CENTRAL AVENUE SOUNDS

Harold Jackson

Interviewed by Steven L. Isoardi

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CONTENTS

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

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TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Jackson's home in Los Angeles, CA

Dates of sessions: August 5, 1999 and August 26, 1999

Total number of recorded hours: 4.25

Persons present during interview: Jackson and Isoardi

CONDUCT AND PROCESSING 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 histories, autobiographies, oral histories, relevant jazz periodicals, documentary films, and back issues of the California Eagle and the Los Angeles Sentinel.

EDITING

Jackson did not review the transcript. Therefore, some proper nouns remain unverified.

Michelle Weiss, editorial assistant, compiled the table of contents, interview history, and guide to proper names.

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

AUGUST 5, 1999

ISOARDI: Harold, let's begin at the beginning, where you were born and what your family was like.

JACKSON: Well, the beginning would have to be 1832.

ISOARDI: What happened in 1832?

JACKSON: This lady was born—Her name was Harriet Baker.

ISOARDI: And who was Harriet Baker?

JACKSON: She was my great-grandmother. She was born in slavery in 1832.

ISOARDI: Do you know where?

JACKSON: In Tennessee, in Clarksville, Tennessee. And the Bakers were related to the Polks—Let me talk about Harriet first, because this lady was almost 32 years old when slavery ended. She lived to be 105 years old.

ISOARDI: No kidding.

JACKSON: Yes, but as a young kid I used to talk to this ex-slave, Harriet Baker—But she was the mother of my father's mother.

ISOARDI: And you knew her?

JACKSON: Sure, I knew her. Back in 1932 when the Depression was on, we were living in Gary, Indiana: my father [Horner Jackson], my mother [Harritte Jackson], and my brothers [Wilfred Jackson, Billy Jackson, Donald Jackson] and siblings [Mary Francis Jackson, Amelia Jackson, Rosetta Jackson]—But times got so hard—He worked in the steel mills.

Now Gary is a city set up right out of Chicago on Lake Michigan, where all the steel—It was one of the biggest steel industries in the world. Carnegie Steel, and—All

the big steel mills came out of Gary and Pittsburgh. Most of America's steel was made there. So my father left the South and came north, before any of us were born, to work in the steel mills, you know, to better himself. He was a child from a slave. He did very well.

My mother and all my brothers and sisters—I had nine siblings, altogether. We had six brothers and three sisters. All the boys on my side of the family, my brothers, were all musicians.

ISOARDI: Every one of them?

JACKSON: My mother was a musician, she played one song.

[mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: What song was that?

JACKSON: We used to call it mama's song. [laughs] But she played it on all the black keys. Now, if you're a musician you know when you play on all the black keys you're playing in the key of G-flat, and the key of G-flat has six flats, and so don't many musicians go there, you know.

ISOARDI: No. [laughs] Especially the ones who read.

JACKSON: But when mama would play that one song, man, people would come [from] all around the neighborhood to hear my mama play that one song.

And some fellows [would] say, "Is that the only song you know?"

And I said, "Well, it may be just one song, but it was good enough for me and you."

Further on down the line, as I talk, I'll demonstrate this song, because I re-recorded it in 1995, About six years after my mother died. I thought about that song and recorded it just the way she played it.

ISOARDI: Wow.

JACKSON: And so during the Depression—

ISOARDI: Did she encourage music in you and your siblings?

JACKSON: Yeah, she did, and my dad—Dad came out of one of the original barbershop quartets. Oh, and he sang; he had a beautiful voice. None of us kids ever got the voice he had. He came through just before the Mills Brothers. Actually, they were hotel bellhops. He moved to Louisville, Kentucky and became one of the singing waiters. They would wait the tables for all the people, serving food, and later on in the evening they would go up on stage and sing all these barbershop songs. So he had a real good job doing that.

But, anyhow, during the Depression of 1932, when food was hard to get and work was so slow, I remember one winter—We used to have a milk back in Gary called Haxson Milk Company, and they used to sell Haxson milk. They would deliver it to your door and you would pay [for] it on payday. But there were glass bottles, and for each bottle you saved you would get two pennies back. And so one day my dad went to get the—He had saved six bottles to get his carfare to go to work and back, but one of the kids had taken those milk bottles and sold them for candy. We all knew who it was, it was [Amilia] my next to my oldest sister, but nobody would cap out, so my father lined all eight of us up against the wall and said, "I'm going to start whopping the oldest on down until I find out who stole those Haxson bottles. I got to walk through all this goddamn snow to get to the mills," which was about three or four miles away from where we lived. He hit my first sister with the belt and finally my oldest brother stepped [Wilfred] out of line and said, "I stole the bottles, Dad." And so he whacked him about six times and thanked him for his honesty, while my sister that really stole the bottles, Amilia—we called her "Booster"—was setting back there trembling, and, you know, my brother took the punch. We all admired him for that, my brother Wilfred.

So in 1932 things were so bad in Indiana—And Indiana is a city made up of—Americans didn't know how to make steel, and the country was young, so when they built all the steel mills they had to send for immigrants and people that knew how to make steel. Now the best steelmakers were the Polish, Czechoslovakians, the Russians, and Germans, and people from the Baltics. A lot of those people integrated into Gary, Indiana, which was a very integrated town, because I remember at my youngest age I went to school with Slockavich and Lebeduskis, and kids like that were my buddies, you know.

ISOARDI: So a lot of different cultures.

JACKSON: Yeah a lot of different cultures—a whole lot, all those different races. I know the Polish used to have a meat called bolshevik, and that's the best lunch meat in the world, man. The only place you can get it is in Gary, Indiana. Now I catch a plane from California now, and I'll fly back, the first thing I ask for is a bolshevik—they don't sell it nowhere else. But anyhow we were down south, in a place that my grandmother on my mother's side, this grandma Baker was—

ISOARDI: She's on your mother's side, your great grandma?

JACKSON: No, she's on my father's side, Ms. Baker. But we went to a place—My grandfather on my mother's side had left a home. He had died and his wife had died, but the home was still there, a beautiful home in Clarksville Tennessee. So mama took all the kids and we went to Tennessee because had our own house. We had gardens, we had pigs, we had everything there to survive on while my dad stayed and tried to work in the steel mills. In the meantime my grandma Harriet was still living. She lived in a city called Round Pond, and I can't think of the county, but it was right out of Clarksville, Tennessee. Her husband was a sharecropper. So she had a daughter out there named Georgia, and my grandmother, my father's mother, was named Francis.

We, me and my brother Wilfred, went out to stay with grandma Harriet. She was 100 years old in 1932. And we used to sit on the porch, and she would tell me things about slavery, and I've got a real good memory about things, and that was 1932 when we were in Tennessee. I used to sit there rocking on the stairs, she'd be in an old rocking chair. There was no such thing as a rest home in those days, see when—in the 32's and everything, when you go buy your friend's house you saw grandma sitting on the front porch—everybody takes care of their own, you know. So she was in her hundreds, and she was still on the porch with her daughter, Georgia, and she sat there and told me a lot of things about slavery. She told me one thing that stuck with me more than anything else, she said she was part Choctaw Indian.

She was half Indian, and I said, "Indian?—Did they have Indian slaves?"

She said, "They most certainly did."

I didn't realize that they had Indian slaves. And so my grandma was half Indian and half black, because they had blacks and Indian slaves on the farm where she was. For thirty-two years she stayed on that farm.

ISOARDI: When were you born Harold? How old were you then?

JACKSON: I was eight when I was in Tennessee with my grandma there. But anyhow, that was the beginning of the Jackson family as far back as I can go. Her son—I would like a picture of her son who was my grandfather. And this is my grandfather on my mother's side, who was John Polk. Now he's a relative—

ISOARDI: John Polk.

JACKSON: He's a relative, by way of slavery, to the Polk that was the president of the United States.

ISOARDI: No kidding.

JACKSON: From his generation—See, my grandfather looked almost like a white

man—In Tennessee—But when he was born, he was born into slavery. He was just a baby when slavery ended. And so his father wanted to keep him, and raise him as a white man. His mother had to kidnap him and run away from his slave father. As he grew up—He grew up more like a white boy did. But he was with his mother who was [of a] dark complexion, and his wife was coal black. And let me tell you, my grandpa got in a lot of trouble. He'd get on the bus in Clarksville, Tennessee, and ride up town, but he had to fight his way back because— "What are you doing with that?"

ISOARDI: Oh, they thought they were a mixed couple?

JACKSON: Yeah, right. "Say, what are you doing with that black woman?" He'd get mad as hell. So that was about the very beginning.

Then back to where I was born—I was born in Gary, Indiana in 1924, March 31. And I can remember back to almost when I was two years old, I cut my hand trying to help my mother peel potatoes, still got the scar. And I remember in 1927, I think it was, when [Charles] Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic. I was just a little kid then. Everybody wanted to be an aviator then, because the flyers used to fly over our homes, down with the two-wing airplanes, and they could see us from the ground because they'd be flying low to the ground. We'd wave up at them and they'd wave back at us, and they throw a lot of little wrappers out of the airplane. They would float all over the city. On some of the wrappers it said "Six Free Popsicles." So we just liked to see the airplanes come over, throw those things out, and we'd go down and hunt all over until we found one that said, "Free Six Popsicles."

