

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

John A. Ware
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
February 18, 2011
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center website at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed John A. Ware on February 18, 2011,
in Fayetteville, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. John Allan Ware. [*JW laughs*] You and I, Scott Lunsford, are here at the—you and me, or is it you—yeah, you and me. We are at the—uh—red barn at the Neal and Gina Pendergraft residence in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Today's date is February 18, 2011.

John Ware: Wow.

SL: And—uh—this is a—uh—Pryor Center recording, the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

JW: We do a layback here with applause and stuff?

SL: Yeah, right. [*JW laughs*] And—um—uh—so we're gonna be videotaping this interview—uh—this interview. Uh—you're gonna get some raw footage from this on DVD. You'll get—this thing'll be transcribed. We'll give you a transcript for you to peruse through. If there's anything you don't like about what we do here—uh—we'll take it out for you. We feel like this is your interview, and we want you to be happy with it. Uh—[*claps*] after everything gets—uh—the way that we like it, and you like it, then we'll make a finished DVD, and we'll make you as many

copies as you like. Uh—and then—uh—we'll post highlights a—at least highlights, [*chair squeaks*] video highlights of this interview on our website. [*Camera clicks*] We'll post all of the approved audio that will be available for download. We'll post all the transcript, the approved transcript on the web. And we do that to encourage—um—students, documentarians—uh—history researchers to access our site, to make use of the material. So we're goin'—we're recording this on—um—video and on audio. And so now I have to ask you if it's all right with you that we are doing this and all this sounds pretty reasonable to you.

JW: Shall I think about that? No. [*Laughs*]

SL: No, you don't really need to think about it. [*Laughter*] But you should say yes or no.

JW: See, that's a bad way to put it [*SL laughs*] because then I can say "yes or no."

SL: That's right. Well, okay [*JW laughs*], you should say yes.

JW: Yes.

[00:02:03] SL: Okay, good—good answer. [*Laughter*] All right, so first it's John Allan Ware. Right?

JW: Yes.

SL: And that's A-L-L . . .

JW: A . . .

SL: . . . A-N. And, John, when and where were you born?

JW: I was born May 2, 1944, in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

SL: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

JW: Uh—my mother was—her maiden name was Henderson. Her name was Ethel Marie Henderson. She was born in Kansas City, Missouri, I do believe. My father was John McKee Ware. He was born in Kansas City. They were both born in 1905. Uh—well, there's the answer to that question.

[00:02:56] SL: Okay, well—um—was it—do you—uh—remember having—uh—did you ever meet any of your grandparents?

JW: Oh sure. I was—uh—a very late child. My—my parents were both forty when I was born. So . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: So the—the Ware Family in Kansas City, which was pretty broad—uh—not lots of generations, but there was just a lotta people.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: Uh—the—the—uh—the maternal grandmother was a—was a grande dame. I mean, she was just—she had her sons, and she had a daughter, and she—she ruled Warwick Boulevard. She—she was a great old bitch. [SL laughs] And my—did I just say my ma—paternal grandparents. The Wares and the Woods.

The—uh—my maternal grandparents lived in Independence, Missouri. And—uh—William Henderson was an insurance agent. I don't how—how big a deal insurance was at the end of the nineteenth century, but he made a—in the Franklin Insurance Company, I think. He was an independent . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: . . . insurance agent. And I believe his wife, although she was a suffragette and a big women's rights advocate for her time—for the time—uh—I believe that she worked on and off in that office. I believe it was—it was a mom-and-pop business.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: I can certainly picture her doing it. But what I'm getting around to is both grandparents were pretty old when I was just cognizant.

[00:04:53] SL: Do you remember any time with them at all?

JW: Oh sure. They—never the twain shall meet—the Hendersons and the Wares.

SL: They didn't . . .

JW: They did not like each other.

SL: . . . get along with each other?

JW: Well, they—Mrs. Ware, she did not like any women takin' her boys away. [*SL laughs*] So I think that all the women who

married Ware boys were theoretically on the outs. And my mom was sort—she had a—she had a mind of her own. She went to Wellesley. She was—she was a pretty uppity girl, you know.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

JW: So I don't think she was ever accepted, and I think they just accepted that she wasn't accepted.

[00:05:33] SL: So—uh—do you remember goin' to Kansas City and—and seeing your . . .

JW: Almost ad nauseam.

SL: Really?

JW: But I tended to stay with my mother's parents because that's where she stayed when we visited.

SL: Oh.

JW: My father stayed at—at the big house on Warwick.

SL: You're—really?

JW: Yep.

SL: So any trip to Kansas City, the family was split.

JW: Right. [*Laughs*] And the—as—as you might guess, then there were the—the holiday dinners and that sort. Of course, I sat at the child's table, but then—th—I was so young, you know, they were so much older than I, since I was born when they were in their forties, that I was the only child. [*Laughs*] So I pretty

much sat alone.

[00:06:15] SL: Wow.

JW: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: Well—uh—in your—did you have conversations with—uh—your—uh—paternal grandmother and grandfather?

JW: I did. I think they were more like audiences.

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: I'm not saying that she was a—she was fancy because she wasn't. She—she—we'll talk about this another time, but she—they all floated the—all those boys floated the White River toge—regularly . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: . . . couple or three times a year, and she always went.

SL: Ah.

JW: I mean, into her nineties. So she was, so she was rock 'em sock 'em . . .

SL: So she was from pioneer stock as well as kind of a Victorian patriarch person.

JW: Yes, matriarch in this case.

SL: Yeah. Uh—so you know, you were probably what? Four or five years old when this was going on? When you were . . .

JW: Yeah.

[00:07:05] SL: While you—so the—do—do you remember any—uh—
I'm always looking for the oldest story that—that you can
dredge. Uh . . .

JW: Right. Well, I ca—here's a couple.

SL: Okay.

JW: And this is Ware stuff because almost nothing happened in the
Henderson household in Independence.

SL: Okay.

JW: It was—it was just like bein' in the country except there was a
whole bunch of 'em, you know. And there weren't—there was—
we're not talkin' about crackers out there. We're just talking
about modest living.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: And they did keep chickens and, you know, that kind—that kind
of stuff.

SL: Now this is the Hendersons or the. . .

JW: Yes, the Hendersons.

SL: Okay, okay.

JW: Uh—at the Ware household, it the—it was always somethin' goin'
on. And it—in a way it was ?cromical?. I'll explain that in
another time as well. But—uh—for instance, they had a version
of charades that they played at the drop of a hat. I mean, if

there was more than ten people in the house, they'd—they'd divide up and play a game of charades. And it's not the television version of charades. This is not acting out—well, it is acting out—uh—the names of things or the phrases or something.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:08:18] JW: I mean, almost anything was useable. But it was big. There was—on the fourth floor of the house was an attic. And there were—there were trunks—steamer trunks full of costumes of the wildest ilk. [*SL laughs*] I mean, back from fr—from my grandmother's grandmother's clothing to things they'd bought at thrift stores and saved for no reason. Military uniforms from the Civil War. I mean, just tons of stuff. So they—they would, in teams they would choose fairly esoteric words, phrases, whatever and act 'em out in full costume. And they'd act—they'd—they'd—they would—it's not like two syllables, you know. They'd act out the whole thing and try and get the—the team on the other side to guess the—the—the right—or this—in many cases, wrong answer to the phrase by the—making the most convoluted story line. And it—I mean, it was just goofy and sort of that [*vocalized noise*] back to your question if four or five, yeah I was, and it was—to me it was like

st—mystifying and gratifying all at the same time.

SL: So—uh—there's some—um—Civil War—uh—relatives then.

Your—um—I would assume Union . . .

JW: And some Revolutionary War relatives.

[00:09:42] SL: But—uh—did you hear any—uh—any Civil War stuff—
uh . . .

JW: Well sure. Uh—my—my great-grandfather was in the Civil War
and was—uh—was an artist. And drew I—mostly for himself—
uh—scenes of—of the encampments and anything that—I mean,
I don't believe I ever saw anything of a battle, but things where
they were—scenes where he was more time to reflect and look
at it and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: . . .make sketches.

SL: Graphite?

JW: Pencil and paper, yes.

SL: Pen and ink, maybe.

JW: Uh—and sometimes ?color inks?.

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: Uh—and they were quite good.

SL: And do—do you know what his name was?

JW: I hate to admit this. I don't.

SL: That's all right.

[00:10:33] JW: Uh—her brother—uh—was Harry Wood. He was an artist also. And—uh—in fact he was a cartoonist at the *Kansas City Star*. Starting out with single panel—uh—cartoons, and then he went into multiple panels. It—it was one of the first, as far as I know, ever worldwide to—to have—uh—a strip. It was called *The Intellectual Pup*. [SL laughs] And—uh—it ran twenty-some years. Uh—or maybe more than that. And I have—I don't know who else—but I have ninety-one strips, and they're—and many of them framed. And they're—they're quite in . . .

SL: Elegant.

JW: . . . they're very dear. I mean—and although most of the men have told me over the years that that is not my father and his brother as the two protagonists, the two [SL laughs] rascals. But it is [SL laughs]. It's so obvious that it is.

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: And so ?yeah?—uh—what was your real question? Did I—you asked about rep—about . . .

SL: Well yeah, you know . . .

JW: . . . the Civil War.

SL: . . . I'm always lookin' at the—for the oldest story. I'm just wondering if—um—your grandmother or your grandfather—uh—

on either side had any kind of—uh—um—counting—recountings of stories that they had heard with their—you know, the oral history tradition of just passing . . .

JW: Got it.

SL: . . . history on.

[00:12:05] JW: I—I think my—I'm going to disappoint you and say I didn't catch that.

SL: Okay.

JW: I caught the drawings, and it's really pretty—I'm a pretty visual guy, so I was more interested in that anyway.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well, it sounds like—uh—at least the Kansas City household was—uh—a very artsy, intellectual—uh—encampment.

JW: I—I hope that's true. It's—it seemed that way.

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: And in retro—in reflection it seems that way. Uh—intellectual troubles me a bit. I'm not too sure about that.

SL: Okay.

JW: I mean, they—they—they wrote—they did things. They were doers more than they were thinkers.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

JW: My—uh—my grandfather on the Ware side was a jeweler and a

watch repair and an occasional watchmaker. Fastidious little guy who I'd—I almost have no memory of. Died when I was a—uh—a whippersnapper, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:13:02] JW: But I'm told that he got up every morning and—uh—quite early and—and walked to work, which was at some distance. And—and—and walked home, and r—just pretty much refused the transportation of—?of? cars and tr—buses and stuff. He was—and—uh—for his time, I think a pretty special kind of jeweler and watch guy.

SL: Uh-huh. That's interesting—uh—on the transportation stuff.

JW: It is.

SL: He preferred to walk. You know, you'd think a guy that could build a watch would be fascinated with automobiles . . .

JW: You would. Good point.

SL: . . . or horseless buggies or . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . whatever, you know. That's interesting. Uh—so before I leave your [*chair squeaks*]*—uh—grandparantage—uh—the Henderson side of the deal in Independence, is that . . .*

JW: Was.

SL: Insurance stuff—eh—do you remember, recall any—uh—any

conversations with either grandparent—uh—on that side that kinda stuck with you in—in any way?

[00:14:13] JW: You know, I'm probably gonna disappoint you there because I—my grandfather had—uh—his larynx was removed—uh—uh—cancer—uh—repair operation when he was fairly young. And so I—although I really loved that old guy—he was—he was fun to be with. I used get in the car and drive from Independence to Kansas City to his office when we were visiting. And—uh—?I can? what the hell I did there. There was nothing to do . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: . . . in that dreadful, old drafty office. But—but he would—he was always tellin' me stuff and whispering stuff to me. You know, didn't stop him from talkin', the loss of his voice box. Uh—but filling me with s—with tales that—uh—that are—that were life forming? I don't think so.

SL: Don't think so.

JW: No.

SL: Um—okay, well let's talk about your—uh—the household that you grew up in then. Uh—born in Tulsa. Uh—were there brothers and sisters?

JW: I had a sister who was nine years my senior. Uh—she was born

in Tulsa as well. Just a couple of years after I was born, my father—uh—I probably should back up—backstory that a bit. My mother, father were born—I mean, were married in 1930. The—the Depression—the serious lack of—uh—of jobs for almost everyone. And my dad had gone—gone to—uh—my—my mother went to Wellesley. My dad went to Columbia University, was the University of Missouri at Columbia. And then did his graduate work—did his—got his masters at Columbia, New York. Uh—and s—uh—they got married in 1930 as I just said, and he had a job waiting for him which is—which is—that's something—1930, to have a bride, a place to go, and a paycheck.

SL: Yeah.

[00:16:04] JW: And he had—he was hired as a geologist by Skelly Oil, which I'm sure he just applied like everybody else in the country was lookin' for work. And although he'd gotten his masters in paleontology and considered himself a scientist and not a man who knew much about finding oil in the ground. He knew what—what it looked like underneath there, and he knew what would be a good thing to look for in finding petro goop.

SL: Mh-hmm. [*Laughs*]

JW: You know, the—the formations that would—that tended to make that. You know, there's a certain kind of rise in the—in the—

uh—formations and the—the—the existence of saltwater. And you know, he—he knew what to look for. But he just wasn't terribly interested in finding oil.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: Uh—not that he shouldn't have been in 1930. It was the beginnings of a great big business, but . . .

SL: You bet it was.

[00:16:55] JW: But so they—they went to Tulsa and set up shop. And you know, he—he worked for Skelly, and my mother was a—I think she did some teaching, but most—mostly she was a stay-at-home mom.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: And so they were—let's say they were there for a dozen years total perhaps. My sister was born in [19]35, and I was born in [19]44, so—and we moved in [19]46 to Oklahoma City.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: My dad got a job at—honestly I don't remember—another oil company.

SL: Yeah. Well—uh—before we get to Oklahoma City—um—uh—so you were kinda the fall crop. Your sister being the spring crop, and you were kinda the fall crop.

JW: Good point.

SL: Uh—that's pretty good distance—uh—between the two.

JW: It was a mistake. It was an error.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And—uh—it's not like they made me feel that way, but it—it was—uh . . .

[00:17:44] SL: You think that you maybe unexpected or . . .

JW: Wildly unexpected. The—my dad and his partner the—outside of the Skelly office—uh—his name is Harold, I think, Kapner, *K-A-P-N-E-R*. He was—uh—involved in various businesses around the oil business.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: And they formed a sample-log service. Meaning as wells were drilled, they literally brought the rock up from the pipe and looked it over. Not a lot of seismic work doing—going on then. And—uh—they—they ground up the soil from various levels of the strata and put 'em in bags. And that's how everybody—that's the currency that everyone talked in was sample core and sample bags. And what they did in the sample-log service company was they mapped it, and they made bags that fit each layer of the map. And—uh—so my dad was an equal partner in that. And they traded their common knowledge and their abilities to a wildcat, or wildcatter, who had some—some action

in the panhandle of Oklahoma. And one of those wells hit. And it hardly made them rich, but it made them . . .

SL: Comfortable.

JW: . . . f—giddy with success. [*SL laughs*] And—and—in—in early May—uh—about ten months after their giddy success, I was born, and Marilyn Kapner was born [*SL laughs*] two days apart in the same hospital. [*Laughter*] Marilyn is still my dear friend.

SL: Sounds like a nice dinner party and maybe dance afterwards or something.

JW: Right. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's funny.

JW: It is.

SL: Well—um—so the house in Tulsa—uh—modest, downtown . . .

[00:19:46] JW: Modest, it was—I think it was a duplex. Uh—the shared driveway was with the Kravis family. Henry Kravis's dad who worked for a radio station. And Henry was younger than I, so if I, you know—I was crawling, and Henry was my—my crawl partner, I'm told.

SL: Yeah.

JW: I—yeah, I've only seen Henry, like, twice since we were adults, and—and this is before he became the—the junk-bond king of the world. [*Laughs*]

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:17] SL: Uh-huh. Well so, how long were you in Tulsa?

JW: I?

SL: Mh-hmm.

JW: Two years.

SL: Just two years. So you don't really have much recollection of all of that. So let's get you to—I guess I should ask about your sister, too. That relationship probably develops in Oklahoma City, I would guess. Whatever . . .

JW: You know, it never really developed. I—she had—by the time I was paying attention to stuff, you know, four or five, she was a teenager and had a life.

SL: Yeah.

JW: So we got to be friends after she got married.

SL: Okay, well, so in Oklahoma City tell me what the house was like.

JW: It was a single-family house in a modest neighborhood in one, two—two floors and a basement. And he had a—my dad had a job, so my mom had a maid. We had a lawn. Nice neighbors.

SL: Let's see, so you probably had radio and television?

JW: I remember the first television.

SL: Let's talk about that first television.

JW: Well, I guess it was a Sylvania. It had the little green glow box

around the—the round or semiround screen. I think it was round. [Nineteen] forty-eight, perhaps. [Nineteen] forty-nine.

SL: Two knobs, left and right?

JW: I guess. [*Laughter*]

SL: One volume, one channel.

JW: I know that I was transfixed by the images, and I didn't care what it was. Just seeing moving pictures just fried me.

SL: [*Laughs*] You've yet to recover.

JW: I—well, you're right about that. [*Laughter*]

[00:22:12] SL: Well so, do you remember some of those first images? What you—what was the first programming you can remember about . . .

JW: The first programming I cared about was Saturday morning programming, and that—and there—really there was not much in the way of cartoons. It was, you know . . .

SL: *Howdy Doody?*

JW: Well, there was that. *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie* was in the afternoons, wasn't it? I'm asking you? You're too young. There was *Buck Rogers* and that sort of stuff and cowboy shows. There was the—what was called in Hollywood, what was called two-reelers and three-reelers were run on Saturday mornings. That'd be Gene Autry and that kind of stuff. And again, I'll tell

you, I didn't really care what it was. [*Laughs*]

[00:23:00] SL: What about radio? Do you remember much about the radio?

