

A TEI Project

Interview of John Ewing

Contents

1. Transcript

- 1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE MAY 31, 1993
- 1.2. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE JUNE 11, 1993
- 1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO JUNE 11, 1993
- 1.4. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE JUNE 15, 1993
- 1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO JUNE 15, 1993

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE MAY 31, 1993

ISOARDI

John, shall we begin with where you were born and what your early childhood was like?

EWING

Well, I was born in Topeka, Kansas. That's the capital of Kansas. And I guess I was born a musician, because I could always hum and--

ISOARDI

As far back as you could remember?

EWING

Yeah. And when I was old enough to crawl up on a piano, I started banging out notes.

ISOARDI

Did you have a musical family?

EWING

Well, sort of. My mother [Willie B. Ewing], she liked music. She had a piano there. And I was the only one who seemed to be interested in music, because the rest of the kids didn't have anything to do with it. They took lessons like I did, but that was about it.

ISOARDI

When were you born? What year was it?

EWING

What year? Nineteen seventeen, January. So I guess I've been a musician all my life.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah, truly.

EWING

Yeah, I was born that way.

ISOARDI

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

EWING

Oh, let's see. I guess I had three sisters and three brothers.

ISOARDI

A big family.

EWING

Seven kids.

ISOARDI

Where did you fit in that?

EWING

I was the last one. The last one.

ISOARDI

Are you the only musician out of all seven?

EWING

Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes I wonder whether that's good or bad, but I followed it all the way, you know. I think I did all right.

ISOARDI

Yeah. So you started school, then, at five or six?

EWING

Yeah. I started school in Topeka, but we moved out here a couple of times. I had a semester at Jefferson High School here.

ISOARDI

When you were in Topeka, did you start studying music?

EWING

Yeah. I took a few piano lessons.

ISOARDI

Private lessons?

EWING

Yeah, private. And then when I moved out here, that's when I picked up the trombone, at Jefferson High School. I joined the instrumental training class.

ISOARDI

But up until then it had been all piano?

EWING

Yeah, yeah, up until I got to Jefferson High School.

ISOARDI

Really? Did you study in the Topeka school system? Did they have a music program for kids?

EWING

Well, I'll get around to that. When I got back to Topeka, I joined the Topeka High School band. But I had instrumental training class at Jefferson High School here.

ISOARDI

You mean, your family moved to L.A. when you were--?

EWING

Yeah. We moved out here. I had a brother, an older brother [Louis Ewing], out here. And we stayed out here. I did a semester here, and then we moved back to Kansas.

ISOARDI

Was that your freshman year? Or was it a little bit later--?

EWING

I'd say sophomore.

ISOARDI

Sophomore year. Why did your family come out here? Why did your brother come out here initially?

EWING

Well, my brother, he came out here as a kid, a young man, and he started his own business in Glendale [California], so we came out and stayed about a year with him.

ISOARDI

What was he doing out in Glendale?

EWING

Auto laundry.

ISOARDI

Aha.

EWING

Steam clean motors and simonize and all that kind of stuff, you know.

ISOARDI

Did he come out here just sort of looking for opportunities?

EWING

Yeah. Yeah. He hoboed out here.

ISOARDI

No kidding?

EWING

Yeah, he hoboed out. That's the only way he could get here. He hoboed and started beating the bricks.

ISOARDI

How did he get into that kind of business?

EWING

Well, he went to Glendale, and he was working for a couple of guys out there. They called them wash racks in those days. They were charging, I think, two dollars to wash a car, so he had to give the station owner a dollar and he'd keep a dollar. He got tired of giving the station owner a dollar, so he started his own business. He was about twenty-one or twenty-two at the time.

ISOARDI

Pretty ambitious.

EWING

Yeah. He never understood why I ever worked for anybody, because he couldn't stand it. He even said, "Why do you play with somebody else's band?" You know, "Get your own." And he never did believe in working for-- And he didn't. That was it. He died about three years ago. He was eighty-nine years old. And he didn't work for a soul after he was about twenty-one. That was it. He didn't like it. He's going to be the boss. He gives the orders. And that's what he did until he sold out. He sold out, oh, I guess, probably--let's see--maybe in the sixties. Something like that. It was quite a while ago.

ISOARDI

Where was he living when you got here?

EWING

Well, first he stopped off up north, and then he came down here. I think the first place he lived was in Boyle Heights. Then I think he moved from there to Twelfth [Street] and Central [Avenue]. From then on, all the way out, you know, different places all going south.

ISOARDI

Actually, let me back up a bit and ask you a little bit about your parents and their background. Were they from Kansas? Had the family been there?

EWING

Well, my father [Wiley W. Ewing] was from Texas, and my mother was from Arkansas. See, my father was a minister, so he had to follow wherever he would be called. He wound up in Kansas, and that was before I was born. He wound up in Kansas, and that's where he stayed.

ISOARDI

So when you came out here, I guess you were about fourteen years old? Fourteen, fifteen?

EWING

When I came out here?

ISOARDI

For the first time, yeah.

EWING

Well, the very first time I came out here I was twelve. My mother brought me out here for a Christmas vacation. I was twelve then.

ISOARDI

And your brother was already here?

EWING

Oh, yeah. He was here, yeah. He'd been here. That's the only reason we came out here, to see him.

ISOARDI

How did L.A. strike you when you got here then? That must have been about 1929?

EWING

Oh, it was-- Oh, that was 1929. Well, that's the first time I'd ever been to a big city.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

So it was real wide, you know. I saw orange groves on the train, stuff I'd never seen before. And I liked it as soon as I saw it. It looked so different, you know. But I was twelve when I first came out here. And then we went back, and then I came back when I was-- Oh, I guess I was about fifteen. And from then on, I've been in and out of California.

ISOARDI

When you came back at fifteen, did you move here? Was that a move?

EWING

Yeah. When I came back at fifteen, my mother had died then, so I came out here and I lived with my brother. And I enrolled in Jefferson High School. That's when I picked up trombone, at Jefferson.

ISOARDI

The first time?

EWING

Uh-huh. I never had one in my hand until--

ISOARDI

Really? Why the trombone?

EWING

Well, I was interested in the trombone, but I never had one. So when I got to Jefferson High School, I went into instrumental training class. That's what they had in those days. I don't know whether they have it now or not. I don't think they have it. I went into instrumental training, and I grabbed the trombone there, and I've been on it ever since.

ISOARDI

What was Jeff like then?

EWING

Oh, it was great, I thought. The races were mixed then, you know. It wasn't all black. It was Spanish, Asian, white, everything. The east side was about-- That's the way it was. It wasn't all one color. I enjoyed Jefferson High because I had a chance to do what I wanted to do. You know, when you do that, you're happy.

ISOARDI

So had you been playing piano, then, pretty steadily up until you picked up the trombone?

EWING

Well, I never did consider myself a piano player because I just didn't have it. I had taken lessons, but I always wanted an instrument. I used to see the trombone players in marching bands, and I was attracted to the trombone. So when I got to Jefferson High School, I went to the instrumental training class, and I started on trombone. And the trombone belonged to the school. You didn't have to furnish an instrument.

ISOARDI

No kidding. They provided them?

EWING

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They had everything. I don't think they have that today.

ISOARDI

Boy, no kidding. [laughter]

EWING

Oh, man.

ISOARDI

Too bad.

EWING

And the first time I ever picked up a trombone, the instructor, he showed me the positions and helped me along.

ISOARDI

Who was the instructor?

EWING

Mr. Davies.

ISOARDI

This class was an instrumental training--

EWING

Instrumental training.

ISOARDI

Was that the class in technique and in familiarity with the horn and that kind of thing?

EWING

Yeah. You had to go through that before you'd go to the senior band, see. That was a training class.

ISOARDI

Okay.

EWING

And when you got out of that, then you could move up to the senior band. You'd get a sweater and all that and go to the football games. But you had to graduate to that. They called that the senior band.

ISOARDI

Was it like a marching band? Or was it a big band?

EWING

Oh, yeah. Yeah. It had some good musicians. I didn't play in the senior band because we moved back to Kansas, but some of those guys who were in that senior band, like Oscar Bradley and Jack McVea, there were a lot of guys who could play then, you know. They were good musicians then, even in high school. I knew they were good musicians. I was supposed to go into the senior band that fall, but we moved back to Kansas, so I never did get to the band.

ISOARDI

So you headed back to Kansas, then, after being out here for just a year, a half a year?

EWING

Yeah. Yeah, about a year. I didn't want to leave.

ISOARDI

But your father felt you were too young to stay out here?

EWING

For some reason he wanted to go back to Kansas, so we went on back there. And I stayed there until I was able enough to join somebody's band and leave. And that was the end of that.

ISOARDI

Were you able to do that?

EWING

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I guess I must have been about eighteen when I left. But I didn't see any future in Kansas. There wasn't any future for me there.

ISOARDI

Nothing was happening in Topeka for musicians?

EWING

Not for me. Now, if you wanted to do-- I know there were guys who went to college, you know, and sometimes I wondered why they had gone to college when they had to wind up being bellhops and all that kind of stuff. I said, "This is not for me. I don't belong here." So I finally got out of Kansas.

ISOARDI

What band did you hook up with?

EWING

Gene Coy. He came through there playing the Kansas State Fair. I was still in high school. He came through there playing in the fair. He had to play a couple of gigs up there in Pittsburgh, Kansas, so he asked my father, "Hey, can I take him up there for a weekend?" My father said, "Well, yeah. He can go for a weekend." And that's what started me out on the road.

ISOARDI

Now, how did he know about you? Or how did you hook up with Gene Coy?

EWING

Gene Coy? Well, he heard me blowing around there with a little band around Topeka. He remembered me. He needed a trombone player, and he hired me. I didn't know what I was getting into, but--

ISOARDI

You must have been excited.

EWING

Yeah, it was exciting, because I'd never been anyplace, you know. So that was it. Before I left with him, I used to hear those bands in Kansas City, like Andy Kirk and Bennie Moten. Count Basie was the piano player in Bennie Moten's band.

ISOARDI

And you saw that band?

EWING

Yeah. I saw that band when I was a kid.

ISOARDI

Gee, where did you see them?

EWING

Topeka, Kansas.

ISOARDI

Oh, when they came through?

EWING

Yeah, yeah. Well, it was just a few miles from Kansas City. See, I was all action when I was in Kansas City. That's where it was at, you know.

ISOARDI

Right. So how did that band impress you, Bennie Moten's band? I guess this must have been just close to the time Bennie Moten died, right?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

You must have seen him just within that year that he died.

EWING

Yeah, I only saw him once, and the next thing I knew he was dead.

ISOARDI

So Basie was in the band then. Jimmy Rushing was with the band?

EWING

Jimmy Rushing, Jo Jones, Lester Young, Jack Washington.

ISOARDI

Jeez. The whole nucleus of the Basie band.

EWING

Yeah. Well, Basie's [band], you know, that's where it came from, Bennie Moten's band. If you know what Count Basie sounds like, that was Bennie Moten. That's Kansas City.

ISOARDI

Yeah, truly.

EWING

They talk about all these other towns, New Orleans and-- All that's okay, you know. And New York. But when they say swing, you say Kansas City. [laughter] When you wanted to move your feet, you would go to Kansas City. That's where it was at. That's where Charlie ["Bird"] Parker came out of. Oh, man. And you were welcome there. They had a thing going there. See, they had different levels of musicians. So when a new guy came into town with a band or something, they said, "So-and-so is in town." Well, he'd just stop off at the one club, that's the number-one club. So he'd take-- They called it a cutting in those days. So if he cut the guys in there, then they'd send him on up to the next club.

ISOARDI

[laughter] No kidding?

EWING

Another level. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Oh, man.

EWING

He had to go about three levels before he was-- You know--

ISOARDI

Jeez.

EWING

Boy, it was rough.

ISOARDI

Well, I guess with so many musicians and so many bands.

EWING

Oh, man, Kansas City was nothing but musicians. Good ones, too. Yeah, when you got to Kansas City, if you thought you were something, you had a chance to prove it.

ISOARDI

[laughter] What's that famous story?

EWING

Because they always started you on the level. "Well, we'll see what he can do down here," you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

And then if you were a little rough for those guys, they'd move you up.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Well, there's that story that I've read so many times about how it's the only place where Coleman Hawkins got cut. [laughter]

EWING

Oh, they didn't care about who it was coming there. They could care less about who it was, because they had somebody to take care of you. [laughter]
Oh, those were exciting times though.

ISOARDI

So you got into Kansas City sometimes?

EWING

No, that's the funny thing. I had guys ask me, "Why didn't you just come on over here?" But I never did live there. I lived close to Kansas City, but I came out this way, you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah. But you were able to hear all those great bands. You heard Andy Kirk?

EWING

Oh, yeah. I heard all of those bands. There were a whole lot of them, too.

ISOARDI

Didn't he have a saxophone player--? Was it Dick Wilson?

EWING

Yeah, yeah.

ISOARDI

Did you hear Dick Wilson?

EWING

Yeah. He had a style of his own, too. He was from Seattle, Washington. I heard Andy Kirk, I heard-- Well, let's see.

ISOARDI

Who else? Harlan Leonard's Rockets? Did you hear--?

EWING

Yeah, Harlan Leonard. Clarence Love, Tommy Douglas. Who else? Oh, they had it loaded. Loaded. And I met Charlie Parker in Kansas City.

ISOARDI

No kidding?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

When was that?

EWING

I met him-- Well, I had been out here, and I was on my way to Chicago, and I stopped off in Kansas City. So my sister [Mildred Ewing] said, "You want to go down and hear some musicians tonight?" I said, "Well, yeah." I went down there. And I'd heard about this guy. Somebody had told me about Charlie Parker, but he had never made any records or anything, you know.

ISOARDI

So this is the late thirties or forties? The early forties?

EWING

Yeah, that was about '38. I met Charlie Parker in a little old club down there, and I went up there and jammed with him. He had never been out of Kansas City. He had never been out of there. But I was convinced that he could play. And I told guys when I got to Chicago, I said, "Man, there's a guy down there in Kansas City." I said, "I've never heard anything like that before in my life."

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

Already that sound was different?

EWING

Oh, I never heard him sound bad. He could play from the time he picked it up. He was just that talented. I've got a picture that he autographed for me. He said, "To Stream [John "Streamline" Ewing], buds forever."

ISOARDI

How nice!

EWING

Yeah, yeah. I'll always have that picture.

ISOARDI

Gee. I hope you've got it framed.

EWING

Yeah. It's back there. I'll have to look it up.

ISOARDI

Yeah, nice.

EWING

Oh, it's-- He had a big bow tie on, you know. But he could always play ever since I knew him. He completely turned the jazz world around. Between him and Dizzy [Gillespie]-- Sometimes they say, well, maybe Dizzy did more, but I don't know whether-- It's hard to say because they came along at the same time. They just happened to meet. They happened to meet, and that was it. And they were thinking alike.

ISOARDI

You know, I think when things like that change, it's not just one person; it's the whole generation that's starting to think differently.

EWING

Yeah, it's the cycle that's changing. It's changing. I don't know what it's going to change to now.

ISOARDI

Yeah. But they just happened to be the leaders.

EWING

Yeah. They were the pioneers. You know, nobody was doing nothing that way but them. And they set a trend. And everybody-- Oh, they just had to play like Diz and Bird, you know, everybody. And they're still doing it.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah.