So I went to school at Roosevelt—In Gary, Indiana at Roosevelt High School.

ISOARDI: Are you interested—By the time you're in high school are you playing music at all?

JACKSON: That's where my music life begins. I had—My mother's sister was a real

piano player, her name was Mattie. Now, she played the stroll-style piano. That's what—Go ahead [makes musical sounds]— [sings] "That's your lovin'." On the other hand, would be— [makes different musical sound] And it's real fast and real difficult. We always loved the way she played. She was really professional; she could play anything. So we had sort of a little interest, my mother playing and my father singing.

But when my oldest brother got in school, he wanted a saxophone (his name was Wilfred). So he said, "Dad, I want a saxophone."

And my father said, "Boy, you're crazy. What—? You want to be a musician? Are you out of your mind? See, you are going to work in these steel mills. You ain't making no living playing no music."

My father wouldn't buy him no saxophone, so my brother worked all summer at a junkyard and made enough money to buy himself a saxophone. When he went back to school that fall, he joined the school band. So he took the first—I'm four years behind my brother, so he was really the first one. He'd come in the house with that saxophone and try to practice. My dad would tell him, "Get out to that back-house and practice!" We had a garage out there.

We were all the Jacksons—We were the first real Jackson band that came out of Gary, Indiana—way before the Jacksons, now Michael Jackson. We were the Jacksons, we lived on Pierce Street.

ISOARDI: No relation?

JACKSON: No relation whatsoever. We were in the same line of work, but see they became very successful. Well, we were successful, too, because we still have some property in Gary, as a matter of fact. We have two houses there. Yeah, we have two houses still there: a front house, and an outhouse.

ISOARDI: [Laughter] That's a good line.

JACKSON: So we weren't exactly that poor because we did have a house, a roof over our head.

ISOARDI: I talked to somebody just a little while ago who also grew up in Gary, Indiana, and that's William Marshall, the actor.

JACKSON: William Marshall?

ISOARDI: Did you know William?

JACKSON: Sure, you kidding? We went to kindergarten together.

ISOARDI: You go that far back with him?

JACKSON: Sure. I'm telling you he's the same age as I am. William Marshall—He played on the Broadway stage, *Othello*, and then he played with Victor Mature in the big movie *The Gladiators*. Yeah, he and Victor Mature co-starred in that movie, *The Gladiators*. William Marshall, he was always a pretty big kid. Even when he was a little boy, he was about a foot taller than everybody else: "the gentle giant," we used to call him. Yeah, he went to kindergarten—I got his picture in here, somewhere. He's going to be in my movie that I wrote, you know. William Marshall, yeah. When did you talk to him?

JACKSON: How's he doing?

ISOARDI: Not very well.

JACKSON: Has he got Alzheimer's [Disease]?

ISOARDI: I don't know exactly what it is but most of his memory is gone. I don't know if it's Alzheimer's.

JACKSON: Oh God, what a tragedy, man.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I know it was really—It was pretty sad.

JACKSON: Well I have a copy here in my recording studio,'cause I got two. I went

back and got all the musicians nobody ever gave consideration. Well I consider William Marshall is it, so I went back and got him recording here in my studio, twenty years ago.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

JACKSON: Doing Langston Hughes.

ISOARDI: Oh that's beautiful.

JACKSON: "Rivers." "Rivers"—I got to re-record it. I better send it to him. I better send it to him quick—I've had that thing for twenty years.

ISOARDI: Yeah you can send it to—When I've seen him, I set up appointments with his wife, Sylvia. She handles all of his—

JACKSON: His wife Sylvia? Sure—That's not his—No, no that wouldn't be his sister—No, his wife, Sylvia.

ISOARDI: His wife. They got married about twenty years ago, I think.

JACKSON: Oh, is she an attorney, something like that, I think—? Was she an attorney?

ISOARDI: I don't think she was an attorney. I think she had something to do with writing or editing—Publishing business, I think.

JACKSON: I never met his wife, you know, but I went to my class reunion two years ago, back in Indiana. It was our fifty-fifth, and William was there, and we got to sit and have a long, nice talk. He was doing well then. He looked well, tall and good-looking.

ISOARDI: He still looks good, it's just that he doesn't remember much.

JACKSON: Well, we have another friend who played drums with us—we all went to kindergarten together—and he's in a rest home with the same problem. Dang. God, I got to get this to him.

ISOARDI: Well, I'll give you—Do you have his number?

JACKSON: Yeah, I got it, his phone number, address, everything. He lives out in Pacom—

ISOARDI: Pacoima.

JACKSON: Pacoima, yeah. Got his address somewhere around here.

ISOARDI: So when you start going to school in Gary, I guess, you said that the schools were all integrated then.

JACKSON: In Gary.

ISOARDI: In Gary. I'm sorry, in Gary.

JACKSON: In Gary, they—We went to school in the William A. Work School System, which was copied all over the United States. We had the best school system considered that time. The William A. Work system was work, study, and play. So we worked, and that was in crafts, like in woodworks and automobile mechanics and that type of thing; studied in our curriculums; and then we had one hour set aside everyday that we were free to play—Do anything we wanted to do: play baseball, go out in the yard, and swim and everything. It was called the William A. Work, work-playing-study system and that's when Billy Marshall and I went to school together. September the fifth, 1929—five years old, the same age, yeah.

ISOARDI: Geez. So, the school was a good experience for you?

JACKSON: It was a great experience, but later on as the city grew, the Czechs and Slovakians and people that lived in our neighborhood—We lived in the southern—You know, on the south side of town. And that's where they always leave us: always on the other side of the railroad track. Well, a lot of the Czechs was over there too, and the Polish and Germans. They eventually—As they got more money they moved to the suburbs of Gary, and other black people and Hispanics bought into their land. So pretty soon it became an all black neighborhood, and they separated by income.

JACKSON: Do you remember when you first—Well, I guess if you were talking to your great-grandmother you knew certainly about the racial situation in this country. When did you become aware of racism?

JACKSON: Immediately. As soon as I learned to talk, the first thing my mother said, "When you see a white man coming down the street you get on the outside of the curb and, if necessary, you walk on the street." She was saying this—I remember when we really had to put it into effect. We didn't have to do it so much in Gary, but when we got to Tennessee in '32 and I was from the North, I really didn't appreciate that.

So, when we walked down the street, me and my brother, and some kids would come by us, little white kids, we'd just stay on the inside of the street and they would challenge us.

They'd say, "What you niggers—Did you know you're supposed to get on the outside?"

I said, "Who said that?" You know we go on—We got in a couple of fights until finally some guy got lynched in Tennessee for something he had done.

And my mother said, "Please, kids, when you see the little white boys coming up the street, you get on the outside. And if it's necessary, if there's enough of them, just get off the curb and let them have the sidewalk, and then you get on after that."

So we had to learn the rules of the South: "When you go to the bathroom, be sure it says colored—don't go in one that says white, because I'm scared to death that something may happen to you." So that was the training we got for Tennessee, which didn't apply in Gary, because everything was more or less integrated.

We just integrated by finance. You know, if the guys made more money, they moved to the suburbs and the poor people congregated until almost all the poor were black and Mexicans. And our neighborhood once had belonged to the Germans and the

Czechs—And the brick buildings—And when they would move out, we would buy in. We would buy into those dumps.

ISOARDI: So what's high school like?

JACKSON: Roosevelt High School in Gary, Indiana. And it wasn't named for the second president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was named for Theodore Roosevelt, because in 1929 when I first went to Roosevelt High School, [Herbert C.] Hoover was the president. So it wasn't named for FDR, but we always considered it FDR, because we loved him. We loved Teddy [Theodore Roosevelt], too. Teddy was a hell of a good president. I didn't know it then, but my mother was a Republican then.

ISOARDI: Really?

JACKSON: Yeah, all black people were Republicans.

ISOARDI: Oh that's right—of course, because the party of Abraham Lincoln, right?

JACKSON: Yeah, the party of Abraham Lincoln was Republican. And so even after FDR got in and did so well my mama still would vote Republican. And my oldest brother, after all these years, he finally tells me, confessed up to me—About a month ago I was talking to him about the politics and Clinton.

He said, "Man, didn't mama tell you I've been a Republican all—?"

I said, "What? Say that again."

He says, "Oh shit!" He says, "Man, I've been a Republican all the time."

I said, "You voted for [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and [Richard M.] Nixon, and all those guys?"

He said, "Yeah!"

My brother's so crazy about my mother, he took everything—her politics and everything. I've been voting Democratic ever since. I kind of got to thinking about Clinton, but then I said, "He's he's doing the same thing all of them did, but he got

caught."

ISOARDI: Exactly. [laughter] Every one.

JACKSON: Senators, Congressman, everybody, but he got caught. And so, now I'll show you another incident thing that happened to me when we was growing up. When I was growing up they had on the outskirts of town a little bit, farms—They're called truck farms. And I remember I worked for a man named Mr. Kyper, me and my buddy Benny Summers. So we used to have to get up at four o'clock in the morning and pedal our bicycles all the way out four, five, or six miles out of town to the truck farm, and get on our knees. We had to start at six, and we worked from six in the morning to six in the evening. He paid us ten cents an hour. Man, you could see the heat coming out of the ground. We'd be out there weeding that corn, and the rows would be so long. Man, I'm telling you you couldn't see the end of the road.

