a distance. Although I knew Bil, I didn't know him very well, and he had his hands full. And people disappear when they have their hands full. I mean, they're busy doing what they have to do. The whole outcome of the Third World Strike, the idea of a Third World College, the ingesting of the inclusion of a wider array of community perspectives in the mindedness of the university. Who's saying what's true. [Course]139X is Eldridge Cleaver speaking to the world through an extension course. And this is the beginning of the notion that we need new voices in the university talking about the issues that involve poor people, people of color, et cetera, et cetera.

After a while, when things settle down, as they always try to do, you have the problem of making sense of the new participants and the new voices. What do you do with issues like appointment, promotion, and tenure? What are you rewarding? How do you reconcile a very articulate welfare mother who's telling students the real story about poverty, who might want to be a regular faculty member, or have a regular job? How do you reconcile that with our lectureship setup? Bil had that job.

Now I'm putting it in a way that has to do with how you manage in the university. Other people would say he had the job of getting rid of a lot of those people who just didn't fit, didn't make any sense. And in truth, I never admired—oh no, I never envied—his job. It looked unbelievably hard. And I think he's still got scar tissue from that. He survived and he's been a real good citizen of this place, but it looked just awful, because he was trying to save something that a lot of the campus didn't want anyway. I heard many stories of faculty trying to say, "We got all those FTE over there in Afro-American Studies, I mean that's not a real program, and it's going through all this stuff, and we need this over here." And I think Al Bowker was under that kind of pressure, you know, to defend that program, that department, against those who would want to raid the FTE. So there were a lot of ongoing, almost permanent conflicts in that whole situation. Not to mention the fact of managing a faculty altogether. Which is really hard. I would never—I only once thought I might want to be a department chair. That's one of the most thankless jobs there is. You're right up against it. You have almost no authority, and no money. Anyway, their big move—what really broke them away from the story line of the Third World College, was their decision to go into Letters and Science—

25-01:06:02

Wilmot:

And away from Ethnic Studies?

25-01:06:08

Ellis:

Well, into Letters and Science. I don't think anybody said, "And we're going away from the rest of this stuff," but that's how it was perceived. It was perceived, for a period, as a betrayal of the larger idea of the Third World College. And I guess—I wouldn't call it a betrayal, but it certainly was a different move—it says, "We're part of the university." My own view is that we don't want any of this stuff to be marginal. I use the language, "It's better to be part of the plumbing." I told a Grace Massie story, where she wanted to report to the chancellor. And I said, "Well, no." First off, that's a bad idea. You never want to report to the chancellor. That's no place to report, unless you're in the structure. But as a grape hanging off the chancellor, that's not good. You want to be part of the plumbing to be effective. It's not a very kind image. Being part of the structure. The flow of resources. The flow of ideas. The flow of gossip. The informal plumbing as well as the formal plumbing.

25-01:07:25

Wilmot:

Was that department supported by the administration at its inception?

25-01:07:30

Ellis:

I think so, I think so. I think Bowker had committed to supporting it, and I think Heyman was committed to supporting it, and it's still here.

25-01:07:37

Wilmot:

I understand that you were distanced from the situation, but—

25-01:07:46

Ellis: But I always participated one way or another. I was on their committees and I sat in to listen to seminars by prospective faculty. I always had relations with African American Studies, I just can't tell you the real story, that's all. I don't know it. There are many people that could tell you the story.

[begin audio file 26]

26-00:00:42

Wilmot: One question I wanted to ask you was, as vice chancellor, in reflecting, what do you consider your biggest achievement, your best thing, what are you proudest of?

26-00:00:56

Ellis: Thank you for sending me that question online. It's very helpful. Thanks for stressing that you wanted to ask me about it again. It didn't take long for me to come up with the answer. And it wasn't any specific thing. It was being part, for probably four years, of a scene here—a total of maybe six years, including a period before I became vice chancellor—of a world at UC Berkeley where the institution, where Berkeley cared really prominently about under-represented students. Really did. Being part of that is what I'm proudest of. Having a Chancellor Heyman, and his, or chancellor's staff and organization and assorted faculty, senate members and departments—that took all of this very seriously, and worked hard within the constraints of their various colleges and departments.

Karl Pister, for example, in Engineering, I think he's just a hero for pushing affirmative action in a department where nobody doesn't have a straight A with AP courses, in terms of the students who apply, you know with AP courses, a 5.0 GPA out of high school. But he was really diligent, and thoughtful, and careful in getting into engineering women and African American students and Chicano, Latino students, and supporting them. Actually quite a bit ahead of the curve of the campus effort. But we had people all over the campus who understood, who worked hard, staff that were concerned, an administration that was committed, and this bridges from the Heyman administration to the Tien administration.

For me, it was a great delight to have a vice chancellor for business and administrative services like Dan Boggan. And Dan Boggan and I were two black vice chancellors. The students felt freed to be angry, to sit in. I mean it was hard, but I always took some of that sense of energy to approach the place, even to hit it, as a protester—not so much like the FSM one where you're hitting the adversary—no, let me not say that. But understanding that it's a place that will be responsive to you if you do approach it, even aggressively. And we had a variety of events here, some painful for me. But I just really adored being a part of a university that was committed to affirmative action. And that is the primitive way to put it. What I really mean is I really adored and I thought I was an effective member of a team that cared

about diversifying the student body, holding a responsibility to a publicly supported institution where all the taxpayers pay into it and should benefit. I just was so happy being part of that process for a few years. And I think I contributed to it. It's a tone, it's a feel, it's the culture of the place. And that's what I'm proudest of. I'm proud of me, but I'm proud of the place and the people who worked during that period on behalf of those students.

A story I think I told last time about the Filipino students is very important to me, because it comes in a way at the end of that, because the Filipino students have never been affirmative action students, they've never been under-represented. But I know damn well experientially, just as me, as a person my age, someone who's been around the scene like this, that their sense of not belonging had to be very similar to a lot of other students of color. And it was just wonderful to be able to say to them in a room, "Nobody here has any more right to be here than you do." What a fantastic thing to be able to say to people. It's not a matter of how you feel about it. This is a fact. You have as much right to be here as anybody else who is a student. Student or otherwise. So when you look around, don't think they're really the ones who belong here. I know how that feels. And it may be for some people a permanent problem, "This belongs to them." But the fact of the matter is, it's public. And the way things work, you have as much right to it as anybody. That's a fantastic thing. And I think that message had a big effect. Had a big effect on me, to be able to say it. But it's so important to say. And it makes such a big difference in how you take yourself.

I just bought my sandwich at the Bechtel building. A black student told me a story many years ago of meeting a friend up there, and the friend said, "What are you doing here?" In other words, "Why are you on this part of the campus?" It wasn't that I didn't know what your major is or anything, but, there aren't black students up here. And that's just empirically the case for all kinds of reasons. Not that there are none, but it's rare, et cetera, et cetera. So that's the end of that. I want to end on the upbeat part, which is—for a period of time, I think people had a sense of ownership, almost ownership, of their spot in this place. And that was nice. And I know it mattered that Dan and I were up there, and that the staff was diversified. I know it mattered. I know it did.

26-00:08:28

McGarrigle:

When you speak of it in the past, it's partly because you are now in retirement, but also because you see it differently today.

26-00:08:34

Ellis:

Well, it's all changed. It's not the same anymore. Throughout the university, as modeled by the office of the president, there's just not the diversity in those leadership roles. When I said, I invented aphorisms, "An ounce of position is worth a pound of policy," I didn't mean that you could cheat, and secret money away—I just meant that it matters that you're there for openers. You

can have all the affirmative action policy you like, but it really matters for people to look up and see this person who's head of that program, looks like them. The people just feel more comfortable. And you can demystify the place, you can explain what's happening. It's the question of welcome.

And this is a huge place. It doesn't—as I always told my students, even when I was just counseling individual students—Berkeley doesn't wake up in the morning worried about you. And I said that to a student who was having trouble here. She was a black student, she had come from Pitzer College, where I taught, and I said, “You know, what you have to understand is that Berkeley doesn't wake up worrying about you.” She said, “I know what you mean. If this had been Pitzer, I already would have had tea with the dean.” It's true. A lot of care. Even Julie, talking about the difference of being admitted to Stanford, versus coming to Berkeley. There are no balloons at the airport. I don't know what happened to you, but she was from out of town. And I know what happens at Stanford in contrast to here. This is a big public place that sucks in leadership and smarts, but we're not preparing the elites here, although we contribute to them. That's not what we mainly do. We contribute to public leadership and research. 10 percent of Stanford undergraduates go on to [graduate] research degrees. Most of the graduate students you see there are from far and away. Stanford students go on to law, medicine, and business. They're recruited to be leaders in those arenas. And they are too recruited to round the edges a little bit. So they are classy leaders, and that's not an unusual kind of thing, that's sort of an English public-school model. Anyway, wandering way far afield. Anyway, that's the answer to that question.

26-00:11:25

Wilmot:

I think one of the things you mentioned early on, actually several interviews ago, is that while you were serving as vice chancellor, the fraternities were a big issue, during the time that you were serving in that post, and I wanted to ask you a little bit more to expound upon that, if it's relevant.

26-00:11:52

Ellis:

Sure, sure. I was aware for various reasons that the fraternities felt discriminated against here, by Cal administration—always being picked on for their parties, or this, that, and the other. And funny things—not funny ha ha, but peculiar things, did happen. I remember at the end of a series of strange events that involved projectile vomiting, and accosting citizens outside the houses of some of the fraternities, just prank stuff, nothing vicious. There was a football game, Cal played UCLA down there. And one of the houses rented a van type vehicle and a bunch of guys went down in that, and it was full of beer, and fun, and so forth. But they had painted on the outside of it a naked woman with her head cut off. And I don't know what the symbolism was. It could have been Cal/UCLA symbolism, something like that. But they then had on the vehicle items that identified it as a Cal—a bunch of Cal rooters. And we had a lot of complaints here, people called in and said, “What's this, disgusting, outrageous,” and so forth. And at the game itself, there was a big

problem of drinking in the Cal section, and people got kicked out of the game proper, and the cops had to come into our fan section.

And Mike Heyman convened a meeting to deal with that, or to talk about that and put his fist down, again, you know. “We’re not having this.” I remember that among the things that happened, a couple of CEOs from the City [San Francisco] who were graduates, alumni of a couple of the houses, wrote in to complain about our bothering the houses, and told us to get off their backs, it was kids having fun, and so forth. Then I wound up in office, as vice chancellor, later, down the road. The whole campus is worried about the fraternities. We have a group that’s organized to look at the fraternities and some of this drinking behavior. And so then we have the fire, the fraternity fire. I forget the name of the house [Phi Kappa Sigma, Sept. 8, 1990], but three people died in that fire.

26-00:15:17

McGarrigle: Was it arson? Was that suggested to be arson?

26-00:15:120

Ellis: No, a cigarette and a couch.

26-00:15:24

McGarrigle: Five Cal students died?

26-00:15:27

Ellis: No, I forget how many Cal students, but they weren’t all Cal students. And then we had an episode where a co-ed fell off a balcony at a party. Everybody was drinking too much, and she fell and broke her back, and she was lying on the ground. This didn’t get out, but it kind of outraged a lot of us in administration. Guys on top of the balcony were peeing on her. It was just kind of like a big joke, but actually her back was broken. Then we had a case where a kid had gotten really drunk, had gone a drinking spree with his buddies and had gone to various clubs around—hadn’t been carded at any of these places—you know what that means? And then came back to the house, where they continued to drink, and I think they also smoked some grass, and this kid went on the roof, fell off, and died. I remember one of the most painful things ever was talking to his mother. She said, “I sent him there to get educated, now he’s *dead*.” You know, it’s like—anyway, there was just a series of events.

26-00:17:01

Wilmot: This is all while you were—?

26-00:17:09

Ellis: Yeah, and it was mainly on Tien’s watch, actually. Yeah, it was mainly Tien. Yeah, it looked like we were cursed there for a while. I think I’ve said this before, because in there was—was Tien on during the earthquake, or was that Heyman? That was ’89. I can’t remember, but anyway. We had the

earthquake, we had the fire, which had big effects on us—the fire, especially. A lot of students lost stuff, a lot of faculty lost houses and everything.

26-00:17:37

Wilmot:

This is the fire of the Oakland hills in 1991.

26-00:17:43

Ellis:

That was Tien's watch. Anyway, there were just a very large series of things, but this one big fire with the three deaths—the city of Berkeley—see the other tension is we don't actually—all we do is allow the fraternities and sororities to say they are UC Berkeley. Now that's significant, right? But we don't actually control them. But the city takes them as our responsibility, which is appropriate. I don't know what they do at Isla Vista, right? You know, Isla Vista, University of California at Santa Barbara, which is a big party place, and lots of dope and weirdness, and the Halloween parties where somebody's guaranteed to die every Halloween, you know down there, and so forth. And all of those are private residences. And the University has *had*—I know that vice chancellor—and he *had* to be aggressive. He actually had to involve the sheriff, who said, “Look, if you're caught here, never mind *habeas corpus*, we're going to get you and put you in jail and release you at our leisure.” I couldn't believe some of the stuff they had to do to intimidate some of these wild folks who drink so much and get so out of control at Halloween at Isla Vista. But anyway, the University's there, and that's why the fraternities are there, and it's perfectly reasonable for the town at some level to say, “Hey, that's your job.” And it is.

So, we got some cooperation from the city at some point on their sprinkling system and bringing their buildings up to code, which is costly. So we were monitoring that. I'm leaving a tremendous amount out. But a certain point at the crest of a lot of these problems, I worked with the faculty representative of the fraternities, and the presidents themselves of the houses, and sororities. I learned very quickly that the presidents of the fraternities and sororities aren't taken very seriously at the house. These are people who dress up and come to meetings and are going to be the leaders down the road, of something or other, but if they go back and say, “Look, we gotta drink less, we gotta do this, we're going to have to start wearing bracelets for those who are okay to drink and not give drinks to those who aren't,” because as my daughter said, they would love to let the high school girls in and get them drunk, you know. But they keep a lot of other people out. A lot of other people out. So, there was a point at which it was a crisis, and I was working with them and I realized that I had to do something radical, because it really was careening. They were drinking too much, and stuff was crazy. And we were getting a lot of criticism, deserved.

