CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with WAYNE OMURA

Interviewed

By

Arthur A. Hansen

On April 21, 2001

OH 2909

This is an edited transcription of an interview conducted for the Center for Oral and Public History, sponsored by California State University, Fullerton. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions that are not factual. The Center for Oral and Public History encourages all researchers to listen to the recording while reading the oral history transcription, as some expressions, verbiage, and intent may be lost in the interpretation from audio to written source.

Researchers are welcome to utilize short excerpts from this transcription without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, the interviewer, and the Center for Oral and Public History. Permission for extensive use of the transcription and related materials, duplication, and/or reproduction can be obtained by contacting the Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, PO Box 6846, Fullerton CA 92834-6846. Email: coph@fullerton.edu.

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: WAYNE OMURA

INTERVIEWER: Arthur A. Hansen

DATE: April 21, 2001

LOCATION: Boulder, Colorado

PROJECT: Japanese American

AH: This is an interview with Wayne Omura by Art Hansen for the Japanese American Project of the Oral History Program at California State University at Fullerton. The date of the interview is April 21, 2001, and the time of the interview is approximately 1:30 p.m. The interview is being held in room 356 of the historic Hotel Boulderado located in Boulder, Colorado. Wayne Omura is the youngest son of the late James Matsumoto Omura.[1] This interview is being done in connection with the interviewer's editing of the senior Mr. Omura's autobiographical memoir.[2] Wayne, before turning to your father's life and memoir, let's talk about you. I would like you to present an overview of your life from the time of your birth to the present day, at least in a profile-type manner.

WO: Okay. I was born September 21, 1955, in Denver, Colorado. Grew up and went to Schenk Elementary School.

AH: Okay.

WO: Just a normal life there. I went to Kepner Junior High. We lived at 1455 S. Irving in Denver, and all these schools were within just a couple of miles, or within one mile, actually. So, junior high school was Kepner Junior High; and high school was Abraham Lincoln High School. And so, my—pretty much lived, I think, a normal life. Do you want me to get into dropping out of high school and stuff like that?

AH: Sure.

---

[1] James Omura, O.H. 1765.1, 1765.2, 1765.3 & 1765.4, Center for Oral and Public History.

[2] See Arthur A. Hansen, ed., *Nisei Naysayer: The Memoir of Militant Japanese American Journalist Jimmie Omura* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

WO: Because I don't think there's anything more different as far anything unusual in my past childhood that happened, up until high school.

AH: I'll go back and fill in and ask some questions. You can just tell the story how you want.

WO: Oh, all right. Okay, well, I guess the most significant thing that people look at, as far as different, is my dropping out of high school and that was during—like I told you yesterday—my rebellious phase. When I was searching for the meaning of life and didn't know whether all this normal, traditional thing of the way people live is the way we're suppose to live or the way I wanted to live. And when I was, like, sixteen is when I became a vegetarian, because I didn't think it was right to take the lives of conscious animals because I figured that they felt pain just like we do. At least they have their brain and show similar reactions when they are hurt. So, that's when I started thinking that it wasn't right to eat animals. Especially, when you don't have to. Maybe it's different in societies, primitive societies, where they have to stay alive or to keep their kids alive or something. But, in modern day society, when there are all these vegetarian alternatives—probably more healthy as far as lower cholesterol or lower chance of heart attacks. All that kind of stuff if you have more of a fruity, vegetarian-type diet. So, I became vegetarian, and that caused a lot of problems in the family because everybody else in the family was just regular. We were raised on McDonald's hamburgers is what I like to tell everybody. (laughs) That was the first rebellious phase.

And then, it was my junior year, half way through my junior year in high school that I just—even though I was getting mostly As and some Bs, I didn't think it was worth it anymore, studying calculus and everything. Like, when I was trying to figure out what the meaning of life was, that I had to be studying hard, because I'd be in an accelerated track. So, it was like I couldn't even study normal. I had to study harder. And it got to a point where I just gave up and said I don't want to do that anymore. So, you asked me what I did.

I know I was going to the library almost every day reading books on religion, philosophy, and all that kinds of stuff, and that's when I caused a lot of friction with my dad. That was the first time in my life that I was causing a lot of friction because my brother [Gregg] had gone on—I guess at that time he was in college. He was doing the normal thing, what was expected of him, kind of (laughs) where I was dropping out and all that. So, it was definitely—I felt like everybody in my family was against me and everything, looked down on me and stuff. Like, was unsupportive, I guess. Kind of makes you wonder, because, if you could get good grades and be top notch to a certain point, they admire you. Then why wouldn't they think your decision has some merit to it? Or, all of a sudden, because you are not doing what they want, it is totally wrong. It's like, unless you follow the mold, you're the bad—well, that's what my dad's stuff is about. If you don't follow the mold, you're the black sheep, and everybody is against you. But, if anybody, he should have understood. (laughs)

But, it's kind of like at that time, when I wasn't in high school, maybe I should be helping him in his landscaping job and all that. But, I wasn't doing that

either, and so he was really mad at me. It eventually got to the point where, like I told you yesterday, that he was always bringing up that he's supporting me and everything. And I said—well, he owed me, because I lent him my life savings because the business was in trouble. His landscaping business was in trouble. So, I was saying, "Pay me back the money, and I'll leave." But, he couldn't do that; he didn't want to do that. I don't even know if he had the money. I don't even know if he would have paid it back because that was his control over me. So, even though I admire my dad, things weren't always that rosy. Well, that's probably the way it is with everyone's family; there's bad things and good things. But, at that point, it was definitely bad things with me. So, at some point, I figured out I was just going to leave with what little I had. My mom [Karen Haruko Motoishi] had contacted her brother that lived just a few miles away, and I went and stayed with them for the summer. And then over that summer, my dad mellowed out more about me because I was gone. What's that saying? Distance—

AH: Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

WO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maybe that's why he mellowed more. I came back because he wasn't mad at me anymore or something. So, I came back. I guess I was out of high school for about a year-and-a-half or something. I'm just guessing. When I went back, it was like everybody I was with had already graduated, which might actually be good because it's more like a pressure thing. I don't have to deal with what people think of me dropping out, because nobody I knew was even there anymore. And still, God, at that time just going back, I was not into that heavy academic study. That I wasn't that into. In fact, I took easy things that I hardly have to do anymore. Like gym, and outdoor education. I was starting to become more outdoors minded. I don't know whether it's because—maybe because of all that studying in the library made me want to get outdoors. (laughs) Or, maybe some of the stuff that I was reading was saying that man is separated from nature, and that we lost our roots and everything. I'm not really sure. I know I'm influenced by the nature philosophy-type writing now. There was one writer, Loren Eiseley, I really like him a lot. I know I was reading him a whole bunch back then and just his nature, naturalistic-type writing probably made me have this more yearning to be more into nature and everything.

AH: Were you reading Edward Abbey, too?

WO: Not back then. Edward Abbey I found during my college days, but it was Loren Eiseley that was the main naturalistic writer back then.

AH: And the environmental movement was big at the time you are talking about.

WO: Yeah, so maybe that filtered down and influenced me.

AH: Especially living in Colorado, it hit hard here.

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: I mean, even in the most popular culture with things like John Denver singing about—

WO: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

AH: Being probably the most popular singer of the late seventies.

WO: Yeah. So, anyway, I did start getting into more of the outdoors and the physical kind of stuff, and that's why I did take the outdoor physical education class. And it was around that time, too, that—you asked me yesterday whether my dad influenced us to get into sports. And I told you about bowling and stuff and how my brother got into football, but I don't know if that was because my father influenced him to. I do know that my dad always said—even when I was in high school before I rebelled, when I just went into high school, they had the bowling team and everything. He was always saying that everything can't just be academic. So, he was wanting me to join the bowling team, which I did because that's what we would do. That's one of the few family things—my mom never bowled, but my dad would take us out from when we were little kids and we'd be bowling. So, I joined the bowling team. But, as far as more physical stuff, he would always say that you have to have a balance. You can't just be all mind. Everything has to be mind and body. He was one of my first memories of somebody saying that kind of stuff. That you have to be well-rounded, well-balanced individual, [it] was my dad. And, of course, when we were growing-up, we were working for my dad.

And, at least during the summertime, we got our fill up of physical labor. (laughs) We were raised kind of like farm boys in a way. Usually, during that time, we worked six days a week during the summer. Even as we got older, on the weekends, too, he'd want us to work at least a day or so. Eventually, when we got old enough and we had more homework, we were able to get out of it by saying, "Well, we have a whole bunch of homework to do." (laughs) But, as far as summertime goes, it's like for sure since we were twelve years old—I'm just guessing—since we were twelve, every summer we'd have to go out and work for my dad, work with my dad. That's what made us different than the other kids is because I had—like in sixth grade or something, I remember everybody else was happy, "Summertime is here and everything." My brother and I were all, "God, tomorrow we have to go to work." We're really dreading—it's like we enjoyed—maybe that made us slanted toward more academic or to do well in school because that's where we enjoyed ourselves. Whereas, when summer came, it was the physical hard labor. So, that's interesting. But, I should note that my brother and I talked about it, and we do think that all that physical hard labor—growing-up like that—that it helped shape our character and was actually good for us. Rather than being able to loaf-around all summer all and everything like the other kids, it did change us and made us a different type of person, so we thought it was good for us.