ISOARDI: Hard work.

JACKSON: Yeah that was hard work, but that's the way we bought our clothes and stuff. You know a suit, a tailor-made suit, cost twenty three dollars then. So we'd work all summer and come back to school with that tailor-made suit on. My girlfriend thought I was the richest cat in town! We dressed good, man.

My father came out there one day to pick me up. I told him I was going to give him a dollar, and it was Saturday. He got there about five-thirty.

He said, "Come on!" He was waving for me to—"Come on—!" For the road.

I said, "No, I can't leave yet, I got to stay until six."

And my father got impatient. He saw what I was doing out there on my knees. Finally I got through and came out. The man gave me my six dollars, and I went out to my father's car and I gave him three of that.

He said, "Don't you ever—I don't want to ever catch you on your knees out here

on this lawn for no ten cents and hour. No more."

ISOARDI: Really?

JACKSON: I was kind of glad and kind of sad, too. But I didn't care. I started carrying newspapers after that.

ISOARDI: Yeah, hard way to make money.

JACKSON: So my brother—Every time he would try to practice on the saxophone, my father would run him out of the house and he'd be out in the garage, the old garage back there. He'd be [makes musical sounds], and pretty soon he got pretty good. He started to play—

My father came out there after he'd been on his horn for about two weeks, "Well, why don't you play "Stardust"?"

He said, "'Stardust'? Dad, I'm just an amateur—I'm just starting."

He said, "Oh, hell, if you're going to be a musician you got to play 'Stardust'."

He said, "Give me time, you know, I just got the horn two weeks ago."

That's the way my father was—he was like that. I tried to take piano one time, and he was the same way to me.

You're playing the piano—"Play 'Clair de Lune'."

I said, "Dad, this is my third lesson." [mutual laughter] "This is my third lesson!"

He said, "Well, okay."

So that's how we first got interested in music. My brother, like I said, was five years ahead of me, so when I came behind him, being that he had been in a concert band and did good at school, they automatically gave me a beginners' band in high school.

ISOARDI: So you're in what, ninth, tenth grade then, when you start?

JACKSON: That was about ninth grade, and I started on clarinet.

ISOARDI: Why clarinet?

JACKSON: My brother played saxophone, so he told me, "I wish when I first started, I had started on the clarinet, then worked up to horns—" You come clarinet, alto, tenor, and baritone, up that way, you know. So if you conquer the clarinet, the saxophone is much easier for you after that.

ISOARDI: Yeah, harder keyboard.

JACKSON: Yeah, but I did. I got the clarinet. I played in the concert band in high school, until I was eighteen. Then I graduated.

It was still hard to get a job in Gary, Indiana in 1941, early part of '42, so my father tried real hard to get me a job in steel mills.

I mean, he had to go to the foreman he had known for twenty years and go to the chain of commands, and say, "My son really needs this job," you know.

So he said, "Okay Mr. Jackson, you send your boy out Monday. We're going to give him a job."

So I went out that Monday—I remember it was in December, about December the first. It was cold as hell—snow and ice. I got the job and my dad bought me all my boots and stuff I needed—my helmet—to work in the steel mills.

The first thing [place] they put me was a slag gang. That's down in the bottom of the mills where all the slush and slag comes in. It's cold down there. And, man, I worked down there from eight that morning to twelve noon. And I came up for lunch and I looked behind me, and wasn't nobody looking. I walked straight out of that steel mill and never looked back. [laughs]

ISOARDI: [laughs] I bet even doing corn looked easier than that.

JACKSON: Yeah, I'd rather do the corn, yeah. That was much easier than the slag gang. And so, my brother told me he'd worked in the slag gang, too. But he stuck it out; that's

how he got his horn.

So I came home that day about twelve. My dad was still working—he was a man out to the mill—

And so, I said, "I don't know what I'm going to say to dad, he worked hard trying to get me this job." I said, "Ain't nothing going to work." So, I had about six, seven dollars in my pocket. I went and got the El, they called it then—The car—South Shore El that was elevated, the train that went into Chicago. Chicago is only twenty miles out of Gary—Thirty miles. And so I went on there to the navy recruiter, and joined the navy.

ISOARDI: No kidding, and this is what, December '41?

JACKSON: December '42. I was eighteen then. I was only—In '41 I was still seventeen.

And so, in '42, December, I came back home that day, and my father said—He was waiting for me—"What happened? I had the foreman call me and tell me you walked out after twelve o'clock."

I said, "Yeah, dad I walked out."

He said, "Well, my goddamn—What's the matter with you, boy? It took me all this to get this job for you."

I said, "Well dad, here." And I showed him my recruit papers and I signed them for the day. And I said, "I don't think I want to make the steel mills my career. I'm going to go with Uncle Sam." And then, in war time, he started crying.

He said, "Man, you might get killed over there."

I said, "So do a lot of Americans, because we got to get our country back. You know, from the Japanese that attacked us last winter."

ISOARDI: Geez. Let me ask you before you get into the war—You played clarinet

throughout high school?

JACKSON: [affirmative]

ISOARDI: Did you have any music training in school? Was there a good music program there? Did you study privately with someone?

JACKSON: Well, see, I had a head start on the other guys, because there was a guy [who] lived about a block from me, his name was Mr. Henderson, that taught piano for a quarter a lesson. And so some of that money I made on the farm a couple years before—I went to Mr. Henderson to take piano lessons—"And one and a two and a three—" And Mr. Henderson was a good teacher. He only charged twenty-five cents, but twenty-five cents in those days was okay. When I was working in the fields in the summer, I could give him twenty-five cents a week. But when I went back to school, I didn't have the money, so I had to drop out. But I learned the—

ISOARDI: So you learned a little bit of the keyboard then.

JACKSON: I learned the bass and the triple lines, and I learned a little counting. So, I was a little ahead of the other kids when I got there because I had had that background in piano. It wasn't as hard for me as it was them.

ISOARDI: Was there a music program at your high school?

JACKSON: We had one of the best, yeah.

ISOARDI: No kidding. You could study theory, or harmony or whatever?

JACKSON: Yeah, all the way up as far as you wanted to go—as far as they could take you, yeah.

ISOARDI: Every year you could take music?

JACKSON: Yeah, every year. Once you got in the band, unless you did so bad they had to kick you out, you stayed all the way through high school.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that's so rare now.

JACKSON: We had beautiful uniforms. We had to go out on the field like football players and train how to march and play. And you got to remember one thing: in Gary it gets awful cold. You play in a football game in December now, your lips—You put your lips to the horn, it sticks.

ISOARDI: [laughs] You can't play clarinet with mittens.

JACKSON: "Hey man take your horn down—song's over." "But I can't, man—it froze to my lips! I can't take it down."

When I joined the navy, we were one of the set of the first blacks to ever join the navy as real sailors. When I first went in the navy, the only sailors—Where a negro could a be a sailor in the navy was to be a mess cook or a waiter—that was all he could be. But Joe Louis had fought a fight and donated all his money, which was about seventy-five or a hundred thousand dollars at that time, to the navy. And all the black people say, "Why did he do that?" You know, the navy won't even let us be a sailor and he donates all his money. Well, that's one reason why they opened up a camp for black people. I think Joe Louis embarrassed them in giving $100,000 to a person who won't even, you know, hire you.

So anyhow, they open the Camp Robert Smalls in Waukegan, Illinois. They open a boot camp called Camp Robert Smalls. And Camp Robert Smalls was named after a sailor, a black sailor, that had been in the early navy in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. They became heroes I don't exactly know why. So we went to—

ISOARDI: Is that where you went to boot camp is Robert Smalls?

JACKSON: Yeah, Robert Smalls. My brother had preceded me there. And so we went through our boots, and then they sent us to Hampton University in Virginia to continue our studies. I was studying diesel mechanics. We went through a six-month training at Hampton Institute and graduated as first class firemen, which we came out—We had a

red stripe on our shoulders that identified us as firemen, auto mechanics, and diesel mechanics.

ISOARDI: So, they're going to stick you with the engines on ship board right?

JACKSON: Yeah, right. You gotta love it, gotta love that. Yeah, I didn't know a damn thing about engines, until—One cycle, two cycle—I didn't know what the hell they were talking about.

ISOARDI: Why did they put you in that? Did you sign up for that?

JACKSON: I signed up for it.

ISOARDI: And they gave it to you?

JACKSON: Yeah, they gave you a choice. You had to take an aptitude test, you know. If your grades were high, they give you a choice of whether—You could have been a [inaudible] you could have been a gunner, you could have been a cocksman—that's the guy that drives the ship, you know, a small craft. There's a lot of things you could have been—almost anything you could think of: carpenter, plumber— So I chose diesel engines.

ISOARDI: Why?

JACKSON: I always had a fascination with those big diesel trucks going up the highway.

ISOARDI: Really?

JACKSON: And there's a—And I seen a lot of boats, you know, because we were out on Lake Michigan. And I used to admire those Chrysler diesels. Twin engine Chrysler diesels— Man, that was one of the fastest boats you could ever see. So I was fascinated with engines anyhow, in cars. And so I'm glad I took that training. I never did use it after I got out of the navy, because in the navy, well, there was—

Strange thing happened to us in the navy, because when we got those ratings,

and we were the first to come through, and they put the red stripe on our shoulder, when we'd go out on liberty—

And the whites, they would look at us, and they'd take a double look. "Say what, he got a red stripe on his arm! Hey nigger what you got the red stripe on your arm for?"