EWING

Yeah. I still hear a lot of these young guys-- I'm waiting to see when they're going to use something that I didn't hear before. See, I think, now, all this modern technology is fine; I'm not against it. But before they had all that, a musician had to think more. That's why they had so many different individuals. I don't hear too many different individuals now. You know what I mean?

ISOARDI

I know. God, I've been having a lot of arguments about that. I agree.

EWING

You see, what I am talking about is you could hear Lester Young. That was one style.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

You could hear Coleman Hawkins. They didn't sound anything alike.

ISOARDI

From one or two notes, then you knew what--

EWING

You'd hear Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter, Willie Smith, none of those guys sound like each other. But like I say, all this modern-- You know, I'm not against this modern technology, but I think musicians have to think more for themselves. "Well, how am I going to play?" See, a guy way out here had never heard of Charlie Parker, so he'd be trying to play a saxophone, "Well, what do you do?" He had to think for himself. And I heard a lot of good saxophone players out here who never heard of Charlie Parker. I heard a good trumpet player that never heard of Dizzy Gillespie. They didn't know anything about Dizzy Gillespie because they weren't doing a lot of-- Dizzy and them weren't recording in those days. But guys had to think. I heard a trumpet player--he died--and he didn't sound like any trumpet player [I ever heard]

even till this day. I've never heard-- He didn't sound anything like Dizzy, but still he was a fast executioner. But he had never heard Dizzy Gillespie. In other words, he was out here-- Let's see now. I don't know who influenced him, but it certainly wasn't Dizzy Gillespie, yet he was a fast executioner, too. He had never heard of Dizzy and never seen Dizzy. And that's the difference.

ISOARDI

I know some nights over the last couple of years, I'll go down to the Catalina [Bar and Grill] to hear people who are "hot," "up and coming," etc., and so many of them sound alike.

EWING

I know.

ISOARDI

It's like they're trying to show you how much they've got in their heads, and they're trying to show how many different chords they can do.

EWING

Yeah, but they are no stylists.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

They are no stylists.

ISOARDI

Exactly. It's like they've all been to the same school.

EWING

That's all they know. That's the difference between those days and today. I don't think there's too much individual-- You know, guys say, "Well, this is the way to go." He hears this on the radio, the records, or whatever, and so he doesn't have to think. Well, this is the way they do it. He's not setting in his style. They say, "Well, I'm not going to listen to this. That's out." "Oh, that's the way so-and-so does it. Oh, that's the way you play it." And then he goes to

school or whatever and he learns the technical part of it or the theory. But as far as setting a style, that's far between. That's hard. That's hard. Now, take for instance-- Now, I never knew much about King Oliver. Now, Louis Armstrong was supposed to have been influenced by-- Who is that, now? Wait a minute. Who was it? Who was that trumpet player? I can't think of his name.

ISOARDI

In New Orleans?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

Bunk Johnson?

EWING

No, he didn't get his style from Bunk.

ISOARDI

Not Buddy Bolden.

EWING

No, they were still in front of him. He was a kid when those guys were around.

ISOARDI

Somebody who's--

EWING

King Oliver. That's who influenced Louis Armstrong. But I'm trying to say this: now, Dizzy didn't sound like Louis Armstrong. Of course, he wasn't as old as Louis Armstrong either, but he wasn't that far behind him. All right. Now, Louis, I worked for Louis Armstrong, and he was a pacesetter. Then next came Roy Eldridge. Now, Roy, he had a little of Louis, but he added something. He went for himself. See, I'm talking about these guys who have set the styles and trends.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

Now, Dizzy started out, he took a little from Roy and said, "Well, I've got to leave here, because Roy's got that." And he went all for himself, and you never dreamed that he even sounded like Roy. That's the way he used to play. But he was thinking for himself. That's the point I'm trying to get to, that I think guys did a little more thinking for themselves. But now it's all cut-and-dried. Oh, man. They can write a book from here to that wall. You know, all the technical points--

ISOARDI

Yeah, monsters of technique but not interesting.

EWING

But now let me hear what you've got to add to that book. Where is yours? Where is your page? And not very many guys can put a page in there.

ISOARDI

No. It doesn't seem so.

EWING

Of course, I would say the jazz world is not standing out like it used to, you know. Because in the jazz world when I came along, you had to play for dances, shows.

ISOARDI

There was a lot more work.

EWING

You worked all the time. Like I say, you'd play in those clubs, and you'd play the dance music, you'd play the show, and then you'd play your stuff. But they don't have those clubs now like they had then. It's all different. Like I say, I'm not against the modern world, I'm not against that, because I know things change, but I don't know where the musicians are going. You know, I really don't know where they're headed. Sometimes I look on TV, look at a football game or something, and they have a 150-piece band. All over the United

States. And I just wonder, I say, "Now, where are those guys going to play? Where are they going to play together?" There are no theaters to play, no nightclubs to play.

ISOARDI

[People] just want to sit in front of the VCR now. People don't go out to hear live music.

EWING

Yeah, yeah, the VCR, if you're lucky enough to get on the VCR. See, they're going to put the best that they can find or the biggest name that they can find on the VCR. And if people are not going to leave their house-- You know, I hate to leave my house right now. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Well, the sad thing is that the kids don't want to leave the house anymore.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

The twelve-year-olds don't want to leave the house.

EWING

They're scared to go out. I can understand it. You know, you don't if somebody's going to knock your head off. You're on the freeway, you don't know whether-- They've got a new thing going now. What do they call it?

ISOARDI

Car-jacking.

EWING

Car-jacking. That's new. Boy, I'm telling you, I had to play a gig on Thursday night out in Canoga Park, and I said, "Oh, man, I hope none of these fools jump out here on me."

ISOARDI

Yeah, it's different. Well, you really had the university of Kansas City right there. [laughter]

EWING

Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI

So that was marvelous.

EWING

Oh, I'm telling you. And there were a whole lot of different guys. You know, a lot of guys never did get a big name or something. It wasn't because they couldn't play.

ISOARDI

Yeah, sure.

EWING

It will always be the route that you took. See, nothing was going to stop Charlie from playing. There was nothing in the world going to stop him from playing, so he went to the top--with a style.

ISOARDI

True.

EWING

He didn't sound anything like Johnny Hodges. He didn't sound like Benny Carter. And it's a funny thing. Somebody said he-- In fact, I read this. It was the strangest thing. One of the saxophone players that he admired-- Who was this? Was it Frankie Trumbauer or somebody?

ISOARDI

Oh, it was Jimmy Dorsey.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

He liked Dorsey's tone.

EWING

Sure. See, that's the type of guy-- He always wanted to know what the other guy could do.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

I remember one time, me and Buddy Collette-- In fact, I called him this morning. I wanted to ask him something and he wasn't home. But I remember me and Buddy Collette-- Jimmy Cheatham had an apartment, and Charlie Parker came by there one time. And Buddy Collette, you know, he was highly rated around here as a saxophone player. Charlie said, "Oh, man, let me hear you play." [laughter] Buddy didn't take his horn out. But Charlie, he didn't care where he was; he'd take that horn out. He didn't need accompaniment. In fact, to really hear him play, he'd play by himself. Nobody. That's how he played. That's how he could think and create.

ISOARDI

Just all the time?

EWING

All by himself. He would come off the bandstand and go over in a corner [mimics busy playing]. You were not liable to hear that again. You were not liable to hear that anymore, because there were so few guys who could keep up with him. There weren't too many people who could join his class. Boy, he was something else.

ISOARDI

Yeah. So you're with the-- Is it the Gene Coy band?

EWING

Yeah. He was the one who took me out of Kansas.

ISOARDI

All right. So you head on the road. Your dad says it's okay and you just take off. [laughter]

EWING

Well, he didn't really like it, but he saw that that was what I was going to do, so "I'll see you later." One of those things. Then we went out all through Texas and Nebraska, Canada, and wound up in Seattle, Washington.

ISOARDI

Seattle?

EWING

Yeah. That's where we wound up. And that's where I left him. That's when I jumped that freight--

ISOARDI

Why did you leave the band?

EWING

Well, another friend of mine, a trumpet player [Douglas Slitz Byars], we decided that we were coming down here. And the only way we could get down here was a freight train, because we certainly didn't have any money, you know. That was out. We hopped a freight train and came down here.

ISOARDI

So you hoboed down here?

EWING

Yeah, we hoboed to Los Angeles.

ISOARDI

So you packed your horns and--?

EWING

Oh, we sent that C.O.D. I didn't know how we were going to get them out of the hop but--

ISOARDI

You sent the horns C.O.D. to Los Angeles?

EWING

Oh, yeah. We couldn't put them on the freight train. [laughter] And nothing else. On the freight train we just had what we had on. Everything else was shipped C.O.D. to Los Angeles. [laughter] When I got to Los Angeles, I told my brother about it. He said, "Well, let's go get them." He went down and got them out.

ISOARDI

What was it like hoboing?

EWING

Oh, man, that's miserable. It was fun and it was miserable, you know. I did it once, and that's all I'll ever do.

ISOARDI

[laughter] What were some of the good and the bad parts?

EWING

Well, there wasn't too much good stuff about it. The bad stuff was you had to ride in freight cars that were-- You know, there's no comfort in a freight car.

ISOARDI

Yeah, true.

EWING

They're hauling freight, not passengers, you know what I mean? [laughter] And it's dangerous, very dangerous.

ISOARDI

What do you mean? In terms of somebody catching you or--?

EWING

Because you don't know whether you're going to get knocked off the train or you don't know whether you're going to ever come out alive. It's very dangerous because you're not supposed to be on that train. We got run off the train two or three times between Seattle and down here. They said, "Get out of here," you know, the dicks [detectives]. They called them the railroad dicks.

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

They'd see you, "Get out and go on down the track." And you would start walking, and when the train would come back again, you'd jump back on. [laughter] Oh, that was funny, you know. That was the fun. But that's not much fun.

ISOARDI

A hard ride.

EWING

Yeah, not much fun. I look at these freight trains, when I see one now, I don't see any hoboes on them now. I guess they're on there, but I just don't see them.

ISOARDI

Yeah, I don't know.

EWING

They're rough, boy.

ISOARDI

Was anything happening in Seattle?

EWING

Yeah, somewhat. That's where Gene Coy's band was-- We were working at-- What was the name of that club? Anyway, we were working at this hotel, and we had to play a floor show. And they had gambling downstairs. At that time, Seattle was wide open, what they called wide open. They had a red-light district and gambling and all that kind of stuff, you know. That was the first time I'd been around that kind of atmosphere. Yeah, I'd never seen anything like that before.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Coming of age in Seattle.

EWING

Yeah, yeah. That's where I got my Ph.D. [laughter], Seattle, Washington. But that was a beginning of-- What did Duke [Ellington] say? "I'm beginning to see the light." That's when the light started coming on. Because when I came down here, I met all kinds of people like Nat [King] Cole and-- He wasn't even singing then, let alone famous. He was just a piano player. I mean, a very good one, though. He was a hell of a musician. I met Nat Cole and-- But he had no idea about-- He wasn't thinking about singing.

ISOARDI

Not at all?

EWING

No. He had never sung.

ISOARDI

When was this that you met him?

EWING

This was in 1937. He was a great musician then, but I just had no idea he was going to, you know, upset the world. That just didn't cross my mind. But he was the type of a guy that-- He was a very brilliant man, too, I'll say that, because he knew how to take care of every-- He knew how to shut every door that was open. He knew how to walk in and close it. Yeah. He wasn't lucky; he knew what [he] was doing. When he got a break, he knew what to do; he didn't goof it. He just got higher and higher. Yeah. Of course, he had the

talent. You know, he wasn't a lucky man. I would say he was lucky to be in the city that could do it, because if he was in Seattle, nothing could happen up there. He had to be down here where the record companies were and stuff like that.

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

So I guess that part of it was luck. He happened to be in the right place. But he was prepared.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE JUNE 11, 1993

ISOARDI

Okay, John, when we left last time, I think in your story you had just hoboed down to Los Angeles from Seattle. And I guess it was a real memorable trip, because you said you'd never do it again.

EWING

That's right. That's right. I wouldn't recommend it for anybody.

ISOARDI

What was L.A. like when you hit town? And what did you do?

EWING

Oh, it was pretty exciting, with some big-name people around here at the time.

ISOARDI

Now, what year was this?

EWING

Nat [King] Cole, I met him when I got in town. Red Callender, Eddie Beal. Let's see, who else? Caughey Roberts, Bumps Myers. Nat wasn't singing at that time. He was just playing. He was a piano player.

ISOARDI

So was this about 1938, '39, something like that?

EWING

'Thirty-seven.

ISOARDI

'Thirty-seven.

EWING

Yeah, he was a fine pianist, you know.

ISOARDI

Back then. Because he must have been pretty young then, I guess, eh?

EWING

Well, as a matter of fact, that's what I remembered him by mostly is as a musician, a piano player.

ISOARDI

Was he playing with his trio then? Do you remember?

EWING

Not at the time when I first met him. But we were making a movie out there at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer], some kind of African thing, and he was talking about his trio. No, it was just a duo that he had started. But I don't think he was singing at the time. And then he added on-- I don't remember whether Oscar Moore was the first guy that he added, or was it Wesley Prince? I guess it was Oscar Moore. I'll just take a chance. It was so long ago. But he always surrounded himself with pretty good guys, you know. Just by being two and three guys, they had a lot of work to do. So he had to have pretty good guys.

ISOARDI

Yeah, really. So how did you run into these other guys? How did you meet Red Callender and Eddie Beal?

EWING

Well, Red was here when I got here. He came down here with a show called the "Brown-Skinned Models." And the first job that I played with him was a parade, a Labor Day parade. And he played tuba in that one, naturally, you know, a marching band.

ISOARDI

You met him in a marching band?

EWING

Oh, yeah. The first meeting was in a marching band.

ISOARDI

How did you get into a marching band?

EWING

Well, they had this Labor Day parade. Eddie Barefield was rehearsing a band, and I happened to walk into the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767], and he said, "Well, we're going to be in the Labor Day parade." So that's when I met Red and different people. I don't remember who all.

ISOARDI

So the union was putting together a marching band to participate in this parade?

EWING

Yeah, this was a union band. And that was the 767 union. I don't remember where we marched, but I know we marched. [laughter] I remember that. But then that led to a movie, first time I ever worked on a movie.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Yeah. We did a movie with Louis Armstrong.

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez.

EWING

We were street cleaners. Everybody had on a street outfit, you know.

ISOARDI

What, did you have the horns tucked away in the garbage cans or something?

EWING

Let's see, how did we do that? No, this is a street cleaner's band, see, and Louis led the band.

ISOARDI

Do you remember the name of the movie at all?

EWING

The only thing I know is that Mae West was in the movie.

ISOARDI

No kidding?

EWING

And Louis Armstrong was the bandleader. And he had these street cleaner's--
[laughter] He went to get a street cleaner's [uniform] to play some scene. I
don't remember. But I do remember him blowing away, I'll tell you. He didn't
mind blowing.

ISOARDI

No kidding?

EWING

Anytime, anywhere. [laughter] He was a funny guy. But never a dull moment
around Louis Armstrong. And he'd jam anywhere, you know. Oh, yeah. They'd
be shooting a scene, and he'd decide he wanted to blow. That was it.
[laughter] Yeah.