AH: And the one summer that you were out of work was the summer that you had dropped out of school, right?

WO: Yeah, uh-huh.

AH: So, that was your one reprieve during the time you were growing up?

WO: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. At some point, there came a point where—I guess with my brother, once he went to college [University of Colorado, Boulder], he was in the beginning coming down and working over the summertime. But, at a certain point, he just stayed up in Boulder here and lived up in Boulder and took summer school classes or something. I know at first it was like I got a bad grade, and so I have to "make-up"—(laughs) It's almost like it was an excuse or something.

AH: So, he [Gregg] wouldn't work in the summer at a certain point?

WO: Yeah or just occasionally. I know the first time, which caused problems. But, what my dad understood was—I told you that when he first started off as [an] engineering [major].

AH: Your brother Gregg?

WO: Yeah. But, he got like Cs or Ds or something—a couple Ds or something. So, he wasn't doing well, and he wanted to make-up some course or take some more courses so that he catch-up better. Something like that. That's eventually why he decided engineering wasn't for him. I guess he decided that he didn't like the—

AH: Was it the math mostly?

WO: I don't know. You can ask him that when you interview him.

AH: But, he switched to pre-med?

WO: Yeah, to medicine. Yeah, pre-med.

AH: And then, when he was doing it, you finished high school. Did you start thinking of college?

WO: No, like I said, even going back to high school, I was more convinced to go back just because even getting a menial-type job, pretty much like I'm doing now, they are going to want you to have a high school education or GED or something like that. And, if you want to get any further—well, I really wasn't concerned about getting any further. I figured, for my philosophical standpoint, just doing the work to pay for your rent and get some food on your table. I guess, even way back then, I wasn't thinking I wanted build my future and family and kids and have to support them and all that because I was more like, "What the hell?" (laughs) See, I'm trying to tone down my language. I almost changed it from hell to heck. Then I thought, You should just say

it. (laughs) "What the hell? What is this all for?" So, even when I went back to high school, like I said, I took as easy a subject as I could just to finish the credits I needed.

AH: Did you sit out a year after high school before you decided to go to college?

WO: No, it's at that point then I was willing to start working for my dad again, and I worked full-time in the summertime. Then, after I graduated, I figured I'm willing to work for my dad, and so that's what I was doing, worked full-time.

AH: Instead of going to college?

WO: Yeah, at the time they said I should—or offered for me to go to college. I guess I wasn't going to say this because I thought I was bragging, because if I don't say this then you're not going to understand the situation. (laughs) I had really good grades, like I said. Just that year that I decided to drop out, they changed to their policy from, let's see—because of getting funds from the federal government, they decided to make a policy that, if you're absent more than a certain number of days, you cannot pass no matter what your schoolwork was all the way through that point. So, more than thirty days absent, you automatically fail.

AH: And you were way over, beyond that.

WO: The things is, when I dropped out that semester, it's like all those classes I was in, I still had As and Bs, mostly As. I remember, for example, my English teacher was one they were considering. [He said,] "Well, he's got As right now. And, even if he totally drops out and doesn't come back, it's like I should still be able to give him a C because an A and an F is a C." But then, because of the federal policy and everything, the Denver School District said so many days absent, automatic failure. So, it was like I totally failed all those classes that I dropped out in during that semester, which pulled my grade point average down. But, when I went back to finish off school and everything—well, okay, in our junior year they had college counselors coming in and talking to us all. There was like six or seven hundred in the class. It's like they pulled the top dozen people to talk to, and I was one of them. So, I was the top twelve out of six or seven hundred. But, even after I flunked out, my grade point average dropped down. But, even when I went back, I probably got As or Bs in gym and outdoor education. I think I graduated—I'm not positive, but I think I graduated number twenty-seven out of seven hundred—

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AH: Your Fs that _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yes, so it was still like I could go to college and make something of myself, because I could still go to a pretty good college and everything. I had to explain that to show

you why my parents think I should still go to college. I still got good grades, and I could still go somewhere and do something for myself.

AH: When you got this information, you didn't capitalize on it immediately, to go to college. You, instead, decided to work for your dad.

WO: Yeah, because I was totally not into all the academic—it feels funny talking to you because you're a professor. But, at that time, I—it's the case when you go to classes and they tell you what to read, what you should be interested in and stuff like that. And I was really more independent. At that time, I was going to libraries I was buying all my books. At that time, I was going to the library all the time and spending a lot of my free time in the libraries and bookstores. I guess I was buying books, I can't resist that.

AH: So, you were continuing your education even when you were working, but you were just doing it on your own?

WO: Yeah, yeah.

AH: You were doing a lot of independent reading and searching and things like that.

WO: Yeah. So, in a way, it's almost though—even though I was still doing the intellectual stuff, I was rebelling against the established academic routine kind of thing, which you should do because, I guess, maybe it was during—might have been left over rebellion from the sixties or something where you should do your own thing and not do what your told to do. It's like, you know best what you think is good for yourself if you look inside. I understand the good stuff of this established way of this is the stuff that this is important because gaining experience, getting a broad view of things is really important. But, I also see that too many people just follow that their whole lives and never look inside to see what they should be following. You know that Joseph Campbell idea of you put the ladder against the wrong wall, you climb to the top, and realize you are leaning against the wrong wall, you should be on the other side or something.

AH: In some ways, you were actually following in a path that your father had followed years before that, because his attitude toward school was similar. He did well in some things, in other things he completely decided that he would follow his views, and that he did a lot of independent, prolific amount of outside reading and stuff on his own. And so, when I saw his grades in the records that I got from you, it was singularly unimpressive his high school grades. And yet, he remembers, I think, that he did quite well in school. I think that it's not false, because I think he is remembering the courses that he cared about. And, if they happened to correlate with his own interests, than he did very well. If there was an interest he didn't care about, he shined them on. But, what prompted you finally to go to college, given the fact that, in a sense, you were thinking to yourself that a regularized education wasn't for you, that you could learn better on your own? What finally got you to go to college? I do know a little bit,

I guess talking to your dad about that when you went to college, you were the architect of your own major. That you didn't take a prescribed—I guess your brother told me—that you didn't take a prescribed major, but you sort of constructed your own major.

WO: Yeah, something similar. But, as far as why I finally went to college was—well, like I said, I was working for my dad and everything. Meanwhile, I should mention this, I was writing. I figured that what I wanted to be was a writer and a philosopher and all that kind of stuff. That way, if any of my stuff got published—like you said, people do not get much out of the books they write, unless you make a salary. I was figuring, even if I'm a starving artist or starving writer, that's what I want to do. So, all I really need to do is have a normal job or just a job that will give me just as much free time as I can. Little did I know that the more menial job that you have, the less you get paid, the more you have to work, the less free time you have. (laughs) But, I think I was realizing how much I was having to work for my dad. (laughs) Anyways, so I was writing in my free time, even though I was working for my dad. I went to college at twenty-two; I was twenty-one when I finished my first novel. So, I had actually sent out—you know, you get tons of rejections slips. In fact, up till now, I've counted how many. I actually was wondering how much effort I'm putting into this and always getting rejections. I actually counted how many times I've written out or sent out material, and it was over a thousand times.

AH: Was it fiction and non-fiction you were writing?

WO: Yeah, both.

AH: Were you writing one more than the other?

WO: It was actually an even split. But anyway, I had finished a novel all about searching for the meaning in life.

AH: And this is before you enrolled at the University of Colorado [Boulder]?

WO: Yeah, yeah. And so, it was all about searching for the meaning of life. So, even though it was _____ (inaudible) and metaphysical, symbolism and everything like that. Like what they say about the first novel the author writes is his autobiography. (laughs) Because the only concern of the person in the book is trying to figure out what's going on—it's like Kafka's Castle. You know, that kind of thing. Plus, I'm proud of this because I know how lucky I was. At the time, I didn't realize that I was really lucky. After all these years, I've realized how hard it is to be a writer and getting them to accept you. But, when I was twenty-one, I got a literary agent to represent me, which at the time I just thought, it's my due. I thought it was normal. But, at the time, even though I was twenty-one, I was like a kid or something. Her name was Shirley Collier, Shirley Collier, her agency, and she was like one of the old guard literary representatives.

AH: Did she approach you?

WO: Well, no, I sent her [a letter] asking if she would. She then wanted my stuff, actually wanted to see the whole novel. Liked it and then agreed to represent me. So, it was—to me, now, thinking back—

AH: Flattering.