JW: Well, I remember the radio in the living room in the house on Twenty First Street in Oklahoma City, and I remember listening to the fights with my dad. And I remember watching, after we got television, watching wrestling matches with my dad. And baseball. All the baseball came later. Televised baseball was a while in the making. It was no way to light it.

SL: Right. [*Laughter*]

JW: We are showing our age here, aren't we?

SL: Uh-huh.

JW: Radio—I do remember listening to radio in my room, which means that, at some time, a radio was moved upstairs. A kitchen radio, perhaps. But it was—I can picture it. It was a wooden, fairly large tube device. And listening to mystery shows.

SL: *The Shadow*.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Chicago. You were listening to Chicago.

JW: Right.

SL: Was anything happening out of Tulsa then, or Oklahoma City, or

was it . . .

JW: Shows?

SL: Yeah.

[00:24:15] JW: Programming—I—you know, that's an interesting thing. I did—I get involved—by the time I was a teenager, I was sort of involved in programming. But to tell you that there was much beyond local news, I doubt that there was.

SL: What about musical instruments in the home?

JW: There was a piano. My mother played piano in the worst sort of schoolgirl—I know the show tunes, I can have four drinks and play at the party. My sister started taking lessons, and she actually put her nose to the sheet music, and she was a—she had an adequate left hand. I'm looking back and saying that. I thought she was great when I was . . .

SL: Sure.

JW: . . . six or seven years old. I thought she was fabulous. But there was a spinet in the living room, and it got played. In fact, I inherited that spinet in my teenage years when we moved out to a bigger and better house.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And I taught myself to play on that spinet.

SL: Well you know, that's interesting that you remember your sister

playing, too, and that, you know, course, I'm looking for early influences for you. Any other instruments in the house besides . . .

JW: No.

SL: . . . piano?

JW: The piano—she learned some boogie-woogie, which I thought was great. And there wasn't much radio to listen to—radio music in Oklahoma City. It was later when I was a teenager I discovered the black stations, of which there were two. But influence, I know you're askin' the right question. I—it was probably not till I was may—the—maybe the fifth grade. What are you then? Ten years old . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:26:13] JW: . . . that I actually started listening to music and saying, "I like that." You know, "that moves me a little bit." Not that I jumped around living room, danced like I needed medical attention, but I [*SL laughs*]*—it got to me. And I . . .*

SL: Music and—what was it that you were listening to?

JW: Well, I probably was listening to Benny Goodman then.

SL: Okay, okay. So before we go further in or more up to date on the history side of this, what about church? Was church ever a part of your growing up?

JW: Did what?

SL: Church. Did the—your parents—did you go to church on Sundays? Were they Baptist or . . .

JW: Right. The Wares were notorious Episcopalians. I mean, in Kansas City for generations. Because they're down-east people. They're—all came from Marble Head. And made the journey either by train or Conestoga wagon. I don't [*unclear word*]. [*Laughter*] And I only say that they're the worst kind because they're really—they were Christmas and Easter Episcopalians. They—nobody went with the regularity of the pious.

SL: So there wasn't like Sunday go-to-meetin' clothes . . .

JW: Not that I saw, but at our house, it was.

[00:27:47] SL: Oh okay. Well, let's talk about your house then.

JW: Well, my mother was kind of like a social climber, and I don't mean that to be—I'm not saying anything derogatory about her. She wanted the best for her family, and she viewed Episcopalians as being the smart people. I mean, smart like smart dressers and smart behaving, not bright. So she gave up her Congregational background. Her parents were strict Congregationalists, which is—it's like anti-Pentecostal, but it's still—it's dogged fundamentalist, reform church.

SL: So it's not Baptist; it's not—it's Congregationalist?

JW: Congregationalists are a different animal. If you don't know, I'll tell you this is, Scott . . .

SL: I don't know . . .

JW: It's—it would require a little research, and I'm not gonna be the guy to tell you. I'm just . . .

SL: Okay, all right.

JW: Congregationalists are—because when I went to college, it—Pomona College was a Congregationalist school to begin with.

SL: Oh, I did not know that.

[00:28:52] JW: Yeah. So anyway, she gave that up, which was a step for her.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And we were, every Sunday, Episcopalians. We joined—this is the royal we—we joined the Saint Paul's Cathedral in downtown Oklahoma City because it was where the smart people went. Enough ugly stuff about my poor mother [*laughs*], but yeah, that's the answer to your question. There was church involved, and I was an altar boy.

SL: Uh-huh. But no real Bible study or any of that stuff?

JW: I went to Sunday school and . . .

SL: You did?

[00:29:37] JW: I—later on I taught Sunday school.

SL: Is that right?

JW: I did.

SL: John . . .

JW: Before I became a full-fledged heathen.

SL: . . . this changes every—this changes everything.

JW: I was seriously considering going to the seminary.

SL: Is that right? Well so, it did play a role then around the house.

JW: You know, it played a role for me much more than it played for my mother and father because I made friends there. And my mother had plans for me to go to a prep school, so when I was five, I was enrolled in something that I wouldn't start until seventh grade—until I was twelve or thirteen. So she had eyes for that ilk of family and peers. And those people who would be my peers, would be my classmates later on, though we lived in a different part of town then, I looked forward to seeing them every Sunday, you know. I didn't go to the same grade school as most of them. And—how am I going to put this? They were mos—they were the rich kids. I mean, she had an eye for it, and she was right. And by the time I was old enough to go to prep school, my father was doing much better, and we lived in Nichols Hills, which was the Oklahoma City version of Beverly Hills. That's where I went to school, that prep school.

[00:31:14] SL: So let's talk about the kitchen and meals. Were you expected—was there a very formal time when breakfast, lunch and dinner were served? And were you to be at the table at those times? Was it . . .

JW: It was sporadic because I had a teenage sister, and she was always busy.

SL: Yes.

JW: But yeah, there was—there were dinners.

SL: Dinner was the main . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . gathering point where family sat?

JW: We sat down together. And often Jenny was, my sister—Eugenia—was not there. That's—by the time I was say, you know, eight or nine years old and really toeing the line about showin' up and being—knew how to put my napkin in my lap and not eat like an idiot, she was often not present. But yeah, we had family time, family discussions.

SL: And your mom was the cook?

JW: We had a maid and she—often Mary cooked, but generally my mother cooked, yes.

SL: And the maid was African American or . . .

JW: African American.

SL: African American. It sounds like to me that you—when you went to Oklahoma City, you were probably in a middle-class situation at that time. So you probably were not exposed to the African American community much other than . . .

JW: When?

SL: When you first got to Oklahoma City.

[00:32:55] JW: When I first got there, I'm two years old . . .

SL: Right.

JW: . . . but there were always black families—members in the house. Her children, her grandchildren—Marian, the maid—extended family. So I'm being patrician here, but it—there were black faces in my household all the time.

SL: Well, that sounds good. I mean, you enjoyed that, I would assume.

JW: Oh sure.

SL: I mean—so you probably had kids that—African American kids that you were kinda growing up with just by . . .

JW: Sorta.

SL: . . . the nature of the family element.

JW: Sorta.

SL: Sorta. And so playmates?

JW: Occasional playmates. You're talking about—but are we

extending now to the next level of playmates? Who did I hang with?

SL: No, I'm tryin' to keep it still in the . . .

JW: African American.

SL: . . . early childhood years.

[00:33:51] JW: Well, the neighborhood in Oklahoma City was pretty rife with kids. So it was good choice on their part about the age of their neighbors and the age of the children. So there was a lot of jump over the back fence, and you know . . .

SL: Go play there for a while, and . . .

JW: Right.

SL: Now let's go to my place . . .

JW: Exactly.

SL: So it was pretty interactive.

JW: It was.

SL: At the dinner table was grace ever said? Did anyone have that chore or . . .

JW: No.

SL: No. Okay.

JW: At—perhaps at Thanksgiving and stuff, but at night, no.

SL: Thanksgiving, Christmas, yeah. Well okay. When did you—your first musical stuff is on the piano?

[00:34:44] JW: Well, it was there, and I tried to figure out stuff that



I heard my sister play. But somewhere in the—as I mentioned earlier, somewhere around the fifth grade, I started listenin' to stuff on the radio—on the car radio. And trust me, the cars that we had didn't have radios for the most part. But by the time we—my dad was buying cars that were made in the [19]50s, 1950s and afterward, there were car radios. And so the television and the radio were delivering real pabulum stuff. And then I discovered—and I'm not going to be able to tell you the age, but somewhere around seven or eight years old, I discovered the black stations, which broadcast music at night. And that changed my life. I mean, I—first time I heard blues music and stuff, and I just went, "God?." And I'd never heard anything like it. This is before we got Little Richard and Chuck Berry, and you know, way before that for me. I remember the first time I heard Chuck Berry, and I think it had been around for a while. And I thought I'd been deprived [*SL laughs*]. That there was some sort of God-given right to hear this music. And at that point, I cut a deal with my mom to—doing some sort of chores if she would take me to the record store on Saturday morning at ten o'clock when they opened, so I could spend my entire allowance on 45s. Every Saturday. I was about eight.

SL: Wow.

JW: [*Laughs*] Wilcox Records.

SL: See, I think when I was eight, I was probably real happy with Tennessee Ernie Ford. [*Laughter*]

JW: Right. Well, I was given . . .

SL: That's what it would've—that was what was around my house.

JW: . . . the same gibberish with—as we got. But you know, there was somethin' about it. And I wish I could say that it came from Marian and her family because it didn't. It just came to my happening—stance of twisting a dial and finding the black radio station in Oklahoma City. And it was—the sponsorship was, for the most part, was by early black vendors and these kind of consciousness-raising monologues from Clara Luper and the *Black Dispatch*. I mean, they were some angry folks down there in, you know, Oklahoma City at least in the early [19]50s.

[00:37:24] SL: Yeah. So [*chair squeaks*] let's just go ahead and talk about that. What was Oklahoma City like in the early [19]50s?



JW: Well, it was completely divided black and white. I mean, th—I don't recall ever seeing black and white bathrooms, but then I was never in a place you—where blacks were allowed to eat.

SL: Right.

[00:37:54] JW: By the time I was a sophomore in high school, I had a black kid in my band, and what we went through with havin' Carl in the band was unbelievable. We were told to leave places that we were working in. We had things thrown at our cars, and you know, it was dreadful. You know, I said this—by 1958 I was fully involved in black music. In 1957 I started playing—I started gigging. I mean, I'd taken a few lessons, and I figured—pshhh [*laughs*—I'm a drummer.

SL: You know, I've read some of that early stuff. Those were—what's the axiom if you can't do, you teach? Is that . . .

JW: Right.

SL: And you weren't—you didn't really learn a whole lot from those lessons, but you did pick up brush technique. Is that right?

JW: I did. It was a—he was a big band drummer. And first thing he taught me was rudiments, and he caught on right away that I was never going to master rudiments, so he just pushed right on. He started to showin' me technique about the—about tone differences by—of rim shots in the center of the head where the circle of resonance was and about brushes and about how to deaden the head, and things like that. I use 'em. Today I use 'em. The same tricks. And I guess that was—started in [19]55 or [19]56 tryin' to take lessons, which is. And before that, my

mom just insisted that I stop bangin' around on that poor spinet and take lessons. And so I did take piano lessons from a sainted woman who put up with my learning techniques and finally dismissed me when she realized that I was memorizing the pieces that she'd play. She'd give me the sheet music, and I'd go—I'd she—"Okay," and I'd take it home, and I'd go, "plff," [gestures to indicate waving them off] you know [laughter]. I'd go outside and play baseball.

SL: Right.

JW: And come time to go back for the lesson, I'd mem—just memorize what she'd play, you know, so [unclear word] . . .

[00:40:14] SL: You know, you brought up—you mention something there in the way of baseball and early stuff as a kid. Were athletics and—I mean, baseball, football, basketball—I mean, you engaged in all that stuff as well?

JW: Yeah. If you could run and throw, I'd do it. I enjoyed being outdoors. I mean, I hated being indoors for the most part, so—and so there were at least seven months out of the year where I could be outdoors.

SL: Did that continue through—I mean, were you a part of teams in public schools?

JW: I was.

SL: Did you go to public schools?

JW: I did.

SL: And so you played on baseball teams . . .

JW: Little League.

SL: . . . in the summer and football? Did you play football?

JW: You know, I did—I played football when I went to prep school, but I despised it. [*SL laughs*] The idea was great. I bought all the hoo-ha, you know, the little pads, and you know, I went just a couple of weeks in football practice. And I went, "This just sucks." [*Laughter*] I mean, not only did it hurt, you just smashed around. But I didn't much care for the—what became of the people. You know, they became different when they got into team mode. And so pfsfh—and I had to show up—part of being in prep school, I had to do it, but I says—this is just stupid, you know.

[00:41:38] SL: Well, what about baseball? Did you play much baseball?

JW: No, after Little League I didn't. I had no interest in it. I mean, I liked—I went to the Triple-A games with my dad or the Texas League games with my dad. I loved goin' to the ballpark. It's great fun.

[00:41:56] SL: Let's talk a little bit about your dad. We've talked a

little bit about your mom. You know, you mentioned the Ware brothers' interest in the White River, which of course, starts in Arkansas and loops up through Missouri, southern Missouri, and then back down into Arkansas. So did that continue once you got all the way over to Oklahoma City? I mean, that's a pretty big drive.

JW: It continued for him, oh sure. They floated the James and the White at least once a year, usually two or three three times a year as a family. And that was multigenerational. I mean, his mother, my grandmother Ware, went on those float trips until she was ninety-six. *[Laughs]*

SL: Well, so was it a—like a family reunion on the river? I mean, did you attend? Did you go?

JW: I did not attend.

SL: You did not.

JW: That's just like the football I figured right away. This is . . .

SL: Not your deal.

JW: You know, I figured out later on that it's my idea of roughing it is like a four-star hotel. *[Laughter]* So you know, the idea of five or six days on riverbanks just didn't do it for me. I'd much rather play drums by that time.

[00:43:19] SL: But so . . .



JW: So I'll stop you. I'll go a bit back to my dad. My dad was a geologist because he's—cause that's where he made money, as a geologist. He was fascinated by the paleontology of—that we all walk on. It, you know, he went on digs, he looked for dinosaurs, all that kind of stuff. But really he just was crazy about what's underneath the surface and what makes all those things go this way and things go that way [gestures up and down].

SL: Right.

JW: I remember takin' trips with him drivin' across the country, and he'd—he always had a geology—geologist's hammer in the car. And we'd be on old highway—60, 60 [*unclear word*]—"God damn, look at that!" And we'd stop [*makes sound of car coming to a halt*], you know. And he'd run across and start hackin' off pieces of rock and, you know. . .

SL: Well, did you enjoy that?

JW: Oh, I did. Yeah. And I—the other thing that I—my clearest memory of him, and to me, the most endearing thing, is the—men would come late at night—seemed like always it was late at night, wantin' him to tell 'em what was goin' on in their well. They'd bring in hunks of core—big, big chunks of stuff they'd brought out of the earth. And he'd throw the newspapers on the

floor of my mother's living room. And they'd plop this stuff down and out would come the whiskey, and they'd sit around sucking whiskey and tastin' that rock and crawlin' around and puttin' that rock in their mouth, and he'd tell 'em, "This was this, and this was that," you know. And I'd sit in the corner, watch it goin', "Wow, man, this is great."

SL: That is great, John.

[00:44:56] JW: Yeah, but did it make me want to do it? [*Inhales sharply*] It didn't. Hard to be fascinated and not want to carry on.

SL: Yeah, that's interesting.

JW: But I liked the kinda rough rascals that he hung with, you know. The wildcatters and the row—the roughnecks that came with us. And I went on wells with him. I went sleepin' in the doghouse and on—sittin' wells for days at a time. And I dug that.

SL: Well, *There Will Be Blood* kinda stuff out there.

JW: Exactly that. I mean, not quite that crude, but close.

SL: Yeah.

JW: It was still—the doghouse was made outta wood, and that's, you know, they were grinding then instead of hammerin' their way through the soil. But it was stuff. And watchin' 'em break bits and go fishin' for that stuff and I—it was exciting.

SL: It—dangerous.

JW: It was dangerous, seriously dangerous.

SL: Yeah.

JW: People were hurt. But it had him—by the time he was in his fifties or so, it had him wrapped up. He loved the oil business by then.

[00:46:18] SL: Did you ever see a well blow?

JW: Physically I went to one that was blowing, but no, I never was present when it happened.

SL: [*Exhales*] So you enjoyed goin' to the ball games with him.

JW: I did.

SL: You enjoyed doin' the archaeology kinda stuff with him out on the road. I mean, I know whenever I'd go on little road trips with my parents my mom would always dig up plants . . .

JW: Oh yeah?

SL: . . . to put back in her yard. [*JW laughs*] Your dad was out there chippin' off rocks lookin' at the history of stuff.

JW: Right.

SL: Um . . .

JW: Now he did—we're still on my dad here for a . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: He did expect that I would eventually get the bug. Not that he



was puttin' on a show much. 'Cause he just dragged me places because he assumed that's what a dad did. I mean, I don't think he got the manual. So he just, he—on a gut level—he—like he got me a shotgun when I was, like, eight—seven or eight years old. And so we went out and killed birds. And he taught me how to fish, he taught me how to kill birds, taught me how—I mean, actually, it stayed with birds for me. Keeping in mind that we ate what we killed.

SL: Yeah.

[00:47:48] JW: And if we caught fish, we ate those, too. But he taught me that stuff, and he took me out to the wells. But it wasn't that he was primin' me for the deal, for the kill, to go to geology school. But it was just playin' the role that he figured a dad was supposed to play. And I was supposed to be playin' the role that the kid was supposed to play. And it was, you know, things were going swimmingly. I went to the church. I went to the wells. I went fishing occasionally. I went out and killed birds. And then I discovered music, and it just went. [*Laughs*] And he just accepted it.