ISOARDI

What was the studio work like?

EWING

What was the studio like then?

ISOARDI

Yeah, what was the work like?

EWING

I don't think there was too much difference, you know. It's like any other studio stuff. I worked in the studio last week, and I didn't see much difference. I saw a lot of booms and cameras and--

ISOARDI

Did you guys actually get to play in the film?

EWING

Yeah, we played, but I never heard the playback, and I didn't see the movie.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

No, I never did see the movie. But I knew I was in the movie. But for some reason I think I left and went to Chicago, and I lost track of--

ISOARDI

And to this day you've never seen it?

EWING

Yeah. I think I went to Chicago. But there were some pretty good musicians in that band, you know. We were a street band but--

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Oh, yeah, some good guys in there. Oscar Bradley. It's kind of hard to remember. But I remember Oscar Bradley was in there. Probably Lee Young,

because he was pretty active during that time, you know, like getting the guys together and all that kind of stuff. He was probably in it. Floyd Turnham. I don't know whether Marshal [Royal] was there or not. I don't remember. It's been so long ago.

ISOARDI

Yeah. You said you got the gig as a result of your playing in the union marching band on Labor Day. How did that lead to getting into this studio thing? Was it some of the people you met that day?

EWING

More than likely. We did some gigs and stuff, you know. Eddie Barefield had the band. We played gigs, and one thing led to another. That's the same band that backed Louis Armstrong. I'm kind of confused now. I don't know just what led up to what.

ISOARDI

Right. Now, you had just come into town then pretty much, right?

EWING

Yeah, 1937.

ISOARDI

So, I mean, you find work right away.

EWING

I really did. When I got in town, off that freight train, I was whipped, so I laid around my brother [Louis Ewing]'s house about two weeks.

ISOARDI

Where was he living?

EWING

He was living on Forty-second Street.

ISOARDI

Just off Central [Avenue]?

EWING

It was close to Hooper Avenue. So after I got my wits back together and my strength, I went down to the union, which was on Central Avenue around Washington Boulevard, just north of Washington Boulevard. I took my transfer, and I transferred into the union. That's how I got into [Local] 767.

ISOARDI

Was there a waiting period before you could go out and work?

EWING

There might have been, but I don't remember. If I was hired, I played, you know. There might have been a waiting period, but--

ISOARDI

[laughter] But you had some work quick.

EWING

If somebody hired me, I was in. Some things they weren't too strict about, because at that time there weren't a whole lot of musicians here. There were musicians, but-- If they had a call, like a studio gig or something, they had to use whoever was available. I don't think there were a whole lot of musicians. Because they had a little old house down on Central for 767, you know. And I never did see it full. I mean, a lot of people--

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

The only time I saw it pretty full and active was when the amalgamation movement was going on. There was a lot of activity then.

ISOARDI

Yeah, right, right. Had you been in any of the other locals in any other cities before you came to L.A.?

EWING

Yes. I was in the Seattle union. I forget the number. That's the first union I joined, was in Seattle, but I don't remember-- It's 4-something. I don't remember.

ISOARDI

Was that also a segregated situation up there where they had two locals?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

That also?

EWING

Uh-huh.

ISOARDI

How did the one up there compare to 767? Basically the same kind of thing?

EWING

It must have been pretty small, because there weren't that many black musicians around, you know. So it had to be small, much smaller than 767.

ISOARDI

Do you have any sense of how many people were in 767 in the late thirties?

EWING

No. I don't think I could even give a guess. I knew quite a few guys, but as far as number of people, I don't know. I knew quite a few people. But I don't think a whole lot. Let's see. Benny Carter was in that union, and Buddy Collette. At that time, it wasn't long before they had that movement for the amalgamation with [Local] 47. It was quite a while but not a real long time, you know.

ISOARDI

Right. So you find some work right away. What kind of gigs come up? Did you get a regular job? Do you hook on with someone?

EWING

Oh, I had all kinds of gigs there.

ISOARDI

Really? So you're playing all the time?

EWING

Oh, yeah. I worked down on Main Street. There used to be a burlesque house down there. I worked in that place a little while.

ISOARDI

Do you remember the name of it?

EWING

The Follies [Theatre]. But I didn't stay long because it was nonunion. Some of the guys went on and worked, anyway, but I didn't take it because it was nonunion. I think I worked once or twice, a couple of nights. And then Phil Moore had a band on around that time. I worked with him out there at the Cotton Club.

ISOARDI

Phil Moore led a band at-- Was that Frank Sebastian's Cotton Club?

EWING

Yeah. Yeah. I worked with Phil Moore. Who else?

ISOARDI

What was that band like?

EWING

That Phil had?

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

It was good, because Phil was pretty smart. He didn't write anything the guys couldn't handle. So he had a pretty smooth band, you know, and had a nice style of writing--very simple but melodic.

ISOARDI

And this was a full big band?

EWING

I think he had about two trombones and two or three trumpets, four reeds. It wasn't a really big band.

ISOARDI

Is the Cotton Club, by the late thirties, still going strong?

EWING

Oh, you mean out there in Culver City?

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

Oh, no. No. I haven't even heard that word in years, you know. It's hard for me to tell exactly where-- It was somewhere around La Cienega [Boulevard] and Washington, somewhere in that area, somewhere around in there.

ISOARDI

Because I know years earlier it was popular.

EWING

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was popular.

ISOARDI

By the late thirties, though, was it still packing people in when you were playing there?

EWING

When we played there? Oh, I don't know about packing them in, but we got pretty good crowds, like on the weekends, you know. But I don't think-- I don't remember it being overcrowded. And I don't know how many nights of work-- I don't [know] whether it was three, four, five, or what. I don't think it was six. I don't think it was that many nights. Jobs were not plentiful at that time, you know. They just didn't have it. There were a lot of clubs around, but I don't think L.A. was too much of a nightclub town then.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Yeah. They had a lot of clubs, but I don't think anybody was doing too well. I think the clubs that did pretty well would be down on Main Street. That's where Teddy Buckner-- He took Lionel [Hampton]'s band. Lionel went with Benny Goodman, so they gave the band to Teddy Buckner.

ISOARDI

Oh, Lionel Hampton had set up a band out here then?

EWING

Yeah, he had a band out here, but then Benny Goodman came out here and took him away from that band, and Teddy Buckner became the leader. That's when I first met Teddy. Because I joined that band.

ISOARDI

When did you do that?

EWING

Oh, that was around '37.

ISOARDI

So you played with Phil Moore for a little bit, and then you jumped to Teddy Buckner?

EWING

Yeah. You know, I gigged around. There was a guy from Pasadena named George Brown. He had a band. And I used to work with him on Thursday and Sunday nights at the Elks hall on Central Avenue. I didn't make very much money, I'll tell you that. [laughter] But I worked. Well, in those days, if you worked, that just about solved half of the thing, because, you know, you were just glad to be working.

ISOARDI

Yeah, with so many people out of work.

EWING

Oh, man. And then the gigs didn't pay that much money. You'd be lucky to get ten dollars for a night's work. That was almost unheard of. Six [dollars], eight [dollars], you know. And sometimes you'd be, "Oh, I hope the guy pays me tonight." [laughter] But Les Hite was the big guy then.

ISOARDI

The big bandleader?

EWING

Yeah. He was the big-name bandleader. He had Marshal Royal, and he had-- There was a fine trumpet player named Lloyd Reese.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah. He went on to be a pretty successful teacher, also.

EWING

Yeah, he became a teacher. And Peppy Prince was the drummer. I don't remember some of the other guys, but I remember those guys were in the band.

ISOARDI

Pretty good core players.

EWING

Yeah, they had a good band. Yeah. Marshal always could play good, you know. He always made a band sound good. He made Count Basie's band sound good.

He had a dominating tone. It's very dominating. If he's in the reed section, if he's on the lead, you don't have to worry about who's leading.

ISOARDI

He was like that even then?

EWING

Oh, yeah. He's always been like that. He's always been a "Follow me"--
[laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] "I know what I'm doing."

EWING

"This is the way it goes." [laughter] He's always been like that. But he'd be right, though. You know, kind of like [Muhammad] Ali. You know, "I'm the greatest." [laughter] And then follow it up.

ISOARDI

Yeah. If you deliver, you can get away with a lot.

EWING

Yeah. If you know what you're doing, if you say that and then follow it through, there's no argument.

ISOARDI

Yeah. Who could argue with Ali?

EWING

You couldn't argue with him, because he could go out and knock somebody out and then dance around him.

ISOARDI

He would prove it.

EWING

Oh, man. "I'm the greatest."

ISOARDI

What was George Brown like?

EWING

George Brown?

ISOARDI

Lots of people have referred to him, but you're the first person I've talked to who worked with him. He was considered as having a pretty good band.

EWING

I think he's still around, but I know he's not active. I saw him maybe ten years ago up here on the corner. He had a good band. But I don't know what caused him to give it up. I guess there just wasn't enough work, you know. Because when I left him, I was on my way to Chicago.

ISOARDI

Oh, really?

EWING

Yeah. But then, when I came back, he didn't have a band anymore. I don't know just what happened. It was hard working a big band then.

ISOARDI

And how big was his band? When you guys played at the Elks, was it thirteen pieces?

EWING

George's band? Well, it was somewhere around twelve or thirteen. Probably thirteen. Because he had two trombones and three trumpets, I guess four saxophones-- maybe five, but I know there were four--a rhythm [section].

ISOARDI

What was his book like?

EWING

It had some special arrangements, and I don't know who made those arrangements. I don't remember. And [it had] stocks.

ISOARDI

Did they just play straight stocks? Or did he change them a little bit?

EWING

Yeah, well, you know, stocks were pretty good in those days. Will Hudson and some of those guys, they wrote pretty nice stuff.

ISOARDI

Oh, really?

EWING

Yeah. Almost all the bands played some of those stocks, you know. But George, I don't think he got too far with the band, though. He had a band, but he might not have known how to-- Businesswise, maybe he didn't know what to do. There used to be a guy in the band who used to kind of take care of business. He was a trombone player. What was his name? I think it was Seward [Thompson]. I think. But anyway, he was a trombone player. He was kind of like a manager and he played trombone. So George wasn't taking care of the business; this trombone player was taking care of the business.

ISOARDI

Yeah. Did George play an instrument?

EWING

George? Piano.

ISOARDI

He played piano, and he played piano with the band? Led it from there?

EWING

Uh-huh. But it was just rough going at that time, you know. It was just rough. We never did have a steady job.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Although we played at the Elks on Thursday nights, every other Thursday. That was about it. I think we played out there in El Monte once or twice for the Spanish people on a Sunday afternoon.

ISOARDI

What would you do the other nights?

EWING

What would I do? [laughter] Well, I don't think too much. Maybe I'd jam or something, you know, if the-- I kind of stayed around whoever was doing something. But most of the small groups, they didn't have a trombone. I remember C. L. Burke had a real nice six- or seven-piece band, but he didn't have a trombone. He had a real nice band. And he was working at-- Let's see. Where was that? It was somewhere on Central Avenue. I don't remember the name of the place.

ISOARDI

So you pretty much had to look to the big bands for employment, and that was about it?

EWING

Somewhat. About the only real big band you'd see was the guy that would come into town, you know, like-- Well, I remember Louis Armstrong came in town once, and he had a big band. Naturally, Duke Ellington. But not too many guys had a chance to play with those bands, because they were established when they got here. I would say that Red played a little bit with Louis Armstrong. It seems like his bass player got sick or something--I think his name was [Pops] Foster, from New Orleans--and Red played the Vogue with Louis. I do remember that. It was just kind of hard times, you know. That's about all I can say. There just wasn't a lot of work.

ISOARDI

What was the avenue itself like? Where were the places people worked?

EWING

Oh, that was a beautiful place.

ISOARDI

[laughter] In the late thirties?

EWING

Oh, man. All the Hollywood people would come out there. I guess they called themselves going down to the Harlem of Los Angeles. It was live and jumping, though. The Club Alabam and-- Let's see. What was the other? There were two or three clubs on Central. And the Lincoln Theatre was going at that time. But anyway, Central Avenue was it. That's where everybody showed up, you know. If you knew anybody, you'd meet them on Central Avenue at the Dunbar Hotel.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Around in there, yeah.

ISOARDI

Inside the Dunbar? You mean just hanging around the Dunbar?

EWING

Yeah. Well, that was the only place you could stay in town, mostly, was the Dunbar. There was no such thing out there in Hollywood somewhere.

ISOARDI

Where did you hang at?

EWING

Where everybody else did. [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] I mean, did you have favorite little spots that you liked to go to or--?

EWING

Well, like I said, I was playing with George Brown whenever he had a gig. Sometimes we'd get a fairly good gig, you know, at the Elks. And I mentioned that we went out to MGM and made a movie. Just whatever was offered.

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

You know, whatever was going on, you just jumped on in there. Because if you didn't take it, you didn't know when you'd get some work again. But I wasn't too worried then. I mean, it was just me. I didn't have any responsibilities.

ISOARDI

And you were still staying with your brother?

EWING

Off and on. If I was in bad shape, I would have to go out there or something like that. But mostly I was on my own. I always was able to rake up enough money to pay the rent and eat. But a lot of fine people were around here then. Nat Cole. It wasn't "King" Cole then; it was Nat Cole. See, he originally was a big bandleader.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Oh, yeah. He'd come out here with a show. And he told me, "I want you to play first trombone." But it didn't turn out that way. He wasn't singing at the time. He was married to his first wife, Nadine [Cole]. And I think Nadine had something to do with "Straighten Up and Fly Right."

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

I think so. I know she helped him write tunes. She was a chorus girl.

ISOARDI

You mean she actually contributed to writing the music?

EWING

She had something to do with "Straighten Up and Fly Right." You know, that's the tune that made Nat.

ISOARDI

Yeah, truly.

EWING

She had something to do with it.

ISOARDI

That was a big hit.

EWING

Yeah. I don't know whether she wrote the lyrics or-- She probably wrote the lyrics, and he probably wrote the melody. That's the way it sounds to me. I'm not sure, but I think that's the way it was. But she tried to help him as much as she could. See, he was determined to stay here. All the other guys went back to Chicago, but he was going to stay here regardless. And I think she took a job as a waitress or something so they could live. Because I remember, me and John Simmons, we decided we were going to go to Chicago.

ISOARDI

When was that?

EWING

That was in '38. So they gave us a big party, a big send-off down there at the Union Station.

ISOARDI

How nice.

EWING

It wasn't Union Station then; it was Southern Pacific Station.

ISOARDI

Yeah, downtown?

EWING

You know, down there on Alameda Street.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

And, oh, man, everybody was there. Nat Cole. We said, "Man, why don't you come on and go back to Chicago with us?" He said, "Oh, no, I don't think I'll make it." They gave us a big send-off. We got on the train and--

ISOARDI

Why did you leave?

EWING

Well, John Simmons kept telling me that Chicago was the place. He said, "Man, L.A. is nothing. Let's get out of here." So I said, "Okay." Because I had worked in this movie with-- Let's see. What movie was that? Well, I made a couple of hundred dollars and I had some money. That was a lot of money then.

ISOARDI

Yeah. You got a couple of hundred dollars for doing the movie gig?