WO: Yeah, I guess it was flattering at the time, even though I thought it was my due because then—and plus, she was a prestigious representative, the one that has been in the business for thirty years or forty years. [She] was getting, in fact, almost ready to retire at that time. And she helped me for about half a year, returned my stuff and said, she can't sell it. She said some people were laughing at her for taking me on. (laughs) But, she took me on. So anyway, that was a high point there. Then the main reason I went to college—I guess I have my stories that I like to tell, so I skip over all the past stuff. I do have interesting things that I like to tell people. But, what got me into college was I had been working for my dad for—I'm just guessing—at least a couple two, three, fours years. Something like that. And full—

AH: After high school?

WO: Yeah, yeah.

AH: Really? About four years before you started college.

WO: It may have only been two years. I'm not sure.

AH: It was a substantial amount of time.

WO: Yeah, because I didn't go to college. Okay, so normal people graduate at eighteen, and I didn't go to college until twenty-two. I only worked a couple years, then full-time, a couple years. And that's when my dad's health was failing.

AH: What year are we talking about, approximately?

WO: I went to college from '78 to '82.

AH: And by '78 his health was starting to—

WO: Well, probably '78, but because he was having problems—you know, it didn't all happen at once. But, it totally came to a decisive point—I'm just guessing again, and I might be off by years—I would guess '76 or '77 is when it became so major that he decided he better sell the business because he can't continue because his health was too bad.

AH: So, you were working with him when that decision was made?

WH: Yeah, in fact, it was kind of—let's see, I'll tell you an incident that happened, which shows, in a way, the family dynamics. I was working for him and we were doing—he did really good landscape. I'm sure he showed you some of the places. But god, some of the places from the ground up was a new, expensive house, and he was the one who put in all the landscaping, plus designed how he wanted the landscaping. They accepted it, he put it in, and it was a major showpiece kind of thing. And we were at one of the places. It was just him and me because it might have been during the offseason. Like, during the summertime, we have ten people working for us. But then, when it gets slower, then we start laying people off after the summertime when the weather starts getting worse, and there is not much jobs to do. Especially, getting through the winter, sometimes—in fact, he would feel obligated to hold on to one or two of the best workers and give them work to do around the shop, just to give them a livelihood until the spring came, and we can start getting paid for our jobs and everything. I guess he had money saved up to be able to pay them. But, it was geared more toward the offseason because I don't remember other workers around. But, it was me and my dad, and we were working and shoveling some work. See, it's some hard, physical labor. (laughs)

AH: Right.

WO: And all of a sudden he started saying he doesn't feel good. And he was kind of tapping on his chest. At the time, we didn't know he had problems with heart attacks or anything like that. And so—this is funny, see? This is funny because all through life, he was the one in charge of making decisions. Even to the point of what we were doing right there and then. You have to dig this out so many inches deep. Now looking back as an adult, I think, "God, I should have told him to go sit down," and, if he was still feeling bad, take him to the hospital or something like that. But, it's almost as though the way—you know?

I think my brother took on more authority or responsibility, but I think that's because it maybe was a normal way of upbringing. But, I think it may be also the Japanese kind of—the first son would be the one that would be the executor of the estate. He will be the one that will continue on the family. All this kind of stuff are things that are built around the first son, and maybe because I'm the younger son or maybe I wasn't trained as much to take control or whatever—at that time, I was probably twenty or twenty or something like that. And, like, some other family might have known and said, "Let's go to the hospital," or something like that. But, he was the one that was in control and in charge. He's the boss and everything. (laughs) It almost like I'm just the worker.

AH: Did he collapse at the job?

WO: No, he was just feeling kind of funny. It was a hotter day. But then, after a while he felt better, and we kept shoveling again. And he kept on tapping his chest. I told him, "Maybe you should rest for a while or whatever." Eventually, I see—you should have made the recording a long time ago because I can't remember what happened.

Eventually, he got to a doctor—I don't know he went—I don't remember doing it. So, maybe we went home, and then my mom took him to the family doctor or something like that because I don't remember driving and stopping off at our doctor or anything like that. So, at the very most he said, "Let's call it an early day," or something like that and just went home early or something.

But, that was the first time he was having problems, and next thing you know the doctor was saying he has to go into the hospital to have more extensive—find out was wrong and everything. That's when they came back and said he had a minor heart attack. So, the doctor was saying how he has got to change, that he can't be going on like this and doing hard work, and I think that's when he decided—I don't know. It's funny, he may have consulted my mom or something like that. You would hope that they would have talked like that, but you never know. Our family is so weird, like I tell you. He may have just decided on his own, but I think this was an important enough decision that he talked it over with my mom first, that we are going to have to sell the business [because] I can't keep on doing this kind of stuff. He did offer it to me, asking me if I wanted to keep the business going and everything.

AH: Because you were not in college at the time.

WO: Yeah, I wasn't in college. And I said, "No way, I don't want to do this the rest of my life." Not only was it hard physical work, which at that time I was starting to get to appreciate more because, like I told you, I was trying to get away from all that intellectual world and more into the outdoors and the physical kinds of stuff. So, I was getting more—after a hard days work, it's hard to believe that you enjoy it, but I was getting more to appreciate that it wasn't that bad. But, it was hard enough that I knew this wasn't—you know, even working in the grocery store is easier work than working behind a counter as clerk, which is what I do. [It] is a lot less taxing. It's good that you do physical hard labor, maybe not every day, or six days a week, or something like that. Because if you want to keep that intellectual side—you get home, and you want to read or do something—then you're so tired, it's hard to keep the intellectual side going. But, it's kind of weird with me—I probably should mention, I was really a night owl all through high school. So, even after coming home from work, I would always want to stay up and do something. Watching TV. I know I read a lot, but that was on my days off.

AH: Did you stay up until two in the morning?

WO: Oh, yeah. At least. (laughs) During the high school days—that's one thing I should throw in there. Are you sure you want all this information about me?

AH: Sure, go ahead.

WO: Okay, because I thought we were supposed to be talking about my dad. (laughs)

AH: We are talking about your dad.

WO: The way he raised us, okay. During my high school days, it was horrible because I didn't get enough sleep. I was chronically sleep deprived because I was a night owl. But, then school started at what, 8:00 or 7:45? So, all the time, that's one of the things, which really, probably, affected me to a negative degree. Just having to struggle to stay awake or to deal with my studies and everything like that. Just because of my natural inclination to be a night owl. That's why the job I work at—I work the night shift because it is perfect for me. I could go to sleep at five or six in the morning and sleep as long as I want because my shift doesn't start until four in the afternoon. And I never sleep that long, so I always wake up ahead of time and get back up here. So, it's perfect that way. But, now where was I?

AH: When your dad wanted you to take the business. You said, "No way, it's just too hard."

WO: Yeah, that kind of work was—I didn't want to be doing that the rest of my life. Plus, I wouldn't be able to do as much of the scholarly, literary kind of work, studying and stuff, that I want if I was always exhausted from working six days a week. Plus, seeing how my dad—it wasn't just the physical work you would have to do out there, but you would have to do all the office work, all the paper work and everything. So, you never have any free time.

AH: So, the business was at a crossroads in a sense that Gregg couldn't take it over because he was already in college.

WO: Yeah.

AH: You were not willing to take it over, and your dad was physically not able. So, did he sell the business?

WO: Yeah. So, that's what he decided to do. You know, I keep on going on a tangent.

AH: They're not tangents, just continue.

WO: I know if I don't mention this, I'll forget. You asked me yesterday about my dad, about whether he had any close friends or anything like that, and this just sparked what we talked about. Sparked my memory of when I went home—my dad was really—I told you before, he was really a tyrant but that's only when things went wrong. But, normally, day-to-day, he was driven but especially with customers—obviously you have to be really pleasant with them—he was always really friendly and talkative and willing to tell stories of his past over a cup of coffee. Like when we would have to take machinery to get fixed, or when we went to plant nurseries to pick up trees and shrub and stuff like that, he would be always friendly with all those people. He would just sit around and bullshit, especially, when it started getting slower in the season, and you didn't have that much to do, when you're fixing things up and had to go get things. During the wintertime, you are totally crazy because there isn't that much landscaping work you can do, so I do remember times when we

would talk forever. I was just a kid, so I would be off on the side listening and bored to heck.

AH: He would be talking to somebody else?