SL: And so there wasn't this huge [*chair squeaks*] tear between you because of that, I mean.

JW: Not really. I think that there was in pillow talk. But it wasn't to

me.

SL: I see.

[00:48:41] JW: I'm guessin'. Because it didn't come my way, but—
and when curious-lookin' people started showing up at my
house, he was cool about that.

SL: Curious-looking people. [*Laughs*]

JW: I don't know how else to put it, Scott. [*Laughter*]

SL: I love that. So you were—you started then having
curious-looking people show up at the house when you were . . .

JW: Thirteen.

SL: . . . thirteen. You had a trap set then?

JW: I had a drum set. I played on a record—there was little studio in
Oklahoma City. A three-track studio downtown Oklahoma City
that actually was a demo studio for Nashville. And it was
because this guy had the foresight to invest the money he made
as an entertainer—he was kinda like—he had kind of a Homer
and Jethro thing goin' on with a partner.

SL: You remember his name?

JW: Yeah, oh yeah. They were Wiley and Gene. Gene Sullivan was
the guy.

SK: Okay.

[00:49:52] JW: And it was a kinda—it was hayseed humor. And they



played county fairs, and as television developed they became television personalities. But he built a studio that was primitive. But like crazy primitive compared to now. But he got—he had regular clientele out of Nashville. So—I—this is beyond my goin' to—my mother taking me to the record store on Saturday mornings. But I got to hanging out at the downtown music store, Larsen's Music. And I—that's where I started meetin' the curious people. And I met this guy, Wesley Reynolds. And I met this very interesting, old black man. I was trying—couple days ago, and I was thinkin' about doing this, and I was tryin' to remember that man's name, and I can't. He was surely in his seventies or early eighties then. And he was a piano player. And he was one of the first guys I gigged with. We just—we kept meeting down at Larsen's, and he asked me if I would come and play a show with him, and I said, "Yeah." And I did. My folks took me over to this little black club, and I played, you know. And a little later on when I was able to drive—my parents gave up of this "this is the law" at sixteen. I was drivin' when I was just barely fifteen. And so I'd go over and get this old gentlemen and drive him to clubs, and we'd play as a duo, piano and drums.

SL: Now this is mid-[19]50s. Is that right?

JW: This would have been [19]57. [Nineteen] fifty-six. Late [19]50s.

[00:51:24] SL: [Nineteen] fifty-seven. so this is like the peak of integration . . .

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . segregation.

JW: I mean, in fact if they'd—if those guys figured out that I was a fifteen-year-old—they knew I was a white kid. That was easy. But if they knew I was fifteen, they'd've thrown me out in a sec—in a heartbeat. But anyway, so I met this old guy. And I met Wesley Reynolds, who is a kind of a hillbilly rocker, before you had a name like rockabilly. But he was—he was a hayseed, but he played—he had a Strat. He set around the music store that Saturday mornings playing guitar, and I thought, "This is—I need to know this guy." And so I just bugged him. I mean, I was obnoxious, and I'd bug him. [*SL laughs*] And he finally came and got me, and I started playing a little bit with Wesley. And I met other folks there. Wesley took me down Sullivan's once—one time—one Saturday, and we cut a record that sold a million damn records.

SL: What was it?

JW: It was the male cover of "Crazy Arms" by a guy named Bob

Beckham who today is the president of Monument Publishing. I got paid ten dollars, and I played a little shuffle behind this thing on a three-track, and it [*laughs*] sold. It was a hit record in 1957.

[00:52:44] SL: So you picked up on the shuffle playing with the—in the black bars, you think?

JW: Yeah.

SL: Is that where that came from?

JW: It was.

SL: Wow.

JW: And I tell—I learned from that old black guy—God, I can't—it's so embarrassing I can't think of his name—the difference between a swing and shuffle. And they are a different animal. A swing is [*taps out rhythm on the table*]. But a shuffle you picture a waltz, "Doon dat dat, doon dat dat, doon dat dat, da dat, da dat, da da." That's a shuffle. And you—for me, you picture an egg rollin'. You know, it's got a pointy side and a round side. And you picture an egg rollin'. That becomes a picture of a shuffle, you know.

SL: [*Laughs*] I love that. I love that. So you—the first time you're in a studio you make a—you do a cut, it sells a million records.

JW: No, it was maybe the second or third. But early on in the—any

studio experience. Yeah, that happened. I mean, I didn't know it was a hit record until later on, but it was.

SL: Wow. Where are we on time?

Trey Marley: We've got about ten minutes left, five or ten. But we can take a break.

SL: Why don't we take a break here?

TM: Yeah, sounds good.

[Tape stopped]

[00:53:59] SL: We were talkin' about your first recording studio product selling a million records, and you didn't—how long was it before you knew that that had happened?

JW: Years.

SL: Years?

JW: Yeah, I mean—I got—don't remember exactly—it wasn't a revelation to me like listening to it saying, "Oh wow, that's me!" Somebody told me about it, and I ran into Bob Beckham in Nashville at Maude's. It was an industry hangout restaurant bar, years later in the [19]80s when I was livin' there. I heard the—a conversation at the next table. And we were leaving at the same time. I realized that was who it was leaving the restaurant at the same time. And I stopped him, and I said—gave him my name, and I said, "Do you remember 1957 when we cut"—and

I—that's as far as I got. He said, "You were the kid at Gene Sullivan's." [*Laughs*] I said, "Yeah."

[00:55:04] SL: Well, who—I wonder who reaped all the benefits from that million-seller? I guess . . .

JW: Publishing.

SL: Publishing.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JW: There was a common practice when women cut a song to back it up with a male cover. But they didn't—nobody believed that Patsy Cline's ability to continue to sell records, so they continued to back 'em up. And in terms of jukebox sales, which is where most of the money was made, to selling to distributors—which was selling to the mafia. So they would sell more product out the door, on plastic, to jukebox owners by male vocalists.

SL: Business is business, I guess. That's funny, but you know, I mean, had you known, at the time, you probably just could have quit. I mean, a million records. [*Laughter*] You know. Selling ten or twenty thousand's a pretty big deal.

JW: It is. You know, it's easy to sell a million units. It was then, and it still is. I mean, a million units to jukeboxes.

SL: You know, I don't even know—I'm not aware of that market or

how that works, but it continues to this day, you think?

JW: I believe so. The—even though some jukeboxes have nothing in them but files . . .

SL: Right.

JW: . . . there's still a sale. You know.

SL: Wow. [*JW laughs*] Okay, so you're fifteen years old at that time?

JW: Mh-hmm.

SL: And you're already gigging. You've got your own trap set . . .

[00:56:50] JW: Let me stop you just for a second. I want you to know that I wasn't very good. You know, I had more than a knack, but I wasn't exactly a gifted drummer. I had some vision because I'd been helped early—very early on by some folks to get a—helped me get a picture of how music should feel. You know, it was never about how drummers play. I just—I never got that. You know, I got a little bit from that teacher that showed me about drumheads and stuff. But never got a feeling for—you know—just because I never was in a marching band. I never took band in school. So I—and I still can't play rudiments, and I can't—I mean, I can't play a press roll. [*SL laughs*] So—I've had a pretty good career [*laughter*] for a guy as a drummer for a guy who can't play a press roll.

SL: Well, have you ever thought about taking lessons?

JW: I—occasionally I do that.

SL: Really?

JW: But it—I never really get—because I'm—for some reason, my hands just don't work very well doin' that, and it ends up with teachers wanna talk to me about who I know.

SL: Right. Yeah, I can understand that. Well now, but going—I mean, parallel with this intense fascination with music and your early stages of involvement with it, you've also got an art thing happening at this time, too, don't you? I mean, isn't there some kinda . . .

JW: That's true. And that's probably is more of the same—more of knack. I had a knack for makin' images. Because I wasn't exactly exposed to grand ideas about art in my home or in the community in Oklahoma City. I saw some stuff hangin' on walls. A—some—nothin' that just sucked me in. But seeing Impressionist art in books and going to public school, which I did after my stint at prep school. I made things that looked like Impressionist art. Mostly it was like sloppy renderings. But I was fearless about making paintings the way I was fearless about playing drums. I mean, so what if I'm wrong? [*Laughter*] Come and get me.

SL: Right. I'll never be in this town again.

JW: Right. You know, I had a pretty cool thing going on until I got to college, and I said, "Oh, I'm an art major." And I looked around at the other kids—the other eighteen-year-olds that were art majors. And they're doin' stuff that I was goin', "How the hell'd you know how to do that?" Man, I mean, I'm in serious trouble here. And then I was exposed to art every day in southern California in class. Art textbooks, which I didn't have in high school, so there were other things to mimic. And the head of the department beginning of my sophomore year liked me as a person, and so he used to take me into LA to—'cause he was a mover, that guy was. And that—when I first started seein' people really doing things, serious stuff in the [19]60s in the art world, it French-fried me. And I couldn't decide if I wanted to own it or do it. And I'm not much of an ownership guy, so doing was the next best thing. You want to move to another area, or do you want me to just keep goin'?

[01:01:09] SL: I want—before we dive into the college stuff and—I want to talk a little bit about the schools in Oklahoma City and what was goin' on there. First of all, did you have any what you would consider mentors or any favorite teachers growing up? Was there a moment where someone turned a light bulb on for

you?

JW: Probably the answer is yes. There was this guy when I was in high school, public high school. The first class I took from him maybe was sophomore, maybe junior year, in the science department. I think the—in general in the [19]50s and [19]60s if you were teachin' in the science department, you taught whatever science course they handed you to teach. I don't know if he had a specialty because I took biology, and then I took chemistry, and I may have taken a physics class from him. I don't remember. So you understand what I'm sayin'. His name was Paul Swan. He was—he'd had polio when he was a child. So he had two cane braces, you know, and braces on his leg.

SL: Yeah.

[01:02:27] JW: Which never affected me one way or the other, but he was cool in class. I liked the way he explained stuff. Matter-of-fact way he talked about—I guess the first course was biology. And I just liked him because of the way the hour went by. And then we just got to be friends. His wife was really interesting, and so—they didn't live far from my parents' house at that time. So occasionally I went over to his house and bugged him. I bought a car from him. I guess during my senior year. So we hardly were peers, but we were friends.

SL: So and . . .

JW: And he did—he switched on somethin' in me. And I think it was when I enrolled in a chemistry class. And I tended to sail through classes. I'm just too smart in some ways, and I'm lazy in others. In high school—because I'd been to prep school earlier, and it was so hard, and it had—speaking of switching on—it had switched on learning skills, learning tricks, mnemonics and stuff like that. So I was just whippin' through public high school. And it was like I was on autopilot. It was so easy after two and a half years in prep school. And I'll tell you if you wanna know . . .

SL: Yes, I do.

JW: . . . for this interview why I left prep school, too, but . . .

SL: Well, I want to know first of all what was the name of the prep school.

[01:04:02] JW: Casady. *C-A-S-A-D-Y*. The Casady School.

SL: Okay.

JW: It's still in existence.

SL: Is it an Episcopalian . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . deal? There in Oklahoma City.

JW: Mh-hmm.

SL: And so that was essentially what would be junior high school? Is that . . .

JW: Mh-hmm. Seventh grade.

SL: Seventh grade, mh-hmm.

JW: It goes through twelfth.

SL: But you lasted two years there.

[01:04:29] JW: Halfway through my ninth grade year [leans far forward]—sorry about that [to camera operator]. [*Laughter*] Focal problems there. I didn't dislike the school. I didn't dislike the amount of work, although it was hellish to be—what are you then? Fifteen years old and have almost no time to do anything except get ready for school and go to school. But that's not the reason I wanted to get out. I was so sick of those people. The—what'd S. E. Hinton call them in *Rumble Fish*? The socis, you know. I really—because I—I started hanging out with those kids that played music, and I wanted to be with rougher kids. That simple. And I thought the best way to do that is to go rough—where rougher kids are. So I invented—a complete fabrication—I invented a whole reason. I had to go to the school board and ask to go to a school that was out of my district. So I stood up in front of the school board, and I said, "uh, yuh, duh, blah, blah, blah, blah, art department," I landed on. And they said,

"Oh well, okay." I had no idea what the art department at Northwest Classen was all about. I just lied. But the school—it worked for me. The school—it—cause I went in halfway through my sophomore year, and I was taking—halfway through my junior year—wrong. Ninth grade. And I was taking classes a year ahead . . .

SL: Right.

JW: . . . by then, of course, and so all my friends were a year or two older than I, the friends I made there at public school. And that served well—served me well. And they were tough. A lot of 'em were seriously tough kids. And I dug it a lot. Mostly I just—I liked bein' around that . . .

SL: Danger.

JW: Danger, yeah. [*SL laughs*] It was danger. Yeah, there were gang fights every Thursday afternoon or, you know, I just—not like I ran over and tried to beat somebody up. But it was just—it was there, and I liked it. I liked taps on their shoes that sparked when they—when they walked, you know. [*Laughs*]

SL: So your mom and dad were okay with that?

[01:06:42] JW: Yeah, they let a lot of the subterfuge in my life go.

They must have known what was going on. When we moved out to Nichols Hills, they bought a house that had a

mother-in-law . . .

SL: Quarters.

JW: . . . on it, on the other side of the garage.

SL: Put you out there.

JW: And they just moved me out there, drum set, spinet piano, little thing called a bed. And people who wanted to play music with me could come and go as they damn well pleased. [*Laughs*]

SL: Wow.

JW: They put a refrigerator outside the door. And my dad kept it stocked with beer.

SL: No kidding.

JW: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: It was heaven.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Wow.

[01:07:29] JW: And I'll say—talk—since they're both dead, I can talk outta school. You know, I went out at night, and they just didn't know where I was goin'. Sometimes I lied and said I was gonna go study at so-and-so's house, and I'd drive down to Ada and play in a bar for four hours. Or I'd say I was goin' up to the movies with so-and-so, and I'd go out and catch a show at one of the black clubs with the—Top Hat Club, mainly. I'd go see

Ray Charles or Little Richard. And I could get into that place because I'd been playin' with that black gentleman. And so they knew me in the black music community. And so not only could I get in without showing an ID, I could get in as a white kid, you know. So that was my life. And I told my mom I'd wake her up and tell her I was home. So one o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the morning, I'd come in and say, "Mom, I'm back, and everything's cool." And she'd say, "Fine. Goodnight." And I'd get up in the next morning and go to school.

SL: You know, it's amazing . . .

TM: Excuse me. John, your left lens has a little speck on it, came from somewhere. Can you look at your . . .

JW: My left?

TM: Yes.

[01:08:42] SL: What's amazing about this freedom that you've got going in the interracial experiences that you were having, this is going on at a time when interracial relations were a big thing, all across America.

JW: It was. You know, it was probably a malfunctioning thyroid on my part or something. [*Laughs*] You know, I was—I felt no need to be a pioneer. I just wanted to play—play cool music. When it was—when I—we had a keyboard player in the band—

we're now sort of in high school. I had a keyboard player, his name was Jerry Fisher, and he was fierce. And he was completely unreliable. I mean, just never knew if this guy was gonna show up. But when he did, it was hot. And he was maybe a year older, and he got the chance to join a band of older guys, and he jumped on it. Playing—went straight to playin' nightclubs, and so I didn't—our band did not have a lead singer. So I went to the black musicians union. Who knew there was a black musicians union? This'd've been [19]59 or so. And I said, "Well, I've got this band, you know, white high school, and I really need a singer, and I just ?wanted to hear?—you know anybody—any kids? Any black kids?" I probably said Negro at the time. And this—the guy that I met with said, "Well yeah, I do. You need to call Mrs. Summers and see if her boy Carl wants to come sing in it." So I did call, and then I went over meet Carl. And he was kind of a wiry, skinny black kid, you know. He called himself Rogel. [*Laughs*]

SL: Rogel. [*Laughs*]

[01:10:35] JW: And he came, and we had a rehearsal. You know, went and played our first little high-school gig, and he just tore it up. I thought, "Well, here we are," you know. And I never thought about whether we were gonna have trouble having a

black kid. And boy, we did, you know.

SL: Well, let's talk a little bit about that. I mean, so were you playing mostly high school dances and proms and that sort of thing, and you'd probably land into a venue, a high school gym or cafeteria and probably . . .

JW: And they just wouldn't let us in. Restaurants were the worst, but yeah, they were—occasionally we would show up at a venue, and they said, "We didn't know you had Negroes in your band."
[*Sound in the background*]

SL: And so the dance was—they'd have to spin records, I guess, or set up somethin'.

JW: Yeah, I guess. Not my problem [*laughs*].

SL: Man.

[01:11:26] JW: We went down to Dallas to play—one of our first big outings. Went to play some kind of a hoo-ha in Dallas. And the motel was a trip. We just cheated. We just checked in and rushed Carl into the room and rushed him out. But we stopped at a restaurant in the afternoon, and they tried to throw us out of the restaurant. Well, they did throw us out of the restaurant. It was just a—you know, a Big Boy or something like that in Dallas, and so—I mean, we—actually we—you know the trick about—well, maybe you don't—I'll tell you. If you have a

plastic-covered menu, you can put it on top of a glass of water, turn it upside down, and then slide the menu out from underneath the glass, which is what we did [*laughs*] whenever we got thrown out of a restaurant.

SL: Left a mess.

JW: Well, if you tried to move the glass, it was a mess.

SL: Yeah. [*JW laughs*] That's good.

JW: It is good.

[01:12:29] SL: So any physical stuff ever happen? You ever . . .

JW: Fights and stuff?

SL: . . . fights . . .

JW: A little bit . . .

SL: . . . guns, brandish.