EWING

Yeah. I think that's the first couple of hundred dollars I ever made in my life at one time. [laughter]

ISOARDI

What did you have to do to earn that? Was it just a music thing?

EWING

We were in some scene. Now, Nat was in this picture, too, and we were African natives.

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez. [laughter] Oh, man.

EWING

And we tried to get Nat to go back to Chicago with us, you know. "No, man. I'm going to stay here." But anyway, when I got back to Chicago, I joined Horace Henderson's band, and then I went with Earl "Fatha" Hines. And I remember, we were going to Saint Louis to play a gig, and they kept talking about this "King Cole" out on the coast. I said, "Well, I just left the coast. I don't know anybody named King Cole."

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

And they were talking about this "Straighten Up and Fly Right," King Cole Trio. I said, "I don't even know who that is." I was telling the guys in the band, I said, "I just left there. I don't know anybody named King Cole. I knew Nat Cole, but I didn't know King Cole." [laughter] But anyway, from then on it was history, you know. He was the guy that if the door opened, he knew how to walk in. He wasn't lucky. No, he wasn't a lucky man. He might have been lucky as far as being in the right place at the right time, but as far as his talent, there was no such thing as luck. He knew what he was doing. He'd always been a fine musician. Sometimes I listen to some of the stuff he did. After he became famous, that stuff was flawless. To this day-- He could just [sing] "Mona Lisa," you know what I mean? Those words come out just perfect. He knew what he was doing. And it seems so strange because when I met him he wasn't singing. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Not at all? I mean, he didn't--

EWING

I didn't hear him sing.

ISOARDI

Do you know what made him start singing? How did that happen?

EWING

Well, it seemed as though-- Now, he was working at some little old joint on La Brea [Avenue] with his-- I think it was a duo first. But anyway, some guy came in and said, "I want to hear 'Sweet Lorraine.'" And I think Nat just hushed this guy up. "Okay. I'll do 'Sweet Lorraine' for you." And I understand that's how he started singing.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

That's what I hear.

ISOARDI

People heard him sing "Sweet Lorraine" and said, "Whoa, don't stop."

EWING

Well, it was some disc jockey around here that I think encouraged him to sing, too. I forgot his name. But, like I say, if the door opened up, he knew how to walk on in.

ISOARDI

So when you go back to Chicago, then, you land some good gigs right away. Horace Henderson and Fatha Hines.

EWING

Yeah. I didn't see any bad days in Chicago. I went to work right away.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Yeah. When I got in Chicago, John Simmons had told them all, "Oh, man, this guy from L.A., he can play trombone," you know, one of those things. So the name got around. And the first thing I know, I got a call to Horace Henderson's band. I played some gigs with Horace. And in the meantime, those guys with Horace were going down to the Grand Terrace to join Earl Hines's band, and they asked me did I want to go.

ISOARDI

Gee, the whole band?

EWING

Well, a big-- Well, most of them had been with Earl in the first place, and then they left Earl and went to Horace, so they went back to Earl when Earl had the job. [laughter] So they asked me did I want to go with them. There was nothing I could do but say yes, because it had become wintertime. I said, "Yeah, I'll join." They came by where I was staying, and they said, "Come on, man, you're going to go down to the Grand Terrace with us." And the snow was hitting on the ground, you know. I said, "Well, yeah, I'll take it. I'll take it. I'll join up." So I went on down there and joined Earl. And Earl had never heard me play.

ISOARDI

So he just took their word for it.

EWING

Well, he called and said he'd give me an audition. I went down there. He was on the piano. And I was a little bit nervous. Walter Fuller and "Mouse" [Alvin Burroughs] and a couple of guys, they had told Earl that I could play. So I joined up. I went on in the Grand Terrace.

ISOARDI

All right. That was one of the best clubs in Chicago, wasn't it?

EWING

Yeah, at the time. It wasn't a booming club, but it was a gangster hangout, you know.

ISOARDI

Oh, it was?

EWING

Oh, yeah. One of the Capone brothers had a club upstairs, which I never did see. We couldn't go up. They didn't allow us up there. I knew they were gambling up there, because the gangsters used to hang out-- When the floor show would go on, they'd come downstairs and sit in the corner and look at the girls dance or whatever. But I don't ever remember seeing that club crowded, and it wasn't a very big place either. I don't even remember seeing it jammed. Joe Louis used to come in there. But I don't ever remember seeing that place where there weren't some empty tables. And we used to broadcast twice a night, seven nights a week. There wasn't any such thing as an off night. We worked seven nights a week. I'd sleep all day and work all night.

ISOARDI

Man. What would you do to break the routine?

EWING

Sleep. [laughter] That's about it.

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez. I mean, nobody took vacation or what? You couldn't take a vacation or they'd replace you or--?

EWING

Well, it seems as though it was like this: it seems as though we worked three months in the Grand Terrace and the other three months would be on the road.

ISOARDI

Oh, man.

EWING

Something like that.

ISOARDI

With no letup anywhere?

EWING

No, not much letup. Because, oh, we had [Edward] Fox. He's the one that owned the Terrace, and he had managed Earl Hines. So he kept us in the club for three months, and then he'd put Fletcher Henderson in there for three months.

ISOARDI

While you guys hit the road.

EWING

Yeah. One would be on the road and the other would be in the club. Yeah, Fletcher Henderson had his band there then.

ISOARDI

What was the Hines band like then when you were in it? Who were some of the other people who were playing then?

EWING

Well, [Billy] Eckstine joined that band, Budd Johnson--he did most of the arranging--and Robert Crowder, we called him "Little Sax," he did quite a bit of the writing. Omer Simeon. Let's see. Who else? Mouse Burroughs, the drummer, a very fine drummer. It was a good band. It could play good dance music, jazz, floor show. He did everything.

ISOARDI

Did you do a lot of recording?

EWING

Yeah, we recorded. That's the band that recorded Eckstine and put him on top.

ISOARDI

That was a young Billy Eckstine.

EWING

No, wait a minute now. Now, Earl got a new band, and we came out here and recorded "Jelly, Jelly." That's what put Eckstine on top.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO JUNE 11, 1993

ISOARDI

So it's a pretty young Billy Eckstine.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

The beginning of his career.

EWING

Yeah. I guess Eckstine was probably a couple of years older than me. We were young, both young men, though. But he always could sing. He didn't learn how to sing; he could sing. And he always wanted to be out front.

ISOARDI

Where did the band go to? Did you cover pretty much the entire country?

EWING

You mean touring and all that? We went all over the United States, you know. We came out here, New York, down South, everywhere. Because that's what you had to do in those days. You didn't have any television and all that kind of stuff. And you didn't record every day either.

ISOARDI

What was it like going through the South?

EWING

Segregation. That's what it was like.

ISOARDI

You just put up with it?

EWING

What else are you going to do? You weren't going to live there, but you were going down to make that money and get out of there. I never had any trouble down there. We didn't have any trouble. It didn't make sense far as we could-- You know, that's the way the South was. I saw a lot of backward people down there that I thought were backward. White people would sit up and come to hear you play, and they're sitting up on the roofs, and the black people were down on the floor dancing. And if we were playing a white dance, then the blacks were sitting up on the roof, you know. I said, "This is the stupidest thing I ever heard of." [laughter] And the idea of it was nobody was even caring about-- You know what I mean? Nobody was caring about somebody else; they'd come to hear the music. Because at that time the radio was the big thing, see. We were on the radio, so they heard us all the time. Well, the people, they wanted to hear the band and see the band, if you know what I mean, and here's a big wall between everybody. It didn't make sense.

ISOARDI

Yeah. You guys, I guess, were broadcasting nationwide from the Grand Terrace?

EWING

Yeah. That's why our tours would be a success, because they heard us. We were on the air more than anybody.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Yeah, because we were on there twice a night.

ISOARDI

Seven nights.

EWING

Yeah. You see, at that time, the songwriters, the only way they could sell a song was on the air. That's how they could sell it. So we had to play those new

tunes. They would have a tune, and we had to play those tunes. I guess Fox got a rake off of it, more than likely.

ISOARDI

Boy, I can imagine. Songwriters beating down his door and--

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

Jeez.

EWING

I didn't really know what was happening there, but I know we had to play all-- Almost every night, they had some-- Budd Johnson and Simeon and Crowder would scratch out an arrangement on one of these funny tunes, you know, and we would broadcast it. But I didn't understand that end of the game then, because I was pretty young. I just knew that we were doing all these strange tunes. Because some of them were very strange. And like I say, they didn't have television then; everything was the radio. And we were on the air a lot. More than anybody.

ISOARDI

And you got a straight salary for playing?

EWING

Yeah. We had a straight salary at the Grand Terrace. When we sat down we had a straight salary, but then, when we went on the road, well, we got paid \$10 or \$15 a night, something like that. We would play at least six nights a week on the road, you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah. So you were getting--what?--\$75, \$100 a week, something like that, maybe?

EWING

Yeah. I don't think we hit that \$100 mark too often.

ISOARDI

Would you get paid for recording sessions, also?

EWING

Yeah, you'd get paid for recording. You might record maybe twice a year. You wouldn't record every other day like they do now. Every time you turn around, somebody's in there recording, you know. Not big bands. I mean these rock bands and stuff, they record-- Those guys have got their own studios. They live out in the hills somewhere, and they've taken a garage and made their own [studio], and they're recording every day.

ISOARDI

They've got their own publishing company.

EWING

They're all millionaires, you know. But I don't blame them, really, because musicians didn't control the recording field when I came along.

ISOARDI

Boy, not at all.

EWING

You didn't control it at all. They recorded you when they wanted to record, and you got paid the scale, which wasn't very big. But these guys, these rock guys, they might laugh at what they do, but they make the money. You know what I mean? [laughter] Whether you like rock music or not, those guys with that long hair are not fools. I give them credit for that. They're making the money. Boy, some of those guys-- I read about it, I say, "My God, they're really fantastic." I'm not a rock fan, but I give those guys credit. Nobody controls them like they did us.

ISOARDI

Yeah. If the record sells, they get the bucks.

EWING

Yeah. I read where some of those groups, the guy lives out in the hills somewhere, and they've got their own studio out there, and then they bring the album out. They're the ones that said, "All right, well, if you want it, it's going to cost so many million" or whatever it is, you know. The scene has really changed. [laughter] It's changed.

ISOARDI

Yeah, indeed. Indeed.

EWING

Oh, it's changed.

ISOARDI

Do you know how much control even Earl Hines had over what you guys recorded?

EWING

Well, I would say Earl was the leader of the men, but I don't think he--

ISOARDI

He wasn't so much a businessman?

EWING

Somewhat. He was a fair businessman, but I really don't think he had too much control, because the radio was the big thing then. He certainly didn't control the radio. We were on the air, but I don't think he could control that, you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah. So was that the most lucrative part of the Hines band, those radio broadcasts? Is that what brought in more money than anything else, you think?

EWING

I think so. Because, like I said, we worked all the time. When we came out of Chicago, we were booked. Earl got smart enough to-- One time, though, the

last time, he got smart enough to get rid of his manager and he booked us all the way from Chicago out here and back.

ISOARDI

So he started learning.

EWING

He learned. He learned a lesson. He must have made pretty good money. I don't know. But he must have done pretty good, because he was on it. It was his band, and he did the booking. He had his own front man, and his front guy would go out and get the jobs, which was easy. It was easy to get.

ISOARDI

I guess with that kind of exposure, yeah.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

Probably everybody wanted to hear the band.

EWING

Yeah. He didn't have any trouble selling the band.

ISOARDI

So how long did you stay with Fatha Hines?

EWING

Oh, I'd say about three years. Well, I left a couple of times. I got tired and wanted a rest.

ISOARDI

Well, I guess-- Yeah. I would think that has to hit everybody if, when you were in Chicago--

EWING

Yeah. When it was time to go, I just said, "Well, I'll see you," and I'd go home and rest. I was living out here, too.

ISOARDI

You had a residence out here?

EWING

Well, my brother did. So any time I wanted to stay out here, I stayed.

ISOARDI

So when you needed a break, you would take off from Hines and come out here for a while.

EWING

Yeah. Well, when I needed a break, I just-- I remember one time we were in Oakland, and they called, "Yeah, we're going to leave at nine o'clock." Freddy Webster was one of the trumpet players, and I saw him down at the station, and I said, "What are you doing down here?" He said, "I'm going to Lucky Millinder in New York." And I said, "Well, I'm going to Los Angeles." So Earl lost a couple of guys right then, but he didn't have trouble getting replacements.

ISOARDI

No, I'm sure.

EWING

Maybe for a couple of nights or so. But he kept going. We didn't bruise him at all, you know.

ISOARDI

So then you finally, I guess, made a decision to leave Hines for good after a couple of years?

EWING

After about three years, I-- Let's see. What did I do?

ISOARDI

Does the service come up here at all?

EWING

I went to Chicago. I stayed around Chicago.

ISOARDI

And this is about--when?--1942, something like that?

EWING

Uh-huh. Let's see. I went to New York, the world's fair. Whose band was that? I guess it was Earl's band. That was '39 or '40, one of the two. I guess '40. I was with Hines then, because we went to New York and the world's fair was going on. I remember going out there. And I was living in Chicago then. It was always between Chicago and L.A. where I would lay up, you know.

ISOARDI

When do you come back to Los Angeles?

EWING

You mean to stay?

ISOARDI

Yeah, pretty much.

EWING

Nineteen fifty.

ISOARDI

Oh, it's not till then? Really? Well, let's go back, then, to about '42. The war breaks out. Are you going to be drafted?

EWING

No. I wasn't good enough for the army. [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] What do you mean?

EWING

They put me in 4-F and said they were going to call me back in six weeks, and I never heard from them again.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

No. I don't know. I might have been AWOL, but I never heard of-- I wasn't going to wait around to see if they were going to put me in the army.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Take the 4-F and run! [laughter]

EWING

And I had contacted-- The navy had contacted me, because I was at Chicago, and all the guys were going up to Great Lakes [Naval Training Station]. They had a thing going where all these musicians around Chicago, they'd stay at home. They'd go to Great Lakes and come in every night, get home, get drunk.

ISOARDI

Oh, they were going to play in the bands?

EWING

Yeah. Oh, they had three bands in Great Lakes, the A band, the B band, and the C band. And all the big-name guys were in the B band, like Willie Smith and Clark Terry and--

ISOARDI

Jeez.

EWING

All those guys, they were in the B band.

ISOARDI

Who in the hell was in the A band?

EWING

Well, mostly the guys in the A band were guys from Saint Louis, because this one guy, he was a kind of a straw boss in the navy, so he built his band from guys mostly from Saint Louis. And the B band was-- Oh, let's see. Well, anyway, most of the guys in the B band were guys that had been with [Jimmie] Lunceford and different bands.

ISOARDI

Jeez. Good band.

EWING

Oh, yeah, it was a good band. And the C band, that band I think went to Honolulu.

ISOARDI

Tough.

EWING

But the A band and the B band, they stayed here. The C band, I think that's the one they took to Honolulu. Nobody wanted to get into the-- They didn't want to go to Honolulu, you know.

ISOARDI

So the A and B band just sat at Great Lakes for the war?

EWING

Oh, that's where they stayed, the whole war. They didn't go anywhere.

ISOARDI

So what did they do? At night they would go into Chicago and do whatever?