I convened them all in Zellerbach. Was it Zellerbach? Yeah, all the fraternities and sororities in Zellerbach. And I gave a speech, saying, “We've come to this crisis point. You're really going to have to do something here. And it's

important that we work with you.” While I’m doing this, there’s some airplanes floating, paper planes floating out of the balcony. At a meeting of [UC Student Affairs] vice chancellors, I described a moment where this dog wanders out of the audience and walks across the stage, and it was a black dog. And this guy, he was at UCLA, said, “Oh, another black dog.” Summarizing it correctly, it was an editorial comment. [laughing] This dog wandering across the platform. It may not have been on purpose, but there was a dog in the goddamn building, right? Anyway, I didn’t even take notice. But it did strike me, and I said, “Look, your shit is out of control.” Which of course was the headline in the Daily Cal the next day. [laughing] So I saw Tien on the elevator. I think we had moved to University Hall because California Hall was being retrofitted for earthquake purposes, and I said, “Look, I’m really sorry about that.” He said, “Hey, you had to tell them.”

So I felt quite supported in those efforts. And then we had a presentation in Faculty Glade. And I had dealt with the parents in large groups, really tearful, unhappy people. And then we had this memorial to the students [who died in the 1990 fraternity fire] in the Faculty Glade, and a lot of people showed up. We marched through, and announced each name, and people spoke on behalf, and one of the speakers, one of the fraternity speakers, talked about the guy who had died. And, this is not consequential, but it’s in my memory, and I don’t know what I’ve done with it. But he talked about what a good guy this was and how they had been standing at adjacent urinals and he had peed into his shoe and so forth. I was just thinking of how inappropriate and how far away from comprehending what the situation was that that comment was, and how much it summarized the trouble for me. Here are guys breaking the rules, here are advantaged guys doing what you do. It’s just time out, it’s role suspension, it’s responsibility suspension. It may be the only time in your life you get to go that far out without real consequences, where you’re kind of protected by the culture. And we just couldn’t live with that, you know we just couldn’t. And then the hostage-taking at Henry’s. Do you remember that?

26-00:24:41

Wilmot:

No.

26-00:24:43

Ellis:

Oh, yeah. Some guy, not a Cal student, walked in and took—and held everybody with a gun in Henry’s, which was a very popular fraternity/sorority hangout. How long did that last, Leah? That lasted almost two days.

26-00:25:05

McGarrigle:

You know, I don’t know that.

26-00:25:11

Ellis:

Oh, boy. That was a big, big event. That was on our watch as well. Tien and I. And he shot a couple of people.



26-00:25:21

McGarrigle: People died?

26-00:25:28

Ellis:

Did he kill anybody? I forget if he killed anyone, but he shot, I think, three people. It was just a nightmare period. And the fraternities were part of it. I think we did subdue them, and I think they got the message, because you don't want a lot of death and mayhem, and fires threatening everybody. And I actually was responsible. I gave speeches to them. I said, "Look, I think you're right about how you're viewed. And I confess I even see you that way some times. Here's what you should do: sponsor—have a side of what you do, sponsor scholarship or sponsor seminars that deal with important public issues, so that your fraternity name is associated with other things, you know, that are about what the campus is about, rather than about just drinking." But I know concretely that they had real problems, because there was a tradition there. It was supported by some of these old guys who would come over and be too loaded to go to the football game, or come over and hit on the co-eds, or come over and use the houses for assignation places. I mean, I know that to be true. So these guys are watching some of the older guys come back and do this stuff, and it's all a big "yuck yuck," but it rolls up into a ball that's not too cool for our setting, you know.

26-00:27:03

Wilmot:

It's so interesting though that the University really maintains kind of this connection and liability for this community?

26-00:27:07

Ellis:

We actually don't have much of a liability. I mean, it's a public liability, in the sense that people will hold us in low regard because our fraternities misbehave, but when fraternities get out of control, we can say "Aloha, we're not sponsoring you." And we do. We do, periodically. I think another thing that happened, is that following FSM, the whole issue of fraternities became uncool. So here are institutional settings, fraternities and sororities with very long traditions, with grandmothers and mothers and aunts and uncles who went there, and it doesn't make any sense not to be a Delta, you know, or Tri-Delt, or whatever. And then in the sixties and seventies, that was reduced. That was a declassé thing to do in terms of the political and intellectual commitments of the place. So I think what we were experiencing was kind of a resurgence of an older tradition.

But when I talked to some people who were kind of responsible in this area, we would have problems. For example, there would be parties. One house, up here near where—I was living up on Panoramic at the time—and I'd go by this house and it was a garbage pit. And residents started complaining about rats and things like that. And I talked to somebody who said, "You know, in the old days, it was the pledges who had to get out after every party and make the place spic and span." And that had broken down. See that old tradition, almost Navy, almost militaristic tradition, had broken down so they didn't

have any order. I mean, some of these places, as a mother said to me, “I went into my son’s fraternity and I saw rats the size of dogs.” And she wasn’t laughing. She was really—I’ll give you an example of something we did have control of, just very quickly so that you’ll understand that the university does take action after a while when it really does have exposure.

Barrington Hall, which had been kind of a hippie co-op for many years, counterculture, and became a drug scene. When we finally leaned on the landlord and so forth, and got that place closed, shut down, and so forth, Jane Moorman, the head of counseling here, said in a meeting, “There’s someone in Holland right now getting on a plane planning to get to Barrington Hall to score some heroin. We’re going to have to leave that place closed for three or four years, before we break that connection.” We did break that connection. It’s now a private residence, and has none of that tradition. But that’s a place where the University did simply finally have to lean on that situation and get it stopped so it wasn’t a co-op, and couldn’t be used in ways that it was habitually used. We don’t have authority over fraternities and sororities, all we can do is not recognize them.

26-00:30:39

Wilmot:

But generally the University does recognize them, and that’s the kind of liability that I’m amazed by, that the University would open itself up to that kind of liability. And also just given the kind of trajectories that we’ve talked about, the arcs that we’ve talked about, in terms of affirmative action, in terms of faculty members’ quietly wishing affirmative action away, and then there’s this other arc that actually kind of goes with it—

26-00:31:10

Ellis:

I have the perfect model for you to understand, and you have to almost be there in the job to understand it. I vote all the time in Berkeley for things, and then I wake up in the morning, and 70 percent of the state has voted a different direction, but absolutely everybody I know voted the way I did. This campus is very complex. It’s got 300,000 living alums. A lot of them care about this place tremendously. And a lot of them went through a Berkeley you didn’t go through. And support a side of the campus, like the fraternities and sororities, that you wouldn’t believe. It’s huge. When Mike Heyman was able to take on athletics and not give athletics everything it wanted in a particular circumstance, he was asked about that, and he said, “Look, a lot more alums care about our academic and research distinction than care about sports.”

26-00:32:20

Wilmot:

Which is something I think that’s actually really important for the purpose of this oral history series, the history of access and diversity. Because I think it would actually make a great idea to just have a series of oral histories devoted to the fraternities, because that’s when you could actually get at questions of access and diversity.

26-00:32:40

Ellis: Well, it's a class system, and we live in one. It's not as rigid as any European one, or any Asian one, as far as I can tell. I told you about the Taiwanese student I had, did I? It's a really great story.

26-00:33:04

McGarrigle: I don't think so.

26-00:33:05

Ellis: Okay, but I will. It's an American class system, and the rich and the powerful have more life chances than the poor and weak. We're no different than any other setting except that we modulate that stuff a bit more, and we make the process a bit more public, and we try publicly to make it the same way the courts do, not show the class bias in the process. But you would have to be an absolute fool to think that justice is equal. [laughs] Justice is *not* equal. But relatively speaking, here's what happens. If someone does a piece of work on access, the fraternities, sororities, and class background—and of course a lot of this work has already been done—IQ versus where you go to college, versus income versus where you go to college. You know, all that work's been done.

I think my pride, by the way—this is a very interesting place to be in our conversation—I think my pride about being part of a culture for a while, was that for a while what we were doing was legitimate, and we had in a way that was fair and not hostile to anybody, although some people felt they suffered. The five thousand straight-A students who didn't get in, and continue not to get in, would blame it on the five hundred black students who did, or however many there were at any one time. But I was just pleased that for a while this place ringingly had these wide arms and this big smile, you know. Wide arms and big smile. Without having to actively hate anybody and have an enemy. And working inside the constraints of the master plan at the time, too. That was the other thing that was good about it. I love—Clark Kerr, you mentioned—I just felt so great being part of that institution that he'd been part of, in terms of the master plan part of it and all.

But yes, it's not fair. It is radically unfair, and that's one of the things that keep you up nights, who is relatively less not fair.

26-00:35:42

McGarrigle: When you say that the University would lean on the fraternities or Barrington Hall, what did that translate into?

26-00:35:46

Ellis: Call attention to them. Meet with them. Tell their alumni representatives, "Hey, hey! Hey!! Hey!!! *Hey!!!!*" Constantly, that's not okay, that's absolutely not okay. Would you call? We need to meet. That has to stop, there will be consequences. Holding the consequences up, sometimes acting on them, being on probation, putting people on probation for a year.

26-00:36:07

McGarrigle: Academic probation.

26-00:36:12

Ellis: No, no, no. Putting the house on probation. No, no parties, no that. Until this is—now, there are a bunch of people who are rotating through all the time. They are part of what Rod Park calls the passing parade. We sit here, the students go through as part of a massive parade, the undergraduates. And we're still here. And the little subsets, the fraternities, sororities, the Cal Band, and now the incentive awards program, in a different way, where we have alumni that talk to the new recruits to come to Cal from Balboa or whatever, and they've got a little setting where they can go and learn the traditions of the place, and get it demystified for them. But there are these little clots in the parade who have special access and special knowledgeability, and simply have an easier path through the place for various reasons. That's it.

The only other thing I want to say—and this is for the record, it's very important—I was very proud of myself. At UCLA, I lived at the co-op for a while on Landfair in Westwood. And I used to despise the fraternity boys. I thought they were arrogant, and la-da-da-da-da. And I really monitored that side of myself very carefully. It's like any bias. I am as racist as anybody, or sexist as anybody. But the job with any of this stuff is, you've got to be working on it all the time, right? I mean, that's the problem, the people who stop working on it, and say, "Them Mexicans x," or "Them black people x" or "Them Jews" or whatever, those are the problems. The problem we all have is not coming to rest in any solid view of any category of people. Trying to stay fresh to every new encounter. And I really worked overtime with that relationship, because I did come loaded, from my experience as an undergraduate at UCLA. And there were people who felt that way about me, I was surprised to learn later on, because I was an arrogant jock. A lot of people later said, "Oh, man, I didn't have time for you, you walked around like you owned the place," which I did. But that was UCLA. They had a tradition of black athletes, I had a home and I felt like it was my home.

26-00:39:09

Wilmot: Russ, were you at one time—and I may not be remembering this correctly—but were you at one time a faculty advisor or peer counselor to the African American theme house?

26-00:39:15

Ellis: Yes. As a matter of fact, yeah, I was really very much involved in its coming into existence. Yeah.

26-00:39:25

Wilmot: And was that in some way a counterpoint to the fraternities—?

26-00:39:34

Ellis: No, just another support setting for African American students. Stanford had gone way ahead, you know typically—the privates do all these things. Even

when I was in Claremont we did things way further out than Berkeley did. No, it was just to find alternative settings and supportive settings for African American students to live that were pleasant and small and contained.

26-00:39:59

Wilmot:

Did you take that on, or were you approached to take that on?

26-00:40:07

Ellis:

I did. I've forgotten how, who did. I was like a monitor of it, I stayed close to that process. It didn't work out. Partly it was too vulnerable. It was just too vulnerable to intrusion. It's a very interesting thing. And I don't know—this is extremely interesting. If someone did a study of the parties that went wrong at Cal, and turned into melees, and window breakings, or fist fights, so forth, I doubt—I would wager that almost never was a fraternity party, or a predominantly white club's party on campus, disrupted by white kids who didn't belong. They just are separate streams. They're separate streams. Not true with Asians, Mexicanos, African Americans. The street is right there potentially at any time, and the mix is volatile. I remember we had the Wah Ching at a party here. It's a Chinese gang. Somebody got stuck, you know stabbed, and this, that and the other. But the kids [Cal students] would have trouble saying no to them. Now, which nappy-headed black Cal kid who thinks he's somebody is going to say at the door to a righteous brother, "No, you can't come in to this party." But that's a volatile mix. It's very interesting, because when you get this new social mixture, there are other issues there, like what constitutes discrimination and exclusion. It's about exclusiveness. A lot of it's about exclusiveness. I need to do more work on this, I haven't thought about it very carefully, that it's just coming up now. You always bring a lot more into the setting when the new people come.

Now on Subject A—I remember we were talking about the Subject A exam. Did you know—American History and Institutions exam. Subject A was "How's your English," and it was a test. Subject A English, which would get you up to speed. And if you didn't pass your Subject A exam when you applied for Berkeley, you had to take Subject A English, which would get you up to speed. Well, I remember an old professor here saying, "Ah, this isn't new." Because there was a lot of Latino and black students taking Subject A. And he said, "This isn't new. We dealt with this when we had this influx of Italian and German students, immigrants, and we went through this before, where we had to—as a matter of fact, I think this is where this rule came from." It was really kind of getting them up to speed for where they would be. Where in an earlier time, this was an induction space for the new migrant rather than the disadvantaged. That was a different setting, where you knew you were doing that, and the University was relatively new as well.

I talked about class here, and how much a class society America isn't in contrast to other places—and then I should stop with this stuff and go on to the final question. But I had a Taiwanese student in one of my classes in

architecture. And my class was one of the ones where you had to write. And architecture students, even at the undergraduate level, self select away from text and toward images. And this young lady was slightly older than most of the students, and had this sense of humor and was not shy, and would joke with me even in class, and I developed a real liking for her. And as a professor, you're often nervous about getting too close to students for all kinds of reasons, but certainly one of them is because you're in—there's a dependent relationship, and it's an evaluative relationship. At a certain point, you're going to say through your actions that this is very good and this is not very good, and that's very bad for friendships. It makes things hard to do. Anyway, I got her midterm back and it was just awful. Her English was terrible, it kind of more repeated what I said, and what the book said, than doing the inventive that we like to do, starting with compare and contrast. I went over to a colleague in Ethnic Studies and said, "I really like this student and I know she can do better than this. What if I were to do this in Mandarin?" And she said, "Oh, God, it's guaranteed she's even less literate in Mandarin than she is in English." Because she's Cantonese, and she wouldn't know that. That's stratification by language, not just region. And in terms of education, she would have to be sophisticated, she'd have to know Mandarin to be mobile in that setting, and she wouldn't be mobile. America is the great second chance, not only for Americans, but for much of the rest of the world. You can be mobile here. Arnold Schwarzenegger, as ridiculous as it seems, is truly the example. You can come over here and do all kinds of stuff. It's amazing. It's amazing.