JW: . . . but it was such a multinational band. I mean, our lead guitarist was Jesse Ed Davis who's a Kiowa Indian. And bass player was John Selk, a nice WASP boy, and me. We had various keyboard players after we lost Jerry Fisher, but they were all pretty much white boys, white bread. So it was—we had a—it looked like television in the [19]70s. We had a black kid, a Native American kid . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . couple of white kids.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And we did—we got in as much trouble for havin' an Indian as we did for blacks in some places.

SL: Now that's interesting.

JW: It is. It was just not a healthy place to grow up in some ways.

SL: So was Jesse Ed Davis in school with you at the time?

JW: Different school, but yeah.

SL: So that—those were segregated, too, maybe? Were . . .

JW: Sorry?

SL: Were Native American schools segregated?

JW: Oh no, no. It just—the part of town he lived in.

SL: Yeah, uh-huh. Well, I don't know—maybe—should we talk a little bit about Jesse Ed Davis and those . . .

JW: Love to.

SL: . . . early years?

[01:13:54] JW: I was playing in a band that played every Saturday at a YMCA camp in the summertime. And I met Eddie at a—at Larsen Music. And I said, "You gotta come out and play with us"—we don't—we didn't get paid. It wasn't like I was bringin' in a new handout, you know. You know, "Come play Camp Ione with us next Saturday." So he showed up. And he played so differently than those guys that I played with out there. They

were all in the country-swing family.

SL: Sure.

[01:14:33] JW: Their parents played country swing. So we were playin' radio rock and roll, but it all sounded like country music because—it just—you know they put a lot of echo on their guitars, and I loved it. I thought it's great soundin' music, but it was definitely had a crisp, white sound to it. And Eddie showed up, and he was oily. I mean, he just played a totally different kind of music. And those guys said—"don't bring him back anymore," you know. "He's an Indian, and he's kind of a sloppy player." And I thought, "Well, he's not sloppy, he just"—so I started goin' over to his house in the afternoons. He was listenin' to Wes Montgomery and, you know, Jim Hollis. He's listening to jazz guys, it's just completely different kind of playing. I'm not degrading those guys that played at Camp Ione. They were gifted players, really fine guitar players out there. But they had different ears. And I thought, "Well, hell, let's do a band, Eddie." [*Laughs*] So that's where Eddie got plugged into my life. And he was—he never changed for the three or so, four years that we played together. He was always the same guitarist that I heard on records when he showed up in LA. He's oily, kinda sloppy. But he had a feel for that ES 335

that nobody else had. And it started when he was fifteen years old or before.

SL: That's a Gibson guitar.

JW: Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah. Solid body?

JW: No.

SL: Is that a—no, it's a hollow body.

JW: Arched, thin body.

SL: Thin body. So you got to be with him for three or four years then?

[01:16:10] JW: Well, I—about halfway through our little tenure I went to the West Coast to go to college, so I played in the summertime. But yeah, it lasted about that long. And then he ran off. By the time he was a junior in college, he ran off to play for Conway Twitty. So that band went pff, you know.

SL: Yeah. So were you—when you were in Oklahoma City, were you aware of Fayetteville, Arkansas at all at that time or . . .

JW: We were completely enamored of Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks. If we had a choice of somebody to copy, it was either Bobby "Blue" Bland or Ronnie Hawkins. And we saw Ronnie and the Hawks regularly. I mean, Oklahoma City was a regular stop on their—in their touring life. So by the time we were sixteen, at

least, we were on chummy terms with Levon and Robbie and Ronnie. We'd sneak into the bars and see them. So it wasn't that many years later that we played the Rockwood. Played Ronnie's club, which, for us, was like playing Carnegie Hall. Not only was it a big place, physically big—have you been in that place, that building?

SL: Yes.

[01:17:40] JW: It was physically pretty big. Enough to be alarming and disarming when you're a teenager. And it was the holy grail of that kind of blues—white blues music. I got to say that I never—I never copped a lick from Levon. Not a single thing I do in my small battery of tricks came from Levon. But his attitude about playing I completely nabbed. [*Laughs*] His—the way he got down into the drum set. I just—I'd sit trying to picture myself, you know, if there were mirrors in the room, which there weren't in my little boy cave out there in my parents' house. I'd try and get down in the drum set. If anybody that I stole from—if anybody deserves naming it was Porkchop Markham who played for Conway. I learned more from Porkchop than I ever did from Levon. Well, that's of no interest. Anyway, the Arkansas thing for us began not playing in Arkansas as in our regular lifetimes because it—Tulsa's about as far as we went,

Tulsa or Dallas. But we got a gig in Tulsa that had a—maybe a country club. Maybe it was the Tulsa Country Club. But Dayton Stratton was there as part of the party. And he came up and talked to us afterwards, and said, "You guys are great. You ought to come over and play this club in Fayetteville." We went, [*laughs*] "Oh yeah. What time does that start?" And I was out of it after that. Eddie stayed in contact with Dayton, and we did. We played the—couple of times, played the Rockwood.

SL: I want to talk about both Ronnie Hawkins and the Rockwood. But let's talk about a Ronnie Hawkins show. So he comes to Oklahoma City the first time you see him?

JW: Uh-huh.

SL: Wha . . .

JW: I think it was the Peppermint Lounge.

SL: Peppermint Lounge.

JW: On Tenth—Tenth Street.

SL: And this is early [19]60s or . . .

JW: Mh-hmm.

SL: So what was his show like? I mean . . .

[01:20:05] JW: It was like a frontal assault. He—th—to begin with, they played loud, but almost nothing was miced. There were like a couple a mics on stage, and Ronnie used 'em. Garth's

Leslies weren't miced. Levon's drums weren't miced. So when he wanted to pump up the volume on somethin', it—he was like a track star. Ronnie would finish his vocal part, and he'd run to the instrument that was going to take that solo, and stab that mic into the Leslie or stab that mic into front of the Gibson amp that Robbie was playing through. You know, they were that—next solo came in he'd run to that. And he was great. He literally was an athlete [pronounced ath lēt]. Or in Arkansas terms, he was an athlete [pronounced a thə lēt]. [*Laughs*]

[01:20:50] SL: Athlete [pronounced a thə lēt], yeah. Well, so he—let's talk a little bit about Ronnie Hawkins's moves. I've seen some early films of him—footage of him, and just the way he pranced there was a fluid nature.

JW: Wasn't he an athlete? I think he was.

SL: Well, yes.

JW: Ran track or something.

SL: Yeah, he did—he was a—he wanted to do the—there are stories about he and the track coach.

JW: Whatever.

SL: Anyway, high jump was a thing.

JW: Before he put on his legendary bear-like girth . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . he was quite trim and . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . and wildly athletic on stage and scary. I mean, he'd, "rrr," you know. And that band, I mean, they'd work at it. They'd start a—Levon'd start a groove, and they'd work it. And Ronnie'd start singin' not when he was supposed to—after they'd gotten that thing goin' on, and they'd get some dangerous pockets. I remember sitting a couple times with Eddie goin', "I don't know what they're doin', but I sure love it." [*Laughter*]

[01:22:10] SL: Well, so Ronnie did something called the camel walk.

JW: Yeah, right. I forgot about that, but yeah. He did have some dance moves.

SL: Precursor to the moonwalk, I think. Also I heard that he was able to do backflips.

JW: Oh, I never saw that. Wouldn't surprise me.

SL: Yeah. [*JW laughs*] So was a—so Robbie was already playing guitar for him when you saw him, or was he playing bass?

JW: When I saw him—I heard about his playing bass, but I did a thing with Roy Buchanan in Carnegie Hall. And I spent a couple of days with Roy, and he got to talking about playing with Ronnie then and Robbie coming up to be a bass player. Apparently Robbie was a teenager then.

SL: Yes. Yeah, showed up in Fayetteville on the bus station, black leather pants [*laughs*] in the middle of the summer. He was great. Yeah. He was basically a roadie out of Canada.

JW: Right.

SL: Ronnie had a knack . . .

JW: For findin' people.

SL: . . . of finding people . . .

JW: God.

SL: . . . and gettting the most out of 'em.

JW: Fred Foster. I mean, th—some of the—some monumental talents went through that band.

SL: Even the recent stuff that I've seen him do. The kids that he brings in are just . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . off the scale. Great.

JW: Well you know, if you want to be great—always have great people around you, that kind of stuff. If you wanna sound great, always have the best musicians. There it is.

SL: Was Ronnie still—was he really good with the banter with the audience?

JW: Yeah. I don't recall a lotta that because we paid attention to the music and not the show. But yeah, he was.

[01:23:56] SL: Yeah. Okay, well let's go to the Rockwood Club now.

Was it—I mean, it was the place.

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: As near as I could tell. [*JW laughs*] Or from what I've heard. I never got to go see those guys play there, but my brothers bounced there.

JW: Oh yeah?

SL: [*Laughter*] Yeah, so I knew about it, you know. But was it always packed when—the times that you were there? I mean you—how many times did you get to be in there?

JW: Twice.

SL: Twice.

JW: The band played with me. They may have played other times without me.

SL: Yeah.

JW: It [*laughs*—was it packed? Did the place have its own audience? Yeah, the answer's yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JW: They didn't care who was playin', I think. [*Laughter*] It was a place in Fayetteville to drink.

SL: Yeah. Well, so did you deal with Dayton when y'all went there or was?

JW: Well, I know we did the first time. I can't recall the second.

[01:24:56] SL: Yeah, yeah. What do you remember about Dayton Stratton?

JW: You know, I was trying to think about that a couple a days ago leading up to this. And not much. I seem to remember Dayton was a cool dresser. And he was a—I mean, he looked a part of kind of a rock impresario. But beyond that I don't remember much.

SL: He was a little guy.

JW: Yeah, well, he looked a bit like his son, doesn't he?

SL: Yeah, yeah. But fearless.

JW: Yeah, oh yeah.

SL: There was a fearless . . .

JW: I thought it was weird that he approached us in Tulsa like that. I mean, we were obviously a bunch of kids, you know.

SL: Well, he liked what he heard.

JW: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: And probably could get you real cheap.

JW: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] I wasn't even aware that Ronnie was there, but Ronnie told me years later in Tulsa—I think it was in Tulsa one night that he'd been there one night when we played. Wish he'd said something. [*Laughter*]

[01:25:53] SL: Well okay, so you—I mean, we can always go back to this high school stuff and this early rock-and-roll stuff that you're doin'. Was it—kinda migrate toward the rockabilly sort of thing that—because of . . .

JW: That band?

SL: Yeah.

JW: It was pretty much a blues band, and if we migrated toward anything other than that it was jazz. We played instrumentals that we nabbed off of jazz albums. Nothing complex jazz, just instrumentals that did have a jazz, bluesy-jazz edge to them.

SL: Okay, okay. All right, so how do you extricate yourself from the music thing and end up in the Pomona College deal? How'd that come about?

JW: Well, I started taking the SATs because I was just forced to get ready for college. And as good as I was at mastering classes, I never was test savvy. You know, so I—first time I took the SATs was in my sophomore year—my tenth-grade year.

SL: Yeah.

[01:27:14] JW: You know, I did poor to average. And I just got better by taking 'em a couple times a year. So I got a high enough score the last time I took the SATs that I could actually apply to schools that had some merit. But you know something?

I got accepted a bunch of schools totally because I was from Oklahoma. [*Laughs*] I mean, everybody was lookin' for some feeling of diversity then in the [19]60s.

SL: Even then?

JW: Yeah. And I got accepted at Stanford. I got accepted at Reed. I got accepted at Pomona. I swear to God every one of those—I just know Pomona was—I feel that the other two was looking for some sense of diversity, states.

SL: Lookin' for an Okie.

JW: Go get an Okie. [*SL laughs*] And I mean, my roommate had a 1600 . . .

SL: Wow.

JW: . . . on SATs. Yeah. He ended up being a C student. I graduated with—I graduated cum laude with a A-minus average. [*Laughs*] Go figure. But it was—I chose Pomona because it was in Southern California. I was John Steinbeck right down the line. You're an Okie, you go to Southern California. Follow Route 66. I admit it right out front.

[01:28:35] SL: So you get there, and it's all about art right off the bat or . . .

JW: No, it's all about hellaciously difficult school. I was enrolled in art, of course, but no, it was—I went to art history classes, and I

went to studio classes, and I draw—I drew naked people, and I tried to make paintings. And I mean, it was just stuff you did as a student. Mainly it was acclimating myself in a completely different kind of life.

SL: Culture shock.

[01:29:07] JW: Yeah. I mean, everybody was way smarter than I was, and it's a big, big learning curve. I mean, I was not like a big man on campus thing in high school. 'Cause once I went to public school I wanted to be, as I said earlier, I wanted to be with the tougher kids. And there was this girl who was a cheerleader. Honestly, I think I'm back in S. E. Hinton's stories again. But she took a hankerin' to me. She was a year older. And she said, "You can run this school if you want to." She said, "You should be runnin' for class office and stuff." I said, "I don't wanna do that, you know." And she said, "Well, you should. Don't be a dope." She said, "All these kids think you're cool, so you should do [*unclear words*]." I said, "Well, they think I'm cool cause they don't know me." [*Laughter*] "Trust me." And so I finally did. I ran for class—after running everybody else's thing 'cause as an art student I made posters and sort of ran campaigns for other people in other years. I ran myself and became senior class president. And never was something so

stupid as to elect me as senior class president 'cause I had all this ability to make decisions for the senior class. And I made just weird choices about no study halls or, you know. They—everybody loved it. They all went, "Oh yeah, this guy's great." And I was just breakin' rules and *[laughter]* it was—but my point was I got to Pomona College campus, and I was like, God, everybody was just swimming in accolades, you know.

SL: You felt tiny.

[01:30:50] JW: I had chosen to not take a drum set with me. You know, I just thought I know I am going to get to college, and it's just going to be too much to do, A. And, B, I could always drive back and get 'em, you know. And probably my life's going to change anyway. So I got there, and I was right about some things—too much work. But it seemed like every third kid in the hallway was a drummer. And I think, "Well, God, why mess with this?" So I became a guitar player, you know. I mean, I knew enough licks from Eddie to get by playing some blues. I went to a pawnshop and I bought a Sears Silvertone and an Ampeg amp, and I—suddenly I was a guitar player. Halfway through my freshman year I had a band *[laughs]* playing lead guitar. Talk about the blind leading the blind. You know, Kit, my wife now, only knew me at Pomona as a guitar player. When we met

again years later in life, I mean, she found out I was a drummer, she was stunned. [*Laughter*]

SL: So you met her while you were at Pomona?

JW: I did—I knew—I met her sister who was the class above me. And Kit was at Colorado College. And she transferred after—we met at her sister's graduation. And she transferred to Pomona for her senior year. And we met then and dated then and, you know, just at the—by the end of our senior year, we went different directions.

[01:32:27] SL: Yeah. Okay, so I'm trying to the get the—your itinerary here at Pomona College. Your major interest was in the art side of stuff there?

JW: It was. I—honestly, I didn't have a clue about what I might do with it.

SL: Right.

JW: But as I said I had a knack, and I wanted to see where the knack would take me.

SL: And one of your art instructors kind of took you under his wing and would take you to LA to shows?

JW: He was a art history guy.

SL: Art history guy. And you were influenced by the Impressionists, the French Impressionists? I mean . . .

JW: Well, that had happened earlier because I—the wall space museums that I saw in Oklahoma City and Dallas had Impressionist work. So I saw that. No, what—this teacher we're alluding to is Nick Cikovski. And he was a New York guy. His dad was an Ash Can School painter. He was a hardcore art, art-all-the-time art guy. And he did start taking me to LA. And so I saw real artists making real stuff. Guys that made a living who were not much older than I. [01:33:53] And it really changed things. And it's not like I went back to the studio and started to copy them. I didn't at all. You know, the first stuff I think I actually wanted to emulate was maybe Hans Hoffman and Helen Frankenthaler. I liked abstract expressionists although I didn't know what the hell it was. I knew I liked the way it looked. So I had a few dollars in my pocket. I could go down, buy stretcher bars, make big canvases, and spread a bunch of paint around. And some of 'em made people go, "This looks great." And my teachers—"This is—you're making important strides," I'd hear. You know, and I thought I'm just pushin' paint around on a canvas. I don't know what the hell I'm doin'. [*SL laughs*] By the time I was—the end of my sophomore year I had this, like, bag I was into. And I decided I wanted to step out with it. I mean I knew I couldn't get a show in LA but stuff like that, but I

could. So I applied during my junior year to Yale, to the summer school. And I shot a bunch of slides of these abstract expressionist, New York school-lookin' stuff. And I took a couple a photographs of me with my paintings behind me. And I got accepted to Yale Summer School of Music and Art, which is a, I found out later, was a huge deal. You know—once again I think they took me 'cause I was an Okie. [*Laughter*] But I got there, and I was really outclassed cause this like twenty painters chosen from the nation of people my age—people seventeen years old. And they—I mean, they knew what the hell they were doin'. And I was like pshh. That was a—that was a scary summer. Three months of not havin' any direction. [01:35:58] I mean, I couldn't or wouldn't take direction from the rotating School of New York teachers that were comin' in. Although all of them had something of value to say to me, I just couldn't figure a way to be hip and do it. You know, I wanted to be pop. I went into New York on weekends, and I saw—I went to the Factory. I met those kids at—workin' for the Warhol. 'Cause that Warhol—well, I didn't want to be Andy Warhol but I—you know, I wanted to find out what was goin' on. Went to some of the small galleries in New York and said, "I want to know how to do that. I want to feel like I can do that and call it mine rather

than my version of somebody else's stuff." And I just never caught it while I was at Yale. So I came back with a body of work, and I had a show in Oklahoma City at the end of the Yale summer, and I sold every one of those pieces. Sold-out show. I sold thirty-something paintings. And all my drawings. So like the ladies with a checkbook in Oklahoma City, they wanted those things to go over their sofas. [*Laughs*] You know. And I felt—I didn't feel gratified. I had a few dollars in my pocket, and I thought, you know, take 'em. And I went back to my senior year at Pomona and they—I talked my way into having a year of self study . . .