WO: Yeah, yeah. I'm just a little kid off on the side or something. So, he's talking with these other people and telling stories, just laughing and yacking it up. So, he didn't have friends that he would socialize with, but, when there was time, where the work situation allowed it, then he was social with people and friendly with people. Just as a good businessman you would figure that is the way you should be, because you should be friendly with all the people that are repairing your equipment because then they would do a good job. And, if something goes wrong, they are willing to fix it for free. It's when you're in good terms with people that it's good for business. If you start making enemies, then that's bad because pretty soon you won't have any place to take your machinery to get it fixed and stuff like that. Nobody at the supply place will sell you stuff because they'll think you're a bad guy. (laughs)

So, he was friendly in those situations. I think that's where he got his social stimulation in a way. And I think all the rest—at the time, he was too busy. Or during the wintertime, maybe because he didn't have to be constantly going throughout the year—even though, when the wintertime came, it's like when he did have more time, it's like he didn't have the social situation where you do go out Friday night, Saturday night or something like that. Because, during the rest of the year, there is no way you can do that because you had to get up and work. So, that's just to explain that it's not that likely, it was totally isolated and had no friends. It's like his work made it, in general, that he couldn't really—that's just an excuse. Anybody could, but it's just easier not to have those obligations to have to go out and have a drink with the guys.

AH: He was a hard working guy is what you're saying?

WO: Yeah.

AH: The type of work that he was doing was very demanding.

WO: Yeah.

AH: So, when he had discretionary time—it was very rare, et cetera—he really didn't use it for socializing. But, in the context of his job, he socialized a lot—especially, in the winters and everything—and when you were bored, he was engaged and everything. It was good business, but it wasn't for business purposes. You could see that there was some sort of social enjoyment of being able to talk to these people.

WO: Yeah.

AH: Bullshitting was not just a means to an end. It was an end within itself.

WO: Yeah, because otherwise he would be doing it and not enjoying it, and I could totally see that he was enjoying it himself to the fullest.

AH: And, after he sold the business, what did that mean for you? And what did it mean for him?

WO: Okay, yeah, we are getting back to the point. That's where we left off. So, he had to sell the business because I didn't want to take it over. Gregg was going to become a doctor. I figured there was no way I wanted to live that kind of life, because I saw how much of his life was taken up by that, and I didn't want to live like that. And so, I said, "No, I don't want to carry it on."

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yeah, because I think he knew I was writing and all that kind of stuff. My mom and him had offered college to me before.

AH: Did you apply for a scholarship?

WO: I did. With me, I did. It's probably because, after selling the business, my dad had a lot of assets, and they said you have to have full disclosure—

AH: Or you're disqualified.

WO: Yeah. They said at most I can get a $500 loan. I have to repay or something like that. But, my brother didn't get much either. It's like he got something but not much. Not much in college. I think he did get a lot bigger loan through med school. But, any at the time—in the pecking order, do you have siblings?

AH: I just have one brother [Roy] like you do.

WO: And he's older or younger?

AH: Two years older.

WO: Okay, so you should know that there is a little resentment—you know, like Tommy Smothers or on the Smothers Brothers? (laughs) Where he always said, "Mom always liked you best." That kind of stuff. (laughs) You always have this feeling of, God, they are always doing stuff for him. Plus, they even bought him a brand new car and everything to go to school. My grandmother chipped in money for that, too. They bought him a car. I don't know if it was a loan that never re-paid. I know he got a brand new car that I don't think he ever paid for. And, by the time it's your turn, everything is used up, but (laughs) you always have this feeling of resentment [that] they always like him better.

AH: Did the business sell for a very good price?

WO: The business itself didn't sell well. What it was, it was auctioned-off. All the stuff was auctioned and then you don't get that much. You are lucky if you get what you paid for it. But, how they made their money was the land that they bought was for the office and the nursery.

AH: Oh, they owned some acreage on that?

WO: Yeah, yeah. It was probably an acre or right around an acre. And at the time, it was away from the main part of Denver. There were some run-down shacks or houses that some of the poorer people lived in, like the Mexican-Americans and people like that. It was like the industrial area of Inglewood, but it was so run-down and vacant lots and stuff like that, that they had bought it cheap. And, by the time he was ready to sell, that area was so massively expensive—

AH: Suburbanized.

WO: It was industrial so it was—at the time, it was a Seven-Up plant two, three blocks away from us, and that was about the only industrial thing around. But now, I've driven there maybe a month ago, two months ago earlier this year. I had not been there for a while, so I just drove through that area to see. It is totally filled-up with businesses and industrial type—

AH: Like an industrial park.

WO: Totally industrial park. And so, that's when they were able to sell. The price of the real estate had shot up. And, if that had not happened, they would not be as good off as they are. So, that's what really made them their money. They should have been real estate investors, not landscapers. You do landscaping all your life, and you barely break even.

AH: So, the business did not continue under that name?

WO: No, no. It was just auctioned off.

AH: So, it was just selling off the equipment and everything that went with the business, but not selling the goodwill of the business.

WO: Yeah, and by that time, we were going—the business was going downhill because at that time, there were a whole bunch of landscape companies because the Denver area was growing more than normal. A lot of suburbs developing all over the place, so there was houses that needed to be landscaped and everything. So, there was a lot more competition, I think his competition tripled from when he first started-out in landscaping to then. And at that time, I was doing some of the bidding—actually, toward the end I was doing just about all the bidding. I was picking up the blueprints and doing the bid on things.

AH: So, you were really involved in the business at the time?

WO: Yeah, and that was one of the reasons he was thinking I could take it over and all that. I guess I should modify the history of when my dad first started having heart problems. He did start pulling away more from the business and not doing as hard a work. And plus kind of encouraging me, prompting me or letting me do more the office work; and doing the bidding and things. So, there had to have been a period there where he first had his first minor heart attack. He must have had ten throughout.

AH: So, he had either something that he talked to you about—or information of his own mortality at some point—and was starting to make some contingency plans in terms of putting you into some different jobs that you would have to know to carry-on a business.

WO: Anyway, so he was getting prepared, like you say there. And, uh—I lost my train of thought. (laughs)

AH: We're still with the idea of him selling the business, and then you said mostly the money he made was through the real estate. And then that put you in the position where you had to make some sort of decision in your life and you said, "What about college?"

WO: Okay, but the reason why he could not sell the business and he had just auctioned it off was because so much competition at that time that the people were willing to take less and less profit just to get the jobs to pay the expenses to pay their bills. There was only a certain amount of the pie, and there was a bunch more sharks trying to get at it. And it's like, even if we got a job, the amount of profit we got off of it was not that much, and a lot of the time we would just be breaking even. I think what really hurt my dad, though, was that at one point—and I wasn't in charge at that time about the bidding or anything. This was around the time I had rebelled and dropped out of high school, and my brother was working. It was summertime, but it was my dad who had done the bid. It was for Lowry Air Force Base. This was kind of sad but kind of humorous, too, so I can't help grinning. (laughs) Don't write that down. (laughs) But, it was a major dormitory area and just acres and acres of lawn. And at the time—this is where my politics come into it—because there was just so much government spending that they—I think it was under [President Jimmy] Carter.

AH: Well, Carter came in '76.

WO: Okay, so it was—okay who was before '76?

AH: Before Carter? Let's see, it would have been Nixon. I mean, [President Gerald] Ford. Ford because Ford finished it [Nixon's second term as president] out.

WO: Okay, I can't blame Carter then. (laughs) But anyway, government spending was just really wasting money. [There was] just acres and acres of area outside the dormitory complexes and stuff. Any normal person would have seeded the area. It's much cheaper to seed. They wanted sod. They wanted instant beautiful lawn, and I think it was in the over $100,000. Just an immense amount as far a blatant—it was squandering taxpayers' money just so that you could see the full lawn fast. So ridiculous, maybe they had some general that was going to inspect it. Like they had to have it all looking good. So, they had to have it sodded or something; it's like ridiculous because sod is so expensive.

But what happened was, my dad just about—god, just made him blow-up when I made him really horrible at that time. And plus, that's probably why he was so mad at me. Especially, that I would rebel at that time period when he needed all that help he could get. On the blueprints, they said—the blueprints had been photocopied or something like that, and even though they were big blueprints, it said blue prints reduced by one-half dimension. And so, my dad reduced the amount by one-half. But, if you know math, you realize that if you—2x2 is 4. It's like he should have quadrupled the amount. *Or wait!* He should have—the amount should have—should not have been just a doubling. It should have been squared or quadrupled or something—

AH: Multiplied.

WO: Should have been way more than just doubled. Let's see how it goes. Like if it was originally 4x4, it was sixteen square feet. But, if they reduced the size of the blueprint to 2x2, that would be four square feet. But, he only doubled it to make it eight square feet and it should have been double that. So, all the tons of expensive sod—

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yeah, and it was like a case where it is like you have to be, ah—what's the term when a company—see, I've been out of it for so long—a company endorses or guarantees your companies will provide—

AH: Underwrite—I know what you mean. Bonds?

WO: Yeah, he was bonded. He always had to get bonding, especially for federal or government type jobs and stuff. So, yeah, you don't have to get bonding at all for residential houses, small stuff. But many, of these major public kinds of things, government things required bonding. And it's like—my dad was saying, "If I don't carry out and take the loss. I'll never be able to do any large job again because I'd have lost my bonding." So, we went way under in debt. I mean, just to the point that he was ready to go bankrupt and everything. In fact, that's the period in time he had borrowed money from all the family members, used all our life savings to help keep everything—

AO: It was a horrible period, wasn't it?