26-00:47:16

McGarrigle:

Did you give her the test in Mandarin?

26-00:47:18

Ellis:

Nope. I talked to her about it, and she did better next time. It was very interesting, that stuck with me, what a shock that was. Because I could tell from the way she was, the ease of her, of her thinking, her talking and so forth, that she could do it. But she had locked into some kind of student role, or some kind of stratification thing, and just done a terrible job. Okay, I'm through, with that.

26-00:47:49

Wilmot:

I didn't ask you about something that I should have asked you about before, which was—and I'm not sure if it's important to get into—but there was a taskforce on black student eligibility. Are there stories associated with this that are important to tell?

26-00:48:05

Ellis:

I think Troy must have talked about that in his oral history. Duster. Because he chaired that committee. What was important about it—and I'm assuming that the listener, the reader, will find out what it was—but it was a group of African American faculty from the nine campuses, all of them, empaneled by David Gardner for three years to investigate a problem. There was a report

from California Post-Secondary Education Committee or somebody the year before this group was empaneled, that showed that of 22,000 new freshmen in the UC system, 834 of them were African American, which comes out to three point something or other percent. And it was a shocking figure. Shocked the legislature, everybody. What the hell's going on? The legislature at the time pointed at the University, "What kind of—what are you doing? Why aren't you doing more on outreach, and why is this like this?" And so this group was empaneled to look at what was happening there, and we worked for three years. I think we wrote a very good report. And then the office put into place for a period of time a unit that then looked at working with local churches and all kinds of stuff, to try to link the University to those places that did seem to be good at getting students to the attention of the University with some kind of community and family backing. It was called Community Outreach I think, and Professor Hardy Frye from Santa Cruz was brought up to chair that, partly because he had real good community skills. And I think it was the beginning of the University's interest in expanded outreach. I wouldn't say it's the seed that grew into that, because it was multiply originated, this whole outreach effort, but I think it was an important part of it. And we know concretely that David Gardner wasn't fond of affirmative action as a tool. But as someone characterized him as his characterizing himself, he was a realist and knew there had to be some way to hold this public institution accountable for its public role.

26-00:51:44

McGarrigle:

Would those outreach programs then have been parallel to the incentive awards program, or how would that have worked?

26-00:51:58

Ellis:

The incentive awards program, I've already told you how it came into existence.

26-00:51:59

McGarrigle:

Right. I was wondering how it co-existed with the other outreach programs.

26-00:52:04

Ellis:

It made sense because outreach had already become a major issue in the University. I'm the vice chancellor, and I'm part of the scene that's creating the scene, and so I allow this to happen. So it's part of what I'm doing and also part of what the institution is doing. It was simply one of the more florid and successful examples, early examples of outreach, and remains successful. But it's an example of a thousand flowers blooming, and this is a particularly rich bloom I think.

26-00:52:51

Wilmot:

Well, I have a question for you. I'm sorry to be moving around as much as we just did, but I wanted to ask you about the anti-apartheid movement here on campus. And I'm wondering if that is something that you were very involved with.

26-00:53:15

Ellis:

Well, once again here's Russ Ellis doing some bridging work. I was completely sympathetic to the anti-apartheid movement. And the idea of the boycott. Ken Simmons, black faculty member in architecture, predated me as a member of this academic community, I think he was the chair of the faculty anti-apartheid committee, and I certainly was in contact with him and other members, and the black faculty caucus that I talked about, that was so important was in the main supportive of—it was a caucus, so it didn't act as a caucus to sign petitions saying the black faculty caucus supports this, but its members in the main did support this, which meant that on the network of conversations and so forth, it was very clear what was happening there. And I wasn't an active organizer, but I'm pretty sure I signed petitions supportive of the boycott. And of course, my close buddy Troy Duster was right at the heart of an awful lot of this, and then the leader was his student, Pedro Noguera, was Troy's student in sociology, graduate student. And Troy was in some fundamental respects a very important adviser to Pedro in some things. It gathered as—hard to call this a movement, although it did sweep the country. At a certain level, this thing rippled right across the country. The final worked-out position of Mike Heyman's here on this campus became the position of the Regents. That is, they backed the boycott ultimately, following the language that we worked out here. But, other things happened too. Movements attracts all kinds of people. And it was during the [Stephen] Biko steps part, where students in order to push the issue, took over Sproul Hall steps and called them Biko steps. Then we got lots of funny stuff. It was all night, every night. Lots of trouble, lots of weirdness. And, in some of the demonstrations, provocateurs.

26-00:56:40

McGarrigle:

And the provocateurs were known to be provocateurs?

26-00:56:42

Ellis:

Well, it was very easy to see. They wore masks and threw concrete bricks at the cops.

26-00:56:50

McGarrigle:

Okay. Because there had been in the past allegations, for example during the Vietnam War protests, there were allegations—

26-00:56:58

Ellis:

—that they were FBI people or something like that—?

26-00:57:00

McGarrigle:

Or that they were communist provocateurs.

26-00:57:02

Ellis:

Oh, well, I believe all stories about provocateurs. I believe the FBI does it some times. Oh sure, I believe all the stories. I've been one. I've been in a demonstration in Southern California, wanting to try to incite the cops into action. I've also been on the receiving end of a situation, where I realized at



Century City, when President Johnson was there, that that's how—we had been set up. It was a very important point in my life, which I think I've talked about. I confronted this cop, and we wanted to fight. I don't know where I thought I was. But I have a little bit of a leadership tendency in these situations, and there were a lot of people behind me who would have moved. It had to do with a kid across the street who sat down in front of a police car, and we were all kind of surging in this crowd, and there was a thin line of cops with their nightsticks out, you know, holding this line. But we saw this kid get hit across the throat, he was about sixteen years old. And then his girlfriend went to try to help him, and they just treated her like cattle. That's what cops do when there are lots of people, you become cattle. And everybody wanted to go help that kid, and I was kind of the thinnest point of the crust. I was the place most likely to break. And Judith was with me, and she was pregnant with David. And I remember the moment, that there was a moment when I said, "No. I'm not going to break this crust and get us hit and all." You know there's the joke about what a socialist is. Have you heard it? It's a communist with a family. It's not doctrinal at all.

Anyway, provocateurs. Anyway, these were guys, exclusively guys, right in front here at one point. And I'm out there, and I'm a monitor at this point. I'm not even in the chancellor's office, but I'm a faculty assistant. And I am already involved in negotiation—I've gone over to the side of negotiating now to try to work out a solution. This is where Harry Kreisler's [Executive Director, Institute for International Studies] name is important. And Harry will remember this, because Harry and I were the ones doing the negotiating. And we'd go to Biko steps, and there would be a different group of people every night to negotiate with, which is kind of strange. But we actually did finally negotiate a meeting. This was in the second year. With the Regents right here in the Hearst Gym. It was a very interesting meeting, in which some resolutions got worked out, and Heyman took a position. It was actually quite positive. I'm very proud of that, because it took a lot of hard work, and it was a very strange thing to do.

26-01:00:33

McGarrigle:

The people who you are negotiating, the parties are the Regents, Heyman, as the administration, and what is the student?

26-01:00:42

Ellis:

A group of students, with rotating leadership.

26-01:00:48

McGarrigle:

And they are, they have a name or an alliance?

26-01:00:53

Ellis:

Oh, there were different groups. You know this guy Billy Nessen, he's in the news, a journalist who was just captured by some repressive regime, this American journalist. He was one of these guys here. I'll tell you where they can find them all. It's in the oral history that we had done here, which I'm

pleased with. Heyman provided the money so that we could interview all the administrative side on what was happening here. But there were a lot of different students, and they were really aggressive, and hard to deal with. Fortunately, I could call on faculty that were close to the student leadership. We could call on faculty that were close to the student leadership, to say, "This is real. Heyman's willing to go talk. The Regents will come to the campus and hear you," which was a big thing, right? That was big. And it's an honest encounter, and we'll talk about the issues and we'll come honestly to hear. It wasn't all the Regents, but it was a group of them. And it worked out. We worked out a resolution that ultimately resulted in the campus validating the boycott. And then the Regents following suit, shortly thereafter.

26-01:02:31

McGarrigle:

Was that a divisive issue on campus, Russ, in terms of faculty?

26-01:02:37

Ellis:

You know, I don't remember another faculty side. You always set up another faculty side when you have such concretely un-University type behavior. You know, window breaking and incivility. But I don't remember there being a pro-South-Africa side, or an anti-boycott side. I don't remember that being the case.

[begin audio file 27]

27-00:00:05

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you a question, and this is kind of based on this conversation we've just been having about how you're someone who's kind of been the person who was the authority monitoring the student protests as well as someone who was at one time in your life at the forefront of the student protesters as a protester yourself. It just kind of overall made me think about just major change and transformation in the times, and being witness to those times. And there was a quote from an unpublished book review. You had reviewed Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and you had said, "Cleaver is a remarkable man who dared to dive into his black rage and comes up with something infinitely and universally human." And I'm asking you to reach back and think about what his words meant to you when you were I guess around thirty. This is a 1968 review, so you were in your mid thirties, maybe. And reflect on how times change.

27-00:01:28

Ellis:

Denzel Washington directed this film, I just saw it, can't remember the name of it. It's the story of a young black man, who looks for his family.

27-00:01:43

Wilmot:

*Antwone Fisher*.

27-00:01:44

Ellis:

Yeah, *Antwone Fisher*. That didn't get very good reviews, but I was absolutely fascinated by it, because it deals with black anger. Here's a man,

and I certainly didn't know what to do with this, and probably was a bit of a sheep with the herd on not paying attention to this publicly, in this somewhat pretentious review of *Soul On Ice*, who chose his rape victims and stalked them and was generally a not nice human being who needed to be stopped and jailed for what he was doing to women, among other things. What was novel about Cleaver for me, was acknowledging his anger so starkly. It wasn't something you *did*. I don't know what I'm talking about when I say it like that, but—and it was so public. That was partly the times, too, everything was explosively public around those times. But then, what he chose to do with it, was to turn it to something larger, purposes of changing the larger social order. That's what got my attention. While the program of the Panthers was too far out for me, I mean I couldn't kill anybody; I couldn't carry a gun and shoot at anybody. I probably could defend my household, or if my world of people was under attack, I could probably shoot a gun and kill somebody. But it wouldn't be my first thought in life. But what I admired about him, for a while, was the fact that he was able to inspect himself in public, and talk about his processes, his encounters, his feelings, his thoughts, as a black man. And then turn that to the larger purposes of social change. That's a hard leap to make. And this *Antwone Fisher* movie is very interesting because it is about a very angry young black man who with his psychiatrist's help, Denzel Washington's help, actually gets in touch with his anger and does some good work with that.

But at the time, I was going through a lot, too. You couldn't help it. You were under a lot of pressure to choose up sides. Which side are you on? Just how black are you? Are you serious about change? Are you part of the problem or are you part of the solution? *You black!*? And I'd done my dissertation in a world, was doing it in a world, where the fulcrum of all of that was really clear. People, Ernie Smith of "ebonics fame," who brought ebonics to the schools. I'm the interlocutor with Maulana Ron Karenga. I told you that story. I'm in this shit, I'm in it. And what am I? I'm a liberal—colored guy. However—and I'm not putting myself down, there's an array of things. US, Karenga's group—it wasn't his group, originally. Don Warden, I think, started US. He was up here in Berkeley. He's changed his name and—Thelton would remember his name.

27-00:06:19

McGarrigle:

It's in his oral history.

27-00:06:21

Ellis:

Oh, is it? But that was United Slaves. I started on the UCLA campus the student chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. And our first act was to save Tom Bradley's council seat, as I mentioned earlier on. Which is a very liberal thing, and the most mainstream liberal of the civil rights organizations, CORE. That wasn't where you go if you're going to make revolution. So that's who I am. So for me, here's this guy [Cleaver] doing something public that I really valued, because I had, and still have, my own angers. A great

dream is just indelibly with me, and it's just the dream—at the time, I was writing my dreams down—I'm not big on dream interpretation, but this particular image is very strong. I'm on a bus. I see me on a bus. And I'm holding a chain, and attached to the chain and seated next to me is a gigantic wolf, with a lady's hat on its head. [laughs] I mean, talk about taming anger, trying to keep it under control. That's how I see it. That's with me, that image. And it's so easy, it was then, and for a lot of people still, a lot of people altogether, to be angry in the system. But at that time when the scab was being picked, a lot of us were exploding in all kinds of directions with whatever was burning inside of us.

Stokely Carmichael, his autobiographical writings have just been edited, and they're out. For him, I take black power to be an eruption that's very private on his part, accommodation or not accommodating the system and so forth. Major impacts on the direction of the movement. My comment about Cleaver at the time was a celebration of the fact that he could do this work, and stay sane, keep his head on his shoulders. Have the experience of prison and all that degradation, and keep something of his integrity as a person. Keep his boundaries together. This should make you crazy, you should be crazy. And a lot of people felt he was, and he eventually was cuckoo. I mean, I saw him around town, and he was cuckoo at the end. Anyway, that's what I was dealing with. That's very far away from movement stuff. It's kind of private, what I thought his contribution was there, was productive confessional.

27-00:09:41

Wilmot:

So that was 1968. 1970 you moved here to Berkeley. Were the Panthers around?

27-00:09:46

Ellis:

Hell yes.

27-00:09:49

Wilmot:

How did that bounce off of your consciousness? Your awareness? Your political and race awareness?

27-00:10:00

Ellis:

Let me pray that I can answer that decently. It's a really big question. I was aware of the Panthers very concretely. I was personally experiencing the tugs and twists of the various tendencies of the civil rights movement.