I say, "I'm a fireman, can't you read?" Yeah, fireman third-class.

They say, "I'll be damned. They got navy people in there with blacks?"

So the country was left with a dilemma. As we were coming through those schools, the white boys were going through the schools. The white boys were stuck on ships immediately when they graduated. But if they stuck me on a ship, I would be a grade or two above a lot of white guys, so they kept us off the ships.

ISOARDI: What'd you do? Where did they put you?

JACKSON: They shipped us out to San Pedro, California, and put us into what they call small craft, which is a dream job. See, in a small craft—During the war, every ship that came through the naval ship yards came into our port—Had to come through what we had—We had a big gate out there, and they had to open that gate to let ships in. So the ship would get about seven or eight miles out at sea, coming in from Yugoslavia or somewhere, and we'd have to take a captain from our base, and take him out on our small craft which they put us on. We'd drive him seven miles out to sea to meet the ship. Our captain would go up on the ship and guide it through the mine fields and through the gate to bring it into the harbor.

ISOARDI: And you'd just head back in the craft by yourself.

JACKSON: Yeah, we'd head back in the craft by ourselves.

ISOARDI: How was that—? You were like a taxi driver then. Geez.

JACKSON: Yeah. That's what we did—it was a taxi service.

ISOARDI: So there's no one underneath you then to boss around there, wasn't that—?

JACKSON: Just three guys on the boat, and those boats were yachts. If I was driving one today we'd call it a yacht. We had sleeping quarters, we had a galley, we had a head, and we kept that spit shine decks.

ISOARDI: Pretty good service.

JACKSON: It was good service. Those white boys would wave at us as the ships were going out, and, see, we'd wave at them. And seven, eight months, a year later, we were still there, and the white boys would be coming back and they'd say, "those niggers are still down there. Damn. I want that kind of duty, too." So they started to complain in '44 when the navy said, "Damn, we can't do this then. We got to put them boys on some ships because, hell, they got it too easy." And so finally in '44 they give us orders to go aboard, and we had to take on duties on the ship.

ISOARDI: So did you get assigned to a big ship then?

JACKSON: [affirmative]

ISOARDI: Where'd you go?

JACKSON: Well, we went all in the Pacific Arena. All over— Okinawa, Japan—

ISOARDI: Really? What kind of a ship were you in?

JACKSON: It was a destroyer escort.

Before we went there we were on the base in San Pedro, in the big chow hall. There was a lot of guys there, a lot of us stripe engineers and white guys working together. When it come time to eat, we would go to the chow hall, and they would send the white guys to eat on the side, where you look out the window— You see all the pretty workers, you know, because they had a lot of women working in the ship yard, in the fort dock down there. We had to go back, way all back in the corner, called "Colored Section." And being from the North, I wasn't too used to that. One day we all

plan—I said to the guys, "Let's all just eat where the next—" We get in chow line with the guys, you know, and we go through the—You know to put in our trays and then we came through—Instead of taking the next seat, we just split to our corner.

I said, "Tomorrow let's all go down there, and when a seat comes up next, let's take that seat."

They said, "Okay, Jack—that's a good idea." So the next day I went down there and I got early in the line.

I was behind three white guys and then some blacks guys started staggering in the line, till the line was staggered. And so when the three white guys got their tray and went to their table, I got my tray and I went right behind them. They took this seat, and I took my seat right next to them. And so the next black guy that was supposed to follow, he turned and went to the colored section, and all them niggers went to the colored section and left me over there by myself. [laughing] I said, "Goddamn—"

ISOARDI: Did you pull it off? What happened?

JACKSON: Yeah, I just sit there eating, you know. [murmurs] You could hear mumbling and so on. It sounded like a roar, you know. And the big guard that, we called him "Chief," is a big Indian.

And he come to say, "How long you been in the navy, sailor?"

And I say, "You see the stripes on my arm? That shows you how long I've been here. I've been here four years, just about four years."

He said, "Well you know you ain't supposed to eat over here with white people."

I said, "We work together." I says, "Why can't we eat together? Now this is my buddy right there. We work in the engine department down there together."

[He] said, "Well, that's not for you to decide."

And he was looking out over in the corner, where the "nigger" was getting

mumbled louder, you know. So the chief stepped back. He didn't say anything. He went, and I finished my meal and I walked out of the chow hall. When I walked out of the chow hall they had four guards grab me, and they stuck me in the brig. I stayed in the brig about a month and then my trial came up.

ISOARDI: A month you were in the brig?

JACKSON: [affirmative] My trial came up—I had more than that to do. They cited me for inciting a riot, for making my sit-down, and I was found guilty by a board of the naval board officers. I had an officer named Lieutenant Grant who was my lawyer, and he argued my case for me. But eventually I lost and they stuck me in the brig for thirty days with bread and water.

And the brig was about two houses away from my regular barracks where all the black guys slept.

And they'd run by there and say, "Hey Harold, how you doing in there?"

I'd say, "Ah, shut the hell all you—Go to hell you bastards!"

I'm in the brig drinking bread and water. So, I stayed out there thirty days on bread and water. And it got to the news all across the country: a black man got stuck in the brigs for eating with white people, you know. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, the Los Angeles papers—all those papers got a story on that. And so about four months after that then, they sent us a notice in our barracks that negroes, all negro personnel, when they go to the chow hall tomorrow, "Just take the next seat—we gonna integrate the chow halls." I think I had a lot to do with breaking down integration in eating. That was the first I ever heard of a black man sitting and eating next to a white man. And I'm looking at it now. I can't see why that was such a big deal.

ISOARDI: [laughs] But back then—Where were you in the brig at, where was that at?

JACKSON: Terminal Island.

ISOARDI: Terminal Island?

JACKSON: I did mine—No, I was in Terminal Island in a section base. In Terminal Island, I stayed there a month while I was waiting for the trial. And the marines—They had the marines guard all the prisoners. The navy didn't have nothing to do with the prison, the marines were the prison keepers. And then back on my base, where I was under the rule of sailors—But I was confined to our jail, and that was about two doors from my barracks. So they had three sailors on our base, you know, for guys that went bad, and that's where I stayed with bread and water.

And I just happened to think of something funny, man. See, every third day they would give you a meal. And so then I went to chow and got a meal, and then I would steal an orange and a piece of ham, and stick it in my shirt. As I went back to the guard—And the guards didn't look me over too good. I said, "Oh boy, I got me an orange now." And so, man, I ate that orange—I said, "I'm going to save this till tomorrow, or the second day." The next day, I got real hungry. I went and took that orange and ate it. That night I got hungry again. He brought the two slices of bread, and I put the orange peelings inside the bread and ate the orange peeling sandwich. That's the best sandwich I ever had in my life.

ISOARDI: I'll be it tasted great.

JACKSON: How can bread—? I ain't never seen bread taste that good. And then one time, I stole a piece of ham from the chow hall on my day that I ate. And I brought the ham back, and I stuck it underneath my mattress—a piece of ham. And I went to sleep, and I waited a day and a half. And I said, "Well, I got that ham." I said, "Now's the time, because I'll eat this now, and then I only got a day to wait and I'll go back to the chow hall again." So, I went to get the ham and it was full of ants—all full of ants—ants running over my hand. I say, "Guard. Guard. I got to go to the bathroom." See, we had

to go out, to go to the bathroom. So the guard come over and opened the door for me to go to the bathroom. I put the ham in my pocket and went in the bathroom, took the water, ran it , washed them ants off of that ham.

ISOARDI: There's no way you're going to throw it away. [laughs]

JACKSON: You're talking about throwing away—I was going to have an ants and a ham sandwich. So eventually I got out of the navy, and that's when I—

ISOARDI: Let me stop you.

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AUGUST 5, 1999

ISOARDI: So you get out of the navy when?

JACKSON: I came out of the navy June 5th, 1945.

ISOARDI: Just at the end of the war.

JACKSON: Just toward—It was not quite over yet.

ISOARDI: Right a couple months more—

JACKSON: —Which I had no way of knowing at that time. So I came out here and I worked in the shipyards—And there wasn't any idea because—I remember when I worked in the ship yards, we were working in close quarters, tearing off that asbestos, putting new asbestos on the ship, which we didn't think—We're breathing all this stuff with no masks, no nothing on.

ISOARDI: They had asbestos before anybody knew there was any—

JACKSON: Before anybody knew it was bad, yeah. It was—All the pipes on the ships were, you know—Asbestos was put on them to guard the pipes, and so we had to go down there take all that stuff loose. I guess that's when they must have first heard about it, but they didn't tell us about it, because that's what we were doing—replacing that asbestos.

So I stayed there about a month, and then I decided to go back home to Gary, Indiana. And I went back to Gary, Indiana. And since I was an early let-out, I was resented by a lot of my buddies at home. I went to a dance one night, and some of the guys that didn't go into the army, they ganged up on me and gave me a nice whipping.

And I said, "Now, this now this ain't supposed to be, I'm a sailor." But hell,

there's six or seven of them and just me by myself, in a uniform. I went to a dance and they kind of jumped on me gave me a black eye and all that.

ISOARDI: Well why?

JACKSON: They thought I was a smart-ass. They figure, "You think just because you're a sailor, you can come back in." That was the beginning of little gang get-togethers, you know, because all my boys were still in the service.