WO: Yeah.

AO: I mean, you dropping out, him losing his bid.

WO: Yeah.

AH: I mean, really winning it, but losing it as a result of it. And then after that—you know when you were talking about the competition going on—I was looking at some of the entries in the diaries covering the period that they had the landscape business, most of the entries were business. One of the things he mentioned in a business entry was that he went to bid and there were sixteen different bidders for that particular job.

WO: Yes.

AH: For that particular job. That's really intense.

WO: Yeah. And they were just dropping their profit margins so much that even if they got the job, you'd hardly make anything. So, it's almost like you stand more to lose. (laughs)

AH: He mentioned that he lost that bid; he was grossly under bid.

WO: Yeah. Oh, I know I made mistakes at time. Was that one of my entries? (laughs)

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: I know I did a major mistake once but it didn't cost that much. I think they still made money. (laughs) It was a case where the Colorado Museum, across from the Denver Public Library.

AH: I know it, yeah.

WO: Yeah, I made the mistake of—I saw a planters. You know, they had these series of planters that had trees and shrubs plus a rock or some kind of—yeah, I think it was a rock, stone in the planter. And I didn't realize that it was elevated at an angle like that, so just looking at the planters—

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Well, what it was that it was flat. To put the stuff in is easy, but if you have to get up to the ceiling, like two stories. We eventually had to have a conveyer belt [because] they figured it was the easiest way rather than how else are you going to get it up there? You're going to take a wheelbarrow full of rocks into the elevator and go up each time? It is like it would take forever, so they rented a conveyer belt thing that

would pull up the rock to the planter and drop it off. So, all of that wasn't in the bid price.

AH: You did the bid?

WO: Yeah, I did that one; that was my mistake.

AH: I went to that place, and I recall it really well. The outside looks like you are looking right over the library, which it's the newest of the libraries. But, I went into that facility and looked all around there in 1997. Well, you were given the promise that for your good services that you would be sent to the University of Colorado, and so you did enroll.

WO: Yeah. I should amend that by saying they agreed to send me the first two years. So, they didn't agree to just provide for my college education. They agreed to pay for it the first two years. And then, based on how I did and how they are doing, maybe pay for the rest. Maybe I'd have to pay for the rest myself.

AH: Which was probably a prudent sort of measure. Giving the fact that they had just gotten out of a business and didn't know how that would play out, probably, in terms of their own personal finances.

WO: Yeah. But, especially now after being able to go through all their finances and everything, I know that they came out of it in good shape. Mainly because selling the real estate. So, the money was there, it was just the case—

AH: You were going to pull out again.

WO: Yeah, yeah, that could be. Well then, that would save them money. (laughs)

AH: But, they were being guarded.

WO: Yeah, yeah. I didn't have assurance that this is my place that I can go for the next four years. It's like, I can go for the next two years and maybe they'd pay for the next two. Depending on how I do and stuff. Maybe if I still wanted to go out and get my degree, I'd have to pay for it myself. See, to me there's always these contingencies put on me. Whereas my brother, they'd do whatever. (laughs) That's what I get for rebelling and dropping out and everything. But, on the other hand, I worked for my dad and helped his business way more than my brother did.

AH: Now, your dad, as I was telling you yesterday, repeatedly had exercised his bragging rights as a father and talked about how well his two sons had done at the university. He made a point of saying you graduated with high honors, and that he also puts that into the entries of the who's who that is listed in those entries. And I can look at those, I know that he had a role in constructing the material, because I saw some forms that you had to fill out and stuff. And he filled out these things about his two

sons and their educational experiences and post-educational experiences. But, you must have done well. Did you do well from the beginning at the University of Colorado?

WO: Yeah, I started off with straight As and everything. I got all the way through, ended up with only getting two Bs. That was because I had problems with the professor, you know, personal problems. At first, I was all upset because I wanted to get straight As because I'm kind of like a perfectionist. (laughs) When I set my mind to do something, it's like I want to do it well. Yeah, it's whether I want to do something or not. That's my problem. It is a matter of choosing what I want to do. But, once I decide, I go all the way, kind of. I was upset. I thought those two professors gave me Bs, but then one of my good professors, as opposed to bad professors (laughs)—one of my good professors told me that believe it or not, getting a couple of Bs is actually good for you because most of the universities for graduate—for accepting you into graduate school and everything—tend to look at people with straight As as being brown nosers—

AH: Right.

WO: Yeah. It's only natural that even though you get what would be almost all As, it is only natural that you can't be like _____ (inaudible) and be totally perfect. It is only human nature that you would make some mistakes or something, or that you won't get along with your professors and out of spite they'll give you a poorer grade. The entrance people look with a skeptical eye when they see all perfect scores. Like, this is too good, kind of. Whereas, getting almost perfect, two Bs, is actually—

AH: Better.

WO: Yeah, actually better. He said he thought it was better on a human level. So, then I felt better. (laughs)

AH: Now, I've said before, and you said that it was approximately? Right. I said that I thought I heard from your brother that your major was a major of your own construction, rather than one that you just opted for of the existing array of choices. Is that right?

WO: A little bit. I double majored in psychology and English, because the main thing is I want to be a writer. At CU they had an English department. They had three different tracks that you could follow to get your English major and one of them was creative writing. So, a lot of the heavy course load would be creative writing courses, so you could do a bunch of writing. I thought, God, that way I could be writing my novels and everything, (laughs) and getting credit for it. That was really good. So, I did the creative writing. I was into different levels of dreams and consciousness and alternate realities and hypnosis, and all that kind of stuff, which I'm still into and that's why I was interested in psychology. Maybe I'll also find out what was my problem back in

high school. (laughs) You know, like this old saying, psychology people are having to work out their own difficulties. (laughs)

AH: But, you had a double major almost from the beginning?

WO: Yeah. Maybe within the first year I decided I wanted to do two majors because it wasn't that much harder to fulfill the extra requirements in the other department of psychology. And it actually made it so that I, kind of like my brother ended up doing—well, this is the case were I didn't have to have the excuse to move back to Denver for my dad because the business wasn't there anymore. But, since I was up here anyway, who wants to move in and out of—especially with all the books I have—moving in and out of apartments every—just for a short period of summertime or something like that. So, I just stayed up here and we all figured, might as well be going to summer school that way I can get out earlier. Thing is, since I decided to double major—

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yeah, because of that—see, otherwise, I would have been able to graduate probably a semester or maybe even a year earlier. But, because I double majored, I had to take the summer school courses, and I graduated on time just like everybody else.

AH: A lot of universities and their psych departments will have different tracks within the major, if somebody is in clinical. Were you into a track major?

WO: If they did have different tracks—they might have now. But, at the time, either I wasn't aware of it or the tracks they had didn't interest me. I wasn't interested in the clinical stuff because I figured I already analyze myself. (laughs) I did want to get into more the altered states of consciousness, but, at the time—and I'm sure it's true now—I even went to the head of the psychology at the time. It's like a rotating body of head. At the time, it was a guy name Bruce Extran, and he had written a book on hypnosis, which is right in line. And I was saying that I was really interested in the altered states of consciousness, in the areas of dream, sleep and everything, but there are hardly any courses and things. I was asking him if he thought there were other schools—whether other universities might have better program or something. And I don't know if it's self-serving that he wanted to keep me there, but I think he was telling me the truth because I read it, actually, in other places and books on consciousness's that that area of research and study—even though it's considered valid and everything—

AH: It still falls outside the property of most universities.

WO: Yeah, and it's considered—he said, these are his words, "It's considered mumbo-jumbo." Like hypnosis is considered mumbo-jumbo kind of stuff. It's like, if you want to get anywhere, if you're going to be a psychologist, you would steer clear of that because you're never going to get anywhere as far as prestige or any position or

anything if you deal in this mumbo-jumbo area. But, he said he thinks it's ridiculous. He thinks that area of research is totally being neglected because of the attitudes of the universities. The establishment, in effect, is dictating what should be researched because they are the ones that deal the grants and all that kinds of stuff and promote people to positions and everything. And based on what they are doing, if they don't like what you do, then you don't get anywhere. So, he said, "That's just the way it is." All across the nation, he said, had places that had sleep research laboratories and things like that. As far as one that was mainly for graduate level and undergraduate level, which I'm at, it's pretty much just basic. And he said that if I do want to follow in those areas, it's like I have to do just the undergraduate work and then get accepted into a graduate school where they are more into dream research or sleep research and stuff like that.

AH: I take it you might have known a little bit about independent study basis.