SL: Sure.

[01:37:34] JW: . . . self-directed study. And at the end of that year, I had to put on a show at the gallery at Pomona. So it's not like I jerked off that year. I mean, I did spend a lot of time tryin' to figure out how I could make a statement. And I built, during that year, a set of props, essentially. They were just like props for a movie of happening art. It was like you'd see in the background of a scene in an art gallery. Don't look at 'em too closely [*laughs*] 'cause my craftsmanship was suspect. But they had this buzz, this LA buzz. And I had to have a review of the work by panel of painters and art historians. And they all went,

"This is great." And it wasn't great. You know, it was props. I propped out the gallery.

SL: Yeah. Had that been done before, you think? Do you think it was something they weren't familiar with?

JW: It was done the next year.

SL: There you go. [*JW laughs*] So they probably were taken aback . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . by the freshness of it, which is probably kind of a reoccurring . . .

JW: Theme in my life. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . theme of your life, yeah. There's something fresh that . . .

JW: Could be.

[01:39:03] SL: Yeah. Well so, you're—it sounds like you're very engaged and really thinking a lot and trying to—I don't know how much you are working on your craft, but you are certainly in that art world. But there's also still this music thing happening on the side? Or is it equal time?

JW: I was playing with some people. I spent some time playing with Frank Zappa when he was living in Cucamonga. We just played bars. And I spent some time with some kids in LA. And we played clubs and stuff—pop music, psychedelic pop.

SL: What—so was Zappa doing psychedelic stuff, pop? Or what was he doing?

JW: Really, he was playin' bar music.

SL: Bar music?

JW: This was before he started taking himself seriously. He had a little studio in Cucamonga, and the best thing about knowin' Frank then was his mom was a great cook. And we used to have Sunday dinner at their place. It was great. [*SL laughs*]

SL: Well, that's good.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Well, so . . .

[01:40:10] JW: But I wasn't playing drums with Frank. I was playing bass with Frank. And then I had that band that—when I played guitar in. But it was just nonsense. All of it was. And I did miss playing drums, and that's—which is why I played with those kids in Hollywood. But it was pretty [*laughs*] highly suspect music. And I still didn't have my drum set. I was borrowing drums to play with those kids. And it wasn't until after I'd graduated—I'd gone to graduate school that I dragged my drum set to LA. So I know you're trying to get a path of music, but it comes later, Scott.

SL: Okay, okay. Well, I mean, just—okay, well, let's go on then.

You graduate from Pomona. I guess you get raving reviews from your . . .

JW: I did.

SL: . . . senior show. What do you do now? I mean, so what's next?

JW: Well, the Yale summer school is a gateway drug for Yale graduate school.

SL: Okay.

JW: And they just expect after you've had the Yale summer experience, and you go back into your senior year, that you will enroll in Yale graduate school. I thought New Haven sucked it. I mean, they took us out and gave us the dog-and-pony show on a couple of weekends. I felt like that, you know, Boston—I could see Boston. I could not see New Haven.

SL: Okay.

[01:41:50] JW: And so I can't say that this is the next best thing, but a little bit of research told me that when people who taught at Yale decided they'd had enough of the town, they went to Santa Barbara. They all went there to teach, and they taught on the beach. [*Laughter*] So I applied to Santa Barbara, and [*claps*] I was in. So I had an almost totally Yale faculty and a teaching assistantship, a house in Carpinteria on the beach, and a drive up the coast to go to class. I was in hog heaven. And it

was a good thing. And I did that for a couple of years. But I finished a Masters, but I didn't finish the M.F.A. And then Reagan cut the budgets like crazy.

SL: This as governor.

JW: As governor.

SL: Yeah.

[01:42:43] JW: So I was out of a gig, and that meant I couldn't pay rent. So I moved back to Claremont where I did my undergraduate work. 'Cause rents were cheap, and I had friends there. And now the story starts.

SL: Okay.

JW: 'Cause I was living in a—they thought at the campus that I was a teacher. I went to student and faculty housing, walked in the door and said, "I need a house." And they just assumed I was faculty, and they rented me, for eighty-five dollars a month, a craftsman house in downtown Claremont.

SL: I've seen those.

JW: Pshh.

SL: They're gorgeous.

JW: It was.

SL: They remind me a lot of the historic district in Fayetteville.

JW: Right.

SL: Actually.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[01:43:27] JW: So I was living in Claremont in a beautiful craftsman house and trying to figure a way to make a living as a painter. And my next-door neighbor was Chris Darrow, who was in a pretty bizarre band called Kaleidoscope. And he had left Kaleidoscope just months before and had joined the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band as a utility infielder. He played mandolin and fiddle and guitar and bass and fiddle. Whatever was needed. So he came to my house one morning, knocked on the door, and he said, "Don't you play drums?" He said, "I know—only know you as a guitar player, but don't you play drums?" I said, "Well, yeah." He said, "Do you have a drum set?" I said, "Well, actually I do." And he said, "Well, I met this girl last night in LA. And I'll tell you, John, she's gonna have a hit record. And she doesn't have a band. And you need to call this girl up and tell her you want to be a drummer in her band. I said, "Okay," 'cause I'm not makin' money doing anything else. So I said, "Okay, I'll do that." Well, now turns out durin' my whatever year—junior year—I'd spent a couple of months in a band with Levon playing bass. Jesse Ed Davis and Levon and I and a

couple of guys from Tulsa had a band. Levon got tired of being booed off the stage behind Dylan . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . and quit.

SL: Yes, I—yes, I know that.

[01:45:00] JW: So he showed up in LA, or he showed up in Arkansas, and then he went to LA. So we had this band. And I could never make it work for me as a bass player playin' for Levon. I just said, "I—find another way. I'm out." It was embarrassing for me, you know. So—but there was a—in this house we rehearsed in in Santa Monica, the harmonica player lived in this house on Hart Street in Santa Monica. There was a girl who was livin' with the harmonica player who cooked meals for us at night when we didn't go to Olivia's or someplace, you know. She was a really cute girl. She was like sixteen or seventeen years old. So a couple of years later, I get this information and a phone number from Chris Darrow. And I call this girl up. Said, "Chris Darrow says I should call you and we should talk about my playin' drums." She said, "Okay. Good. Come on in." So I drove to Santa Monica, and I knocked on the door of this house, and the girl opens the door, she says, "Hey, I know you!" And I said, "Yeah, I know you." And so it was the

girl who cooked at the house with Levon and Jesse Ed, right?

SL: Yeah.

[01:46:06] JW: And that's Linda Ronstadt. So about fifteen minutes in the house, I had a gig [*SL laughs*] playing drums for the Stone Poneys. She never asked me to play; she just said, "Hey, I know you." So that was the beginning of Linda's solo career. And because the Stone Poneys never played a gig really—not after they had a record out. They broke up instantly. Integrity, really because Nick Vinet made this cute little record, "You and I travel to the beat of a different drum." You know, then they went, "Man, we are out of this." And Linda was really a good—great singer. Just a killer. And we went through a bunch of different versions of road bands, and they never stuck until I got Chris Darrow to come leave the Dirt Band and come back in, and we started making a pretty serious country rock band. And what Linda was, is the—she was the school. She was the graduate school for country rock. It was the place to learn country rock 'cause nobody else was doing it. This is 1968. You know, the Eagles didn't exist. Poco didn't exist. We played the Troubadour, so all those guys were, like, watchin' us, you know. And I was with Linda for close to three years doin' that. And it was time to leave. The band was gettin' pretty good. Jeff

Hanna had come from the Dirt Band and joined Linda's backing band. It was gettin' to be a good band. And the guy who wrote "Different Drum" for Linda was Michael Nesmith, the Monkee. So we all got to be friends with Michael. And the Monkees were about to go into destruct mode, implosion mode. And Mike was actually tryin' to produce Linda's backing band—trying. Never amounted to much. He wasn't a great producer and it wasn't really a great band without Linda. And then the Monkees did go belly up. And I went to Mike and said, "You have more contacts than Carter's got little pills, and we oughta be a band." And he said, "Well, I got a lot of bad, bad news goin' on in my life, too." And I said, "Well, let's take a chance. Let's be a band." [*Vehicle passes*] And he said, "Here's the deal, Johnny. If you can get Red Rhodes to leave the Palomino Club and join us, then I'll be a band." So I said, "Okay." And I phoned Red Rhodes, who I didn't know. And I said, "My name's John Ware, and I'm at Michael Nesmith's house, and we want to know if you want to be in a band." We expected him to start laughing. And he said, "Sure." [*Laughs*] So . . .

[01:49:06] SL: Well, tell me about Red Rhodes.

JW: He was a—you know he's dead now?

SL: No, I didn't know that.

JW: He died in the [19]90s. He was a beer-swillin' redneck from East Alton, Illinois, which is St. Louis, which is across the river from St. Louis, which is about as tough a place as a human being can grow up. Red knew how to fight before he quit suckin' tit. [*SL laughs*] I mean, he was a bad boy. But he was also a hell of a electrician. And I don't mean wiring your house; I mean stuff he did with amplifiers and guitars. He was wizard at stuff like that, which served him well after the band with Mike broke up. He became famous again as a amplifier and pickup line master. [01:50:03] But anyway, as far as—what was he like? He was probably the most inventive, very old school steel player in existence. He had a way of playing that was—that goes right back to Charlie Byrd. Very, very old fashioned, and yet he loved to get high. He'd get more loaded than—he'd get higher than an air show in the studio and play the strangest stuff, and it always worked. He was—it was just a masterful blend of complete left-field-thinking Michael Nesmith and stoned Red Rhodes. It was great. It was a great band. And the fact that it only lasted eighteen months only means that it was my problem. 'Cause I broke the band up. I quit because I couldn't stand the inner tension with Mike's life being in such turmoil. And I said—I mean, I quit, and it broke the band up, but it's revered now.

That band is revered. It's some kind of like the—Mike is called the inventor of country rock, and the argument over the Internet is it wasn't Gram Parsons; it was Michael Nesmith. And all this. It's all just BS, but we made records way before the *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* was done, you know. Way before the Byrds did it, or Gram did it or anybody. We did do it first. Doesn't mean it was the best or the—I do like to listen to that music. And I don't like to listen to myself much.

SL: Yeah.

JW: In fact, I don't listen to myself much. But I do like to listen to the First National Band.

SL: Who else was in the group [*someone coughs*]?

[01:51:47] JW: Mike, Red, and John London, whose real last name is Kuehne, who was Mike's friend from San Antonio, from high school. He was Mike's stand-in on the Monkees. They've just remained friends, and he was a more than adequate bass player. He was—and they were a duo. They were like folk duo—Mike and John were when they were first in LA together. Stand-up bass and acoustic guitar. Playin' . . .

SL: You know, the—of course, the print was that, of the Monkees, Mike was the really—only real musician in the group. I don't know if that's entirely true, but . . .

JW: No.

SL: . . . but I remember at one point in time there was, you know, this urge to have them actually do concerts where it was actually them playing and . . .

JW: They did.

SL: Yeah, yeah, but still it sounded like that Mike was pretty much the driving musicality of that group.

[01:52:57] JW: He's was the guy who argued for it becoming a music event and not a television event. He and Donny Kirshner and Bob Rafelson got into fists fights about—not the direction of music because it needed to be pop music, and that's the way it was . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . but about—and not just about their playing it, the integrity of their playin' it, but about their having constant input. Not just showing up with Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart having already cut the tracks.

SL: Right.

JW: You know, they wanted to—Mike wanted them to have a big say in the ongoing musical development of the Monkees. And so much so that a lot of his songs ended up being—I mean I can't say that he wasn't trying to get his songs on there and make

money as a songwriter 'cause he was. But it was about the integrity as much as anything. And you know, he won in some ways. They could never really go out as a foursome and play although they did. It was a hideous mistake. They did a few shows. At one point they hired a black band, a R&B band called Don and the Goodtimers. They were the house band at this place on Sunset Boulevard. We went [*laughs*]*—*I wasn't the first to go, but Mike and I went one night. He said, "You gotta hear this band." And we went to this bar, and they were just knocking it out, this kinda Memphis backbeat stuff. And they went on tour with Don and the Goodtimers, and they got booted off the stage. The teenagers just couldn't handle that.

SL: Didn't know what they had in front of 'em.

JW: Right.

SL: So . . .

TM: Scott, we can—need to change tapes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:54:32] SL: So I'm tryin' to remember exactly where we—I don't remember exactly where we left off, but I remember exactly what I want ask to you.

JW: That's good enough, isn't it? [*SL laughs*]

SL: You mentioned about a brief stint with Levon Helm, and he had left the Dylan tour because—and just for the sake of the folks listening or looking at this—there was a time when Dylan decided to go electric. And he had chosen The Band, the old Hawks, Ronnie Hawkins's Hawks, to be his band. And Bob's audience wasn't ready for that. And so when they started playing the electric music with Bob Dylan, Bob's getting lots of boos. And like the audience didn't like it. And Levon didn't like it—didn't like that reaction, and he left that gig. Spent a little time in Arkansas, a little time actually on oil rigs in the gulf.

JW: Yeah, I heard about that.

SL: And then ended up in LA, I believe. Is that . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . is that the chronology there?

JW: That's about right, yeah.

[01:55:46] SL: And somehow or another, you cross paths with him.

How does that come about?

JW: Well, Eddie Davis was hangin' with Leon Russell as all the Okies in Hollywood were. And ran into Levon there and, you know, a few beers and some what-ifs, and they decided they wanted to do a band. And Tommy Markham was in town, Tulsa singer. Some—there was an odd bunch of people who just got done the

Mad Dogs and Englishman tour. And were all—everybody lookin' for the garbage can full of beer, you know. Just nothin' to do. So Levon and Eddie decided they wanted to do a band. And Eddie called me up and said, "Do you want to be in a band with Levon?" My answer is, "Are you kidding me?" But he was dead serious, and he said, "Don't you play bass?" And I said, "Well yeah, I do have a rig." And he said, "Well, come on to the house and let's see what happens." And Sandy Konikoff was there. There's another drummer. I said so the room is essentially two folk singers, a ?blues shouter?, and drummers. [*Laughs*] You know. So we tried it. We rehearsed, and we had a great time eating and drinkin' beer and playin' old blues songs. It was doomed—just it was no way that we were ever going to get a gig, but we did go one night finally down to a bar in Santa Monica to audition.

SL: [*Laughs*] Gosh.

[01:57:24] JW: I mean, this band had some firepower, I want you to know. But we were—we were nobodies. We were nobody and the nobodies. And we walked in and dragged our little amps and drum set in and set up and played four or five blues songs. And you know, kinda heads down meet you at the coda, long solos, havin' a good time, lots of laughin', you know, till we finished.

The bartender's yelling over at us, "Hey, y'all know 'Monday Monday'?" [*Laughs*]

SL: Oh no.

JW: [*Laughs*] And Levon said, "No, we don't."

[01:58:01] SL: So you guys didn't make the cut?

JW: Didn't make the cut.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh man. But that was a good time.

JW: It was great. And I mean, they went on, and as I have mentioned to you, I found myself being—I was—I didn't even have the right string for the wrong yo-yo. I mean, it was completely the wrong thing for me to be doing. I wanted to be around Levon, but I didn't want to be in that position.

SL: Yeah.

JW: So.

SL: Well yeah, I've never heard you play bass, so I would guess you could probably do that, but sounds like you were in a room where the bar was pretty high.

JW: [*Laughter*] Well, ba—of my own making.

SL: I mean, you know, there's Levon had been playing with Danko, fretless bass. Was yours a fretless bass? Probably not.

JW: No.

SL: Yeah. Well, okay. I just—I had never heard that story, [*claps*]

but I'm glad that you got that chance . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . to spend that time with him because it sounds like it was good. Okay, so where were we in the last thing? We were talkin' about Linda Ronstadt, I think. Weren't we?

JW: I don't know. She would know [points toward audio engineer].

SL: We—there was something that happened . . .

Joy Endicott: You were talking about the Monkees' concert failure.

SL: Oh, the Monkees.

JW: We were in Monkeeland, yeah.

SL: We were in Monkeeland.

[01:59:38] JW: We—I'd actually gotten up to—we'd had some conversation about the First National Band, about Red Rhodes and . . .

SL: Yes.

JW: . . . Michael Nesmith and John London and myself. I—what I will say is about that music in general because we—it was a short-lived band—is I—to this day I enjoy listening to that music. It's—there's a bit of magic in there that's just—I'm not really a—I'm not a recording guy. I don't—I'm not a technician. So recording for me is either magic or complete dead—dead end. And in that case, there was a lot of magic. I can hear mistakes

in it. I can hear my mistakes. I can hear everybody's mistakes in it. But I like to listen to it. You know, as opposed to my tenure with Emmylou where everything is dead solid perfect, you know. [*Laughs*]

[02:00:46] SL: Well, Mike—Michael Nesmith was the driving force in that, right? I mean, he was . . .

JW: In that . . .

SL: . . . kinda callin' the shots on that.

JW: In the First National Band?

SL: Yeah.

JW: Oh yeah, it was Michael's backing band.

SL: And wasn't he very open to just trying stuff? I mean, it seemed like I read something about a—lots of percussive instruments laying around, lots of stuff that you would just—that he would say, "Try that" or whatever, so . . .

JW: Well, the story is that Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, who produced most of the Monkee records, did fill the room with toys. They also filled it with the best studio players in LA, so everyone knew what to do with all the junk that was in the room. The first week we went into RCA to record the First National Band, I walked in to find a room full of toys and things that I'd never seen in my life. And some of them made sense.

They were percussion instruments that were based on keyboards, based on tunings. African instruments that had a scale. Not our scale, but a scale. And I could, you know, I could work my way around 'em. So [*clears throat*] it was fun. It was dangerous stuff. You know, we'd finish a basic track, and he'd say, "Well, Johnny, go play that." "Well, okay." [*Laughter*] And you know, it's—necessity being the mother of invention—you just—you go out and play at it, and sometimes playing at it makes things work.