[interview interruption]

Well, my friend Troy was in conversation with the Panthers. He had maintained his relationship. Not very close. I think since his sponsorship of the Cleaver course, he had always been on the scene and on the list. Bobby Seale was aware of him, what's his name? Who got offed, finally, the chair?

27-00:11:47

McGarrigle:

Not Huey Newton?

27-00:11:49

Ellis:

Huey. Huey, right up to the end in his crazy drug phase in his penthouse. He had Troy up. I don't know if Troy talked about this in his oral history. But he was beckoned by Huey, he wanted to talk to Troy about—I think Huey might have been trying to get his PhD in something, at Santa Cruz or something.

27-00:12:08

McGarrigle:

History of Consciousness.

27-00:12:09

Ellis:

History of Consciousness. And he wanted to talk to Troy about something. And Troy went up to his penthouse with him raving around about this, that, and the other. It was impossible not to be in touch with an awful lot of these streams because students were under pressure to belong to things, and do things that you had to talk to students about. And there were student organizations that you dealt with.

But when I got here, what was overwhelming about what was going on here, in 1970, which is early, seemed to have a lot more to do with participation in general, and reconstitution of the University. Do you remember that? Do you know that language? There was a reconstitution thrust here, which was, sort of got going after the bombing of Cambodia, which was, “We’ve got to rethink this whole enterprise” and “Courses need to be in the community.” It was kind of a return almost to the Ethnic Studies sort of thing. It was very big. And in Wurster Hall for a while it was a huge problem, because, with a significant portion of sympathetic faculty, they gave away their keys to the students so they could come and go. “The place should be open.”

27-00:13:56

McGarrigle:

Open university.

27-00:13:57

Ellis:

Open university. It's funny. You ask the question and the only answer I can give you is, it never wasn't important. Race and movement issues, and going to meetings and dealing with these things, and deciding how much of you you're willing to commit to what. The world now for me is very strange, because I don't know where all the black people went. I mean, I've stayed and I go to a group now, I don't go to it much recently, but it's called the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, and there are a lot of them [clubs] around the United States organizing around Wellstone. At one point, there were probably like two hundred people at the meeting. Average age probably fifty four. I'm the only black person in the room. And everybody knows it. Now, that was true in 1958, but why would it be true now? It's really interesting to me. And I know where activity is taking place, but I feel some radical segregation, resegregation is going on right now. I don't know what's happening. And I'm also not the person who's going to be getting on a motorcycle and running around to all these things. I'm turning inward. You know, I have my friends. I want to be active and fight the fascism that I see

growing, but I do it in a way that a sixty-eight-year-old does, or my sixty-eight-year-old does, anyway.

But the answer to your question is, being black in that period and being active in any sort of way, was, you were always pressed up against all the issues if you were out there. And it was hard. It was hard. It was hard. And there's all these tests, the tests of walking your talk. There were people who would come in and take advantage of the whole, what I thought was this little channel of leadership that you could get if you go up and be angry and loud and black, and people'd get out of your way. D'Army Bailey, who came and was a member of our city council. A couple of brothers came into town and everybody got out of their way. They were just like hellions. I didn't respect them, because they were doing things on the side that wasn't about all this black ideology, that I knew about. Where they were spending their nights and all this kind of stuff. That was complicated, complicated unfolding. But I put Maudell Shirek's name into nomination for city council, Berkeley. Way the hell back. And I was a newcomer in town. That was 1974.

27-00:17:20

Wilmot:

One of the things that's interesting to me also from the way you situated yourself, and you self-consciously situated yourself as a "liberal colored guy." But it's also funny because then there's quote from your "One Ralph Turner Remembered." May I quote it?

27-00:17:40

Ellis:

Surprise me.

27-00:17:41

Wilmot:

Okay. And you say, "I harbored a secret ambition to become Max Weber's modern black equivalent."

27-00:17:52

Ellis:

Neil Smelser, not anybody's favorite on the left here, but he would always say that I was the black Max Weber. He was kidding, I never had that scope. But I finally woke up to the fact that I was trying to be German, a German sociologist. I really did have a love of that stuff. Anyway, I don't know if I answered your question, but it was a great question and I should have a better answer. I think the best answer is just the story of my engagements. You know, the Maulana Ron Karenga encounter, which I told you about, the Haynes Hall arguments, I told you about that.

27-00:18:43

Wilmot:

Yeah, you did.

27-00:18:44

Ellis:

That was a defining moment for me. Where I lost. And to my surprise, I lost in the eyes of my faculty, whom I admired. And then they were liking all this homily shit, you know, that Malcolm had just brought to the stage and you know. [laughing] Yeah. But that's the struggle of being a person. It's almost

the other side, let me see, what is it? You know, I talked about my racism. My various –isms. Well, I got something for everybody. You get me a somebody. I got some shit for them that I don't like. But I know me. I am not settled in my dislike of anybody, categorically. I know that's true. Because I know what I have to do is I got to walk out every day and be prepared to see somebody I adore, who's a member of a category that I might somehow in my head have affixed as being worthy of my hate. And that's no way to live. I wouldn't want it. I know that I don't want it to happen to me. And I don't wish it on anyone, so it means work, incessant work. No rest. No rest ever. You always have to say, "Don't you *dare* put that person in the category that you're trying to put them in." Mexicans? How long have you been living with people who are Mexican American or Mexican. Since you were conscious. Who was Fernando Ledesma? [middle distance runner who attended Compton High School with me and went on to run for the University of Southern California.] Who was—I've got a list of people—who was Olivia, my first love? [4<sup>th</sup> grade] right? So you are working all the time.

The other side of that, is where people are trying to get you to declare. My son said that he would have occasions in Berklee where some of his friends would say, "Hey, Dave. Come over and play with the brothers." Basketball. And that might be a little tension there, but in Berkeley, California you could wing it. When he went to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where life is cut by class for real, and by ethnicity for real, there was no confusion about where you were going to be and what you were going to do, if you considered yourself Italian, or black, or whatever. There weren't a lot of choices, in the larger realm. Not at Berklee College of Music, but in Boston. And we're not as rigid as that out here. As a matter of fact, I remember listening to a group of counselors in the creek at Cazadero Music Camp, the counseling staff, sitting out there—they weren't in the creek, the creek was dry, it was summer, but they had their encampment out there, and they were talking—and they were calling themselves Berkeley Cripples. Un-PC language, by which they meant that how they were raised in Berkeley was just not effective in the rest of the world. They were too loose, or too open to this, that, and the other—and it just didn't work in the rest of the world. You had to declare.

And so, either you make some very hard choices—and you don't have to just not deal with, for example, white people, you don't have to make that choice. You can make some decisions about who's important finally, and who you're going to spend your time with, and where the resources are going to go. Or you make intermediate decisions. I said, "I realized that I was vice chancellor for all the students, but one of the reasons that was important that I was there and black, is because I was black." And the people who were black would expect something from me. And I agreed with that. Yes! You have special access. Yes, do come to see me. Yes! It's a yes! It's a loud, affirming yes! Come over here. Yes. Don't ask me to hand you an extra \$50,000 in Sproul Plaza or anything, but if I can facilitate something that makes sense,

absolutely yes. That's what I'm here for. And I must do it in a way that doesn't deny or violate anybody else.

So, it's a constant negotiation, personhood and category membership. That's one of the things America does to you if you let it. America also lets you settle, if you want to. You can just be a racist or a sexist or something. If you hide it well, you can be mobile and not get in a lot of trouble. But there are problems for you in every sphere, private and public these days, if you—well, the Bush world is taking us to a whole new place, so I don't know what's happening now.

27-00:24:20

McGarrigle:

Well, let's reserve for next time. We've decided that we'd like to meet and talk about community involvement, and do that at your home and do that with some video.

**[end of session]**



Interview 14: January 13, 2004  
 [begin audio file 28]

28-00:00:10

Wilmot: Interview 14, Russell Ellis, Jr. Today's date is January 13, 2004.

28-00:00:20

Ellis: Happy New Year. The reason I was talking about Secretary Paul O'Neill's problem for the Bush administration is that they may well try to discount and discredit him, and reduce the impact of his whistle-blowing on the President, but what I learned some time ago is that when you take on big people who have friends, who have experience, who can afford lawyers and so forth, they fight back. It takes *your* money, it takes *your* time, and *your* people to conduct this battle, or whatever it is your dealing with. And it reminded me of a story that I don't think I had told you.

It was a very sad occasion for me, where I had to undertake the business of firing my registrar. He's a person whose company I had enjoyed a lot, he's a down-to-earth fellow, silly, good humored, political in my experience in a not outrageous way. We all are, you better be if you're going to be on campus administration. And then it turned out that, I'm not sure quite how it came to our attention, but he had been accused of using staff time, someone in his office, to type his book he was writing. And that led to questions about his income-earning relations with vendors whose equipment and products we were using. And then the story kept building, so that we folks had collected—I think that Stephanie Siri was our auditor [Director of Audit and Advisory Services on campus]—oh, I know she was—at the time, and she's the one that I think brought this case to me, when I was vice chancellor. Oh, I know what it was. The registrar had \$24,000 expenses in travel one year. That's a lot of travel. And he was a fairly high officer in the National Guard, and was away, I think, two weeks a year or so on duty. And on some of these [National Guard] trips, we had evidence that somebody else was with him, on the bill in the hotel room where he was staying.

Anyway, I remember that I had to—he had been accused by people in the Asian admissions controversy of doing yeoman's service for the University, in hiding information in how the University had discriminated against Asians in the admissions process. This was on Mac Laetsch's watch, and I was working in Mac's office at the time. So there was this thing lurking back there, people saying [the registrar's] the bagman, he's [allegedly] the man who's taking care of all the stuff and hiding the information on this kind of thing. That was neither confirmed or proved, but he was vulnerable, and so there was this sense in which somebody was out to get him. And that was on the other side of the very concrete information we had on what he was doing with money and vendors, and so forth. Anyway, I was in this terrible position where I had no choice but to take him on. And I remember meeting with the various highly placed people, to see if maybe, "Can we slip this one by offering him early

retirement?” Because that was the period during the early retirement packages, the VERIPS. I got the last one. And so people were looking for a way to do two things: to solve the problem without making it a big public story, which you always want to do; to do some kind of justice, to ease him out—not so much that he lands on his feet, but that you don’t necessarily damage him. Because he had done good work, he had been there for eighteen years.

Turns out the registrar is a member of the academic senate, and that’s been an effort just to keep that office close and under the supervision of the faculty. Anyway, that’s where I learned—going back to the O’Neill story—when you take on, as I did, people who are deeply rooted in the place, are big in their own right and so forth, that you have a different kind of fight than you do when you take on a little person. And Stephanie Siri said something to me in private after our big discussions with the administrators in the room. She said, “Russ, I have an \$800 case of theft that involves a janitor, and the sheriff or somebody’s coming today to deal with that. How are we going to let this one go?” And it just struck me. That’s exactly right. You just cannot let that happen. And there are other reasons you can’t.

The thing that people lose track of, high up, is that the floor is made of glass. You’re sitting behind your desk in your seat and you’re doing things with your feet and your knees and your hands and trading money under the table, and the people down below can see it. You know, they can see it. And they do a couple of things with it. They violate their own values by maybe being quiet. And that’s very destructive, to have people not say what they’re seeing when at least the ceremonial values and rules are “We shouldn’t be doing this.” And this is a place like the university, which is about truth and beauty. The other thing that happens is people say, “Wow! This is the deal, huh?” So shortly after we got into this case, we discovered other things going down below, like folks in the registrar’s office were—there was a whole deal that was worked out, where if you were sitting at a console entering the grade record of a student, and you went to the bathroom and left your computer on, there was a system of grade changing where someone would rush over to your computer, change the grade pre-ordered. In other words, the student would pay some money—it turns out this was in Oakland—would pay somebody a certain amount of money to change their grade on the official record. And then someone in the janitorial staff knew where the official paper was, that you put the record on. We had paper, just like currency, that the record goes on. It was so elaborate and the money flowed through some minister in Oakland. It was an elaborate scheme. And there were some other things that had to do with people looking up and saying, “Well, it looks like this is a place where you can make extra money.”

28-00:09:44

McGarrigle:

And Russ, out of what you’ve told us so far, what of that became public, in the Daily Cal or other papers?

28-00:09:51

Ellis: You mean, what year?

28-00:09:53

McGarrigle: No, what of that information became public?

28-00:09:57

Ellis: Not the stuff down below that I talked about, the grade changing. That never, I don't think that hit the press. It might have, but it wasn't as sensational. It was more sensational that [the registrar] was fired and then he had a good lawyer who was one of these thrashing lawyers, who really got to the press a lot and called us names, and said this was a vendetta and this, that, and the other. And the academic senate took the case, and that was very complicated, because the senate, when it looks at any of these kinds of issues, it will bail on them if there is a procedural violation. It doesn't matter whether or not you did anything. If you did or did not publish, or whatever the issue is, when they get it. When it comes to tight adjudication of the situation, they look for whether or not the process of review was tight and perfect. And it's not inappropriate, because when these things get out to the public and they go before juries, that's the first thing the jury looks at: did you guys obey your own rules? So it's not an inappropriate thing to do.

Anyway, this hit really big. It was in the local press. And I think it lasted about six to eight months as a public phenomenon. I don't remember if I was deposed, but I had to testify in several circumstances. And it was very painful, especially sitting in the room with [the registrar]. But it took a lot of energy. And there were colleagues of mine, fancily placed in the administration, who didn't want it to happen. Now at the time—see this was under Tien, which made it even more complicated, because Tien, as you know, had been the representative of the Asian side in raising questions about Asian admissions so, it was kind of dicey. But Tien, while I don't think he was a great administrator, he really never interfered with anything unfairly.

28-00:12:14

McGarrigle: It was dicey in what sense, Russ?

28-00:12:16

Ellis: Oh, just that people questioned the motivation for going after [the registrar].

28-00:12:20

Wilmot: What ethnicity is he?

28-00:12:22

Ellis: He's white. Oh, wait a minute. That's not the right answer to the question, what's his ethnicity. I think he's Baptist, from the Midwest.

28-00:12:39

McGarrigle: So was there an admission of guilt there? What was the conclusion?