EWING

Yeah. They'd be in Chicago every night, and they'd get on the El all knocked out. You'd see them-- [laughter] It's the way they get on the El, you know, going over to Great Lakes every night. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Tough war duty.

EWING

Boy, that was really something, though.

ISOARDI

So were you in Chicago throughout the war?

EWING

Yeah. See, they had arranged for me to be in the B band, up to Great Lakes, but, like I say, when I went down to the draft, they rejected me. But I understand how they would do that. I finally found out that they would take so many guys, and they'd reject that guy, say he had something physically wrong with him. In other words, the way they were selecting guys, they wouldn't be taking all good and they wouldn't be taking all bad. I mean, that's what I hear. Because when they rejected me, they said, "Oh, he's got a spot on his lungs." And that really scared me, you know. So when they told me that, I went down to the health department, and I said, "I want an examination." So they gave me an examination. "Well, you can go on home now." I said, "Well, I just got rejected by the military because I have tuberculosis." And they said, "Well, you can go back to tell them they don't know what they're talking about." And I was happy. I was really happy.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah. No kidding.

EWING

I was really happy. And that's when I joined Jimmie Lunceford. I sent him a telegram. I said, "Well, I'm ready to come out."

ISOARDI

No kidding. So when you weren't going in the army, you got ahold of Lunceford, and they--

EWING

Well, he had wanted me in the band, you know. So when I got rejected, I just sent him a telegram, and he sent me a ticket to come to Philadelphia, and I joined him in Philadelphia.

ISOARDI

All right. What was it like playing with the Lunceford band? You guys were certainly popular.

EWING

Oh, it was nice. It was nice. It was real nice, you know. Real nice. He had a style and very interesting music. Yeah, I enjoyed that.

ISOARDI

Was Gerald Wilson with the band then when you joined?

EWING

No, Gerald and Snooky [Young] and Willie Smith and those guys, they all quit because they weren't making enough money.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Snooky Young. They all quit. Gerald was the ringleader. He said, "Well, we ain't making any money, and Lunceford's keeping all the money." So he just took everybody out of the band. All the key players, he took them out. "Follow me." [laughter]

ISOARDI

Jeez. Well, Gerald must have had some authority. He'd done a lot of writing with that band.

EWING

Yeah, he did a lot of writing. You know, he was a guy who would speak his mind.

ISOARDI

Yeah. Gee, this is a nice photograph.

EWING

What's that?

ISOARDI

This album cover, Jimmie Lunceford and His Orchestra, 1944.

EWING

Oh, yeah, yeah. That was Jimmie Lunceford.

ISOARDI

Was this at Great Lakes?

EWING

No, that was up here, Fresno or somewhere. That was during the war.

ISOARDI

Oh, it says McDill Air Force Base.

EWING

I guess so.

ISOARDI

June 15.

EWING

I think it was up there in--

ISOARDI

McDill was out here?

EWING

I think so. Somewhere out here.

ISOARDI

Yeah, a good picture of the band. Great. So how long did you stay with Lunceford?

EWING

Oh, I guess about three years. Something like that.

ISOARDI

Who was outstanding in that band then? Who was--?

EWING

Who was outstanding in that band?

ISOARDI

Yeah, from that period.

EWING

Joe Thomas, naturally. He was there. Paul Webster, "Jock" [Earl] Carruthers, Ed [Edwin] Wilcox. Let's see, who else? Omer Simeon.

ISOARDI

So you've some friends in this band that you'd played with before.

EWING

Yeah. There were some nice guys there.

ISOARDI

So you're back touring, then. I guess with Lunceford you'd tour all the time.

EWING

Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI

Just about all touring?

EWING

Yeah. Vocal. He always had singers. We had the Trenier Twins [Claude and Cliff Trenier] when I was there. They were with us.

ISOARDI

Oh, gee, before we leave Chicago, let me ask you, what was the union situation like in Chicago? I guess you joined when you went back there.

EWING

Oh, it was separate.

ISOARDI

Same kind of deal?

EWING

Uh-huh. About the only unions at that time that were integrated were the [Local] 802--

ISOARDI

New York?

EWING

Yeah, the 802 in New York and maybe a couple of smaller unions. I don't remember where they were.

ISOARDI

Did you ever hear anybody talk about any kind of amalgamation or unification in any of these other places? Did that ever come up?

EWING

The first time I ever heard of amalgamation was in Los Angeles.

ISOARDI

Really? Nobody had talked about it as far as you know. Not in Seattle or Chicago?

EWING

Not that I know of. Nobody talked about it. In Chicago, they were against it. I mean, the black union, they didn't want to--

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Yeah. They figured they were going to lose some power. The black union here was against it. I mean the leadership. Yeah, [Local] 208, oh, man, they raised hell about that. They said, "Well, listen--"

ISOARDI

Was the Chicago local that big, that strong?

EWING

Yeah, the 208, they said, "What are we going to get out of going to Local 10?" They didn't dig it, you know. Of course, some of the members were for it, but the leadership then-- It was the same thing here in Los Angeles. The union leadership, they weren't for that. They weren't for it, because they said, "We've got our own union. What do we need to go over to [Local] 47 for?" They'd say, "Well, you'll be a small fish in a big pond." That's the way they looked at it. And then there were guys that figured that, well, they were doing all right without going over there. Like Buddy Collette and a couple of other guys, they were doing the Groucho Marx show [You Bet Your Life], so what good was it going to do to go to 47? You won't get the same money. And a lot of guys, when the amalgamation was coming up, they said, "Well, if we don't go over there, we're going to bring some of those guys over here, and we'll raise the scale here, and they'll still get the same jobs." Oh, it was a mess, you know. Oh, yeah. They said, "Well, we'll bring some of those guys over. They'd come over."

ISOARDI

You mean some of the white guys to the [Local] 767?

EWING

Yeah, "We'll bring them over here." Sure that's what they were going to do.

ISOARDI

[laughter] No kidding.

EWING

There wasn't anybody asleep.

ISOARDI

Do you think the leadership knew that? That that was going to happen?

EWING

You mean the 47 leadership?

ISOARDI

Yeah. Because that would probably worry them, wouldn't it?

EWING

Yeah, I think that at first they were fighting it. So a guy at Local 767 said, "Well, listen. We'll raise the scale, because those guys, they're going to have the same jobs, anyway. We'll raise the scale, so that way--" In fact, they didn't care what they did, you know. They said, "If they don't want to amalgamate, it's fine with us, because we'll fix it so those guys are-- It will be all right."
[laughter] Oh, boy, that was funny.

ISOARDI

Yeah, truly, truly. But not much sentiment, then, in Chicago and Seattle and places like this for any kind of unification?

EWING

They didn't much want it. Chicago-- Well, Chicago was a unique place. Now, they had all these nightclubs and things going, and they said, "Well, what's the use of--" They said, "We don't see any sense in going over there to the 10 because we got these jobs ourselves. So what's the advantage of going over there to 10?" You know, that's the way leadership was talking.

ISOARDI

Right, right.

EWING

But naturally, those little guys, they didn't want to give up-- They had their own president and secretary and everything. They said, "We're going to lose that if we go over there."

ISOARDI

So the other local, the white local, like L.A., was much bigger. And you'd be just--?

EWING

Oh, in Chicago?

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI

It was much bigger?

EWING

But they didn't have the studio stuff going in Chicago like they had here. See, the Hollywood studio thing was a big thing. But it didn't make a big difference, because it was a few guys that got work like Collette and William Green and-- Who else? No, it wasn't a big thing, really, that they got over there, because they were doing that before they amalgamated. Because I was living with Buddy Collette at the time when all this was going on, you know.

ISOARDI

Was the union, like in Chicago, was it an effective union?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

In terms of representing its membership and--?

EWING

Yeah. They had their jobs. Like I said, there wasn't a lot of studio work then, I mean, for whites or blacks in Chicago. There wasn't a lot of it. Well, the white guys, at that time they had an orchestra like at WGN or something like that, but I don't think they were getting rich.

ISOARDI

So most of the membership made their money in clubs?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

In the white union, as well?

EWING

Yeah. Everybody-- You know, now it's do the best you can. [laughter] I mean, the union doesn't have the power that it did then.

ISOARDI

Yeah, truly.

EWING

They could go and almost close a joint at one time. But there are no joints to close now. And those rock guys, you certainly can't fool with them, because they are wealthy.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Serious money.

EWING

They are wealthy. [laughter] You're going to tell them what to do? Uh-uh.

ISOARDI

They'll buy their company.

EWING

They've got more money than the union's got. I don't know the name of some of those groups, but I read about them, you know. Like I said, they've got their own thing. I mean, on TV shows and that kind of stuff. They call the terms. I guess some of them are union, but it's not like it used to be. I don't think any unions are raising too much hell.

ISOARDI

No. It's really been downhill. Especially the last twenty years have been tough.

EWING

Some guys, they say, "Well, listen, what do I need the union for, because I can get my own job." But on the other hand--

ISOARDI

But that isn't even happening much anymore.

EWING

I can see advantages in the union, because I've done things in the union that I get checks for today, like residuals and things. That comes from the union. I've never been anti-union.

ISOARDI

Yeah. I've never understood how any working person could be. [laughter]

EWING

Well, all your biggest jobs come through that union. You know, like I say, I get a small pension from that. It's small, but I get it every month just like clockwork. How am I going to go against that?

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

You know, I worked with some nonunion guys out in the valley on Thursday night. "Oh, the union--" I said, "Listen, the union is all right with me." I said, "I get a check every month from the union. You guys don't get me a check."
[laughter]

ISOARDI

No kidding. And they don't have anybody to fight for them if anything goes wrong.

EWING

It all depends on how you come out in the thing. Everybody is not the same. I did the Lucille Ball show, The Lucy Show, for about two or three years. That was union. So you mean to tell me that-- So how can I be all--? Some guys just don't know what to do anyway, you know. The union is not supposed to be an employment agency. They don't call themselves employers.

ISOARDI

Yeah, I guess some guys get upset because they don't get jobs. The union doesn't get them jobs.

EWING

Yeah, I mean, "What's the union doing for me?" "Well, you get the job, and we'll protect you." That's what the union is for. But they're not supposed to go out here and-- Of course, I guess they do have something to do with getting jobs, I imagine. But you still have to get your own job whether you're union or nonunion. And I've gotten some good things out of the union. I was even on the relief committee. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Really? That's good.

EWING

I was on the relief committee. That was funny. But that's about as much of an office as I ever had at the union.

ISOARDI

When was that? When did you do that?

EWING

Oh, it hasn't been too long ago. I guess maybe five years ago I was on the relief committee. I went out to see a couple of people in the hospital or something. If somebody needed some help, I'd recommend that they get some help. Stuff like that.

ISOARDI

Yeah, a good committee. So you were with Lunceford, then, for about three years--I guess from about '42 to '45, something like that?

EWING

Uh-huh.

ISOARDI

Pretty much during the war years.

EWING

The war years, right.

ISOARDI

Traveling, I guess, all around the country. Did you ever go outside the country?

EWING

No, because we couldn't get outside. We couldn't get out of the States.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah, of course. With the war--

EWING

Yeah, we couldn't get out. But he was booked overseas then, because he had been over there-- Well, I guess that was probably somewhere in the thirties, maybe. He was supposed to go again, but we couldn't get out. We couldn't get out of the country. And I really wanted to go at that time, you know. Oh, I wanted to go bad.

ISOARDI

So what happens after Lunceford?

EWING

Well, I was in Chicago for a while. I worked with "Red" [Theodore] Saunders around there. And I used to work at the Regal Theatre. At that time, they had a minimum of men that you could have. Like somebody's band would come to the Regal Theater where you had to have so many men. I worked with Louis Jordan and some of the smaller bands, because they had to add on men. So I had a pretty good thing going there.

ISOARDI

Really? That was pretty regular?

EWING

Yeah. It wasn't every week, but sometimes it would be twice a month or whatever. Then I'd be working at different clubs, the [Club] DeLisa with Red Saunders. You know, whatever was available. I don't remember every job. I worked at the Rhumboogie [Cafe] out on Garfield Avenue, Fifty-fifth Street. Chicago was pretty good to me. I did pretty good in Chicago.

ISOARDI

I guess during the war the club scene was probably pretty strong?

EWING

During the war? Let's see.

ISOARDI

I guess just when you come back it's about '45.

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

Or did it start tapering off a bit as the war ended?

EWING

Yeah, I think when the war ended, I think some of the places kind of went under, you know, because a lot of the places had-- Well, servicemen hung out and all that. A lot of people didn't want to see that war end.

ISOARDI

Well, I guess everybody was working.

EWING

Yeah, that's true. Everybody was working. You were either working or you were in the army, one or the other. [laughter]

ISOARDI

I guess after the Depression, that's--

EWING

I don't like war, but I know it puts everybody to work.

ISOARDI

Crazy.

EWING

I don't like war, you know. I never had to participate in it. But I had a job. Always working. I remember one time--this is really funny--I was in Chicago and-- Everybody said, "Well, if you get a defense job you can stay out of the army." So a friend of mine said, "Well, let's go out to Carnegie Illinois Steel and get us a job." So we went out there and went to the employment office. The guy said, "What do you guys do?" We said, "Well, we're musicians." "Oh, I've got just the thing for you."

ISOARDI

Just the thing for you in a steel mill?

EWING

"I've got just the thing. Be here tomorrow morning at seven o' clock" or whatever, you know. So I thought, "Since we're musicians, he's going to give us something." [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah, he's going to have you playing a concert.

EWING

We got out there, and, man, that big steel mill, you could hear that furnace roaring, and I'm looking, and flames are everywhere. So they said, "Okay, come on. We're going down the railroad track a little ways." So I guess we walked maybe-- I don't know if it was a mile, but quite a ways down. We all walked, a gang of guys. There was a whole line of flatcars, and they were all loaded with rocks. Our job was to get up there and throw the-- [laughter]

ISOARDI

Oh, you're kidding.

EWING

That was our job.

ISOARDI

Oh, man.

EWING

I think I lasted one day and a half. [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] Oh, this guy--

EWING

I said, "I'd rather go into the army than do this." I said, "I'd rather go to the army," because this was killing me.

ISOARDI

Oh, man, this guy was probably cracking up, inspecting your reaction.

EWING

"Let me get out of here." [laughter] And I didn't weigh but about a hundred pounds then. Yeah, throwing these rocks.

ISOARDI

Oh, gee. Lifting them by hand?

EWING

Oh, yeah, by hand.

ISOARDI

No shovels. These were big rocks.

EWING

Oh, shovels? Those rocks were too big for a shovel. All of them were as big as that vase and bigger. This vase right here. That would be the smallest rock.

ISOARDI

Jeez. So at least a foot and a half by a foot or something.

EWING

And they would be up to as big as this lamp. And you're supposed to-- "Uh!"
[laughter]

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez.

EWING

Oh, boy, what a job.

ISOARDI

You were almost lifting your weight in rocks.

EWING

But I think about that guy when he said, "I've got just the job for you."
[laughter] I can see that he was thinking, "These soft musicians." [laughter]
But I said, well, it was either going to be death or I had to leave there.
[laughter] So I left. And to show you how things happen, I left and went on
home, and I was down, and my back, you know-- So I got a call one night from
a guy from Texas who had a band. He said, "Hey, are you working now?" I said,
"No." And he said, "Well, listen, can you open tonight at the Rhumboogie?" I
said, "Yeah." And I had to go to the Rhumboogie like this, you know. That was
it.