[02:02:31] SL: So what became of the National Band?

JW: So what became of it?

SL: Yeah, what became of it?

JW: Well, after I walked away from it, Mike, in a stroke of genius, named the replacement parts the Second National Band, [*laughter*] and it just went off the cliff.

SL: Yeah. So what happened with Michael Nesmith after that?

JW: Well, I don't wanna tell Mike's story without Mike in the room, but he—his mother left him with a sizable problem, and that was that she invented liquid paper, and it was an international going and growing concern before the Internet where you could white out anything with the dash of a cursor. It was useful stuff. He tried his best to become interested in the company as a thing to

do with his time.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And that didn't work. He had [*smacks lips*] some money because of his writing, his publishing backlog. And after the band broke up, he took that money and bought a little farm in the city confines, farm, the valley, I don't know which city—could—had the property rights on the—property tax rights on the property. But it was—it was in a neighborhood, yet it was a couple of acres zoned for horses and, you know—and he built a recording studio in it. And it was called Countryside. And he had—I think he had a deal with Elektra for product. And he went after some old resources around LA. Some—and outside of LA. He had maybe a five-person roster, six acts. And the—what the answer to what happened? Not much.

SL: Yeah.

[02:04:42] JW: I was pretty angry, and yet he called me several times, askin' me to come—become involved, get involved, production, something. And I turned him on to some musicians, but I just couldn't do it. Couldn't look the other way. And I—that finally dried up for him. But he—in the process of, I guess the words are, finding a new playground, he got interested in recording himself and making it—television on his terms rather

than looking for a television program, an outlet, he decided to be the engine. So he made this new company then was called Pacific Arts, and he made a long-form video of stuff—of his stuff, full costume, stand-up, some, you know, skits, some music videos. And wildly entertaining stuff called *Elephant Parts*.

SL: Okay.

JW: And he sold it. Had Pacific Arts as a distributor, and he found some people to do the legwork and it—he actually got a Grammy, I think, in that first year it was out. Because they didn't know what to do with it—as the "Best Video Disk."

[02:06:14] SL: Wow, that goes back.

JW: Right. [SL laughs] But it—that just got his appetite up, and Pacific Arts went on to become an esoteric, artist-based record label. You bring the product in, and we'll be a record label. We don't pay to record. Bring the product in.

SL: We'll distribute.

JW: He might remaster but the—what's good for artists in situation like that is you earn for the first product—the first record out of the door, you're earning. It's none of this recoupable stuff because there is nothing to recoup.

SL: Right, right.

JW: And he signed some good people, and he did good work. And

then he expanded Pacific Arts to—into library stuff for PBS. And he distributed, after he got this kinda library deal, he started distributing their television shows for them. He became the video wing of broadcast radio and television and whatever—television. Which was workin' like crazy, I think, the last time I was in contact with him during that period. But they decided to go around him and do their own work. Their own reproduction sales and that kind of—and they made a terrible mistake because they had a contract with him.

SL: Yeah.

[02:07:44] JW: And so he whipped a lawsuit from purgatory on 'em and won.

SL: Yeah.

JW: So he got—I have no idea how much money he made but he made money. And he funded some of his ideas. So now he has this thing in Carmel called Video Ranch, which is a website, and it just does a lot of things. It's—you know what Second Life is?

SL: No.

JW: I'm saying this to you, to the camera. There is an avatar-driven . . .

SL: Okay, yes.

JW: . . . world called Second Life.

SL: Yes, yes, yes.

JW: And this is an alternative version. Or except you go—you're going in to Mike's world in this case. And it's fun.

SL: Neat, yeah, I've seen some of that. It's very cool.

TM: Let's wait for this right here if we can.

SL: Yeah, we've got some noise here.

[Tape stopped]

[02:08:37] SL: So—well, that's good. Sounds like he's doing fine.

JW: He is, and I think he's gonna start performing again. I really have a feeling. He did a little thing on his own on his website a couple of months ago that was for him, that was successful. And we spoke a little bit by e-mail about that and about his feelings about—it's complicated but being—about gettin' in front of an audience when it's not padded with a television camera.

SL: Right. Right.

JW: And I think he's interested.

SL: Good.

JW: His two sons are both musicians and have been encouraging him to do the old family band and . . .

SL: There you go.

JW: . . . we'll see.

SL: Well, that's good.

JW: Yeah.

SL: That's kind of exciting, really. So, but didn't he—now you know, I'm not sure if I should be leaving LA right now or not. What happens next after the Levon thing? What—or I guess the National Band happened next, is that right?

JW: Close enough, yeah. I . . .

SL: Or they're kinda simultaneous?

JW: The Levon thing was before my joining Linda Ronstadt. But . . .

SL: Okay. Well, how did he Linda Ronstadt come across? I mean, how'd that happen?

JW: Well, I explained earlier to you about the, "Hey, I know you," and . . .

SL: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, okay. So how long did that last? Three years?

JW: A little less, and then I [*clears throat*] went to Mike and said, "Let's do a band." 'Cause the Monkees had obviously . . .

SL: Right, okay, okay.

JW: And we did a band.

SL: Okay.

[02:10:15] JW: I will break away for a story. We finished the first album, the First National Band. And it's not as though people were knockin' at the door asking us to come play, but he had a

name, and we had product, and it was getting airplay across the nation. Not a lot, but it was getting airplay. And the first thing we had to do was move to England. [Shakes his head no] We had management, and they said, "We think this is a good idea." So we moved—lock, stock, and barrel. No—not taking wives and pets but, you know, all of us, all of our equipment. We leased a flat in Knightsbridge and lived in England. Went out to play working man's pubs in Scotland and occasional jaunts over to Holland. And they—playing to people who had no idea who we were, who had no idea who the Monkees were. Playin' to—in some places playin' to the chairs. And for months—the first thing we did in town, in London, was throw a party. And which got about as much press as a nuclear disaster. I mean, it just was huge. We leased the top floors of the Hilton on Hyde Park and had a gazillion cases of longneck Buds flown in and a dinner. And invited everybody on his rock and roll Rolodex and had a big ol' party. And you know, got tons of press and still no place to play. It's just—insanity. We had—there was—there were two Rolls-Royce Silver Clouds in the courtyard of the flat we had waiting for us go do things. I mean, none of us had any idea what to do. [*Laughs*]. We were gonna go out and have a beer in this Rolls-Royce? [*Laughter*] We were there for months.

[02:12:06] SL: So management didn't have that figured out? They didn't have a exit strategy, I guess.

JW: No—they didn't have a clue about anything. In the meantime the first single went to number one in the nation in LA or what—number one in LA on, you know, whatever the hot pop chart is. And it—in the top twenty nationally. And then we're not there to chase it.

SL: Back it, yeah.

[02:12:29] JW: Insanity. And that made me nuts. It made me absolutely nuts. And then we got back and played a few gigs. We did a Dick Clark Tour and some other things. And I went to—into the financial office one day and said, "Uh—I think I need some money." And they said, "Well, they ain't none."

SL: Uh-oh.

JW: So.

SL: It's funny how that makes one move on. [*Laughter*]

JW: So anyway, that's—[19]70, the end of [19]71 or so. And so I really was footloose and not too fancy. And I needed somethin' to do. And I signed on with some—what you do in that town. I played for John Stewart. And I played for Hoyt Axton and folk acts that were gettin' electric backing. And you know, it was fun in some cases, especially Hoyt was just fun. We played—we

toured. Did the van and stationwagon tours and playin', you know, five hundred seat clubs and getting outrageously drunk and getting huge reviews. Hoyt was just—he's so much bigger than life or was so much bigger than life. And—you just—it was easy to overlook the fact that it was not musically satisfying.

[*Laughter*]

SL: Right.

[02:13:55] JW: It was just fun. And I—at the end of that period, I was desperate for cash flow. And I took a gig with Johnny Tillotson. "Poetry in motion, ba da da." Right?

SL: Yeah.

JW: Pop star from the [19]60s playin' Las Vegas. Two shows—ten and two, playin' to the drunks from Ohio. And I did that for a while, and I thought, "I'd rather sell shoes for Thom McAn." I really [*laughs*]—just awful.

SL: They have a big warehouse there, I think, by the way.

JW: Oh. [*Laughter*]

SL: Go ahead.

JW: Thank you. But I got word that Linda Ronstadt was gearin' up for a long tour and had let a lot of the guys in her band go. So I called up and actually went and auditioned for a gig that I'd had for three years. And got the seat, and I—so that took up a hunk

of time. That was a great tour. Jackson and Linda, Jackson Browne and Linda Ronstadt.

SL: Yeah.

JW: Great package.

SL: Yeah.

[02:15:07] JW: And we did a long—the tour that wouldn't end. I mean, every time we'd seem to—we'd get to go home, play with our pets and wives, and they'd say, "Oh no, there's twenty new dates," and [*laughs*]. At one point I got so bored with the busses that I went in the semis for a while with the crew. Just for a new look . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . a new smell, you know.

SL: Yeah. [*JW laughs*] Well, I can understand that. So that was a couple of years more with Linda Ronstadt?

JW: Yeah, year.

SL: So what did you do after that?

JW: Well, I was in LA and knockin' around and doin' some studio stuff for Christian folks. I had some friends who had—were runnin' Maranatha, and since I was the guy who didn't mind getting up at eight o'clock in the morning, I did a lot of that stuff. But one night I'd been in LA late, recording late in the afternoon, and I



stayed over to go see Bobby Keys, the sax player for the Stones—was playin' in a bar in Pasadena. So I went to see Bobby and sat in and did a lot of stuff, and a bass player was sitting in that night, too, and we got to talkin' afterwards, and he said, "What are you doin'? This is great fun." And I—well, "I'm just looking for somethin'—the next best thing." And he said, "Well, you got to come up and meet my wife. She's—we got a house in Laurel Canyon." So I went up, and that was Charlie Larkey and Carole King. [02:16:36] And so she had just done an album with this guy David Palmer, who is the original lead singer in Steely Dan before Fagen decided to take over. And he quit because Fagen decided to take over. And Palmer's a great songwriter and a great singer and a hermit by nature. Literally damn near agoraphobic. But he produced—wrote all the songs and produced this Carole King album called *Jazzman*, if you're ever lookin' stuff up. And he and Carole had fallen in love, if not in lust, and decided to do a group. So that's—Charlie was thinkin' ahead and hauled me up there, and that took a year out of my life. At one point, we had singers galore. Michael McDonald was in that band. And David and Carole, couple other guitar players came and went. And it just looked—we had Lou Adler as a management. It just looked like it was nothing but

money written all over this thing. And yet there was no money. And one day I was at rehearsal in the valley, and I ran into one of the roadies off the tour that wouldn't end. And he said, "What are you doin', man?" And I says, "Playing with Carole King in that room right there." And he says, "In that room?" He said, "Well, I'm here working for Emmylou Harris, and she's in this room right up there, and she's yellin' at her manager saying, "I don't want that drummer. I want the drummer that's underneath me." So I said, "Well, tell her to call me." So that night she called and said, "Come be in the Hot Band." And I said, "Who's in the Hot Band?" And she said, "Glen Hardin and James Burton." I said, "Stop there." [*Laughter*]

[02:18:26] SL: Okay, now wait a minute. You know, so it sounds like to me as self-effacing as you are about your craft and your drumming abilities . . .

JW: We have to be careful about that. There's art, and there's craft.

SL: Well, your art . . .

JW: I'm a lot closer to art than I am to craft.

SL: Right. But it sounds like to me that there's something about the way you play that was attractive to those that listened to drums and rely on drums for their living. Or good drumming. And so I know at one point in time, I've read something about some of

your influences, and you mention Moe Tucker, is that right?

JW: Mh-hmm.

[02:19:10] SL: And this is a woman drummer from Velvet Underground. Am I right on this?

JW: Correct.

SL: I'm kinda challenged 'cause in your writing, you said, "If you don't understand that, you're just not gonna get it." But this is a person that—a lady that—actually, I think she's still playing at this moment.

JW: She is.

SL: I think she's out there, but she's kinda—an interesting career, but we're talking mallets, we're talking standing up, and we're talking no cymbals. Is that right or no?



JW: I don't recall her having cymbals at all. She played with mallets, and the first time I saw her in LA with the Warhol tour with the Erupting Plastic Inevitable.

SL: Okay now, see, we gotta—we gotta talk about that. But go ahead.

JW: She was—the bass drum was like sitting on like a coffee table, and she was pounding that. She had a snare drum and, I guess, then a bass drum [*SL laughs*]. I mean, it was primitive beyond primitive. But it worked so well for that music. I don't know

how they would have like phoned up Earl Palmer and had him come and play. And it wouldn't've worked. I mean, it's . . .

SL: Yeah.

[02:20:19] JW: So it—her art was miles beyond the ability of craft to take over. And seeing that, her shows, the Velvets and the scene of the Erupting Plastic Inevitable was—I was transfixed. I mean [*laughs*] it was mind-blowing beyond my ability to describe it to you. It wasn't all that loud, and the music was not all that good, but they had a vision that was zhh—it was so good. And I do revere her to this day. I think she was a very important piece of American rock and roll. And when you hear these—or see especially in print on the Internet, all these kids saying their big influences, they list, you know, the Stones and the yada yada. And it's always the Velvet Underground. My question to anyone of them, can you tell me the name of the drummer in that band? You know, and they can't. They don't know. I say, "Well, it's a woman named Maureen Tucker."
"Oh." [*Laughs*]

[02:21:28] SL: Well, but the thing that [*exhales*] what had to hit you right in the face was how simple . . .

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . the setup was and how minimal. And yet how it, somehow

or another, the product that they were working on, that is what it needed.

[02:21:48] JW: What got to me about that and maybe the biggest influences I've had in a group, you know, in a kettle were almost primal in their simplicity. You know, Al Jackson jus—one of the best pocket drummers that ever lived. And he plays more than you think. If you listen carefully to those records, there's more goin' on than I was getting it when I first found Al Jackson. But still it's wildly simple stuff. And rockabilly drummers, I mean, I loved Buddy Holly records, and when I finally found out that most of that stuff was played on shipping cartons, I thought, "Man, now there's history." It's not drum sets, it's the impact, you know. You could get this terrific impact by hitting a—hitting empty shipping cartons with drumsticks and mallets and stuff. And Eddie Cochran records. Earl Palmer's listed as a drummer on most of the Eddie Cochran records that were done in LA, and they were all done on shipping cartons. And "Cut Across Shorty" and "Summertime Blues"—I mean, that's great stuff. And Moe Tucker, and it's just, shhh, the rock—what is rock and roll? [Beats out rhythm on legs while singing] Boom, bap, boom, bap, boom, bap—shhh. How much schooling at Berklee do you need for that? [Laughter]

SL: Well, there is that. But you know, there are—there is some rock-and-roll drumming that is quite complicated in a way. I mean a lot going on . . .

JW: Oh sure.

SL: . . . but still has that sim—it comes across as a simple thing. Maintains what it is about rock and roll but somehow or another makes it lyrical, I guess is what I'm getting around to. There is art in the rock-and-roll stuff.

JW: And high craft at the same time, yes.

[02:23:44] SL: Yes. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so Emmylou Harris is recording upstairs. You're recording downstairs. And you're not making any money. But she's—somehow or another she knows about you.

JW: Well, we had met when I was with Linda in with the deep—the years before . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

JW: . . . [nineteen] seventy—[nineteen] seventy-three or so. We met in Washington, and then just maybe four or five months previous to the event at the Alley recording studio—or the Alley rehearsal hall, she had opened for Linda at an outdoor festival with her band from Washington.

SL: Right.

JW: So we were passing acquaintances.

SL: So she—y'all were aware of each other . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . just cause you'd crossed paths.

JW: Right.

SL: But apparently at that point in time she was . . .

[02:24:37] JW: It's the ultimate crossing. I mean, coincidence is my life, anyway. That was the biggest coincidence I can call right—?should I say?, you know. And the band was just prime for that because I knew Glen D. had recorded with the First National Band. I'd played sessions with James . . .

SL: Burton.

JW: . . . enough. And so we knew one another, and he was—those two were not suspect of me, having come off five or six years of having playing with—behind Elvis with Ronnie Tutt, who's just a machine drummer. Just this ball of energy and notes. They were gracious and not suspect. And the first few gigs we played were just the kind that make your heart stop. There was just so much goin' on. And so much music and so much energy from Emmy and that kind of stuff that was just, you know. And it did grow into hell of a band.

SL: Seven years?

JW: That I was there?

SL: Yeah.

JW: Nine.

SL: Nine.

JW: Yeah. Which is too long. I should have quit earlier, but I was jus—I was in management by then.

[02:25:50] SL: So in management, we're talking road management? Or what exactly?

JW: I just was in management.

SL: Just in management. Okay. We won't go any further than that.

JW: No.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, but you had a good time.

JW: Ye—I certainly did.

SL: And the—if there was ever any craft invading your space, is this where you may have picked up some craft? I mean, it sounds like it was little more [*snaps fingers*].

JW: I sculpted my drumming to fit that situation. You know, if I was ever unhappy it was because I knew what I was gonna play before I heard the first few notes of the song in the first rundown in the studio. I could hear my part. It was preordained. I was handsomely paid to do it. And I got a lot better at it. I honed the craft, and though it didn't require any—

my thinking about it, I knew that I was etching it in stone. I was gonna get famous as that drummer, which is not exactly what I was. You know, left to my own devices, I'd have been playing other stuff, completely. But I was in that band, and that's what I did. And back to your first question. I enjoyed the hell out of it.

[02:27:20] SL: Was there—you have one or two enjoy-the-hell-out-of-it instances you want relate?