28-00:12:48

Ellis:

No, he never admitted guilt. It's interesting. He left. He left. I think he had to pay, reimburse, restitution. And I got a call from someone, somebody I know. Tunney Lee, a colleague of mine at MIT who was in Hong Kong at the time, Chinese guy, super guy, asked me, "Hey, he has applied for a job here and he's used your name as a reference." That was such a weird thing to hear. He was invoking the old friendship and saying, "I know this kind of got funny, but would you vouch for me over here?" And I had to tell the story instead. It was sad.

Anyway, the lesson—it's odd that I tell this—I think this is a very important event in the history of the University. And it's a transitional moment in the whole admissions thing, and affirmative action, and everything. It's a very important story. Why I was motivated to tell it this morning, partly because of the O'Neill issue and how the [Bush] administration is now going to try to destroy him. We never did that, but the lawyer basically said that's what we were doing, that we were trying to destroy him because we had some questions about this, that, and the other.

28-00:14:18

Wilmot:

I have one last question about this, which is, just to get a sense of who all was involved, on the administrative side. I'm thinking of you, in the vice chancellor's office with Mac Laetsch.

28-00:14:32

Ellis:

Now Mac wasn't vice chancellor at the time, I was.

28-00:14:36

Wilmot:

And then I'm thinking of you've mentioned that the academic senate was involved. What did the trail look like in the institution of who was involved in disciplining and mobilizing against—?

28-00:15:01

Ellis:

Let me recast it. The people who were responsible for following these cases when they were brought up—I mentioned Stephanie Siri, she reported to Dan Boggan. She reported through that line, so that was a Boggan issue, the Vice Chancellor for Business and Administrative Services, so it involved his office. And so there was a span of control, and cognizance that that's something could explode in his bailiwick. Right? Either way. To pursue it or not pursue it, it's explosive, potentially. Why didn't you pursue it? And, potentially, why did you pursue it? That's why people like to have these things go away. Because they can explode for many different reasons, many of them unrelated to what you're thinking about. Like, Sally Jones was sleeping with [the registrar] and—you know, I'm making it up, but you never know what all this stuff comes to. So on my side, it of course necessarily involved my staff. Pat Hayashi was Associate Vice Chancellor for Admissions and Enrollment, and [the registrar] reported to him, to Hayashi. So that raises whole bunches of issues there, which are obvious if you know anything about the campus.

The chancellor had to be involved; he had to be kept aware of what was happening. [Michael] Smith, our campus legal counsel, had to be aware. Now I'm not very—the way the hierarchy works at that time when there were only four vice chancellors, probably I was third in line, of the four after the chancellor. It would have been John Heilbron, then Dan Boggan, and then me, at least on paper, something like that.

So, basically, as with the student union building and the murder of the student there, I had to say, "Look, *I'm* going to do this. I'm going to do something about this building. Eshleman Hall, this is out of control, and I don't care what they say about student control of the student union building, we [the administration has] got to do something, and *I'm* gonna do it." In this case, too, I said that, after talking to Stephanie. I was probably going to go after [the registrar] anyway, but after talking to her, I said, "Gee, you know, she's right. We can't do this, because all kinds of people are getting in big trouble at bottom of the stratification system for much less egregious things than this." But then I have to make everybody aware of the fact that I'm exposing the institution to trouble, that I'm going to make trouble. Then I have to convince them it's worth it. And most people want to go, "Well, gee, you know, we have a budget problem. Couldn't we focus on something else in the issue?" "No, we have to do this." So it involves everybody in a way. And Heilbron—I told you what John Heilbron's thing was, what he said about many of the faculty problems. Oh, we had a peeping tom faculty member, among other things. And John, I remember saying at one point, "You know, this institution simply is not constructed to deal with these kinds of problems." And that's true. The academic world, its whole setup, is not set up to deal with people who are crazy, or really criminal, or terribly devious—I mean outside their disciplines [laughs]. So, you have to make arguments for taking extraordinary action in a context like that. So, that's saying more than you asked.

28-00:19:57

McGarrigle: Was there a protocol set up, afterwards, in response to this, Russ?

28-00:20:02

Ellis: No, I think this was an ad hoc event.

28-00:20:04

McGarrigle: So there wasn't a system of checks and balances that was implemented afterward to make this more difficult?

28-00:20:10

Ellis: I think the system was tested and I think the system did what it was supposed to do. And basically, in hippie terms, he was *vibed* out. [laughs] That is to say, "Hey, buddy. Hey, buddy, you gotta go." And at a certain point, he said, "Alright, I gotta go." Right, you gotta go.

28-00:20:31

McGarrigle: Now the other story you told, about the grade changing, is a significant story, and that, you said, did not become public.

28-00:20:41

Ellis: I think it did a little bit. I have this memory that maybe it got into *The [Oakland] Tribune* or something. It was a most peculiar setup. It involved janitorial staff, maybe staff who were members of a congregation in Oakland. And there was actually, I think, a minister in one of the Oakland churches entangled in this, or aware of it. You put in orders—

28-00:21:12

Wilmot: I love the long arm of Oakland.

28-00:21:14

Ellis: Right. People tried to counterfeit Berkeley degrees all the time. Back then, we had three hundred a year of these phony, fake, Berkeley degrees. They're really primitive. They often don't know how to spell Berkeley and so forth. But people really try hard to have degrees or have grades, or have accomplishments. People mess with their resumes more than you would think. I'm surprised. Not so much in academia, but in the higher staff positions and administrative positions. Say they've done things, and had authoritative levels that they didn't really occupy.

28-00:22:04

McGarrigle: What were the repercussions and the follow-up to the grade-altering scam?

28-00:22:11

Ellis: We found the people and fired them. We took some precautions on leaving your computer on when you go to the bathroom. Some things we didn't know—well, I never knew—I was curious about it and I don't think I ever asked—were the people who left them on involved in the scam? But you know, you're busy. It's drinking from a fire hydrant in that job up there. And you can't stay aware of everything. I imagine somebody knows.

28-00:22:43

McGarrigle: Do you think that charges were pressed against—?

28-00:22:46

Ellis: Yes, yes.

28-00:22:50

McGarrigle: —the minister in Oakland as well?

28-00:22:51

Ellis: I don't know. I just didn't follow it out that far. Well, I don't know. I can't say probably or not.

28-00:22:58

McGarrigle: Well, thinking about what you just said, which is so true about the institution not being constructed to handle this type of crisis, there was another event

which we talked about off tape, which was the rape of this young woman who was a student. She ultimately left school afterward, and my understanding is that the district attorney, I think ultimately did not press charges against the young man who was accused of raping her. But it was around that time that a committee also was formed to put in place policy that would at least address the issue of sexual harassment, not the rape itself, but issues involving women on campus, faculty/student relationships, and that kind of thing.

28-00:23:58

Ellis:

What's your question to me?

28-00:24:04

McGarrigle:

You were on campus at that time, witnessing these things, and what your perspective would be on them? And also, this committee that was formed was an attempt to deal with the reality on campus, the difficult and unpleasant reality that the campus wasn't set up to deal with. But it was also speaking to the times, which was that there were individuals on campus, including women faculty members, who were no longer willing to sit back and watch things happen without a very public implementation of protections and so on.

28-00:24:43

Ellis:

Well, let me tell you. My first reaction to this is, this stuff happens in time, over a span of time. It never doesn't happen. These aggressive men and their sexual longings, and so forth. And I want to begin with an extremely interesting story, because the case, and I'm almost certain it's the case at the student dormitories at Dwight Derby Center. And I read every word of the very long investigation of that case [because I wanted to understand how such events developed]. But to introduce this issue, because I think it's extremely important, when Joe Kapp was the coach of the Cal football team, and I was faculty assistant in Mac Laetsch's office, one of my enjoyments was helping recruit football players, partly because I have an arrogance about my ability to do that. Because I never tell lies. Some recruit says, "Hey! I'm looking for x, y, z," I say, "This is not the place to come." Which is not what most coaches and most programs want. They want you to not lie, but they also don't want you to tell the kid "You want to go to Stanford, because they have that there." But I enjoyed working with young people and I have my own history of involvement with athletics, and I know something about the trajectory of going from a rough-hewn jock type person to someone that looks around and says, "My God, there are all these other things that go on here."

Anyway, so this one kid came from outside the state, and his mother was here, she came with him, and she liked us. She said, to me, "You look out for my boy." And I said, "Yeah, I'll look out for him." I ordinarily wouldn't say that, I have many other things to do than, you know. Anyway, he came, God-fearing, lovely kid, and one of the first things that happened to him is that he witnessed stuff happening in the locker rooms and the dorms that he could not believe. He simply was dumbstruck at what women would do, to put it simply. Totally unsophisticated guy, however. In my community in the old days, they

had an expression, “He ain’t had it since it had him.” He was so unsophisticated. One of the first things that happened to him, he was a handsome guy, someone liked him a lot, and he pushed it too far. He did. There was no question about it. This young lady had an uncle [on the police force] in L.A.—

28-00:28:13

McGarrigle: Now just to bring it back to—

28-00:28:14

Ellis: No, I’ll get back. I’m going to move really fast. And she thought about it and she said, “That wasn’t okay.” And it *wasn’t* okay. Anyway, he wound up in prison later, complicated story. And when he got out—and I visited him in prison, I did the whole thing [as I had promised his mother]—when he got out, he was looking for a job, and I acted as a referee and I wrote letters and made phone calls. And I got a call from a guy my age who had gone to USC, and he didn’t know this guy had been in prison. And I said to him, “By the way, he’s been in prison.” And he said, “Really, what for?” And I told him. And he said to me, “How old are you?!” And I told him my age. He said, “Where you from?” And I told him. He said, “You know, you remember the times when you and me would have been put in prison for something like that, if the laws were like that?” I said, “Yes.” This is about time.

28-00:29:11

McGarrigle: Just to be more clear for the record, is it statutory rape? Is that what you’re talking about?

28-00:29:22

Ellis: What was the legal—actually, I’m trying to think what the law was. It was a date rape case. I don’t know what category that falls under. And this guy said to me, after figuring out we were the same age and so forth, said, “You and I would have been in prison if this had been the law back then.” And I agreed with him. Okay, so that’s kind of setting a baseline. The law has changed so much, okay. These cases come up fairly often throughout the United States, and surprisingly often, and not particularly visible, here at the University. I’ll go to that case. Just like the dean of the law school. Now, *that* was not necessarily strange behavior. This is an unsophisticated man. What was his name? [John Dwyer]

28-00:30:33

McGarrigle: Don’t test me today. [laughs]

28-00:30:34

Ellis: Anyway, here at Boalt Law School. Faculty involvement with students is not so unusual. But the tolerance and the public scrutiny of all this stuff has changed a tremendous amount.

But this case was volatile in a major way.



28-00:30:56

Wilmot: The one you're referring to?

28-00:30:57

Ellis: Yeah, the one at Dwight Derby. And I won't go into the details, but there were strange things about it. The young lady was sleeping with a football player. And in the ethos of the contemporary world—the roommates are there [in the next room], they're not even invited to go away. Oh god, it's so hard to talk about. There's this dumb thing that some young men believe that in the dark they can trade places and the woman won't know? You think this is unusual? It's ridic—it's so *stupid*. But there's this notion out there. Well, let me see if I can condense it. She was not shy.

28-00:31:56

McGarrigle: I don't think we need to go into the details of the case.

28-00:31:57

Ellis: No, no. But—this is an issue, because it's a clash of a sort that's heavy duty. And so, there was a non-student guy in the room who was coming at her once the thing broke open, and you know, she was upset and so forth, and all of the sudden there are several guys in the room. And she has to retreat into the bathroom to get safe from this young [nonstudent] thug guy, who she calls short and ugly.

28-00:32:30

McGarrigle: Well, now I think we are into the details of the case, which I don't want to go into today.

28-00:32:36

Ellis: Leah, I promise you I will stop, but I want to make a point. What I think has happened, is we're getting to an intersection we never got to before. Lots of different kinds of folks are doing lots of different kinds of things. Diversity brings with it *lots* of different things. Attitudes, confidences, willingness to do things. And the system I think is responding to the management of its diversity. I couldn't make up a story like some of these cases I've seen. I couldn't make it up because I can't envision the people. I don't know life that way that I could make up the students motives and behavior. So I think what's happened now, is in general the world has said "Enough already." This guy, on one of his cases—and the guy I was looking after did it again [pushed intercourse with another woman he was dating], by the way—got *seventeen years*. And we had to double back and get some lawyers, and we did get it cut in half, and he wound up spending half of that time. [eight plus years in prison]

28-00:33:51

McGarrigle: When you say we, you mean the general counsel?

28-00:33:57

Ellis: [No]. His mother, the lawyer we got. *Seventeen years*, this was a lawyer in San Francisco, of course the student had to leave here and he got in trouble

again at San Francisco State, seventeen years. But the lawyer was not having it—I mean the judge was not having it, he just threw the book at him. And that was [this] new context, right? In San Francisco, which has much more experience, and was much harder on him.

28-00:34:24

Wilmot: For looking at rape.

28-00:34:29

Ellis: You see this is the trap. Yes, we're talking about no tolerance, aren't we? And in this new context, where the [sexual] fireworks are going off—"Hey, everybody, *no!* Especially guys, *no!* We don't care what the set up is, you don't get to do that."

I want to make it volatile in the telling, because I think that's what I experienced. And I experienced really extraordinary behavior, all over the place. Now, the faculty/student stuff doesn't come up as much, because generally there's more discreteness, and faculty and staff is not as much a problem as when you're in a dependent relationship, that's a whole new—when there's romantic involvement and there are power issues, then there's a different kind of thing going on.

28-00:35:31

McGarrigle: Well, the committee was when, I think—

28-00:35:35

Ellis: A Senate Committee On Women and Ethnic Minorities [S.W.E.M.].

28-00:35:36

McGarrigle: Now, that's the committee that—

28-00:35:41

Ellis: Was Jewelle chair of that at that time?

28-00:35:45

McGarrigle: Yes, that was charged with putting protocol into place.

28-00:35:46

Ellis: I was on that committee for a while, with Tien, actually. Tien was very aggressive on that committee. And that's good, and appropriate, and fine. I agreed with everything they did, and *you* know the law. The law is one part rules and consequences, and another part warnings, right? The law is a set of warnings that presumably replaced what the word god used to do, or hell, or other consequences, you'll go not to hell but to jail. [laughs] But I think that's appropriate.