I was one of the earlier releases, June 5th. So finally my brother got out—After they bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima my brother got out of the service. He was in the navy, too. He went in before me, and he moved to San Francisco where he had gotten married and had a kid.

And so I was in Gary, Indiana, and my first job—I intended to stay in Gary, so my first job was at the—Also at Gary—Whiting, Indiana has got one of the most largest refineries in the world—oil refineries. And so my first job was in a refinery. And my job was to dig deep, six-foot holes to lay the pipelines down in. So we had to dig those and, well—See, all the men were in the service just about, and on that line there was a lot of women digging those holes, you know. Those women could work, man. I'd been there about two weeks, and my back was killing me, and it hurt. So about noon, the foreman came down there, and I was about up to my knees, my hole had been built to my knees, while the woman were up to their chests, and sand was coming all out of the hole. They were out-digging me fifty to one, and frankly, man, I got embarrassed. So I said, "Hell, let me get out of here." I said, "These women are beating me, digging faster than I can dig." I was just to my knees and they were to their chests in that hole. And so, I got my check and I said, "To hell with this, I'm going to San Francisco to get with my brother." So that's when the music started.

I went to San Francisco, and my brother was playing around with some of the

jazz bands up in San Francisco, and my first job I got up there was a chauffeur, because my brother's wife's mother worked for these rich people. That's all—She cleaned up houses and all this stuff, so she know a lot of people. When I got there she said, "Well, these people want a chauffeur and you go over there and see—You drive?" I said, "Oh sure, I drive." I didn't even have a driver's license. I'd never driven a car, hardly. A little bit—I drove a car but not much. And so I went on an interview and they just said, "Yeah, we like you. Very nice—Nice looking kid." And I was studying music, and could play "Claire de Lune" and all that stuff. She had a big piano and I said, "Would I mind—?" And I went over and played it—"Claire de Lune" and "Moonlight Sonata." Well, she thought, "High class. I got high class. Shoot, I got a black man that can play the piano."

So she gave me my little cap, and said, "My chauffeur will take you down, and he'll take you to a—I want him to see how you drive and everything." So, she said, "Well, you take Harold down—" And she lives on Nob Hill, in San Francisco—Mrs. Willis J. Walker. Her husband was an Oregon lumber man—he had made all this money in Oregon lumber. She's very rich. So the chauffeur came. They had a 1942 Packard Limousine. And so, he got me down there in San Francisco—Hilly—I'd never seen as many hills in a city. And so he got me.

He said, "Okay, you take it." So I took it, man. I started going up this hill.

I said, "Oh my God." I was scared of heights anyhow, you know, going up this hill—

ISOARDI: And this wasn't an automatic transmission, was it?

JACKSON: No, no you had to shift gears. And so, I got to the top of the hill and the car—I was still on the hill. Another car was waiting for the stop light, and I—The only way you can go is back down. So I put on the brakes and stopped the car there, and

when he moved on I took my foot off the break and the car started rolling backwards.

He said, "Give it gas! Gas! Gas!" And I gave it gas, and the car went back over the hill. He said, "Pull over." He said, "Phew!" He said, "How long you been driving?"

I said, "Man, I really haven't been driving that long. As a matter of fact this is the second time I ever drove."

He said, "That's beautiful. That little bitch. Working with that goddamned woman—she won't pay me right!" The he said, "Come on, come on, let's go back over there." He said, "He's excellent." That's what the chauffeur told to Mrs. Walker.

She said, "Okay then you got the job."

ISOARDI: Geez—During all this time you're in the service for a few years, and then you go to San Francisco—Is there any music going on during this time—? When you're in the service?

JACKSON: The only music that was going on was the piano that I'd learned from the—I'd learned how to play "Clair de Lune", "Moonlight Sonata", "Serenade", I was a real—I loved classical music, as [inaudible], and I could still, on my lunch period, in the chow hall—I mean, in the recreation hall, they had a nice big piano there. And nobody played piano, so I'd go over to the recreation hall and play "Clair de Lune" and all this other stuff so then they wouldn't get away from me. I loved classics. I wouldn't mention nothing but classics then. So, I kept my fingers kind of limber on that, so I did know the keyboard, and I knew the clarinet, which I never played anymore. And so I decided I want to be a—

My brother was forming a band, so he said, "We need a bass player"

So I said, "Okay." That was in San Francisco, right after I left the chauffeuring job. I stayed on that job six months and I really did learn how to drive. I'd say, "Miss

Walker, you know—" I'd say, "The way I like to do is, before you go anywhere, let me know so I can check the map and make sure that I can get the best route to take us," because I didn't know that city. I didn't know one street from another. San Francisco—That's a horrible [city] to learn anything, because the streets go nowhere. You start off this big boulevard and all of a sudden it's a dead end street. Nightmare. And so that's how I finally got to learn the city. I'd get my map and I'd look at it and, so eventually I—I left in good graces when I left the job. I was a good chauffeur.

She'd say, "Go up to Carmel." I'd drive all the way up there, and I learned that drive on the chauffeur job.

And so, my brother and I lived—We got a housing project, with three bedrooms, for thirty-one dollars a month. And then we sent for my sister from Gary. She had two kids, and her husband was beating them all up, so we sent for them. And he had a baby by his wife in San Francisco, but she had died at childbirth, and so we had his little baby and my sister's two babies coming out to help us raise our daughter. And so we got this three bedroom place at Hunter's Point. That was the most beautiful view, right—You could look all over the bay at Hunter's Point, and I could see the city, the lights, and right at the window. And then we put a piano there, and I'd look out the window and look down at all the beautiful lights, and I'd be practicing on the piano.

But eventually I took a waiter's job—Waited tables at a place called Julia's, down on Filmore, where they had a lot of jazz sessions. And I was a waiter, and I waited that job. My tips were good, and I finally got five hundred dollars together. I went and bought a bass fiddle—upright.

ISOARDI: Why bass?

JACKSON: Huh?

ISOARDI: Why bass?

JACKSON: Because my brother said he needed a bass for the band, and I always loved the bass anyhow, you know. And so, bass to me was easy reading because I was reading from clarinet. It was easy to read the bass notes and everything, very easy. You just had to get the hands and the finger and everything to go together. So I studied with Phillip Korp, of the San Francisco Symphony. He was my teacher. And then I left Philip Korp and went to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on my G.I. Bill. You could go to any school you wanted to, so I went there. I stayed there two or three years studying bass and harmonics and that type of thing—theory and—Cut the tape off a minute let me get my—

[tape off]

JACKSON: Okay, back in San Francisco where me and my brother had just got the housing project—And he was going to raise his young daughter—her name was Sylvia—that was born to his wife. But his wife had died at childbirth. So, we had this little baby and my sister. We sent for her to come up with her two children, to help us raise—I call it "our baby" because I loved the little girl, named Sylvia. That worked pretty fine, and—

In the meantime, my brother had a degree from Hampton in music theory. And so, he would set up a music room in the three-bedroom place we had with the piano, the chartboard, and he began to teach us more formally about harmony. By then, I'd sent for my next to youngest brother Billy, to come out and join us.

Billy was playing tennis as [well as] clarinet in the high school band. When we brought him to San Francisco, he was about sixteen. We immediately gave him a good clarinet teacher from the symphony, through Phillip Korp, who I knew. I got my brother a teacher there, too, Billy. And Billy turned out to be a great, great saxophone player in his later life. So that was the beginning of the band. We had this music room

in our housing project. We were all going to school, and then we had a little jobs on the side.

So finally my brother, whose daughter had become about one a half years old—And my brother was the most studious one in the whole family, you know, he got his college degree and all that, and we barely got out of high school. So I'll never forget this day. Little Sylvia—our little baby—was outside playing, and she came up and knocked on the door, in Hunter's Point at the housing project.

She—"Knock, knock, knock." And nobody answered. So she said, "Knock, knock, knock." Nobody answered. She said, "Open dat door!" My brother jumped straight up off his stool. She said, "Open dat door!"

My brother jumped straight over there, man—I saw the strangest look come over his face. He went out the door, and opened the door—

He said, "What'd you say?" He said "What'd you say?"

She said, [in falsetto] "Open dat door, daddy."

Okay, the very next morning, my brother took Sylvia over to his wife's mother. They were all raised in San Francisco, and they all spoke real proper English, you know, and everything. He took her over there and said, "I'm leaving her with y'all. I don't want my daughter growing up and talking like this." So then, after he took her over there, and we—The air was kind of thick around us because I was so mad, because he had taken our little girl from us. And so he finally said, "Oh hell, I'm sick of the whole thing, anyhow. I'm going to go back to college." He said, "I'm going to go get my master's degree." So a couple of weeks later, he left. And there I was in San Francisco with my sister, and her two daughters, and my brother Billy.

My brother Wilfred, the one that left, had written out a chart for a four-piece band. He wrote about eighty or ninety charts. I said, "Billy, let's take these charts and

see what they sound like."

So, down there from us was a guy that played piano, Sebastian Mitchell from Gary, Indiana, too. And so he came up, and we sat down in the music room and took the first number out of the Jackson chart and played it. Man, it sounded good. Eventually, we rehearsed and went through the whole chart. We had a whole repertoire, about ninety songs, all arranged. And we added a drummer, a guitar player, and then I went out to San Francisco and began to look for jobs. By this time we're really into music now.