JW: Well, gee. The first time we played outside of the country the band was bigger than Emmy. The names in the band were bigger than Emmy in Europe. She was big because Gram Parsons had made a huge impact because he was hangin' with the Stones, and he got a lot of press. Not because of his product on the street. And so the first show we played was in Amsterdam. The venue was big enough but not heart-stopping big. Three thousand, maybe. And the house lights went down, and the stage lights went up, and we walked on, and we got a five-minute standing ovation for walkin' on the stage. I thought, "Well, I could live with this, you know." [*Laughter*] And we played a pretty hot show, good for us and great for most, I suppose. And when we quit they wouldn't stop yellin' and applaudin' and stuff. And they stood as Germans and Dutch and

Swedes will do, they clap in time, you know [*claps hands*] when they're happy about something, and they went on and on and on. And then we went on to London a couple a days later, and the same thing happened. It was this monumental standing ovation for walkin' on the stage. Wanted to see if my zipper was up, you know [*laughter*].

SL: Now, John.

[02:28:56] JW: James was—James is an incredible fountain of notes. He's a savant in some ways. He sometimes is not playing in the right key, and yet every note he delivers is perfect. Not what you expected, not what you'd heard on the record but some version of just jaw-droppingly perfect. What we used to do backstage is just to trick him—not trick him—to amuse ourselves and tweak him is we'd jump around the corner—we'd give him his own dressing room. We'd jump around the corner and yell the title of a Ricky Nelson song to him. And he'd play the part exactly for us and [*laughter*—I mean, he was hip to the game and always up for it, but God, he was—he's so good. And I'll tell you, one night that just—glossed over it, but one night he literally played a fairly touching song in the wrong key. He put—he was grabbin' the—and he never changed it. And yet he continued to bend his notes so that every note was dead on and

just like head shaking like what-on-earth kinda stuff, you know. And I told him after we got off stage, I said, "James, you know you were playing that in the wrong key." "Oh yeah, I meant that." [*Laughter*] "No, you didn't." He's just a genius savant, you know. I don't want to go too far into that analogy, but in the studio the first time through, you better get it. Your machines'd better be runnin' because his part's perfect. I'm not kiddin'. And it's best—if we went past like take three or so, we were just doin' it for the rhythm section. And he'd played, and everything be fine. But I knew that we—once we were past take three, only the bass and drums were gonna stay. And sometimes we'd go to take twenty or twenty-two. In one case, a hit record, "Two More Bottles of Wine," Delbert's song, we—was literally up to twenty-two or so takes, and the next time I'd heard the song, they'd stripped everything but the drums off. And Albert, our lead guitar player, had put the piano part on and a new bass part and everything. "Why not—why didn't we use a take from earlier?" "Well," Brian would say, "You never know." [*Laughter*] Crazy stuff.

[02:31:37] SL: So—was—how many records did y'all generate?

JW: Well . . .

SL: Albums, I guess.

JW: As that band?

SL: Yeah.

JW: 'Cause it changed, the band, you know. I think that band did eight, maybe nine. Well no, there's some greatest hits in there. That's seven, right?

SL: Yeah. That's quite a—that's pretty big deal.

[02:32:00] JW: Yeah. The two best things that happened to that band were losing James—sounds wrong, but had James stayed in the band, it would have continued to be the best version [*cell phone makes sound*] of the James Burton band that it could be. But James went back to Elvis at the suggestion of his wife. And we were playin' at the Laguna Bowl, and I'd been playin' a couple a nights before with Don Everly on some time off, which I did pretty regularly. And Albert Lee had been there playin' with Don. And I mentioned the Bowl, the gig. And Albert walked in backstage, and James had just announced he was goin' back to Elvis. And Emmy said, [*smiles and looks surprised*] [*laughs*]*—so we said, "Hey, Berty. Ever thought about being in the Hot Band?" He said, "Sure!"*

SL: Serendipity, serendipitous again.

JW: Serendipitous, and that's the first great thing that happened to that band was losin' James and gaining Albert 'cause it took a

big turn and became just—I mean, it was—there were nights, that band playing live, I swear I left the stage cryin'. I mean, things happen that was like—musical things just like I can't believe I've played on that. I can't believe I was part of that. It just—unbelievable stuff. James—I've heard other people say things like that, but I swear there were nights—I just said James—when I swear Albert was levitating. I mean, it's just so much energy coming out of his—so many notes in there and all just beautiful, and you'd just swear he lifts off the stage. Amazing. [02:33:47] And the other great thing that happened was losin' Rodney. Which I thought what an awful thing for Emmy to lose her duet singer and a source of such great material. But he was gone, and she said, "I've got this kid in Kentucky, and I'm gonna bring him out. And you guys are gonna bitch, but this kid can sing like crazy, and he plays mandolin and fiddle and guitar. And you're gonna love him." And we're—I was goin', "Rrrr," you know. And this kid came out, and that's Ricky Skaggs. Another big turn. I mean, it's a great addition. Even though he sings—he hears flat, so he sings sharp, and it'd cause her to sing a little sharp all the time, still the stuff that—the way she embraced bluegrass, and we, you know, it did become, arguably, the world's greatest country band

then with Ricky and Albert. It's st—there actually was a competition on one of the big, country television, you know, TNN, or something about finding the world's greatest country band.

SL: And that one won out?

[02:34:51] JW: The Hot Band was the world's greatest country band.

SL: There you have it.

JW: Yeah, there somebody has it.

SL: Well, it's probably you knew that anyway, whether they won or not.

JW: Yeah, well, that accolade and three seventy-five would get me a coffee at Starbucks. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, so how did you exit from that? How did . . .

JW: It got to the point where I was repeating myself, and it's just not healthy.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And that's it. There's a long answer, but the short answer is it was just time to go. I literally found myself carrying cassettes of albums around during dead time to play 'em in the car to remind myself of what I was—what I'd played. Yeah, not good.

SL: Time to move.

JW: And there was—the band was solid replacement parts. Good

players; hard band to get a gig in and not be a great player. But it was—I needed to go.

SL: So what did you do?

JW: Literally I had a place in Colorado, and I kinda holed up there for a while, and then I went to Arkansas. And I had this house that my dad built 'cause he wanted to be right—close to the White River as he could get. And he chose Rogers and built this house in [19]69, I think it was. And then a couple of years later, he died. So he never had a chance to really—to milk that puppy.

[02:36:26] SL: Now had the dam been built then? I don't think . . .

JW: The dam was built, but it was still fillin'.

SL: It was still filling at that time.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And my mother just didn't have it in her to go alone to use that house. So when I left Emmy in [19]82 at the end of the touring season in [19]82, that house was essentially a derelict. And so I just went there to chill. And had some old friends, some of my dad's fishing buddies, and you know, drinkin' whiskey on the lake and lookin' for brown trout.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, I can identify with that.

JW: I'm sure you can.

SW: So . . .

TM: So hey, would there've been trout above the dam? Is that what?

SL: No.

TM: Okay.

[02:37:26] SL: The—but somehow or another you get back involved with Nashville somehow, don't you?



JW: Well, after a while in Arkansas, and it wasn't very long—less than a year—I—all my friends from LA had moved to Nashville. That was the beginning of the big exodus.

SL: Exodus.

JW: Yeah. And I decided I'd give it a shot. So I had enough money to do what I did, which was to do a little research and find a place. And I was on the phone with Nesmith constantly during this period tryin' to think, "How am I gonna make all this work? How am I gonna put these parts together?" And one conversation I said, "I think I wanna go to Nashville and not play." I think I wanna go to Nashville 'cause I just couldn't imagine bein' in another band.

SL: Right.

JW: You know. Guys from the Hot Band were joining bands, you know—they were [*unclear words*] play with Kathy Mattea? Fine singer, just—it ain't the Hot Band, you know. So I said to Mike,

"I think I want to go and not play drums. I think I want to go and make music videos." He said, "Hey, cool idea. Have you ever made one?" I said, "No." And he said, "Well, why don't you go and tell 'em you work for me. Tell 'em you're settin' up an office for Pacific Arts." So that's what I did. I leased a farm in Franklin. Bunch of acres, got some horses. It was like—props. And I called up the Nashville papers, the music press and the regular papers, and announced that I was in town settin' up shop for Pacific Arts. And it worked. I started gettin' action.

SL: But you didn't—you'd never done a music video in your life.

JW: Hell no.

SL: You didn't know anything about it, did you?

JW: No. [*SL laughs*] But nobody in Nashville had ever considered a music video.

SL: That's true.

[02:39:43] JW: So I had no competition. And also my phone was ringing but not with peo—my phone was ringing askin' me to deliver stuff. Asking me to deliver product. Not to make product. And I mean, I didn't know much about makin' music videos, but I knew enough about business to not promise I'd deliver something that I knew nothing about. So I just got on the phone, which I've done before that, and I've definitely done

since, and started asking questions. And the first thing—well, I—there was something I wanted to do with Nesmith, but it had nothin' to do with something that would make money. And in the pursuit of that then that—the that was doing a long-form show based on Rodney's songs. This body of work that I knew of Rodney's then about twelve dozen or more songs.

[02:40:42] SL: Rodney?

JW: Crowell.

SL: Okay.

JW: And make that into a—one long piece fired almost entirely by the songs. And Nesmith's idea was, "I like that. That's cool, but who's gonna pay for it?" I said, "Well, Mike, I'm on the phone with you to see if you'll pay for it." And he said, "Well, I'm probably not gonna be the guy that pays for that. It's too esoteric. But I'll sure help you find it." So I—Sissy Spacek was in town, in Nashville, makin' a movie. And Billy Jett helped me get in contact with her. She was married to Jack Fisk then who is—as production designer and art director had done a couple of pretty odd things.

SL: So now how did you and Billy Jett—how did you know . . .

SL: Oh, when I—durin' that short period, I was hanging in Rogers.

SL: Rogers, okay.

JW: Yeah. I—his wife, K.B. . . .

SL: Yes.

JW: . . . had a shop on the square.

SL: Left Bank?

JW: Yeah.

SL: Yep. Okay.

JW: That's it.

SL: All right.

JW: So I wandered in there, and she said, I said, I'm—she—"What do you do?" I said, "I'm a musician." She said, "Hey, my husband's a musician," you know.

SL: There you go.

JW: You know that story.

SL: It's all over. [*Laughs*]

[02:42:02] JW: Anyway, so I met Jack Fisk. He'd done *Days of Heaven* and some other stuff. And I really admired his work visually. So I went back to Nesmith, and I said, "Okay, I got Jack Fisk to direct." And he said, "Well, I don't know the name." And I explained it, and he said, "Well, that's interesting, but he's not a director." I said, "Well." It just wasn't moving forward, you know. But I had tongues waggin' in Nashville. And Tony Brown who was the last keyboard player in the original, in the

real Hot Band, was already ensconced at RCA by then as a running—he'd been running Free Flight, and then, by then, he was in Nashville running like a VP at RCA. So he took me aside essentially and said, "We're about to do a thing on Waylon, so why don't you see if we could do something, tie in what you want to do, what Nesmith can do and, you know, and Waylon's new release." So at this point, I went to Nesmith said, "Well, I've got this and this and this goin'." And he said, "Do it on your own." He said, "You got speed. Do it on your own." So a program had just started on Cinemax, which was owned by HBO at the time, called *Album Flash*, which was the introduction of an album by an artist and a support—certain amount of money was given out. You made talking heads, and you made a couple a music videos with the money and . . .

SL: Yeah.

JW: . . . you know.

[02:43:37] JW: It was room to make money, and there was room to get seen. So I just called up Cinemax in New York and said, "Hey, I've got this new Waylon Jennings project, and I want to do an *Album Flash*." And they said, "Hang on." And suddenly I had this guy, "Hi, this is Ben." I said, "Well, Ben, I wanna," you know. And he said, "Let's have a call—let's have a conference

call about this on Thursday" or something. And suddenly I'm in a conference call, and it happened. They shipped me a hundred thousand dollars, and I crewed up and made an *Album Flash* on Waylon Jennings. But instead of what they'd been getting in the past because they sent me a few to look at, I filled it up with music videos. I made five music videos and minimal talking heads and—with the given amount of money. I ran over budget, but we don't care about that. They care about that. I forgot.

[Laughs]

SL: Well, it's not like they probably weren't expecting it.

[02:44:34] JW: But it was a big deal. It was a huge deal in Nashville and amongst Nashville publishers and the record labels. And it got tons of press, and [smacks lips] it just set my path. And I still didn't do it. I mean, I produced it, and put I all the peas in the pod, and I zipped the pod shut. But I didn't make the thing.

SL: Right.

JW: Cinemax—to Cinemax and HBO, I made it. It was my name on the contract, and they shipped a check for a hundred grand to John Ware. But when it gets down to it, I—RCA forced me to hire a director that they knew of and, you know, how those things can go. And so I couldn't even put a reel on the street sayin' this is what I've done. But I went to—not Jim Ed Norman,

but well, whoever was running Warner at the time, and I said that I'd just done this. And they said, "Oh yeah, we heard about that." I said, "Well, who you have that I might do a video on?" And he said, "Well, nobody we can't—who's gonna pay for it?" And I said, "Don't record labels pay for videos?" And, "We don't pay for that kinda stuff." And [*sighs*] once again. [02:45:53] And then Hank Jr. called me. Said, "I want you to do the same thing you did for Waylon." I said, "Well, I don't have Cinemax." And he said "Well, don't you worry about it. We'll find the money." So Hank gave me the first release on that album, and that was "All My Rowdy Friends are Coming Over Tonight." And I put together a budget for like \$30- or 40,000. And then it got bigger, and then it got bigger. And then I realized I was going to be over budget at that level, and the record label kept saying, "Oh, we got to stop there. We can't do that." So by the time we went into production, we were at a 160 and goin'. And nobody in that town had ever paid more than \$10,000 for something on television. And so a couple of \$100,000 later I made "All My Rowdy Friends are Coming Over Tonight." And it was the first country video to ever go on MTV. And then it got on heavy rotation on MTV. And it totally changed Hank's life. And then ABC got involved and wanted it for football. And then ABC's

calling me and askin' for rights to do the—to do my material on football. And I'm saying, "Well, gah, I'd love to give it to you, but it ain't mine." [*Laughs*] But still I could put that on my reel.

SL: Yeah.

[02:47:05] JW: But I hired a director from New York. I got on—watchin' television and I—there were two videos I really liked, and I found out they were directed by Eddie Grilles. So I called up Eddie Grilles's office and asked if he'd like to come and just be my tutor. You know, be—I'd pay you to come for two days to Nashville. And he said, "I don't have time. I'm tied up in sports with Donald Omar. But the guy that was my AD and wrote the script for those two videos you like, named John Goodhughes, and I guarantee he'll get on an airplane and come to help you at any moment at a drop of a hat." So I called up this guy in Connecticut, and he came down. And he essentially—he directed the thing for me. I wrote the script, and then he directed my shots. So that did go on my reel. And it went on John's, too, and it should. But of course, when it won the CMA Video of the Year, he went to accept the award. And when it won the ACM Video of the Year, he went to accept the award. [*Laughs*] And then the next year, I did the same thing with George Jones. I got—CBS called me and said, "We want you to do the same

thing you did for Hank for this big song George is going to do." And I said, "Send me the song." So—and the price went up and up and up. And they kept saying, "Well okay. Well no. Oh well, okay." So I did "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes," which won the CMA Video of the Year and ACM Video of the Year. And in both cases, George accepted that one. [Laughs]

SL: Of course. [Laughs] And why wouldn't he?

[02:48:53] JW: So by the time I'd quit Nashville I'd done, if you count those videos inside the—I'd did a Crystal Gayle *Album Flash*, too. When you count all those videos, plus the ones I'd done independently, I'd done sixteen music videos as either as a producer or producer/director. And I was done. I stuck a fork in that puppy, and I was done. I mean, I didn't want to do one more thing of makin' pictures for somebody else's music. I just—and I was sick to death of that town. It's a pretty town, but there's—people are too damn pious.

SL: Oh now, be careful now. [Laughter]

JW: That's the end my grouching. It's not a good match for me.

SL: Yeah. So . . .

JW: Good for a lot my friends, not good for me. So I went back to Nashville, I mean, to Arkansas. And I set up shop, and I went to Mark Blackwood, and he helped me get the word out that I was

hangin' a shingle out as a filmmaker. And stuff started happening. And it was probably the most satisfying decade of my life. Bein' on Beaver Lake and making bunch of goofy product with you. [*Laughter*]

SL: We did have fun.

JW: We had a lot of fun.

[02:50:17] SL: You know, I will say this, that there was something about the way you could build a video with almost anything that was given to you to work with. I can speak personally to that.

JW: My personal mantra is there is no such thing as a bad shot.

[*Laughs*]

SL: You know—and you taught us that again and again. It was quite remarkable. You know, when you're—I'm sure it's kinda like with the way they want you to learn to play drums. The way they want you to learn to shoot video is, you know, you get the shot, and you hold it and you give it a front end and a back end, so they can mess with a little bit. And it has to be nice and focused and steady, [*JW laughs*] and you know, you need to know what it is and all that. But you know, I found working with you in an edit suite, you would often take the stuff that I—everyone else would have thrown away. And it makes for much better product in the end. It was quite remarkable. Now you—

where did you learn to build videos? How did that happen?

[02:51:32] JW: Well, it happened in Nashville. Doin' the very thing that I pooh-pooh now, I watched so many good shots go sailing away when the PA that had been hired to help me assemble the offline, "Oh, this is the shot." I said, you know, my instincts said, "No, there's the shot." They said, "Well, you'll never get away with that. This is the shot." And I just did that enough that when I—when it was my chance to say what the shot was, I went for that one. My instinct was, it still is, to build the most interesting block of moving things, and it's got nothing to do with what's the best shot. And I'll say it again, there is no bad shot. There is just definitely no bad shot.

SL: That's really for camera operator here, isn't it?