ISOARDI

Grabbing your back?

EWING

Oh, my back was gone. Shoot. And that was the end of that job.

ISOARDI

Oh, man.

EWING

I don't think I went back to get my pay. I don't remember getting a check from those people. I think I told him, "You've got that and the job. I'll see you later."
[laughter] This guy tickled me. He said, "Oh, I've got just the job for you."
[laughter] I guess he had--

ISOARDI

Oh, he had a good laugh.

EWING

"I'll fix him. I'll fix him." Oh, boy. That was really funny. But anyway, it's all in the game.

ISOARDI

Yeah, truly.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE JUNE 15, 1993

ISOARDI

John, before we continue from where we left off from last time, I have to ask you one question that we haven't dealt with yet. How did you get your nickname, "Streamline"?

EWING

Oh, that goes back to the streamlined trains in Kansas. We had a gig, a little band there in Topeka. We had a little gig up in Salina, Kansas. So this train came by. That's the first time I think any of us had seen it, you know. And this drummer said, "Hey, man, that train looks just like you, a streamline train." And I haven't been able to get rid of it since.

ISOARDI

[laughter] And you were pretty young then, I guess.

EWING

Oh, I was about seventeen or eighteen. I haven't been able to get rid of it since.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah, everyone refers to you as "Stream" or "Streamline" when they talk--

EWING

That's it, that's it. That's how it happened. I've always been slender, you know. I guess that's the reason why he said that I looked like that train. I think that's what it was.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Okay, good. Got that cleared up. Last time, I think we'd gotten up to the point where-- I guess it was just before you came to L.A. You'd been working around Chicago after the war. I think we finished with your story about the guy at the steel mill who had just the perfect job for you musicians.
[laughter]

EWING

Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's true.

ISOARDI

Throwing the rocks off the trains.

EWING

Yeah, that was something I'll never forget.

ISOARDI

So maybe we can take it from there and talk about how you got back to L.A.

EWING

Well, let's see, that was in the forties. I think right after that, that steel mill gig, right after that--

ISOARDI

Right after that one-day gig.

EWING

Right after that steel mill gig, I started gigging around Chicago with "Red" [Theodore] Saunders over at the [Club] DeLisa. That was around 1944 or '45,

one of the two. So let's see. I started gigging around the Regal Theatre, you know, stuff like that, and then I got a call from Cab Calloway. I had worked with him once before. He wanted me to do some dates with him, you know, big band. So I did some dates with him, mostly theaters. The last date I did with him was in Detroit, Michigan. The band was going from Detroit to New York, I think to go in the Zanzibar, one of those theaters there. Well, I could go, but what was going to happen was he was going to have me work in each trombone player's place a night. So that would have given me three nights a week working. And then he was going to give me \$50 a week to go to New York. But I didn't take it. I went back to Chicago.

ISOARDI

You mean he was going to have you playing each of the different trombone parts?

EWING

Yeah, yeah. So I would have had three nights working. See, because you had to belong to [American Federation of Musicians, Local] 802 to work regularly in New York.

ISOARDI

And you weren't a member?

EWING

And I wasn't a member. And I wasn't too interested anyway; I wanted to go back to Chicago. But I thought that was a pretty good deal. They were going to give me \$50, and I would have probably made \$25 on each trombone. A guy would have to lay off, and I would work in his place. I probably would have made about \$125 a week in New York. At that time, that was good money.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

But I went on back to Chicago and started doing what [I was doing before] I left, you know, at the Regal Theatre. At that time, you see, the union was pretty strong then, and they would put a minimum amount of men that could

work at the Regal. So for bands like Louis Jordan or-- Let's see, who else? Paul Hucklebuck. When they would come to Chicago and work at the Regal Theatre, then they would have to add on some men. They would have to have about a minimum of maybe eight or ten men. And King Kolax, the trumpet player, and I was trombone, we were always standbys at the Regal.

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez.

EWING

Oh, yeah, we had a good gig.

ISOARDI

Good, yeah.

EWING

And then, let's see. Gerald Wilson came to town with a big band. Well, Gerald Wilson, Roy Eldridge, and somebody else. Anyway, I had a chance to play with all those bands in Chicago. That must have been around '47, somewhere around in there. Yeah, I said Gerald Wilson. I worked about three weeks with Gerald Wilson in the El Grotto cafe, and I worked with Roy Eldridge in there about the same amount of time. He had Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis with him then. A real exciting tenor [saxophone] player.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

Like I said, I did that. I did a lot of different things around Chicago.

ISOARDI

But you always had work it sounds like.

EWING

I usually worked.

ISOARDI

Pretty steady.

EWING

Yeah. I guess I had the luck of being in the right place at the right time.

ISOARDI

A good musician, too.

EWING

Well, I did that for a while around there with those different bands and everything. So I decided to come back to L.A.

ISOARDI

Why?

EWING

Well, I wasn't satisfied in Chicago, and I was having problems with my wife, and I said, "Maybe a change of scenery will do me good," you know. So I headed back to L.A. for about the fourth time. And at that time I met Buddy Collette, and he was doing the Groucho [Marx] show [You Bet Your Life].

ISOARDI

And this is '48, something like that? 'Forty-nine?

EWING

It must have been '50, because that's when I met these guys. It was 1950.

ISOARDI

How did you meet them?

EWING

Well, we used to go to a symphony rehearsal. It was sort of a training orchestra. Jimmy Cheatham was going to Westlake College of Music at the time, and Buddy Collette was working on the Groucho show. He had a good job too. I had no job, but still we had an apartment together, three guys, you know.

ISOARDI

You, Jimmy Cheatham, and Buddy Collette?

EWING

Yeah. And that's about the time the amalgamation [of American Federation of Musicians Locals 47 and 767] movement was getting ready to get in gear.

ISOARDI

Let me ask you, how did you hear about the symphony orchestra? How did you hook up with that?

EWING

Well, Jimmy Cheatham-- Let me see. How did I hook up with that? Well, a lot of Hollywood people would come to that rehearsal. I know one guy became a pretty famous conductor because he came up there-- It was a class, you know, kind of like a class. Elmer Bernstein.

ISOARDI

Oh, really? He was very famous.

EWING

Yeah, he was in the training orchestra. He came up there and, boy, you know, he went onto pretty good, to high heights.

ISOARDI

Yeah, one of the leading film composers.

EWING

Yeah. And there was another guy, Zoltan Kurthee. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know whether he died or what. But there were good musicians in that, good guys, studio guys. Anybody that could play, you were welcome to sit in the orchestra.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

This is a classical orchestra, then.

EWING

Yeah, symphony. There were some good and some bad.

ISOARDI

So you wanted to play classical? You had a--

EWING

Yeah. Well, I'd had a taste of that, like in high school. I'd had a taste of it. I wasn't in love with it, but I figured, you know, I didn't have anything to do--

ISOARDI

So why not.

EWING

You know, all the guys were there on-- I think that was-- I don't know whether that was a Tuesday night or a Thursday night, and that's when the orchestra rehearsed. And a big orchestra. Not just, you know--

ISOARDI

Like a symphony orchestra.

EWING

Yeah, symphony.

ISOARDI

Who made up most of the musicians in it? Where were they coming from?

EWING

Oh, different guys. I remember George Kast and-- A lot of the guys were studio guys.

ISOARDI

Aha. So there were a lot of white musicians--

EWING

Oh, mostly.

ISOARDI

So this was an integrated band.

EWING

Oh, yeah, mostly white. Shoot, I don't think there were over four or five black guys in there. And like I said, the amalgamation movement was kind of coming up.

ISOARDI

Well, you said that you, Buddy, and Jimmy were living together then.

EWING

Yeah, we had an apartment.

ISOARDI

Where at?

EWING

It was on Saint Andrew's Place. The building is still there. It was built in 1903 because I looked on the meter.

ISOARDI

Really? [laughter]

EWING

It was a pretty nice building. I think it's still there.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

Over on Saint Andrew's Place and Pico [Boulevard]. Well, anyway, Josephine Baker came in town, and everybody was either pro-amalgamation or against it.

ISOARDI

Well, could you explain how it gets going? How does this whole amalgamation thing come up? Or was it already going when you got here?

EWING

Well, let's see. It started-- Like I said, about the time around 1950, that's when I came back here. About that time there were some people that wanted to put the unions together, and there were some people that didn't.

ISOARDI

This is within Local 767?

EWING

Yeah. They wanted to put 767 together with 47. And you heard more speeches, and all of them made sense. For instance, the guys at 767 would say, "Well, listen, why go over there? We're going to be lost over there. What difference does it make?" And then you'd hear people say, "Well, it's supposed to be one union. That's in the constitution of the American Federation of Musicians, that you cannot have two unions in one city or in one jurisdiction." So it was illegal, but it was never enforced. So about that time, Josephine Baker came in town. You know who she was.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah.

EWING

And she came to that-- They had some kind of-- I don't know whether it was a fund-raising or what, but they had something at the Humanist Hall.

ISOARDI

What was the event for?

EWING

I don't know what it was for. I do remember-- It had something to do with amalgamation. It seems as though they wanted to raise money.

ISOARDI

So it was like a benefit or a rally in support of the amalgamation.

EWING

Yeah, yeah. I don't remember exactly.

ISOARDI

Well, that sounds like something she would support.

EWING

Oh, yeah. That's why she was there. And I don't know who brought her there. I don't know whether it was Benny Carter or Marl Young or Buddy Collette or some of those people. They might have brought her to this meeting. It was on a Sunday afternoon. I do remember that. Well, after that meeting, I think-- I'm not sure, but it seems as though Marl took some of that money and went to New York, because he wanted to talk to [James C.] Petrillo. Because Petrillo was anti-amalgamation.

ISOARDI

Oh, really?

EWING

Oh, yeah. For some reason he had to go to New York. I don't know whether Petrillo asked him to come up there or what. But anyway, he went to--

ISOARDI

So you guys must have been gaining a lot of steam if Petrillo--

EWING

Oh, he was something else, you know. Anyway, he went to New York. And it seemed as though Petrillo was saying that, "Well, it's not right" or one of those types of things. He was against it, plus the people at 47 were against it, the majority of them. And like I said, everybody that stood up and talked would say something, and it made sense on both sides. See, because the guys

over at 47 would say, "Well, if they want to join, let them come over here and join like everybody else." Because they had just put up this new building out there on Vine Street, you know, and here these guys from Central Avenue are going to come in free. But anyway, like I said, the guys at 767--I think I mentioned this once before--they said, "Well, either way it goes, if we don't win, all the guys at 47 can come over and join if they like, if they want to."

ISOARDI

[laughter] Is this what you guys were saying?

EWING

Yeah, that's what Benny Carter and all these guys, Billy [William] Douglass and everybody, they were all saying that.

ISOARDI

So if you didn't win support for this, the election, you were just going to open up 767 to white musicians.

EWING

Yeah, yeah.

ISOARDI

That must have upset the people at 47. [laughter]

EWING

That was a bombshell. Yeah, that was really a bombshell. And like I said, both sides had something to say. It was just a matter of which side you went with, because both of them made sense. And here these guys had put up this fabulous building on Vine Street, you know. Now, what do they need with these fifty or a hundred guys over here? "If they want to join, tell them to come on over and join like everybody else." Then, like I said, it had finally come down to this. We're going to 47, everybody, I mean all the guys at 767. We're going to Hollywood. So the property over there on Central Avenue, that had to be sold. In other words--

ISOARDI

So the union, 767, owned the old house and--

EWING

Yeah. That was the 767 guys, they owned the building. It was a house, that's what it was. It was a house, an old house. So that's about the way the amalgamation got going.

ISOARDI

You were supporting this movement?

EWING

I was supportive of it, but on the other hand, I was really-- I'd say I was probably on the fence.

ISOARDI

Yeah, you could see both sides.

EWING

Because I had a chance to go with the Harlem Globetrotters, to play a tour with them. And I remember-- Let's see. There were about four or five, maybe John Anderson and Charlie-- What is his last name? And me. I think it was four guys in this Harlem Globetrotter band. We had to play the show. You know, we'd play before the game started, and then we played the show at halftime. And, oh, man, we were a wild bunch, I'm telling you. [laughter] I remember we were on United Air Lines, and I had never been on an airplane before in my life.

ISOARDI

First trip?

EWING

And Jimmie Lunceford, see, he had his own plane. I never would go up with him, you know. But anyway, I got this gig with the Harlem Globetrotters. The first stop was Chicago. We got on this plane out at the airport. It was the old airport then; it wasn't that new one they've got. And boy, we were loaded with liquor. [laughter] And we flew all night long to get to Chicago. Well, to make a long story short, the stewardess said, "We always knew when the

musicians were coming on board because we could smell them before they--"
[laughter]

ISOARDI

Before they got there. We can see them, they can smell them, right?
[laughter]

EWING

We were all drunk, you know. It was really kind of like a joke, because after we had learned the show--

ISOARDI

It just repeats every night, I guess.

EWING

Yeah, the same thing every night. And there were only maybe at the most ten tunes. I don't think it was that many. So what was there to do but just ball, you know? [laughter] And we went back and forth across the United States about four or five times. And they were getting ready to go to Europe, but Abe Saperstein--he was the owner--he said, "Well, I can't take you to Europe." So he brought us back to Los Angeles.

ISOARDI

Gee, I'm kind of surprised. I would have thought especially in Europe they would love the music.

EWING

Yeah, well, he was--

ISOARDI

I guess he couldn't get enough extra for musicians.

EWING

Yeah, yeah, because they were big moneymaking people. I don't think they felt as though the musicians were that important. But anyway, "No, I'm not going to take you to Europe." And he gave everybody a ticket back to L.A. And I've been here ever since.

ISOARDI

So you left with the Globetrotters just as amalgamation was beginning or--?

EWING

Yeah, when I went with the Globetrotters, they called me over to 47, and all the musicians from here, and they gave us a Local 47 card. Because, you know what I mean, we were going around to all these different cities. They wanted, "Oh, those guys, they're from Local 47," you know. [laughter]

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

And that's how I got my 47 card. But I've been here ever since.

ISOARDI

Yeah. You said you could see both sides of the thing about amalgamation.

EWING

Yeah, I could see both sides. I mean, because somebody--

ISOARDI

What were the issues on both sides?

EWING

Well, you couldn't prove anything racial. You couldn't prove it. You could say it was, but like I said, "If they wanted to join, come on over here and join, pay their money just like everybody else." Now, whether they were racial or not, you couldn't swear that.

ISOARDI

Yeah, right.

EWING

And like I said, the guys over at 47, I mean, the pros and cons-- The guys that were anti-amalgamation said, "What are we going to give up everything that we have for just to go over there?" You know, I told you that.

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

So basically that's what that was. That was in 1953; I do remember that.

ISOARDI

Okay, the guys who were opposed to it and said, "We'll just get lost over there. We're going to give up everything we have here."

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

What would you have given up? What did you have there?

EWING

Well, I wouldn't have been giving up anything, because I didn't have a house then. You know, we had this apartment and--

ISOARDI

I mean, what did the people in 767--?

EWING

What would they be giving up?

ISOARDI

What did they say you were going to give up if you went over to Local 47?