My brother Billy wanted to be a straight ahead jazz—I mean like Dizzy, Charlie Parker. He didn't want to play this blues, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll stuff. But I noticed that most of the jobs were taken by the jazz guys. And they stood on the bandstand with an arrogant look on their face, and wouldn't smile for anybody. These are—Remember Jerome Richardson?

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

JACKSON: Jerome Richardson was one of the guys working around there. Vernon Alley was one of the drummers they had—Bucky Harris, I think, was a great drummer—He's deaf when—Those guys were getting all the good gigs, but they were—No personality. But they weren't getting no gigs downtown in the [inaudible]. They was always around the black jazz club—maybe a concert for the white place, because they weren't hiring too many blacks then, either.

And so I went down to one of the white clubs right in the heart of town, and I said, "We've got a terrific four-piece band." I said, "We think we can help your business a lot if you give us a chance at it—Hire us." His name was Johnny Gutierrez.

He said, "Okay, but I don't have a piano in my club."

I said, "Okay. Why don't you let me come over there with you and you go down

and pick out a piano? You can rent one or buy one."

He said, "Okay." So, I went down him and we picked out a piano.

They gave us a job, making fifty dollars a week a piece. There's four of us—Two hundred dollars a week was good money in San Francisco then, because scale was only a dollar or two more. Maybe it wasn't—Maybe it was—We were about on even with scale. So that's how I got my first job playing music in San Francisco. Billy Jackson, Harold Jackson, Sebastian Mitchell, and Julius Irving—Julius—Irving Julius, just the opposite of the basketball player, just the opposite. He was the guitar player. And man, we started playing down there. And we started playing. People would be asking all kinds of requests. They wanted to hear "Stardust," they wanted to hear western songs, they wanted to hear old standards, and they wanted some swing too. At that time, Nat King Cole was real popular and his songs like, "Route 66," and all those songs—"Mona Lisa" had just come out, and we were playing that type of music, while other guys were playing straight-ahead jazz. They wouldn't be caught dead playing "Stardust." You remember those days? You don't remember—That's the way it was in those days, the jazz cats, yeah. They wouldn't be caught dead playing all those commercial songs. So, by being so commercial, we began to get a nice crowd.

Pretty soon we would call ourselves the Chicago Rhythm Boys—Harold Jackson and the Chicago Rhythm Boys. Pretty soon, we are one of the most popular bands around in San Francisco and Oakland. And we worked just about all the top jobs. We even worked Jack's Tavern. That's in the black part. We had proved ourselves to the white people downtown. When we went out to the black area, we did good at Jack's Tavern which—He had about the best club, the California Club up on the hill. We worked both of those clubs, and then another one they called the Rendezvous Club, down on Filmore Street where all the jazz—Was all the jazz scene.

And we bumped into a lot of great musicians. As a matter of fact, that's the first time I saw Teddy Edwards, the great saxophonist. [He] came through there with—I can't think of the band's name now. That's when I first heard him play, and I said to myself, "This is the fastest saxophone player I've ever heard in my life." That little dude can play man. And he's [makes fast musical sound]—he's playing twice as fast as Billy.

Billy, my brother, said, "Dang, man, that's what I want. I don't want to be playing all this old commercial stuff."

And then I'll be [saying], "We making the money. We don't want to let go of this."

ISOARDI: [laughter] Were you guys in the union up there?

JACKSON: Yeah, eventually. See, the union was so jealous, because we started to get all these little offers of jobs. So I remember even prior to that I'd go down to try to join the union, and they said, "We have to give you a music test." And so they put me before the test board which is Vernon Alley, Jerome Richardson, and the union secretary then, Forbes, Mr. Forbes. So we had to go over to his house. He had a little music set-up in his basement, and they put the bass chart. And Vernon Alley put out a chart, man. I'm telling you, that thing—I've been playing clarinet, and I didn't see bars moving like that on clarinet. So I didn't do too good on that audition. They had a silly rule then: if you can't read music you can't belong to the union. I said "Well Art Tatum—What about all those guys—?"

ISOARDI: Erroll Garner. Erroll Garner could never read music.

JACKSON: And he was making it good then, too, Erroll Garner.

The only way I could do that—I had to send back to Gary, Indiana to our musicians' union there. And they put me in the union in Gary, and then they sent me out my card, and so then I went down to the San Francisco union and said, "Transfer me."

And we did the same thing with Billy. They looked up at me—Wasn't nothing they could do. They had to transfer me, see. But you could only work weekends, you can't work no steady job until—

ISOARDI: They have a waiting period?

JACKSON: Yeah, that'd be fine. Six months. So the six months went by real fast, and then after that we were legal and we started getting every job in town.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

JACKSON: Mmmm, yeah, we were doing good. That was in San Francisco.

ISOARDI: How long did you stay there?

JACKSON: Stayed there three years.

ISOARDI: You were up there for three years? '45 to '48 or so?

JACKSON: Eight, just about '48—First part, I came down in the latter part of '47—Came down, you know—In the first part of '48 I came down here. So, I stayed there for three years.

ISOARDI: Well, let me ask you, when you were down in San Pedro—was it?—when you were stationed there during the war? Did you ever get up to L.A., up to Central Avenue?

JACKSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we came to San Pedro. That was in '43 when we came here. I remember that train ride, man, because there was nothing but sailors and soldiers coming out of Chicago, coming into California. We came over the San Bernardino mountains and started down the valley. All I could see for miles and miles around were oranges. Those orange trees—The air was so clean and fresh. Even smoke from the engine—You'd let your window open, smoke come on in from the engine. But even with the smoke up in there you could start smelling the fruit. And all those little cities

you see out there, all them cities out there now, they weren't there then. There was nothing but orange groves. And I said to myself, "Good Lordy. Well, I didn't know this happened in the world." It was in the winter too. No it wasn't the winter, it was the summer.

Once I saw California sunshine, and these inside toilets and showers, I said, "You're never going to get me back to my property in Indiana." I said, "No way am I ever going back to that place. I got an inside toilet, man." Here you go, and so—And showers and all that stuff.

So we landed down in San Pedro. And then we got leave—I worked on a boat where you work twenty-four [hours] on and then twenty-four off. We would get with the crew and we'd take three days—Maybe Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday we would stay on. They would come on, say, Wednesday, Thursday Friday. Then we'd have three days in the city where we could really roam around—that's the way we worked it. And so when I first came up to Los Angeles [Club] Alabam was one of the best clubs. That's where you could see the big show with Johnny Otis, and a band up there. That's the first I saw of him. Then the Last Word [Cafe], on Forty Second and Central. But the Downbeat Club wasn't there, then. They built that later. Up the street from the Last Word club, they had the Memo Club—

ISOARDI: Is that the next block or—?

JACKSON: The next block, on the Forty-Third block. Forty Second Place to Forty Third Street, it was in that block.

ISOARDI: Right, and it was on the East side of the street? Same side as Last Word?

JACKSON: Yeah, the East side, the same side as Last Word, on the East Side of the street. And the Memo—Then you walk a little farther up the street—On the other side of the street, you had a little restaurant called Sweet Dreams. Then you had a

Woolworth's five and ten cent store. As you got to Vernon and Central, right around the corner there, they had Ivan's Chicken Shack.

ISOARDI: Oh—Ivie's Chicken Shack?

JACKSON: Ivie's Chicken Shack, yeah. We used to love Ivie's chicken. So we used to go over there to eat there at Ivie's Chicken. I'd take my girlfriend or somebody I'd met, and we'd go in there. And maybe there's four or five sailors and four or five girls sitting around, because they had a piano player there. And he was playing my favorite kind of music; he was playing classical music. And I used to love to hear him play those—I requested the songs I knew, "Moonlight Sonata"—He played them much better than I could. He was a big musician; his name was Charles Brown.

ISOARDI: Oh, the Charles Brown?

JACKSON: The Charles Brown. Later on Charles Brown became famous as a blues singer, and I still picture him playing "Clair de Lune" and all those classical songs. I just can't—I said that's the same—I saw him on stage one time, Charles Brown. Before then, I didn't know his name, I just watched him playing. I didn't care what his name was. Then he got his first hit record around the time I was in San Francisco. I said, "Dang. That's the guy that played the piano at Ivie's Chicken Shack." Yeah, that's Charles Brown. Yeah, he can play classical piano. Sometimes I'd go by there, and it would be his off-day, when nobody playing the piano, and I would then say Ivie, "Could I go play a couple of songs?" I'd go play "Clair de Lune" and get that thing out of me. That was during the years I was in the navy.

Then, on Vernon and Central, on the southeast corner and upstairs, they had a place called Lovejoy's. Now Lovejoy's used to be more famous for its after-hours activities, because when all the other clubs closed, Lovejoy's would be just opening.

I remember seeing a lot of movie actors and things come up—Movie actors from

Hollywood would come up to Lovejoy's. Matter of fact, they came all up to the clubs in Central Avenue to buy the music that was being played over there. They loved that music. Big limousines would pull up on Central—And there was no such thing as race wars and all that kind of stuff then, not on our side of the fence, because they were real welcome over here. We loved to have those movie stars and everything coming to clubs to see Johnny Otis. As a matter of fact Nat King Cole played there, at the Last Word. I came in one day, and they had an all-girl group there, and I said, "Damn, let me go and see these girls." They were pretty too; they had their picture outside of the club—

ISOARDI: Which club was this do you remember?