TM: I love to hear that. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well okay, so you get back to Arkansas, you talk with Mark Blackwood. You've got some video credits, some film credits under your belt now. You can actually really hang a shingle out there. And of all places you end up with a Razorback Football coaching show. Is that—is that how that?

JW: Isn't that weird? It's Neal, you know?

SL: Neal Pendergraft.

JW: Yeah. He was by then had moved through the ranks with—in

E. J. Ball's company—law office that he was kind of assigned Jack Crowe when he came into the football program because any football coach has to be represented . . .

SL: Yeah, sure.

[02:53:25] JW: . . . and this is the gateway to the Razorback Foundation and, you know, all that stuff. And viewers not gonna care. But he took me to lunch, Neal did, and said, "You need to meet this guy Jack Crowe. He's gonna need a coach's show. I know you don't know anything about coach's shows, but they are they bread and butter of coach's existence. And a good one can help this young, untested coach immensely. And there's enough money to make it interesting for you and good for us," meaning the Razorback Foundation. And yeah, all those things. So I met Jack, and I liked him. Disarmingly charming guy. Obviously in over his head and willing to say yes to almost anything. [*SL laughs*] There were some "you can't do this," but almost anything. And when sh—I did have one guideline, and that was he brought me a couple of tapes of Pat Dye's show at Alabama where he had been backfield, quarterback, somethin'.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And Pat Dye's show was pretty entertaining. It was still fat guys on screen . . .

SL: XOs.

[02:54:47] JW: Yeah. But beyond that it was pretty interesting.

So—oh, and the words "music video" were used in the introduction to Jack. So I felt that I had the—if I wasn't ready to dive, I was certainly—I was on the springboard, and I might as well get crazy until I'm told to stop. And we went out and got that Hi8 camera, and so I could get you—was inside the box, which the NCAA wouldn't allow.

SL: That's correct.

JW: And I called Dr. Witte.

SL: Me, too. [*Laughs*]

JW: See, it—it's—great minds think alike. And that worked. I'm not even sure that shit, that stuff, was broadcast legal.

SL: You mean as far as product goes . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . or NCAA? I mean—sure, it was. Yeah, I think they put the stuff on it at Ozark. I mean, I think it met everything. Maybe not.

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Okay, great.

[Tape stopped]

[02:55:58] SL: Okay, so I don't know if we're on our third or fourth

tape, but we're talkin' about—we were talkin' about the *Jack Crowe Show*. And you've kind of come back into Arkansas. You've hung your shingle out. You're doing—starting to do work. We had a wonderful time. Set some precedents with coaches' shows, with the *Jack Crowe Show*. But you know, the—I know that there's another story early on about your Arkansas influences on you. And that's in the name of John Tolleson, who was contemporary with Ronnie Hawkins at the time. They were kinda like the two guys in Northwest Arkansas that people were nuts about it. Seems like Tolleson's biggest hit was maybe "Tennessee Stud."

JW: Mh-hmm.

SL: And I forget—there was another one that he . . .

JW: That's enough.

SL: Yeah, that's enough [*JW laughs*]. Well, talk to me a little bit about John Tolleson and why he figured in that influence for you.

[02:57:03] JW: That band was the frat band favorite. If you had enough money—and they must have done pretty well for themselves for a while there—to hire Johnny Tolleson, your frat party was going to be the deal. And it would, you know, at the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State, it was just packed joints just time after time. I, first amongst the—our band or our

musical group, our—the comrades. And I was the first to fall in love with that band. I just—they were so potent. And it was 'cause it wasn't guitar driven. It was totally different because it was piano driven. And it was—now I recognize what it was. It was more like a pop band than it was like a blues or a rock and roll band. And they were loud, my God, they were loud. And it was more song oriented, which is what pop is, tune oriented. Witness how they made their signature song, "Tennessee Stud." What—who would do that? [*SL laughs*] And it was a monument to song. It was just huge the way they did it. And it was undeniable. You'd leave, and everybody would leave singing that song as driving home. He was great. I couldn't tell you another song the band did. [*Laughs*] And not to their detriment. It was just the power of that song. And maybe in my lifetime, I saw them ten times. But I remember that. And finally when I started taking Eddie Davis and some of the other guys to see 'em, and said, "You gotta see this band." And everybody's attitude was, "I don't know, man. This ain't for us." Admittedly it never became a big jumping-off point for—that band at that point was called the Continentals. It wasn't important to us like the Hawks were. But it was maybe a more successful band than the Hawks in terms of four guys settin' up

and firing weapons at the audience.

SL: Yeah, I think you hit it that it was piano driven.

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: And it, you know, it was—the sound was pop, but you know, the piano was really pretty rock-and-roll kind of piano. Or that's the way I remember it.

[02:59:43] JW: Oh, it was. It was really loud. Not just the band was loud. That piano was, you know. I guess it was a Wurlitzer as opposed to a Fender. It was . . .

SL: It may have even been a Baldwin.

JW: Well anyway, it was really hard-hittin'.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

JW: I mean, it was an electric piano. It wasn't a miced-up . . .

SL: Right, right, right.

JW: . . . spinet. It was—ah, gee—[laughs] It was potent music. I get to thinkin' about that while—I had this little automobile accident at the end of the [19]90s. And I was holed up for a while, and one of the things I ca—doin' on a daily basis besides watching game shows was reviewing the ups and downs of my own life. And I started thinking about Johnny Tolleson. So I looked him up in the phone book and called him, you know. And I said, "I just want you to know you were a major influence on

my life." He was cool about it. I mean, it's not like he was the guy whose sold balloons on the corner for a living. The guy had a big life going, but he took the time to listen to my little story and, you know . . .

[03:00:49] SL: Well you know, I knew him just as a guy that was dating and ended up marrying the girl across the street from where I grew up.

JW: Oh really?

SL: So.

JW: Well, he's your senior by . . .

SL: Oh, quite a bit.

JW: Yeah.

SL: I mean twelve, fifteen years I guess. Maybe twenty. I don't know he's—but he's still here in town.

JW: I saw him—recently I saw a picture of him.

[03:01:10] SL: Works with the University. Yeah, yeah. You know, out of his music career, he ended up at Baldwin Piano.

JW: I did know that.

SL: Yeah, yeah. Electric piano division.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Sold more of those than anybody else, I think.

JW: Well, good for him. [*Laughter*]

SL: He could do it. Knew what it took. Okay, well, I just didn't want to . . .

JW: But I'll say this one more thing is the way he played piano he treated it totally as a percussion instrument, which it is. You know, it's mallets striking metal. But it would—they would get wildly percussive. I mean everything was percussive. Drums, piano, mallets, I—it was a great band.

[03:01:51] SL: Well, I can testify that I had a John Tolleson moment when I was in junior high school. I got to see him setting up and running through "She's a Woman" [*JW laughs*] in the Fayetteville High School cafeteria. It was just him and his PA and his piano, and he was practicing. And I was ruined [*JW laughs*]. It was a religious experience. And it was—and you're right, it was the percussive nature of his . . .

JW: Yeah.

SL: . . . piano playing and he had a good voice. He could kick on the voice. He could do it.

JW: Yeah.

SL: Okay, so I just didn't want to miss John Tolleson.

JW: Good point.

SL: Because I remember you talking at length about him earlier. So you're in Rogers; you're kinda working in Fayetteville a lot 'cause

Fayetteville was, at that time, it was—Rogers and Bentonville hadn't really made their major growth spurt yet. And so . . .

JW: Boy, Rogers has had a population of about ten thousand then.

SL: Right, right. But you also got involved with the Cate Brothers.

[03:02:59] JW: I did. I bullied my way into that. I used to, without ever telling them about it, I used to jump off tours and fly into Tulsa and and drive over and see Cate Brothers shows in Fayetteville. This in the early [19]80s, end of the [19]70s. And I just loved that band. I loved that version of the Terry Cagle and Ron Eoff version of the band. And when I found myself knockin' around and goin' to George's in the afternoon after I'd moved back to Rogers, I just kind of approached them.

[*Laughs*] "Here's this idea. I'll pay for this and this and this, and you get this. We'll have a one-year contract, and let's see what happens." And they were true to it. At the end of a year, Ernie called me and said, "Is anything happening that we don't know about?" I said, "No." He said, "Can we get out?" I said, "You're out." That was it. But it was an interesting experiment. And I fussed with stuff that they would never have done. I altered their sound a bit. Not that I wanted to hurt it. I just wanted to drag it into the next century, at least for the ?smoke?. And I think it shocked and/or hurt their feelings a little bit that I

would alter things the way I did. But I didn't want to make another "Union Man."

SL: Right.

JW: So I made a four-song EP. And as I told them I would, I paid for it, and I paid for distribution, and I paid for some marketing. And all I wanted to give them was a chance at a regional breakout. If one song started to break out—it'd be fairly easy to market the Cate Brothers into somethin' much bigger than they were. Then they actually—better than the sum of the parts, you know. And CBS was knockin' on the door, and things were going great. And then somebody at CBS said to me in a conference call, "Hey, man, they're a bunch of guys in their forties."

[Laughs]

SL: Heartthrob factor, I guess.

[03:05:19] JW: Yeah. But I liked the experience. I mean, I'm glad I did it, you know. I borrowed the money to do it. I paid the money back. It's business. And Earl and Ernie are good friends to this day. And I'm—it was good. It was . . .

SL: It's hard not to be good friends with those guys.

JW: That's true. And in the process I delivered David Renko to them, so . . .

SL: There you go. Yep. That does take us down to Fort Smith. We

did some gigs in Fort Smith as well. I guess the band started out as Razorback, ended up being Gray Ghost, is that right?

JW: They were Razorback when I met them. I think there was— yeah. Gray Ghost at the end.

SL: Yeah, yeah. That was some of the most difficult shooting I think I've ever done.

JW: [*Laughs*] I don't want to go into that.

SL: Okay. All right. Well . . .

JW: I think the most difficult shooting you ever did was for the Judds.
[*Laughter*]

SL: Well, that was true, too. Yeah, that was fun, too. Is there anything you want to say about the Judds at all? I mean we didn't mention them in the Nashville stint. But you were in Nashville when that stuff came up. That was unusual, curious stuff.

[03:06:39] JW: I don't know what to make of that. I didn't mind doing it 'cause I liked, separately, I liked Naomi, and I liked Wynonna.

SL: Yeah.

JW: Together . . .

SL: Right.

JW: . . . bad idea. I didn't mind doing that foolishness that you and I

did. You know. Didn't mind it. It was—I didn't make a penny.
You may have made a couple dollars more than expenses.

SL: Yeah.

JW: But you know, it was a gift. I never expected anything to come
of it. And it didn't, so . . .

SL: Right.

JW: I—it's very rare that I talk to Naomi, and I've only seen
Wynonna once since then, since that one we did in Nashville
together. So it doesn't matter.

SL: It doesn't matter?

JW: Yeah.

[03:07:32] SL: Okay, but you're still coming back to Fayetteville,
Arkansas. You come back at least once a year here?

JW: Now?

SL: Yeah.

JW: Oh, more than that. I mean, Neal and I do stuff, whatever.

SL: Yeah.

JW: Two, three times a year.

SL: You have a—you've been doing some stuff with Darren Novotny,
is that right? Some mixing?

JW: I love to mix with Darren.

SL: I do, too.

[03:07:54] JW: You know, I'm a good mixer. My instincts are good.

I don't trust my own ears after years of big stages and big monitors. Just . . .

SL: Yep.

JW: . . . too much damage. And he makes up for everything that I miss, and I don't have to ask him about it. He just makes up for it. So—and we did all that music together for the coach's show, which was—taught me a lot. Not about his capabilities, but about alternate recording techniques.

SL: Right, right.

JW: Which are not so alternate any more, are they?

SL: No, they're not. I will say I find the live products of the Cate Brothers the most rewarding to me to listen to.

JW: Really?

SL: Yeah. I do. His work with them livewise, I think. It's pretty—I guess it's because it seems fairly authentic . . .

JW: Right.

SL: . . . to the way they are.

JW: Yeah.

SL: So I value that. Well, is there—I know I've kept you here for a while. Is there anything that we need to talk about Arkansaswise? Do you want to—any other Arkansas musicians

that you feel like you should mention?

[03:09:09] JW: I can't think—the answer probably is no, but I occasionally go to sites looking at people who claim to be Arkansas musicians, you know, born and/or tooled their careers here. And I understand that at the top of everybody's list is like Glen Campbell and . . .

SL: Sure.

JW: . . . you know, Johnny Cash. But just like when the University was set up, and the people in the northwest decided that they'd pay for the bond issue. And the people in Little Rock decided they wouldn't.

SL: Right.

JW: And the University ended up in Fayetteville. I think the same thing happened about music. I think that the heart and soul of Arkansas rock and roll is in northwest Arkansas. I personally think it doesn't exist in the south. I mean, I understand the Delta is—has churned out some seriously great blues musicians. I've heard some of 'em. I understand why the King Biscuit thing still exists down there. But I think that nothin' has happened like what happened in the late [19]50s through the early [19]70s in northwest Arkansas. It's just—every time people start talking about that "Texas sound," you know, or the—

hogwash [*SL laughs*]. I mean gibberish. Austin? Give me a break. What happens in Austin sounds like Disneyland compared to listening to Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks. And Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, I'm sorry, that is a yawn compared to Ronnie Hawkins. This is stuff you'll never be able to use.

SL: Actually, that's probably will be our first highlight clip.

JW: Really?

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*] So we did get to see and spend some time with CeDell Davis in front of a nursing home that I really enjoyed.

JW: That was fun. CeDell and his fork. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah, yeah. He's got his own little website now, Facebook.

JW: Yeah, I saw that.

SL: Yeah, yeah, I've seen that. Well, okay. I think that we can wrap if there's nothing else we wanna—you wanna talk about Neal at all or . . .

JW: He's pretty proud . . .

[03:11:26] SL: Your work that you're doin'? I mean, you know, I see the CJ's photographs and your layouts everywhere here. Is that—it looks pretty rewarding to me. It looks like pretty stunning work.

JW: It is rewarding. In many ways, it's rewarding. I—Neal is—I

don't want to spend a moment saying things he wouldn't say for himself here or so. I'm thinking about this. When I first knew Neal, he was an accountant. He was a CPA in Fayetteville. And he worked his way through law school and worked, I mean, it was work. I don't think he was—wasn't a desire on his part to become an attorney. I think he was pretty happy the way things were. But E. J. had a plan. And obviously Ross was not averse to it. He didn't try and stop it. But I don't think it was Ross's idea, either. But he did law school, and he went to work for the firm, and you know, it's been a great thing for him. Not only the coincidence of the Don Reynolds empire and that stuff. That's good, but it—what has happened is he's become a man of means. He's become a huge-hearted individual. And it's not just that he does things because he has the abilities, and they're fun. And they're fun because he—'cause they don't hurt him financially. He can do anything he wants to have a good time. He's careful to make sure that everybody involved is enjoying exactly the same thing he is. Does that make sense?

SL: Yes. Mh-hmm.

[03:13:34] JW: And so the things we do together—and that is I advertise in national publications for his daughters and his niece who are involved in the American Quarter Horse Association.

And really what the girls do is they show—it's about the horses. The girls are trappings to the horses. And I don't mean that to be rude because it's a lotta work on their part. A lotta work. But a good performance on any given afternoon is the horse. It's the horse that gets judged. And no amount of good posture and expensive clothes is going to make the horse perform better. So Neal sees it—to it that they have the best machine they can have, meaning the animal and their trainer. The animal is trained by the trainer. The girls are trained by the trainer. And they go out and do what they're supposed to do. And there's a lot of other people with exactly the same tools, good trainers, good horses. And these girls do very well. And we see to it that they look better than anybody else. There're people who have fancier looking ads, people who have more tricks. I use no tricks except my girl, Cheryl Jacobs, C. J. Nikolai, who shows up with a forty-year old camera and shoots in your basic old black-and-white film. And we assemble these things based on the idea that it's a show. And we want to make sure that the show—sorry about that focal length [to the camera operator]—that the show is as much fun for the girls and for Neal and for the viewers as it could possibly be.

[03:15:28] SL: And you guys are having fun with it, too.

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: You—I mean, you're doing—what I find great about Neal is he kinda turns you loose.

JW: Oh yeah.

SL: And lets you do what you do best and trusts your skills there.

JW: Right. That's right.

SL: Yeah.

JW: And this other thing we do, this—the Red Barn Ramblers.

SL: I was gonna bring that up next.

[03:15:51] JW: Neal has had many events in this big barn that we're sitting in now. And given an hour's notice and a crowd, he'll hire the Cate Brothers any day because that's his idea of bringing music to my house. And then he said to me one time, "Why don't we have a bunch of people and just—we'll all play?" Meaning Neal plays and a bunch of his friends play. So we assembled a list of people and said, well what if, and what if, and what if? And it's not the same people now that it started with, but it's close. It was a good idea. And a lotta people—a lot of them came out of Fort Smith, which is where he's from. Logical. So it's a—it's two, three times a year. It's kinda like a jam session. And Neal makes sure that he's having a good time, so there's lots of food and cold beer and that kind of stuff. And

he makes sure that everybody else involved, meaning the people who come to witness or the people who come to play, are having a good time, which means good equipment, cold beer, good food. And sometimes, it's magic. And sometimes, it's slop.

[*Laughter*]

SL: But it's always. [*Laughs*]

JW: But I'll drop what I'm doin' in a moment to show up for these things. It's great.

SL: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

JW: That's the story of Zippy and the Red Barn Ramblers.

SL: All right. That's good.

[03:17:22] JW: It's on the web now, folks. Go to your search engine and look for Red Barn Ramblers.

SL: Okay.

JW: Good.

SL: We're good.

TM: All right.

SL: Okay.

JW: Thanks.

SL: I'll call Kris. Thank you, buddy.

TM: Thank you.

SL: Great stuff. Fun stuff.

JW: Yeah.

[03:17:37 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]