EWING

Well, in other words, they had their own offices, they had this house, this old house, which was their union building.

ISOARDI

Right.

EWING

And that's basically what they were talking about.

ISOARDI

So it was mostly the union leadership, then--

EWING

Yeah, the union leadership.

ISOARDI

--who didn't like the idea?

EWING

Well, I mean, like I said, if I had been president or secretary or something like that, I would have been against it. I wouldn't want to give up my job. You know what I mean? They just said, "What are we going to gain?" So that was mostly the argument. And like I said, it made sense on both sides. I could understand the guys at 47. I don't know what that building cost. It's still over there. "Now, if they want to join, let them come over here and join like everybody else." Now, that makes sense, too. But then, I told you about how 767 was going to open their doors to everybody.

ISOARDI

[laughter] So I guess you would have all the young white jazz musicians who probably wanted to come down to Central Avenue. [laughter]

EWING

"Come on over!" [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah, Local 47, the leadership there wouldn't have liked that.

EWING

Oh, no, it would just be a bombshell. So that's about it. I went from one thing to another after that.

ISOARDI

When you came back here in the late forties, early fifties from Chicago--you'd been away from L.A. for a little while, a few years--how had it changed? Central Avenue I guess had changed a lot when you got back.

EWING

Well, no, not too much.

ISOARDI

No?

EWING

I mean, when I came back in the fifties, the Dunbar Hotel was the main stomping ground on Central Avenue.

ISOARDI

So that still was going, then, in the early fifties. The Dunbar was still functioning?

EWING

It was still going.

ISOARDI

And the [Club] Alabam?

EWING

The Alabam. Because I worked in the Alabam. I worked in the Alabam with-- Let's see. Who had that band? I can tell you who the stars were.

ISOARDI

Oh, who?

EWING

It was Redd Foxx and Dinah Washington.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Yeah, they were the stars. And I mean, Dinah was big then.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah.

EWING

She was big. We used to record. Every time she came out here to California we recorded her--I mean, the California guys. The first time I recorded with Dinah was in Chicago with Gerald Wilson's band. I think it was Gerald Wilson. No. No, it wasn't Gerald Wilson. I don't remember. But I know the first time that I recorded with Dinah Washington-- Oh, I know. Rene Hall conducted the session, and that was in Chicago. And when she came out here, well, she would always ask, "Where's--?" She used to call me "Streamie."

ISOARDI

Streamie?

EWING

"Where's Streamie?" And one time somebody had a record date. I don't know whether it was Benny Carter or whoever it was. So all these guys that had been making records with her, they weren't on the date. She cancelled her date and paid everybody off.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

That's right.

ISOARDI

Why?

EWING

Why? Because we had made her hits with her.

ISOARDI

Oh, no kidding.

EWING

You know what I mean? If somebody makes a hit with you--

ISOARDI

Nice.

EWING

--that person did something that was right.

ISOARDI

That's right.

EWING

So at that time I started doing a lot of record dates around here. And I was doing okay, you know. I wasn't getting rich, but I was doing okay.

ISOARDI

You mentioned that the Dunbar was still going and the Alabam--

EWING

Oh, no, those places, that's over with. They're no more.

ISOARDI

When does it end? When do those places stop?

EWING

When did it end?

ISOARDI

Yeah, when did the Dunbar or the Alabam close? How long ago?

EWING

That's pretty hard to-- It was in the fifties, I know that.

ISOARDI

When you left to go with the Globetrotters, when was that?

EWING

'Fifty-three.

ISOARDI

Was the Alabam still going then?

EWING

I think so. I think so, because, like I said, I worked in the Alabam with Dinah Washington and Redd Foxx.

ISOARDI

Were you in the house band?

EWING

Yeah, we were kind of a house band. And then there was a little club close to the Alabam on the same side of the street, and I remember Red Callender and Gerry [Gerald] Wiggins and Bill Douglass had a trio in there.

ISOARDI

Really? It was near the Alabam?

EWING

It was very close.

ISOARDI

Was it in the Dunbar or--?

EWING

No, it wasn't in the Dunbar. It was some little club very close to the Dunbar, and what the name of it is I don't know to this day. I'd probably have to ask somebody. Buddy might know. And Bill Douglass, he was in the trio. Bill Douglass, and at one time Joe Comfort was in that trio, and I think one time Red Callender. I think it was probably just one guy was working and another guy would come in or something like that.

ISOARDI

Yeah. Do you remember in the early fifties, then, before you go with the Globetrotters--the Alabam was going--do you remember any other clubs? Was the avenue sort of shutting down or--? Were there any other clubs open?

EWING

Let me see. It seems like there was a club named the Milimo.

ISOARDI

The Milimo?

EWING

The Milimo. I'm not sure now. But that name rings a bell with me. Because that's where C. L. Burke worked.

ISOARDI

Where was that at?

EWING

That was on Central Avenue.

ISOARDI

It wasn't the Memo [Club]?

EWING

That was it.

ISOARDI

Ah.

EWING

Now, you helped me out. You helped me out. The Memo.

ISOARDI

I think it's probably because I was just talking to Britt Woodman, and he was telling me about a club called the Memo.

EWING

Yeah, that was the name of it. I said Milimo. But there was a Milimo somewhere. I don't know where I saw that. There was a Milimo. I don't know whether that was on--

ISOARDI

Was that near the Alabam? Or was that further away?

EWING

The Memo?

ISOARDI

No, the one you're thinking of.

EWING

It was somewhere-- It probably was in that area, a little further south, but I'm not sure of that. I'd have to check with somebody on that.

ISOARDI

About that time also, around '53, are the Downbeat [Club] and the Last Word [Cafe] still going?

EWING

The Downbeat?

ISOARDI

Are they still open or functioning?

EWING

I don't know much about the Downbeat. I think the Downbeat was kind of proper when I was out away from here.

ISOARDI

So when you came back, it wasn't much if it was anything?

EWING

I don't remember anything about the Downbeat. It might have been going, but I don't remember anything about it.

ISOARDI

Well, probably it closed then, maybe.

EWING

It might have been. It might have been. But I don't remember anything about the Downbeat. It seems as though I was in the Downbeat one time. It seems as though, but I can't swear, you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah, maybe during one of your earlier visits.

EWING

Yeah, like I said, at that time I was-- [laughter] I was sailing on cloud nine somewhere. I might have been in there and don't even remember it.
[laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] Well, it sounds like you guys probably had a good time over at Pico and Saint Andrews.

EWING

Oh, I had a good time everywhere I went. You know, if I worked in a barbershop I was having a good time. But everything was fun to me.

ISOARDI

Yeah. You mentioned that your apartment was near Saint Andrews and Pico.

EWING

Yeah. It was just-- Let's see. It was south of Pico, because I remember Country Club Drive. We weren't very far from Country Club Drive. And Marl still lives on Country Club Drive. He still lives on Country Club Drive.

ISOARDI

That's right, just off Crenshaw [Boulevard], I think, or something like that.

EWING

Yeah. He's been there a long time.

ISOARDI

That same place?

EWING

Yeah.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Yeah. Probably forty years.

ISOARDI

Jeez. [laughter] By California standards that's incredible.

EWING

I think they've changed the ownership once or twice, and he's still there. Yeah, at this very minute, he's there. You know, I worked with Marl on The Lucy Show [Lucille Ball's television series].

ISOARDI

Oh, really?

EWING

Yeah, he was the conductor on that show. I had to play bass trombone on that show, and I'm not a bass trombone--

ISOARDI

You don't like playing bass?

EWING

Well, it's just too bulky for me.

ISOARDI

Yeah, it's a big instrument.

EWING

Yeah. I did it because that was the only way I could get the job. And it lasted about two or three years.

ISOARDI

Did you ever fool around with the valve trombone?

EWING

No.

ISOARDI

Don't care for that?

EWING

To me it's not a trombone.

ISOARDI

[laughter] Right, yeah, right.

EWING

Very few trombone players will say it's a trombone. It plays in the trombone range, you know, but it doesn't have that sound. It just doesn't have that texture that a slide has. I don't know any slide trombone player that thinks much of a valve trombone. And I know several guys who played valve, they said, "Well, man, I'm going to try to get me a slide." In other words, they're coming over to the slide club. [laughter]

ISOARDI

No kidding. Yeah, really.

EWING

There's only one guy, to me, that had a beautiful sound on a valve trombone, and that was Juan Tizol with Duke [Ellington].

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah.

EWING

Now, there might have been others, but he had a sound that was a good warm sound. And Duke used that sound a whole lot. That's the only thing I regret in my whole career is that I didn't go with Duke Ellington, and I had a chance.

ISOARDI

When was that?

EWING

That was-- Let's see. Because Tyree Glenn was with Duke at that time. He wanted me to take his place because they were going to Europe, and his leg was broken or something. He said, "Man, I can't make this trip." He said, "Come on, take this job."

ISOARDI

Would that have been the early sixties?

EWING

No, that was-- I was still in Chicago then. That must have been around '47. But that's the only thing that I regret. I really regret that I didn't take that job and go on to Europe with Duke, because, you know, Duke was a very-- There's only one Duke Ellington. If it sounded right to him, that was it. If you didn't do but bloop, bloop, bloop. "You do that, and I'll take care of the rest." In other words, "I'll put you out there with that bloop, bloop, bloop," you know. And he built around it. Everybody in his band had to star, but he'd see to it that they starred. Maybe they couldn't play but what he did for them, because I won't call any names, but there was one guy-- I was so surprised, you know-- This guy, he had a little band. That was out here. And this guy called me up and said, "I want you to play a gig with me." I said, "Okay." So we went over to his house. There were about five or six guys. And boy, this guy, he-- You know, Duke had guys who couldn't read. He had several guys who couldn't read a note.

ISOARDI

No kidding.

EWING

Like I say, all you'd do is do what you could do, and he'd take care of the rest. And everybody was a star. He'd find something for you to do.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

He'd find something to do. You don't just sit up there and count time, you know. But anyway, I'm sorry I missed that.

ISOARDI

Why didn't you do it?

EWING

Why didn't I? Well, at that time in Chicago we had a real unique band. We had two trumpets, and I played trombone, a tenor player who doubled on trombone, and one of the saxophone players doubled on violin. We had a trumpet player that doubled on violin. And, boy, you're talking about hearing some music. And Duke heard that band. He came in there, and he wanted Melvin Moore on violin. But I could really see what he wanted, because he already had Ray Nance. See, he was going to cook up something with those two. And they were different types of violin players.

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez. So he'd put them against each other and just see what happens.

EWING

Oh, man. He was really-- Then they had O. C. Johnson on drums. Have you heard of O. C.?

ISOARDI

No.

EWING

A fine drummer. And he could write, too. But we had this band, and we were just like a family. If you took one, you had to take everybody. We played a floor show and all that kind of stuff, and Duke was in there one night. I'll never forget that place, because everybody that came to Chicago, like Ella Fitzgerald, whoever it was, they had to come down there to see what was going on down there.

ISOARDI

What club was this?

EWING

That was the El Grotto. And they changed the name to the Beige Room, but that was the El Grotto. And, brother, it was just like Saturday night every night in there.

ISOARDI

Jeez. Yeah, it's hard to walk away from a gig like that.

EWING

You couldn't. And we had a band. We didn't care about anybody. And we were so solid, you know. It was the Lonnie Simmons band.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO JUNE 15, 1993

ISOARDI

So Lonnie played--

EWING

Yeah, he played alto sax, soprano sax, and later on he played organ. But that was really a job that I enjoyed. And we just-- Oh, man, we were just-- What do I want to say? A fish in the water, you know. It was just beautiful. And the music was good. We already had two guys that wrote for the band. So everything was jammed up. These same guys wrote for the show. We still had the same band, they had that same sound, and, boy, I'm telling you. Everybody came in there. I remember Charlie ["Bird"] Parker came in there. I had met Charlie before. But anyway, he came in there, him and Max Roach and Tommy Potter, Al Haig.

ISOARDI

Gee, that was his group? Was that the group that Bird was traveling with?

EWING

Yeah. Well, yeah, what little traveling they were doing, because Bird was flying high then, you know. And let's see. Did he have a trumpet there? If he had a trumpet, who was it? But anyway, like I say, I had met Charlie before in Kansas City before he had recorded with anybody. He was a very good friend of mine. He was really-- Well, you know about Charlie Parker. What can I say?

ISOARDI

So they all dug you. They liked your band.

EWING

Oh, yeah, everybody came. Well, they were working there, and they liked the band. And everybody came there. Like I said, Duke, he was sitting up there just listening to this phenomenon. [laughter]

ISOARDI

[laughter] High praise.

EWING

I've never played in a band like that before or since.

ISOARDI

No kidding. Did you guys do any recording?

EWING

No, I don't think we did. They were trying to get a-- I think Melvin, the trumpet player, I think he was trying to get his mother-in-law or somebody to put up some money, but I don't think it ever came across. I don't think I ever remember recording with them.

ISOARDI

You know, it's too bad, because you hear of so many excellent jazz bands that never got recorded.

EWING

Oh, plenty of them.

ISOARDI

Like the one that I've heard about so many times [while] doing these interviews is the band the Stars of Swing with Buddy Collette and Charles Mingus and Britt Woodman and Lucky Thompson. You know, it lasted for a short while, and it was never recorded, and you just hear stories. And now here's another one.

EWING

Well, it wasn't easy getting a recording date in those days. It wasn't easy, you know. They really wanted names then.

ISOARDI

No one was taking any chances.

EWING

Yeah, they wanted names. They still want names. But some people-- You can do things without somebody with a real big name. But then, you'd just sit back and let everybody else do the recording. Well, you've got a whole bunch of recording studios now, more than you can count. And a lot of times these little guys will record somebody and sell out to some big guy. A lot of times it's like that. But that's the game, you know.

ISOARDI

Yeah, yeah.

EWING

Whether it's good or bad, that's the way it is.

ISOARDI

Well, let me ask you a couple of big questions. One is, you came back, I guess, pretty much when the scene on Central [Avenue] is certainly different from the way it was when you had been here earlier.

EWING

Yeah, it's kind of hard to really say exactly--

ISOARDI

What happened?

EWING

Yeah, because all the cities are like that, you know. All the cities, all the black communities, which they called a ghetto, all of them--whoosh!--you know what I mean, just deteriorated. And I don't know just how you can really pinpoint that. Because all my relatives come from the east side, and they were beautiful people. You know what I mean? I mean, my brother [Louis Ewing], like I said, he had this business in Glendale and he had a friend over on Central Avenue who had a business. But all that-- I don't know. It's hard to pinpoint it. I don't know whether that was a planned thing or whether that was-- The schools were fine, and now they're talking about the schools are no good. They're talking about gangs. Well, you know. But that wasn't happening then. I mean, I'm talking about way back. It was alive over there. It was alive. You didn't have to worry about somebody hitting you in the head. But that's not only Central Avenue, that's all over the United States. I'm going to Washington, D.C., in about a month, and it's the same thing up there. When I used to play different places in Washington, like the Howard Theatre, oh, man, you say, "Is this where I used to work?" You know, the subway is coming up underneath there. I recognized the old building, the Howard Theatre. I recognized it. But I said, "Well, that's where the big bands used to work." Duke Ellington, Don Redman, Erskine Hawkins, Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, you name it, all of them worked in that spot. Jimmie Lunceford. Because I worked in that spot with Jimmie Lunceford. The first time I went to Washington, D.C., I was with Jimmie Lunceford, and we worked at the Howard Theatre. And around the corner--I think it was U Street--they had this-- Well, it wasn't a real fabulous restaurant, but they had fabulous food. I never will forget that. But like I say, Harlem, all those places, every one of them is no different. No different. They're all the same. And all at once, it just seems like it just, boom. It just seems like that. I can't say-- It's hard to pinpoint. I mean, maybe somebody else can do a better job than me.