Anyway, boy, there are—if someone does the history of these cases, it's going to be very interesting. And by the way, in another case, when I mentioned joining the Berkeley Breakfast Club, we had another case, and someone from the district attorney's office, who's also a member, came to me, sat next to me

at breakfast and said, "What are you guys going to do?" I said, "We'll take care of it." He said, "Yeah?" I said, "Yeah, we'll take care of it." So they butted out. There was an informal back channel as they say, that allowed us to take action, on the student athlete, rather than the kid having to get a lawyer.

28-00:37:21

McGarrigle: The Alameda County district attorney?

28-00:37:22

Ellis: Yeah.

28-00:37:25

McGarrigle: So what is the Berkeley Breakfast Club?

28-00:37:26

Ellis: It's a ninety-five year old institution of firemen and businessmen and so forth who have breakfast, let's see, I don't know if they go to Spenger's any more, but that's where it was. Seven in the morning at Spenger's.

28-00:37:50

McGarrigle: And is it all male?

28-00:37:51

Ellis: No, no. It was once, but it's not anymore.

28-00:37:52

Wilmot: What would you say the percentage is?

28-00:37:55

Ellis: Of men to women? I left, after I left my office. I'd say 85/15.

28-00:38:04

Wilmot: 85 percent men. Is there anything still called The Bohemian Club?

28-00:38:10

Ellis: Yes, there is. And you don't even need me to say anything about it because it's so written about. [laughs]

28-00:38:20

Wilmot: Okay, thank you.

28-00:38:25

Ellis: And it's a relevant question, although this is peanuts, compared to the Bohemian Club.

[pause in conversation and recording]

28-00:38:43

Wilmot: How did you come to join the Berkeley Breakfast Club? How did that occur? Were you nominated?

28-00:39:02

Ellis:

I think this happens in Rotary, and other kinds of volunteer associations. You are asked to come to their event three times, which is the signal that the one who invites you is interested, that's a signal to the larger group. And I guess then they gossip about you [laughs], you know. And then later your name's put in nomination and then a vote is taken. You know, I don't really remember. But I had lots of—there was almost the relevance of my office. Because, that's a place where work gets done also. It's an informal setting, which can overcome the cumbersomeness of regulations, and rules, and memos, and letters, and so forth. So I don't know if I said this on tape, but someone did say to me about one of the sex cases on campus, [someone] from the DA's office, wanted to know what the campus was going to be doing. And I vouched for the fact that the campus would be doing something. Well, that was very helpful for them, because it was a marginal case and the issue for them was, "Is this our thing or are they going to take care of this?"

Anyway, but I had many friends from the campus who were members, and I think probably that helped the gossip process a little bit. As I've said of myself, it *was* relevant that I was vice chancellor. I know how things work and I had the interests of the place in mind. I really do. And for those who say that I'm bought—by having that office, is an indication that I'm part of the system—are right. There's no question about it. [laughs] So, I think probably I had already demonstrated my relevance to some decent taste in all of this. But I had to leave it [the club], because I was getting too involved, and I didn't want to do that. So after I left office, I resigned from it.

It's a very interesting place, and people like [the poet] Bob Haas, who I got to go talk to them, the poet laureate, loves that kind of audience. He *wowed* them. He knocked them *out*. He was perfect, he was so good. And they loved the poetry, and he didn't dumb it down, or make it iambic pentameter. He just did it, and it was just wonderful.

28-00:42:10

McGarrigle:

Now when you ate at Spenger's for breakfast, did people have brandy Alexanders? That's one of the drinks that Spenger's is known for, or was that Irish coffee—?

28-00:42:23

Ellis:

There is a very discreet bar, and some people at seven in the morning did have alcohol in their orange juice, or their tomato juice, or their coffee. I never paid attention. It seemed inappropriate.

28-00:42:43

Wilmot:

To notice people having alcohol or to notice where the bar is?

28-00:42:44

Ellis:

Well, I kind of didn't want—the bar is obvious, you know, the bar is where the bar is. That's a great question. It may reveal my age a little bit. Well, it's a

little strange to me, drinking at seven in the morning. The Swiss do it, brandy in their coffee. Lots of people do it around the world, the Italians do it, all kinds of people, it's a perfectly legit thing to do. But I disattended it, I think. It's the way I do with dope now. If I'm around people—like I had friends in Santa Cruz, my age, still just *stoners*. Go to their house. And here in Berkeley, not just talking about Santa Cruz, we know some judges who got in trouble—not Thelton—almost judges, who didn't get to be judges because of the dope, right? But I disattend. I'm not going to judge it, but I'm not going to engage it. I don't really care.

28-00:44:06

McGarrigle:

I was thinking as a way to talk about your involvement and perspectives on Berkeley politics, to ask you if you can think back to what your first involvement was in Berkeley politics.

28-00:44:16

Ellis:

My very, very, very first involvement, well, it wasn't so much political, but Franklin Parent Nursery School, being the parent that went to a parent nursery school and had joint responsibility with the teacher for all of the students who were there, for a period of time. That was really interesting. That was very interesting.

28-00:44:48

Wilmot:

That was for Zoë?

28-00:44:49

Ellis:

Zoë, I think.

28-00:44:55

McGarrigle:

So it was a parent cooperative?

28-00:44:56

Ellis:

Yeah, but it was part of the school system in those days. Yeah, it was wonderful.

28-00:45:02

McGarrigle:

Funded by the public schools, for nursery school?

28-00:45:05

Ellis:

That's right, it was wonderful. And God, I just adored those kids. Because there you are, you're a giant. You're a giant and you need not to be in their way. But you also don't want them to hurt themselves, or each other. And then they're making this world, and I just love that.

And I've always been interested in the schools. Although the only truly political involvement in schools, had to do with this organization, this evaluation organization, DEEPS, the acronym I'll leave to you, I think I have some documentation of reports and things. [Documentation and Evaluation of Experimental Projects in the Schools] That was Len Duhl and a very famous man, Jack Seeley, they were co-directors of this project. Dick Foster was

superintendent of schools back then, it was the Nixon era. And Nixon had some amazingly liberal things he did. This institute on experimental education, which had a lot of money available nationwide for alternative and experimental education endeavors, at a time, of course, when there was a big push on all of this. And so this was one of those situations where a formal organization was set up to evaluate the outcome of the money that came. So this was what was called a second level evaluation team that I was part of. Wes Churchman was in it from Business. Was Wes Business or Philosophy?

Oh, all kinds of interesting people were involved in that. It was political in a way because the alternative people, I think appropriately, were really irritated that there was all this money going into evaluation, that could have been going into programs. It's a constant problem, forever. You make a formal program, the money comes out of governmental institutions, and you get in the War on Poverty days, what we called poverticians. There's always a group of people who are going to get themselves in the path of the money and manage it. Manage the program and pay some rent, pay some mortgages and buy some dinner with that stuff. So my involvement in the schools wound up political.

Herb Kohl, was the founder of probably the most famous alternative school in Berkeley, called Other Ways. As a matter fact, his colleague, Arnold Perkins, who's now the director of—is it Public Health in Alameda County? We were close, Miles Perkins, his son, was the bass player in the Berkeley High Jazz Band with my son David. But it was a dicey relationship because Herb was pissed off at me, for good and bad reasons. That was one of the more complex times that I had in this town in the seventies working on that.

Later, I worked on the Waterfront Advisory Board. I think it was later. And that, in two stints, lasted eight years. That was very heavily political. And it was kind of a defining situation for me. Sue Hone was a council member, Berkeley Democratic Club, and she asked me to serve on this commission. Now I had not publicly sort of made my stance known, I don't think, about my politics. And I was comfortable with her appointment of me, and I don't think anybody was surprised or bothered on the left about that, because I hadn't taken up any kind of particular stance, I don't think. I wasn't known anyways, surviving on the campus is what I was doing. Anyway, it was about the environment and stuff, and I was interested in it and I didn't—oh no, it wasn't the Waterfront Advisory Board. It was the Housing Advisory and Appeals Board. Do you have the picture of me being arrested? Okay. That's what this was. See, memory, age. That's what Sue Hone appointed me to. And I got on there and Ying Kelly was on, Pat Devaney, very famous name—I was kind of friendly with Pat for a while—and a bunch of other people. Warren Widener was mayor. The political context was about community-based organizations with federal funding, and neighborhood groups voting on the disposition of their neighborhoods. They were advisory votes—I'll let you do the research on the bureaucratic technology of all that—but it was a time.

And we went down to look at some houses that were scheduled for demolition. And the issue was, did they merit demolition? And some of them were boarded up, and we took the boards off and walked through, found a dead dog in one of them. The houses were fine, and the Ocean View was a historic place. One of the buildings there still is the original city hall, it's almost Berkeley City Hall, although [it was] a separate town. So we came back and we identified most of the buildings as easily rehabilitatable. And the board—it has a new name now, I think it's commission—but has some judicial power, so presumably our word was supposed to be it. And I'm not going to characterize Widener's motivation, because I never heard anything close to coming from his mouth. I had no beef with Warren Widener. As a black mayor, I liked the man; he seemed effective. But there was contention here. There was the Ocean View Committee, which is a bunch of radical folks down there wanting to maintain housing and this industrial base, and do some kind of urban village thing; there's a whole bunch of motivations down there. And so, it was interesting. And it's town making, and how do we do this together. And then it got more and more contentious. And then one day I get a phone call, "Russ, the bulldozers are headed towards the buildings." And so I went with other people and we lay down in front of the bulldozers, and we went to jail. Ten of us.

28-00:53:14

Wilmot:

Who were they?

28-00:53:18

Ellis:

Who are these people? One of them was a freshman with me at UCLA, in the co-op dorms, Stan Fukson, the husband of Veronika Fukson, who was a council member, I think at the time. I think. I think Veronika was on the council.

28-00:53:44

McGarrigle:

What was the explanation for the fact that you had been on this committee and you had made a recommendation and supposedly—?

28-00:53:57

Ellis:

Presumably our recommendation was solid. And it hadn't gone through an appeals process and some other decision made at another level. It was a ham-handed decision to go knock them down.

28-00:54:13

McGarrigle:

And that was made by a specific person?

28-00:54:15

Ellis:

The mayor. Warren Widener.

28-00:54:16

McGarrigle:

In the face of this report that you had prepared. Without any warning.

28-00:54:24

Ellis: Right, exactly. So that was a big turning point for me. It got me in some trouble at the University.

28-00:54:31

Wilmot: Could you slow down a little and tell me a little bit about that?

28-00:54:34

Ellis: Oh, it was just a senior faculty member quoted the provost at the time, on the professional school side, as saying, "Okay, if Ellis wants to spend his time like that, let's let him just do that." In other words, if he's going to be doing that kind of stuff, we're not going to worry about his mobility in the University as much as we might. And that was a way in which I did embarrass the University. It's not embarrassment, I didn't regard it as embarrassment. But that's not how the University likes to see itself in the newspapers. [laughs] One of its members arrested for doing battle in the city.

28-00:55:19

McGarrigle: So you were arrested and booked?

28-00:55:21

Ellis: Booked. Went to jail.

28-00:55:26

McGarrigle: For how long?

28-00:55:27

Ellis: Oh, just overnight. But the trial lasted quite a while. Dick Duane was our final lawyer. He's an interesting man in town.

28-00:55:41

McGarrigle: So the city pressed charges against all of you?

28-00:55:45

Ellis: Mmm-hmm. We got off, because they [the Berkeley police] pushed the truth a little bit on how things had happened. And we had photographic evidence. As a matter of fact, if you look at the caption of the piece I gave you, it identifies the photo as demonstrating what the police contended could not have happened. But that was a big event, and—I forget the year. But that pushed me more in the direction of the other side of Berkeley politics. And then I got very active in a lot of things, the Waterfront Advisory Board, where we were having—that was a really, big, big battle time. But that was over slip rates for people who didn't live in Berkeley. Because Berkeley had these low, low rates. Then there was a whole houseboat issue and so forth. That was one of the most interesting things. Fighting the race track because they had built up the land too high so motorists couldn't see [the Bay], and we had rules about that. That the land could not interfere with the drivers' or the pedestrian view of the scene, and Golden Gate had kind of agreed to reduce some mounding it did there.



It tied me very closely to my work in the department. I had some of the most enjoyable times planning for the dump. You weren't here then, but the dump was where Cesar Chavez Park is right now. That's where we used to dump our stuff, so it's landfill. Peter Bosselman worked in landscape architecture and planning. Oh God, all kinds of people in the building [Wurster Hall] were interested in this, and I had this very concrete connection. So we would do models of how the park might look. Got in major public fights with, God, I forget the guy, the environmental writer in the *Chronicle* at the time, who [Harold Gilliam] accused us of wanting to turn it into Disneyland, and having all these people with candy wrappers on it and so forth. All we were doing was having a community process, what would people like to see. And indeed, some people said, "We would like Disneyland." What are people going to say? We want a place to go to have fun. I fell out of love with the Sierra Club a little bit during that time. I found them to be almost Stalinist in their willingness to tweak the truth. Neither they nor the Audubon Society seemed to be very interested in people; they're interested in migratory birds, which I like too. But they didn't want what's there now. They wanted a lake with some brambles around it, so that the birds would have a place to settle at the top, a plastic lined kind of lake up there, at the top of the park, Cesar Chavez.

28-00:59:12

Wilmot:

There is a little inlet next to it, close to the pedestrian bridge.

28-00:59:23

Ellis:

But that's the water of the bay. They wanted a lake. They wanted to keep out feral cats. I can understand that. But the pathways for pedestrians, and access—they won on buildings. Because we wanted to build a building on the west side, that would be protective for seniors and other vulnerable populations, and we never did that. You know, it's politics and you struggle with that. Every time I go down there, I regard that as one of my contributions, being part of that, and students got a chance to think about it and play with it, do videotapes, and make models. That was fun.

28-01:00:06

McGarrigle:

Well, there's some innovation, isn't there, in the, maybe the chemistry of turning garbage into a safe environment, that happened there?