WO: Yeah, okay. See, I take a long time to get where I am going because I like to talk about myself. (laughs) So, what happened is that I did double major in all that, but I was doing—neither psychology nor English allowed a certain percentage of independent study so that you wouldn't have to fill-up. You wanted to do your own work and fill more independent and everything that you could just get a professor to sponsor you, and watch over you, and evaluate you, and grade you at the end. But, that you could take a certain percentage of courses, a few courses, during your time period of independent study. And I maxed out all that, (laughs) all those courses. By the end, it's like I couldn't do any more independent study because you'd go for nothing. They wouldn't count it because I took too many. And I actually petitioned—this is probably in the junior and senior year—but I actually petitioned the—

AH: The school?

WO: The dean, yeah, Dean Middleton was his name. At the time, they'd get together with their board of directors and all that at the monthly meetings. And I petitioned to be allowed to have more independent studies. And I got a whole bunch of recommendations from a whole bunch of professors and I'm really proud I saved all those, because they said incredible things about me to get it, to allow more independent studying and allow it to count. And the board and the dean looked at all the stuff. Some of the people were very prestigious. Like Hazel Barnes—I don't know if you know her or not—

AH: Was she in phycology?

WO: She's in existential literature. She knew Jean-Paul Sarte and Simone de Beauvior and these people.

AH: So, it really meant something when she gave—

WO: Yeah, she was one of the most prestigious professors there, and I had taken a course in existential literature through her. And even let her read one of my books and my first novel—the one I'm embarrassed about (laughs)—and got her recommendation and everything, and they still denied me. They said that after looking at the stuff, they still have to hold to their policy. All the professors were just shaking their heads, they couldn't believe it. The different professors thought that if anybody around that they should allow my own stuff because it's important.

AH: They denied—

WO: Yeah, they denied it. But, it was funny because one of the guys walking through the hallway—it's like some professor I didn't even know—stopped me and said, "Are you Wayne Omura?" And I said, "Yeah. He said, "I was on the board there, and it's like, God, I can't believe." He said he's really impressed by me. A totally unknown professor.

AH: They're not so impressed that they will give up bureaucratic ways.

WO: Yeah. So, what happened was that—I'm sure they won't get them in trouble, but potentially it could. I guess if you had enemies, you could get them in trouble. But, some of my professors agreed to allow me to take courses, enroll courses—

AH: _____ (inaudible).

WO: Yeah, they said you don't have to go to classes, take finals or anything. You could do your own stuff. I'll just grade it as part of the course so you got credit for it, but you're able to do everything you want.

AH: That's the only humane way to deal with the situation like that. Otherwise, you're stymying somebody.

WO: Yeah. In fact, one time I couldn't find any of the professors that were willing to do it themselves because if they've spend time doing independent studying with a bunch of people and you have to take on another independent study, it is hard for them. And so, one of the ones who was my mentor—because I won an award, you were required to name a mentor—and he actually got one of his friends, the department of—oh, god, it was something like—it wasn't sociology—

AH: Human services?

WO: No. It was something totally of being on the thing of art and architecture or something.

AH: Art history?

WO: No, it wasn't even—it was more the technical kind of thing.

AH: Oh, I see, architecture.

WO: Yeah, but it was—I can't even remember, now. But, it was not related to me at all. (laughs) And it only counted as being one of my electives or something. It was so far off, it had no bearing on my thing, but he was willing to say I'm in one of his courses that I'm not even in, do me as independent study. And so, I did that. But, anyway, I got through college like that, got honors and things.

AH: You mentioned a little while ago how graduate school would look more favorably upon you if didn't have all As. Were you thinking of graduate school at that point?

WO: By the time I graduated, I thought, no way. Some of my professors were telling me that I can go anywhere in the country I wanted, anyplace in a heartbeat. So, anyplace that I had the desire to go to would take me for sure. But, I said I was so sick being told what I could do and couldn't, at the very least, I was going to take years off and do my own stuff. And I thought maybe in the future I could see myself going back, but at least, for sure, not for a while.

AH: You never did go back.

WO: Yeah, I never did go back.

AH: And so you are still doing exactly what you were going to do. Is that right? This is how many years after your graduation? When did you graduate, 1980?

WO: Eighty-two.

AH: So, from '82 to 2001, in a sense, you have exercised your right to not go to graduate school. You gave up graduate school to basically have your life. And so, what did you do? Your dad didn't have a business any longer—because they did pay the way throughout the four years, right?

WO: Yeah.

AH: Because you were obviously doing well.

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: But, the subsidy ended, right?

WO: Yeah.

AH: And so, you had to get a job? Did you have a job? Part-time or something?

WO: What I did was for probably a couple of years—a year-and-a-half, two years—able to do my own stuff on my own. And because of all the money I saved up working for my dad, I had saved up a bunch of money, so I was able to live for two years on my own. But then, as my resources started dwindling, then I had to get a job. Then, I did apply to a bunch of bookstores, but one of my friends—one of my girlfriends had a boyfriend. (laughs) A friend, who was a girl, had a boyfriend who worked at Bovas, which is where I work now. But, he was like the manager, and he was saying we could use you part-time—especially if you just want to be part-time. They always have room for part time people. Eventually, I just wanted to work full-time to pay bills and everything, but at the time, none of the bookstores I applied to accepted. It's just them knowing me, and knowing I was looking for a job, they right away offered me a job. I thought about it and accepted it. And then after that, one of the bookstores said come in for an interview. (laughs) My whole life could be different. I would rather be shelving books than shelving cans of tomato juice.

AH: What's the name of the company you work for?

WO: The convenience store is called Bovas.

AH: How do you spell that?

WO: B-o-v-a-s.

AH: I never heard of it. It's not on the Pacific Coast, I don't think.

WO: No, it's just a small mom and pop grocery store.

AH: I see. Here?

WO: Yeah.

AH: One store?

WO: Yeah. It's one of the landmarks on the hill because it's been there forty years or something like that.

AH: Wow.

WO: And it's kept their name because everybody knows it. Every time it changes ownership, they just keep the name.

AH: It wasn't initially a convenience store, just a full service grocery store. Forty years ago, I'm thinking—like 1960.

WO: Well, yeah, I guess so. I guess small grocery store, convenience store. I mean, it is all the same to us.

AH: I think a convenience store—small grocery stores have become small convenience stores. I mean, I was thinking of 7-Eleven—

WO: Okay, we are different than them. We are like a small grocery store rather than convenience store.

AH: Do you give credit to people, neighbors, and stuff?

WO: We try to get away from that, but we have been in the past. But, so many times they don't pay-off; they move away and don't pay. We pretty much don't even do that anymore.

AH: Are you one of the small numbers of employees there?

WO: Now we are because the store is either ready to sell or go bankrupt or whatever. Before in the past, they'd be, like, eight people plus the owners, so there would be like a dozen people working in the store, but, at different times, only two or three at one time. But, on the payroll, like twelve people. Now, a lot of people—hours have been cut. Just about ready to go under or be sold or something, so there's only a few people working now.

AH: And do you have a special responsibility there as your longevity?

WO: Yeah, I do a lot of the ordering and everything, and my official title is night manager. (laughs) I pick up a lot of the supplies and stuff, store it and things like that. And, if the store does sell—or one option is that, because they haven't paid their rent two or three months, so the landlord might be forcing them out. In fact, there's an eviction on them. And one of the things—the landlord wanted me to take it over and run it—and maybe he is thinking his sister, who is working for Wild Oates Grocery store—to come in and work at the store, too, so she and I can run the store ourselves. And I know enough that I can run the store. I could run it myself, but that would be too many hours. That would be like my dad's business is too many hours from my life. I was telling them there is no way I would run it myself, that it would have to be with another person, and that's why he is thinking of his sister or another person from another grocery store. Another manager is thinking of quitting and coming to the store.

AH: You know, your dad ran a grocery store with another person, and it turned out to be a disaster, the partnership.

WO: Oh, really?

AH: Your dad felt that he was doing all the work. This person was quite reckless and irresponsible. So, what they ended up doing then was selling it. But, he had a grocery

store; it was a mom and pop store that they bought. And this was many, many years ago—

WO: That's funny.

AH: —but I was just thinking it was a prefigurement of your situation right now.

WO: I didn't even know he was in grocery for a while.

AH: And I was going to ask you, because one of the things that your dad talked about in terms of you, he would say things in terms of your education, but he would also talk about your mountain scaling or climbing. When did you get into that, and when did that become a large part of your job? And also your writing, when did that start to surface as an interest?

WO: In my first year of college, I met my friend—in fact, he's the one I talked to last night about how much I should divulge, because I really didn't want to bad mouth people too much. But, my friend Mike, I met him in my first year of college. [He] was in a Franz Kafka class, a German literature class, and, at the time, he had climbed a few of the Colorado Fourteeners, was kind of into it.