ISOARDI

But you noticed the same thing just going on everywhere? You've traveled a lot.

EWING

Every city in the United States where you had a big black population. They all just--

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

And I've heard a lot of people-- The politicians don't seem to be able to correct it, you know. They don't seem to be able to correct that. Now, I'll tell you one thing that happened over there at south L.A. You had a big Mexican American [population]. They just about took over out there. And their argument is that they were here first, that "this was ours in the beginning." [laughter] You've got that going, too. You know, going out to UCLA, those guys out there-- Now, I haven't been keeping up with that. But I know that the Spanish people always figured that California belonged to them in the first place. Go clear back to whenever this--who was it?--Cortez or somebody, and this used to be Mexico. Right where I'm sitting right this minute used to be Mexico. You see? But you don't hear much talk like that, you know. But so many other people have come in: the Asians, they're talking--the Asians and everybody else. So I don't know. I can't solve it. I'm waiting for somebody to really come up with something. "Well, here's the way you do it." Like I don't know whether [Mayor Richard] Riordan is going to do anything or not. He's so wealthy. I mean, if he's all that wealthy, he must have another motive. You know what I mean? I don't know, I can't say-- Like I say, I don't know what-- I've got to give him a chance, to see if-- Since he's got all this money. And he says that he's got to bring the big people back here. That makes sense, too. And then he's talking about [how] he's going to have a big police force, police the city, but all his followers are from the [San Fernando] Valley. Now, all those people moved to the Valley to get away from this. They're not coming back over here, you know what I mean? They're not coming back. "Oh, here's a couple of dollars; I'm not coming back." Because I work in the Valley every-- I'll be out there tomorrow night. And there's nothing I can-- You know, I don't ever hear anybody saying

anything. "Oh, yeah--" I'm welcome out there, you know. I mean, it's okay with me. But Riordan-- Now, he won the vote. It wasn't big. But all those people were from the Valley. I've got to play a thing out there-- Let's see. I've got to play in the Valley on the eleventh [July]. That's next month. I think that's going to be-- I don't think it's Simi Valley. It's out that way. One of those places out there in the Valley. Like I say, all those people, they left L.A. All of them, or 90 percent, you know. So I hope Riordan has a lot of luck. I hope he has luck, because there's a lot to be done. I kind of read those articles and things, you know, so--

ISOARDI

Let me ask you another big question. In looking back, from what you saw of Central Avenue during its heyday and all the people who came out of it, how would you sum up what Central's importance was?

EWING

At that time?

ISOARDI

Yeah. What did it give to the culture? What did it give to jazz history? How should it be remembered?

EWING

Well, they had places to play, and you had to have somewhere to play. Now, the black musicians at that time, they all didn't work on Central Avenue. They worked different places. Like Nat [King] Cole, like I told you once before, he wasn't working on Central Avenue. I think when this guy said, "Sing 'Sweet Lorraine,'" I think he was working on La Brea [Avenue].

ISOARDI

Where at? Do you remember the club?

EWING

The Melody Club?

ISOARDI

Was that where it was?

EWING

I don't know. I don't know the name of it. But like I said, I knew Nat and-- Well, I told you that.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

And there were other guys there, Jack McVea. I went to Jefferson High School with Jack McVea. But I don't know. It's a hard question to really pinpoint, because-- I'll put it like this. If I were a younger guy-- You have to get out in the atmosphere to really know what's going on. I don't get out there now. I wouldn't know what to say. [laughter] What am I going to say to somebody nineteen years old or twenty years old, not that they ever ask me something. But I was-- "Hey, you come on here and do this." What am I going to tell them? They don't want to hear me. I'm not dressed right, I don't look right, and I'd better not say what-- [laughter] Because I'll be challenged and can't answer them. So I don't know. I just hope them well. If there's any way I can help, I'll be glad to help any way I can. But that's a problem I can't solve.

ISOARDI

But should kids today know about Central Avenue, then?

EWING

Oh, yeah, yeah. I think that's what you're working on there. They should know. Maybe that will help a whole bunch of people.

ISOARDI

I mean, say you were talking to a bunch of kids and trying to tell them about what L.A. once had.

EWING

Yeah, because they have no idea what went on.

ISOARDI

Exactly.

EWING

They probably think it looked like it does now.

ISOARDI

What would you tell them?

EWING

Well, I would tell them, I'd say now, this wasn't considered a ghetto then. People had lawns and everything was nice. It wasn't fabulous, but you didn't have to be ashamed of it either. I'd tell them that. I'd say we had wonderful schools, and you weren't afraid to walk down the street. You weren't scared to go home. But it takes a brave soul to go over there now. Especially after dark. It doesn't have to be dark, you know. But that's a hard question, Steve.

ISOARDI

Well, what would you tell them about the culture, about the music?

EWING

About the music?

ISOARDI

That came out of Central.

EWING

Well, we had a lot of people, not only the music, but the show people. Like Lena Horne, all those people, I worked with them here. I worked with Lena Horne here. In other words-- How am I going to put this now? It wasn't only the musicians. There were people like Sammy Davis [Jr.]. All those people came in here. And a lot of them are still here, those that are still alive, you know. I see programs now where some big athlete or somebody is going to appear somewhere and they're going to raise a few dollars here and there, you know, and I say that's good, but I don't know whether there is really any real strong leadership. That's what it really takes. I don't know whether Riordan is a strong leader. I'm not sure of that. I'll have to see it first. [President William J.] Clinton, I don't [know] whether he's strong. You know what I mean? I mean, where is the leadership? Probably the people that are

leaders can't get up front for some reason. I'm not sure of that, but a lot of times a guy, he can be a small guy, but he can have some bright ideas. But can he get up front? And that's what's hard. I don't know whether I've answered your question or not, because it's so hard. If some of these people can't answer it, I sure can't answer it. You know what I mean? [laughter] You know, Riordan, when he put \$6 or \$10 million out there-- [laughter] Now, if he can't get his idea across, you know, maybe they'd better go ask some little guy, "Well, what should we do?" I don't think that's foolish at all. Like I said, a lot of times a little guy can say, "Well, if you do so and so and so, we can do this. You've got the money; I've got the idea." But I'm still answering your question. I really don't know how to get in there either.

ISOARDI

Well, let me just conclude by asking you if there's anything that we haven't touched upon about your experiences on Central Avenue that we should get down or any final comment you want to offer.

EWING

Well, every time I turn around, somebody of my generation has left us, you know. Like I heard-- Well, this was yesterday. I heard about a musician that was a very good musician, Red Mack, a trumpet player.

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah. He just died?

EWING

They just found him dead in his house. Now, that's been within the last twenty-four hours.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

Yeah. If you've ever heard of Red Mack, you've heard of a fine musician.

ISOARDI

On Sunday I was just talking to Britt Woodman, and he, I think, mentioned Red Mack.

EWING

Red Mack was a beautiful trumpet player, a beautiful trumpet player.

ISOARDI

And he just died?

EWING

And that's been in the last twenty-four hours. And then, about a month ago, there was a guy-- I had to play one of those things out there in Hollywood, you know, when you take a guy and you put his name on the sidewalk [Hollywood Walk of Fame].

ISOARDI

Oh, yeah.

EWING

So I got that gig, and I hired a tuba player. I had to use a tuba. I couldn't use a bass; we had to use a tuba player. And let's see. Who were those people who had their names put on that sidewalk? It might have been-- Probably a disc jockey or something. They had their names put on the sidewalk. The agent gave me the job. So I hired a tuba player. And he had problems that day. We had to march maybe six blocks down Hollywood Boulevard. And he had a hard time making it, you know. You could see he was pumping and struggling to do this thing. Well, about two or three weeks ago now he died. And his wife wouldn't let anybody come in the house. Have you ever heard of such [a thing] in your life?

ISOARDI

Oh, jeez.

EWING

That's a horrible way to end a story, because I don't know how to really end it. I really don't. I don't know how to end this thing, because it's not just one-- You know. Now here's Red, and he was a beautiful, beautiful musician. Now, a

lot of guys didn't have real big names. That didn't mean that they weren't good musicians. A whole lot of guys could play. I could name guys that-- I remember one guy who was a trumpet player, and his name was Fletcher Galloway. I remember he was down on Main Street in Teddy Buckner's band, and that band was the band that Lionel Hampton left [when he] went to Benny Goodman. So [there] had to be some good musicians in that band.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

But I heard this trumpet player play, and I'd never heard of Dizzy Gillespie at the time. I had never heard of him. He didn't have a style like Dizzy Gillespie, but I'll bet you he was just as exciting.

ISOARDI

Jeez. So a lot of good musicians.

EWING

So his wife wanted him-- "Why don't you get you a job? Get you a job." So he got a job in the post office. And I saw him one day. I was working at the Beverly Cavern. Or was it--? No, it was the 400 Club down on Eighth Street. And he'd come in there, "Hey, man," you know, blah, blah, blah. He said, "Man, I'm sure glad to see you're still playing."

ISOARDI

And he hadn't?

EWING

He said, "My wife wanted me to get a job, so I got a job. I got a job at the post office. As soon as I got a job, she quit me." [laughter]

ISOARDI

No?

EWING

Yeah, yeah. There's a lot of--

ISOARDI

And he just stayed with the post office?

EWING

Yeah. The next thing I knew, he was dead. Now, who knows about him? Who knows about Fletcher Galloway? If I were to say, "Well, Fletcher Galloway--" "Well, who is that?" I can't go out here and say, "Fletcher Galloway was this fine trumpet player that was in Lionel Hampton's band." Because, see, Lionel Hampton had this little band down on Main Street, and they played-- This club was called-- What was the name of that club? Because I worked in the trombone player's place one night, and that's when I met all these guys, you know. What was the name of that club? But anyway, they had a floor show there, and they-- Oh, I'll tell you something. This is politics. Democrats. Now, this was in the sixties, early sixties, I think. Now, John F. Kennedy was at a convention out here. That's when he was nominated. And I played on the bandwagon. [laughter] I played on the bandwagon. We all went down to the garment district. And I was closer to John F. Kennedy than I am to you.

ISOARDI

Really?

EWING

On this truck, you know.

ISOARDI

A flatbed truck with a band on the back?

EWING

Yeah. And Sammy Davis Jr. was on this truck. And who else? Jessie Price, Jewel Grant, we were all on this truck. [laughter] John F. Kennedy. I didn't know who John F. Kennedy was. Who was that? But this is something in my life I'll never forget. Two things: this first one, John F. Kennedy. Now, like I say, I didn't know who John F. Kennedy was. I wasn't into politics then. So we all went down in the garment district and everywhere, and Sammy Davis would dance and carry on. Well, you know what happened to John F. Kennedy. Just a few

years later, Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy, I was working for him. I was playing trombone the night that he got murdered.

ISOARDI

You were at the Ambassador [Hotel]?

EWING

I was at the Ambassador. So you were asking me what some of the highlights were. Those two things were definitely highlights with me. Because we were at the Ambassador. Jerry Rosen had the band. I don't know whether you've heard of Jerry Rosen. He was a studio trumpet player. We were at the Ambassador that night. It was in one of those rooms. So what happened, now, we were standing up there. We were waiting for Bobby Kennedy to come in and all of these young people. Everybody was young, you know. All of these young people were waiting for him to come in, waiting for Bobby to come in. And all at once I heard somebody said, "Bobby Kennedy's been shot." And, boy, you just-- It's hard to explain. We just sat there, and [there was] all this commotion. So I decided, I said, "Well, I guess I'll go on home." So I walked down and walked through the lobby of the Ambassador, and it was like that-- police, you know. I didn't pay too much attention to that. I went down to a liquor store on Eighth Street and bought I think a half pint of vodka and I put it in my case. The police said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home." One of them said--they called downtown, you know--"Get his license number. Get his name." So that's what they did. They got my name. "Okay, you can go on." But then I didn't know until the next day that I was the only musician who got out of there. Those guys had to stay there all night.

ISOARDI

Oh, they kept everyone there, then.

EWING

Yeah. But it was just me. I didn't know what to do. When I got home, my wife [Vivian Moultrie Ewing] was standing in the window, and she heard on the television or radio, one of the two, and she wondered about me. Now, that was pretty exciting. Both of those guys, I played for both of them. And one of them, I didn't see him. Like I said, I saw John F. Kennedy because I was on this

bandwagon with him. I didn't see Bobby Kennedy. But all this commotion, you can imagine. The Ambassador was just-- I can't tell you how many people were there. And they were young. So that's about it. I don't know what else I can say to be more exciting than that.

ISOARDI

Yeah, yeah.

EWING

What could be more exciting than-- Two people are murdered. [People] that I think would have helped this country out. We might not have been in the shape that we are today. I don't know. Nobody else knows. But I do believe that those people, those two brothers, I think they really meant what they were trying to do. I think they were trying to-- Well, they had money. They didn't have to try to-- They were born wealthy. But "We'll try to help this little guy here," you know. "He can stand a lift. Just give a guy a little shove off. If you just shove him off, he'll go on. If you push a guy off in a pond somewhere, he'll learn how to swim." [laughter] You know what I mean? Because that's the way it was when we were kids in Kansas. You had to learn how to swim. If you didn't, you'd drown. Because I came close to drowning one day. The water was right up to here and I was-- And this river was going on down, and I was looking for my toes. I said, "Right here. Here's the water." [laughter]

ISOARDI

Jeez. Up to your teeth?

EWING

This is the way I was. My head was back, and the water was right there.

ISOARDI

Boy.

EWING

And my mother [Willie B. Ewing] had told me to stay away from that river, because she had a brother that got drowned in a river. But getting back to these Kennedys, I would probably say that that's about the most exciting. The

most exciting parts of my life have been the Kennedys. And I was part of what they were trying to do.

ISOARDI

Well, shall we end on that note?

EWING

I don't see what else I could say.

ISOARDI

Yeah.

EWING

You know, I don't know whether any of those other guys could say that. I hope they said something better. You know what I mean?

ISOARDI

[laughter] Yeah, yeah.

EWING

I hope so. I hope they did something better. I'm for one for all, all for one.

ISOARDI

John, thank you very much.

EWING

Okay. [tape recorder off] Oh, like I said, I would like to mention that I played for Martin Luther King [Jr.]. That was right after the Watts riots. He was out here to try to smooth things out. Gerald Wilson had the band. We were at-- It probably was the [Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and] Sports Arena. Gerald Wilson had the band, and Mahalia Jackson sang on that program.

ISOARDI

Wow.

EWING

Martin Luther King spoke. And I'm glad that I was there, because that was really something. But other than that, that's about the only way I can go out.

ISOARDI

[laughter] A good way to go out. Thanks again.

EWING

Okay.

[Parent Institution](#) | [TEI](#) | [Search](#) | [Feedback](#)

Date:

This page is copyrighted