28-01:00:17

Ellis:

I think the preservation, the whole idea of preserving what you have for some grander purpose, I'm sure Berkeley's not the first place in the world to turn garbage into delight. I don't know what they did with Treasure Island. I think that was all fill. I don't know if they used garbage at all to put that military base out there. But I think it continued a trend that had developed early on. God, I don't want to take any credit at all for the instincts in this town. I mean, this town has been so full of people who are concerned about the environment. You know about the whole issue of fighting the tower that was going to go up in the middle of the bay. The Save The Bay tradition and so forth. So a lot of it is view from the hills by people who care about about this stuff, and don't

want hotels and Ferris wheels, some of it's that. But what I like about Cesar Chavez park is, we know where it came from and why. We know it's going to take a while for the methane to burn off so that you can get other kinds of foliage on it. Interesting, looking at all those ground squirrels out there, what's going to be the future of that and all? I think it was one of the accomplishments of the city that then goes along with the current mayor, Tom Bates' interest in the East [Bay] Shoreline park, which is not an endeavor to gouge and build and mound up, but to preserve for use, evolving use, what the citizens want. And to protect it, to make a gentle imprint on the landscape that's useful and delightful. And the birds find it delightful. They sit right next to the cars and hunt the gophers and this, that, and the other. So yes, there's an involvement there that's not just political, but also involvement in the cultural evolution of the town.

[begin audio file 29]

29-00:00:36

McGarrigle: Tom Bates, as you know, has been interviewed by the office [ROHO], and his interview will be public any day now. So it's interesting, because I was the interviewer, in that context, to talk about—

29-00:00:53

Ellis: No, I didn't know that.

29-00:00:54

McGarrigle: Did you know that?

29-00:00:55

Ellis: No. Maybe I knew it and forgot it.

29-00:00:57

McGarrigle: So the next time you see him.

29-00:01:03

Ellis: I saw him this morning at 7:30.

29-00:01:02

McGarrigle: Okay, at a breakfast meeting?

29-00:01:08

Ellis: Yeah, at the Jazz School restaurant. His chief of staff called me and said, "Would you mind moderating this conversation?" They invite civic leaders to come and meet the mayor. And the first one, Tom was supposed to talk for ten minutes and entertain questions. And Tom talked for, you know, half an hour. [laughs] And so, I was there to pull his coat and keep him under control, and talking in a finite time, and then call on people with questions. It's been the first time I've been out in a while in any kind of political activity, or even public activity. I've been mainly around the house.

29-00:01:51  
McGarrigle: And so you have that also in common. And his interview is similar in length to yours.

29-00:01:55  
Ellis: Uh-huh. And that's intermediate? That's long? What is that?

29-00:02:05  
Wilmot: The longest, I think, Germaine [Laberge] recently interviewed [Karl] Pister in 24 interviews.

29-00:02:09  
Ellis: Oh, wow.

29-00:02:13  
Wilmot: This is actually long.

29-00:02:17  
McGarrigle: I consider it long.

29-00:02:18  
Wilmot: It's just that Karl Pister takes the cake.

29-00:02:19  
McGarrigle: Tom Bates came here, as you know, as a student.

29-00:02:20  
Ellis: Student athlete.

29-00:02:22  
McGarrigle: Student athlete, on the football team, and I wonder if you can recall when you first met?

29-00:02:29  
Ellis: Whoa! It wasn't back then, I wasn't here.

29-00:02:41  
McGarrigle: Realizing it wasn't back then, but if it was early in his political career? And he's also somewhat of a neighbor of yours.

29-00:02:50  
Ellis: He lives, now, not that far away. When he hooked up with Loni, he was in town and around a lot more. That's basically—

29-00:03:05  
McGarrigle: So he was in the legislature at that point?

29-00:03:06  
Ellis: Yeah, and I was a supporter of his, and so forth. I didn't do anything big, big time public with him when he was in the legislature. He was a high quality guy with standards, and I was an admirer, and saw him at political events. But

I really didn't get to know him really well until after he was with Loni, actually.

29-00:03:41

McGarrigle: When you were on the Berkeley Waterfront Advisory Commission—I might not have all that—

29-00:03:49

Ellis: Waterfront Advisory Board it was called then

29-00:03:52

McGarrigle: Okay, nomenclature correct. Did the board have communications with Tom about seeking his support in Sacramento for funding or other issues relating to—?

29-00:04:05

Ellis: Yes, I didn't, but there was talk back then about the preservation of the property, negotiating with Santa Fe, which owned all of that, to try to keep it from becoming hotels, big commercial venture. The idea of the trail is quite old. I don't remember that—the one that circumnavigates the bay. I mean that's an old idea, and we were talking it back then in the early seventies. The [pedestrian] bridge is an old idea. The one that now spans the freeway at around University. It was an old idea. As you know in any of these adventures, every now and again, ideas have wings, but they also get legs, which is kind of nice, and they come to fruition. I forget when Tom became the specific advocate. I couldn't honestly say that I remember when, but his name has been associated with the Eastshore Park for a long time. I've advised him to have a bicycle rental shop near the north end. Expand the usage.

29-00:05:39

Wilmot: There was something you mentioned, your earliest community involvement here in this area happening at the time your child, your daughter, was in day care.

29-00:06:01

Ellis: Franklin Parent Nursery School.

29-00:06:00

Wilmot: I wanted to follow-up on that and ask you what kinds of choices have you made around education for your kids through high school here in Berkeley?

29-00:06:13

Ellis: My ex-wife and I, Judith Ellis and I, were committed to public education. So there was never a question of private school. That was never an option we considered.

29-00:06:33

Wilmot: Above and beyond financial concerns, it was just—

29-00:06:37

Ellis:

It wouldn't matter what. We also, when we came, decided we didn't want to live in the hills. And it wasn't a class issue, it was like tricycles going down hill. And a different kind of life, you know, living where there are people milling, and you see them and so forth. When we left Claremont, we went to New York, where I just spent a year at SUNY Old Westbury. But one of the things that made it easy for us to leave Claremont was the lack of diversity in the community. And we wanted our kids to be in a town where there's, you know, lots of different stuff going on. And I remember the delight of going to a bus stop one time, and the kids on the bus, it looked like a UN genetics experiment I called it. Looking at the kids along the window, it was like oh my God, look at my town. I loved that part.

Zoë was I think in the first cohort, that didn't go to West Campus. West Campus was the ninth grade for all students in Berkeley, as part of Berkeley's desegregation plan. There was one year before high school where everybody—oh, ninth grade, before junior high school—

29-00:08:14

McGarrigle:

Before high school. I went there, I went to West Gate.

29-00:08:15

Ellis:

Oh, you did? Gosh. David loved it. It was interesting, I was surprised. Zoë never thrived in school, but being part of that cohort—she was first or second—that went directly from [MLK] junior high to high school—she got lost. So we had to make some very hard decisions about what to do, and so we moved her around to a variety of schools. There was this school over at Sacramento and University, behind the 7-11, it was the Independent Learning School an independent study school. It was an interesting kind of place, kind of Skinnerian, you know, you get rewarded for the things that keep you going there. And we discovered a lot of faculty children going to this school. Some very famous other faculty's kids were not taking to school very well. She didn't stay there very long. She really wound up graduating from East Campus, basically Berkeley's continuation school. And I regarded those people as heroes of the realm. They really know how to work with kids who were hanging on by their fingernails. Now, I have just profound sympathy for my daughter. My daughter is active, vigorous, just a magnificent self. She's just big and noisy and so forth. And a fantastic singer, which we didn't discover until somewhat late. Her brother had been the superstar virtuoso, but while she's going to Cazadero and this, that, and the other, she was picking up the stuff.

29-00:10:19

Wilmot:

I've been at her performances. She's a wonderful singer.

29-00:10:23

Ellis: She is great, isn't she? And Keith Terry has just invited her to join Slammin', his a cappella group, and they were at La Peña [Cultural Center] a couple of nights ago. And it's going to be permanent, it's great.

29-00:10:37

Wilmot: I'm going to make sure and go see her.

29-00:10:40

Ellis: But there was a moment that broke my heart, because she had lots of black friends, girlfriends. And there's just a moment, it's a teenage thing. It takes different versions in different groups. But there came a moment when she couldn't be with her black girlfriends. She was too light-skinned, she was—. And it was a tribal thing. I mean it was just like they couldn't afford to be seen with her, she couldn't be part of it. She's never admitted, I don't think, to having been hurt by that. And then when she went to East Campus, she was dealing very largely with young black men and women who were there. And she got her chops back. I mean she's very good with dealing with that. Now, she got confused about what's about class, and what's about ethnicity. And she identified with the problems they had, you know. And we'd have to tell her, "Actually, you don't have those problems. We're not poor," et cetera. But she's got such a big heart. But it was hard. Not just a school thing, but definitely a school thing, to try to be in this town and live out some higher values, and it is better than other places. David went to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he ran into ethnicity and class, you know. [uses arms to express writ large] He said, "Whoa!" And I've heard young people here talk about themselves as Berkeley cripples. Now today we don't use that language anymore. But in the seventies, I've heard young people talk about their inability to function away from this [city].

29-00:12:39

Wilmot: I had a question about David going to Berkeley High. Berkeley High is notorious for being a tracking school, being a kind of school that serves different populations in different ways. As a parent, did you feel like it was important to be involved in order to make sure that they did not track your son in certain ways?

29-00:13:01

Ellis: No, we didn't have to do that. And the tracking is, then—it's a complex story. If you go to a small school system, as you're gonna do, you're going to have a whole lot of trouble keeping one group of students out of the Afro-Haitian dancing class. People want to be with their friends. You're gonna have a whole lot of trouble. As Pedro Noguera pointed out, who's in the chess class? And who goes home with whom to play chess after—?

29-00:13:32

Wilmot: [talking over each other] reflection of our society.

29-00:13:34

Ellis:

Really. So was the campus! Although less so, and the world has a lot of difficulty understanding. Surely, there must be tensions there. They impose on the world the one they know. And the kids know that nobody black or brown or yellow or white comes home for dinner. But they do their best to experiment with it at college. Well, high school is very different. It's conformist in a different way. So is college conformist. I think, as Neil Smelser argued, when you talk political correctness, it's just different language about the conformism that you see among young people very often.

Anyway, David didn't have the same problem. David thought he had to go to school. Now, that's a big thing. And he didn't get himself in trouble talking too much. Zoë would get in trouble when she wasn't doing anything because they expected her to be the one that's talking or something like that. And then he had his saxophone, he had his music. He ran with a college-going crew while being a jazz musician. Not just college-going, but a lot of his friends were Ivy-League-bound kids.

29-00:15:02

Wilmot:

He graduated from Berkeley High when?

29-00:15:12

Ellis:

Let's see. Is 1983 right? Yeah, I think about 1983. It could have been a little later. Don't know why I don't have that memorized. But anyway, he had the hook of music from the fifth grade, because Berkeley had the music in the schools program. It even had jazz in the middle schools. Phil Hardyman would go to, I think he was at Longfellow for a little while. But he always had that hook, and boy, that hook was sustenance. You knew where you were going. I say, and I know it was true at a certain point, the status of a jazz band member at Berkeley High was higher than football player or basketball player. You weren't a dork or a weirdo for doing that.

29-00:16:17

McGarrigle:

Well, they were traveling the world and winning awards. So Phil Hardyman had a group of people who he nurtured before David, and there must have been an exchange, I'm thinking, people who I went to school with were Peter Apfelbaum and Steve Bernstein and Jessica, now Jones.

29-00:16:36

Ellis:

Yeah, Jessica was David's mentor. She was his first teacher.

29-00:16:39

McGarrigle:

Okay.

29-00:16:42

Ellis:

She was his first teacher. She was very, very good to him. Cared about him a lot. Was his teacher at Caz as well. Right. That was very important.

Let's see, I wanted to say one other thing about hook. You know, when you have a hook, in a setting, a lot of other things go with it. Mom and Dad come. This dad came with his Nakamichi tape recorder and his mikes, and he's crawling under seats at the auditorium. When Zoë joined the San Francisco Girls' Chorus, I did the same with her. And I got wonderful recordings of them and so forth, and it was wonderful driving across the bay with the several girls who were in it from Berkeley, listening to them. I learned so much, listening to them talk in the back of the Volvo wagon, on the way there and back. But when you have a hook, other people come along, if you're lucky. If you're lucky. And Judith and I were very much entangled in our kids' accomplishments, and did a lot of stuff together with them. And so, I think it gave David a sense of—not just our involvement—but the town, the support the town gave for the enterprise of making music, and in particular jazz music, for various reasons, was just great. It was just wonderful. And you find anybody her age and they will know the people who were in the band, they will know them. And proud to have known them.

29-00:18:29

McGarrigle:

Well, I've followed their careers. I see all of these people around from time to time. I remember when there was a service for Phil Hardyman. Peter Apfelbaum's mother [Anne] was working in our office for many years, and she was involved in putting that together and with finding some of these people. But I also see Steve Bernstein's name in *The New York Times* for the clubs he's playing in, and Peter's too.

29-00:18:55

Ellis:

And Steve did the music for that movie [*Cotton Club*]; he was the music director for the one on Kansas City, that Joshua Redman performed in, and some other folks. Yeah, our folks have done really well. Zoë didn't have that until later. I'm going to go back to education decisions. So that was the only time we were really stretched out. And it was extraordinary time; it was a hard time. Trying to find out a place where somebody like her could use her genius and her energies where it would be respected and used. And boy, I have a full appreciation for how schools are set up for a range of people, but not everybody. There was a time when she was in this short-lived group with her friend Caitlin.

29-00:20:01

Wilmot:

I remember, The Braids.

29-00:20:02

Ellis:

The Braids. And we were dealing with New York and some lawyers on a speakerphone on the third floor up there. And this lawyer started talking, and I'm the dad and I'm the protector and the guardian, and the kids had wanted me to hang out on the edges of their stuff to make sure that people smelled okay and so forth. And I'm up there, and I'm talking, and I've got the sound of authority in my voice, and the lawyer says something at some point, and I have no idea—Zoë understood every word, paraphrased it, and ran it back.



Because she was interested! [laughs] She didn't know more law than I know. But she understood what was being said. She could disentangle the language, reassemble it in ordinary talk because it involved her set of concerns. Just blew me away. How consistent that was when it was an issue of relevance to her life. David once, or a couple of times, maybe, said, "Why is calculus important to know?" But that never kept him from studying it. He just said, "I don't see why this is relevant to anything." But he studied it anyway, because he thought he had to. I told my kids also, to their mother's consternation, I think, that they had no choice, they had to finish high school. And I don't think either of them has ever complained about my setting the bar so low. They had to finish high school. I never said to either of them that they had to go to college. What I said, you have to work harder to make the same amount of money if you don't go to college, than someone who does. But you can live a happy life, and productive life doing things that don't involve a college education.