AH: When you say fourteen, you mean fourteen thousand—

WO: Fourteen-thousand-foot elevation. And so, at the time, we became really good friends. We would see each other almost every day or something; we had classes. Originally, we had classes and stuff. Then we started socializing and things, and eventually, it grew into going into camping and maybe climbing. So, we started doing that. So, he's the one that got me into climbing, and ever since then, I've been into climbing mountains and everything; got different friends to go into mountain climbing, too. In fact, it's almost as though all my friends are—or the only friends I have—they also mountain climb. I don't know if it's because I drew them more into it, or whether I only gravitate towards those types or what.

AH: Does climbing peaks correlate with having peak experiences for you?

WO: Yeah, in fact, one of my novels are—they always say an author should write about what he knows about, instead of trying to tackle some problem he doesn't know anything about and just do that as a challenge or something that is not as good as what they really know about. So, after a while, I said, "What the heck, I should write a book about my mountain—or get my mountain experiences into some kind of book or form—mythical form or something." Because I spend so much of my time doing that—because a writer should write about what they know about. I got this idea of doing this novel based upon going on this expedition to climb some unknown mountain that's highest in the world. That is the highest that we know. I never use common names like Mount Everest or things like that but—

AH: Everybody else would assume.

WO: Yeah. I'm just saying there's this secret mountain that is supposedly higher than anything else, and so this expedition is going up to climb it. It's like this whole thing is like journal entries as they're climbing this or attempting to climb this peak. The whole thing of the climb is like metaphor for your passage through life, and the peak is like kind of like you've achieved the goal. But, in my book, too, the peak is your destiny, kind of, and so your life is over, like your whole life was going up to this destiny. So, that's how it ends.

AH: Has it ended?

WO: Yeah, in fact, my ex-girlfriend said that it was the most fun of all the books I've written, and it's the easiest to read, because it's really short and everything. But, I got her into mountain climbing, too. She was so happy because I got her into it, and because she got hooked—even though she and I broke up before she finished—she eventually finished climbing up all the fourteen-thousand-foot peaks in Colorado.

AH: I haven't read many mountain climbing books, but one that was very important to me in an early period was *Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac, which deals with him climbing this Matterhorn in California. But, just the way in which the elixir that feels in terms of reaching the top and then, actually, the sense of liberation in coming down. I remember that you had written a piece dealing with taking your dad's ashes and . . .

WO: Oh, yeah.

AH: —and how meaningful that was to you. The whole context of being able to take time there and then you coming down in the dark and everything else like that. It had a strong emotional impact on me. But, have you ever had a genre of literature that deals with mountain climbing and is there a large literature that deals with that topic? I mean, fiction, as opposed to Kerouac's account of his trip, you know?

WO: There's not really that much fiction on something like that, so, if you go to the bookstore, the mountain climbing section, there's tons of stuff on accounts on their expeditions and stuff like that so it's all true to life. But, as far as somebody fictionalizing something—

AH: Not much.

WO: Yeah. There's one—yeah, there's only a couple.

AH: Yet, so many people right now are getting into mountain climbing. It seems to me that you've got a natural audience for it.

WO: Yeah, my friends—a lot of time my friends are critical—not so much critical but maybe because they think I'm so egotistical they don't want to add fuel to the fire. (laughs) So, they won't praise me or something.

AH: Is there a social life? A girlfriend? You mentioned a friend that you talked to. Do you have a community of significant others that you deal with.

WO: I have friends, I mean, close friends, in a sense that you can tell them everything, kind of, just because I've known them for so long. But, a lot of them—like Mike got married. We're getting older, so I think it's almost a suburban disease or something, and getting older so you don't want to go do those hard stuff anymore, like climb a mountain. It's harder to get them out there. It's probably because I'm the single guy of all of us, but I feel like I have to drag them out to get them out there. Once they're out there, then they say, my gosh, this is great; they ought to do it more. But, it is so easy to sit in front of the TV or sit home on the weekends, instead of taking off to the mountains or something. Yeah. So, I do have friends that I can rely on, but I really don't socialize with them like you would see them every week or go out and do something. And mainly the way I see them is through the outdoor stuff and because they are not willing to do it as much because they are getting older and getting more sedentary.

AH: Sedentary and probably sedate, too.

WO: Yeah, sedated, by the TV, (laughs) so that I don't see them as much. It's just friends I can rely on or divulge anything to, but I don't see them as much. And I don't know whether, at my age, you can, all of a sudden, get new friends or surround yourself with new friends or something.

AH: One of the diaries [of your dad] that you brought me that I was looking at—it was the oldest one you had. It was from the mid-thirties, and it correlates with the trip that your dad took across the United States. Part of his reason for going was that he had a girlfriend that was in Washington D.C., and he talks a little bit about when he got to Washington D.C. and seeing her and everything. And he really basks in the fact of how much he was in love with this person, and it's not a person he later on married. I don't know what happened to this person, but it was sure important to him, and to her, at that particular time. He talks about this very, sort of, emotional parting when he takes the train out of Washington D.C. to go to New York. And after he leaves New York, he comes back to the coast. He mentioned that she was the first love of his life, and he reflects—I mean, this is the person who doesn't have the second love, but who was able to talk about how powerful and meaningful his first love is.

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: And he just couldn't get her out of his mind. It sounded like it was a good relationship in lots of ways, just being with her and conversing and everything else. Just having a good night and saying, "Gee, we didn't even have a good night kiss or anything, and

we just had a wonderful time." Just wondering, I know you had a pretty serious girlfriend at one time.

WO: Yeah.

AH: You had a series of serious relationships where they've been on the precipice of marriage or—is that part of your life where this interval after college, or even during college, or whatever—

WO: I guess I really never wanted to get married. But, I had a girlfriend. Her name was Nancy, and she and I were together for almost nine years.

AH: Wow.

WO: Yeah, in fact, people we knew who got married were divorced in the time period. (laughs) So, it was like, people don't think we are serious because we are not married. But hell, these people go and get married, and they end up getting divorced. We are more serious than they were.

AH: Is this somebody you lived with?

WO: Yeah.

AH: The nine years pretty much?

WO: Yeah, uh-huh.

AH: So, you were effectively married?

WO: I wouldn't say married. But, we broke-up as good friends. In fact, we are still friends. When she comes out to visit, we get together and do stuff, and she'll call me and things. So, it was really a good break-up.

AH: How long ago was it that you broke up?

WO: Uh, god, something like five, seven, years or something like that.

AH: So, it was something growing out of college and extending beyond college?

WO: Yeah, I met her in a class, creative writing.

AH: Oh, okay. So, that was really—was that your first real love, too?

WO: (laughs) You know, I guess because you're a historian, because I'm a philosopher, I think I have to tell the truth, (laughs) and I think most people would answer this way if they would be truthful. Because I really think that most people don't really—I

mean, maybe there are different kinds of love and everything. But, the kind of love, true love that you say that my dad had for that first love or something or the kind of true love that I'm looking for, I don't think I really had for her. I think we just had a relationship and had the kind of tender loving care kind of thing. You know, she was always mad because I wouldn't say I loved her. (laughs) It was hard for me to say I loved her.

AH: So, there was something missing, sort of ingredient?

WO: Yeah, that's probably why—it's probably the reason we broke-up, too.

AH: Was she a successful writer?

WO: Not really.

AH: She was taking creative writing, but writing wasn't a passion for her?

WO: In fact, when you say successful I would say, "But am I a successful writer?" (laughs) I haven't gotten published, but I guess I have to believe this way, just by doing it is what's important, whether it gets published or not.

AH: A lot of writers, when they graduate from college—who are interested in creative writing—go to Iowa, to the Iowa Workshop. Was that ever a consideration of yours, to go to a workshop there or Stanford or someplace?

WO: No, I guess the whole workshop atmosphere I didn't like. In fact, one of the visiting professors, her name was Rhoda Lerman. She was a writer in residence that they had for about a year at CU, and I took one of her courses. She eventually read my first novel—the one that I don't like that much. (laughs) But, she also said to me that I shouldn't even be here, this kind of workshop atmosphere, that she thought it was ridiculous for me to be there. That's the only way I could get credit. The only way they were going to give me credit so that I graduated with an English major. So, she thought I shouldn't be there. And that's why—yeah, the workshop thing, it's like them people would get—I guess you could get good criticism, but a lot of it is coming from people that are just students or just—and yet, you're reacting all emotional to everything they're saying because they are picking apart your stuff. And, yeah, I guess any criticism I can get has to be definitely more from somebody, whether it's a professor, or at least somebody who reads a lot of stuff that they have better opinion or better basis to judge something.

AH: Do you have a critical circle or set of significant critics, aside from those people who read your material and send you back commentary when you're submitting it for publication purposes?

WO: No, that's one of the things. I feel I'm in an intellectual vacuum. That's one of the only possible reasons why I might ever consider going to graduate school. I'm

getting too old anyway—I guess you're never too old, but I guess my mind frame would be too old, because I don't feel like a student anymore. (laughs)

AH: But, there are a lot of things that don't even exist within the academic things that are critical circles aren't there?