JACKSON: Last Word.

ISOARDI: Oh it was at the Last Word.

JACKSON: And so I went in and they had this girl on violin, named Ginger Smock, and they had another girl named Nina Russell that was playing jazz organ, which I'd never heard before. I mean, she's boogeying on that organ, man. She had them big ten feet, and man you could see the [taps foot, makes musical sounds], she'd be tearing that organ up, and Ginger's smiling. Then they had another girl named Mata that was playing the piano, so they had the piano, organ, and violin, and that was the best song group I'd heard in years—Ever heard. And the girl playing the violin, I especially looked at her, because I was about eighteen or nineteen then. I guess she was about 22 or 23. She had one song she played called "Holiday on Strings" [hums song].

ISOARDI: Classical, right?

JACKSON: That's called "Holiday on Strings." And she'd play it pizzicato, then the bridge would come up, "la da da", [hums] and she's bow the bridge and go back on the last eight [hums] pizzicato. And then she would just get into [hums] on the violin. She was the first and the greatest jazz violinist in the world. Her mentor was Stuff Smith.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JACKSON: Stuff Smith—she loved Stuff.

And I used to go in there, and I would tip her a dollar to just—They got to know me pretty good. When I come there and play they'd play that little "Holiday for Strings" for me without asking. And I would ask, and I'd give them their regular dollar, which was pretty big money in those days—a lot of money for me. I was making twenty dollars a month in the navy. All I was getting was twenty dollars a month. Ginger Smock later on was going to become one of my wives, as the story goes on.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

JACKSON: Yeah, yeah, me and Ginger married years later. So, in San Francisco in 1947, my brother had already left us. My sister and my baby brother Billy—He was sixteen, going to high school and was playing on the gig with me at nights. And my sister Rosetta, and her two children, Brenda and Stephanie, we were all living, at Hunter's Point at the same place my oldest brother had left us.

And so my father, still in Gary, Indiana, was coming out with his wife to visit us. It was my stepmother: my mother had died many years before; he had remarried. And him and his stepwife, my stepmother, were coming out to visit. I did everything spic-and-span. I went and painted that whole apartment. We went down to the furniture company and got some new furniture on credit. We had the place spic-and-span two days before my father was to come out here. And so I came home from work one night and fire trucks were all around the building.

ISOARDI: Oh.

JACKSON: And I said, "What's this?" you know. And then come to find out that it was coming from my apartment. My niece had set the curtains on fire and it burned out just about all the furniture inside. They got it before it could tear the walls down, but it was

all smoky and wet. And so when they got all of it, it took me and Billy another day to get all the mess out of that place. And the furniture had been scorched, and so we'd—Everything was scorched and I didn't have time to repaint it, and my father comes to town.

So when he got there he said, "I'll be goddamned. I never dreamed you kids was living like this in California."

I forgot my other baby brother had came to be with us too, named Donald. And Donald was only about 14. So my father stayed a week and I explained to him that we'd just—Our place was spic and span but the kids—He didn't want to understand that, he wanted to look at the bad side.

[He] said, "You're all living like tramps." He said, "I'm going back to Gary and I'm taking Donald with me. He's 14 and I'm not going to let him live in California in this shit."

So man, you know, I loved my dad. I wanted him to think that I was doing good, you know, taking care of my sister and my two brothers and their two daughters, and me just by myself now, you know. But he left. He got on the train, left—And they had to cross on the ferry boat to Oakland to get the train out of Oakland that goes on through. So I took them over there, and came back on the ferry and when I came home, man, I was crying so bad.

I just didn't have nothing left, so I came home, took my bass fiddle, went down to the pawn shop, got me a hundred dollars for my bass fiddle. I pawned it. I went into the train yards and caught a train, came to Los Angeles. I left my brother and my sister and her two kids up there.

I told them, "I'll take care of you, but my nerves are shot. I just can't go through this no more in San Francisco, it's just too much pressure."

ISOARDI: Yeah. So why L.A.—? Because you knew it a little bit from the war—? You thought there'd be opportunity?

JACKSON: Yeah, I knew Los Angeles. I'd been out here two or three years. I knew—L.A. was like my home. So I came back down to L.A. Man, I'm going to tell you, I was hit pretty bad. That little money I had from the bass fiddle went in a minute.

And so a couple of my navy buddies was staying here. So my navy buddy let me stay—I slept on the floor in his room for a couple of nights, and then he told I had to go because his girlfriend was coming in for the weekend. So one night I slept on a park bench down by the railroad station. Then the next morning I went into the railroad station, and I was dressed sharp. I had on my suits that I used to wear, ties—I was really dressed clean.

And I went into a restaurant, and I asked for the kitchen section. And so the lady came over—A black lady was running the kitchen, dishwashers, and waiters, and all those people.

She said, "You want to work?"

I said "Yes, ma'am. I want to work."

She says, "No, you don't want to work here. I can tell the way you dress, you don't want no dishwashing job."

I said, "Lady I haven't eaten in three days. I need a job."

She said, "You really haven't eaten, have you?"

I said, "No."

She took me back to that little place, [said] "Come back into the kitchen."

I went back in the kitchen. They had a little office there, where the help eat and everything, you know. She sat me down, went and brought me back a meal. Man, I whipped that meal down like a wild coyote. I was putting on a show for her, too. I

wanted that job, so I was letting that lady know I was hungry.

I was eating, saying, "Thank you very much." I said, "Thank you so much, I feel so much better now."

She said, "You really do need a job, don't you?"

I said, "Sure."

She said, "Well, come to work tomorrow."

So, I went to work the next day. That guaranteed I could get a little room. I went and told the people in the building where my friend was staying that I had a job now; I couldn't pay them right away, but I'd pay them ten dollars before the week was over. And so that's how I got my first room.

And then I used to just go up and—Marvin Johnson, that's who I was trying to think about a little earlier, when Teddy Edwards played with him in San Francisco. So he was playing at—By this time they had the Downbeat club. So Marvin Johnson was playing the Downbeat. I used to leave my place on Central Avenue. I was living right off 46th Street and Central Avenue in a little housing court where they had rooms, and then I'd come out of there and walk up Central, past the Empire Furniture building, the pawn shops, and little clothing store there. They had real sharp jitterbug-type clothes, you know, what all the young black people liked to wear. And then walk on down the street until you come to the Last Word club, and that's where Marvin Johnson was playing.

He had a kid playing saxophone with him at that time named Charles Ferguson, from out of the East Coast. Well, Charles had to be one of my best friends—we went to kindergarten together. I was so glad to see Charles. We played clarinet in the same section in the [inaudible] band. And Charles was going and I thought he was a god, man. I said, "This guy's playing with Marvin Johnson." And I went up to see him, and

Charles was playing with Marvin Johnson, but he was on this stuff man. I could tell his eyes were glassy.

[speaks as if intoxicated] "Hey, Harold. How you doing baby? Yeah." He said, "Oh man, I grabbed the group up in New York and they was headed this way and they asked me did I want to come. You got any stuff?"

I said, "No Charles, I don't have no stuff." But anyhow, that was Charles.

I told you about Ginger Smock and the group—All right, now let me back track a little bit more. While I was in the navy, in San Pedro, Nat King Cole was playing at a place out on La Brea, The La Brea Inn.

ISOARDI: Was that the Swanee Inn?

JACKSON: Swanee Inn. Yeah, right, the Swanee Inn, and the La Brea Inn is further up the street—Yeah, the Swanee Inn.

ISOARDI: Where on La Brea was the Swanee Inn?

JACKSON: Swanee Inn was on about Second or Third street on La Brea.

ISOARDI: Going up toward the Hollywood area?

JACKSON: Going up toward Hollywood. And then the La Brea Inn was on Santa Monica and La Brea, near Sunset and La Brea—Swanee Inn, that's right.

So while they were playing one night—You know, Nat King Cole never sang those songs, he just played. You know they had the trio, and they just swung. He could play his ass off, you know.

ISOARDI: Oh, he's a great pianist.

JACKSON: Great, great piano player—great. And so one day some guys came in—And I heard this right from Eddie Cole, Nat's brother—He's the one that told me this story. He taught Nat how to play the piano. That's Eddie Cole, Eddie and his wife Betty—very dear friends of mine. We worked Honolulu and all that together, which I'll

get to later on.

Well, he said "This man was sitting out in the audience and some lady walked up to the band, and said, 'I like the way you play, but I want to hear you sing something, so here's a 20 dollar bill.'" And that was a big tip.

ISOARDI: Very big.

JACKSON: Yeah, the band could play the rent on that.

So Nat said, "Well, I usually don't do no singing, but I'll do this—I got a song I wrote. I'll play this one for you then, if it would be all right."

She says, "Okay."

He said, "Okay, then." He said [sings] "The monkey took the buzzard for a ride in the air, the monkey thought that everything was on the spare, the monkey tried to throw the baby off his back, the monkey grabbed his neck and say now listen Jack, straighten up and fly right, ain't nothing stay right."

And so when the song was over everybody clapped so hard. He'd never got that much applause since he's been there, you know.