You're having trouble?

29-00:22:06

Wilmot:

No. I had a question and this is actually a question I've wanted to ask you for a while. And it's coming back firmly to your academic achievements. I wanted to ask you academically, what is your favorite thing that you've done? What did you like about—and I'm kind of springing this question on you—but academically, when you think about range of contributions, ideas you were exploring, concepts, what was your favorite?

29-00:22:41

Ellis:

Oh. Something I wrote called "Planning, Design and Black Community Style: The Problem of Occasion-Adequate Space" was probably a conceptual adventure that I found the most promising. I didn't do much with it, but I'm pleased with that.

29-00:23:30

Wilmot:

What about it pleased you?

29-00:23:38

Ellis:

The idea of social occasions, which is an Irving Goffman—he didn't invent it, but—Roger Barker, a social psychologist I think at Kansas, and others—seemed to me to fit very well at the intersection of space, human activity, and things, about which I was responsible to work in the architecture department, in the field of environmental design. So what I thought I had to work with there, and got started, and for reasons known only to my semiconscious self, didn't follow up on, was that there are different styles of doing occasioning, of using space and time.

I'll give you an example that's a bit too obvious. In the case of the black community style, the issue is like the "oldest established permanent floating crap game in New York" from *Guys and Dolls*, where your space is

constrained by class position—and I just happened to use folks I knew—where you were going to be in time and space, what you were doing in time and space, was socially defined. It could be now a card game, it could be now a discussion of some important issues, how you get a job or this, that, and the other. And the space could be redefined in the same situation. And I even had one of the young photographers in our department, Lewis Watts—I don't know if you know him—go out in Oakland and get me some shots of street corner life that I was actually going to work on to illustrate the points there.

A more familiar situation to you that's institutionalized in England, is the pub. It's institutionalized around the problem of space in the home, and class. Both of you are probably too young I think, to have been to England and have experienced the fence between the middle-class part of the pub and the working-class part of the pub. When I first went to England in 1961, there was a swinging gate and a fence that segregated the middle classes from the working classes in the pubs. And also, occasioning in England and throughout Europe, you don't invite everybody to your house. And America's famous, among Europeans, for saying, "You must come over for dinner sometime," and you do. And then they come to be your friend for your life, and you're on to something else. They don't do it the same that way. The sanctity of the inside of the house, the domicile and the dwelling space inside the house, is really quite different from what it is here. And so, very often, especially when there's a finite amount of space, the pub becomes the communal living room.

Okay, so the occasion of that world of the living room—"Are you going to be over for bridge in time," Samantha, Sally, Joe, you know, "for bridge?" We schedule that stuff in a certain kind of way, in our living rooms. They don't do it the same everywhere in the world. Anyway, I was toying with those ideas. How we assemble our activities in time and space. And so I got started, in a turgid way. I get carried away with the conceptual nomenclature. But I'm still pleased with it, I'm happy with it.

29-00:27:57

Wilmot:

Well, the idea of redefining occasion and inscribing it in space, and meaning in space, is very exciting.

29-00:28:07

Ellis:

And the opposite. Taking what for some people is spatial, and doing it in time. You see, that's the idea. In other words, what are we doing now? We don't have much space. All we've got is this street corner. What's happening now? And people do that. It's a market for a minute, et cetera, and corners get redefined. You get a lot of people using a corner, and it's a market. And it can be a market for not such good things.

29-00:28:42

Wilmot:

Yeah, there's a word for that one, evanescent, kind of a transitory space.

29-00:28:46

Ellis: Yeah, I don't know what it is. But that's what I like. And the other thing I like, that I never published, is this *Architect's People*. Oh no, I did publish that. It's the, oh what do I call it? God. I forgot what I called that damn book. But it's my collected studies of Operation Bootstrap, of Kilimanjaro, the Berkeley alternative school, the park in the Mission District, and this school around the corner, Peralta Elementary School. [*People Making Places: Episodes in Participation, 1964-1984*]

29-00:29:35

Wilmot: Were these schools or playing areas?

29-00:29:36

Ellis: Peralta's a full school. Right over here. Hardy Frye's wife [Rosette] is the principal of this school now. Interesting how that goes, Peralta. Anyway, I'm really proud that I was around and collecting those stories, because it was getting and characterizing life on the ground. And I just [recently] discovered the photos that go with the Bootstrap stuff, so I'm looking forward to getting those in The Bancroft and maybe packaging the Bootstrap story fully and getting it in there, because it's about an L.A. that doesn't exist any more.

29-00:30:16

Wilmot: And those are two distinct things really, the Operation Bootstrap is actually very different from the collection of stories—

29-00:30:21

Ellis: I wrote my dissertation on Operation Bootstrap, but then I went back later, when I was conceiving of the book to see what had come of that story, and I have a more extended piece of writing on it, because—on Central Avenue, they've gone from this self-help job training program to actually making dolls, black dolls that looked black, not white dolls painted. And then Mattel picked them up. And then it got bigger and bigger. They made action figures. I have upstairs the original box of the O. J. [Simpson] action figure, and it's the reason my son had so much difficulty going with the critique of O. J. because he had lived with this action figure.

29-00:31:20

Wilmot: It might have been one of the reasons. [laughter] I have one other question for you and I don't want—

29-00:31:29

Ellis: So those two things.

29-00:31:33

Wilmot: Those two things. Yeah. I remember really enjoying your "Architects' *homunculus*," which was a word I didn't know before, which featured the implicit actor who lurks in the designer's imagination. That was about Frank Lloyd Wright, I believe.

29-00:31:44

Ellis:

That's how I used it. I had the idea of the homunculus before I wrote about Frank Lloyd Wright. I went to Frank Lloyd Wright's writings to see if I could—he seemed like a good prospect for this idea of the being who's in the stuff, right?

29-00:32:02

Wilmot:

Well, it's also interesting because that's what designers do, they create these spaces for these lives that unfold according to a certain model, which may or may not be how people's lives really unfold.

29-00:32:15

Ellis:

That's the very practical way of saying it, too, because how can people design for a life they don't know anything about? Well, what you do is you go find out how some other people live, and then you try to find a way to incorporate that in a way that is useful to them, and you only know that by hanging out, or watching how they hang out, watch how they change things. The homunculus idea, what I was motivated by was the fact that I was part of something larger that was quite international, and that is, "Let's ask some anthropologists and sociologists at colleges about people, so we can find out what we [architects] should be doing." And some of the questions are fairly primitive, and they never go away. "How do we design for community?" Or design to make people happy, or neighborly, or something like that. And what kind of building does it. It can get very primitive in architecture, because architects think that meaning inheres in stuff very often. They don't think that it's put there by people over time in culture.

So very often, they will think that it's the changing of stuff that will do it. And it may well be, but they are also changing the context of meaning-making by people. And I used to love, I have an object upstairs, I think I may have shown you, which you can't make any sense of. It's a cast iron piece, and you look at it, and I say to someone, "What is it?" I've never met anyone who could tell me what it is. It's clearly a manufactured piece. And in one class, my Soc 140 class at the time, called Sociocultural Factors in Architecture and Urban Design, I said, "Okay, this is going to be the sign of the society of the pig." And so I took them through a full semester of rituals and words and gestures and so forth, so when I pull it out and say, "What is this?" And I wouldn't say a thing. But then we'd bring some other people into the room, I'd pull it out with my class there, and my class would realize, they all knew what it was, what it stood for, and these other people in the room had no idea what that thing was.

Now, I had assembled meaning around the object in a finite community over a short period of time, but I was trying to make the point of the human involvement in meaning, to get them away from this notion [of meaning that inheres in things]. But then what I wanted to do, was to say, "Okay, we ask people about what they do, what they like, what they care about, that we could design for, but what people do the designers in the world carry around in their

assumptive toolkit?” I mean, what do they take for granted about what people are like, what they do, what they care about. That’s part of just their assumptions. So that’s where the *Architects’*—possessive plural—*People* comes in. What are their people? I’m really pleased with that idea. And I did a lot of homework to find out who had dealt with it before, and it hadn’t been dealt with it hardly at all. So Oxford got interested, because it was novel enough. So, that book was fun to do. And I got to bring along a graduate student on that project. And she was really good, she got architects from all over the place talking about this in New York. It was way beyond the set of people that I had organized to write their chapters on it, so it was just really cool. It was a nice enterprise. Dana Cuff is her name.

29-00:36:22

Wilmot:

I have kind of a last question—are you at that place?

29-00:36:24

McGarrigle:

Mmm-hmm.

29-00:36:30

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you to reflect on the process of doing an oral history. How has this been for you?

29-00:36:33

Ellis:

I’ve had an insight, and it was unforced. It just struck me since you identified this as the last interview. And my insight was, “Gee, this wasn’t at all what I thought it was going to be like.” And then when I thought about it—not very systematic, but I just kind of let myself wallow in the thought. I realized that one of the notions that I had was that this was going to be somehow more fully autobiographical; I was going to tell my story. And then you guys will recall I was always threatening to do some homework, which I never did. I got some photos, is the most I did. But I never went back and looked at my course notes.

When you asked me about courses, I was embarrassed I couldn’t remember—I can’t even remember the title of the unpublished book. I never did any real homework to be ready for you. Now, part of that was my own bias—that used to get me in trouble when I taught, because I hated teachers who had their same yellow notes all the time. So I wanted to be spontaneous. So some of that was my spontaneity bias. But then the insight I had was, “Gee, Russ. How strange that you would be like this, isn’t it? This is exactly the way you are about everything.” In other words, I do just about everything the way I did this oral history. I do some homework, and—that’s not true—some things I really do a lot of homework on. But, I went very quickly from that insight—that this is what I’m like—to an understanding that I now have fully—is that this isn’t my autobiography.

This is a story of a person among a set of other people who are talking about what it was like to be in the world, and then to be in the University and all of

that, and the reason that I'm having it done is because I was at the University, not because I'm Russ Ellis. But because I was at the University and a participant in something larger. And then I thought, "Gee, if somebody wants to do some homework on any of this stuff, they're going to have all these documents." And I will have made a contribution to telling a larger story about the University, what black folks who were on the faculty went through, what other faculty went through, what people went through, what it was like to be in this town, what it was like to try to have a career in the University while you're being a parent, and make money, and have pains in your side. So I got much more modest, especially thinking that there's a lot more that surrounds this. I don't know—is Mac doing his oral history, Laetsch?

29-00:40:07

McGarrigle:

Not at this time that I know of, but there are all these possibilities.

29-00:40:11

Ellis:

All these ways of tying these things together, you know.

29-00:40:13

McGarrigle:

I'm interested in how an autobiography, in your mind, would have been different. Can you describe how that would have been different? Would there have been any overlap or would have been a complete—?

29-00:40:27

Ellis:

Oh, certainly overlap. And as a matter of fact, a lot of the highlighted points would be the highlighted points in my autobiography as well. Certainly the University, my activity in the town, being a parent, probably say a lot more about my track career, just as a formative thing. A lot more about trying to be a parent, and a lover, and a partner—you know my ex-wife is a very private person, so there's a lot I don't think I would talk about. But my instinct to talk about it would be very strong. My mother's leaving, my father, what his life was about, as I reassemble it, what it was like to live on that farm in Fontana. Probably things like that. Maybe a little bit more, oh, there would be overlap, and the high, salient topics wouldn't be so different, I think.

29-00:41:40

Wilmot:

Interesting. Well, it's going to be also interesting another layer of this whole process when you see the transcript. That's actually a whole other layer of translation and reflection.

29-00:41:51

Ellis:

I do understand that. I'll tell you the great anxiety I have is all the people I didn't talk about. But everybody I'm sure has that. You come to the end and you say, "Oh my God! How could I possibly have left out my grandmother?!" I'm not talking about my grandmother, but—high-salience points, my relationship with your colleague, Julie Shearer, is very important in my life, but there are all kinds of reasons I wouldn't even talk about that very much in this context, having just to do with my inclinations, to sort of leave that part out, ROHO interviewer.

29-00:42:31

Wilmot: I'm really glad you said that because that was one thing that I think we could have asked you and didn't.

29-00:42:35

Ellis: Thank you very much.

29-00:42:39

Wilmot: The role of your partner in your life.

29-00:42:43

McGarrigle: I think also, as you know, for some people the oral history serves as the basis for a different memoir, which includes some of the more—I'm just not thinking of a different word than personal—but some of the more personal, intimate, relevant features of a life.

29-00:43:06

Ellis: I've had the thought. I've had the thought for myself already. That's a great excuse. Okay, I could do this. I probably won't. What I think I will do, I've started a web site, which is mainly just for family and friends. And I've got some sculpture on, and I'm going to put some of my new stuff on. I'll tell you how to get on if you're interested, at some point. I would like to make a link to my oral history. I don't know if it's ever going to be online, but I know some of them are online.

29-00:43:45

Wilmot: If you agree to put it online, it will go online.

29-00:43:48

Ellis: That's fine. And I would love to make a link on my web site to that, and take some of my unpublished stuff. I've got, something that Julie and I talked about last night—I wasn't aware she had even noticed, but there was a working paper out of an environmental design I did called "Buildings Dreamed: The Nightscapes of Women Who Are Architects." And I interviewed several women who are architects who are local. I really like that piece. It's not very deep, but I like the angle I take on it. And I'd like to have that. There's another piece on driving in Italy. San Mignano, it's this town outside of Siena. It's a real suburban thingamajiggy. It's where they put the church—I mean not the church—the hospital, when they moved it out of the center of the town and modernized it. And that's another piece, I gave that to you, but I'd like to put that on my web site.

So I think what I'm feeling now is broad. I'm having a wonderful time. I have the benefit that I will characterize as not having to look over my shoulder. There are no ex-loves that want to shoot me in the back of the head, as far as I know. I don't have any children out there, other than the two children I have. I'm not in horrendous debt. I haven't stolen anybody's money. I'm not expecting anything other than an earthquake, and something more audacious from these fascist beasts who run our country. But it's a wonderfully

liberating thing to have an oral history, at this point in my life, to look forward and broad.

[End of Interview]