WO: Yeah.

AH: Like they are—I'm sure older _____ (inaudible) and those different groups seeing the intellectual make-up of these bookstores, and they are having readings in there and things like. And it must have some—

WO: Yeah, I guess. I know you could look through and see creative—I mean, like authors or people, writer groups and things like that. That to me is like a workshop situation. In the past, I have tried to keep in touch with some of my professors and get some kind of feedback. There's no way—they are more interested in what you are doing personally and everything, and, if you want them to read anything, "Oh, I really don't have time. (laughs) Maybe during the summertime," but then it never happens either.

AH: But then, a new wave of students come along that have urgencies and stuff, too. It's kind of like, I mean, looking at it—because I've had students send me manuscripts that they've written, and I try to spend as much time on it. But, on the same token, you have this crop of graduate students and other sorts of things, and it's hard. And the palpable relationship is no longer there with that person. They left and everything, and so it's difficult. But, I do think, on the same token, that you probably get some sort of reaction from some people to your stuff, don't you? You've got this friend of yours that you went out with last night.

WO: It's a little bit sad. In the very beginning, my college days, I was very secretive about my stuff, but then I learned to open up and let people read my stuff. But, over the past ten years, nobody has been interested in reading any of my stuff. I'll come out with a new book or something—I guess my ex-girlfriend is the only one who's been interested in wanting to read my things. And, in fact, this last book that I just finished a year ago or so, she was upset because I—now I'm going into a secretive phase again, and I didn't want her to read it. I almost heard tears in her voice talking over the phone. I felt she was really felt hurt. But, to me, (laughs) it's like maybe my ego is, ah—this is my psychoanalyzing myself—maybe my ego was wounded enough that if nobody wants to read my stuff, well then, fine. I won't let them. Nobody can read my stuff. (laughs) It's *my decision* now. (laughs)

AH: So, what scenario do you entertain sometimes when you're thinking of a life script for yourself as far as a writer, for instance, that does not have an audience? Does not have publications? And does that have satisfaction for you? Or, do you have another sort of thing that there is going to be some kind of breakthrough, and that there will be a responsive reader or two, which will tap into an audience that's out there? How do you see this, as a quick sonic sort of thing where I'm not going to make it, et cetera,

and I'm going to do this anyway? Or, the fact that you would like a readership, and you would like to be a published author of that kind of thing?

WO: With all the major technical breakthroughs, with the internet and all that kind of stuff, it is really changing the publishing industry, and things like desktop publishing—

AH: E-books and things.

WO: All that kind of stuff—you know, like Stephen King just having his novel up there, and people could donate money, a dollar to read it or something. All that kind of stuff is changing the shape of getting yourself out there. So, in a way, there is some kind of encouragement that things are getting so open to the world and everything that, that kind of thing might happen in the future. In fact, that's why my friends and people—my brother, relatives, everybody is saying, "Yeah, you should start learning the computer." So, one of my friends gave me his old computer because he bought a new one—so to get my books onto the computer and eventually get into the internet, you start seeing what's out there and exposing myself. (laughs)

AH: Cyberspace.

WO: Yeah. And another professor has even said to me, "Well, if you're not concerned about money or rights or anything like that—well, you can even still protect your rights, but if you're not so paranoid about people stealing your stuff and using or something but you just want your material out there so people can see it, you can even open a website for a cheap price and let people make hits on your thing." You know? God, you might end up with—there might be only twenty people like you all around the country, but through the internet, you can all get together—

AH: Well, yes, it's true. You are tapping into that group that's lacking right now that you respect but don't necessarily want to go down just for groupthink or group therapy, et cetera. You're reading every week, you know?

WO: And so, for that way I think there is hope. (laughs) But, as far as commercial publishing, unless I write a really good seller, I can't see it. But, my friends have told me that—like that mountain climbing one is really fun and easily readable, readable? What's the word?

AH: Readable.

WO: Readable. Readable, is that how you pronounce it?

AH: That's the equivalent of edible. (laughs)

WO: Oh, readable, okay.

AH: Some books are food for thought; I guess they're edible and readable. (laughs)

WO: Anyway, that's one book people are saying they can't see why it can't get published and that it should be published. And so, that's one of the most positive responses that I've gotten from friends and everything on that book. So, possibly that one could make a breakthrough. Especially, like you said, there isn't much fiction on that kind of thing and especially fiction along the line of the meaning of life, metaphysical, metaphor, kind of life's journey kind of thing, which really should sell in the new age marketplace, but I don't know why—I don't understand it. (laughs)

AH: Last question for this session. The question is to do with a middle ground between where you're at now and where you want to be. I mean, in a sense that let's suppose—like we've already talked about when your dad's business went up and now your business has a chance of going out, whether you're the owner of it, which is a high risk sort of thing—and I'm sure you have to think about this—is there something that you would like to do as you continue to work on your writing that would be in a direction of a more conventional kind of way of life or not? I mean, like a lot of people who don't write, teach and do other things like that. You talked about working at a bookstore and something of that nature. Are there some other pursuits for your income that you've thought about doing while you're still nurturing your craft and everything and trying to make it as a writer?

WO: As far as financially, I have really thought about bookstores and everything, but it's like I would be starting at the bottom again. I had already applied to almost all the bookstores in the area and in Denver, too, and I actually got no response. And even at a place like Tattered Cover, where I would like to work, they weren't hiring at the time, and they just handed out a photocopied thing saying, *For anybody that was thinking of working here, there are no exceptions, we start at*—and gave an amount. It was almost minimum wage. I mean, it was really low. And it said, *Regardless of age, experience, anything, we start you off at that level, and you can work-up from there.* But, currently, that there isn't even any openings, and you could apply again later or just send in your thing. So, it's not good. I've even talked to a lot of the owners of used bookstores, and they've said, Don't even think about it, it's not even worth it. It doesn't pay anything. Then they asked me how much I got paid at Bovas, and they said that there was no way in heck that they could even match that. So, they said I'm better off—they actually told me, Stay where you are. You're making good money. And, if you even think of owning a bookstore or anything like that, getting into books that way, bookstore people spend all their time working at bookstores because they can't afford help, and you're just going to end up as an old bachelor. If you do that, you're never going to have any kind of life outside of it.

AH: One of my favorite genres of writing that I have stumbled across in recent years and I really like it a lot—I read a lot of these out loud to my wife when she does the taxes or she quilts or does different things—and the enjoyable thing is a literature called travel narratives. I went over to a bookstore today, and they call it armchair travel.

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: I was noticing that. But, I like it a lot because, first of all, it's less expensive than actually going on the trip, but I think the writing is so fantastic. The writing is somewhere between fiction and between fact. It's a very engaging type of reading for me. It seems to me that some of the experiences that you have had and everything, the combination of things, with the mountain climbing and stuff that you've already talked about one of the books that you've written, but it's fiction. Have you ever thought about doing any kind of travel narratives, writing?

WO: That could actually sell. I mean, there is a market for that. Of course, I would have to travel somewhere because just climbing the mountains around Colorado—

AH: But, Denver is an appealing place to a lot of people in the world, whether you're from Germany, or whether you're from California or New York or something like that. I think the area of the Rocky Mountains has magic to it. I was just wondering if that's something that you can tap into that you know so well?

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: It was just a thought. I don't know if you were ever even contemplating it or not.

WO: Yes. Some of my friends have suggested stuff like that, but I guess I don't think—even though to me the experiences there in the mountains have been thrilling to a reader, I don't think it would be *that* thrilling. I guess a lot of that armchair stuff isn't that thrilling, anyway. It's just interesting, you know, that people going to different places and stuff.

AH: And they don't necessarily go and do it themselves, it's like taking a camel across Australia. I mean, I've read these things, and I'm never going to take a camel across Australia. (laughs) I loved that book. And I've found a whole array of different people, and it's more them and their takes on these situations than necessarily the places. You know, some people read it for the places or as model for their own adventures. I'm not going to walk across Wales, and yet I loved the book I read about a walk across Wales and stuff. But, it just allows me, for instance—I've got a limited amount of years to live in this world, and this gives me the opportunity to do these things and to have as a guide somebody who could write about it engagingly and significantly, and oftentimes, it moves out of straight descriptive writing into sort of a lyricism that I found fascinating—

WO: Yeah.

AH: —spiritualism and all of these types of things. That's why, to me, it's not to me a prosaic genre. It's a really interesting one.

WO: Uh-huh.

AH: Anyway, I have an appointment at four o'clock, and I want to thank you very much for this session, Wayne. I really enjoyed it. I also want to thank you for the different services that you have rendered for me, which I will not go into on tape, but I appreciate it very much, doing what you have done for me. You've made my trip here most meaningful and rewarding, and thank you very much.

WO: Well, thanks. Thank you for all the stuff you're doing. Plus, thanks for this. (laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW