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CENTRAL AVENUE SOUNDS

Vi Redd

Interviewed by Steven L. Isoardi

Oral History and Archives Project
of the
Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences

Completed under the auspices
of the
Center for Oral History Research
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and
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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: 1930, Los Angeles.

Education: Dorsey High School, 1947; A.A., Los Angeles City College, circa 1950; B.A., social studies, education, California State University, Los Angeles, circa 1952; teaching credential, University of Southern California, 1970s.

Spouse: Nathaniel Meeks (one son); Richie Goldberg (one son); Al Avelino.

CAREER HISTORY:

Saxophonist, vocalist, 1940s-present.

Worked as a bandleader and with such artists as:

Count Basie
The Futuristic Five
Dick Hart
The Melodic Dots

Schoolteacher, Los Angeles, Compton, California, circa 1976-95.

SELECTED RECORDINGS:

Bird Call (1962)

Lady Soul (1963)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Steven L. Isoardi, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., Government, University of San Francisco; M.A., Government, University of San Francisco; M.A., Political Science, UCLA; Ph.D., Political Science, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Redd's home, Inglewood, California.

Dates, length of sessions: July 12, 1997 (60 minutes); August 23, 1997 (64); October 25, 1997 (71)); January 31, 1998 (89); July 8, 1999 (64); July 25, 1999 (20).

Total number of recorded hours: 6.4

Persons present during interview: Redd, Isoardi, and Redd's husband, Al Avelino.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series designed to preserve the spoken memories of individuals, primarily musicians, who were raised near and/or performed on Los Angeles's Central Avenue, especially from the late 1920s to the mid-1950s. Musician and teacher William Green, his student Steven Isoardi, and early project interviewee Buddy Collette provided major inspiration for the UCLA Oral History Program's inaugurating the Central Avenue Sounds Oral History Project.

In preparing for the interview, Isoardi consulted jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues histories, relevant periodicals, documentary films, and back issues of the *California Eagle* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Redd's childhood in Los Angeles's Central Avenue neighborhood, continuing with her education and the beginning of her career as a saxophonist and vocalist, and concluding with her musical activities, her work as a schoolteacher, and her involvement as a consultant for the music panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. Major

topics discussed include important musicians in her family, particularly her father Alton Redd and her great aunt Alma Hightower; early musical relationships in Los Angeles, notably that with Eric Dolphy; important musicians, families, and music teachers in Los Angeles; the role of female musicians in the world of music; and the westward movement of the African American community in Los Angeles and the resulting decline of Central Avenue.

EDITING:

Alison Easterling, editorial assistant, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Redd did not review the transcript. Consequently, many proper names remain unverified.

Alex Cline, senior writer, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history. Jane Collings, principal editor, compiled the names list.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 12, 1997

ISOARDI: Vi, shall we begin your life story by going back as far as you can—where you were born, what the area was like, and maybe something about your family and as far back as you can go in your family history?

REDD: Okay. I was born in Los Angeles, California, at the Los Angeles County General Hospital. I was born to Alton [Redd] and Mattie Thomas Redd.

ISOARDI: When were you born? Do you mind saying?

REDD: Nineteen thirty.

My full name, given name, was Elvira Louise Redd. It was shortened in 1949 by a favorite bass player of mine who just began calling me Vi, and it stuck. His name was Morris Edwards, and he now plays and lives in New York.

I had a wonderful, wonderful family life. I had an extended family. My aunt, Mrs. [Alma] Hightower, who taught us music, lived with us a great deal of the time. My father was a wonderful father, and my mother was a wonderful mother. And when I look today at what parenting is like, I often think how fortunate I was to have come up in that time when the aunts and the grandmothers and everyone helped to rear children. It's so different from today.

ISOARDI: So you had your whole family involved in raising you, then?

REDD: More or less.

ISOARDI: Your extended family.

REDD: Yes, yes. More or less. Especially the music part.

ISOARDI: You came from a family of musicians.

REDD: Yeah, about four generations. Even on my mother's side, I have discovered that my mother's father played the Jew's harp, as they called it. [laughs]

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: So the music came from both sides but mostly from my father's side.

ISOARDI: How far back can you trace your family? I mean, you mentioned four generations of musicians.

REDD: Well, let's see. When I think in terms of Mrs. Hightower, then my father, then myself and then my sons—I have a relative of mine, Mildred Lewis, who is now looking up the family history, who is gathering information on Mrs. Hightower that we'd never known before—you know, the birth dates and all that sort of thing, my grandmother's, who was the older sister to Mrs. Hightower. So Mrs. Hightower was—

ISOARDI: Is that Miss or Mrs. Hightower?

REDD: She was Mrs. Hightower. She was Alma Julia Webster. She was from the Webster family, and they were a family of teachers and musicians. There are quite a few Websters in Los Angeles now. One is a new judge in Compton [California], Allen Webster. I remember Allen Webster Jr. I remember when he came to Los Angeles as a youngster—he's about six or seven years younger than I am—and Mrs. Hightower told me, "You've got a new little cousin here—" No, a new "coosan"; that's

the way they said cousin in Creole.

ISOARDI: "Coosan."

REDD: Yeah, "'Coosan' here from home." He's from down home, you know. I can still see him now in his little suit. Allen, you know I love you. [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: Down home? Where did the families come from?

REDD: Louisiana. My family came from Louisiana.

ISOARDI: Both sides?

REDD: Both sides! Yes. And I might also add that they were also cooks, because my grandmother came to California cooking for a family. She had picked out my mother—old world, you know [laughs]—she had picked my mother out for my father. He was here seven years, and then she sent for my mother to come here to marry my father. It was real— You know, like when they picked— That kind of thing.

ISOARDI: Who was your grandmother? What was her name?

REDD: I was named after her. Her name was Elvira Webster Redd Allen. That's my father's mother.

I don't think I could have had a better family life. Everyone was supportive. But you know, in the thirties and the forties the family structure was different. Most people were trying to be good parents. Every now and then you'd hear of some family in disruption. And like you said, the music families were the Young family and the Royal family and the Redd family and the Woodman family. But not only were our families concerned about good parenting, many of the families were concerned about

good parenting and what children did and how they respected older people, etc.

ISOARDI: Did the Redds and the Websters come from the same part of Louisiana?

Did they know each other, the two families, then, back in Louisiana?

REDD: Yes, because my mother's aunt, who reared her after her mother and father died— They were separated like they did many years ago. There were eight children, and my mother's mother passed away, and the father, and then one aunt took two and another aunt took two. That's the way they did. And of course, that was during the slavery period and shortly thereafter, so it was pretty difficult.

But anyway, my great aunt on my mother's side knew my grandmother as a cook, because she used to work for her sometimes. And she fell in love with my mother. She wanted my mother for her son. So that's how that happened.

ISOARDI: Was your father Alton the first one to come out to California?

REDD: He came with his mother.

ISOARDI: Oh, they came together then.

REDD: Yeah, they came together.

ISOARDI: I see. Why did they come? Do you know?

REDD: She came cooking. She was cooking for a family, and she came also.

ISOARDI: Oh, the family brought them?

REDD: Yeah. She wanted to better their circumstances.

ISOARDI: So they thought it was a good opportunity?

REDD: Right, so they came out.

ISOARDI: Do you remember the year?

REDD: I've been trying to pinpoint that year with another friend of mine, John Herod, who doesn't live too far from here. His grandmother came out about the same time. I think it might have been around 1913, somewhere in there between '13 and '16. Or maybe—I'm not positive.

ISOARDI: Do you know how old your father was then, when they came out?

REDD: Oh, let's see. I really don't know exactly how old Daddy was.

ISOARDI: Because it seems like, I guess, the mid-twenties or so your dad's name just appears—

REDD: Yes, everywhere.

ISOARDI: —in music circles in L.A. He's playing.

REDD: Right. He's playing with everybody. [mutual laughter] Well, he was a great guy. Oh, he was a great guy. I've traveled around the world, and I've told both of my sons—before Randy [Randall Goldberg] passed—no place have I ever been where they didn't say, "Are you Alton Redd's daughter?" They'd say, "Oh—" I came through customs one time— Would you believe this? I came through customs—this is the honest-to-goodness truth—coming back from Japan, and this one man said, "Oh, don't you know Vi the musician, so and so?" "What's her name?" The guy said, "No, I don't know." And he said, "Vi Redd." He said, "I don't know Vi Redd, but are you any relationship to Alton Redd?" And I said, "Yes, that's my father." He said, "Go through. Go on."

ISOARDI: Just waved you through?

REDD: Yeah. That's how much people thought about him. He was a fantastic guy. The most benevolent person I've ever known in my life. Totally concerned. My late son, Randall, was very, very much like him, even looked like him.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah. [tape recorder off] My father, he was involved in the music of the twenties, the music of the thirties, the music of the forties, the music of the fifties. His last engagement was with the Young Men from New Orleans at Disneyland. That was his last engagement.

ISOARDI: Which of the Young—?

REDD: The Young Men from New Orleans. Remember the Dixieland—? [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: Actually, I meant to ask you also, is your mom the first of her family that comes out here, then?

REDD: Yes, because she sent for her sister and she sent for her auntie.

ISOARDI: And she comes out here to marry your dad?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: So she thought it was a good idea too, other than your grandmother?

REDD: Yeah, apparently. They stayed married for fifty years, I think. I guess they had their ups and downs but, you know, they stayed like people stayed in those days. Divorce wasn't as prevalent. And she had a good life. My father was a good provider.

She often spoke about the time my father did his first movie job and, "He earned sixty dollars in one day." She was frying fish, and she was so excited she spilled the grease from the fish. [mutual laughter] It was really exciting.

ISOARDI: Do you remember what the movie was?

REDD: No. I don't remember the movie. But my father was in *King Kong*, was it?

ISOARDI: The original *King Kong*?

REDD: Yes. He was in the original. And I didn't find out about it until I went to Spain in '60— No, no, no. I went to Spain in 1980, to Barcelona. They planned a big party for me and da da da da da, and they had some tapes from Disneyland—I adored my father—and they thought they were having something real nice, and they showed him on the screen. That just kind of shook me up. Then they had books about this movie, and the book said that Alton Redd was the original drummer in that. It was done in—what?—1933 or something like that?

ISOARDI: That's the year I've got in my head. Yeah, '33.

REDD: Yeah, I think it was done then. He was the original—

ISOARDI: And he was playing in the—?

REDD: Black musicians were used as sidelining, they used to call it. Sideline. But he was in that. And the people were so surprised that I didn't know, which I didn't.

ISOARDI: Well, your dad did so much.

REDD: Yeah. He took Lionel Hampton's place with Les Hite when he [Hampton] went to join Benny Goodman, you know, things like that. "Papa" Jo Jones just loved

him, because he used to pick up the musicians. He used to run taxi when they'd come to the Union Station in downtown Los Angeles.

ISOARDI: [Count] Basie's band?

REDD: All the bands, because they couldn't live in the hotels downtown.

ISOARDI: Well they'd come out to the Dunbar [Hotel], wouldn't they?

REDD: They'd come to the Dunbar and along Central Avenue. And Daddy would go and carry three and four of them at a time, you know, just back and forth, back and forth. So all the guys that ever worked with him just loved him.

ISOARDI: How far back can you trace music in your family? Did your grandparents play music?

REDD: My mother's father played a Jew's harp.

ISOARDI: Right. In a band? Or was it just a—?

REDD: It was just like, you know—

ISOARDI: For entertainment in the family?

REDD: Yeah. Then at that time some of them frowned on the music, and they thought it was devil worship or something like that. So I think that was kind of cut out, you know. [laughs]

ISOARDI: What about your dad's side? Did your grandmother play?

REDD: No, but she sang.

ISOARDI: Did she?

REDD: She sang.

ISOARDI: Sang in church?

REDD: Yes, she sang at First A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal Church]. She sang in the choir, and then she started sending— She had lots of brothers and sisters. Alma was the only sister, but she had several brothers: George [Webster], Lawrence [Webster]— I really should have Mildred here for this. Let's see, Lawrence played trumpet, but Alma was the dynamite musician in the family.

ISOARDI: She was the best of that generation?

REDD: Yeah. Yeah, drummer, trumpet player— And to this day I can't figure out how she learned so much and how she knew so much. She knew music theory like you wouldn't believe. I could teach a class with what I learned from her. Music theory. We used to learn all of our chords, all of the scales, all of the forms, and the melodic minor, the natural minor. She knew so much for a woman in that era, and to this day I can't figure out how did Auntie Alma know so much.

ISOARDI: How much schooling did she have?

REDD: Well, she went through high school and then two years of college. At the time, you know, what is now Southern University [and A. and M. College] used to be Baton Rouge College.

ISOARDI: Oh, she went there for two years?

REDD: She went there for two years.

ISOARDI: Studying music, I assume.

REDD: I don't know. But she was just so knowledgeable. And I tell everyone she

could roll a drum like Art Blakey, and play trumpet. She wasn't as skilled in the stringed instruments. She liked the Hawaiian guitar, though. Later on she would fool around with the Hawaiian guitar. But she taught me saxophone. She taught me and, I mean, so many others, you know. Trumpets and everything. She was just an unbelievable woman, really ahead of her time. Trombone, she taught trombone. And she'd say, "Give me that horn. Let me see what I can do." [mutual laughter] But most of all I was always— How she knew so much music theory— Not harmony as much as— She'd sit down, she'd write our parts out, she'd transpose. She did the whole thing sitting right at the piano. She was something else.

ISOARDI: Did she spend most of her life teaching? Or did she—?

REDD: Well, no, she was in vaudeville, too. She traveled in vaudeville, and she was with Whitman. One of her dearest friends was Madame Sul-Te-Wan, who was the first black woman in the speakies. Yeah, Madame— I used to see them. When I'd go by and see her I'd see Lester Young's mother [Lizette Jackson Young], his real mother, and I'd see Madame Sul-Te-Wan. I'd see Hattie McDaniel. Those were all her friends. Hattie, Sam— You know Hattie won the Academy Award.

ISOARDI: Yeah, for *Gone With the Wind*.

REDD: Yeah. These were her contemporaries. And she'd cook gumbo for them. I mean, when I look now and I think about that setting way back when, you know, and think how—

ISOARDI: [laughs] Look at the world you came into.

REDD: Right. And look how far they were ahead of everybody, with no hang-ups about being women. You know what I mean? Can I do it because I'm a lady? I tell everybody if Auntie Alma said "drive a truck" I'd drive it. My cousin told me one time my aunt had never driven a car. She was living in Watts. She said, "Alma got in that car and drove it from Watts all the way to Thirty-third Street near Jefferson High School.

ISOARDI: [laughs] It was probably a stick shift too, right?

REDD: Had never driven before in her life. She said my grandmother was just furious. She was saying, "Oh, my God, she's going to kill Dine." That was Geraldine, her— Oh, she loved Geraldine, my father's favorite first cousin, I always say. He loved them all but, oh, God, Geraldine was his heart. She drove that car from Watts to Thirty-third— Well, that must have been at least ten miles.

ISOARDI: That's a good drive.

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Seventy blocks. Seventy or eighty blocks.

REDD: She had never driven before. And she was just that— She was just— She could cook, oh, gumbo, and just— Sometimes when I was teaching school I'd think of her. I'd be so tired. I'd just come in and start cooking. She'd come in with a hat on, overcoat, everything, go right to the stove, start. Never take anything off, you know, just start cooking right away.

We had lots of games. And then she was involved with the WPA [Works

Progress Administration] program. And then she started taking—

ISOARDI: During the thirties?

REDD: She started taking— Let's see. I guess it was about '37 or '38. She started taking kids over to the playgrounds. That's where she started having the bands go to the playgrounds.

ISOARDI: So did the WPA pay her to lead a band? Like a local band?

REDD: Yeah. And then she just had— Oh, God, there was just so much about her. It was just—

ISOARDI: What playground was this?

REDD: Ross Snyder [Recreational Center]. It's right there on Forty-first Street near Compton [Avenue].

ISOARDI: Wasn't that the band that Melba Liston I think was in and so many people?

REDD: Yes, yes. That's the same band. We were called the Melodic Dots.

ISOARDI: So she started that during the Depression in the thirties. But she did that for a while, didn't she?

REDD: Well, no. No, it wasn't back that far, because the WPA was up like 1939 and '40, around in that time. But a lot of musicians worked for the WPA, because whatever they did, it was a work project kind of thing, which I later learned in school, you know. Yeah, but that woman was something.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Was there anything she couldn't do? [laughs] Did you ever hear her say, "I wish I could do this"? [laughs]

REDD: No. She didn't like to do housework too much. She didn't like that too much.

She'd always have somebody to do housework. But she could cook. And she'd sit at the piano— When she was teaching music, like if she was teaching piano, she'd have that chair, she'd sit at that chair, one student after another, maybe for eight hours. And she was so tiny. She was only about, not hardly five feet. She was a small woman.

ISOARDI: A lot of energy, though.

REDD: And she had little tiny feet. Women have small feet in our family, and I think hers were about the tiniest I ever saw. She wore about a [size] four shoe.

ISOARDI: What's your first memory of her? Is there something that sticks out?

REDD: My first memory of her? Stern. I was a little afraid of her.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I would think so.

REDD: A little intimidated at first. We knew we had to respect her. I mean, you'd better not start anything. Most children did. You know, they respected the adults.

ISOARDI: Where did she live?

REDD: Well, she lived with us for a good deal of the time. I remember she had been on the road in vaudeville or something, and she had been. Also there's a school in Mississippi, the Mallory School, where they taught music to black children or something. She was either at the Mallory School, or she was out in vaudeville, and she got stranded. She met some friends in Kansas City [Missouri], and then my mother sent for her to come to teach my brother and me. She just taught almost all the whole city. [laughs]

ISOARDI: Is that when she first came out here?

REDD: Right, when she first came.

ISOARDI: Do you remember what year that was?

REDD: That must have been about 1940.

ISOARDI: So you were about ten years old?

REDD: No, let's see. Let me get it right. Maybe 1939. Something I can't remember exactly.

ISOARDI: So that's when she comes out. But right away she has that band, then?

REDD: Oh, no. Right away she starts teaching privately, and then she starts going to the playground, and then— And you see, she was a generational teacher.

ISOARDI: What do you mean by that?

REDD: She taught so many generations of people. She taught dancing, too.

ISOARDI: [laughs] You're kidding.

REDD: No. And I tell everybody she could teach dancing and never get out of her seat. She could teach them how to dance, and she'd sit there and do this, "What do you mean? You're not doing it right." [mutual laughter] She taught dancing. She taught my brother. All those old vaudeville songs that Bert Williams sang, "My Landlord" and all that kind of thing, she remembered all of those kinds of things. She taught my brother how to do those songs.

ISOARDI: Pretty formidable lady.

REDD: She was something else. We almost got South Park named after her, when

Mr. [Gilbert] Lindsay was down on the [Los Angeles City] Council, because she knew him. I was trying all I knew how, and I'm going to start it again, because she worked in that particular area, you know, South Park over off Avalon [Boulevard]. In fact, she lived around the corner from there. She lived around the corner from Dexter Gordon and his family and my godmother here. She lived all in that same area, on Towne Avenue. But there were some people who wanted to name it after Billie Holiday and John Coltrane, but as wonderful as they were, they were not involved in that community. So something happened, and now it's still South Park. So maybe at some point I can—

ISOARDI: I think the timing may be good. There will be a couple of books coming out on Central Avenue in the next year or two, one of which I put together with a bunch of people. One of the themes that comes out really strongly are legendary teachers in the community and how much of the music came from their efforts. There are actually three particular teachers that everybody talks about, Sam [Samuel] Browne at Jefferson [High School], and Lloyd Reese, who taught privately, and Alma Hightower.

REDD: Yeah, that's very true.

ISOARDI: I think when more of this information comes out you'll have a stronger case.

REDD: We'll have to go back down.

I remember some years ago, Yvonne Burke—

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, [Yvonne] Brathwaite Burke.

REDD: Yeah. She grew up here. When I had my little band at L.A. [Los Angeles] City College, she used to model, because I used to play for all the little affairs, you know. And Diane Watson, I just saw her a couple of Sundays ago. They used come. She had asked me some time ago to let her have some of Mrs. Hightower's things, because she wanted to use it for the [California] Afro-American Museum, but I never was able to get her things. I think Bette Cox was able to get some of my aunt's things, because she used to— When Bette was teaching school, she used to say to have a good orchestra, what she would do is send the kids to Mrs. Hightower. Send them to Mrs. Hightower, and then she'd teach them the music and bring them back to me. And I knew I had the best orchestra in the city.

ISOARDI: She taught a long time then?

REDD: Oh, yes. And my Randy that passed, he was her last piano student.

ISOARDI: You're kidding.

REDD: Yeah, he took piano from her. Let's see, that was in '68, I believe.

ISOARDI: So she taught till around 1970 or so? That's about thirty years.

REDD: She taught till about a year before she passed.

ISOARDI: When was that?

REDD: In '70. Remember, I came across a program from her funeral the other day. I just happened to be looking for some old things, and I came across that. I think it was about '70. And I was working in Chicago. I couldn't come for the funeral because I

had an engagement there, but I sent flowers to the family. And when I came back, let's see, in '68— I think '67 or '68. The first time I went to Europe— My mother had my two boys while I was in Europe the first time. She had started teaching Randy, and Randy was learning pretty good, and then— Well, I wanted to get my own apartment, and then something else came up, and she went to live with another person.

Randy often said, "Oh God, I wish Aunt Alma had taught me piano." You know, even though he became a wonderful drummer, he wanted that piano. So she was actually teaching up until about '67 or '68, and she passed I think in '70.

ISOARDI: So she spent thirty, forty years just teaching, private teaching?

REDD: Right. I have her piano, the piano that she sat and taught at. It's in my garage. I plan someday to get it to the Afro-American museum over there in Exposition [Park].

ISOARDI: Yeah, I think if people aren't recognizing it now, certainly in the next few years people are going to recognize the incredible contribution of very important teachers that just—

REDD: Absolutely. Yes.

ISOARDI: Because now the people are realizing Central Avenue was a tremendous music center, and so many wonderful players like yourself really came out of there. Then people are going to realize they were taught by—

REDD: Alma Hightower. She taught my father. She taught Red Mack. He was a good trumpet player. You ever heard of Red Mack [Morris]?

ISOARDI: Red Mack, sure.

REDD: Yeah, she taught Red Mack. He called her Aunt Alma. And she taught Roy Priestly. Now, when I say generational, these were people that were with my dad, you know.

ISOARDI: Yeah, Red Mack was playing in the late twenties, thirties.

REDD: Right, right. Red Mack. McClure Morris I think was another one. [laughs]

Red Mack and—I'm trying to think of some of the others. Then she taught my cousins, Dorothy Webster, Vivian Webster. They were all top-notch chorus girls at the Bal Tabrin. She taught them dancing and singing. Dorothy Webster was very popular in the early forties, and that was her niece, Vivian. Oh, Vivian was a hell of a dancer. And there was—

ISOARDI: God, could she sew costumes too? That's about the only thing— She could put on an entire show by herself if she could do that.

REDD: She was phenomenal.

ISOARDI: Truly. Was she ever married?

REDD: Yes, she was married to Mr. Hightower, and I understand she had another husband. She was married to a Mr. Levy, some guy—

ISOARDI: First?

REDD: Yes, and then Hightower. She didn't talk about him much, but she was married to Hightower. But she never got too domestic, you know, because the music—

ISOARDI: Doesn't sound like the domestic type.

REDD: The music kept her going.

ISOARDI: Who was Mr. Hightower?

REDD: I don't know. She didn't talk much about him, but I think he was in World War I. I think. That's about all that I remember about him.

ISOARDI: Well, when she was out here, when she came out here at the end of the thirties to settle down, was she with a husband then?

REDD: No.

ISOARDI: Oh, so this entire time, then. Oh, I see. The two marriages came earlier on before she came out here, and she wasn't married since then.

REDD: Right. That's as much as I remember about her, you know. She had a foster daughter, Minnie. Her name was Minnie Moore. She's here in some of the pictures and things.

ISOARDI: That name rings a bell.

REDD: And she taught her a lot, too. She could do all like the gymnasts do in the Olympics. She taught Minnie all that kind of stuff. [Isoardi laughs] She did. Minnie used to give recitals doing Paul Dunbar's poems, and then she'd play the piano, and then she'd do this acrobatics.

ISOARDI: Extraordinary.

REDD: Yeah, she was an extraordinary woman, I'm telling you. She really and truly was. And as I said oftentimes, I wondered how did Aunt Alma learn so much?

She was a very spiritual woman and very ecumenical, because even though they were reared— My grandmother and Aunt Alma were African Methodist, A.M.E.s. When I was going to City College she used to play at the Unity Center, and I'd sing twice a month at the Unity Center. Then sometimes she'd be at the Baptist Church with some more of her kids that came on. You ever hear of Elsie Smith, a very fine woman tenor saxophone player that played with Lionel Hampton?

ISOARDI: No.

REDD: She's under me. She's younger than I am. Elsie was with Lionel. That was one of Aunt Alma's students. Elsie died very young.

ISOARDI: When did she play with Lionel Hampton?

REDD: Oh, she played with him in the late fifties or early sixties. Because Aunt Alma kept having bands. That's why I said she was generational. She just kept doing it.

ISOARDI: So when she first came out here through the WPA, she got the funds to have this band in the park. But she always had a big band when she taught privately?

REDD: No. The kids, she would teach them privately, and when they got good enough, then she'd put them in the band. And then she had— Oh, and she taught Arthur Walker, who was a marvelous trumpet player, who went on the road very early with Jay McShann. And my cousin Lloyd Prince, she taught him; he was a great tenor saxophone player.

ISOARDI: He died pretty young, didn't he?

REDD: Yeah, he died young. He got involved with the drugs.

ISOARDI: Was that what did him in?

REDD: Yeah, finally.

ISOARDI: When was that? Do you remember?

REDD: Oh, Prince finally died about '72 or '73, something like that. And the bands—
Let's see. Jay McShann and— Arthur played with Billy Eckstine, too. Then she had a
rehearsal hall in the back of her house when she lived on Vernon [Avenue]. That's the
first time I ever saw Miles Davis. Miles and Lucky Thompson used to come there and
rehearse in her little rehearsal [hall].

ISOARDI: She had her own rehearsal space behind her house?

REDD: Yeah. She had a house in the front and two little houses behind that, and then
she had a big garage, and she converted that to her rehearsal space. There weren't too
many places the guys could go and rehearse at the time, and that's the first time I ever
met Miles, gave him some water. I was going to Dorsey High School then.

ISOARDI: So this is mid forties, maybe?

REDD: No, I graduated in '48. Well, maybe—

ISOARDI: Mid- to late forties?

REDD: Yeah, maybe I was already at City College, because that's when Miles was
out here. Miles and Lucky Thompson an— Who else was back there that one day?
They wanted some ice water. I went and got them some ice water. You know, it's
amazing when I think how significant those things were. Right now all this history is

very important. Then I think of the little area around there where Mrs. Hightower lived and where Dexter Gordon lived and where Miss Jackson lived and where— Who else lived in there near Towne Avenue and Avalon? And across the street from it was a telephone company. But Dexter's father was a doctor.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Was he a dentist?

REDD: No. His brother was a dentist. He was a medical doctor, and he was my aunt's doctor. The one that's a dentist, his wife, Mrs. Gordon, was my eighth grade social studies teacher, and I really loved her. I really loved her. Oh, she was sensational.

ISOARDI: Your great aunt then would have a rehearsal band pretty regularly in this space?

REDD: Right.

ISOARDI: Throughout all this time, for her students.

REDD: Right. Absolutely.

ISOARDI: That's an invaluable experience.

REDD: She kept having bands and bands and bands, you know. She'd teach them privately. There's one young man who was very— He did very well with Motown [Records]. I wish you could speak to him. His name is Clarence McDonald. There were two brothers. He was in that group of the last orchestra she had with Elsie and— Let me see. She had two Filipino youngsters in there; Obligani and something were their names. They did real well in music. And then Clarence McDonald. He was

very influential at Motown. When Motown came out here, he did a lot of work, and he accredited Mrs. Hightower. And the mother just adored her, because she taught both those guys. I don't know where Clarence is right now, but he was towards the last of those. Then Randy was actually her last student.

ISOARDI: But what an experience for all those years to keep a rehearsal band like that going. For those kids that's just priceless.

REDD: Oh, it was something. And she was strict. But along with her being strict she was— She said, "We'll rehearse the reeds from one [o'clock] until three [o'clock], and the brass guys can go out and play baseball. And here's a little money. You can get a hamburger, and you can get a Fritos, and you can get a something, and you can get something." She'd reach in that big old coat she had, and she'd give everybody a little money. "Go across the street to Frank's Market and the hamburger place and get something. Okay, but I want you in here on time, because then the saxophones, the reeds are going to go out and play." I mean, we were children, you know. "The reeds are going to go out and play." And they came back on time. They'd better come back on time.

ISOARDI: She was really preparing them to survive as musicians, to know what it's like to play in an ensemble, to really take care of it.

REDD: And the repertoire. Our repertoire was like all the marches—John Phillip Sousa. We learned all of those marches, overtures, *Poet and Peasant* overture.

ISOARDI: It was all kinds of music.

REDD: Yeah. But she loved Duke Ellington when we started playing jazz. Oh, she loved Duke Ellington. You had to listen to Duke Ellington. She took me and some other children to see—I was about twelve [years old] then—*Jump for Joy* down here.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, that was around '43, was it? 'Forty-four? Downtown?

REDD: She said, "I want you to listen to Johnny Hodges. I want you too listen to—" I'll never forget, there was a saxophone reed, and I picked it up, and I said, "Johnny Hodges's reed is down here." I picked it up, and she said, "Put that filthy thing down!"

ISOARDI: Oh, no. [laughs]

REDD: Yeah, she did. She was something else, I'm telling you. That woman was too much.

ISOARDI: Any other people that you can remember that came through her classes?

REDD: Oh, Robert Ross. Arthur Walker was something else, could sing and play trumpet. Bernice. She had another little fat, round girl that played baritone. Oh, I don't know what happened to Bernice. The family moved back to Texas. Alice Young!

ISOARDI: I know that name. She played in a lot of bands.

REDD: Alice, who played with Percy Mayfield. When he had that accident on the road, Alice was on the road with him then. Yeah, and she had broken her arm or something. I talk to Alice every now and then. James Jackson, who was with the Honeydrippers. In fact, Willie Jackson, who was partially blind, and James Jackson were the mainstays in the Honeydrippers band. She taught both of them. Now, James

was along with us, but Willie Jackson was along with like Red Mack Morris, in that group.

ISOARDI: Much earlier on.

REDD: So that was the environment I came up in.

ISOARDI: What an extraordinary person she was. Did she ever do much writing? Did she ever write her own music?

REDD: Not much, but she would go and get the music from the store and then write the parts.

ISOARDI: And then arrange it for herself. She'd get stocks and then rearrange them?

REDD: Right, and write everybody's part out, transpose it. "This is yours. This is yours. Keep up with your music, because I know you're going to lose it." I love popcorn to this day, and she used to let me pop the popcorn when you got your lesson right. And she taught math through music. She used to teach us to cut up the fruit to one-quarter, one-fourth, one this, you know. I used that method somewhat when I was teaching school. But she used to tell us that it's just music, it's just math. Oh yeah, she taught Melba Liston. You know that.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right, Melba was in that band.

REDD: Yes, she was. I'm trying to think who else.

ISOARDI: You know, I don't know if I'm misremembering this or not. Was it Anthony Ortega who I interviewed—?

REDD: No, I don't think he was in the band.

ISOARDI: Did he ever sit in?

REDD: He might have sat in. But I remember Anthony Ortega.

ISOARDI: But there was another guy from that period, I think. I can't remember who it was right now.

REDD: Well, what does he play?

ISOARDI: I thought it was a saxophonist, but I guess I could be wrong.

REDD: Really?

ISOARDI: I just can't remember now. But yeah, her name is another one that just comes up.

REDD: Yeah, over and over and over again.

ISOARDI: All the time. All the time.

REDD: I thought too, I said, "Well maybe if we can't name the park after her, maybe we could have a statue or something downtown," you know.

ISOARDI: But it seems like especially since the park was so important to her when she had that band out there, too—

REDD: If they named it Ross Snyder Playground after— Well, that community is largely hispanic. But even South Park— I mean, there are a lot of people around here, old timers and young old timers, they remember Mrs. Hightower.

ISOARDI: Well, I think that because of projects like this, and then if you do your own memoirs, this history is just starting to come out now over the last six years, and it's going to continue, and I think people will find out that there was an important

history here, and they'll realize that some people should be recognized. I mean, I would think she would be one of the first.

REDD: Yeah, she and Papa Young.

ISOARDI: Papa Young?

REDD: Yeah, that's Lee and Lester Young's father [Willis H. Young]. He taught [Charles] Mingus how to— Oh, and here's another interesting thing. My grandmother and Mingus's mother used to go to prayer meetings together at the Holiness Church. Now, they were Methodists, but on Wednesday night they went to the Holiness Church.

ISOARDI: Wednesday night?

REDD: Mingus later wrote something about it.

ISOARDI: "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting"?

REDD: "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting." They used to go to Thirty-third [Street] and Compton [Avenue].

ISOARDI: But didn't the Minguses live way out in Watts?

REDD: He lived in Watts. But she'd come up here to go—

ISOARDI: But she would come all the way up to go to this Wednesday meeting?

REDD: That's right, with my grandmother. That's right. My mother told me that.

ISOARDI: You mentioned Papa Young. He did something?

REDD: Oh, he taught Ben Webster how to read music, he taught Mingus to read.

ISOARDI: I didn't know about the connection with Mingus.

REDD: Yeah, Mingus used to get on the “U” car, run it down Central Avenue.

Everybody knew he was going to Papa Young's house to learn, you know, to really learn. One time Martha and I were up in—

ISOARDI: Lester's sister? Martha?

REDD: Lester's niece. Irma was his sister.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right.

REDD: Martha's mother. We ran into Mingus. He was playing at the Jazz Showcase or something—was it Jazz Showcase—in San Francisco. No, he carried on so much foolishness. Oh, he was a character.

ISOARDI: On the stage?

REDD: Yeah, and he was talking back and forth to Martha about Papa Young, and the people in the audience, they didn't know what was going on, you know. Yeah, "How is so-and-so. Hey, Martha, how is Lee, and how is—?" And the audience was just sitting there. He was carrying on this conversation on with Martha, and Martha was answering. One time Martha and I went— “Pres” [Lester Young] was playing with Jazz at the Philharmonic—I was still going to Dorsey I think, or I had just started the City College—and Martha and I went down there to the Shrine Auditorium, and we wanted to get in. We didn't have any money, so Martha said, "Well, I'm going to go back there." “Uncle Bubba,” that's what she called him. Prez was Uncle Bubba. So Martha timidly walked up there, and I was right with her, "How are you doing Uncle Bubba? How are you feeling Uncle Bubba?" He says, "How are your feeling,

Martha Ann?" And we turned and went out, because he was kind of angry. I don't know why.

But anyway, our families are very close. They still are. James Tolbert, whom you probably know, attorney James Tolbert.

ISOARDI: I know of him.

REDD: Yeah, well, his family— That's Lester's nephew, and Martha was the niece, see. They were first cousins.

ISOARDI: Oh, so then Jimmy Tolbert is Irma's son?

REDD: No. I don't know his father's name, but they're niece and nephew. They were— Wait a minute. Papa Young was the grandfather to all of them, but I don't know who James is—

ISOARDI: His relation—

REDD: Yeah. I don't know his mother and his father's name [Alice Young Tolbert and Albert Tolbert]. I don't, but they were all related. [James Tolbert is Willis Young's grandson] Our families have always been very close. I talked to him— My husband played cards with him last night. So I stay in touch with him, that family, the Young family. The Young family has produced an outstanding actor, Lee Young's grandson, Wren Brown.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, yeah. He plays in a lot of the movies now. I can't think of his mother's name right now, but his father was a trumpet player named Troy Brown. And Wren,

we called him "Powwow." That's Lee Young's grandson. You see him in so many commercials.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

REDD: Yeah, and movies. You see him all the time.

ISOARDI: Good for him.

REDD: Nice guy. Those were some of the family and friends.

You have education. Of course, I went to elementary school.

ISOARDI: Well, let me ask you, you've talked quite a bit about your great aunt, what about your dad and his—? Do you know much about his starting in music and his early career in L.A.?

REDD: Yes. You know how he started? He was working in a bicycle shop.

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REDD: Miss Jackson always says to me—my godmother—she says, "Vi, you know all the jazz musicians and I know all the church musicians," because she played in church. I said, "Annie, I know all of them. I know the jazz, the church musicians, religious musicians, all of the musicians." Because most of us all started playing in church anyway. Fannie Benjamin, have you ever heard of her?

ISOARDI: No.

REDD: She just passed away here. She used to play her— He was important, too. His name was Arvant Benjamin. He was a trumpet player.

ISOARDI: I never heard of him.

REDD: She played piano and worked for the mortuaries for many years. She must have been about ninety-five. She just passed earlier this year. Fannie Benjamin, a wonderful woman. And then have you heard of Florence Cadrez?

ISOARDI: I've heard of her in the context of the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767], as secretary of the union.

REDD: She gave watchacallit his first group, because I worked there just before the musicians amalgamated—Norman Granz.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah?

REDD: She organized his first group for Jazz at the Philharmonic. She organized the

group. I told him one time when I saw him with Basie one time— He says, "Is she still living?" I said, "Yeah, she's very much alive." Because he tried to act like, you know, he didn't know it was her. I said, "Yeah, Florence Cadrez. Don't you remember her? She gave you your first group." And she's gone on now, too.

ISOARDI: Yeah. So when does your dad start playing music?

REDD: Back to daddy. I got off on Mr. [Satchel] McVea.

ISOARDI: Well, we have so much to cover, and we're going to cover the McVea family, too. [laughs] Definitely.

REDD: Daddy was working in a bicycle shop.

ISOARDI: About how old?

REDD: He was a teenager, I think. He was working at a bicycle shop making three dollars a week, I believe.

ISOARDI: When was he born? Do you know?

REDD: Oh, I have to go back and look that up. I think Daddy was— I'll tell you next time.

He was working in the bicycle shop making three dollars a week, and he went and played a gig with Satchel McVea, and he made three dollars that night. Daddy said that was the end of the bicycle job.

ISOARDI: [laughs] That's basic math.

REDD: And he played after that.

ISOARDI: That was his first professional job?

REDD: Yes. Well, I don't know if it was his very first one. It must have been, unless he was playing on the side. But then, Daddy also sold cars. He sold tombstones at the cemetery. He did all of these things so that we could really have a good—I went over here once to look, when I was going to get my mother's tombstone here in L.A. They said, "Mr. Redd was that your father?" Yeah, everywhere I go. [mutual laughter]

Honest to God. All the guys at this Enterprise— What is it? Enterprise?

ISOARDI: Yeah, the rental car outfit.

REDD: Okay, one of the guys that was with Enterprise—I went one time to see about a car—he knew my father. He knew Daddy well because he loved cars, and I love them, too. I love to look at them. [mutual laughter] Daddy used to go and bring cars home and drive them, you know. He sold them, too. He sold them, and all the guys, the car dealers, they all knew him. He was just such a likeable person. Everybody just gravitated towards him.

ISOARDI: Natural salesman too, then.

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: I assume working with Satchel McVea he was playing drums, right?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: Had he started playing much earlier than that? Do you know?

REDD: Not professionally, I don't think.

ISOARDI: But, I mean, had he started learning?

REDD: Yeah, started learning the drums, because my Aunt Alma taught him to. Here

we go back to her again. She's the start of everybody.

ISOARDI: She's the one who got him going in music as a child?

REDD: Yeah. She got everybody going. If you were going to be around her it was like—

ISOARDI: You're going to play music! [laughs]

REDD: That's right. If she came back and you stayed with her, you were going to get a trumpet or something. You're going to get a horn. That's all there is to it. "What do you mean sitting around?"

But even though she was as stern and as strict as she was, she also wanted children to have— What is this, croquet? We learned all the games. We learned tennis, we learned— What else? Baseball, of course. And I always remember the only time— Melba hit me in the head one time with a tennis racket: "You see, you swing like this." I didn't want anymore to do with tennis until this day. But she wasn't so stern that she didn't realize that children were— You know, it was no child abuse. She realized that we had to have times when we had to play. And as I said, she'd rehearse this section, and you go outside and play, and "Melba, you go back in the room, and you write so-and-so and so-and-so, then you come back," and then— You know what I'm saying. It was a fun time for us, because we got to do all the things, and we had supervision.

ISOARDI: So your dad, does he join Satchel McVea's band, then?

REDD: He played with Satchel, but at the time Satchel would not join the union. He

wasn't a union musician, but he got all the gigs, and the union musicians would sneak and play with him. You know, when I really started playing professionally he named me— Wait an minute. You know Ginger? You ever hear of Ginger?

ISOARDI: Ginger Smock? The violinist?

REDD: Yeah. Her name was Emma Smock. He named her Ginger.

ISOARDI: Satchel McVea did?

REDD: Yes. And he named me Ellery Queen. I don't know why. [mutual laughter]
She played gigs, and when I first started— I've got to get it right chronologically now. I played gigs with Mr. McVea, and so did my brother. I remember the night I made eight dollars; oh, my God, I went shopping. Daddy said, "I know you're going to shop." Then, when I was about in the tenth grade, I worked with Mr. McVea, and I made— Oh, I don't even remember exactly how much I made. But I bought a suit and some shoes, and I told Daddy, "Daddy, you don't have to worry about buying me any more clothes, because I'm with Mr. McVea." Satchel McVea, he lived on Thirty-fourth Street just east of Central [Avenue]. You already know that, though.

ISOARDI: I didn't know that he lived there. I know where it's at.

REDD: Yeah. He had a son— He had a daughter too, but I don't think she was a musician, the daughter.

ISOARDI: She probably hadn't met your Aunt Alma.

REDD: No, I don't think so! [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: The gigs that came up with Satchel McVea, were those mostly one-night

things? Or did he have a regular band?

REDD: Oh, no, mostly in the white community.

ISOARDI: So society kind of gigs?

REDD: Yeah, society gigs. [sings] "Does your mother know you're out, Cecilia?"

[mutual laughter] And "Marie Elena." And "Josephine." [sings part of melody]

[mutual laughter] But, see, I could read the music, so there was no problem. That's when I had to start to wear stockings. Well, of course, my mother didn't want me to wear stockings until I got to be sixteen years old. You know, red lipstick—

ISOARDI: And you were still a ninth, tenth grader?

REDD: No, you couldn't wear stockings. So Mr. McVea said, [imitating a high-pitched voice] "Now, Ellery"—he had a real high voice like that [mutual laughter]—"Ellery, if you're going to keep coming down to these gigs, you can't wear those bobby socks." [mutual laughter] He said, "You can't wear those bobby socks. You've got to tell your mother she's got to get you some stockings." So I went and I told mother, "Mother, I've got to." She said, "You're not wearing stockings until you're sixteen!" [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: So what did you do? Lose the gig?

REDD: No, I didn't lose it. She came up with the stockings.

And— Oh, God. Like when I hear people say Simi Valley [California] and places like that— He used to take us places, and we'd leave at three o'clock in the afternoon to get out there.

ISOARDI: To go to places like that?

REDD: Yes, to go to make the gig for eight [o'clock] that night, because there were no freeways!

ISOARDI: Oh Jesus, Simi Valley must have been a long haul then.

REDD: Simi Valley— Let me see, another place. Thousand Oaks [California].

ISOARDI: Thousand Oaks, yeah. I mean, even on the freeway that's forty-five minutes, an hour.

REDD: But my aunt, when we were kids, I mean like this [gestures], she used to take us to Hawthorne [California]. We used to make seventy cents apiece. Boy, we thought that was something. [laughs] My brother and I were talking about this the other night, I'm telling you. [laughs] Oh, I was just a part of the Webster family, I guess.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: The Websters. We have nice family reunions every now and then. We had a lot of deaths, but we still have our family reunions, the Websters.

ISOARDI: Did Satchel McVea's band have a name?

REDD: No, they just called him Satchel McVea and his band. I think Mr. Satchel McVea played for the Perfection Bakery, one of the first radio broadcasts they ever had of jazz in Los Angeles. Perfection Bakery Company. You ever hear of that company?

ISOARDI: No, no.

REDD: His band used to play that gig, and they were nonunion. See, a lot of the union members used to sneak and play with Mr. McVea, but the union, you know, they didn't do— Well, they did something, I guess. But anyway, he'd keep you working. He'd keep you working.

ISOARDI: What was this Perfection—?

REDD: He played the banjo.

ISOARDI: This was a radio broadcast?

REDD: I never played on it, but I was told that he played— There was a large bakery like Helms Bakery, and this was called Perfection, and they had jazz coming on the radio.

ISOARDI: They sponsored a jazz radio program? Do you know when this was?

REDD: No, I don't remember the exact year. It was a long time ago. Yeah, with my father—

ISOARDI: When you were in high school? Or earlier?

REDD: Earlier than that.

ISOARDI: Earlier than high school?

REDD: Oh, yeah. Maybe I was in junior high, or it might have been in elementary school. I used to hear about the Perfection Bakery show. Most of the musicians were Mr. McVea's music people. His son Jack [McVea] played tenor [saxophone] and clarinet, you know. But old man McVea played banjo. Oh, boy, he could play it, too. And he used to— [laughs] My lord. Thinking about some of these memories are just

zooming through my head.

ISOARDI: Great.

REDD: Oh, gracious. Some of the tunes we played.

ISOARDI: How long did he play, Satchel McVea?

REDD: Oh, he played a long time. He was up in his nineties.

ISOARDI: You're kidding.

REDD: He was still playing that banjo.

ISOARDI: Still playing?

REDD: As I remember.

ISOARDI: Lucky guy.

REDD: Satchel McVea. Jack McVea's father. And everybody played with him.

You're probably finding this out in your—

ISOARDI: No, a lot of people have talked about Jack but not many about the father.

REDD: The old man.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Well, Ginger worked with him. He named her Ginger. Her name was Emma.

I was Ellery Queen, and she was Ginger.

ISOARDI: So he hired a lot of women in his bands.

REDD: Oh, yeah. He used to have lady named Miss Lewis that played the piano.

He didn't care.

ISOARDI: Gee, he probably had more women playing in his bands than anybody

else.

REDD: Probably. Come to think of it, probably.

ISOARDI: I mean, was there anybody else who hired that many women?

REDD: No. Oh, did you ever hear about the Sturdevants? The man [Wibert Sturdevant] that taught clarinet that lived on Forty-seventh Street right off of Central. He was important.

ISOARDI: I think Jack Kelson [also known as Jackie Kelso] mentioned him.

REDD: He probably did. He used to bring Jack McVea— No. Mr. Sturdevant was married to a woman named Marian Sturdevant, and he also taught clarinet. A very fair-skinned— How do you say that? A very fair-skinned black man. He was a fine musician. And he had a wife named Marian. They both played with Mr. McVea.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah, they'd do gigs together. She was a little tiny, short lady.

ISOARDI: But his thing was mostly teaching?

REDD: Yeah, he taught too, but he played gigs for Mr. McVea. Let me see. I knew their grandson. George was his name, George Sturdevant. And he played around with the clarinet, but he never did anything professionally, I don't think.

You know, I really should just— There's so much in my head that I know, you know, right off the top, so many incidents. I jump way up, and I think about the night John Coltrane and I sat over at Fatburger down on Western Avenue. There's so much in my head that really has got to come out.

ISOARDI: It will.

REDD: It's got to come out.

I'm doing to this because my grandson's at UCLA now, you know. He's in his third year now in pre-med. His name is Brian Meeks. He's a fine student and a fine young man.

ISOARDI: That's right, you were married to Nathaniel [Meeks] once.

REDD: Nathaniel. Yeah, Nathaniel was the grandfather. And I have two very brilliant grandsons that I'm extremely proud of. One just enrolled at Hampton University—it's an all-black college in Virginia—and the other one's here at UCLA. I had a son by Nathaniel. His name is Charles Meeks. Maybe you've heard of him?

ISOARDI: No, I haven't.

REDD: Oh, you haven't? He's played with Chuck Mangione and people. He's a schoolteacher now, like I was. Schoolteachers.

ISOARDI: Like I am. [laughs]

REDD: No, I retired from the school. I keep looking at this and seeing family and friends in education. I went to Nevin Avenue [Elementary] School. You know who else went to Nevin Avenue School?

ISOARDI: Let me ask before we get into it— We haven't even started focusing on you yet, and look at all this already. [laughs]

REDD: Chico Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, the Hamiltons. You know who Chico is. That's the elementary school he went to.

ISOARDI: Your father, his first gig is with Satchel McVea, then. That's when he starts playing. I assume that's probably in the 1920s sometime, right?

REDD: Late twenties probably.

ISOARDI: Maybe the late twenties or so?

REDD: He also worked with Paul Howard in the Quality Serenaders.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? That was one of the most important bands in L.A. in the late twenties.

REDD: He was working with Paul the night that I was born, and Paul and I were born on September 20.

ISOARDI: So it was Paul Howard's birthday and—

REDD: And mine. We always kept close contact.

ISOARDI: Was he just sitting in with Paul Howard's band? Or was he a member of that band?

REDD: I guess he was a member. Did you hear about Cee Pee Johnson, too? You know about Cee Pee Johnson from Buddy Collette?

ISOARDI: The name has come up, yeah.

REDD: Did you have any pictures of that band? I have a picture of them with Paul Robeson.

ISOARDI: You're kidding. Really?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: With Buddy and Paul Robeson?

REDD: Cee Pee Johnson played the tom toms, and he was a front man. He had about a nine-piece band, and I have a picture of it. Buddy gave me a picture of that: my father, Paul Robeson, and Buddy Collette. Let's see. Cee Pee, Paul Robeson, and Daddy were out front. Paul Robeson had come to hear them one night in Hollywood.

ISOARDI: This must have been in the late thirties when Buddy was just a twenty-year-old.

REDD: Yeah, because he looked young. He looks young in that picture.

ISOARDI: Because I think he joined Cee Pee's band around 1940.

REDD: Yes, around that time. They were playing out in Hollywood somewhere, and Paul Robeson came to see them. And I said, "What?" You know. "Paul Robeson?"

ISOARDI: Great photograph.

REDD: Yeah. I have it at home.

ISOARDI: Gee, I'll have to remind Buddy. Buddy and I are working on his autobiography.

REDD: Are you really?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Well, he'll tell you. He'll show it to you.

ISOARDI: Yeah. I mean, he tells a great Paul Robeson story about the fifties that's just fabulous.

REDD: Really? Well, Paul Robeson— Ask him to show you the picture with the band with Cee Pee Johnson.

ISOARDI: Well, it's all here, too.

REDD: He sent that to me about two, three years ago.

ISOARDI: I'll remind him, because that should be in his book. That should be in his book.

REDD: My father's funeral was something. It was like every— There's a picture— now Howard Morehead has it—at my dad's funeral. He wanted that Louisiana thing, traditional thing. A great picture of Red Callender sitting on the church steps at 1302 East Adams Boulevard with the music in one hand and the tuba in the other hand.

ISOARDI: Wonderful.

REDD: Howard Morehead used it in his collection.

ISOARDI: I know Howard. He's a great photographer.

REDD: He uses it in his collection. So anyway, Daddy played and played and played and played.

ISOARDI: So your dad joined Paul Howard's band, played with Paul Howard for a bit?

REDD: He played with Paul Howard. Who were the guys that used to be down on Twelfth Street? I can't ever remember their names. You probably could—

ISOARDI: Oh, the Spikes brothers [Johnny and Reb Spikes].

REDD: That's it, the Spikes brothers.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right. I meant to ask you—

REDD: About the Spikes brothers?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: They were like the businessmen.

ISOARDI: From what I heard, out of that place they had on Twelfth and Central, they, for a while, were just the hub of everything.

REDD: Right. The Spikes brothers were. They had like a music store and something, because really on Central Avenue—I could remember this, I mean, even though we lived about three blocks east of Central Avenue. Everything was on Central Avenue. At Twelfth and Central there was the fire department, they had a black fire company on Fourteenth and Central. Across the street was a Coca-Cola [Bottling] Company [plant], which is still there. The mortuaries, the department stores, the markets. I'm going down Washington [Boulevard]. And on Central was the Clark Hotel.

ISOARDI: Oh, wasn't there a Clark Annex or something?

REDD: The Clark Hotel. The gentlemen who ran it had, he was a druggist, had a pharmacy there. And we used to have our affairs there for baby showers and affairs for your bridesmaids and things like that at the Clark. That was that end of Central. You come on down, there was the Rosebud Theatre by Twenty-third [Street] and Central. The Young family lived right near Washington and Central. They lived right next door to the musicians union.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's Seventeenth [Street] and Central.

REDD: Seventeenth and Central. And then you came on down, there was the

Florence Mills Theatre. She was a great black actress, Florence Mills. There was that theater. Now I'm going in my mind down Central Avenue. There was a Coney Island chili place. [laughs]

ISOARDI: A restaurant?

REDD: Yeah, but that was down further by the Bill Robinson Theatre. But I was saying that to say, you know, people came to Central Avenue. There was a Western Avenue Dry Goods store. The fire department the next one up on Thirty-fourth Street. You know, it was all black at that time. And let me see. Everything that the people needed at that time, all the needs for market, the needs for clothes, the needs for entertainment, it was all on Central Avenue.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

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ISOARDI: Vi, let me ask you a couple of questions just as a follow-up to the last time. Actually, I realized we didn't talk about you at all. [mutual laughter]

REDD: Talking about everybody.

ISOARDI: There was so much to talk about. Your family, that's about as far as we got, but that's great. Actually, you've given us just a wonderful portrait of your great aunt [Alma Hightower].

REDD: Oh, Mrs. Hightower.

ISOARDI: Yeah. It's the first full one we've had, so it's very nice.

First off, your family. Where in Louisiana were they from?

REDD: My mother [Mattie Thomas Redd] was born in a place called Wilson, and my father [Alton Redd] was born in Baton Rouge.

ISOARDI: Okay. Where's Wilson at?

REDD: It's off the map now.

ISOARDI: It doesn't exist?

REDD: It no longer exists, or its been named something else.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yes. It was called Wilson, Louisiana. It was a very small place. But she spent most of her time in Baton Rouge, as I was told.

ISOARDI: Last time when we were finishing up, you briefly mentioned the Spikes brothers [Johnny and Reb Spikes]. Do you want to add anything about that?

REDD: All I remember is my father talking about them as being, I mean, just really progressive guys, ahead of their time, so to speak.

ISOARDI: In what way?

REDD: Owning a music shop. They had a music shop and another kind of store up near Twelfth [Street] and Central [Avenue], kind of near where Lionel Hampton used to live, because he lived on Gladys Avenue. I don't remember too much about them, but I remember how important they were to the other musicians.

ISOARDI: When you said that they were really progressive, do you mean in the sense that they were in the business end of it too and controlling all these things when not many people were?

REDD: Right, right. I think one was a drummer. Do you know?

ISOARDI: Gee, I'm trying to think. I think Reb was a saxophonist?

REDD: Was he?

ISOARDI: And maybe Johnny, I think it was his brother, and I can't remember what he played.

REDD: Johnny Spikes. Yeah. They were very important and in the early years. I mean, not during the [Second World] War, but up in the 1920s and all like that they were very important.

ISOARDI: Did your father deal with them?

REDD: Yes, he was a good friend of theirs.

ISOARDI: Did he play with them?

REDD: I don't know, but I'd hear Daddy talking about "Big Boy," and all of them had kind of— All of the musicians named each other the craziest names, you know. But I'd hear him talking about them. I'd hear him talking to Mother about them. I don't remember if Daddy ever played with them. He probably did. But I know that everyone was very fond of them, from what I can recall.

ISOARDI: Before we get into when you were born and your early years, is there anyone else in your family we should know about?

REDD: My brother.

ISOARDI: Buddy?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: And Buddy is older than you?

REDD: He used to be. No. [laughs]

ISOARDI: Now he tells everyone he's your baby brother? [laughs]

REDD: No, no, no. I used to be the oldest, now I'm the youngest. Yeah. [laughs]

Yeah, we just switched around a little bit. Very talented young man. Oh, little older man now. My aunt, Mrs. Hightower, taught my brother a lot of those Bert Williams things, and he still remembers some of them.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah. "My Landlord" and— Oh I can't think of another one. [sings] "If

there's anybody ever able, that's my landlord." You know, the comedian Bert Williams.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: And I mean, he really used to do them. He can imitate [Frank] Sinatra. My mother always said he missed his calling because he should have been just a comic, straight out. But he's a good drummer and a blues guy.

ISOARDI: I heard him sing. I heard him sing at MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art].

REDD: [sings] "Wake up, old maid, don't you know your growing old. Ten more years and all your youth will be gone."

ISOARDI: He was wonderful.

REDD: Wasn't he, though?

ISOARDI: He was so into it.

REDD: Wasn't he, though?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: And he hadn't done that in some years.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes, because my brother—

ISOARDI: Oh, he looked like he really wanted to be there doing it, too.

REDD: Yeah, and I was very proud to have him, because he's had some difficulties with a little too much juice every now and then. He's overcome it, and I'm extremely

proud of him, extremely proud of him. God still works miracles, because I still pray for him.

ISOARDI: Does he want to play more?

REDD: Oh, yes. Yes, he does. And different people have asked me, "Why don't you and Buddy start back together again?" My mother was always for that, you know. But I'm very proud of him in recent months.

ISOARDI: When was Buddy born?

REDD: Now, let me see. I don't remember. [mutual laughter] He'll tell you later.

ISOARDI: Well, let me ask you when you were born. Was it 1930?

REDD: Yeah. You already asked me that! [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: And Buddy was born somewhere around there?

REDD: Right, right.

ISOARDI: Where were you born?

REDD: Los Angeles County General Hospital. It's now the [Los Angeles] County-USC [Medical Center].

ISOARDI: Right.

REDD: And my brother was born there, too. We both were born there.

ISOARDI: And where did you grow up?

REDD: The house that I lived in, that we lived in until I was about thirteen [years old], it was 1553 East Thirty-third Street, right off of Compton [Avenue] just a few blocks behind the Jefferson High School. I went to Carver [Junior High School]. I

went to Nevin Avenue Elementary School and Carver. And just as I was leaving they were changing it from McKinley to Carver, you know, in memory of George Washington Carver. And then I went to Jefferson High for just about six weeks.

ISOARDI: Why only six weeks?

REDD: Because we moved west. See, that's when I moved west, and then I met all the, quote, unquote, "west side" musicians: Hampton Hawes and Eric Dolphy and Froggie Johnson and—

ISOARDI: Where on the west side did you move to?

REDD: Thirty-sixth [Street] and Gramercy [Place]. Yeah, because my brother, let's see, he didn't go to— He went to Foshay [Junior High School], and then we went to Dorsey [High School]. So that's when I met Eric [Dolphy] and all of the, quote, unquote, "west side" musicians. Because at that time the families that were able and were trying to move up, so to speak, they started moving west, and Daddy wanted us to move west. In fact, he started buying the house before I graduated, and I didn't know. Before I was out of junior high school, he started buying that house so that I could go to Dorsey High School.

ISOARDI: So it's this is around 1944, I guess '45, something like that?

REDD: When he started buying the house? About 1934.

ISOARDI: About a year later or so you moved—

REDD: I graduated in '48, thereabouts. But it was that he thought it was so important for us to get the best education that we could. He wanted us to be in either—I wanted

to go to Manual Arts [High School]. In fact, I went to Manual Arts one day, and I stayed there for about a week, and then they walked in one day and they called me, "You're wanted in the office." I said, "For what?" They said, "You don't live at 1793 West Thirty-seventh Drive, you live at 3600 South Gramercy Place, and you are not in the Manual Arts district, so you will go to Dorsey."

ISOARDI: Why did you want Manual Arts?

REDD: I don't know. I just knew more kids there. I knew more people there. And at Dorsey I didn't know that many people. And the schools weren't—Dorsey was only—what? They had about eighteen black kids there when I first went. I didn't know anybody. Not that I had any problems with the other people on the campus. But it's just at Manual I knew more people, and I wanted to be there. But I was happy at Dorsey.

ISOARDI: I want to ask you more about high school, but actually before that let's go back early on. You started at Nevin grammar school?

REDD: Nevin Avenue, yes, where—This is interesting, too, and I still like to cook. Chico Hamilton's mother was the cafeteria manager at Nevin school when I went there. And you know Bernie [Bernard] Hamilton, the actor?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Yeah, we were about in the same class together. I used to go and help Mrs. Hamilton in the cafeteria. Daddy always gave us lunch money, but I just wanted to be in the cafeteria with Mrs. Hamilton. I loved her so much. She was such a nice lady.

ISOARDI: Did you know Chico? I guess he was a few years older.

REDD: Oh, of course. Yeah, he's older, but I know him well. Chico, Adair [Hamilton]—who's passed on—Bernard, and Don [Hamilton] is the baby, and— Let me see. I can't think of the girl in the family, because she was older, I think, than Chico. But they lived right across the street from Nevin school. Have you ever interviewed Chico?

ISOARDI: No. Actually, we tried to. He was on our list, and he's—

REDD: Oh, I hope you do.

ISOARDI: Well, we sent a letter to him. He's living—

REDD: In New York.

ISOARDI: Yeah, right by the United Nations [Building].

REDD: Yeah, in New York.

ISOARDI: He wrote us back, and he was very nice about it. I think Dale [Treleven] from UCLA called him, and he said he was writing his— He's taking a creative writing class and wanted to write his memoirs, so he thought this would be a conflict with that.

REDD: Oh, really? That's too bad.

ISOARDI: You know, we tried to tell him that it's not a conflict, that you can use this to write your memoirs, but he didn't want to. Yeah, it's too bad. We certainly did—

REDD: He would be good.

ISOARDI: Jack Kelson [also known as Jackie Kelso] talked a lot about Chico—

REDD: Oh, yeah. He's quite a guy.

ISOARDI: —in our interview with him. Yeah. They grew up together and played music together.

REDD: Oh, I know, and Jackie Kelso lived right near. And Jackie had a sister named Phyllis [Kelson Holloway]. Did he talk to you about her?

ISOARDI: Yes.

When you were very young, I guess, was music all around you at home?

REDD: Yeah, everywhere. I remember my mother saying one time, she said, "People talk about noise now, kids making noise." She said, "One time Lloyd Reese rehearsed a twelve- piece band in my living room." She said life was going on, but the musicians were rehearsing. She said people talk about noise nowadays, [but] the bands used to rehearse in people's homes. I really cannot remember not knowing music in my life, you know, at home or at church or as I think back. It was just always music. [sings] "Music, music, music."

ISOARDI: Yeah. Were you around when Lloyd rehearsed that band there?

REDD: No.

ISOARDI: Or that's what your mother said?]

REDD: Yeah, mother told me that. She said, "Lloyd Reese rehearsed a twelve-piece band in my living room." [laughs] But life went on, you know. Because they needed a place to rehearse, and I guess places were more restricted, you know, as to where they could rehearse.

ISOARDI: Music was around you, but when did you start thinking that you would be involved in it, too?

REDD: I never thought about it; it just happened. My mother took in a lady who was on hard luck, a lady by the name of Mayola Givens. She was great. She was a teacher down at Southern University, but something happened. She came to Los Angeles from New Orleans. And my mother had known her. She is the one person that I can think might have inspired me a little bit to be a performer or an entertainer. She was a great piano player and singer, something like Hazel Scott, whom I met later on. She would stay with us.

ISOARDI: How old were you when she was with you?

REDD: I must have been about— I was still in elementary school. I might have been about nine or ten. Like I said, in those days, especially black people, they had to protect each other and sort of look out for each other when one was down on their luck. Mother would say to Daddy, "You've got to give Mayola a job. Mayola is a good piano player." [laughs] And he was hesitant too about hiring a woman, but, see, like I said, when I hired my father, that's when I got to play with him. I hired him for a job at UCLA. But anyway, Mayola Givens— And the song that I recorded some years ago, "If I Should Lose You," I remembered her singing that song.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: And another song she used to sing— I don't know if you want this singing in, but—

ISOARDI: Yeah, go ahead.

REDD: [sings] "Never should have told you that you're wonderful, like a dream to me, baby, never should have told you—" I can see her right now sitting at the piano singing those two tunes. And that song, it stayed with me enough from—what?—thirty-something years ago, I recorded it. It was a part of my childhood that I went back to that. Mayola Givens was her name. A very striking woman, very talented. She stayed with us for a while—oh, at least a year, at least.

ISOARDI: Did your father get her a job?

REDD: She finally did get to play with Daddy. [mutual laughter] She finally did get to play with him.

ISOARDI: What happened to her?

REDD: She passed away. I don't know.

ISOARDI: Back then?

REDD: Shortly after. Shortly after. Her name was Mayola Givens, and she's another one of those people like Atwell Rose that nobody seems to know anything about.

ISOARDI: Gee, that name, his name comes up, though.

REDD: Does it really?

ISOARDI: Atwell Rose does.

REDD: Does it?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Oh, well, I'm glad to know that, because for some reason or another I just

want to know more about him. Because I remember him playing with my father at the Masonic hall on Fiftieth [Street] off of Central. And I was so impressed with him and his violin playing that I never— You know, maybe Buddy Collette might remember.

ISOARDI: Marshal [Royal] talked about him.

REDD: Did he really? Oh, no kidding?

ISOARDI: I'm pretty sure. Do you have Marshal's book?

REDD: No, I don't.

ISOARDI: It came out.

REDD: Oh, it did?

ISOARDI: His autobiography was published about six months ago, nine months ago.

It's hard to find. It was done by an English publisher. I ordered it through a bookstore, and it took them two months to get it for me. But I'm pretty sure he talks about him.

REDD: Oh, gosh. Well, I hope so, because I've always—

ISOARDI: I think he played with him.

REDD: Oh, I'm sure he did.

ISOARDI: One of his first gigs in the late twenties I think was playing with him.

REDD: Yeah, Atwell Rose.

ISOARDI: I think they did violin duets together.

REDD: Really?

ISOARDI: It's been a while since I've interviewed Marshal.

REDD: Yeah, well, he was one heck of a violin player that got lost in the history somewhere, because nobody ever seems to know anything about him.

ISOARDI: Do you know what happened to him? When was the last time you remembered him?

REDD: No. It seems like he had an appendicitis or something like that.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And that did it?

REDD: Yeah. I'm not positive. But he's a mystery in my mind, and I want to know more about him.

Back to, you know, when I decided I wanted to— Other than the influence of Mayola Givens, when my aunt was around— And there was another lady before my aunt came to California. Her name was Ophelia Combs. She gave me a few piano lessons.

ISOARDI: Who was she? Was she a private teacher?

REDD: She was a private teacher that played piano for our choir at church. I was just told that I was going to play. My mother—more so my mother than my father—stressed it.

ISOARDI: Really? Would you know why? Did she tell you why you should be playing?

REDD: It was just what you did. You know what I'm saying. [laughs] She felt like

you should have this opportunity to play. Many of the parents at that time gave the children dancing lessons. There was Miss Butler's, Loretta Butler, who was a very good friend of my aunt, and she had the Butler kiddies. And then there was the Covans that had the children dancing.

ISOARDI: Willie Covan?

REDD: Yes, Willie Covan. You know the name.

ISOARDI: I know the name. He was a great dancer and teacher.

REDD: I should say he was. Over there right across the street from Jefferson High School.

ISOARDI: That's where he had his studio?

REDD: Yes. So most parents in those days wanted their children to have these cultural opportunities. And since my father was a musician, and she just went and sent for my aunt—

ISOARDI: Well, it sounds like you have both Miss Givens as well as your aunt, your great aunt, coming into your life at the same time.

REDD: Yes, just about.

ISOARDI: Sounds like the late thirties?

REDD: Just about.

ISOARDI: They were both on the scene then?

REDD: Right. Maybe '39 or '40. Mayola Givens.

ISOARDI: Before this time, then, you're studying, you're taking some lessons?

REDD: When?

ISOARDI: Before Givens and your great aunt are on the scene.

REDD: Maybe I took a few lessons from Ophelia Combs. That's it.

ISOARDI: Your dad isn't pushing you?

REDD: No, Daddy's working hard just being a wonderful father.

ISOARDI: What's the neighborhood like?

REDD: Now?

ISOARDI: Back then when you were a kid. What was it like growing up?

REDD: A lot of Italian people were in the neighborhood at the time. We lived next door to the Castro family, Bessie Castro and Brassie Castro. Oh, there were the Gilliano's, there were quite a few Italian people in that neighborhood at the time. It was fun, you know, playing in the vacant lots. There was a vacant lot next to our house, and playing— The kids would play baseball in the streets, and it was just a lot of fun.

ISOARDI: So mostly families. And it was kind of a mixed street with single-family houses and that kind of thing?

REDD: Right, absolutely. That's what it was. Then, of course, we spent a lot of time at Ross Snyder Playground. We'd walk right down the "B" car track, and there was Ross Snyder Playground.

ISOARDI: What would you do at Ross Snyder Playground?

REDD: That's where we would rehearse with my aunt.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's where she had her band.

REDD: For hours and hours and hours. I spoke to a city councilperson at the Central Avenue affair about not South Park being named after her but Ross Snyder, because that's where she really labored for years and years and years.

So I had a very happy childhood, a very a happy childhood. My father was a wonderful provider.

ISOARDI: Did you listen to music much then when you were a kid?

REDD: Yes, I listened to—

ISOARDI: I mean aside from everyone practicing around you?

REDD: Yeah, I listened to all kinds of music, because my aunt wanted us to know.

Not only did we know about jazz music, we knew about church music, overtures— She loved overtures. She wanted us to know about all kinds of music, and we listened. We listened to a choir. It was black choir called Wings Over Jordan. You ever hear of them?

ISOARDI: No.

REDD: They used to come on the radio on Sundays, and she used to make us get up and listen to them. Wings Over Jordan. So we heard all kinds of music.

ISOARDI: What church did you go to?

REDD: I went to two churches. [laughs] My father was AME [First African Methodist Episcopal], or African American, you know. Yeah, Daddy's family and my grandma [Elvira Webster Redd Allen], my grandmother's side, and Mrs. Hightower,

she was a AME, African Methodist Episcopal. Then my mother had been a Baptist, but when she came to California she joined the Holiness Church, the Church of Christ Holiness. So I was an ecclesiastical hodgepodge. [laughs]

ISOARDI: You went to both churches?

REDD: Yeah, I went to both churches, and all the other churches in between when we played on programs. I went to Christian Science, because my aunt was very ecumenical too, Mrs. Hightower. She wasn't just hung up on the denomination thing. She used to play at the Unity Center, but that was much later, much, much later.

ISOARDI: So then, in a lot of ways she didn't recognize many boundaries in terms of religion, music, or whatever. You just take what's good no matter where it is.

REDD: That's right. Absolutely. That's a good way to put it.

ISOARDI: I keep thinking of Duke Ellington's definition, there are only two kinds of music, good music and bad music, and you know it's the same kind of thing.

Was she a powerful role model for you?

REDD: Oh, yes. But she would make us angry so much, too. She was such a disciplinarian until— If you could blend being in awe and intimidated all in the same emotion, [laughs] this is where we were with her. We were in awe, but we knew that we'd better not do anything wrong to intimidate her. So she was such a powerful personality but so small in stature. She was barely five feet [tall]. She could barely touch the piano pedals.

ISOARDI: She had an aura.

REDD: Yeah. She could barely touch the pedals on the piano. And then, you knew you had to obey, so whatever she said, do. I mean, that's what we had to do. And as you said, barriers didn't mean anything to her. She just did what she had to do. She could play pool. She beat all the guys playing pool. Oh, she beat them good.

ISOARDI: Did you make any friends in Nevin that would last through your life, or people that you might play with later on, anything like that?

REDD: Not that I would play with, but one of my dear friends—I don't know if you've heard of the Crouch family. They're part of the Church of God in Christ. Crouch, Andre Crouch's relatives.

ISOARDI: Oh, of course.

REDD: Andre is related to that family. Bishop Samuel Crouch. His daughter Rosie, who just passed away a few years ago—on vacation, ironically—Rosie Crouch was my best friend in elementary school. She would be like a cousin now, I think, to Andre, because I think Andre's father, Bishop Crouch was his uncle. But Rosie and I were friends up until a few years back. I went to a party not so long ago for the—
Let's see, it was for another person who I met in junior high school. That was Gretchen Chadwick, who was a dancer, and her sister was a dancer. And I bumped into the daughter of Lee Gibson, who founded the Cleff Club with my father.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yes. Wilhelmina [Gibson]. “Baby Gibson” we used to call her. I came across her. And now there are parties maybe once or twice a year of people that went

to Nevin. And there's a club called the Eastside Boys. They had an article in the [*Los Angeles*] *Times*. Some of the people that are in that club—Hal Miller, even though I didn't go to elementary school with him— But there are those people around that I know, that I went to elementary school with.

ISOARDI: Was there any awareness when you're this young in elementary school of problems of racism?

REDD: Yeah, of course we knew.

ISOARDI: Do you know when you start become aware of how things are?

REDD: I don't know, because right next door to us was the Italian people and Bessie, and she was like my mom.

ISOARDI: So you were growing up in a mixed area.

REDD: Yeah, and her daughter Virginia was my friend. We went everywhere together. Yeah, we had an incident, Gingy and I, when the two of us went shopping one day. She was Italian. We had one incident in downtown L.A., and I didn't understand it at first. I came home and I asked my mother about it, and then that's when I really started to find out about the race issue.

ISOARDI: What did your mother tell you? Do you remember?

REDD: They said [it was because] because Gingy's white and you're not white. But Gingy was my best friend. In fact, the Castros were— Let's see, Daddy's been gone since '79. Two of the Castros were at my father's funeral. Andy Castro was my brother's best friend. He sold his drum to him for ten cents. [mutual laughter] He got

the beating of his life. But in those days I never— I guess we were kind of sheltered in a strange way, because there were a lot of Italian people that lived around, and some Hispanic people lived on the streets too, and we got along, we did. That's a good question. When did I first meet overt racism?

ISOARDI: Become aware of how things are.

REDD: Yeah, when did that first happen to me? And you know, of all the thoughts I had, I'm trying to remember. That incident with Gingy I think is the only— One time we went shopping down on Broadway, and we had a little incident. That's about all.

ISOARDI: It's interesting the way you grow up and where you grow up and how that shapes you. Given the way you grew up on that block and the friends that you had, how do you think that affected you later on? Do you think it had any influence on the way you acted, the fact that you grew up in a very much multicultural block?

REDD: It was. When I went to Dorsey High School, many of the kids were white, and I had white friends. I mean, we didn't socialize like the kids socialize now. We didn't go to the homes. But I remember a singer. She became very famous, too. Let me see, what was her name? She used to sing for— Let's see. She was the voiceover for a lot of Julie Harris, all these kinds of people's [films]. Marnie Nixon. Marnie McEtherton Nixon. She became very famous. I don't know if because of that— But then, too, in show business families it was a little different in a sense, because some of my father's friends were white. He had some white friends. At the time we just didn't have any hang-up about it. But our parents knew, you know what I'm saying? Our

parents knew. I can recall when my aunt, Mrs. Hightower, would take us to a place called Coast Ice Cream Company if our music lesson was good. This was just a few blocks passed Slauson Avenue off of Compton.

ISOARDI: So south of Slauson?

REDD: Oh, yeah. There were no black people there.

ISOARDI: No. That was the boundary for a lot of years.

REDD: Absolutely. It really was.

ISOARDI: But you could go down there without any problems?

REDD: Yeah, we went down there, and I'd see all the neighborhood. It was different.

She'd stop, and we'd run in. Nobody ever bothered us, but I noticed the neighborhood was different. My aunt, as always, nothing stopped her. "Let's go get some ice cream.

We're going to get some ice cream. We don't care where it is, if we have to cross

Slauson or wherever, we're gonna get some ice cream." So I do recall that as a child.

Then Danny Webster—that's my father's first cousin to whom my aunt taught

trumpet— He was a very fine trumpet player, Danny. He was a very fine trumpet

player, and he lived on Fifty-ninth Place, which was maybe about two blocks south of

Slauson. We went to his house to visit him, and I knew that it was different than our

neighborhood. But within that area there was so much— Everything that we needed

was where the black community was, unless we went down to get ice cream at Coast.

There was no need really to have to go out. Everything was so compact.

ISOARDI: Right there.

REDD: Yeah, right there. It was not at all decentralized. [laughs]

ISOARDI: A real community.

REDD: Yeah. And as I said, on our street there was the Gilliano family, the Castro family, there was a Hispanic family that lived across the street from us.

ISOARDI: What did most of the people do who lived on your block?

REDD: What did they do? Many of the women stayed home, some of them were domestics. My mother was very fortunate; most of the time she stayed home. Later on she got a job, but she'd do just what she wanted to do with her money, because she'd say, "Your daddy's going to pay the bills." Mother would use her money to fix up the house. She liked to fix up the house, you know, buy nice things for the house. Some of the men ran on the road. Oh, that was a good job if you ran on the road.

ISOARDI: What's that? Do you mean working the rounds?

REDD: You know, what do they call them? Porters.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, railroad.

REDD: Yeah, on the railroad. A lot of the men were porters. That was a good job. Some of the women were beauticians. Many of them were beauticians. My aunt was a beautician, the lady across the street from me was a beautician, my mother's sister was.

ISOARDI: You say your aunt was, you mean aunt—

REDD: No, on my mother's side, my aunt Magg. She was a beautician, later became an LVN [licensed visiting nurse]. But you were asking me what many of the people

did—

ISOARDI: What about the men?

REDD: The Italian man next— Well, Mrs. Castro, Bessie Castro, she stayed at home and had kids. He worked for a trucking company.

ISOARDI: Drove a truck?

REDD: He'd always have his brother— He would sell trucks, or he had some involvement with trucks. He was home most of the time, but he always had his trucks out there. He used to kid my dad, and he used to say, "Oh Alton, you need to get some exercise. The only time you get some exercise is when you throw that drumstick up in the air." Oh, they were wonderful neighbors, really, really wonderful. When we moved west they were still there, they were still there. They moved about a year or so after we came over on Gramercy.

ISOARDI: Do you know where they moved to?

REDD: Off of Western [Avenue] and about 121st [Street]. That area there at that time was largely Italian.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes, at that time, all that whole area out there by the golf course. There's a golf course there now. We kept in touch with them through telephone conversations, and when somebody got married, Surdy-Birdy died or somebody, Big Bessie got married or—

ISOARDI: Surdy-Birdy?

REDD: Yeah, that was the baby's name, Surdy-Birdy. I'll never forget that baby.

ISOARDI: How do you spell that? [laughs]

REDD: And she was wonderful, wonderful. I remember an incident I had— And I still have a scar on my leg. I was trying to cross over our back fence. One fence divided— What do you call a common fence? I was trying to climb over the fence to get some figs out of their tree, and a nail stuck in my leg. The fat was coming out of it, and Bessie grabbed the shirt off the line and tore it—her husband's shirt, I'm sure it was—and tied and bandaged up my leg real good. Yeah, that's the kind—

We were very close. I never learned to eat Italian food so much. Ginky loved to eat soul food, but I didn't learn to eat Italian food too much. But we were in and out of each other's homes all the time.

Maybe our parents protected us from that, because they knew we were going to find out later, for sure, what the real world was like.

ISOARDI: Maybe they wanted you, too, to be able to get along with all kinds of people.

REDD: Oh, well, that's true. That's true. And then there were a lot of Japanese around.

ISOARDI: Really? In that area?

REDD: Japanese, too, yeah. They had the stores, the little markets and stuff, before they shipped them off to the camps. There was a little Japanese store right near where Chico lived.

ISOARDI: That's quite a nice area.

REDD: Yeah. They shipped them off.

ISOARDI: Then you go from Nevin to Carver.

REDD: Yeah. And then there's when I really got off into the bands and stuff.

ISOARDI: At Nevin did they have a music program?

REDD: Oh, yeah. Let me tell you. Oh, I should say.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: I was in the all-city orchestra.

ISOARDI: In grammar school?

REDD: Yes, I was, at the Shrine Auditorium. In fact, I think I still have the picture.

They used to go around and pick out the best kids. I think Eric Dolphy was in that, too, even though he was going to Thirty-sixth Street School. I know he was. They picked out the best students from, you know, all the elementary schools, and they had a concert every year at the Shrine Auditorium, and I was in that.

ISOARDI: What year was that? Do you remember?

REDD: I can't remember.

ISOARDI: Was it before the war?

REDD: After the—

ISOARDI: During the war?

REDD: During the war it must have been. The war was in '41, wasn't it?

ISOARDI: That's when we got involved, the end of '41.

REDD: I got out of elementary I think in 1940, so it must have been before that. I have it with some of my mother's pictures and things. But I was in the all-city orchestra.

ISOARDI: What were you playing?

REDD: Saxophone. Yeah, I was playing saxophone, and the Johnson twins, Alma and Almita {Johnson}, they played violins, but they didn't take from my aunt. But Eric Dolphy was in that. But, you see, Eric Dolphy's family was already on the west side, see. They were living on Thirty-sixth Place, right off of Western, and Eric was going to Foshay. And that's the first time I ever met Eric.

ISOARDI: So you're studying music when you're at Nevin, then? They have music classes?

REDD: Oh, yeah. We joined the band. We were in the band. We had a little [hums], you know.

ISOARDI: A little orchestra.

REDD: Yeah. So my aunt— You know, you had to be in the band. You'd better be in the band. We rehearsed every Tuesday, I think it was.

ISOARDI: So you probably hadn't been playing saxophone very long, then, had you?

REDD: No, I hadn't. No, no. But she'd tell us, "That's what you need. You need to practice at home, and you need to go to school and practice."

ISOARDI: So she had you playing quick. [laughs]

REDD: Right. That's right. She'd make you play quick. You'd better do it and do it

in a hurry.

ISOARDI: So the band gave a concert at the Shrine?

REDD: Every year, yeah, we were at the Shrine Auditorium.

ISOARDI: Was that exciting for you?

REDD: Yeah, it was. It was. I was there doing what I was told to do. That's what it was. I was there doing what I was supposed to do, happy that I got picked, one of Mrs. Hightower's students, you know. So that's the way that went.

ISOARDI: Who was teaching music at Nevins or leading the band? Do you remember?

REDD: Mrs. Ludlow, a lady named Mrs. Ludlow. No, no, no. I take it back. Mrs. Ludlow was the supervisor that used to come around. Mrs. Allen, one of the teachers, led the band.

ISOARDI: Was she any good?

REDD: Yeah, she was pretty good. And she was so nice, a very attractive woman.

ISOARDI: It just occurred to me I should have asked you earlier, but among the teachers that you had at Nevins, were they mostly white?

REDD: White.

ISOARDI: All?

REDD: Except Mrs. Allen. Most of them were white. Let me see. Who else did I have?

ISOARDI: Can you think of any that weren't?

REDD: Mrs. Allen. Oh, what was her first name? Hortense Allen.

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ISOARDI: The principal, you said, at the school was Miss Tibbitts.

REDD: Tibbitts. Mean. [I was] scared to death of her. But later on we got a black principal, Bessie Burke, who was the first black principal in the city of Los Angeles.

ISOARDI: Do you remember what year that was, about?

REDD: I don't know.

ISOARDI: Was that while you were there?

REDD: Yes. Bessie Burke.

ISOARDI: So it must have been the mid-, late thirties sometime.

REDD: She was there about maybe 1939, something like that, because she had been over to Holmes Avenue [Elementary] School. That's where she was first. And she was a very good friend of my mother's cousins that lived in Pasadena, and they would come and visit our school, Brogan and Mabel, because Miss Bessie Burke was the principal.

I'm trying to think were there any other black teachers. Mrs. Allen. I think there was one other black teacher in primary grades. But I had a teacher I liked a lot named Miss Huff. She was a white teacher.

ISOARDI: Why did you like her?

REDD: I don't know. She just kind of stayed with me as I think back. She used to

take up time with me after school.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah. I used to like to piddle with paper dolls, you know, art stuff, and she would just kind of— She wouldn't say, "Well, I've got to go home now," you know. She'd stay and kind of hang out with me after school. And she was extremely gentle. She was a very gentle person. When she'd speak to you, she'd speak real softly. I remember that about her. She impressed me.

ISOARDI: How about the student body at Nevin? Was it a mixed student body?

REDD: Yes, it was mixed. It really was. It had Italian kids and Mexican kids, black kids, and we all went there together. You know, that's interesting how we all went to— Maybe we were all so innocent. How did it happen?

ISOARDI: I interviewed Brother [William] Woodman [Jr.].

REDD: He was in Watts.

ISOARDI: The way he describes growing up in Watts is just the way you described growing up on the east side. It was very mixed. And he said, "I had to come up to downtown, in L.A., to find out what racism was." He said, "I didn't know what it was when I was a kid"

REDD: I know.

ISOARDI: "We all got along, and whatever was happening with the adults we never thought about too much anyway. We were just at school with our friends, and everybody was there." And Buddy [Collette], [Cecil "Big] Jay" McNeely, all of them

say the same.

REDD: And we exchanged candy. I was a popcorn lover, and I still am, and Gingy and I would go around— Oh, I'd love to see her. I remember her birthday till now; October the eleventh was her birthday. Because I'd save my pennies to buy her a present. Virginia Castro. Girl, where are you? [mutual laughter] She married a man in the navy.

ISOARDI: You lost track, then, of her?

REDD: Yeah, I lost track of her. But when my father passed away, Leonard Feather had a little mention in the paper, and the Castro family got in touch with us. But I don't remember— I think Gingy had moved to Orange County.

ISOARDI: It shouldn't be that hard to track.

REDD: Yeah, well, she was my best friend.

ISOARDI: You ought to.

REDD: Yeah, she was my best friend, Virginia Castro. But that's just the way it was. As I look back now, how did it all get so complicated? Maybe our parents were protecting all of us from what they already knew.

This whole thing about discrimination and— I mean, if you just— When you see little innocent children, it's the grownups that fill their minds with all these things.

ISOARDI: Yeah, people aren't born that way.

REDD: I know it, they're not. They are taught.

ISOARDI: Then you go from Nevin to Carver. Well, it wasn't called Carver then,

though, right?

REDD: It was McKinley, McKinley Junior High [School]. When I graduated it became Carver. The next year it was Carver.

ISOARDI: Is that much of a change?

REDD: Seventh grade.

ISOARDI: You were seventh and eighth?

REDD: Yes, seventh, eighth, and ninth.

ISOARDI: Oh. Three years you were at McKinley? Okay.

REDD: Then there were more black kids, I think, at the time. But there were still more— There were Hispanics. But then the Italian people started to move south, and there were fewer of them. Like at the time Fremont [High School] and all those schools, they used to fight Jefferson High School. I mean, they used to have almost race riots. When Fremont High School would play Jefferson they'd have to have the police out.

ISOARDI: Really? It was that tense?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And Fremont was mostly white?

REDD: Yeah, at that time. But it's out on San Pedro [Street], around Seventy-eighth [Street] or something, in that approximate area. That's when I started to see more black kids. And I never had any trouble making friends with kids.

ISOARDI: Are you studying music at McKinley?

REDD: Yes. Mrs. Cobbledick is the band teacher, and she wanted all of Mrs.

Hightower's students. So I'm in the band. And it's the funniest thing. I sat in the band playing E-flat alto [saxophone], transposed for a whole year, because she wanted me in the clarinet section. So I had to read the clarinet music. Every time I saw B it would be F-sharp, and every time I saw C it would be G. I could really transpose [snaps fingers] just like that. It was like in my computer. [laughs] She would take us to different programs. You know what happened here not so long ago? This same Mrs. Cobbledick was out here at Leisure World [in Laguna Hills]—you know where they have the senior complex?—and somebody held her up or did something to her.

ISOARDI: Oh, no.

REDD: Yeah. I saw it on television, and I called out there to try to contact her, but I couldn't get to her.

ISOARDI: Was she okay? Or was she hurt?

REDD: Somebody played a con game on her or something. I'm going to tell you where she used to live, right across the street from the Seventy-fourth Street [Elementary] School, even though she came to McKinley. Now, that area there was all white. She was white, and, oh, she dressed real nice. This happened about a year or two ago that I saw this. I called out there to Leisure World to make contact with her to see if she was okay, because they said she was partially blind now.

But she would take us on little trips when our music ended. Oh, she was something else, too. Mildred Cobbledick was her name. She was our music teacher.

ISOARDI: So you had band, then, at McKinley. Did you have music classes as well— harmony or anything like that?

REDD: No, just the band.

ISOARDI: It was just the band?

REDD: She had junior orchestra, senior orchestra. We were always senior orchestra because we could read our notes and things. So that's how that happened.

ISOARDI: So where are you at musically in junior high school? Are you taking it more seriously? Or is it just something you're doing?

REDD: It's always been something I did. As I was growing up I wanted to be a mother and have four kids. That's what I wanted to do. Then I had two, but I found out that there are some other things in life, too.

By the time I got to junior high school they were hiring more black teachers. One of the teachers that I had was Hilda Johnson. Hilda Johnson's father was the first president of [American Federation of Musicians] Local 767.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yeah. She started to kind of inspire me along that line. She taught me social studies. It was social studies then. And of course, Mrs. Gordon was at Carver. That was Dexter Gordon's auntie. She was at McKinley at that time.

ISOARDI: Teaching?

REDD: Teaching.

ISOARDI: What did she teach?

REDD: She taught social studies, too.

ISOARDI: Also?

REDD: Yes. I was a pretty good student.

ISOARDI: Most of your teachers and most of your influences are women, aren't they?

Your music teachers, the teachers that have a big impact on you, are women.

REDD: Yeah, seemingly. But I was never conscious of that fact. Let's say this right.

Well, yeah, they were. Even in my aunt, my aunt on my mother's side, Maggie—oh, just lost not to long ago—she was very important, too. She was strict disciplinarian, too. She was a beautician, my mother's youngest sister. Manners—I mean, you had to have some manners. Yeah, women that had a lot of— Other than my father and then my cousin— There were so many extended relatives in our families. My mother took in one her sister's sons, Lloyd Prince. I think I mentioned him. He was a fine tenor saxophone player. He influenced me a lot in a strange way.

ISOARDI: What way?

REDD: I was extremely fond of him. He was like my big brother. When he started off playing early with Bardu Ali at the Lincoln Theatre, he and Melba [Liston] were in the same band. He was two years older than me. He used to give me money to come to the movies and see him play. He'd always give me forty cents because I loved popcorn. Oh, and I had to have my four bags. I still love it. He'd say, "Well, look, I'm just not going to give you the money. You're going to have to make me a cake. Your going to have to bake me a banana cake." I'd get in there and bake him a cake,

and then he kept giving me my forty cents until— Or was that twenty cents to get in?

No, that was popcorn money. Daddy gave me the admission money.

ISOARDI: At this point, I mean, you mention the Lincoln Theatre— When you're in junior high school, do you have much of an awareness of Central Avenue and night life?

REDD: In the affair the other day over at Central Avenue— We hadn't moved yet, but—I told you about where I lived on Thirty-third Street—Carver was like near Vernon [Avenue], and Mrs. Hightower gave us about a half an hour to get home. You didn't fool around on the streets. You know, you'd better get home and get those horns out and start practicing. But I can remember going from Carver or McKinley back to Thirty-third Street on the side where the Dunbar [Hotel] was. Oh, it was just— People were like this [gestures]. People just moving like this. Aunt Alma would say if you'd stay off of the side where the Dunbar is you'd get home, you'd get home faster if you walked the other side of the street. Because you coul— I saw Billy Eckstine one day there.

ISOARDI: Just hanging out front?

REDD: Yeah. And, oh, he was such a handsome man. I went home and told her, "Oh, I saw Billy Eckstine." And, "What are you doing seeing Billy Eckstine? What are you doing on that side?" [mutual laughter]

Then there was a neighbor who had moved away from us, Leona and Francis Bluford. They went to the hospital with my father to pick me up when I was a baby.

Leona and Francis. Leona and Francis had moved down on Forty-seventh [Street] right off of Central. They would see me struggling to get back to Thirty-third Street, and Leona would say, [imitates her voice] "You'd better hurry up and get home, Elvira Louise. You'd better get home or I'm going to tell my mother, and she's going to call Aunt Mattie!"

ISOARDI: [laughs] Tell them you're on Central Avenue.

REDD: Right. Fooling around. So I'd say, "Oh, no, Leona, I'm going. I'm going home, Leona."

I'd walk on the side of the street where they had the Memo and—let me see—the other one.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, the Memo Club?

REDD: Yeah, but the side where the Downbeat [Club] was, where the [Club] Alabam was. People were like ants. That was the spot, you know. But we weren't supposed to be getting involved in all of that stuff. I'd go down there with Daddy when he would take his drums. I used to go with him to set up his stuff.

ISOARDI: Did you go on any of your dad's gigs at this time? Maybe a little too early, junior high school?

REDD: No, I didn't. Oh, of course not.

ISOARDI: So you had never seen him play?

REDD: I was a big girl when I saw him play. Oh, yes, I saw him play many times. I played with him, too—like I said, when I finally gave him a gig at UCLA. I had to

give him the gig.

ISOARDI: [laughs] Oh, but that was later on, yeah.

REDD: Yeah. But no, not then.

ISOARDI: But early on you had never seen him play in a club or anything like that?

REDD: No. No, no, no, no, no.

ISOARDI: He would just sort of leave, I guess, early in the evening, and then—

REDD: And then come back at night. Always have our lunch money up there and a couple of pennies or two to spend. He was a great guy. Great big Christmas trees and bunny rabbits and Easter eggs and— And I carried out the same tradition with my kids. I always say I had a wonderful childhood.

My heart aches for some of the children now, you know. And this thing about parenting, how did our parents learn how to be parents? You've got to have a class, parenting class. How did they learn? You know what I'm saying? That fascinates me, parenting. "What is she taking?" "Oh, I'm taking a parenting class." How did our parents learn how to be a parents?

ISOARDI: Well, people for the last 5,000 years or 20,000 years, whatever.

REDD: Yeah, they just were parents. Men were men and women, they knew what their jobs were. Well, then most, many, of the women stayed home. And as you said, many of the women in the community were domestics. Some of them had jobs staying on the place. You asked me what they did. They'd work at homes, and they'd stay on the place, stay on the job—you know, work, live in.

ISOARDI: Oh, and maybe come back for the weekend or something like that?

REDD: Yes, they'd come home every Thursday and every other Sunday. That's a live-in job.

ISOARDI: Well, we're up to McKinley Junior High School. Buddy [Redd]. Are you and Buddy—?

REDD: My brother?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: He was a rascal.

ISOARDI: Yeah, are you and Buddy good friends then?

REDD: Were we good friends?

ISOARDI: When you were growing up?

REDD: Of course we were!

ISOARDI: Did you get along?

REDD: Sure! I used to tease him all the time. I told him he was adopted one time and he almost had a fit. [laughs] We still talk about that.

ISOARDI: I used to tease my brother that way. [laughs]

REDD: Really?

ISOARDI: Yes. I used to tell him it was the milkman. That was back when they had milkmen. [laughs]

REDD: Yeah, I know. And my brother loved milk. My father, he still loves milk to this day. Drinks milk like crazy.

ISOARDI: Is Buddy's career, his trajectory in music, something like yours? I mean, you just grow up, it's around you, and you start playing something?

REDD: That's it. That's right.

ISOARDI: Of course, he followed your dad. He starts playing drums.

REDD: Drums. My aunt taught him drums. She wanted to teach him vibes, like Lionel Hampton, because she gave him some few lessons, too.

ISOARDI: Hamp[ton]?

REDD: Yes, sir.

ISOARDI: On vibes?

REDD: She gave him some few lessons on vibes, and she wanted my brother to be like him. Buddy, all she could do was keep him on the drums.

ISOARDI: So if he had his druthers he wouldn't have done it at all back then?

REDD: No. He was a bad little guy. [mutual laughter] He was something else as a kid. Mischievous, that's what I meant to say.

ISOARDI: I can see that. [laughs]

REDD: He was something. But he knew to respect my aunt. He got so many whippings. [mutual laughter] She worked on him.

ISOARDI: [laughs] From your little five-foot great aunt.

REDD: Right.

ISOARDI: And Buddy was probably tall as a kid, I would think.

REDD: Not too much.

ISOARDI: No?

REDD: Wait a minute.

ISOARDI: Well, he grew big later.

[tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: What about friends at McKinley? Do you make new friends here that may be any musical friends or anything like that?

REDD: At McKinley?

ISOARDI: While you're at McKinley.

REDD: Oh, yeah. The Johnson twins were my dearest friends, Alma and Almita.

They played violins, and they were related to Ralph [J.] Bunche.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes. That was his family. Their oldest sister, they had a sister named Jane, Jane Johnson. Jane played the piano. She was in the orchestra with us, too. Jane's husband was the superintendent of L.A. schools not so long ago— Jones, when there was a Jones two years back. Because she became a teacher. I used to see Alma and Almita come around over here, because one of their relatives, who's passed on, lived on the same street where Randy [Randall Goldberg] used to live. Alma and Almita Johnson, they were twins. They had a brother named Tommy Johnson, who worked a lot in the studios, but he was under us.

ISOARDI: He played music in the studios?

REDD: Yeah, he played tuba a lot. Tommy Johnson.

Let's see. Who are my other good friends, my musical friends? Well, George Sturdevant, because I used to sit next to him in the clarinet section with my alto. Eugene Cravens, who was an excellent musician, great, great saxophone player, who had a nervous breakdown.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes. Let me see. Who else? Raymond Martinez. My aunt gave him drum lessons. Who else? I can't remember. I know the Johnson twins were my closest friends. They were in all-city orchestra, too. That's where I first met them.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yes. They were good violinists.

ISOARDI: After you finish at McKinley you begin at Jefferson.

REDD: For about six weeks.

ISOARDI: So your family hasn't moved yet. You're still at Thirty-third, and you go to Jefferson for about six weeks. What was Jefferson like?

REDD: Oh, it was fun. I liked it.

ISOARDI: Was this about '44, '45, I guess, something like that?

REDD: Yes. I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave our neighborhood, but Daddy said, "You're going. You're going to Dorsey, and your brother's going to Dorsey." That was it. But, you see, things were still so that if you lived on the west side— A lot of people that lived on the west side, quote, unquote, they still knew a lot of people that lived on the east side. It was kind of a class thing, you know.

ISOARDI: The west side was more considered upper class?

REDD: Yeah, more kind of like a class thing. Everybody was moving to the west side. I remember the lady that had the apartment building just down the street from where we moved— Joe Louis came one afternoon. I saw Joe Louis.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Who's this dancer I saw? There was a market, and I just got through reading an article about Dorothy Dandridge. It was a market called the Arlington Market at Arlington [Avenue] and Rodeo [Road], I think. That's where I'd see a lot of the entertainers come, you know. I'd see Dorothy Dandridge there. She was a beautiful woman.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

REDD: She was gorgeous. You'd see her there. A lot of the musicians and their families were moving west. Then that apartment house, oh, I'd see all the entertainers. We lived at Gramercy and Thirty-sixth Street, and the apartment house with all these celeb[ritie]s— I saw Lena Horne one afternoon. All of these celebrities lived right here at Thirty-sixth and Saint Andrew's [Place]. I'd have to pass there to go up to Jefferson [Boulevard] to catch the "J" car. Because the "J" car was running up and down Jefferson then.

ISOARDI: Now, this was before they—

REDD: That was when I was in high school.

ISOARDI: This was before they abolish restrictive covenants?

REDD: About that time.

ISOARDI: This is a little before that. So is there tension with so many people coming into the west side?

REDD: It's happening. It's happening just about this time.

ISOARDI: Oh, people are starting to challenge those things then?

REDD: Right. Loren Miller, Miss— What's her name? Charlotta Bass from the *[California] Eagle*. They were challenging these covenants.

ISOARDI: Were you aware of any kind of tensions in the west side when you moved there? Anything like that?

REDD: There were some Greek people in the neighborhood, but we didn't have any problems as I can recall, not having to do with race.

ISOARDI: Actually, before you get too much into the west side, I wanted to ask you also— I know you were only at Jefferson for a little while. Did you ever encounter Sam [Samuel] Browne?

REDD: Oh, yes. I knew him. I knew Mr. Browne. And then I met him later, because my first husband, Nathaniel Meeks, was one of his best students. But he told me that after Nat passed.

ISOARDI: That's saying something.

REDD: Yeah. He said, "Vi, I taught for forty-two years, and Nathaniel was my most brilliant student." That's what he told me.

ISOARDI: That's high praise considering he taught everybody.

REDD: Right. He never would go out after he retired, but when Nat passed he went over there to Angelus [Funeral Home] and sat with him—sure did—and he told me that. He said, "He was my most brilliant student." But, you see, at that time I wasn't so anxious to meet Mr. Browne, because I was just there. I knew who he was. I knew he was the music teacher there, and I knew a lot of people were anxious to get in his classes and things, but I was trying to get my algebra together. [mutual laughter] I had a hard time with algebra. By the time I started digging into that algebra it was time to move.

ISOARDI: Well, you weren't thinking—I guess you were just in what tenth grade when you went to Jefferson?

REDD: Yeah, tenth grade.

ISOARDI: You're not thinking too much of a career or anything like that at this time are you?

REDD: No. No, just trying to get that algebra. I'm trying to get out of that first seat. She would put you in the roll according to where your last test grade was.

ISOARDI: And the people who did the worst had to sit right up front, is that it?
[laughs]

REDD: Right. And I had a time trying to get out of that first seat all the time. I finally got about fifth down the line, but, oh, I had a time with it. I was good in life sciences and English, but that algebra whipped me, gave me a hard time. Then I had to take geometry. Ironically I did better in geometry.

ISOARDI: Yeah, they're very different things. I had the same experience. Algebra I struggled with; geometry I sailed through.

REDD: I know it.

ISOARDI: Different parts of the brain, different way of thinking.

REDD: I guess so, because I made it through geometry.

ISOARDI: Yeah, it's a different thing.

Were there any other impressions of Jefferson other than that that you might remember?

REDD: I remember a Chinese boyfriend I had named Shuk Wong. I remember him still today.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

REDD: I sure do.

ISOARDI: Was this your first boyfriend?

REDD: No, he was my second boyfriend, because I had another boyfriend named Marcus Johnson.

ISOARDI: When did you have him as a boyfriend?

REDD: Well, he was my ninth-grade boyfriend, I think.

ISOARDI: Oh, at McKinley?

REDD: Yeah. But Shuk Wong, his folks had a grocery store on— Oh, wait a minute.

I'll tell you where it was. They had a grocery store down near Adams [Boulevard] and Compton, somewhere down in there. He wanted to walk me home with my books,

and one day Daddy saw me. And I'm sure it wasn't because he was Chinese, but daddy was just, "What do you mean having—? You don't need any boy to bring your books home. You bring your own books home." [laughs]

ISOARDI: His little girl is growing up.

REDD: Yeah, tenth grade. And I was playing the little gigs with Mr. McVea and getting the cute little clothes and things. So I remember Daddy said— He never said anything too much about, you know, boys and girls, but he told me that. "You don't need any boys to carry your books home. You bring your own books home." Shuk was good, too, in algebra. He used to help me with my algebra. Shuk Wah Wong. I remember him still.

ISOARDI: You mentioned you had some things with Satchel McVea. You were playing professionally?

REDD: Yeah, I was playing little gigs with Satchel on the weekends.

ISOARDI: When did that start?

REDD: I guess when I was in tenth or eleventh grade. Somehow I'd go on the weekend and play my gigs with Mr. McVea. I sure did. And then after a while my brother started.

And I was always active at the church. You know, my mother was very active, and we had to go to choir practice every Friday night.

Let's see. What else was I doing around that time? I can't think too much more today. [laughs]

ISOARDI: Do you want to take a break?

REDD: Yeah. And I should have been writing some more things down. I just want to remind you about my father and the police.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right, the story about your dad.

REDD: Yeah, my father was a reserve officer for a long time. And he used to— Oh, and this is the funny part. After Daddy became ill, well, by this time— And I'm looking at his picture right there. See that corner picture with Marla Gibbs and the mayor [Tom Bradley]? He came to see me play one time. Anyway, I had seen him at somebody's retirement party, and he said, "Well, how is Alton doing?"

ISOARDI: This is Mayor Bradley?

REDD: Yeah. I said, "Well, he's in bed. He's sick," I said, "but he's doing better." So he wrote him a little note, and I carried the note home that evening. And I said, "Daddy, guess who sent you a message today?" I said, "Tom Bradley." I said, "I bet you don't even remember. You don't even know Tom." He said, "Of course I know. He's a detective." [mutual laughter] I said, "Yeah, Daddy, he's more than a detective now. He's the mayor of the city."

ISOARDI: [laughs] He's in charge of all the detectives.

REDD: Yeah. He says, "Of course I know who Tom Bradley is. He's a detective. I used to ride with him."

ISOARDI: When did your dad ride with him?

REDD: That must have really been— I'm trying to think now.

ISOARDI: This was probably later on, I guess. It must have been the fifties, sixties, something like that.

REDD: It must have been in the late forties. It must have been.

ISOARDI: Late forties?

REDD: It must have been, because I don't remember what year exactly that Bradley became mayor. He's a great jazz fan.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

REDD: Oh, he loves Duke Ellington.

ISOARDI: Well, I think when he came into office he started honoring a lot of musicians, too.

REDD: I know it. I remember when he was in the tenth district, a [Los Angeles City] councilman, and the musicians used to have the after-hours jazz things, and we used to have little things to get money for Tom Bradley so he could get on the city council. Because he always did like jazz, jazz music.

ISOARDI: Yeah, he's been a big supporter.

REDD: He has been. I'm so happy to see him bounce back as he has. I saw him the other day on a program for Cicely—

ISOARDI: Cicely Tyson.

REDD: Yeah. And he was standing there, something else I've seen him take part in. He had a real bad sick spell there. It's really nice to see him back on the scene. He was a fine man.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 25, 1997

ISOARDI: Vi, last time we got up to the point where your family moves to the west side from the east side. You said that you had at least started Jefferson High School, but then you moved, and you were switching schools.

REDD: I was at Jefferson for just about six weeks.

ISOARDI: Right. So you moved to the west side. Maybe we could begin just by talking about how the west side looked, or what it physically looked like compared to the east side. What kind of a change was this?

REDD: Well, the houses were nicer.

ISOARDI: A more upscale kind of area?

REDD: Yes, more or less. Definitely, definitely. There was just beginning to be the transition past Main [Street] and those streets for blacks. I found out that my father [Alton Redd] had bought the house when I was still in junior high school, and he was renting the house to a lady. But when it was time for me to go to high school, he wanted me to go to Dorsey [High School]. I wanted to go to Manual Arts [High School], but I was really in Dorsey's district. There weren't very many black people there. The family, when we first moved in, they were Greeks right next door to us. There were not too many black families past Second Avenue, just a little bit on the other side or Arlington [Avenue]. Up the street from us was an apartment where I

used to see some of the— You see, the lady's name was Della. I remember that she was an entertainer in New York at one time, and she had bought this apartment building. I remember one afternoon coming home from school, I saw Lena Horne, and a couple of days later I saw Joe Louis. They stayed in this area. And I guess you were sort of, as the TV thing says, [sings] "You're moving on up!"

ISOARDI: Yeah, yeah.

REDD: Daddy wanted us to have the best that he could offer us, so we moved west.

ISOARDI: Your dad had owned this property? It was only when you went to high school that he decided it was best to switch?

REDD: Yeah. He wanted me to switch at that time. I wanted to go to Manual because I knew more people at Manual Arts, and Dorsey was so far out. That was like in the sticks. There weren't even buses. Daddy used to take us to the end of the "J" car line, and then, some days, this old, funny-looking bus would come. And then other days he'd call it the "Farmdale Express." That was his car. He'd pick up a bunch of predominantly black kids that were just integrating, I guess you could say, from that area. Because a lot of the people were Jewish and Greek in that area, like all out West Adams [Boulevard] and all out Jefferson [Boulevard] near La Brea [Avenue]. Most of those families in through that area were Jewish, a lot of them.

I'm trying to think how was it different to me. For many of our activities we still went to the east side. Like for our church, we still went to the east side. I was in a club call the Ramblettes. Wilhelmina Gibson was also in that club.

ISOARDI: What kind of a club is that?

REDD: It's a social club. I wish the girls, especially, had more clubs now instead of gangs. We had more clubs, social clubs, and we'd meet at this one's house, and we'd meet at that one's house. When it was my turn to have a meeting, they all had to get on a bus with their dads and moms and come all the way to the west side, which they hadn't been doing, because our family was one of the first— Oh, Eric's family had been there for quite some time, Eric Dolphy. In fact, Eric went to elementary school at Thirty-sixth [Elementary] Street School, and so his family had been there quite a while.

ISOARDI: Were there any problems when you moved out there?

REDD: I don't remember having any. It was beginning to integrate. There were other black people on the street, but there were Greeks—

ISOARDI: And Jewish people?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: But there was never any trouble that you noticed?

REDD: No, no. Of course, further out near Hancock Park, which was considerably away from where we lived—we were at Gramercy [Place] and Jefferson—there had been problems with Nat King Cole.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right. They wouldn't let him move into a house that he bought or something like that?

REDD: He moved into it, but that was like in Hollywood, going towards Hollywood,

and we were closer to Western Avenue. So we didn't have the same problems. No, even at Dorsey, when I went to Dorsey, there must have been about eighteen or twenty black kids there when I went.

ISOARDI: Out of how many students?

REDD: You know, a regular number of high school students. I don't remember exactly the number, but it was a regular high school, and they were just beginning to integrate.

Then I had a girlfriend, whom I still keep in touch with. Her name was Doris Edwards at the time. When her family moved west, they moved just a little bit further west than we did on Second Avenue. She was going to Jefferson [High School], and somebody had told her to get in touch with me because I was the only one that she knew. In fact, I didn't know her that well at Jefferson, but somebody had told her to contact me because she too was moving west. She moved way on over on Second Avenue. That was about four or five blocks further west than where we were. So Doris and I became very good friends. Later on, Hampton Hawes's father became the minister there at the Presbyterian Church on Third Avenue, because he had been down on Denker [Avenue]. Then it started to integrate as people started moving in.

Then for a time there was a sort of a renewing of clubs and things on Western Avenue, because a lot of the black community started coming west.

ISOARDI: So, of course, the clubs followed.

REDD: Absolutely. There was sort of like a renaissance. I was talking to a friend last

week about that. There was Glen's. There was another club on Twenty-ninth [Street] and Western; I can't think of the name now. There was Alpha Bowling Club, where I used to play for all the little parties with my little band.

ISOARDI: What kind of a club was it?

REDD: The Alpha Bowling Club? It was just a hall for social clubs to have dances. And that's where I met Jesse Belvin, the singer. He used to sneak in the back window. [laughs]

ISOARDI: He was a kid then. He had a wonderful voice.

REDD: Oh, yeah, he was great. And he'd say, "Let me in, let me in." Martha Young was playing piano. She'd say, "Yeah, I know what you're going to sing, 'I Miss You So.'" [laughs] It seems like just yesterday. But then he got a big break with one of the major record companies, and unfortunately he lost his life down South.

ISOARDI: Yeah, very sad. He was a lot like Nat Cole in some ways. He had a great career.

REDD: Oh, yeah. I encountered a couple of his grandchildren over at Seventy-fourth Street [Elementary] School who were involved in the music program over there. So it goes on. The beat goes on.

ISOARDI: Were they aware of their grandfather?

REDD: Yes. They are very much aware of him.

ISOARDI: That's good.

Now, what were some of the other clubs like on Western that you mentioned?

REDD: On Western, let's see. There was Glen's.

ISOARDI: What was that like?

REDD: Glen's had food, and then they had jam sessions there. I'm going to call this friend of mine and give you the names of those clubs the next time I speak with you.

ISOARDI: Oh, great.

REDD: There was the Red Hut, where everybody went afterwards, and there was Fatburger's where everybody sort of assembled after affairs. That's where [John] Coltrane and I went one time for a hamburger, but that was sometime later.

ISOARDI: All right, we'll get to that. In fact, I've got in my notes to remember to ask you about Coltrane at Fatburger.

Was there a place—I'm trying to think of the name—called the Oasis [Club]?

REDD: Oh, yes, yes. That was on Western. How did I forget that? Yes. It was on Western near Thirty-eighth Street. Then it became the Red Carpet, and that was by Gertrude Gibson and her former husband Alex Penland. I worked there with my former husband, Richie Goldberg, on drums—Richie, myself, and a very fine woman organist by the name of Laverne Gillette. She married— Oh, what's the young man's name? He was kind of an avant-garde pianist and moved up to Pittsburg [California]. Oh, gosh, I can't think of his name. What she could do with a little spinneret organ was unreal. Jennelle would come in there. And they used to have these Monday afternoon jam sessions, and they'd serve food. It was quite something.

ISOARDI: Most of the week they'd have a regular act?

REDD: Yeah. It was called the Red Carpet then, when they had it.

ISOARDI: And that was located where?

REDD: At Thirty-ninth [Street] and Western.

ISOARDI: Was that probably the most important club there?

REDD: Yeah, I would think so.

ISOARDI: Would you compare Western, what it became the fifties, at all with Central [Avenue]?

REDD: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

ISOARDI: You just had a few places here and there?

REDD: A few places, yeah. It was pretty viable, but nothing to compare with the Central Avenue scene.

ISOARDI: Did you ever, in the fifties, find yourself going back to Central Avenue for any kind of entertainment?

REDD: No.

ISOARDI: It was pretty much gone by then?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: I wanted to ask you also, I guess your dad was doing okay, right? He was investing in property on the west side and—

REDD: Yeah, Daddy did well. He did.

ISOARDI: So he could play, and he also had some business smarts, too.

REDD: Well, yes, he did, he did. He sold cars briefly. He would sell cars to the

musicians. [laughs] I find myself doing the same thing.

ISOARDI: [laughs] Seriously?

REDD: Just kind of accidentally. Daddy also sold tombstones. And Daddy was also a reserve policeman. I told you that, didn't I?

ISOARDI: Yeah, you did. He drove around with [Thomas] Bradley, didn't he?

REDD: Yes. He just knew how to make a dollar.

ISOARDI: It sounds like he was always busy, though. If he wasn't playing at night, he was busy during the day.

REDD: Right. He knew how to make a dollar, he really did, and take care of his family. I had a wonderful childhood. I tell a lot of people that today. I really and truly had a father who provided for his family. And when my mother [Mattie Thomas Redd] worked, she would do a little of this and that. She'd serve parties, and maybe she'd do a little domestic work. I remember for a long time she drove a handicapped child like a chauffeur or something like that. But she used her money mostly for fixing up the house. My mother was never told, "Look, you've got to pay the gas bill, and I'll pay the water—" You know, that kind of thing. Daddy paid the bills. That was it. I love him in his grave for it.

My son Randall [Goldberg] that I lost was very much like him. He felt the man's responsibility. He used to tell me, "Mother, a man should never count on a woman. A woman bears children. She can work one day, and the next day she can't." You know, even though he never had any, but my father was the same way, and

Randy just sort of inherited it. All this fifty-fifty stuff, you know, it's for the birds.

You know, it was a different tradition then.

ISOARDI: Yeah, very much so.

REDD: We had the best of shoes, a nice home to live in, and—

ISOARDI: What was your house like, the one you moved to on the west side?

REDD: Oh, it was lovely—still. I just sold it about three years ago.

ISOARDI: You've had it all this time?

REDD: Yeah. Well, my mother would always fix it up. It was a lovely place right on the corner of Thirty-sixth and South Gramercy Place. Now, that area has changed considerably, but it was lovely. My mother had it furnished lovely—custom-made drapes. We had four bedrooms, a living room, a dining room.

ISOARDI: Two stories?

REDD: No, one story. It was a one-story house. I had my bedroom, my brother [Buddy Redd] had his bedroom, and my mother and father had their bedroom. We had a den. It was a lovely home.

In that section there was really pride of ownership. The people who moved into that section were very proud, and they kept up the places. There are still some people living in that neighborhood now that were there when I was there. I know one lady, she just passed away. Her son is still there.

ISOARDI: Really? You started—right?—at Dorsey as soon as you moved out there?

REDD: No. I started at Manual and stayed a few days at Manual. Then one day they called me in the office and told me, "Hey, look, your father owns the property on Thirty-seventh Drive, but you live at 3600 South Gramercy Place. And you will be going to Dorsey High School."

ISOARDI: Oh, so your dad had property somewhere else that was in Manual's district. Oh, good try. [laughs]

REDD: I must have cried. I cried when I left Jefferson, and then I cried when I left Manual because I was just getting used to it. I was just getting used to the kids, and then I had to go. It's interesting as you get older and mature how things— You know, when you're younger, so many things that seem trivial upset you. But as you get older— Most kids don't like to leave where they have their friends.

ISOARDI: Oh, it's very hard.

REDD: But then, the social scene was such that even though I left Jefferson High School, as I said before, I was still in contact with what was going on in the east side, because most of us still had all of our activities.

ISOARDI: So you had the clubs that you were still a part of?

REDD: The social clubs mostly—the church, the social clubs— Not so much the theaters, because the theaters were kind of moved out.

Most of our friends still lived on the east side, you know? And a lot of them never moved west, but we were always still friends. In fact, my first date that I had, [laughs] my mother let me ride the bus with this guy from Forty-first Street and

Central over to Exposition [Boulevard] and Gramercy. That was an exciting first date, our bus ride, because his family still lived at Forty-eighth [Street] and Hooper [Avenue], and we had moved west. So I was thinking, "Hey, sixteen [years old], big date. Now I'm going to start dating." Marcus Johnson was his name. He came over on the bus, and I got to ride with him on the bus, and Forty-first Street was the end of the line. So I rode to the end of the bus line, and he rode back with me to Exposition, and that was the date. Isn't that something? Isn't that something?

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: And then I told mother, "Next week I'm going out with so and so. I'm going out with Marcus." [imitating mother's voice] "No, you're not! No, you're not!" When I was eighteen, she still chaperoned me to the beach. [mutual laughter] My son used to laugh. He said, "You mean Mama went with you on a date when you were eighteen?" I said, "She sure did." Not only did my mother do it, other mothers did it.

ISOARDI: How did you meet somebody over at Forty-first and Hooper?

REDD: No, we were in school. I had known him from junior high school. That's how that happened. [laughs] Just like Shuk Wong and his family lived down at [West] Adams. They had a store at Adams and Compton [Avenue], right on the corner. He was going to Jefferson, Marcus was going to Jefferson, and all of our friends. My friend Doris Edwards was the first one to come west from Jefferson High. And of course, she looked me up, she went to Dorsey, and we're friends till this day.

ISOARDI: Nice. So what was Dorsey like?

REDD: Oh, it was very nice. It was a different environment altogether, you know. I went to school with Italian kids— No, mostly Latin kids when I was on the east side, and then I started to meet more Jewish kids.

ISOARDI: On the west side?

REDD: Yeah. In fact, Dorsey only had about eighteen or twenty black students, I think. Yeah, thereabouts. Eric [Dolphy] was there. [laughs]

ISOARDI: He was there?

REDD: Yeah, Eric was there, and Leon René's son was there. Do you know the songwriter Leon René?

ISOARDI: Yeah, "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano"?

REDD: Yeah, his son was there. And the Bowman family was there. And, oh, gosh, there were a few of us.

ISOARDI: When did you meet Eric?

REDD: I met Eric, but I didn't know him so well. Remember I told you that my aunt [Alma Hightower]'s students all went to— When we were in elementary school, they would come around to elementary schools and pick out the best musicians.

ISOARDI: Oh, right, for the all-city [band]—

REDD: At the Shrine Auditorium.

ISOARDI: That's right, and Eric was one of them.

REDD: Well, Eric had been picked from Thirty-sixth Street [Elementary] School. That's when I first met him. But, you know, elementary kids, you don't think— So

when I got to high school I remembered him.

ISOARDI: Oh. So did you become friends?

REDD: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely, yeah. Eric used to save a place for me in the lunch line on the days that they had coconut cream pie. [laughs] Isn't it amazing how I remember these things? Because—and I'm going to tell you why—Eric was always in the music hall. I guess he took every music class possible, and the music hall was right where you form the line to go into the cafeteria. And certain days they had coconut cream, and I loved it. My mother was careful about what we ate, so I got coconut cream pie. Eric would go put his instrument up and go get in the line and stand until I got there to give me a place up front in the line. So I don't know how significant that is, but it's significant enough for me to remember it. I'm still playing a mouthpiece that he gave me before he left California.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes. One night I was playing a job out in El Monte [California], and I was hurriedly getting the horn out of the case and dropped the mouthpiece. That was a year before he had left here. I said, "Lord, who could I ask?" I couldn't play that night, so I got the number from information, and luckily I called him at home. He drove all the way out to El Monte and brought me that mouthpiece.

ISOARDI: How sweet.

REDD: I just held onto it. Then I saw him again, just a little before he passed, in '63. I went to New York to do a record date or something, and he said, "Where's my

mouthpiece?" I said, "You're never going to get it." And he didn't. I still have it.

He was the most unusual man.

ISOARDI: Unusual in what way?

REDD: I always said he was childlike—very intelligent, but he had the innocence of a child.

ISOARDI: Throughout his life?

REDD: Yes. He was so innocent, happy all the time, laughing, shaking his legs and laughing. He was very unusual. I've been thinking, too, as I think about Eric sometimes, I have a tribute there I did— It's in the congressional records we did over at USC [University of Southern California] in memory of him. I think of my son passing at thirty-six [years of age], and I think of Eric. Two most unusual human beings, you know. Eric was just— Randy was— They had qualities alike, and I thought of that when I look right up there on my wall.

ISOARDI: What do you think of Eric's career as a musician? Do you have any thoughts on that?

REDD: I was saddened that he had to go to Europe to really get the recognition that he deserved, but he was happy being over there. It was unfortunate that he passed away so young. He was diabetic, and he had a heart attack, too.

ISOARDI: Yeah, Buddy [Collette] told me.

REDD: He's a wonderful guy.

ISOARDI: Buddy told me that when he went to visit him in New York, he spent a

while there, and he noticed that he and Coltrane were on this health food kick.

REDD: Yeah, he used to eat a lot of honey. He used to eat honey, just spoons of honey, honey, honey.

ISOARDI: Buddy said that all the time he was back there he never saw him eat a meal. They claimed it gave him all this energy so they could play these hours-and-hours solos, and I guess he didn't know he was diabetic. Maybe that's what did him in.

REDD: No. I actually talked to— What's the boy's name? He was with him that day when it happened. He had a heart attack in the recording studio, and they took Eric to the hospital the next day, and that's when he passed. I'm trying to think who was there. Was it Pharaoh? You know, Pharaoh Sanders. They used to call him "Little Rock."

ISOARDI: No, I didn't know that.

REDD: "Little Rock," yeah. Who was that that was there with him? I'll think of that. Because we spoke of it after Eric's passing, we spoke if it. I know. Wait a minute. He was an alto saxophone [player], and he played with "Diz" [Dizzy Gillespie]. Leo Wright? Leo Wright, the saxophone player, was with Eric that day when he had the attack, and then they took him to the hospital. He wanted to come home. He wanted to see his mother, but they didn't want him to fly because he had just had the attack, and he died.

ISOARDI: What was he like at Dorsey?

REDD: Eric was in every music class. No, he wasn't in choir with me. He and Herb

Geller had a lot of classes together.

ISOARDI: Herb Geller was at Dorsey then?

REDD: Oh, yes! At the same time. You know, he lives in Europe. The last time I was in London he came over to take us to lunch. Well, anyway, I saw Herb. Eric had a friend, and he was just inseparable with him. His name was Roy. We used to call him "Froggie" Johnson, Roy Johnson. He played trumpet. He wasn't the musician that Eric was. He later became a teacher. And Roy Johnson passed early, too. They were very close. He also had another friend—none of them equaled him in terms of his musicianship—named Bernard Roberts. He was his other friend. He was just all heart and soul music.

ISOARDI: All of it. Did he have his own band or anything?

REDD: Yeah, he was in the band. I had a theory class with him. And then I met him later at Los Angeles City College. We took flute together. Oh, that flute whipped me. I could not get that fourth register. I don't play it today. And Eric would say, "Why don't you play it? I'll help you with it. Why don't you bring it home?"

He had a little Model-T car, a little raggedy car, he used to drive some days. Because we lived at the corner of Thirty-sixth and Gramercy, and Eric's family lived on Thirty-sixth Street just on the other side of Western.

We were very close. In fact, I helped Mrs. Dolphy's sister plan her funeral service. I saw him all the time, you know, because—

No, Thirty-sixth Place was a thoroughfare, straight through. There were

signals there, but Eric would pass our house all the time. He was just a great guy. He was most unusual.

ISOARDI: What was his approach to music like then? Was he experimenting back then?

REDD: I don't think he knew he was experimenting; I think he was just playing.

Because Martha—Martha Young again, who was very dear to me, and my pianist, and Lee and Lester [Young]'s niece—would say, "Here comes Eric. Eric, why are you playing all that? Eric, what is it? You must have been born free." She'd say it like that, he's playing "free." Even then they started to use that terminology of "free." Even before Ornette [Coleman] we started referring to Eric and his playing as free. Martha would say [imitating an angry voice], "Eric, don't you come in here playing all that! Don't you come!" She'd get so angry, and I was always the mediator. Eric would say, [imitating his voice] "Ha ha ha ha ha. Martha, I'm gonna play. I'm gonna play, Martha." He'd laugh and shake his legs. And she regretted it when she— He had a little way he used to do his leg like that when he would play. He would just kind of put his foot and—

ISOARDI: Sort of shake it horizontally and not pat it up and down.

REDD: Right. It would go something like this when he would play. Martha moved up to Pittsburg, and Eric was there in San Francisco one time with Chico Hamilton. Oh, how she hated the fact that she didn't get to see Eric, because she told me about it. She said, "I was too broke. I didn't have money to get from Pittsburg down to San

Francisco, and I wanted to see Eric." By this time Eric was getting to be known, and he was with Chico Hamilton.

What else can we say about Eric? He loved his mother and father very much, very much. I understand that their house was damaged somewhat in the last riots that we had.

ISOARDI: Yeah, somebody told me that they lost a lot of the memorabilia they had in there.

REDD: The memorabilia, yes. I took a young man over there, Mark Broyard, whom you may come in contact with. He sings now, a lovely person. He had a duo with my son Randall. I took him over there and introduced him to Mrs. Dolphy. She gave him a lot of Eric's memorabilia, and then some of it was left. A young man, Otan or Ohan or something like that, he bought the property. He was a fan and a budding musician, I guess you'd say. I don't know what happened. You know, I must go by there sometime and see what happened to that house. I understand it was damaged quite a bit in the riot.

ISOARDI: I picked up a little while ago a film that was done in Sweden on Eric Dolphy. There was one scene where the Swedish guy who was doing it came out here. There's one part where he goes to the house, and he's got Roy Porter and Buddy Collette with him, and they walk through it. It almost looks like they've set it up like a museum.

REDD: Well, I think the young man who bought the house, I think this is what he

wanted to do, and something happened. I understand it was damaged or severely destroyed. Because Mrs. Dolphy left that house to her sister, and the young man bought the house from Mrs. Dolphy's sister.

I have a couple of souvenirs here. I have, from their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the cup that they drank out of. And then the cups there in the kitchen, those are Mrs. Dolphy's. And those glasses she gave me.

ISOARDI: What was the music program like at Dorsey?

REDD: It was very advanced. We had a teacher named Miss Healy. Oh, what was the band teacher's name? It was pretty complete. There was harmony, theory, band, orchestra, a cappella choir, and another choir they had, because I sang in the choir a lot in high school. In fact, I didn't play in the band. Sometimes I'd just bring a horn, but Herb and Eric used to kid me about, "What are you doing with the horn?" I used to go in there and play with them sometimes, but I was not in the band. I was not in Dorsey's marching band, even though I know the song [sings] "We're Dorsey Dogs from Dorsey High, and our colors are green and white." Oh, I still remember that.

ISOARDI: Were Eric and Herb both in the marching band?

REDD: Yes, at Dorsey. They were in the band.

ISOARDI: Did you have anything like a jazz band, like Sam [Samuel] Brown had at Jefferson?

REDD: Yeah, they had a jazz band, too.

ISOARDI: They did?

REDD: They had a jazz band, also. They had quite a few people who were involved later in music like Marnie [Nixon], you know. She's a great singer. I'm trying to think— Several people who were involved later on in music came through Dorsey High.

A very interesting thing, since we're discussing Eric: When I was in Japan in 1980, I believe, a young man came up to me and was asking me about Eric, because for some reason or another everyone knows that Eric and I were close, because somebody's always asking me about him, even in Japan. So this was kind of sad in a sense. He knew where Eric was buried over at Rosedale. It's called Angelus Rosedale Cemetery. And at the time he went over there— He came to this country to visit some relatives in Gardena [California], and he went to Eric's grave, and he carried a flower. In fact, they are many, many, many visitors who come to his grave, because a gentleman asked me one time when I was there for my aunt's service, "Who is buried over there? Who is that where there's music all the time. Who is that?" I told him Eric Dolphy was buried right in that area. And this young man in Japan said to me he carried the flower. He said then he went over to Thirty-sixth Street School, where Eric went to elementary school, to leave some flowers, and the principal didn't know who he was. Wasn't that sad?

ISOARDI: That's not surprising, I suppose.

REDD: And he was so shocked that Eric could have gone to school there and they didn't know who he was. I said, "Well, that happens sometimes."

ISOARDI: Around the world they know, but here—

REDD: Yeah, isn't that amazing?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: That's amazing.

ISOARDI: Teddy Edwards told me once that when he was in France he was driving somewhere, and he was going through a little village. When somebody heard who he was, they all flocked around, and they took him to the local schoolhouse, and there were third graders learning about Billie Holiday and Teddy Wilson, and they all knew who he was. These were grammar school kids, and this was what they were being taught. And he said, "In my own block nobody knows who I am back home."

[laughs]

REDD: In my own country, yeah, I know. When I went over there in Europe they know your daddy, they know your grandmother. I went over with [Count] Basie.

That's when I first met Mahalia [Jackson]. In '68 we went to the Antibes [Jazz] Festival. And there was a gentleman over there who was primarily involved. He's the person who introduced me to Mahalia and gospel music, but his name was Gospel Willie. That's what they called him. And he left one afternoon, after he met me, and a few hours later he came back. He says, "I know who you are. You're so and so, and your father was Alton Redd and so and so." He had apparently gone somewhere and looked it up or something. It's really amazing.

But Eric was one in a million. Coltrane just loved him very much. He worked

with him.

ISOARDI: Are you playing a lot of saxophone while you're at Dorsey?

REDD: Not too much. I was singing a lot more.

ISOARDI: What were you thinking in terms of your future while you were at Dorsey?

REDD: I don't know.

ISOARDI: Did you have any specific plans? Or were you just taking it day by day?

REDD: I used to think I wanted to be a nurse.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah, but there was music going on. By this time I was sort of beginning to help my aunt, Mrs. Hightower, with her younger students. Remember I told you she was generational?

ISOARDI: Right.

REDD: That's when I would go over to her house and sort of help out with some of the younger students at about this time. I kind of wanted to be between a nurse and a teacher. I had never thought of myself as being a professional musician. I really thought of myself as being a housewife with four children. [laughs] That's what I used to think.

ISOARDI: Which is probably more typical, I suppose.

REDD: Oh, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I used to tell my mother I wanted four children. She said, "Well, you'd better learn how to do something else."

ISOARDI: That's what my sister used to say all the time. Now she has two, and she

says, "That's enough."

REDD: Yeah, and I had two. I wish I had more. Now I have three grandsons. We have a little baby grandson now.

ISOARDI: Any of them going to be musicians?

REDD: Well, I think so. One is a music major; that's Jamal Meeks. He's a music and business major at Hampton University. He just went down South to school at Hampton, Virginia. And then the other one's pre-med out of UCLA, but it seems like music's going to come out in him.

ISOARDI: Did you make any other musical friends at Dorsey? Are there any other people that you met that have become musicians?

REDD: Let me see. Oh, yeah, there were a lot of them. Nelson Alexander. Who is the guy that I see all the time? I bumped into him in Copenhagen. Billy Reagan. You know, they played some but did not really got involved as much as I and my family did. The Rice kid, Edgar Rice, he had gone to Dorsey with me. He played in Nelson's trio. Nelson was sort of self-taught, but he was sort of in that Nat King Cole kind of bag, you know. Have you ever heard of him, Nelson Alexander?

ISOARDI: Yeah, I have.

REDD: You have? Really?

ISOARDI: Yeah. I can't place the name, though.

REDD: Nelson Alexander and he used to sing, sort of self-taught.

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ISOARDI: What kind of music were you listening to at this time?

REDD: May I say something just a little bit more about Dorsey?

ISOARDI: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, by all means, go ahead.

REDD: There was Roy Johnson, whom I mentioned, who was a very good friend of Eric's, and he played trumpet. He became a public school music teacher, but not professionally. His uncle was a dear friend of my father's, Marvin Johnson. Marvin Johnson was a saxophone player.

ISOARDI: Okay, that rings a bell.

REDD: Yes, that was Roy's uncle. I'm trying to think of some more people that were involved in music at Dorsey that sort of followed through later on. I can't recall right now.

Okay, you were asking me something.

ISOARDI: Yeah, what kind of music are you listening to?

REDD: Right now?

ISOARDI: Back then when you were in high school.

REDD: Oh, I was listening to a lot of rhythm and blues and a lot of vocalists. I've always loved Nat King Cole. And I was listening to Diz, you know, when the bebop thing—

ISOARDI: Bebop, big bands, and that kind of thing?

REDD: Yeah. And gospel. Well, it wasn't called gospel then, it was just church music. It didn't really become gospel— I'd better retract that, because Sally Martin and Thomas Dorsey were—

ISOARDI: They go back a few decades before that, don't they?

REDD: Yes, yes, they do, in the late thirties and early forties, so I won't say that. But we called it church music. We didn't use the term gospel so much.

I just listened to everything, because my aunt taught us to listen to everything. We listened to marching music. The other night they were listening to— Wynton Marsalis was conducting a band playing "Stars and Stripes Forever," and my husband called and said, "Hey, here's one of your old tunes you used to play." [mutual laughter] We played the *Poet and Peasant* overture, and we listened to Duke Ellington. Oh, yes, we had to listen to Duke Ellington—"Blue Serge," all of his early things. She made me listen to Johnny Hodges and Nat King Cole, of course. I just adored him. And that's all we listened to.

ISOARDI: Are you listening to any saxophonists in particular, at this time?

REDD: No. No. You know, I never heard "Bird" [Charlie Parker] play.

ISOARDI: You mean in person?

REDD: No. I never had that opportunity. I saw him one time in the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767] building, but I never got the chance to hear him play. He was talking to Florence Cadrez one day in the Local 767 just before it

integrated. I worked and helped in the office there part-time, and I saw him. He was so nice. This is the great Charlie Parker, but he was having some union problems with Elmer Fain, who didn't want him to play because his union card from New York wasn't straight or something. And he was saying, "Florence, will you please tell Elmer to let me play?" He didn't say "gig," but he said "my job" or something like that. And I said, "Oh, there's the great Charlie Parker." But I never heard him.

ISOARDI: Did you talk to him at all?

REDD: No, just kind of said, "Hi, how are you?" You know, like that. Many people have said, and I certainly feel complimented when they say it, that the sound that I have is similar to Bird's.

ISOARDI: God, yes.

REDD: Yeah, I did sound something like Bird. You know, that really makes me feel good. And then Max [Roach] would tell me— Well, when I met Max over in Europe when I first went there, he said, "Bird would have loved you. He would have helped you so much." I often think about that.

ISOARDI: Oh, how wonderful. Another one who died when he was too young.

REDD: Oh, I should say, wasn't it? He was thirty-five years old. Oh, my goodness gracious!

ISOARDI: When did you start working at the union?

REDD: Let me see. They amalgamated about in 1953.

ISOARDI: It was April '53.

REDD: And I must have started there at about 1952 working part-time.

ISOARDI: You were still in high school?

REDD: No, I was out of high school. I watched the process as I worked there in the office. I remember Buddy [Collette] and Marl Young and—

ISOARDI: Bill [William] Douglass?

REDD: Yeah, Bill Douglass was involved in it, too. And Estelle Edson.

ISOARDI: Oh, Estelle Edson? I think she was one of Marl's old girlfriends.

REDD: I think she was. She was involved in it, too. I remember that time period really well.

ISOARDI: What did you think about that?

REDD: I don't know what I thought about it at the time. I was sympathetic, in a way, to some of the, quote, unquote, old-timers, like my dad and Leonard Davidson, who was the president, because they felt as though they were going to get totally swallowed up, and they did to a degree. But the long-term benefits outweighed, apparently, my initial concern about what was going to happen.

ISOARDI: What long-term benefits?

REDD: The long-term benefits of having one integrated local. But you know what? I think—and somebody might correct me—that Chicago still has two locals.

ISOARDI: I don't think they do. Because they, over the next ten years, had eliminated all of them.

REDD: There used to be Local 10 and Local 208. I read in this musician's paper not

so long ago, 10 and 208.

ISOARDI: Well, some of the ones, apparently the international forced them to integrate, because some were reluctant to do it. In fact, there were some cases—maybe it was Chicago—where the black local was better than the white local; it was better run and had more money. They forced all of them. I think in San Francisco, they had to force them, too. So what they did, apparently, to show—

REDD: Oh, wait a minute. San Francisco? Didn't they just have one local in San Francisco?

ISOARDI: No, they had two. They had a huge fight, and they had to force them to do it. Apparently some of the locals that were forced together decided to put both numbers together, like 10-208 or 10/208.

REDD: I think that's what's still going on in Chicago.

ISOARDI: But they probably still have just one. Yeah, it's one local, but they've got both numbers in their name.

REDD: Just like this ridiculous thing they had going on in Mississippi not so long ago. In some school in a small community there they had a white homecoming queen and a black homecoming queen and a black homecoming king. But I think they've done away with that now.

I could sympathize at the time with the concern of the black officers, because it was sort of like the church in the sense that so much went on there family-wise and everything.

ISOARDI: Oh, so a real social center for the community?

REDD: Yes, yes, yes, it really was. The Labor Day parades—oh, my goodness gracious—and the jobs that they got that came through there, the movie work. I guess it was just a part of the evolution of what was going to take place. Many of the black musicians felt as though they lost some semblance of that family thing, you know, and also some of the money. I don't know. You heard some of them complain about was this equitable, was the merger equitable in terms of the finances. But in the long run, I think it's what should have been.

ISOARDI: Mostly for integration? For that reason? Were there also other specific benefits that you got financially or anything that were better with Local 47?

REDD: No. No, I just think in terms of, quote, unquote, social progress.

ISOARDI: Right. Everybody that I've interviewed, I always ask about the amalgamation and whether they were for it or against and what they think about it now. It's a real mixed bag of opinions, I think.

REDD: And right now I don't know what's going on, because I haven't been to too many of the meetings—hardly any—but I used to go. I really used to go during the late sixties. I hardly ever missed a union meeting when I was in town, because I was working more then in music. But I really used to go to the meetings and raise a whole lot of sand about things that I didn't think were fair. And right now, I guess, since I haven't been attending meetings in a long time, a lot of the black musicians down there have passed on, and then a lot of them just became disinterested. What they did, too,

was a few of the officers that were at 767 went over there when it first amalgamated, like Florence Cadrez. She had a job there. Paul Howard had a job there. Elmer Fain had a job there. He was up there in the business office. And then later on Jimmie Clark.

ISOARDI: He was the first black business agent, wasn't he?

REDD: Who?

ISOARDI: Jimmie Clark?

REDD: Where, over there?

ISOARDI: At 47?

REDD: No, Elmer Fain went with the amalgamation.

ISOARDI: Oh, he became a business agent over there as well?

REDD: Elmer? Yes, he did. He was there for a while. Then as the black officers sort of fell off and died—well, mostly attrition—it affected their presence there, and then I think a lot of the black musicians just started losing interest or something. They never seemed to have felt too welcomed, you know? A couple of times I had problems, and I'd gone up and talked to the presidents. One gentleman was there—I think he's still there, too—he knew my dad well. He knew my dad when they were boys. That's right. I can't think of his name right now. He has an Italian name, and he lived kind of in the community where I grew up. You know, a lot of Italian people were there. I wish I could think of his name right now. Maybe I shouldn't say they didn't feel welcome, but it was just different. [tape recorder off]

I think that right now there's more social integration. I just don't know.

Sometimes I think that there is and then at other times I think that there's not. But within maybe ten years after the amalgamation, maybe ten to fifteen years, they sort of settled in. But it wasn't at first, as I recall it. And right now I really don't know what's going on out there, because I don't get out there that often. I send my dues in through the mail. I never bother to go much to meetings.

ISOARDI: When did you join the union?

REDD: Oh, my aunt made us join, I guess, when I was about sixteen or seventeen.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Then I dropped out and then back again. [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: So, you were in 767 then?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: What were some of the people like? You mentioned that you worked around Florence Cadrez, and you mentioned Elmer Fain. What were these people like? They were involved in 767 for so many years.

REDD: Oh, yes, I should say they were. Well, Florence was a remarkable woman, a moral woman, a wonderful, wonderful woman. A very fair-skinned woman, who many of the people— We didn't see that many white people come in there, but they didn't know whether she was white or black. You know what I'm saying? In terms, she was a Creole type. She looked Latin, you know. She taught me so much, and I loved her an awful lot. I loved her a lot.

ISOARDI: What did she teach you?

REDD: She taught me about things that were moral. Working around men. Maybe I'm sounding a little old-fashioned. I was talking about this this morning to my husband [Al Avelino] about how in the past older women would talk to younger women about the way they should conduct themselves. Well, of course, she worked with men all the time in that union in the office. There were men coming into the building for jobs and telling me you can have as much fun as anybody and still be a lady. You know? She taught me some things about spelling and writing letters, and about buying property, because she married late in life, and she married a contractor. She would tell me about the things that they were doing. And when she left, when she passed on, she left quite a bit of property, I believe.

Elmer Fain was my father's best friend.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: He was stern. Oh, everybody was afraid of Elmer Fain, because he'd fine his mother. He would fine her. I remember when Fain married Frances [Fain], Nat King Cole came to the house and sang at their wedding. I've never forgotten that. But anyway, everybody was afraid of Elmer Fain, because he would really fine you. "Oh, Mr. Fain, I'm trying to make my way." "No, where's your contract?" You know, he was really, really stern.

Now, Mr. Johnson was the first president, I believe.

ISOARDI: Of Local 76?

REDD: Yes. Then there was a Bailey, and then there was Leo Davis. I knew him best.

ISOARDI: Leo Davis was president when they amalgamated?

REDD: Yes, he was.

ISOARDI: He was the last president of 767?

REDD: Yes, I believe he was. He was a nice man—very mild mannered, talked very soft, a very intelligent man. I think he went to Fisk University for a while. And he played alto saxophone.

I'm trying to think who else. Of course, Mr. Moorehead.

ISOARDI: Oh, is it Baron Moorehead?

REDD: Baron Moorehead. Yes, somebody's told you that, eh?

ISOARDI: I remember the name.

REDD: He was one of the business agents. Fain was one of the business agents. I think there were just two of them at the time.

ISOARDI: What was he like, Baron Moorehead?

REDD: Oh, a big joker. He liked to fly. He was really into airplanes and flying, I think.

ISOARDI: I think I heard Celes King [III] talking about him, then, because I know Celes King was into flying.

REDD: Yeah, yeah, they were friends. He was a big joker. He liked to kid you. He was a short guy, quite bow-legged.

ISOARDI: What did he play?

REDD: I don't remember what his instrument was. But he wasn't as stern as Elmer. No. And Elmer had to go out into all of these areas that were not integrated at the time—you know, the little towns around. Elmer Fain didn't back off for anybody or any time. He didn't care what color you were. I mean, even though he'd make you angry as could be, he really fought for unionism for the musicians and for the musicians to be treated right and to be treated fairly. He really and truly did that.

ISOARDI: How long was he a business agent for 767?

REDD: A long time. A long time. Because he was at 47 for a while.

ISOARDI: But he had been at 767 for quite a while?

REDD: Right, right, he had been. He came over the day my father passed away, because that was Daddy's dearest friend. And when Daddy was about to leave, he called Elmer, and he came to the house.

He was wonderful to his family. He was a wonderful man to his mother, and he had a brother that was handicapped or something. But he was unusually devoted to his family. It's amazing how you remember things about people. And everybody used to say, "Oh, that Fain, he's something. He's a dog." But he was good to his mother and good to his brothers and his wife, too—I guess his second wife, anyway. I don't think he stayed with the first one too long, Frances. I remember Frances. I remember the day they married. When Daddy told us that Nat King Cole was going to sing, oh, my God, I went nuts.

ISOARDI: And he did?

REDD: He sang "I Want to Thank Your Folks."

ISOARDI: What did Florence Cadrez play?

REDD: She played piano, and she worked a lot with Jester Harrison.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Oh, yeah. She used to accompany Jester and all of his group. Florence, Jester, and I think she worked some with the Hall Johnson Choir, too.

ISOARDI: Wow.

REDD: Oh, she was a sweetheart. She was a sweetheart.

ISOARDI: What about Paul Howard? He must have been around there, right?

REDD: Oh, yes. Paul was the treasurer, because he took care of the little books. Paul was like my godfather. He didn't christen me at the church, but I was born on the same birthday. I think I told you that. We have the same birthday.

ISOARDI: You and Paul Howard?

REDD: Paul Howard. Of course, it's a different year, but on the night that I was born it was his birthday. We always used to exchange cards and things.

Oh, he was involved in the Freemasons. Oh, he loved that.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, did he ever love that Masonic order, my goodness. They had the Fats Waller Lodge, you know, that came out of that Local 767.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yeah. Did you ever hear of Fats Waller Lodge?

ISOARDI: No.

REDD: Fats Waller Lodge is the Freemasons and the Shriners. A lot of musicians were in it. Maurice Simon—he's still living—he was a part of it. Oh, so many of the men.

ISOARDI: Did you run into any woman musicians around 767? Are there any that you can think of?

REDD: Yes. The pianists, Perry Lee Blackwell—I met Lady Will Carr, too.

ISOARDI: Oh, did you?

REDD: Yes, I did. In fact, I played one gig with Lady Will at the Elks auditorium. It was just accidental. She was a great pianist.

ISOARDI: That's what a lot of people have told me. I've got a picture of maybe Cee Pee Johnson's band from just before World War II, and I think she's playing piano.

REDD: Is she?

ISOARDI: She's just eighteen or nineteen [years old]. Very young.

REDD: Yeah, she was very good.

ISOARDI: She went to Jefferson, didn't she?

REDD: Did she? I don't know, I don't know.

I'm trying to think of other women. Most of them were— Then there was a women's group, Ivy, Vern, and Yvonne, something like that. I'd see them come through every now and then.

ISOARDI: An all-women band?

REDD: Yeah. And of course, there was Emma Smock, "Ginger."

ISOARDI: Oh, she would play violin?

REDD: Yeah. I'd see Ginger and talk to her on the telephone. You know, they'd call.

I heard Nellie Lutchter. Let me see. Who were some of the other women?

Nellie, Clora—

ISOARDI: Clora Bryant?

REDD: Clora was very active.

ISOARDI: What about Melba [Liston]?

REDD: Melba, yeah. But during this time, this is the period when Melba had stopped being involved in music. She was kind of disgusted.

ISOARDI: Oh, so she worked for the school board.

REDD: Yes, she went back to the school board. She wasn't too active during that time. Then shortly after that she decided that she wanted to go to New York. So I didn't see too much of Melba at this time.

ISOARDI: What percentage of the membership of 767 were women?

REDD: Oh, let me see. There were quite a few women that played piano and played at piano bars and that kind of thing, but not so many in bands.

ISOARDI: I mean, would you think there were more than a couple of dozen out of the total membership?

REDD: Let me think, let me think. Maybe as many as thirty-five.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? And this is out of membership of maybe six hundred or so?

REDD: Something like that, yes.

I was just trying to think who else was down there. Leo Davis, Florence Cadrez, Baron Moorehead, Elmer Fain, Paul Howard. And then there was another lady, because I took her place working part-time. Her name was Ella Tate. She used to write songs, too, write lyrics. I would say maybe around thirty-five women at the most. Marie Coker.

ISOARDI: Did you ever hear any of them talk about complaints or any issues that affected them that were different from issues that men would have?

REDD: No. No. No, I didn't, because while working there I didn't have time to discuss issues. And the women's movement, quote, unquote, was not so to the forefront like it is now. Women were just sort of resigned, more or less, just like some blacks were—"Well, this is what I have to accept"—until Martin Luther King [Jr.] and so forth. "This doesn't have to be this way." Many women, I imagine, were the same way. The issue wasn't presented as much.

My mother used to stay on it, "Alton, you're not hiring so-and-so. Why didn't you hire your daughter, Alton?" [laughs] Like that our piano player. "Why didn't you hire Mayola [Givens]? She's good." She's the lady that came to stay with us. I think I mentioned her to you. "Why don't you give Mayola a chance?" My mother was very outspoken on social issues, a very outspoken woman. I think I take some of that from her. [laughs] I mean, it was like this: if you think you're right, speak up. Yeah, she

was that kind of person.

ISOARDI: Good role model.

REDD: Yeah, I should say.

ISOARDI: You graduated from Dorsey when you were eighteen?

REDD: I don't remember if I was seventeen or eighteen.

ISOARDI: Okay. And then what? What's your future? You knew you wanted to go to college?

REDD: Oh, yes, yes. I had been taking voice at USC [University of Southern California] the last year.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? Your last year at Dorsey?

REDD: Yes, I was taking voice lessons at USC. I was a soprano, [sings] "Once upon a time."

ISOARDI: Oh, well, singing was your main thing then?

REDD: Kind of in through there. So I took the entrance exam at USC.

ISOARDI: Oh, an entrance exam?

REDD: Yeah. I passed it. And my girlfriend Doris that I'd mentioned, her folks didn't have the money at the time for her to go to 'SC, and my mother was going to send me to 'SC. So Doris came and begged me, "Please don't go!" So I went to Los Angeles City College with her.

ISOARDI: Oh.

REDD: I went to L.A. City College with her. But it's so ironic, when I finally got my

bachelor's degree, I was two units short at Cal[ifornia] State [University,] Los Angeles, and I had to go to USC to make up those two units before they sent my— Then, when I went back to get my teaching credential, I went to USC. So USC was kind of in my blood in a way. And it was much more expensive, you know.

ISOARDI: Certainly compared to Cal State or LACC.

REDD: Yeah, well, LACC, it was like six dollars per unit or something like that. But anyway, Doris and I were so close that we went to City College. Then that's when I met Eric [Dolphy].

ISOARDI: Oh, you mean you hooked up with him again?

REDD: Yeah. We were in L.A. City College. We had some wonderful teachers there, too.

ISOARDI: Did you have a major at L.A. City College?

REDD: Yes, music and social sciences.

ISOARDI: What were you going to do? Still didn't have any plans yet? Are you just still taking it kind of day by day?

REDD: I thought I was going to teach. I had lost my desire to be a nurse by this time. I wanted to be a good musician, and I really wanted to learn the flute. That's the only thing that really ever defeated me. Sometimes I want to go back and get that sucker and learn that fourth octave. It's difficult.

ISOARDI: Well, you know, Bill [William] Green twisted my arm for I don't know how long before I said, "Okay." I just had been doing alto and soprano [saxophone],

and he said, "Now you've got to try flute." I had no interest in playing flute—

REDD: Oh, I just think it's such a beautiful instrument.

ISOARDI: —and then when I started it, though, I loved it. But it took me a month before I stopped getting dizzy. Once I got past that I was okay.

REDD: I really didn't even know you played.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I studied with Bill Green for a while.

REDD: I felt like I was going to fall out of the chair. I could never get the fingering on that fourth octave. Every time I see someone playing beautifully, like James Moody or like Rahsaan [Roland Kirk] or some of the classics that I see in orchestras, I say, "Oh, there's that flute." It was really something.

But then, by this time, I played for all the fraternity parties and dances. In fact, I even used to go out to UCLA and play dances.

ISOARDI: Really? Why flute?

REDD: Why flute?

ISOARDI: Yeah, how did that come up?

REDD: Oh, because Eric was doing it, and I wanted to learn all of the— I had played clarinet a little bit. I didn't like clarinet, though. My aunt made me learn "Mood Indigo" and all those Duke Ellington things. I didn't care too much for the clarinet, but I really liked the flute. It was a heck of a challenge. It was a heck of a challenge.

ISOARDI: Do you know why Eric picked up flute?

REDD: Well, Eric just wanted to be proficient in everything, you know. Why did he

pick up bass clarinet, you know?

ISOARDI: Well, Buddy [Collette] has told me stories about him playing baritone [saxophone].

REDD: Everything. He just wanted to play everything. He was quite a young man.

ISOARDI: So you mentioned there were a lot of great teachers at LACC.

REDD: Dr. [Leslie P.] Clausen. I think one of the buildings [Clausen Hall] is named for him now out there. There was Mr. [Robert] McDonald, who had this jazz band.

ISOARDI: What did Mr. Clausen teach?

REDD: Harmony, theory. And of course, there was Dr. Straylitzer, who taught the choirs—the classical choir, a cappella choir, and he had the opera program. Dr. Hugo Straylitzer.

And Don Lee White. Don Lee was a professor out at Cal State L.A., but he never played jazz much. He still to this day directs the choir at Grant AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Church. Dr. Straylitzer used to say, "Where's Don Lee? I can't start my class without Don Lee." He was such a good musician and a wonderful person. He's been very active in the music of the city, mostly in church music. Don Lee White. A great organist, a great organist.

ISOARDI: So Eric was there. What other students were there?

REDD: At City College, Billy Bettis— Some of these names I'm going to remember next time and write down for you, because it's going back so far trying to remember all of these names. Billy Bettis had a band. I think Eugene Cravens went to City College

for just a few minutes. [laughs] I'm going to look that up for you. That's important, too.

ISOARDI: What music classes were you taking?

REDD: I took music theory, I took harmony, but I never liked—I've always been a performer, you know? I couldn't sit still long enough. And, see, when I was a child, we had so much music theory. My aunt gave us theory up the you know what.

ISOARDI: Well, you knew all this stuff.

REDD: Right. I knew my music theory. I wasn't as good in harmony, and it would take me longer to write out everything. It just was not my cup of tea. But I knew all about the time and the scales and the different forms of the scale. I had learned that as a child. Miss Hightower, shoot, she taught you that, about your keys and just the theory of music. It wasn't very hard for me. But Dr. Clausen taught harmony. And we used to have sight-reading.

As I'm speaking to you, I'm still trying to think of some of the people that were in music. Oh, Donald Johnson, who had a band around town for many years, he was at City College at the time.

ISOARDI: They had a big band, I assume, right? Did you play?

REDD: Don Johnson had a big band. No, I never played in his band. He didn't have the band until after he left college.

ISOARDI: Could you sign up for a big band class?

REDD: The big band was mostly in the evening, and for some reason I just went to

school in the day. Then later on, toward the last, I did go to night school before I got my degree. I did have some night classes, but I was taking educational classes, because I was working for a credential then. I'm going to really remember some of those. My brother will probably remember, even though he didn't go there. He remembers a lot of musicians. I was able to give Roy Porter somebody's name last week, somebody that he didn't know in his book [*There and Back: The Roy Porter Story*]. I remembered the first name, and my brother remembered the last [name] last night. But I will check that out for you.

ISOARDI: Okay. How long were you at LACC? Was it two years?

REDD: Oh, two years. But I was there about two and a half years, I think, before I graduated.

ISOARDI: So you got an A.A. [Associate in Arts] degree?

REDD: And I didn't want it. I said, "Mother, why do I have to get that? I want to get the B.A. [Bachelor of Arts]." Mother says, "Get everything they've got. Go and make sure you got your A.A., too."

ISOARDI: [laughs] Don't turn anything down.

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: That's good. Are there any other memories you have of LACC that are worth—?

REDD: I was always in all the choir programs.

ISOARDI: So you're still doing a lot of singing?

REDD: Still singing a lot. Yes, I sure was.

I think I must have been at City College about the time when I played for [Frank] Sinatra's daughter. I played for Nancy Sinatra's prom at University High School. ISOARDI: She must have been a kid then. Well, that must have been later.

REDD: I was playing dances then. We had played for one class, and Nancy heard me play. Then she said that she wanted my band to come. Sammy Davis [Jr.] had a big entourage, and when they got through, then my band came on. I had been wanting to see her and just say hello since then, but I haven't— She was someplace with one of her books or something, and I was going to go that day, but I couldn't. I can remember her sitting right on the side of the stage waiting for us to get set up. Yeah, I'm several years older than she is.

So I was playing out at UCLA all up and down Gayley [Avenue].

ISOARDI: This is while you're at LACC?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So you put your own band together then?

REDD: Yeah. Remember I told I had? Then sometimes I had the five-piece group, and then sometimes just my brother, Martha [Young], and I played trio gigs. Then I added Morris Edwards, the person that named me Vi. Well, he lives in New York now and plays. I had him on bass. And then my first husband Nat [Nathaniel Meeks] was on trumpet. But many of the jobs it was just a trio with myself, Martha Young, and my brother, Buddy Redd.

ISOARDI: What got you out performing with your horn?

REDD: I don't know.

ISOARDI: Money? I mean, was it a job?

REDD: Yeah, well, there was just music. The first band I had, the gentleman down there at MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art]—the concert where you were—I introduced him, because, as I recall, his name was Alfred Moore, and he was under superintendent of schools one while here in L.A.

ISOARDI: Alva [Moore Stevenson]'s dad?

REDD: Yes, yes. He formed my first band, and it was called the Futuristic Five.

Alfred and his partner named Cliff [Clifton Dixon] used to go and give dances all around the town. They got me together and had me form a band, and that's how my band got started. Alfred Moore formed my first band, the Futuristic Five.

ISOARDI: That's good.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 31, 1998

ISOARDI: Last time we finished with your years at L.A. [Los Angeles] City College.

But before we actually get too far into the fifties and too past Central Avenue, I was just wondering if you had any thoughts in looking back, maybe why Central Avenue declined, if you have any thoughts about that.

REDD: Well, I think it was because of the [Second World] War, and much of the black population started moving west.

ISOARDI: And that's pretty much what did it?

REDD: Pretty much, yes. We used to use the term loosely, "Do you live on the east side, or are you on the west side?" And that was for a long time just Main Street. You know, it's still considered East and West, the street Main Street. But then, people started moving up near Normandie [Avenue] just from back on the west side. Now, Eric [Dolphy]'s family lived on the west side for many years. He went to elementary school on the west side.

I think the war had a lot to do with it. I really think so. And economic times were better, so people could afford to buy a home.

ISOARDI: So when the opportunity came, people just started moving away?

REDD: Yes. They just started moving away.

ISOARDI: I know that during the end of Central Avenue, you were a kid, and you

were growing up around the avenue. But do you have any thoughts or anything you want to say about how it should be remembered or why it should be remembered?

REDD: Oh, it was very important to the culture of the city. Many careers started there, really. It was very important economically. So many of the musicians that couldn't work in Hollywood and some of the other places because of the race issues, they worked up and down Central Avenue in different bands. It should be remembered because it was like the hub of that loosely called east side. Central Avenue was like that hub, like the airlines have hubs. Central Avenue could be compared to the hub activity. Because on Central Avenue there were not just clubs; it was everything that the community needed. I think we spoke about that earlier. You know, there was the music store, there was the fire department. At that time we only had two fire companies, one on Thirty-fourth Street and Central and the other one on Fourteenth [Street] and Central. The one on Fourteenth and Central I think they recently had some kind of celebration.

ISOARDI: You're right. Yeah, that was recent.

REDD: Because there were only two fire stations. One at Thirty-fourth, right around the corner from my cousin, Dr. Cory Holloway, and right near St. Patrick's, a great big Catholic school. That was the one where if our house would have caught on fire they would have come too, you know. And there were the movie houses: the Florence Mills [Theatre], the Bill Robinson Theatre, the Lincoln Theatre. And there were the restaurants. Gibbs Jockey Club was very important, too. That's where my aunt used

to have us sitting out playing.

ISOARDI: What do you mean?

REDD: That was the restaurant that was called Gibbs Jockey Club.

ISOARDI: It was a restaurant?

REDD: Yes, and they had wonderful food and ambience.

ISOARDI: Where was it?

REDD: It was at Forty-third Street and Central.

ISOARDI: So just on the other side of the Dunbar [Hotel]?

REDD: Right. Right up the street. Gibbs Jockey Club.

ISOARDI: What do you mean? You guys sat out front and played?

REDD: We played on the lot with my aunt when she had Mrs. [Alma] Hightower's Melodic Dots.

ISOARDI: The big band?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: You had the whole band sitting out playing?

REDD: Right. We played in the parking lot. Oh, yes. You know, I have an interesting thought—

ISOARDI: But, hey, that's wild. Could you imagine today walking down the street and all of a sudden there's this big band playing on the side?

REDD: And there's my brother [Buddy Redd] with his big hat on. They used to think he was a midget, you know, because he'd be sitting there playing the drums, and my

aunt, Mrs. Hightower, she'd have her coat on. We'd play three or four numbers, and then the guys in the trumpet section would go out and pass the hat, and then we'd play another three or four numbers. I also remember what we played.

ISOARDI: What did you play?

REDD: We played "Back Bay Shuffle," "Bless You," and one other number, and then she'd tell them, "Okay, go out now." Then the guys would go out with Melba Liston. Melba was in the band, and Melba said when she went somewhere with "Diz" [Dizzy Gillespie], I think it was way in the Middle East—

ISOARDI: Oh, in the fifties, when she was in that big band?

REDD: Yeah, went she went with Diz over there. She said one of those people came up to her and said, "Oh, I remember you. You were one of the kids that used to stand on the corner and play with Miss Hightower." And she said, "I cursed them out." She said that she called him a bad name or two. Now, honest to God, I don't if that actually happened, but she said, "Oh, yeah. We played there, and then we moved further down."

My aunt was something else. I mean, she was really an innovator. And then she had us down on Forty-ninth [Street] and Central, too.

ISOARDI: Another lot?

REDD: Yes, another service station. We played at a service station then, just out there playing, playing these horns. You know, all of us in the band: Robert Ross, Melba, Arthur Walker, James Jackson, myself, my brother, her adopted daughter

Minnie—

ISOARDI: Minnie Hightower?

REDD: Yes. Alice Young—

ISOARDI: Pianist? Yeah, I've heard of her.

REDD: Alice Young. Yes. You should speak with Alice. You've got to speak with Alice.

ISOARDI: I think Clara [Bryant] mentioned her, as well.

REDD: Yes, Alice was in the band with Percy Mayfield when he had that bad accident on the road.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yes. When somebody brought her to my aunt, she was playing all of this music by ear. She could play Avery Parish's "After Hours" and all that kind of music just by ear, you know?

ISOARDI: Gee, and she was just a teenager then.

REDD: Yes. My aunt taught her how to read music and everything. But anyway, I mentioned Alice Young. We were all out there playing.

ISOARDI: So what did you do with the money?

REDD: Well, my God, maybe we'd run down to the—oh, what was the name of that place?—and get some chili right quick. It wasn't much money.

ISOARDI: Was it Coney Island?

REDD: Coney Island.

ISOARDI: Is that the chili place?

REDD: Yes, that was the chili place. Gibbs had some good chili, too. And we didn't make that much, but, my God, think of that.

ISOARDI: How often would you do this?

REDD: Every other weekend.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, yes. We'd sit down. You know, my brother and I were riding the other day—yesterday, in fact—down Hawthorne Boulevard, and we remember as kids—
Now, imagine east Thirty-third Street way on the other side of Central. She found a place for us to play in Hawthorne. We used to play for dances in Hawthorne, and we lived like on east Thirty-third Street near Jefferson High School. At that time we hadn't moved west. But Aunt Alma found us—we always referred to her as Aunt Alma because she's my auntie—this gig, and we made about ninety cents apiece. She'd take the whole band to this place, and we had to bring the instruments all the way upstairs. She was something else. How she would find these gigs, you know?

ISOARDI: Well, that's the way to learn. What a wonderful experience.

REDD: Yeah, and she was bold, too. You know the race thing? Oh, Hawthorne was very racist, but she didn't care. You know, she never—I don't know where that woman came from. [mutual laughter] She was the most unusual female I think I've ever known in my life.

ISOARDI: But what a role model.

REDD: Oh, yeah, yeah. A cook, musician—I mean, she was something else. I'm glad that I had some of her genes, you know? She was too much, I'm telling you. Too much.

ISOARDI: Did you very often play off Central in other places? Did you ever travel outside of Los Angeles and play or anything like that?

REDD: Not much. We didn't travel out far too much. But she had us playing at market openings. There was a market down the street on the left-hand side of the street called the Victory Market. Reverend Clayton D. Russell was very important, too, because he was the minister of the Independent Church, and he was like our Adam Clayton Powell out here on the West Coast. He led this thing, "Don't spend your money where you can't work."

ISOARDI: Oh, I've heard of that campaign.

REDD: Yeah. And he had Victory Markets, and we played for the openings of one of the Victory Markets. That was at Forty-third Place and Central. You know, we played at First AME [American Methodist Episcopal Church] when it was downtown. That's where I sang my first note in church, I think. It was at Eighth [Street] and Towne [Avenue]. It's now a historical monument or something. Now it's over here on Harvard [Boulevard], Reverend [Cecil L.] Murray. She had us playing everything.

One time she put us on a truck. We were on a truck playing for political things.

ISOARDI: Like on the back of a flatbed?

REDD: Right. Playing, you know. I don't remember whose campaign it was, but, I mean, she had us playing. She knew [Gilbert] Lindsay. Everybody knew her.

ISOARDI: Did she do the music? Where did you get the music from?

REDD: Oh, she'd get some of it from the music store, and she'd write a lot of it. She'd write our parts out.

ISOARDI: So she'd get stocks and then maybe rewrite them a bit or something?

REDD: She'd get stocks and add to it, rewrite, and make different arrangements.

Then Melba would help her, because Melba was really sharp. She still is, in spite of the illness that she's had.

ISOARDI: Oh, I know.

REDD: She's back in New York again. I hope she's well. I hope she's doing okay.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I heard. She's still arranging great. I just sent her a letter, because she's one of the people in the book [*Central Avenue Sounds*], and I'm going to send her a copy of it.

REDD: I had an address on her and a telephone number, but I think the telephone number was disconnected. Or did you send it to her aunt's house?

ISOARDI: No, no. I got her address in New York from Clora, and I mailed it—someplace in 140s, I think, 145th Street or something like that.

REDD: Well, she had us all over town. I'm telling you, that woman was something.

I sort of wandered off in a sense as you were asking me why I thought Central Avenue should be remembered.

ISOARDI: Well, you're saying why.

REDD: I mean, everything was there. It was just a hub, because not only were your needs for entertainment satisfied—movies, as much entertainment as we had—but all of the mortuaries, the libraries. The library was on Central, too, right at Forty-fifth [Street]. It's named the Leon Washington Library, now. It's named after the gentleman that founded the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, but I don't remember what the name was then. The library was there; that was at Forty-fifth and Central. And even further toward town you had your major markets. They're still down there. You know, produce markets and things.

ISOARDI: Yeah, the stuff down around Tenth [Street], Eleventh [Street], Twelfth [Street], and that area?

REDD: Right. My mother used to take us to the bank. For the first bank account that I ever had when I was a kid, my mother took us to the bank at Eleventh and Central. We'd get on the "B" car and go to Eleventh and Central to bank of—I don't know, bank of somebody. I think it was Bank of America. I want no plug for them, but—

ISOARDI: Really? I think that most of the produce places down there now are all Latino.

REDD: Oh, yeah. They were Italian a lot when we were growing up.

ISOARDI: I think around Eleventh and Central there's this old hotel or place that used to be a hotel about four or five stories high. But judging by the look of it, that must go back to the World War I or before it.

REDD: Probably so, probably so.

ISOARDI: This might be an usual question, but is there any way you could put your finger on maybe how Central Avenue shaped you? Are there things that you can point to that you really got out of growing up in that scene?

REDD: As I said before, indirectly— Let me see. I have to give that some thought, because other than the fact that my father [Alton Redd] worked in the area, I met like Marshal [Royal] and Evelyn [Williamson Royal]. The musicians would come to the house, and my mother [Mattie Thomas Redd] would cook for them, and I'd meet them. And of course, I was in awe of them. But Central Avenue, per say, I'd have to give more thought to that to really say how it shaped my life other than in the terms of economics. My father was employed there. I knew that I'd better get home from McKinley-Carver Junior High School and scoot down Central Avenue as fast as I could to get home by three thirty and get the instruments out so we could practice. But let me think more about that.

ISOARDI: Okay. I think last time when we had stopped, you were finished with LACC, and your mother had insisted that you get your A.A. [Associate in Arts] degree, right? Then what were your plans? Did you have any?

REDD: At that time?

ISOARDI: Yeah. What did you want to do?

REDD: Oh, then I wanted to teach. I got interested in teaching.

ISOARDI: Teach what?

REDD: I wanted to teach music at first, and social studies. I was always interested. But I was still playing, because I played all of the dances around here—the sorority parties and the fraternity parties.

ISOARDI: You had a band at this time?

REDD: Yes. I played gigs the whole time. Even when I transferred to Cal[ifornia] State [University], Los Angeles I was still playing. The first time I ever went out of town on the road I went with Dick Hart, and I hadn't started doing that.

That reminds me, my father never would go on the road much.

ISOARDI: Really? Didn't like it?

REDD: No, he didn't travel much. Well, he had a family, and, you know, he was strictly family. He'd come home to his bed and get his meals, you know? And somebody said, "I'll be darned, Alton would never go on the road." When he finally decided to go on the road, where did he go? He takes off and goes to Europe when he went with Kid Ory in 1959.

ISOARDI: He did it right. [mutual laughter]

REDD: Yeah, he really took a— My mother went with him, too.

Let's see. Oh, what other activities did I have?

ISOARDI: So after LACC you transferred to Cal State L.A., and you stayed there and got your B.A. [Bachelor of Arts]?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: In music?

REDD: In social studies and education. My last two years I switched when I decided I was going to teach.

ISOARDI: So while you were at Cal State then you kept playing? You had your band on the side, you played your gigs, and you got your bachelor's?

REDD: Oh, yeah, I just kept playing everywhere, everywhere. Let's see now. I'm trying to think about what time my older son was born and when I— He was a little fellow. Gosh, after a while all the years just sort of come and mesh together as you try to figure out what you did. Somewhere in there I left town with Dick Hart. That was after my marriage.

ISOARDI: When did you get married?

REDD: Let's see. In 1953, I think.

ISOARDI: Had you finished Cal State L.A. then? Did you have your bachelor's?

REDD: I think I got it the next year. Isn't funny how, as the song says, [sings] "Time just slips right on the way."

ISOARDI: Yeah. You haven't thought about it in a long time.

REDD: Yeah, I know it. The years just mesh.

Well, during that time is when I started playing with Dick Hart.

ISOARDI: Why don't you tell us something about Dick Hart, his background. Do you know anything about him?

REDD: Oh, yeah, I know a lot about Dick. Dick was playing during that time in the Midwest. Oh, I can't think of the name of this band now that he played with. He'd

probably know.

ISOARDI: A territory band?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: Where? Out in the Midwest?

REDD: Nebraska and all in through there. Oh, who was the guy? Because I did get a chance to meet him. We were someplace working, and he introduced me to him. The first band he ever played with, he played with Junior Raglin .

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Junior Raglin that later played with Duke Ellington. He made a bass. He played through that era, and with Johnny Otis. In fact, I think he brought Johnny Otis out here.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: Yeah. This is important. I really ought to ask Dick. Can I stop and ask him?

ISOARDI: Oh, because I think Johnny came out here with Harlan Leonard's band, the Rockets, Harlan Leonard's Rockets, to play at the [Club] Alabam.

REDD: It's important to me, though, because that was my first trip out on the road to play. [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: How did you hook up with him? Did he have a band?

REDD: Yeah, he had a band, and he asked me to join the band. We did this gig in Palm Springs [California], and we left from Palm Springs' gorgeous weather to—that's the first time I saw snow, really—Great Falls, Montana.

ISOARDI: This is in the winter?

REDD: Yes. And it was cold. It was like in November or something like that. We worked in a hotel there. Then, from Great Falls, we had a week off, and I came back home. Then we went to Rapid City, South Dakota. You know, a lot of Indian people were there. Oh, gosh, it was wonderful.

ISOARDI: So it was good, your first road trip?

REDD: Yeah. We're still friends. We lost track of each other when I lived up north for a while. From '64 to '67 I lived in Berkeley [California], which is another interesting part of my life. I was married to Richie Goldberg at the time, the drummer who has passed on. We were very involved in all of the activities— What's the gentleman's name that was in charge of the Free Speech Movement?

ISOARDI: Mario Savio?

REDD: That's it. He was six doors from us. He was my neighbor.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah, he was my neighbor. And we were involved in the Caesar Chavez— Richie would go on Saturdays down to the grape strikers in Delano [California]. We knew Ronnie Stevenson. He was a very active, very progressive person. We played a lot of benefits for everything, all the progressive movements coming out of the college. My sons loved it up there.

ISOARDI: I'll bet. That was an incredible time.

REDD: Oh, I should say it was!

ISOARDI: I was living in San Mateo [California] then, just on the other side of the [San Francisco] Bay. That's where I grew up.

REDD: I met this girl, and I wanted to see her some more—Dolores Huerta.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

REDD: She's still living?

ISOARDI: I think so.

REDD: Yes, I think I saw her on television not so long ago. That was the last person that Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy spoke to before he was assassinated. And I learned so much in Berkeley. At that time, oh, it was jumping! The Black Panther Party.

ISOARDI: In Oakland [California]? Did you spend much time in Oakland with the Black Panther Party?

REDD: I wasn't a part of it, but I was coming home from the beauty shop one day, and I saw all these guys on the corner with these guns, and I said, "Oh, my God, what is happening?" And they were getting ready to march to Sacramento. Of course, they actually walked into the legislature with these guns. I said, "Richie, the guys have got guns out here." Oh, gosh. But that was a marvelous learning— And I played all up there. I had one of the last bands to ever play Slim Jenkins.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: You ever heard of Slim Jenkins in Oakland?

ISOARDI: Oh, Oakland still is a major blues center.

REDD: Yeah, he had a club called Slim Jenkins. I was one of the last people to play

there—Martha [Young], myself, and Richie. I played out in Richmond [California] during that time. That was quite a bit after what we were talking about. But there's just so much. I guess I'm just going to have to start writing some of it down. That was a very, very interesting part of my life. I'm glad that I left. I was having some domestic problems at the time, and we thought we could do better if we went into Northern California.

ISOARDI: Why Berkeley?

REDD: Because I didn't like San Francisco to live. You know, I like San Francisco, but then when we met Ronnie Stevenson he said, "Well, you know, I can get you a place in Berkeley." I don't know. Richie and I stayed in a hotel for a while, and I think the kids were— Then we decided we wouldn't live in San Francisco, and we decided on Berkeley. And, I mean, they had the coffeehouses, they had the thrift shops. Everything was just like utopia there. They had the markets that were the co-ops, you know. It was a grand time. It's very ironic that my present husband, Mr. Avelino, was living up there at the same time, but we didn't know each other.

ISOARDI: You mean in Berkeley?

REDD: Oakland. He lived in Oakland from '66. He came there in '66.

ISOARDI: But you didn't know each other?

REDD: No, no. I was married to Richie at the time. Oh, was that an interesting time. Or was that an interesting time? Oh, those days!

ISOARDI: Oh, that was extraordinary. Yeah, I ended up staying up there to go to

college in San Francisco

REDD: Where did you go?

ISOARDI: The University of San Francisco. I didn't want to leave the city. It was just too much, and musically— Everything.

REDD: I should say, it was just too much going on. Right, right. I used to work at the Jazz Workshop on Monday and Tuesday nights. That's where I first saw Thelonious Monk and his wife Nellie [Smith Monk]. Richie had been living in New York, and he knew a lot of the musicians that I didn't know, spending so much time on the West Coast. And, God, he used to bring everybody home for me to fix spaghetti. Oh, God, my house was full all the time. Art Blakey and his guys. That's how I met McCoy Tyner, [laughs] frying chicken for them. That was really, really an interesting experience. But when we separated, my oldest son [Charles Meeks]— He still has friends that he met while he was up there.

ISOARDI: How many kids did you have, anyway?

REDD: Two. I just had two.

ISOARDI: Who were they?

REDD: Randall [Goldberg] and Charles.

ISOARDI: And how old were they when they were up there? They were just babies?

REDD: Oh, no. Randy started kindergarten— Well, yeah, they were little fellows.

He started kindergarten in Berkeley. And, oh, boy, did he love his kindergarten teacher. I can remember her to this day, because he cried— You know Hills Brothers

coffee? She married one of those brothers. A kindergarten teacher, you know.

ISOARDI: Gee, she could buy the school.

REDD: Yeah. I'll never forget her, she was so wonderful. She said she waited until she was thirty-two [years old] to marry, and she wanted to "marry well," quote, unquote. She married one of the people from— Randy cried and cried because he didn't have his teacher. She was telling him, "Well, I've got to get married now" and so forth and so on.

But anyway, my other son still has a friend, a Japanese young man named Wayne. That family was very close to us. Another thing about Berkeley is that ethnically it was just something else. You know, sometime I'm going to go the library and just read about the history of Berkeley, because when I look back now at Berkeley and the things that happened there, I would like to know more about the founders of the city. And really, my husband will tell you, whenever I go up north—we were just there right after Christmas—I have to go there. It's something that draws me there. And particularly, in of the dime stores—it used to be one of the dime stores—Cress, on the corner of University [Avenue] and Shattuck [Avenue], somewhere on Shattuck, it draws me there. There was something so vibrant in Berkeley at that time until— When I go north now I still must go down Shattuck and University.

ISOARDI: I'm the same way. I always make a point of going back up there and walking on Telegraph [Avenue] and going into the Cafe Mediterranean and having a coffee.

REDD: Absolutely. People just don't remember— They don't realize what that was, how significant to the history of this country Berkeley was in the sixties. They used to say, "The way Berkeley goes, the way the rest of the rest of the country goes."

There was jazz in little holes and, you know, jazz programs. I have some jazz things from some write-ups that I had. I worked up there. I worked in San Francisco at a club. I'm going to get some more of these things better organized for you the next time you come, because that was a very significant time in my life.

ISOARDI: Why did you leave?

REDD: Well, I went to Europe for the first time. My husband and I separated, and I got an offer to come to Ronnie Scott's, so I went.

ISOARDI: As a single?

REDD: Yes, I went as a single, because they had a rhythm section there. I went over. They still had that problem of musicians—

ISOARDI: Oh, you couldn't play over there unless one of theirs came over here or something like that?

REDD: Right. Absolutely. So I went over as a vocalist.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right, because it didn't apply to singers.

REDD: Right. As soon as I got there after about three or four nights, they said, "Hey, you're doing more playing than you're doing singing." Leonard Feather was very instrumental in helping me get this booking. They said, "You've got to join our union now," because— And, oh, my God, these were three great months.

ISOARDI: You were there for three months?

REDD: Yeah, ten weeks.

ISOARDI: That's a long time.

REDD: They didn't want me to leave. They wanted me to be a British subject.

ISOARDI: Did you think about staying there?

REDD: No. I had to get home to my kids, you know. Mother eternal.

ISOARDI: Where were your kids?

REDD: They were here with my mother in Los Angeles, and I had to hurry and get home. One guy said to me, "If you could just forget your kids for a while and just stop in New York, we'll make you a big star." I said, "Oh, I've got to get home to my kids."

It's always my kids. And I have no regrets in terms of being a good mother.

At Ronnie Scott's there's never been an American— I played there longer than any American.

ISOARDI: Oh, the ten weeks? That was the longest?

REDD: See, because they booked me— Ronnie used to have a singer and then a musical act, you see, to work the first two. And it was really the whole spectrum of jazz. They booked me to work two weeks. When I first came in, I worked two weeks with Ben Webster, then I worked two weeks—

ISOARDI: He was the musical act, and you were the singer?

REDD: Right, and I was supposed to be the singer, but I was playing.

ISOARDI: Did you play with Ben? Or did you have separate shows?

REDD: No, we had separate sets. Then after that was two weeks with Archie Shepp and two weeks with Max [Roach], and then four weeks with Coleman Hawkins. I was playing more and more and more. I was getting into it more and more.

ISOARDI: Oh, God.

REDD: I'll let you see some of the write-ups sometime.

ISOARDI: No [John] Coltrane?

REDD: No, "Trane" was gone by then.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's right. If you were there in '67. Yeah, that's right. He had just died.

REDD: Because Eric [Dolph] passed in '64, I believe. But you know who was there? And not only was I working in a club, the other guys were coming over and playing concerts all around. The bass player— Gosh, everybody I talk about now seems like he's passed on. The guy that used to play bass.

ISOARDI: With Trane?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Jimmy Garrison?

REDD: Right, right, Jim. Wait a minute. No, before Jimmy.

ISOARDI: Art Davis?

REDD: Wait, hold on. The little short one. Jimmy Garrison, right?

ISOARDI: Well, Jimmy Garrison was in his classic quartet with McCoy Tyner.

REDD: Right, that's him. He was over there playing with somebody at that time.

And Miles [Davis] came over. All the musicians were coming over. My flat was the head- quarters.

ISOARDI: Oh, God. [laughs]

REDD: Oh, it was headquarters. Herbie [Hancock] and Tony Williams and— Oh, I had such a marvelous experience then, too.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Max was just so wonderful to me.

ISOARDI: You know, he's in town this month.

REDD: Where?

ISOARDI: Max Roach. At the Jazz Bakery.

REDD: You've got to be kidding me.

ISOARDI: No, he's going to be there around the third week in February. They just sent me their calendar.

REDD: I have something I have been trying to get to him since he send me some sticks at the time of Randy's leaving, and for some reason I've never been able to talk about it to him. Maybe I'll go over and see him. I hope he won't hate me forever.

ISOARDI: Why would he hate you?

REDD: Because he sent these sticks, and I just haven't been able to— I know when I see him it's going to be hard. But anyway, he's coming to town?

ISOARDI: Yeah, and when I get home I'll call you with the dates and tell you exactly.

REDD: Maybe I should send him a little note in advance to tell him, "Please don't be

angry with me. I love you, and I can talk to you better when I see you"—sometime like that, so he won't be so angry.

ISOARDI: So what happens in between this time? You take your first road trip with Dick Hart, right? And by this time you're married, though. Why do you get married?

REDD: I guess I was in love.

ISOARDI: Who did you marry?

REDD: I married Richie then.

ISOARDI: Because this is around '53, right?

ISOARDI: Oh, no, I married Nathaniel Meeks. That's Charles's father. Charles Meeks.

ISOARDI: And Nathaniel was a trumpeter?

REDD: Yes. We were married for about three years.

ISOARDI: Where did you meet him?

REDD: Playing around Los Angeles. He was in Roy Porter's band at one time. I had another young man by the name of Sherman Lassiter. His sister was a wonderful singer. He got sick one night or something. We were playing at the Elks auditorium. I was playing for some dance. I don't know who it was, but they said, "Why don't you use this trumpet player, Nathaniel Meeks? He's really good." I used him, and then I married him subsequently. [laughs] But that's how that happened.

ISOARDI: Did you two play together after you got married?

REDD: Yes, a little bit. We played together. Yeah, he had his problems, and we

divorced.

ISOARDI: How long after?

REDD: I was married for about three years and five months, almost four years. I had one son from that marriage.

ISOARDI: That's Charles.

REDD: And then later I married Richie, and I had one son from that marriage.

ISOARDI: How did you meet Richie?

REDD: I was playing at the Shrine Auditorium for some kind of beauty contest or something. I was in the band, the only woman—I don't remember who else was in that band—but Richie [Goldberg] was with Ray Charles, and they came also to play this event. That horn has gotten me into a lot of trouble. [laughs] That's how I met my present husband. The horn always gets me— Oh, God. So that's how we met. After, I was waiting. Someone was supposed to pick him up or something for him to take his drums over on Central Avenue that night. He was going to leave the drums, because they were going to play Central that night.

ISOARDI: Central?

REDD: At the Elks, Central Avenue.

ISOARDI: So there were things still going on at the Elks?

REDD: So he didn't have a way to get there or something, and he had started talking to me or something, and I gave him a ride, my cousin and I, Dorothy. She came by to pick me up in her car, and we carried him over there to leave his drums. He gave me

some money and said, "I want you to come back tonight to hear the band." And I said, "Okay, I'll be back." And that's how we met. By this time I was divorced from Nathaniel. And we married in the study of Reverend Rakestraw at Wesley Methodist Church over on Main Street.

ISOARDI: So this was the later fifties?

Throughout all this time you take the one road trip with Dick Hart, but that's pretty much it, then? You're based in Los Angeles after that?

REDD: Right.

ISOARDI: Are you playing mostly?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: You're not teaching at all? Did you ever try and follow up on that?

REDD: Oh, I did social work for a while, too. I worked for the County of Los Angeles as a social case worker.

ISOARDI: When did that happen? When you came back from the road?

REDD: After, but I retired when Randy was born. I was doing that when I was carrying Randy. When he was born, then I resigned from that. Some of the years are kind of clearing up now, because that was in '60.

ISOARDI: So you weren't playing much then?

REDD: Yeah, I was still playing gigs, parties.

ISOARDI: Even with the two kids then, you're still playing a lot?

REDD: Yes. I was still playing. Like if the office was having a party or something,

they'd ask me to play the music. Yeah, I was still playing. I'm going to get some of this better for you in chronological order, because I feel like I'm kind of jumping.

ISOARDI: Well, that's okay. I wouldn't worry about it.

REDD: Because things come to you as you talk, and then the minute you say Berkeley, well, then everything comes out. And, you know, that's where I rediscovered—and this was important to me, too, because she was up there in this god-forsaken place in a very ugly domestic situation—Martha Young. Martha's daughter, Sandra [Young]—and they're both gone—was my goddaughter. I christened her right there in that house, 1710 South Central [Avenue], where the Youngs lived.

ISOARDI: Yeah, right next to where the Youngs lived.

REDD: Right. Well, anyway, she and Sandra were up in Pittsburg, California. This man that she was married to had taken her to Pittsburg, California.

ISOARDI: What is it about Pittsburg? God, just a little steel town, I think.

REDD: Right. It's grown some now, I think. But she was in a very ugly domestic situation, and Richie and I went up there, and, I mean, we just kidnapped her.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah. We just got her out of there, her and Sandra.

ISOARDI: She wanted to go?

REDD: Oh, yeah, she was ready to go then, but she needed someone to— He had just torn her down so she didn't even think she could play anymore. Then after we got her out of there she stayed with us for a while.

ISOARDI: Who was her father?

REDD: I don't know Martha's father. Her uncles are Lee and Lester Young. That's Irma [Young]'s daughter. Piano player.

ISOARDI: Yeah. I can't remember who Irma—

REDD: Irma was Martha's mother, Lee and Lester's sister.

ISOARDI: But her husband, you don't remember who that was?

REDD: I knew Martha's husband. Let me see. She was married to a twin the first time. I can't think of his name. But this one I'm talking about, his name is not even worth remembering. I think he's gone on, too. But he was very mean.

Anyway, Richie and I went up there and actually kidnapped her out of that situation. And she said, "Look at my refrigerator." Should I say all these things?

ISOARDI: Sure. She wasn't performing?

REDD: No. He wouldn't let her.

ISOARDI: He just locked her in the house?

REDD: Oh, he was mean, mean, just mean. And he would fight her. Whenever they say "domestic abuse," I always think about her, because she took some stuff off her— In fact, my brother, with his strange sense of humor— He [the husband] was fighting her before she left and went up to Pittsburg.

ISOARDI: Fighting her not to go?

REDD: Fighting her just physically. And she would come to work with patches over her eye, and Buddy would say, "Oh, we've got George Shearing tonight. You're not

seeing us." He [the husband again] would fight her something terrible.

ISOARDI: This is the guy who took her to Pittsburg?

REDD: Yes. He took her to Pittsburgh, and after so long— I remember one time when she remembered when she lived here, she said that when Eric came to San Francisco one time she cried that night because he wouldn't let her go to see Eric Dolphy play.

Some men are just so mean with this domestic thing. Well, luckily, I've never been involved with that kind of thing, that domestic violence bit, because I couldn't stay with you. If you hit me one time, I'd be gone. But talk about low self-esteem, it was down to the—

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Richie and I had been playing gigs together. When I moved up north, she was so happy. So Richie and I just went and got her and Sandra.

ISOARDI: Jeez.

REDD: As long as you've known her, was low self-esteem always a problem?

REDD: It was.

ISOARDI: Was it because she was Lester Young's niece and Lee Young's niece?

REDD: No, she had a problem with her weight at the time that kind of affected her. But some people just have low self-esteem, and in their family situations they're not encouraged. But I can't really say that in terms of her family, because her grandfather taught her. There was no abuse of that kind. They were a nice family.

Sometimes, some people are just more submissive than others. But she'd raise hell on the bandstand with the musicians, oh, my God. But she never raised hell with—I'm not even going to say his name. He was such a brute.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 31, 1998

ISOARDI: This is probably as good a time as any to ask you about your observations about problems of being a woman playing in jazz and R and B [rhythm and blues].

REDD: At that time, you mean when I had my own band?

ISOARDI: Well, yeah, and in general.

REDD: Well, I know one thing: Dick used to encourage me a lot. And he hired women a lot, too, because he hired Clora at one time, and he used to tell me all the time— We went one time, and I think Ruth Brown or somebody was playing, and I was hesitant to get up, because I thought, "Oh, I can't do that." And he said to me, "Look, I don't care if Lena Horne is playing on this stand. You do what you know you can do. Somebody will like you, and somebody will like Lena." He would always encourage me. When I had my own group, I didn't have as many problems, because as I got older I found out about the problems of being female and them not wanting you to— I think that all stemmed from the fact that a woman taught me. My aunt, Mrs. Hightower, never gave me any preconceived ideas that I was going to have problems playing an instrument—other than the piano maybe—as I grew up, because I saw her do everything. I saw her play drums, play trumpet, play this, play that, recite poetry, and I never conceived of the idea that there was going to be gender prejudice. Well, a

little bit in my own home, in a way, because my father didn't hire that many women musicians.

ISOARDI: Did your aunt ever give him a hard time for that?

REDD: No, my mother used to give him a hard time. There was a friend of ours named Mayola Givens—I think I've mentioned her—she was a good friend of my mother's.

ISOARDI: Oh, your mother said something like, "Why don't you hire Mayola?"

REDD: Oh, could she play and sing, and she was a beautiful woman. I think he finally hired Mayola. But when my father and I played together for the first time, I hired him. Really, that's true. That's how we played together. I'm saying that to say I never thought that there were going to be any limits on me, but I found out as I got older.

ISOARDI: How?

REDD: A couple of guys walking off the bandstand.

ISOARDI: That happened to you?

REDD: Yeah. And it still happens. I had some experience of that recently.

ISOARDI: You're kidding.

REDD: Yeah, it still happens. Some guys that are insecure, you know, they don't welcome you like they welcome another man.

ISOARDI: When did that start happening? I mean, was it when you started playing more outside of Los Angeles? Or was it everywhere?

REDD: It's everywhere. It's everywhere on certain occasions with certain kind—
There was a guy that had a big band, and he was popular, too, up in the San Francisco area, an Italian guy. He used to have a band, and they used to play jazz concerts all around the Bay Area. I'm going to try to remember his name, because he used to encourage me. I used to do guest spots with his big band up there all the time. In fact, I have some of the memorabilia from that. But it's out there, you know? Guys just have some problems about—

ISOARDI: Still?

REDD: Yeah. Not all of them, but some guys still have it to this day. I was surprised about this recent incident.

ISOARDI: Was this in Los Angeles? Or was it somewhere else?

REDD: No, it was back East. It's amazing, you know. After I played a number, he was "Oh, you can play." That time I was unnerved, but the situation was such that I came there to do that, and that's what I did. I had told my friend John Conyers I was coming. I'll tell you what the event was. It was the tenth-year celebration of jazz as a national treasure. You know, he passed that bill. He got that bill passed in Congress, and they celebrated it, and I received an invitation, and I went.

ISOARDI: I've always thought Washington [D.C.] was a southern town.

REDD: Well, it had nothing to do with race; it was gender strictly. But life goes on. I was kind of really taken aback. I couldn't believe it. At this late date in my life? So that lets me know what the younger women musicians are still encountering.

Sometimes I want to talk to Terri Lyne—

ISOARDI: Terri Lyne Carrington?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: Yeah, a wonderful drummer.

REDD: I remember when she first started playing with Rahsaan [Roland Kirk] when she was a little girl. He used to come out. He used to stay with me all the time.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, we were very close, very close.

ISOARDI: God, I've just been on this big kick of his.

REDD: Rahsaan?

ISOARDI: I just got this ten-CD set of all his Mercury [Records] recordings. I've just been playing them all the time.

REDD: I used to pick him up at the airport. And I can tell you some funny experiences we've had. He was another one that really pushed women.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: And I played with him out here at UCLA.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, yes. He was very supportive of me.

ISOARDI: I like his music so much.

REDD: He used to say, "You ought to be my agent, because there's only one of you and one of me." That's what he used to tell me. He used to call me from all different

points: "Cook something," and "Get the red beans on." And Randy used to run around the corner and get him his red soda pops. And, oh, God— We were very good friends. I'm still in touch with his wife. I get cards from her. And when I can think of it, I bring her Sees candy, because she loves Sees Candy.

ISOARDI: She lives here?

REDD: No, she lives in New Jersey. I might call her later on this afternoon. She sent me a card. I don't know if I sent her one for Christmas.

These are guys who were so secure within themselves, and they look at the art; they don't look at your sex. Maybe they look at your— Now, how can I say this? Let me be careful the way I say this. They look at the fact that you're a woman physically. You know what I'm saying?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Rahsaan had no vision, but he used to tell me, "Girl, baby, you sure look good." My house here, he'd get the feel of it, and he'd say, "Your house goes round and around, huh, Vi?" See how you come out of the kitchen and go around and around? In fact, I recorded for him. When he had that stroke, I was so concerned about him. And Warner Bros. [Records] allowed him to do something. He did. And then he recorded me, and he recorded somebody else after he had the stroke. I went back there, and I wanted him to know that I was supportive of him. I don't know who has the master [tape].

ISOARDI: Never released?

REDD: Never released. They paid me, but it was never released. I think Dorthaan [Kirk], his wife, might have those. But it was done by Warner Bros.

ISOARDI: Yeah, well, the record company still does.

REDD: Oh, and when I got back home I had to fight to get my money. I had to get a friend of mine to call his friend at Warner Bros. Because they went over budget. You know how they do the jazz musicians. And you know what? I can say this right here.

In terms of how they do jazz musicians for their money and hassling with their lawyers if you went over budget five hundred dollars or something— The other night when I sat here and I looked at that American Music program—

ISOARDI: Yeah, the American Music Awards.

REDD: I was almost in tears. To think that there was no jazz hardly even mentioned.

There was a brief appearance of the wonderful George Benson, and they had him with this new girl, Erykah Badu. She's sort of in the jazz genre a little bit. But not only did they not present him properly, they almost cut him off at the tail end of his music. I kept telling my husband, I said, "This is American music and there's no jazz?"

Nothing but a slight appearance, and he was accompanying somebody! Can you believe that? It's sick.

ISOARDI: Yeah, he shouldn't have taken the gig.

REDD: It's sick, you know? I'm blessed to the point that I don't have to do it. If I can't be presented properly, forget it. There was a time I had to do it. "I'll take this."

No more. Because with the music goes a lot of dignity. And I know what some

musicians put up with for me, in a way, to make it better. Well, I don't know. I'm saying that, and yet I'm saying maybe what my father put up with to bring me up and give me a comfortable life—not being able to sit at the tables, eat in the back, and all that bullshit— You see? As Rahsaan says— And I'm not saying this in any vanity, but I don't know any other woman in the history of the music that played and sang besides myself. He always used to say that.

ISOARDI: Well, there were so few women who were playing horns anyway. You can count them on one hand.

REDD: Right, right. So I am left to speak, and I will speak. I was almost in tears the other night. I was upset. American music. How can you present American music without jazz?

REDD: Well, things like that are run by the big record companies that are pushing popular music.

REDD: Oh, I know, I know why it happens. But at least at the Grammy [Award]s— Well, no, the Grammys are almost as bad. Because what do they do? They have all the jazz before it comes on television, and they don't realize how many people like jazz.

REDD: Well, I know at the school I teach, this is what all the kids are listening to now is jazz and blues again.

REDD: Are you kidding?

ISOARDI: No, the most popular band at the school is a blues band.

REDD: Isn't that something?

ISOARDI: That's what they're listening to.

REDD: It's a private school, eh? I went over to Washington Prep[aratory High School]. Now, they've got a good program going over there.

ISOARDI: They've got a fine music program.

REDD: Yeah. We went there for Martin Luther King [Jr.]'s— They had a principal [Marguerite Poin La Motte] over there— What's her name? She's a marvelous woman and doing a marvelous job at that school. She is from Louisiana. They had what she called a cultural-jazz-Martin Luther King holiday all in one. They had the band play "[When] the Saints Go Marching In." They did the Louisiana thing with the umbrellas and all that. But they do have a fine jazz program over there at that school, but it's so limited. Maybe at Washington and maybe at Locke [High School]—

ISOARDI: It's only in a few schools. And Hamilton [High School].

REDD: And Hamilton? Maybe, yeah.

ISOARDI: After you're out of school and you're playing around, do you run into many other women who are playing? I'm sure you run into vocalists, but—

REDD: You mean right now?

ISOARDI: No, no. I mean back then in the fifties.

REDD: Not too many. No, very few, in fact. I see more now. I'm not working with them, per se, but there are more now. Some of them play with these rock bands. There are a couple of shows on television now that have women who are holding

instruments. Their level of musicianship I question. It's the sex:: breasts out— You know, that kind of thing.

ISOARDI: There are a number of women in jazz and horn players who are recording.

REDD: Oh, yeah. Jane Ira Bloom.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that's who I was thinking of, too.

REDD: Right. She's good. Soprano [saxophone]. But I'm saying there are a couple of programs that are on now that I think are beginning to try to get women as gimmicks, and I kind of resent it. Quincy [Jones]'s show, *The Vibe* show, and then that other show that comes on, they've got the girls hitting a few chords, and I said, "Oh, are we going back to that?" You know what I'm saying?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: It's the sex thing again. It's the gender thing again. You know, you've got to be up here, and you've got to shake your booty, that kind of thing.

ISOARDI: Do you know of women who might have run into anything more than just sort of not being taken seriously? Were there any other kinds of pressures or issues?

REDD: Explain that a little more.

ISOARDI: Well, I can tell you this story now because it's part of the public record.

When I interviewed Melba [Liston], she told me— I don't know if she talked about this before or not. I was asking her what it was like being on the road with big bands.

I asked everyone who did that about their highs and lows. People say how great it is being able to play with a lot of good musicians on a daily basis like that and how much

you learn. Then I asked her about the lows, and most people usually talk about the long bus rides from place to place, endless one-nighters. That's tough.

REDD: Well, I didn't have much of that.

ISOARDI: Well, that's what everybody's expecting people to say. And Melba got really quiet, and she didn't say that. She said, "Well, it was the rapes."

REDD: Oh. Well, I never had any experiences like that.

ISOARDI: And the thing that floored me was that it was plural.

REDD: Really?

ISOARDI: It wasn't just rape; she said it was the rapes.

REDD: Well, you've got to be kidding.

ISOARDI: No. I couldn't get over it. She didn't want to talk about it. It was the only time I didn't know what to say in interviews. I asked her one or two questions like—

REDD: "Are you sure?"

ISOARDI: No, like, "How could that happen? You're with the band, and you have all these guys to protect you." She said, "It was the guys in the band."

ISOARDI: Oh, really? Well, I never heard of anything. I never had such an experience personally, because I wasn't in many buses, you know. But I can't speak to that issue.

ISOARDI: But you never heard stories from the few women who might have been able to do things?

REDD: No. You know guys [about] whom you say, "Well, he's fresh," or "He hit on

me," or something like that. But I never heard of rapes. I'm not going to say it didn't happen, though.

ISOARDI: Exactly. The thing that floored me was that I'd never come across any reference to that before or anything like that happening, and I was so stunned when she said it. I just had that funny feeling that maybe she hadn't really talked about it before.

REDD: Maybe so.

ISOARDI: So it was really an unnerving moment. She just didn't want to talk about it.

REDD: Well, they say that happens to rape victims. They keep it in sometimes, and it's no good. Now, I can't speak to that. I've never had that kind of experience. Never. My father was always very protective.

ISOARDI: Well, also, if you were playing mostly in Los Angeles too, you were known.

REDD: Yeah, I didn't travel a lot.

ISOARDI: Melba said that when she played with Gerald Wilson's band there were no problems, because Gerald would look out for her, and most of the people were from around here.

REDD: Well, I wonder—I don't know. I'm not going to discuss it, because I don't really know who she played with and what a devastating experience that must have been.

ISOARDI: She was in Dizzy [Gillespie]'s band when it happened. That's what she said.

REDD: Wow. It's mind-blowing.

ISOARDI: Oh, I just couldn't believe it.

REDD: Devastating. As you're saying now, it's in your books, so you can— Whew! It blows my mind, too. The thought of it, you know? The thought of it.

Some of the guys were protective. I remember when I went on a tour with [Count] Basie in '68. I went to Europe with Basie because he needed someone who could— It was wonderful, but I got some of that chauvinist stuff. They needed a women who could sing some blues, and I wanted to play and sing.

ISOARDI: And they didn't want you to play?

REDD: They didn't want me to play. Basie would say, "Well, you have to go and ask Marshal [Royal], and you have to go and—" They just wanted me to get up there and sing those numbers because they needed someone who could sing some blues, because Joe Williams had just left. It was a wonderful experience, though, because Basie was such a nice man. He was so nice.

ISOARDI: Well, Marshal must have been on your side, though, wasn't he? He didn't want you playing?

REDD: We'll just stop right there. We'll just stop right there.

I don't know what it is about drummers. I can always get along with them. Some of my best friends are drummers to this day. I guess it's been drummers all

around me. My whole life, I always get along with the drummers in the band. And this time it was the drummer, Grover, who has—

ISOARDI: Grover Mitchell.

REDD: —the band now, doesn't he? He was so nice to me at this time. I'd say, "Grover, come on and help me carry this. I can't carry this." He'd say, "Vi, I'm carrying nothing because nothing is what I want to carry." [mutual laughter]. But he would always say, "Oh, you've got nice legs" or something like that, you know, but never anything like that bad. Oh, my God, I can't imagine that.

In Europe we were on a bus from one airport to another, and I was gone for about two weeks. It was a short tour.

ISOARDI: Did you ever have a chance to pull a horn out?

REDD: I played two choruses on some blues when I sang. But I wanted to play "Willow Weep for Me."

ISOARDI: You couldn't sit in the section?

REDD: No. No! I sure couldn't. [laughs] You're looking at me so strange.

ISOARDI: No!

REDD: But it is true, it is true. And it's not that you want to be a crybaby, but it's out there. Even the younger women now who are playing— Like I said, I would like to go out to lunch one day with Terri Lyn and Patrice [Rushen]—who came up with my son [Charles Meeks]—and Nedra [Wheeler] and just sit and chat and see what their experiences are in terms of that gender prejudice and see how they're getting along.

ISOARDI: A while ago I chatted with— Do you know Ann Patterson?

REDD: Yes, the saxophone player. Does she have the same problems too?

ISOARDI: She has a lot of problems playing in the studios and getting gigs. She said that it's such an all-boys network.

REDD: Isn't that something? You just can't get through, eh?

ISOARDI: She says she still grabs gigs. She'd like to have—

REDD: Yeah, stay home and just work in the studio.

ISOARDI: Not just do that, because she likes to do other things. She really likes to play, but she says it's nice to have something to fall back on after a while. Because she still has her big band and all, and that's a great— Maiden Voyage is a wonderful thing that she's been doing for twenty years.

REDD: Have you ever seen them on television or anything?

ISOARDI: Exactly. No.

REDD: But like I said, these bands that they have on a couple of television shows here now locally, it seems like it's getting back in the gimmick bag.

ISOARDI: Yeah, very much so, very much so.

You know, somebody who's done, I think, something good too is Buddy Collette with his big band.

REDD: I never heard of his big band.

ISOARDI: He's got two woman trumpeters.

REDD: Oh, really?

ISOARDI: And Ann Patterson playing alto.

REDD: No kidding! Who are the women playing trumpet?

ISOARDI: Stacy Rowles—

REDD: Stacy and who?

ISOARDI: And Ann King. Oh, Ann's a wonderful player. Both she and Stacy are great in the trumpet section. And Ann Patterson, of course, can play great saxophone.

Yeah, she plays alto in Buddy's band.

REDD: Well, good for him. Maybe he'll call me sometime since my dad gave him his first job. [mutual laughter] Maybe he'll call me sometime. He always tells me, "Oh, Vi—" One time I was playing at O.C. Smith's church. You know O.C.'s a Christian Scientist. Oh, a lot of musicians go in there. He said, "You're still singing on that alto." He said, "You could always sing." I said, "That's where I was taught." My auntie taught us to learn the words to the song, because you project, you know. But he never calls me either.

AL AVELINO: That's one of the things I wanted to say. All the musicians that you know that know your capabilities, they don't call you. And a lot of them you have hired and have gone on to be, quote, unquote, "successful," they don't call. They don't look back.

REDD: No. Joe Sample, Stix Hooper—I don't know what it is. We used to play at the Lighthouse. Oh, Joe Sample and I used to play gigs in Long Beach when he first came here. When the Jazz Crusaders couldn't get a gig I'd take him on my gigs, and

he'd play organ. Yeah, not just them.

I mean, I've always been— I never had a drug problem, I never had an alcohol problem, because I never did drugs and I never used alcohol and I never smoked. It wasn't that, you know.

ISOARDI: How did you stay away from all of that in the fifties?

REDD: I don't know. I'd say God has just been good to me. It was everywhere.

When I say this, I can say this— Well, my father was a teetotaler. My father never drank. I never saw my father take a drink in his life, but I saw him hold a cigarette one time. My mother, Jack McVea and his first wife were out to celebrate my mother's wedding anniversary; and Daddy, when he took a picture, said that he wanted to look all macho, and he held a cigarette in his hand. I have that picture.

ISOARDI: [laughs] That's the only time he ever had a cigarette?

REDD: Yeah, the only time he ever— And you know, if you'd come to the house and you smoked, as soon as you were finished Daddy picked up that ashtray and took it out. He couldn't stand it.

It's so ironic now when I hear people talking about second-hand smoke. When my father last took sick, he had bronchitis and never smoked a day in his life. So that environment we worked in I figured had a lot to do with it.

ISOARDI: It was funny, too, when I studied with Bill Green for a while, when he came down with lung cancer nobody could believe it.

REDD: I don't remember him smoking.

ISOARDI: You don't. I mean, he was just this health fanatic. Oh, he prided himself on his diet and the way in which he was always in condition.

REDD: Right.

ISOARDI: He was doing martial arts for a while. He just did all this stuff. And it must be maybe secondary smoke.

REDD: Well, it could have been. My mother also had lung cancer, and she never smoked. A lot of it's environmental, and a lot of it's in our food, too. They've given us a lot of stuff that just ain't right.

Like this problem Oprah [Winfrey]'s going through that she would dare say anything bad about meat. You know, she's got a case going now.

ISOARDI: So somehow in the fifties, when this was everywhere—

REDD: I escaped it. I escaped it. And I give God the glory, because by myself, how could I have escaped it? It was everywhere!

My first husband had a drug problem, you know. Nat was a wonderful man—highly intelligent, brilliant man. He had a problem with the drugs. It was everywhere. I never saw it. I never saw him use it. I just escaped it. I've never been high on everything.

ISOARDI: Just life.

REDD: Just high on life. But if they respected me for that, and they respected me for playing, then why didn't they call me? [laughs]

ISOARDI: Back to gender. What else could it be?

REDD: I remember one time I was working in Chicago, and the guys had something back in the dressing room. The guys said, "Here comes Vi, don't do that," you know, like that. And he said, "I don't care. I've started doing it. I don't care if it's Vi." And one of the guys, I don't know who it was, said, "Man, she told you don't do it!" And he didn't do it.

But I had been very blessed in that regard, because it was everywhere. My first cousin, [Lloyd] Prince, who was a great saxophone player, had a drug problem, and he passed away very early. But then, here's another thing: when it was happening primarily in our community then, people looked at it differently.

ISOARDI: In what way?

REDD: They looked at it differently, not like it's a sickness. They're acknowledging now that the addiction is a sickness, and alcoholism is a sickness, but then it wasn't. You're just a low-down, dirty addict. There were not these hospitals and programs for the people. They just locked them up in the county jail. A lot of the guys in that band that Roy [Porter] had were addicted young men. Fine musicians. A lot of them, I really don't think they knew what they were getting into.

ISOARDI: No. Well, Roy was doing it pretty seriously. I don't know what he was doing at that time, but—

REDD: They didn't know what they were getting into, you know. And I think about some of them sometimes, and—

ISOARDI: Did you ever run into any problems because you didn't? Did you find

people who didn't want to play with you because you weren't doing junk?

REDD: Now, let me think. No, but I had a very interesting thing that happened to me— Where was I? I was in Hawaii. I went into the restroom, and I saw this lady there. She was watching me the whole time I was playing, and it was like when I got off the stand I went into the lady's restroom—you know, like you had the stalls—and she was talking to me when I first came. We were both using the restroom at the same time. And she said, "Here." She spoke to me through the stall, and she said, "Put your hand out." I put my hand out like that, and she put something in my hand and just wrapped it up. I looked, and I threw it. I said, "What makes you think I need that?" She rushed away. She thought she was doing me a favor. I don't know what was in the papers. It probably was something illegal.

ISOARDI: Yeah. [laughs]

REDD: Yeah. And she pressed it so hard into my flesh like that. I've never forgotten that. It was like, "You're going to take that." You know what I'm saying?

ISOARDI: Maybe she was high and didn't even realize.

REDD: Yeah. She pressed that thing so hard into my flesh that it hurt my hand. And I said, "What makes you think I need that?" She didn't even converse with me.

But no musicians ever told me that they wouldn't play with me because I wouldn't do that. I guess they just figured I was a square. Yeah, but I'm glad. I'm glad I was a square.

AL AVELINO: Makes me think about the comic.

REDD: Who?

AL AVELINO: Renaldo Rey.

REDD: Oh, yeah, Renaldo used to say, when I worked with him up at Marla's [Memory Lane], that it seems like for some people that's the only way they get notoriety nowadays is to get with this drug thing. But that was just a joke. It's unfortunate, that mentality. But a lot of those young people then really did not realize what they were getting into.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I think that's probably true. Well, the junk really wasn't around until the late forties, early fifties.

REDD: And this thing now. What is it Maxine Waters was investigating? The crack cocaine situation that's more prevalent now. I think a lot of those youngsters don't know what they're getting into until they're hooked real good. Then they're going to jail even though they have the clinics and things now for them.

ISOARDI: Let me asked you: When you hooked up with Basie, was that right after you played at Ronnie Scott's?

REDD: No. I played at Newport [Jazz Festival]. Yes, it was. No, no. Wait, wait, wait, wait.

ISOARDI: Because that was '67 or '68.

REDD: I had just come back—

ISOARDI: From London. You were back here in Los Angeles after Ronnie Scott's.

REDD: Right. And, as I said, that's the time I saw Judy Garland, because Basie had a

concert with her in Philadelphia, and that's where I met the band to do my rehearsing.

ISOARDI: They sent for you, then, from Los Angeles?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: How did they pick you?

REDD: Through Leonard [Feather]. They called Leonard and told him they needed a woman who could sing blues and play.

ISOARDI: Why did they need somebody who could play?

REDD: I don't know. They wanted somebody to sing blues. They wanted somebody who could sing, and I think it was more like I just happened to play. I didn't get to play that much. You see where I'm coming from?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Okay. That's how I got to do that tour. Because I remember Leonard asking me, "Do you still have your passport in order?" I said, "Oh, yeah. Why?" He said, "Well, Basie is going to Europe, and he can't go to Europe unless he's got somebody to sing the blues," because Joe Williams had left Basie.

ISOARDI: Well, he had left earlier than that. Sonny Craver had been with the band, wasn't he, for a while? I mean, Joe Williams left in the early sixties, didn't he?

REDD: I don't know. They needed somebody, and I went. Catherine said, "Basie's not going to have any more women in that band singing, so you meet the band in Philadelphia for rehearsal," and we'll leave that there. [laughs]

ISOARDI: But they took you.

REDD: Yeah, I went on.

ISOARDI: So he won. [laughs]

REDD: Yeah, I went on. He was a lovely guy, such a nice man. He was so mild mannered.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that's how he seemed.

REDD: Yeah, he was so mild. One time on the bus—he was diabetic—that's the only time I ever saw him raise his voice, to the valet who misplaced the insulin or something. He got on the bus, and, oh, God, he cursed him. That's the only time I heard him raise his voice, the only time. He was a very, very sweet person. I liked him very much.

ISOARDI: What did you sing with the band?

REDD: Blues. "Stormy Monday" over and over. What else did I sing? "Every Day [I Have the Blues.]"

ISOARDI: Oh, you sang that old Joe Williams—

REDD: Yeah, I had to sing it. I wanted to play so badly. I wanted to play more, you know.

ISOARDI: He has a great saxophone section, too.

REDD: One day—Randy, a little before he went on, tried to get me—He said, "Mother, you need to record" in some kind of new way they have now where you can set up like a party and do your own recordings. I get so disgusted sometimes. You know, why do I have to go through this? I would love to play my saxophone on a

movie. I think—and not in any vanity I say this—my sound would be perfect for a movie. I really do.

ISOARDI: God, yes.

REDD: And when I turn on the television and I see Kenny G, and they tell me this is the greatest saxophone player in the world, and I can't just play in one movie?

ISOARDI: It's cheaper than Valium if you buy Kenny G discs.

REDD: Did you hear what he said, "It's cheaper than Valium." And, I mean, that with all due respect to whatever he's doing, that's the best that he can do?

ISOARDI: He's making a pile of money is what he's doing.

REDD: Right. I understand he lives in Bel-Air, you understand? [laughs]

ISOARDI: Yeah, I believe it.

REDD: He lives in Bel-Air. I think he had a fire out there.

ISOARDI: Although friends of mine who've been in the studio with him say that guy can play. He's good if he wanted to— He just chooses to do the pop stuff.

REDD: Yeah, play the pop stuff.

I told Lalo Schifrin— I saw him when they were putting the star up for Diz. You know, he remembers me and remembers me playing with Diz at Newport. Oh, and then I went to his house one day.

ISOARDI: Lalo Schifrin?

REDD: Yeah. I went to his house. It must have been a long time ago. He was making a movie with Ann-Margret, and they needed a voice like a throaty kind of

sound like myself. It didn't happen. I didn't get the part. I got paid for the audition and everything. He's the only person that I know that writes for movies.

Red Mitchell was going to try to get me a movie job. He was to talk to John Williams about it. But then Red was so hung up in politics, and he left this country. He stayed in Europe all that time, so that didn't happen. So, you know, maybe one day it will happen. Maybe I'll send Lalo some tapes.

ISOARDI: Why not?

REDD: I've always felt like my sound would be good for a movie. Hey, you agents out there—!

ISOARDI: It's a wonderful sound.

REDD: Yeah, and I think it would be good for a movie. Maybe I ought to write a script or something and say, "Yeah, I'll play that music."

ISOARDI: It's the way the saxophone's supposed to sound. [laughs]

REDD: Yeah. That's the one thing that I have not done. And I wanted to play with the Boston Pops. They did at least have Grover [Washington Jr.], so there might be hope for me.

ISOARDI: What do you want to do with the Pops?

REDD: I want to play. I want to play "Laura." No, I said I'd never play that again. I played for that at my son's service, and I said after that, no more "Laura." That was his favorite. But I'd like to play some ballads and some jazz swing things. When John Williams was there they had quite a bit of jazz. He's not there anymore with the

Boston Pops. I think he's out here.

ISOARDI: Is he, really?

REDD: I think he's out here. But they don't see me much, so I guess they figure well, when they want a saxophone player they'll call Kenny G, eh? But he doesn't play alto.

But that is my one dream. I would love to just be given an arrangement, and he'd say, "Here's your part, Vi. You play here, and you play there. Here's your music. We've written this for you, and we're going to use it." Just my horn. I don't want any strings or anything. Well, I'd take the strings if they'd use the saxophone.

ISOARDI: So when you come back from here, how long are you in Europe with Basie? Just a couple of weeks?

REDD: A couple of weeks.

ISOARDI: And then you came back?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, what was the tour like, though?

REDD: It was great! We played in— Oh, God, where is that place? My dressing room was— Now, wait. Let me think of this, because this is where Basie said, "Oh, you loved it there, didn't you?" Carthage [Tunisia]. That was our first stop. Carthage.

ISOARDI: In North Africa?

REDD: Where Hannibal was.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: I had this ancient, ancient dressing room to change my clothes, where they

used to give shows years and years and years ago. I changed clothes there. Oh, and the people loved me. Oh, they gave me applause after applause after applause. We were in North Africa, we were in Sweden, we were in— Oh, where was this other place? They gave me one of these Muslim flags. We went to Antibes [France].

ISOARDI: Gee, you were all over.

REDD: Oh, yeah. We had twenty-one days, I believe, and we did eighteen dates or something like that. Right. I had fun on that bus with the guys.

ISOARDI: My God.

REDD: I never had any experiences—

ISOARDI: No problems at all?

REDD: No.

ISOARDI: Well, that's good.

REDD: It was really nice. It was a lot of fun. And Eric— He's gone now. He used to play tenor with Basie.

ISOARDI: Oh, [Eric] Dixon?

REDD: Yeah. That was my buddy. Yeah, he was so nice. And Grover. I had met Sonny Payne, too, another drummer. When I went to play Newport, there's "Papa" Jo Jones. He found me. [laughs]

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ISOARDI: So aside from not playing and not sitting in the [saxophone] section, [singing with Count Basie's band] was a good experience?

REDD: No, I didn't play. It was just that once more I was a vocalist. Oh, it was wonderful. It was a wonderful experience.

ISOARDI: What was it like fronting that band?

REDD: I just got on out there and had on my little black skirt and beaded top and got out there and did what I had to do, you know. It was great. I'd look back at them and say, "You won't let me play in the section, eh?" [laughs] But one thing I'll say: I do think that the younger guys were a little different.

ISOARDI: In that band? Or you mean today in general?

REDD: No, today. A little different. My son and his contemporaries. My son Randall [Goldberg], who has gone on— His friends, you know, like Ray Bailey, Mark Broyard, and Charles Love—and these are Randall's contemporaries—they'd say, "Miss Redd," so and so, "Come on, Miss Red. Are you going to play with us? Sit down, Miss Redd." You know, they are a little different than these old guys that are all staid and set in their ways.

ISOARDI: Really.

From your couple of weeks with the band, was Marshal [Royal] as tough a straw boss as everyone has said he was?

REDD: He was a straw boss.

ISOARDI: He pretty much ran that thing.

REDD: But, you know, coming back, though, Eddie Davis was in charge of a lot of stuff, too.

ISOARDI: Oh, "Lockjaw"?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, that sort of is what got Marshal booted out of there, wasn't it? It was he and Lockjaw going at it?

REDD: Listen, I got sick. I'm allergic to shrimp, and I ate a shrimp in Copenhagen and was violently ill. Waiting for the plane out of France, coming out of Paris, some nut with a truck ran into the plane, and then we had to wait two hours, and I was real sick. Lockjaw just nursed me like I was his sister, you know, because I was sick. Oh, those shrimp made me so sick. I was up-chucking all over the airport. And it was hot and musty and muggy. Then they wouldn't let me eat, and I was starving. Oh, gosh. You know, if I have to have any enemies, I must make them myself. Do you understand? The guys just— They didn't like him, but he was so—

ISOARDI: Lockjaw?

REDD: Because he was the boss. He was a sweet guy. I won't say they didn't like him, but he had to be the boss for Basie, and guys don't like to be told what to do sometimes, especially when they're messing up. But he was just wonderful to me.

I have another friend who a lot of people don't care for. This is another

musician. He's a drummer, too, ironically. I dare not mention his name, but I like him very much, and I like him for the things that he's done and things that he's done for people that never get known. You know what I'm saying? But it's always me and the drummers for some reason.

ISOARDI: So what happens after Basie? Then you come back to Los Angeles at the end of the tour?

REDD: So I come back home, and I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what I'm going to do. Richie [Goldberg] wanted me to come back with him, and I didn't want to. He was up in San Francisco, and I came back to Los Angeles where the kids were. I started gigging around. It was kind of slow. I worked the Lighthouse.

Then, I have two friends that were teachers, Hampton Hawes's wife, Jackie Hawes, and Mabel Davis, another friend of mine. They said, "Well, Vi, why don't you just start teaching?" Well, see, I already had my degree, but I didn't have a teaching credential at that time. They said, "Well, why don't you go back, then?" And that's when I went back to 'SC [University of Southern California], as I'm remembering now, and got my teaching credential. And then I started teaching, but I was still playing. I just kept teaching and just kept playing.

ISOARDI: Who were you playing with? What was the setup? Was it your own group?

REDD: Usually my own group.

ISOARDI: Where would you play?

REDD: I played at Marla's Memory Lane. Well, it was whatchamacallit's place then, the other guy that owned it before that [Larry Hearne]. I played all around in gigs. I played a couple of places over on the east side. Some of the places I can't remember because they change names so often, and that was very significant. A lot places get new owners, and they change the name of the place. I'd play out at the beach at the Lighthouse. I played a lot of Sundays when they'd have those Sunday events. I played for a lot of affairs, but I was still teaching. And I did that because I had the two boys. And the oldest one [Charles Meeks] would say, "I'm tired of going to Nana's house. When are you going to stay? I'm tired of going to Nana's house." I can hear him now. [laughs] There's something I'd like to say to him, too. But anyway, I just kept the music going. And then I'd play and then I'd go to Hawaii.

It was like this: I was teaching. Spring break, where am I going? Zoom, Chicago. I'd catch that red-eye back and be right back in the classroom. See, like that. Did you see the Jazz Showcase? You know, I'd go back and play those gigs. I worked for him quite a few times. He told me one time, "The only two women I hire are you and Shirley Scott."

ISOARDI: Who is this?

REDD: Siegel. Joe Siegel.

ISOARDI: He ran the Jazz Showcase in Chicago?

REDD: Oh, yeah, yeah. He ran all the jazz back then. He got angry with me one time, because I didn't want to play for one of these New Year's Eve things if I wasn't

going to get paid for playing for it. In other words, he wanted me to record— You know how National Public Radio goes to nightclubs at New Year's Eve time? He wanted me to play for scale, and the scale was like—

ISOARDI: On News Year's Eve?

REDD: Yeah, forty-two dollars.

ISOARDI: That's when everybody makes money.

REDD: Yeah. He wanted me to play for NPR. No, it wasn't New Year's Eve, it was just a regular time. And they wanted to transcribe it. I guess when I close my eyes they'll bring all that out. But no, I didn't play that time. Charles MacPherson was on the gig with me, and Charles said, "I'm not going to play, Vi, if you're not going to play." I said, "Look, you do what you have to do. I'm not trying to influence you in any way. If you want to play for that and play for that amount of money, go on and do it, but I ain't coming." I didn't come, and he got mad at me. And do you know, I had played for him for several years, and he never called me after that.

ISOARDI: Oh, jeez.

REDD: One time there I had a bout with this chauvinist stuff. I dare not mention the person who it was—you'd be surprised—but he didn't want me on the bandstand with him

ISOARDI: Is this a musician?

REDD: Singer. And Joe really came to my rescue. It got so hot that night, he said, "Vi, you go across the street and stay in the hotel until he gets through with his set."

When I would leave that bandstand, it would be hot. I'd call him up and— Oh, he was something else. So Joe said, "You go on across the street and you stay. When it's time for your set, I'll come over and get you." Can you imagine?

ISOARDI: Jeez.

REDD: That was in the seventies. That was in the seventies—not too long ago. He tried to apologize to me some years later. And I was actually hurt that time. I was almost to tears that time, you know. He was one of my own, and he was so terrible.

But I kept on playing. And I grabbed Randy. I said, "Baby, we're going to Chicago, and we're going to so and so," because school would be out for him, too—spring break. It's ironic that my other son now is doing the same thing.

ISOARDI: What do you mean?

REDD: He's teaching and going to gigs. Whenever you get a break, you've got to get some more money. I did that for a long time. And I'd be so tired some Mondays. I'd come back in, you know, "Ugh!" [imitating a child's voice] "What did you do Miss Goldberg? Where have you been Miss Goldberg?" Because the kids all knew that I played.

ISOARDI: So how long did you keep this kind of routine up?

REDD: A long time.

ISOARDI: How long did you teach?

REDD: Almost twenty years.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? You taught that long?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: Full-time?

REDD: Yeah. I just retired three years ago.

ISOARDI: Oh, I didn't know that. Really?

REDD: I taught in Compton [California] briefly, and then in the Los Angeles Unified [School District] most of the time. But I touched some lives. I occasionally see some of the children. A very interesting experience I had about jazz— Because all my bulletin boards would always be full of jazz—you know, pictures of jazz musicians, like Mahalia [Jackson]. I had one youngster that I taught— There was a record store right here in this community over in one of the malls with something like Target [department store] after I had been here about a little longer than ten or twelve years. But he saw me one day, and he hadn't seen me in a long time. He called me, and he said, "Miss Redd, is that you? You know what? I am the assistant manager of jazz at Target records." He said, "And you know how? From what you used to teach me about jazz." He got that job just because they couldn't figure out he could be so young and know so much about all the jazz, you know. I have often thought about that.

Teachers are so important, and they get mistreated too in terms of respect and salary. How you touch lives. Oh, all of my kids knew about jazz, and they were all good language students, because I really stressed that. I worked on language and English. It was a great experience.

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JULY 8,1999

REDD: Well, good morning.

ISOARDI: Good morning. It's been a while.

REDD: How are things? It has been. So—?

ISOARDI: So first, to go back and cover some bases that we didn't finish last time, I know you mentioned to me your father [Alton Redd]'s role in the Cleff Club. Maybe you could explain how that happened and basically what the Cleff Club was.

REDD: The club was— My father was a very benevolent, concerned gentleman, always for all of the— When the musicians would get sick and they'd die, Daddy was a pallbearer to everybody you could think of. When I'd see him get that suit out in the morning, I'd ask my mother, "Mother, who passed away?" Daddy was getting ready to go to another funeral. There was another drummer in Los Angeles by the name of Lee Gibson. I went to school with his daughters, Gloria, Wilhemina, and I can't think of the other one's name. We were in school together. He and Daddy were very close. So they decided, "Well, look, let's do something. Let's form a club to look after the musicians and their wives." And that's how the club came about. And it remained that way— They used to go from house to house having meetings. The jam sessions came up I'll say maybe in the mid- to late sixties. But the club, it was originally about 1948, somewhere through there.

ISOARDI: So it was part of the old union [American Federation of Musicians, Local

767], then?

REDD: No. What happened was you had to—I remember this now—have belonged to Local 767, which was a segregated local, before 1940. That was the number-one criteria.

ISOARDI: [laughs] Really?

REDD: Right. You had to have belonged to Local 767 before 1940. And Daddy was on the board of directors. He was on the sick committee forever at 767 until they merged with [Local] 47. But that was the number-one criteria, and, of course, that you were concerned about the fellow musicians. That's how it started, and that's how it remained for a long, long time. And unfortunately, I hate to say, but they're divided now into two segments.

ISOARDI: Sort of political squabbling or—?

REDD: I don't know. Some money matters or something.

ISOARDI: Well, does the rule still apply that you had to be—?

REDD: Oh, no, the rules were changed after that, because nobody—

ISOARDI: Otherwise there wouldn't be many people left.

REDD: No, because there are not that many in it now, and the people that are in it don't know the history of it. A lot of the people in it, the ones heading it, some of them thought it was a part of Local 47. But it wasn't.

ISOARDI: But it isn't a part? It's completely separate from the union.

REDD: Yeah. The Cleff Club I'm talking about didn't have anything to do with the

musicians union. It was strictly a social, benevolent kind of thing.

ISOARDI: But they formed this then when 767 was still going.

REDD: Oh, yes, yes.

ISOARDI: I thought it was something that came after the amalgamation [of the two locals].

REDD: No, no. It was before the amalgamation.

ISOARDI: Another story that you— What, Al? [Redd's husband, Al Avelino, comments off mike]

REDD: Oh, yes!

ISOARDI: You're an honorary member?

REDD: Oh, well, I was. I remember one time my father was down for sick for about four years, and I took him to member. And they acclaimed me as a honorary—I was the first woman—it was all-male thing—and they took me in as an honorary member. I didn't follow up on meetings. Playing here, playing there— And my dad was sick for a while. But I carried him to a meeting. And they made me an honorary member. And then, subsequently, Nellie Lutchter was made a member.

ISOARDI: Well, wasn't she in 767 before 1940?

REDD: Yeah, yeah. But they wouldn't take her in at that time because it was all male. It was a male thing. And I don't how it's all split. I think Jennelle [Hawkins] is in it now, one of the segments. Jennelle Hawkins. But it was strictly a male club to help the families, and subsequently I understand they've given money to sororities or

something like that. So I was kind of hurt when it fell apart. But nothing I can do about it. Everything must change, as the song says. And that's what happened to that.

ISOARDI: I can't remember if we covered it before, but you, early on, reminded me to tell you to tell a story about John Coltrane at Fatburger on Western Avenue.

REDD: Yes. [laughs] Well, that was— I was previously married to Richie Goldberg, a drummer, who has since passed on. And “Trane,” who— Richie knew all the musicians from New York when he came out here and we got together. But he knew everybody. When they would come out west, we would go see him or go pick him up, or they'd stay at the house for a couple of days and eat. So we wanted to go see Miles [Davis], and we were kind of short of change that night. So he said, “Well, let's go pick up Trane, and we're just going to backstage with him.” Well, that was at the Watkins Hotel.

ISOARDI: When was this?

REDD: Let me see, now. That was about thirty-eight years ago, something like that. Randy wasn't born.

ISOARDI: So it was about 1960?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: And the Watkins was over on—

REDD: Adams [Boulevard] and Western. So we went and picked him up, and we went on to the Shrine Auditorium. We went backstage and hung around backstage, talking to the different cats, you know. He was introducing me to a lot of them,

because I didn't too many of the New York cats. So all of a sudden, before Trane went on stage that night, he got a telephone call. And it was his mother. She was having, apparently, some kind of financial problems or something, some kind of distress. And he told Richie, "That was my mother. She asked me—" I don't even remember exactly what he said she asked. He said, "You know, I'm concerned, because she has never asked me for anything." And then he went on; he went on stage. So when he played that night, I don't know if it—I hate to say that it wasn't one of his better performances, but he might have been affected by the telephone call. I don't know exactly. And then he was really in the midst of evolving the style, too, at that time when he was with Miles. I don't even think Cannonball [Adderley] was with him then. I think it was before "Cannon." But I know he was there.

So after the thing was over, he got in the car, and we left the Shrine Auditorium and went on down Western Avenue to Fatburger. And Fatburger is still there. So everyone was excited about Miles and jazz and everything. We were really into jazz. That's all we knew as kids. Well, I guess like the kids are into hip-hop now. So Richie said, "Well, I'm going to park. You and Trane go on up there and decide what you want to eat." So Fatburger, their menu is up real high, and you have to stand and look up to see, you know, like that. They don't give you a menu, you know. So there was some guy coming down the street. I was standing here, Trane was standing here, we were both looking trying to decide what we wanted to eat. And Trane was just looking, and I was looking. "Do we want a hamburger with chili or no chili, or

how do we want it?" And somebody asked this guy up the street, "Man, how did Trane play tonight?" "Man, Trane ain't playin'—" S-H-I-T! [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: This is just two guys talking, then.

REDD: Yeah, they were down the street, they were coming!

ISOARDI: They didn't recognize him.

REDD: They didn't even know he was there!

ISOARDI: They were just hollering.

REDD: And we were standing there. Trane was trying to pick out was he was going eat, and I was trying— And he never moved his head. He just kept looking. And the guy, I mean, you could hear him two blocks away, you know. And it didn't disturb him. He was still— Like whatever his mother told him, I think it still bothered him. And then we got our food, we got on in the car, and we took him back to the hotel. [laughs]

I'll never forget that. Every time I see Fatburger I think of that. And this guy never realized that that was Trane standing there. A little short guy. I can see him now, strutting down Western Avenue, "Trane ain't playin' shit."

ISOARDI: Knows it all.

REDD: Yeah. Yeah.

ISOARDI: Where else would you like to go now? What things would you like to cover? [tape recorder off] Okay, Vi, among our final topics, how about your career as a jazz consultant for the National Endowment of the Arts [NEA]?

REDD: Okay. At the time, Benny Powell was living out west, and they wanted representation from— You know, on this panel they had people from the east, people from the west, northwest, and so forth. So I was selected, and I was on for three years. And at that time we'd go over the grants and different agencies. I went to Detroit for John Conyers when they were having problems with their music programs. And of course, he was always so interested in jazz. But I'll say one thing about that experience. I thought at one time I would like to be in politics. But when I really found out that you cannot be your own— You must be a game player. You cannot be your own self and really be successful in politics. It had a political arm, because it was the National Endowment for the Arts, you know. And the things that I wanted and the desires that I had, even that Benny and I had together, we were always outnumbered by the eastern musicians. And it really made me realize how— I'm trying to think of the right word. I could never be in politics. I am very politically aware, but I would never be a politician, because you can't be your own person. It's impossible.

One wonderful experience I did have, besides going to Washington, D.C., about three times and working on grants, Dr. Anderson, who was at the time the director of the music program for the NEA, he invited me to the White House when they gave Marian Anderson a congressional award. And that's— [laughs] When you came in the building, you were supposed to say, "My name is so and so," like "My name is Vi Redd," and tell the people why you were there. And of course, Mrs. [Joan

Adams] Mondale [wife of then Vice-President Walter F. Mondale] was there, and I saw [A. Philip] Randolph— Oh, the gentleman that was in charge of the railroad porters. Oh, I can't—

ISOARDI: Oh, Randolph.

REDD: Yes. I saw him and all these other people. Then I looked up, and I saw Marian Anderson. And I'm usually never speechless, but I couldn't remember my name, you know. [mutual laughter] I saw Ms. Mondale, and I said, "I'm Vi Redd, and I'm here for the National Endowment," you know. And then there was Marian Anderson, and I said, "Ah— Ah—.Ah—" Then I just hugged her. And I was so overcome, I just started crying. I was just so touched by her presence, you know, and I just cried. And then they told me, "Now, you go sit over there. Somebody's going to take you into the blue room" or something. I had to get myself together, because I remember seeing her when I was a kid. She used to come to the Philharmonic Auditorium and sing. And, I mean, I just held her in such esteem, you know. And then when I saw her and looked right at her— I'm sure she realized what a bad way I was in, because she just hugged me. [mutual laughter] And I guess they said, "What is the matter with this woman? But that really touched me, deeply touched me.

ISOARDI: I remember when Horace [Tapscott] talked about her, he said, "She was our queen."

REDD: Marian Anderson? Yes, yes. See, years ago we used to have lots of music in the schools, and these people would come to the Philharmonic, and we would see

these kinds of people. Like my aunt [Alma Hightower], she would encourage us to go.

ISOARDI: You had a chance to hear her sing live?

REDD: Yes, at the Philharmonic. I must have been in about the eighth grade. In fact, I remember when she sneaked into the auditorium, and I was sitting right on the side seat, and nobody saw her, and I said, "There's Marian Anderson, there's Marian Anderson." And suddenly the usher grabbed her and took her off. And then I think [Alfred] Wallenstein, he was the conductor [of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra] at that time. The next thing I knew she was on stage.

But that's the only time I think I've never been unable to speak. [mutual laughter] It was really something. Honest, I couldn't get it out, I was just so taken aback. And then I looked up, and about fifteen minutes later, there I saw this great big smile, and it was President [James E.] Carter in the room. And I said, "Well, I'll be darned." All of this. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven or something, all these wonderful people I was meeting. So I had a wonderful experience.

But it didn't quite turn out like I had hoped that it would turn out, because I was— Someone later said to me, "Vi, you were pretty feisty in your opinions," you know. And I don't think some of the people liked it, but that's the only way I knew how to be.

ISOARDI: Were there things that you were pleased that happened while you were on there?

REDD: Oh, yeah. Hey, yes. Some of the people got grants from out here that had

been ignored many times.

ISOARDI: Such as?

REDD: Clora [Bryant] got a grant. Oh, there were several people. Uh, Vinny— He's an avant-garde musician.

ISOARDI: Out here?

REDD: Yes. Golia?

ISOARDI: Vinny Golia?

REDD: Uh-huh. He got a grant. Oh, there were several. I can't recall them all, because that [was] in the eighties. I can't remember all the people's names. But that was the only thing that disappointed me. I liked meeting some of the congresspeople that I met and just moving about in another realm, the arts.

ISOARDI: You mentioned Clora, you mentioned Vinny Golia. Any other local artists around now that you'd single out.

REDD: As what? Worthy?

ISOARDI: Yeah, as worthy of attention, or people that we should be aware of who are making a contribution.

REDD: This is awful, but I forget his name. He lives right around the corner from me, and he plays tenor with Ray Charles. My son [Randall Goldberg], when he was living, he used to talk to him all the time. He's a hell of a tenor player. I going to give you that name. Rudolph [Johnson]— A tall gentleman. He would be one. You're saying worthy of wider recognition?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: Hmmm. Terri Lyne Carrington. I don't know if she lives here anymore. I think she does; I think she's still here. A woman drummer. Terri. Oh, she's phenomenal. But you see her just every now and then on some TV show, and then she'll be traveling with a singer or something. But, I mean, the spotlight should be on her.

ISOARDI: We're almost at the end of the—

REDD: Millennium?

ISOARDI: Millennium, yeah. Have things improved?

REDD: Nedra. Oh, Nedra's another person.

ISOARDI: Nedra Wheeler? Oh, yeah, of course. How long have you known Nedra or of Nedra?

REDD: I just have known her ten or twelve years. [tape recorder off]

Jennelle Hawkins, because Jennelle is—I hope I use this word correctly—a seminal kind of artist that just can go from gospel to jazz, jazz to gospel, and just as smooth as anything you could ever see. She has a fantastic ear, too.

ISOARDI: And she's from here?

REDD: Yes. Jennelle Hawkins. She plays piano and organ. She's played with [Cecil] “Big Jay” McNeeley. She's played with a lot of other groups, but right now she's playing for a church. And she plays over at Luisinger High School for some of the dance classes and the choir. But I was just at an event last week, and the guys,

they were playing, and this one was playing. Horace's group came, and they played good. But when Jennelle got there and got on the piano, she just pulled it all together, and it started to swing. She has this kind of talent that a lot of people are unaware of, and sometimes I think Jennelle is not as confident of herself. She doesn't realize how talented she is. She sings, too, and had a hit record in the sixties. "Moments to Remember" was the name of the song. She sings beautifully. I say that because—even though, hey, I play in church, too, but—if you've got a funeral and it's a musician, you need Jennelle on the organ, because she can play anything in jazz and anything they do at church. She really does it with just such ease, you know; it just flows. Just beautiful. Any key you want it in, just anything. She's a very talented woman. And she's had her problems rearing kids and children. Two of her children were sick very early, and it hasn't been easy for her. But we talk most days. I call her my little sister. She's younger than I, but she's— A lot of people are asleep on Jennelle. She's important, I think. And, you know, Big Jay McNeely. Yeah. Since he's been playing again he uses Jennelle most of the time.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Uh-huh..

ISOARDI: Have things gotten better for women in jazz?

REDD: Well, more of them are playing. But just like I said, Terri Lyne, where is she, you know? Maybe she's someplace I never see her or hear her. I have been in contact with a young woman who lives outside of Atlanta. Her mother contacted me because

her daughter [Traci Wynn] wanted to play, and she had no frame of reference. She came out and talked to us. She didn't know anything about women musicians. She didn't know that they existed. She wanted to know and see somebody in the flesh. So she came to California, treated us royally to lunch. And then I was back in Atlanta a few months ago, and I got to see Traci again. That's her daughter, Traci Wynn. She's struggling to play, and she's coming along pretty good. She's just been playing about three years. But she's having some of the same problems, guys, and I wanted you to get up there and play. But it seems like in the symphonic orchestras they're having a better—

ISOARDI: Advantage?

REDD: Yeah, yeah. I notice something that— Wynton [Marsalis], when he did the tribute to Duke Ellington, when they had the New York Philharmonic, I believe it was, and they had Wynton's band, they kept showing all the women in the Philharmonic on oboe, on french horn, on all the instruments. And it seems as if the cameraman was trying to bring this out. And when they'd go back to Wynton's smaller group, not a woman. Not a single woman. This is New York, now.

Fostina Johnson. Fostina, yeah. She's a good tenor player. Reads music.

So I guess in other areas it's opening up, but in— It's somewhat better, but not too much, I would say.

ISOARDI: Any thoughts on the community and how it's changed over the years? I mean, you remember growing up in Central [Avenue]'s days. But you certainly have a

remembrance of the community then. What's happened over the last fifty years?

How's it gone?

REDD: I would think it's changed. Well, World War II had a lot to do with it. Then the lifting of the restrictive covenants had a lot to do with it.

ISOARDI: Housing covenants.

REDD: Yes. That had a lot to do with it. And when people started to move west.

My father bought a house over on Gramercy [Place] before I was even ready to go to high school. People started moving west. And with the wartime came the decline of the clubs. All the restrictions that were placed on nightclubs and things during the war— And then, after the war years, people just started moving west. And for a while Western Avenue was kind of like a mini Central Avenue, because they had Tiki Island. But believe it or not, when we first moved there, the Tiki Island Room was still segregated.

ISOARDI: Where was that at?

REDD: It was on Western Avenue right near Exposition [Boulevard]. The Tiki Room. Then they had a place named Vina's, which was a wonderful eatery.

ISOARDI: What was the name of it?

REDD: Vina's. A lady from Louisiana. Oh, she had the greatest— I've never tasted a salad dressing like she made. [laughs] That was a wonderful restaurant. We used to go there— I mean, you dressed up to go to Vina's. And let me see. Cresswell's down near Twenty-ninth [Street] and Western. Then right across the street, where I played

so many dances—and a lady reminded me of it the other day—Alpha Bowling Club, where I used to have a lot of dances. Hampton Hawes used to play there one night, and I played the next night. And then, let's see—

ISOARDI: The Alpha Bowling Club? That was a club?

REDD: It was privately owned.

ISOARDI: It was a bowling alley?

REDD: No, it wasn't bowling alley. Bowling club. And then, as you went on down Western, you'd get to Western and Adams, there was the big Watkins Hotel. Let me see. What was up on the other end? And down on the other end was the York Club, which had a lot of— This is very interesting. When I think of it now it's hard to believe.

ISOARDI: York?

REDD: The York Club at Florence [Avenue] and Western. It was still segregated. Blacks didn't go there, but blacks worked there.

ISOARDI: Black entertainment, white audiences.

REDD: Yeah. Same thing at the Tiki. For a long time.

ISOARDI: In through the fifties?

REDD: Maybe about 1950 it might have changed at the Tiki, because the guy used to ring a bell in there—ring, ring, like a fire engine or something. He wore a little funny hat. You used to see him—I don't remember that guy's that name. But he finally died, and somebody, a black owner, bought it. But they used to have top-notch

entertainment there.

Well, as I said, as a community— Even like the mortuaries, our major mortuary, I call it, Angelus Funeral Home, it was on Central, at Thirty-fourth [Street] and Central, and he moved over to the Crenshaw district, see. At one time, like we've spoken of before, everything that you wanted was on Central Avenue: all the movies, the major movie houses, the two fire stations, the major furniture stores, drug stores, Dr. Henderson at Washington Boulevard] and Central, and Dr. Windsor right off of Central on Hooper [Avenue]. Everything was right in that same— From about Twelfth Street all the way down to Slauson [Avenue]. Another interesting thing: on the other side of Slauson, say, a lot of Italian people lived.

ISOARDI: Just south of Slauson?

REDD: Just south of Slauson, maybe when you got to about Sixtieth [Street], there were no more black people.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that was kind of a boundary line for a long time.

REDD: Yes, it was.

ISOARDI: From there down to about Ninety-second it was all white.

REDD: Absolutely. That's right. A lot of Italians. And when we would do our music real good, my aunt, who was fearless, Mrs. Hightower—she didn't care about race or anything—she used to take us to Coast Ice Cream Company to get ice cream cones on the other side of Slauson, about like Sixty-fifth [Street], maybe.

ISOARDI: You never had a problem?

REDD: Not with her. She'd just put us all in the car and take us to get ice cream cones at Coast. I was talking to somebody about that, my cousin Arthur. Arthur knows about this. A lot of people don't believe that. This was like Slauson, on the other side of Slauson, near Hooper and Central and Compton [Avenue]. Say from about '58 on back, that was almost the Italian neighborhood and very few black people, and it was that way for a long time.

And when they started moving west, we lived at Gramercy. With the exception of— There weren't very many. Well, Daddy bought the house before we moved. We were still on Thirty-third Street on the east side. But Eric Dolphy's family lived over there. I hope I'm not rambling. I'm just trying to relive it.

ISOARDI: No, it's great.

REDD: Eric's family had already moved west, so he went to Foshay [Junior High School], and my brother went to Foshay. But I went to Carver [Junior High School], or [formerly] McKinley [Junior High School]. But as people started moving west, they were like on Normandie [Avenue] and Denker [Avenue]. And then, when you'd go to Arlington [Avenue], that was something. We lived at Gramercy. Arlington was still going towards Dorsey High School. Which direction is that? Well, by the time you got to Third Avenue there was Hampton Hawes's father's church, Presbyterian church. And it had been back over on Denker, oh, about eight to ten blocks east. Everything just started moving that way, people that could afford it. See, then some moved, and that's how the Central Avenue thing started to—

One of the factors, I think, is things got better for some families. We always had a good life. My father was a good man, worked hard, and provided for us. I tell everybody that if you could have had a father like I had— I'm sure he had some faults. He didn't wear a halo. But as far as being a family man— And not only to our family but to his friends, his brothers and sisters, he was a wonderful man. So we didn't worry about were we going to get free lunch and all like that. We were really blessed, you know. It was always the best. When the televisions came out, we were the— In 1947, I think, the televisions came out, and we looked up, and there Daddy had a television, a little twelve-inch television made by Hoffman Company or something—the television and this little record player all together, you know. And I said that to say all the families that could move west started moving west because the schools were better. You know, there was Manual [Arts High School] and Dorsey and L.A. [Los Angeles] High [School]. And of course, as you said earlier, everything must change. And Mrs. Hightower, who— I'm trying so hard to get something done in her memory. She did all of her work mostly on the east side. But now that's— Most of the people there, Hispanic people, would not know anything about her now. At Ross Snyder Playground they wouldn't know.

ISOARDI: It's 90 percent Latino now.

REDD: Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. So I'm hoping we can do something, get something in downtown L.A.

ISOARDI: When did she pass?

REDD: In 1970.

ISOARDI: Jeez. What happened to her as Central declined?

REDD: She kept teaching privately. Then she started another group, another group after us. And Clarence McDonald, who plays— He plays a lot at O.C [Smith].’s church, and he used to work for Motown [Records]. He and his brother were her prized students. I see Clarence now sometimes over at O.C.’s church, and he’s playing—

ISOARDI: Did she move west with you?

REDD: No, she didn’t move west. She still lived—

ISOARDI: Till the day she died she—?

REDD: —on Vernon Avenue. No, not until the day she died, because my mother took care of her toward her last days. But that house was there. She had rented it out.

I think the back part was rented. That’s where I first saw Miles Davis. He used to come back in the back when he was out here, you remember, in the forties. Miles was here in the late forties. And “Bird” [Charlie Parker]. They used to come to Aunt Alma’s house and rehearse in her back [building]. She had an upstairs apartment in the back. And then the garage, she converted it into a rehearsal hall. And Dexter [Gordon]’s mother lived right up the street there on Towne Avenue right off of Vernon.

So, as I’m saying, many people moved, and as it relates to— You had asked me about how the community is now and—

ISOARDI: Yeah. How have things changed?

REDD: Well, ethnically, it's changed. It's mostly all Hispanic now. Another interesting thing— [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: Okay. Well, gee, the last time—

REDD: Oh, wait, wait. You were asking me how about how the community has changed.

ISOARDI: Yeah, yeah.

REDD: It's more decentralized now. Everybody used to go get on the “B” car or the “J” car and go to downtown L.A. You know, everything was down there—May Company, Bullock's, all the big [department] stores. Now with all the malls and everything, people are shopping everywhere, and the black community is going into the inland empire, way out in Riverside. I have a cousin who just moved to Apple Valley. A lot of them are moving that direction. And that's about as much as I can say in terms of the geographics of the whole thing being affected by the immigration.

Socially, it's been— Many of the black churches— Now, this is another interesting thing. Many of the black churches that are still in these areas rent their churches out now to the Hispanic groups. Like they'll come in at 1:00 or after the service is over, your regular service. At several of the churches now, they have two services. You see that in Gardena [California], too, where there's a lot of— The Buddhist people, they rent their temples out to the Hispanic population, because they have really come in big time. So those people that are still there, they share, you

know. You don't have to jump on the streetcars anymore to go downtown, because, as I said before, everything's spread out now, with the malls. And [you can] go to the [San Fernando] Valley and shop and— You know Jimmy [James] Tolbert?

ISOARDI: Yes.

REDD: He was one of the first people I know to move to the Valley.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah, he was one of the first.

ISOARDI: I interviewed him last year.

REDD: Yeah, he was one of the first. I remember the day he moved. I said, "James, why are you going way out there?" "Oh, I want to get away." But he's one of my dearest friends. Yes.

ISOARDI: Vi, the final thing I had down was just a general area category, and that's people to remember. Because, as you've said, you've been a confidante of probably hundreds of musicians and artists.

REDD: Oh, yeah. But the dearest people in the world— Mahalia, I got spend time with her when I went over with Basie in '68, to Europe. She was over there. We went to the Antibes [Jazz] Festival, and she said, "What are you doing up there with that trumpet?" [laughs] I had a saxophone. She said, "Don't you know I'm the star here?" [mutual laughter] I'll never forget it. And then [S.I.] Hayakawa, you remember, Professor Hayakawa, was having trouble up in San Francisco.

ISOARDI: At San Francisco State [University]?

REDD: Yeah. He was a good friend of Mahalia's. She gave a concert out here at the Long Beach Auditorium, and she called me up and she wanted me to play saxophone. I was on a program with her, with Mahalia. And there was Mahalia and Dr. Hayakawa and myself. [laughs] And my friend kept saying, "Vi, you'd better move away, move away. They're going to get Dr. Hayakawa, and if you don't move, they're going to get you, too!" [mutual laughter] But anyway—

ISOARDI: What was she like?

REDD: She was very nice to me. She was *very* nice to me. She encouraged me to teach school, because that's how I sort of got started teaching. You know what she said to me, too? She said one day I was going to be a minister.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yes, she did. She told my mother [Mattie Thomas Redd] that, too. She said there was something about me that made her believe one day I would be in the ministry. I don't think I'd ever be a minister. We just don't know about things like that, though. No, we don't. We really don't know. That's yet to be seen. But when she would come back and forth from Chicago to L.A., she'd call me up, and I'd go up— Because she was living way out on La Cienega [Boulevard], way up the—

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

AL AVELINO: No, she is a minister. She's always praying for people, praying with people. She's always praying for people.

REDD: And about myself, too.

ISOARDI: And if you're a confidante of so many people, that's one of the things.

AL AVELINO: You know, when we use the word minister—

REDD: Yeah, I guess we're all our ministers in a sense.

AL AVELINO: We have preconceived ideals and notions, and we always put them in the church.

REDD: Uh-huh.. We all can be ministers.

AL AVELINO: But to be a minister you don't have to be in the church.

ISOARDI: That's true.

AL AVELINO: So I'm thinking, as you said, that this came to my mind. She was right.

REDD: Okay, that's my husband speaking, so— He lives with me. And my neighbor— She's Jewish, ironically, but she always compliments— Well, she speaks of my spirituality. I guess if I didn't have a faith in God I wouldn't be here to tell the story. And God has blessed me. I've had reasonably good health, and that's the greatest blessing. Because I don't care how much money you have, if you're sick, what does it mean?

ISOARDI: Another artist you mentioned a few times is—

REDD: Rahsaan [Roland Kirk]?

ISOARDI: Rahsaan.

REDD: Oh, yeah, he was a dear. He's mentioned in here, too, in that book [indicates].

Oh, I met Rahsaan some years ago. He was very dear to me. And towards the last,

after he had the stroke, I went back to New Jersey where he lived and did a date for Warner Bros [Records]. He produced it. I rushed back there, because I didn't want him to think that his life was over just because he couldn't play, you know. And either Warner Bros. has the masters or his present wife, Dorthaan [Kirk]. His other wife's name was Edith. And— Oh, gosh, so much to say. You know, when you say Rahsaan, I remember when he adopted his son and, I mean, just so much. When they picked up the boy—

ISOARDI: What should people know about him?

REDD: He was an innovator. He was indeed an innovator. He did a lot to try to help women musicians.

ISOARDI: Did he?

REDD: Yes.

ISOARDI: Such as?

REDD: What's the organ girl? The girl that played organ with him for so long? I'm not remembering names too well today, but so much has happened. She's still playing, too. Myers? Amina?

ISOARDI: Oh, yes.

REDD: You know what I'm trying to say?

ISOARDI: Amina Claudine Myers.

REDD: That's her. I played with him at UCLA. I played with him on other dates.

Oh! Terri Lyne Carrington. When she was about six or seven years old, she used to

take the drumsticks and play with Rahsaan.

ISOARDI: My God.

REDD: Yeah. Uh-huh. Her dad was a good friend of Rahsaan's. He [Kirk] would call me all the time and tell me to cook, have him some red beans and rice, because he was coming to town. And when he went to Australia one time, he came and stayed with me about a week, he and his present wife, Dorthaan. Then he went on to Australia and brought me some souvenirs back by the Aborigines, because I've always been interested in the Aboriginal people. I still am. And he stayed another three days or so. And then, as I said before, when he had the stroke I went back and did the date with and spent time listening to— What's that kind of radio he used to have?

Shortwave.

ISOARDI: Shortwave?

REDD: Oh, yeah. He liked that. [laughs] Yeah, we flew with that half the night.

And when he'd come out here, I'd take him around. He used to like to go out to Donte's to hear Don Menza. He liked Don Menza, tenor [saxophone] player. And whenever I see Don Menza I think about him.

Rashaan. He was just a great guy. My son Randy was crazy about him. He really did love him when he would come to the house. He was so much fun and he'd chase the kids through the house and—

I don't think people realize what an innovator he was. Even after he had that stroke—and I saw him out at the Lighthouse—he was still playing with the one hand

that would work. I don't how he did it. He was still playing the multiple instruments with one hand. And one time he was in San Francisco—because, you know, I lived in Berkeley for a brief time—and we went over to him, and I was sitting there talking to him on his break, and— The floors in that place were kind of like cobblestones. And the key fell off of the instrument. Bang! Something happened. I heard it hit the ground. And before the set was over, he went in the back and fixed it, put that key back on that instrument. I don't how he did it. And he was up there playing again.

ISOARDI: Jeez.

REDD: Oh, he could upset a house and blow. And this thing now, this breathing thing that they have, Rahsaan started that stuff.

ISOARDI: Circular breathing?

REDD: Yeah, he could do that and do that for half an hour. And I'd be going [gasps].

[mutual laughter] And Rashaan would be going [exhales loudly]. [mutual laughter]

His cheeks would be all out. Oh, God, he was very special to me. Yeah.

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JULY 8, 1999

REDD: Kind of reminds of my aunt, in a way, his outfit, because all the guys come in on Saturdays—

ISOARDI: You're talking about Billy Higgins now?

REDD: Yeah. They all come in on Saturday. He used to hang with Randy's dad, Ritchie. They used to hang around a lot. Drummers. I tell you, drummers are always in my life. [laughs] But he has this place called the World Stage over in Leimert Park, where they have really tried to recreate like a Central Avenue scene in the Leimert Park area. There on Sundays now Rose Gales is even playing. She has a set there. The only thing is it's so small. I just wish there was some kind of way he could enlarge it. I don't know, maybe he could go upstairs. I'm going to talk to Billy about that and see if maybe he can enlarge it. It's like a place where all the people come. And there's usually a rhythm section, and then all of them— Just like my aunt used to teach. “Everybody, you play, now you play, now you play, now you play.” And it's really nice for the younger guys, younger people coming up. And Billy, he's so beautiful. I mean, he'll play with anybody, you know what I'm saying? I mean, he's played with the greatest. He's most the recorded jazz drummer. But he gets up there, and he plays, and he don't care who it is, he plays with them.

ISOARDI: How long have you known him?

REDD: I've known Billy for over thirty, almost forty, years. I've known him a long

time. He used to date one of my younger cousins, too, Caroline. Yeah. But, see, like, I remember when like Ornette [Coleman] and— I remember when they all left here and went to—

ISOARDI: Oh, in the late fifties? 'Fifty-nine, somewhere in there?

REDD: Yeah, when they went to New York. Billy left with him. I believe Billy left with Ornette.

ISOARDI: Yeah, he did.

REDD: Uh-huh. And let me see. Who else? Don Cherry.

ISOARDI: Don Cherry was in the group, and Charlie Haden played bass.

REDD: Right, right.

ISOARDI: Did you hear them out here?

REDD: Yeah.

ISOARDI: At the Hillcrest [Club]? Or around there someplace?

REDD: Yeah, yeah. It was sounding avant-garde then, you know. But Eric [Dolphy] was already doing his avant-garde.

ISOARDI: That's what I was going to ask you. When people talk about L.A. in the fifties, the avant-garde, everybody just talks about Ornette Coleman, but there were other people—

REDD: Eric was playing. As the guy used to say, Eric was born free. [mutual laughter] Eric was the number-one freedom man. Did you ever hear of a guy by the name of [LeRoy] "Sweet Pea" Robinson?

ISOARDI: Yeah. He's one—

REDD: He's one hell of a player!

ISOARDI: That's what everybody says.

REDD: Oh, my goodness! And Eugene Cravens, too.

ISOARDI: Eugene Cravens? Not many people talk about him.

REDD: Oh, Sweet Pea, too. Sweet Pea—

ISOARDI: What about Sweet Pea? I know—

REDD: The last time I saw Sweet Pea was up on the corner of El Segundo
[Boulevard] and Van Ness [Avenue].

ISOARDI: When was that?

REDD: That was at least fifteen years ago.

ISOARDI: So he was around that long?

REDD: Oh, yeah. He was in Roy Porter's band.

ISOARDI: Well, I know that, but those are the only recordings, I think, of him.

REDD: Yeah. But then, he had a drug problem, and he—

ISOARDI: That's what shortened his career?

REDD: Yeah. But— No, I think his life was taken.

ISOARDI: But he was around up until 1980 or so?

REDD: Yeah, but he was working at a cleaners one while. And he kind of stopped
playing. Oh, but he could—

ISOARDI: When? In the early fifties or so he stopped playing?

REDD: No, later than that he stopped playing. You didn't hear much about him. His name was Leroy. Leroy "Sweet Pea" Robinson. He could play some alto [saxophone].

ISOARDI: That's what everybody says.

REDD: And another one was Eugene Cravens.

ISOARDI: Now, who was he?

REDD: Eugene Cravens? He was a little older than Sweet Pea. Sweet Pea was about my age. But he used to— Oh, and he was so— Oh, he was— Oh, gosh, how can I best describe him? He was a suave— Oh, I hate to say cool cat. That's so corny. He was suave, very affectionate. He knew how to flatter the ladies, you know.

ISOARDI: Well, you could say when it was really hip he was a cool cat. [mutual laughter]

REDD: Yeah, he was cool. And a sweet guy, sweet person.

ISOARDI: What was his playing like?

REDD: Like "Bird" [Charlie Parker].

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Oh, and could he play! He was really excellent. He was under Mr. [Samuel] Browne over at Jefferson [High School].

ISOARDI: Also?

REDD: Yeah. Eugene was over there, too. But Eugene kind of flipped out, and they tell me he was on the road somewhere, going somewhere to play, and he got out of the

car or did something and left the instrument on the highway or something. I don't know what his demise was finally, but he just—

ISOARDI: Yeah. Do you remember any of the other guys, say in the fifties, who were sort of playing on the outside—?

REDD: Not too many. Let me see. Eric. I'm trying to think of another guy who used to play in Gerald [Wilson]'s band. I don't know. Eric was the number-one, and then, of course, Ornette.

ISOARDI: Were Bobby Bradford and John Carter out here?

REDD: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, they were! Sure, that's Carmen [Bradford]'s daddy.

Yeah, they were into it, too. Bobby used to play with—

ISOARDI: With Ornette.

REDD: With Ornette, yeah. I saw him when did we see him at the thing for Horace Tapscott. I hadn't seen him in years. She looks just like him, Carmen. That's my girl. She can sing for me any day. Yeah, she somebody that's— The spotlight really needs to be on Carmen Bradford, baby. I mean, she's heir to Ella Fitzgerald, if you ask me.

Oh, she can sing. Can she sing. And she can sing anything—blues, anything.

Carmen Bradford. Oh, God. She's not an instrumentalist. But I heard something: she's going to be working over in the jazz program at USC [University of Southern California].

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Uh-huh. Clora [Bryant] told me. I saw her at the memorial for Melba

Liston]. She told me. And—

Oh, I can think of some more people. I just didn't know you were going to ask that question. Let's see.

ISOARDI: Anyone else we should remember?

REDD: Oh. Yeah, maybe I should have prepared a little more for today. [tape recorder off] —the what-you-call-it came about, Jazz at the Philharmonic?

ISOARDI: Jazz at the Philharmonic? The Norman Granz thing?

REDD: Yeah. Florence Cadrez. She was an absolute jewel.

ISOARDI: Oh, she was a long-time secretary?

REDD: Secretary at the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767]. She gave him his first musicians. She picked them out and organized his first band that he had. Norman Granz. I told him about it one day. I saw him. He was here, and they were having something for [Count] Basie. And I said, "Do you remember Florence Cadrez? She gave you—" I told him. Because sometimes people don't— They try to act like, "Oh, well, I've always been blah blah blah." I said, "Florence gave you your first band." He said, "Is she still living?" I said, "Yeah, but she's gone now." But that band was formed right there at 1710 South Central Avenue, the first band. Jazz at the Philharmonic with— What's his name? Norman Granz, Norman Granz. Mostly he had local guys at first.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I think it was Jack McVea.

REDD: Jack McVea, you're darned tootin'!

ISOARDI: Illinois Jacquet.

REDD: It was mostly local guys at first with one of his first—

ISOARDI: Well, I think it was Lee Young who told me that they started having jam sessions at a club that he was playing at, and Granz used to hang out there. And Lee organized the first jam session or two.

REDD: Well, see, he lived right next door.

ISOARDI: He suggested that Granz take it over.

REDD: You know what? He lived next door. The musicians union was here, and the Young family lived right next door to Local 767.

ISOARDI: It think it may have been one of Billy Berg's clubs.

REDD: Oh, Billy Berg's was way in Hollywood, the first nightclub I ever went to. My aunt took me.

ISOARDI: I think that's what Lee said, though. It grew out of these jam sessions that Lee started. That he didn't want to get into the business of running jam sessions, so there was this young guy there, Norman Granz, and he said, "You want to run these sessions?"

REDD: And he went down to the musicians union, and there was Florence Cadrez.

Oh, she was something else. And she played piano, too. But she played for a lot of the choral groups.

ISOARDI: Did she sing at all?

REDD: Yeah, she sang, too. Florence. That's Florence Cadrez Brantley when she

finally married.

ISOARDI: Was it Tiny Brantley? Was that her stage name?

REDD: Tiny. She was large. She looked like she was white, kind of Creole. She was a Creole-looking lady. Her mother and my grandmother [Elvira Webster Redd Allen] were very good friends.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Uh-huh. And they were friends with Charles Mingus's grandmother. They used to go to the prayer meeting services together. Uh-huh. Florence was a jewel.

AL AVELINO: "Wednesday [Night] Prayer Meeting."

REDD: "Wednesday [Night] Prayer Meeting."

ISOARDI: Yeah, "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting."

REDD: Yeah. Mingus—

ISOARDI: A lot of his stuff, "Better Get Hit in Your Soul," things like that—

REDD: Yeah, yeah, it's right out of the church. Oh, he was a character.

ISOARDI: Did you know him?

REDD: Mingus? I didn't know him too well. I met him on two occasions, a real crazy occasion up at—

ISOARDI: [laughs] It seems like no other occasion with Mingus, I'm afraid.

REDD: I played for his memorial. I played for so many memorials it ain't even funny. Buddy Collette was upset that day, and he asked me to play.

ISOARDI: Where was this at?

REDD: It was at a junior high school or something.

ISOARDI: A memorial for—

REDD: For Mingus. I was in San Francisco. That's when I was living in Berkeley. And Martha Young, whom I mentioned—that's Lee niece—she wanted to go see Mingus, because she knew him better than I did. He used to come to her house for his lessons, because her grandfather [Willis Young] taught him how to read music. And Mingus—Everybody knew Mingus. The car that ran down Central Avenue was called the "U" car, and Mingus used to get on there with his bass, on the streetcar. So Martha's name was Martha Ann. And at that time, in San Francisco it was all like topless. Everything was topless, you know.

ISOARDI: Oh, and that was coming in on Broadway?

REDD: Yeah, on Broadway. And the people—

ISOARDI: This was in the early sixties?

REDD: Yeah, yeah. And the people were just—The tourists were just falling in the jazz clubs. They didn't know jazz from hazz. And they were just falling in the clubs to see topless or something. So a bunch of people were in there that night, and Mingus was acting crazy, and he was talking to Martha and me. People were waiting for the music. [He asked], "Martha Ann! Hey, how's your granddad? Hey, how's Lee Young?" He says, "Look, don't pay them any attention"—he's talking about the audience. He says, "They want to see topless. I'll show them topless!" He took his shirt off. [mutual laughter] Mingus took his shirt off and tried to act like he had

something up top. He played the whole set with no shirt on. [mutual laughter] He was crazy. He was so crazy. And he had a bad temper, too, you know. He had quite a temper with the musicians.

ISOARDI: Did you see it?

REDD: I never did see it. I didn't have that much to do with him, you know. I didn't know him that well. His buddy was Buddy Collette. They were like this [indicates], you know.

ISOARDI: It's really funny the stories Buddy told me. Whenever Buddy was around, Mingus was—

REDD: Nice. That's what I heard, too. It was like he didn't want Buddy to— But when he went to New York and Buddy wasn't there he'd kick ass! [mutual laughter] They had to throw him down and break jaws. It takes Jackie McLean to talk about Mingus. Oh, God, he'd talk about Mingus something terrible. He'd say, "You'd better have your insurance paid up if you're going to join his band." [mutual laughter] "Because you're liable to— You'll need medical and everything!" He could not stand for the music— Don't play the music wrong. That's what irritated him most.

Now, another indirect experience I had with Mingus: When I did that *Bird Call* album, and it turned out as well as it did, I was supposed to do another one for Alan Douglas. Okay. Alan Douglas was already set to redo another album for me. In the meantime, United Artists gives him \$25,000 to get Mingus to do a concert. And Mingus messed it up.

ISOARDI: Is that that the Town Hall Concert?

REDD: That's it! Where he was talking to the people and told the people to come and get their money back and da da da da da da. And United Artists fired Alan Douglas, and I didn't get to do that other album.

ISOARDI: Oh,, jeez.

REDD: Uh-huh. Now, that's as close as I came to Mingus. I don't what was wrong with him then. I never—

ISOARDI: Well, Buddy tells the story.

REDD: But does he say—?

ISOARDI: Buddy was there.

REDD: Was Buddy there? And he was telling the people, like, “Go get your money back,” I heard. “This is not going to be so and so and so.” You probably know more about than I do. I wasn't there. It's just things that I heard.

ISOARDI: Well, I mean, I know what Buddy has told me.

REDD: Uh-huh. That was it.

ISOARDI: When I interviewed him for UCLA, we got an account of it, and then we filled it out more when we worked on Buddy's book [*Jazz Generations: A Life in American Music and Society*].

REDD: They said it was a scene.

ISOARDI: Buddy said they didn't know what was going to go on. They'd been practicing in the early morning hours because all the guys had gigs, and they were

doing it free. They would show up at one [o'clock] a.m. to practice, and Mingus would be pissed off because they weren't playing things. And Buddy said the music was so hard. [laughs] He said it was just impossible!

REDD: Well, Alan Douglas lost his job with United Artists, and that cut me out, because I was— He was all fired up to do another album with me.

ISOARDI: Well, apparently George Wein was producing it. He wanted—

REDD: No. I don't think so.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's what Buddy has down in the book, anyway.

REDD: Was George Wein producing it?

ISOARDI: That's what he said. Maybe he was working with Alan Douglas.

REDD: Alan Douglas.

ISOARDI: United Artists was supposed to be releasing it.

REDD: Alan. That's right, United Artists.

ISOARDI: But apparently they wanted a live concert, and Mingus wanted to treat it as a rehearsal for a recording session, in which case, if it doesn't go right, you stop, you start over again, etc. And he wouldn't budge on it. They said they got out there and they'd start playing, and Mingus would stop them. Then he went out in the audience at one point and said—

REDD: That's what I heard.

ISOARDI: He said, "You know, I wouldn't light that if I were you."

REDD: Oh, he was terrible that time.

ISOARDI: Oh God, it was just a— And then, on top of that, Buddy said when he flew in, he got to New York, and they didn't need him there, but Mingus insisted that he be there. So they flew him in at the last minute.

REDD: He loved Buddy Collette.

ISOARDI: So Buddy says he gets in a cab, gets to Mingus's apartment, and the doors are open. He said there's paper all over the floor. A lamp is knocked down and crashed. It looked like a disaster area!

REDD: Maybe he hit somebody with it.

ISOARDI: Yeah! He came walking in the door, and he says, "Charles, what's going on?" He [Mingus] said, "Oh, Jimmy Knepper called me a name and I had to hit him."

REDD: He was violent.

ISOARDI: And he knocked one of Knepper's front teeth out.

REDD: That's what I heard. He hit him.

ISOARDI: And Buddy said Mingus was coming apart. He said, "This isn't ready. We've got a rehearsal in a few hours." So Buddy said he just threw off his coat, kneeled down on the floor, and started filling in all the parts.

REDD: Oh, God. Yeah, he was a character.

ISOARDI: And after every rehearsal they would go out for breakfast, he and Jerome Richardson and Charles. And Charles said, "That's it, I'm not going to do it." And they'd have to talk him into it, every morning, to go ahead with it.

REDD: Oh, my gosh.

ISOARDI: It's just such a story.

REDD: Yeah, that was really— Well, that's how it affected me indirectly. I didn't get to do the second album for United Artists.

ISOARDI: I can imagine United Artists pulling the plug.

REDD: Yeah, they did. And they paid him, too. He was paid.

ISOARDI: Well, eventually they released an album.

REDD: Did an album come out?

ISOARDI: Yeah, an album came out of that, of a few things.

REDD: Yeah, well, not like it was supposed to have been.

ISOARDI: Right.

REDD: But that's all I know about Mingus.

ISOARDI: But, you know, it's funny. Everybody has Mingus stories.

REDD: That Mingus story with Martha and I in San Francisco. "Yeah, you want topless? Sure, I'll play topless!" He just took his shirt off and was standing up there with his big red tits. [mutual laughter] Martha just looking at— I mean the people in the audience. And he's carrying on a con[versation]: "Martha Ann, how's Lee?" You know. "Hey, girl!" Just talking. And the tourists— They didn't know what was going on anyway, because it was like— Some of them knew about jazz, but they were just dropping in. You know how Broadway used to be.

ISOARDI: I grew up there.

REDD: You did? In San Francisco?

ISOARDI: I was born in San Francisco in 1952.

REDD: No kidding?

ISOARDI: And when I was three [years old] my family moved to San Mateo, about twenty miles south.

REDD: Oh, yeah. I used to have a gig in San Mateo.

ISOARDI: Oh, okay.

REDD: Yeah, I used to go on Sunday nights to San Mateo.

ISOARDI: In the fifties we always did Sunday dinner up in North Beach when it was the Italian part of San Francisco. My grandparents lived up there, and we would always go up there. That was before the strip joints came in .

REDD: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: I remember when they started coming. It just changed the whole area.

REDD: Well, that's when the jazz started, too.

ISOARDI: Yeah, right..

REDD: And then they had Basin Street East down on the corner. I played up there the night that they buried John F. Kennedy. The town had been closed. And, you know, Al [Avelino] was living there at the same time. We both were.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Yeah. But I was married to someone else.

AL AVELINO: We didn't know each other.

REDD: We didn't even know each other. And we were there at that hot time. It was

hot in Berkeley, baby! And I lived about six doors from Mario Savio.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I remember you told us that.

REDD: Yeah, he was something else. My kids didn't want to leave from up there.

ISOARDI: Yeah, it's a great place.

REDD: But I had to go overseas, so Richie and I broke up, and I brought the kids.

They stayed down here with my mother [Mattie Thomas Redd].

ISOARDI: Well, any other people we should remember, Vi? Or do you just sort of want to wrap it at that?

REDD: No, I—

ISOARDI: What would you like to do?

REDD: I think there are some more people that I should remember, but I can't think of them right now. I would like for you to give me a chance to think about if I've forgotten something.

ISOARDI: Why don't we do that.

REDD: Maybe one more time and we might be able to wind it up.

ISOARDI: Why don't I check back with you.

REDD: Okay.

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ISOARDI: Okay, Vi.

REDD: Well, hi, Steve.

ISOARDI: Hello. You were going to remember some people for us.

REDD: Okay.

ISOARDI: You want to start with Ginger? Ginger Smock?

REDD: Okay. Ginger Smock, who was named Ginger by the illustrious Satchel McVea many years ago. Her name was Emma Smock, and Emma played at the Independent Church of Christ for many, many years.

ISOARDI: When she was younger?

REDD: Uh-huh. And she also did gigs with "Old Man" McVea, as we called him, and that's how I really got to know her. She was an excellent player, very beautiful, striking woman, and a very nice person. In fact, I remember when Ginger lived over on Santa Barbara Avenue. It used to be called Santa Barbara. It's now—

ISOARDI: Martin Luther King [Jr. Boulevard].

REDD: Martin Luther King. Way on the east side, because she lived— We lived on Thirty-third [Street], and the next street over was Santa Barbara. And when we'd come home from some of the gigs, they'd drop me off first, and then they'd drop Emma off— Ginger. But Mr. McVea named her that, Jack McVea's father.

ISOARDI: Why? Why Ginger?

REDD: I don't know. But why Ellery? He named me Ellery, [mutual laughter] you know, from that thing that used to come on the radio, Ellery Queen. And then, that's one of the reasons why I started wearing stockings so early. My mother would send me on the gig with bobby socks. And he had this high-pitched voice. He'd say, [in high-pitched voice] "Ellery cannot come to work with bobby socks on. Ellery's got to wear stockings." [laughs] I must have started wearing stockings when I was about thirteen. The girls wear them early now. But I got into stockings. My mother [Mattie Thomas Redd] wouldn't have let me wear the stockings maybe until I got sixteen [years old], you know. Then, later on, she worked with two or three women's groups.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Uh-huh.

ISOARDI: Do you remember who?

REDD: You know, Clora might be able to tell you exactly who those groups were that Ginger worked with.

ISOARDI: Where did she go to school?

REDD: I think she went to Jefferson High School.

ISOARDI: She did go to Jefferson.

REDD: But I'm not positive. I'm not positive.

ISOARDI: She always played violin?

REDD: Yeah, she always played violin. In later years, I know when Sammy [Davis

Jr.] would come to [Las] Vegas to play, he demanded her in the pit band.

ISOARDI: Sammy Davis?

REDD: Uh-huh.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: And, you know, with those racial restrictions they had, he would just jump up and down if she wasn't in the band. And she married one of the Jackson brothers.

They were around here in Los Angeles. They had a band. They used to play out in El Monte and different places.

ISOARDI: Oh, Harold Jackson was one of them.

REDD: Yeah. I think Harold was the one she married. I'm not— Straighten me out because, I was—

ISOARDI: Guess who I'm interviewing tomorrow?

REDD: Who?

ISOARDI: Harold Jackson.

REDD: Isn't that ironic.

ISOARDI: I'll ask him.

REDD: Yeah, ask him. Because Harold was married to Dimples [Harris]. Wasn't Harold to Dimples? And then he married her, or he married her first, and then he married? You tell him Vi does not have it straight.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

REDD: But he married Dimples, and she passed away.

ISOARDI: Right.

REDD: Uh-huh. The Harris sisters. One of them was married to Redd Foxx. There was Beverly [Harris], Dimples, and— Oh, I can't think of the third one. But anyway, she was an outstanding musician and a very nice person.

ISOARDI: How would you describe her playing style?

REDD: Let me see. Sort of like Stuff Smith, or a cross between that and Ray Nance, because she was very, very lyrical. Yeah, she was very lyrical, and then she'd get hot. She could work with that bow, now.

ISOARDI: Wow.

REDD: Harold could probably tell you more about that.

ISOARDI: Now I remember what he told me. He has a studio setup at his house.

REDD: Right, right.

ISOARDI: And he said about twenty or thirty years ago he started bringing in people who were on Central Avenue to play. Just liked they played back then. And he taped them all. So he taped her.

REDD: She might have done some work on Central Avenue at the Last Word. There was a club there on Central called the Last Word.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Harold owned that at one point.

REDD: Who did?

ISOARDI: Harold Jackson.

REDD: I don't think so.

ISOARDI: He said he bought it in 1950.

REDD: He did? Well, maybe he did. Ginger used to work— There was a group called Ivy, Vern, and Von. And then there was another woman's group that used like piano, violin, and bass, and I think Ginger was in one of those groups.

ISOARDI: Really? I've never heard—

REDD: She wasn't in Ivy, Vern, and Von.

ISOARDI: Who was that?

REDD: Clara [Bryant] would know more about this, because she was actually out there playing. Do you mind if I call her and ask her?

ISOARDI: No, if you want to.

REDD: [to husband, Al Avelino] Al, hand me my horrible-looking address book. And I could ask her what was the group.

ISOARDI: Who was in Ivy, Vern, and Von? Do you remember?

REDD: Ivy, Vern, and Von was a— Oh, and who was this—? Willie?

ISOARDI: These were all local groups, right?

REDD: Yeah, yeah. [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: [You were talking] about Ginger.

REDD: Oh, yeah. Well, she was just a fine musician. And she played at— Did I say at Independent Church?

ISOARDI: Yes.

REDD: She played there for many years.

ISOARDI: And she played various spots on the Avenue?

REDD: Yeah. I met her through Mr. McVea at the time, because he'd send everybody out on gigs, you know.

ISOARDI: What about Satchel McVea?

REDD: What about him? Oh, he was Jack McVea's father, and he played the banjo. He would go out and get jobs on his own. He'd play for these women's social clubs and things that wanted live music. He never did join the musicians union [American Federation of Musicians]. He didn't want to be a part of that. And all the guys knew. We were going out doing the nonunion gigs with Mr. McVea because everybody had done them. After my aunt [Alma Hightower]'s band, after our kids band broke up, then everybody started with Mr. McVea. He'd get gigs, and you'd go and make eight or ten dollars. I mean, for me that was— Not only for me but for some other people, that was pretty good pay in those days. He lived over on Thirty-third Street right off of Central, between Central and Hooper [Avenue]. He was a fanatic about you being on time. You had to be on time. He liked for you to come to his house or either, in some situations, he'd pick me up.

And if Ginger was on the gig, she'd go— I was on Thirty-third Street, and she was on Santa Barbara. She was just a lovely person and extremely talented. A very attractive woman. Looked kind of Latin like. But he will be able to tell you more about her.

ISOARDI: Another artist is Lady Will Carr. It's funny, because I came across, a little

while ago, a European discography or something. [tape recorder off]

REDD: She was very small and—

ISOARDI: Lady Will Carr?

REDD: Yeah. I think it was at the Elks auditorium that I worked with her just one time.

ISOARDI: Really?

REDD: Uh-huh. She was ahead of me. After—

ISOARDI: What was she like as a pianist?

REDD: Excellent. Sort of like on the Art Tatum style, you know. And it was so easy for her. She was an easy, easy player. She just would swing, and her little body would just go with the music. She was a very good friend of— What's his name, now? He used to be in the Cleff Club. A drummer. It will come to me in a minute. They were very close. Well, I'll talk some more and the name will come to me. Some names just come like that [snaps her fingers], and then others— He was a friend of my father [Alton Redd]'s, too. I'll get that name, because it's going to come to me.

ISOARDI: It's good to know something about her, because—

REDD: They were very close.

ISOARDI: —I've come across references, I think, among European discographies or writers, and they question whether she even existed.

REDD: Oh, yes.

ISOARDI: Whether it was somebody's pseudonym or something.

REDD: No, no. Lady Will Carr.

ISOARDI: It's good to know about her.

REDD: And she used to wear some kind of little dark— Well, it would be soft like a little dark suit. As I'm speaking to you now I can kind of envision her in my mind.

She used to wear like a little dark suit.

ISOARDI: Well, you'll have to look at this picture of her when you get *Central Avenue Sounds*.

REDD: And she used to wear her hair like the pompadours, on the side. Is that the way the picture is?

ISOARDI: I think that's how the picture is, yeah.

REDD: Uh-huh. Kind of a pompadour, like that. She was highly respected by the males, too, highly respected by the men musicians.

ISOARDI: Well, [Charles] Mingus respected her, and he didn't respect that many people. [laughs]

REDD: So if Mingus— She had to be, yeah. You can say that again.

ISOARDI: But she passed, then, sometime in the fifties?

REDD: I believe so.

ISOARDI: In this boating accident.

REDD: Uh-huh, that's what Clora just told me. It was in a boat. And I kind of remember hearing something about that.

ISOARDI: Too bad, too bad.

REDD: Uh-huh. Yeah.

I don't know, but, as I said, he'll be able to tell you all about Ginger. He can tell you even more about Ginger since he was married to her. But I remember her when she was starting, after she left Independent Church and started playing with the different women's groups and things like that. She was quite a bit— Well, she would have been at least five or six years older than I am. Ginger. And when she'd talk, she was so matter of fact, you know. She'd stand up and play that violin. Oh, boy, could she play that violin. And she hasn't been gone too long. It's just recently.

ISOARDI: Yeah, it's a couple of years ago.

REDD: Give my regards to him.

ISOARDI: Harold Jackson? I will.

REDD: And his brothers. His brother's name was George, I believe.

ISOARDI: I'm trying to remember. I think he had about—

REDD: He had several brothers.

ISOARDI: —five brothers or something like that, four brothers.

REDD: And they all had a band together at one time. And he was always sort of progressive, trying to do things. Oh, that's wonderful. I'm glad you'll get to speak to him.

ISOARDI: One other thing we had down, Vi, and that was you've recently spent time in Europe, I guess.

REDD: Well, a couple of years ago.

ISOARDI: A couple of years ago you were over there. I wonder if you could sort of contrast jazz in Europe and jazz in America and the way musicians are—

REDD: You mean, as a response?

ISOARDI: As a response. The respect, that kind of thing.

REDD: Well, even farther back— When I went over the first time in '67 or '68, I had an incident that I recall so vividly in terms of the patrons that come into the club, how they respect you as artists. I had told my husband about the incident where I had a flat on Dane Street in London. I could tell you about that now?

ISOARDI: Yeah, sure.

REDD: Sundays were my night off, my whole day off, because they've got crazy things going on over in England on certain days. You can't buy razor blades on Sunday or something. If you want to shave, you can buy it. If you want it for medicinal purposes, you can't buy it or something. But they had all kinds of odd laws on Sunday. So the clubs were closed on Sunday. They'd have just a little bit of music. But anyway, that was Sunday. I was in the Laundromat. I'd gather up my sheets and things, because I had to have the bedclothes cleaned. And all of a sudden, three people came by. I have their pictures, too. They came by, and they looked in there at me, and they said, "Vi, what are you doing here?" I just nonchalantly said, "Well, I'm trying to tidy up my apartment." And they said, "Why, you're an artist. You shouldn't be sitting here doing this." One guy [whistles] called for a cab real quick before I could hardly get my breath. They knew where I lived. And my clothes were washing.

They washed the clothes and brought them to me, and they told me they didn't want to see me in there anymore.

Now, I can't imagine that situation in the United States. [Isoardi laughs] I don't care if you're playing at Carnegie Hall. I don't imagine anyone saying to Wynton Marsalis, "Now, Wynton, you'd better run home. We'll bring you your laundry."

[Isoardi laughs] Not hardly. That's really a contrast. Maybe it's because they don't get to hear as much jazz as the people in this country refuse to hear.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that could be.

REDD: You heard the last part of what I said?

ISOARDI: Yes, I did. [laughs]

REDD: What they *refuse* to hear. See? And they're over there longing and wanting it and wanting to know about all of the people and what the people are doing. You know, really appreciating your sacrifices. And I do say sacrifices, because you're not going to make the kind of money that the rock people make. It's unbelievable, the contrast in terms of salaries. You can go for a whole year to do an album, and they're paying you the whole time. Here, when I did that *Bird Call*, we did it in a week. And I think I got triple scale or something like that. There is definitely more of an appreciation of it, of jazz music, and some gospel, because I talked to Mahalia Jackson about it, too. She told me when she came over there, they wanted her to come because they did not want Marian Anderson at the time, because what she was singing was European. She sure told me that. They wanted to hear her gospel songs. And it's the

same thing. They want to hear jazz because they don't get to hear that much of it. And they really are authorities on a lot of the people. They know when you were born, you know, who your daddy was—I guess in my case because my father was a musician. I got a letter the other day from a friend of mine, Peter Vacher, in London. He was talking about [Harry] “Sweets” Edison, his passing, and the way it was covered in the *Guardian*.

ISOARDI: You're kidding? Really?

REDD: Oh, yeah!

ISOARDI: Here you'd never know.

REDD: Well, no, the *Los Angeles Times* had a wonderful article about Sweets in the obit[uaries] section. I'll show it to you. But it was in three papers over there.

ISOARDI: Yeah, see, that's the difference.

REDD: That's the difference.

ISOARDI: And if Sweets— I mean, if he had been from L.A. or born in L.A., he wouldn't have been covered at all probably.

REDD: Yeah, well, you can say that. Right. He spent a lot of time back East, and he was the last link with that big [Count] Basie band.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that great band of the thirties.

REDD: That's right. He was the last of the Mohicans in that situation.

ISOARDI: Do you notice if there's any difference in the attitudes toward women jazz musicians over there?

REDD: I didn't notice it as much—

ISOARDI: Compared to here, it's about the same?

REDD: They were kind of— I wasn't like a novelty, but it was like they were impressed with the fact that I was female in several situations.

ISOARDI: And blowing saxophone.

REDD: Yeah. The first time I went over there, the way some of the critics wrote me up, you know, “The lady with the dress and the—“ Something, just their description of me, it was not a put-down. You know, even though I was dressed very feminine, I was like a mystery person to them.

ISOARDI: Ellery. [laughs]

REDD: Ellery Queen. They didn't know that much about me, because Leonard Feather was really responsible for my first trip going over there.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

REDD: He wrote to Vic Lewis, who was in Nims Enterprises. See, Nims, that's the Beatles office. But Lewis was still handling the jazz. A gentleman told me, he said Leonard had never written as nice a things about anybody since Billie Holiday came. Because just before she had her last breakdown, she went to London to try to get herself together. He was very fond of her, too, you know. So he set it up for me to go. I was kind of a mystery. They didn't know I had one date, the album [*Bird Call*], and then I had done Monterey [Jazz Festival] and a few things. But they didn't know too much about me over there, and they called me the mystery lady. I was a mystery artist

in a miniskirt. It was something else. But, oh, my reviews were good, though.

ISOARDI: I'll bet. [laughs]

REDD: And they didn't want me to come home.

ISOARDI: I'll bet.

REDD: I went over there to work two weeks, and I stayed ten.

ISOARDI: I'll bet. I think if you wanted to you could be touring all the time.

REDD: Yeah. I could probably, and, as we were saying earlier, I'm going to be in touch with Don [Littleton] and Jeff [Littleton] and try to continue to play as a tribute to my beloved son, Randall Goldberg.

ISOARDI: I think that would be great. You can celebrate the fact that you had almost twenty years. That's a long time of creating a special kind of music.

REDD: With my son.

ISOARDI: And that's something that few people can claim. So why not celebrate that?

REDD: That's right.

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