And these two guys were sitting out in the audience, and they're saying, "Dang, that was good." So they came up to the—After he came down for intermission, they called him over and they said, "You know, we liked the way you did that song." They said, "We are starting a new company and we'd like to maybe try to get you interested in recording that song with us."

And Cole said, "Yeah, I guess I wouldn't mind, but how much money is it?"

They say, "Well, we could either give you some cash money, or we could give you some stock in the company, for all you guys, you know, because we are not that big."

So he said, "Okay." And so they went in and recorded. So Nat said, "Give me

my money—Fifty, a hundred, whatever it is, give it to me."

ISOARDI: He didn't take the stock?

JACKSON: No, he didn't take the stock. He didn't want no shitty-ass company.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that became what—? Capitol Records?

JACKSON: The guitar player, Irving—not Irving, was it Irving?

ISOARDI: Irving Ashby?

JACKSON: Yeah, Irving Ashby took it. He said, "I don't care, man, I'll take the stock." And I think the bass player took the stock, too.

The song was an immediate hit. That's when I first heard of Nat King Cole really.

ISOARDI: Yeah, that was a smash.

JACKSON: And the company starts growing from there. Later on the company's name was Capitol Records. And was it Irving Ashby—? Was that Irving Ashby—his guitar player?

ISOARDI: Oh, Johnny Miller?

JACKSON: Yeah, Johnny Miller was a bass player.

ISOARDI: And who else—God, who am I thinking of? My mind is a blank.

JACKSON: I keep saying Irving, but no, the guitar [player] didn't take—Because Irving Ashby, I think, joined them later.

ISOARDI: I think so, too.

JACKSON: Yeah, I can't think of the name. Maybe it will come to us later on.

ISOARDI: Who was that—? Oscar Moore?

JACKSON: Oscar Moore.

ISOARDI: Oscar Moore.

JACKSON: Yeah, Oscar Moore, because Johnny Moore was his brother. He was a

blues man, yeah, Oscar Moore, that was the one.

ISOARDI: Yeah, Oscar Moore, that's who it was.

JACKSON: So he took his in stock.

So later on when Nat got married he started getting big. His wife told him, "Drop those guys, you don't need them. Just go single." So Nat did. He did everything she told him to do. The guys did all right, but Oscar Moore did especially well because he still had stock in the Capitol records and, you know, Capitol became—The rest is history.

ISOARDI: Yeah smart, smart move.

JACKSON: I thought that was quite interesting. Let's stop for a minute.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 5, 1999

ISOARDI: Interview with Harold Jackson, tape number two, August five, 1999. Okay, Harold.

JACKSON: I was just explaining how Oscar Moore and the Nat King Cole Trio broke up. I keep wanting to think of his wife's name. But anyhow, his present wife—Nadine was his first wife. Everybody loved her. And the second wife nobody loved, except Nat. And, man, she called all the shots for him from then on. And so he fired the two guys that came along with him, Johnny Miller and Oscar, and went on a single after he got real famous. And while I was in the navy—That's when I was hearing all this new stuff about Nat King Cole.

He was in Los Angeles and he came out of Chicago. I'd seen him once before in Chicago. When I was about sixteen I'd sneaked into this little bar, and they had the Nat King Cole Trio playing in there. But I didn't pay too much attention then, I was looking for girls.

And so another time we come up, and I went out to the place in Watts called the—They had a little USO out there where entertainers went to be entertained. I walked in there one day and went upstairs, and they had this young kid that was playing saxophone. I told some of my neighbors, "That guy's going to be great, man. Look, he's real young—Nice, still in high school—" Looked like he was in high school, about tenth grade or something like that.

And so I walked over to the guy and say, "Hey man, you really sound great. What's your name?"

He says, "Jay McNeely." [Laughter]

"Jay McNeely, man, you still sound good."

ISOARDI: You were right.

JACKSON: Yeah, that was about 1944.

ISOARDI: He was still in high school then.

JACKSON: Yeah, he was still in high school. They had this little band they put together, just playing their USO affairs.

ISOARDI: And he's still doing it. Fifty-five years later he's still doing it.

JACKSON: I don't think Jay even knew I knew him back then. I don't think I ever mentioned that to him.

ISOARDI: You'd been around a bit by the time you came out to the West Coast, even for your first time I guess, you were near Chicago, you'd been into the city. How did Central Avenue strike you, as a place?

JACKSON: Central Avenue had a magnetic pull on you. You could remember every—It looked like the whole world settled on Central Avenue, you know, all the night clubs and all the glitter, and just every—

Even the hamburger stands had a class of their own. They had the first drive-in, right on Forty-first and Central. I can't think of the drive-in, but it was the first drive-in probably in the city—One of the first. You drive through there and get your little hamburger.

Later on they turn it into a breakfast place, and later on in my story you'll see I became the owner of that Last Word [Cafe] club, which at the time I was trying to get that job down at the restaurant. I never dreamed that I would be owning the club I was passing—That was the last thing on my mind in '48, man. I said, "Shit I'm—"

"Someday you're going to be the owner of that club." If it was magic—[If] these

psychics could have told me, man I'd have been in heaven. I wasn't, I was in hell.

And so I worked on that job for a little while and finally I bumped into a couple of musicians, one named Pete Lewis, a saxophone player. He was having a little gig out in Santa Monica and he wanted a bass player. I didn't have a bass then. I left my bass—I lost it at the pawn shop.

And so he said, "I know a friend of mine is a bass player with Louis Jordan. He's got two or three basses, let me call his house."

So they let me borrow Louis Jordan's bass player's bass—His wife did. And so I went on the gig with Pete, and that's when I started getting back into music then.

They had another guy named Luke, Luke Jones, I think it was, that owned a barber shop. He was a hell of an alto player. And so Luke was on this gig with us. And then Luke started calling me for little bass gigs, and I would borrow the bass from Louis Jordan's bass player. I can't think of his name right now though. That's after I came back to California.

In the meantime right next to the restaurant at the depot at Union Station, right across the street, is the Terminal Annex, which is a mail carrier place—mail place. So on my break one day I went out there and filled out an application for a mailman. I was just making enough to eat on, and get bus fare, and a little recreation change. I wasn't making much at the restaurant. So in about a month they called me to Terminal Annex, so I went on down to work as a temporary and eventually stayed on to be permanent.

So I was sending home—I'd been gone from San Francisco about a year now, and I came home one evening, and the lady who I was renting from was a friend of the family's.

She said, "Harold, I got a surprise for you."

I said, "You got a surprise?"

"Yeah," she said. "Go on back to your bedroom."

I went back to the bedroom it was my brother Billy.

I said, "Golly, man, what are you doing here?" There's the horn sitting on the floor.

And he said, "Man, you went off and left us."

I said, "Billy, I couldn't help it. My nerves, the day I left—" And I said, "I just couldn't stand it no more, I was about to have a nervous breakdown." And so I said, "What are you doing now?"

He said "Well, I just came down—" Billy with Jay McShann, up in Seattle—"I just came down. I was working with Jay McShann's band, but they're going back east. I didn't want to go back east, so they dropped me off in Los Angeles, and I tried and look you up." He said, "But I was up in Seattle. They had a cat there working the matinees named Ray Charles. And they had another guy up there playing trumpets, work with us, [whose] name was Quincy—"

ISOARDI: Quincy Jones.

JACKSON: "Quincy Jones, up in Seattle, the busiest young kid. He's got nice arrangements. I played some of his arrangements, he really writes nice."

I said, "What you planning to do now, Billy?"

He said, "I don't know. I guess I'll try to find a job."

I said, "No, no, no, no. You didn't finish high school."

He said "No, after you left I just started going down the road."

I said, "Okay, run on back over to Jefferson [High School] get your diploma." So I said, "I got a good job. Now, you can stay here with me and run over and get a diploma." And so that was in late '48, and Billy went back to school.

ISOARDI: He was doing okay though, right? He was playing Jay McShann's band.

That was a big band.

JACKSON: Yeah that was a great band—Jay McShann. Yeah, he was doing fine. And all of them loved him. Ray Charles loved him, and everybody—They all loved him. He was just a young kid who was playing nice, real nice saxophone. But he still wasn't eighteen. He was still to make his eighteenth birthday, and he made eighteen and—I guess he made—Yeah, he was born in '29, this is '49, so he just made—About to make 20—So he went back to school and got his high school diploma. He went to L.A. State college, studying chemistry.

So Billy was in the car one day with a friend of mine named Paul Madison, and they were driving up Central Avenue. And on Central Avenue there was not a whole lot of police activity. There was not too much animosity between the policemen. They didn't have any black policemen. They had two white policeman that walked the beat right in front of the Downbeat [Club], Last Word, and all night long right in front of that entertainment center. Those would be the police walk, night after night up there. Eventually I think we began to see black policemen. As a matter of fact I was standing in front of [Club] Alabam one night, Lorenzo was playing in the background and—

ISOARDI: Lorenzo Flennoy?

JACKSON: Flennoy, was playing at the Alabam in the cocktail lounge. They had taken off the big show and had just opened the cocktail lounge. And that blues singer—

ISOARDI: Big Joe Turner—? It wasn't Big Joe Turner, was it?

JACKSON: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Big Joe Turner—? Jimmy Witherspoon—?

JACKSON: No, Turner, Big Joe Turner—And the blues singer, Joe Turner. And they were in there with about two or three people in the house every night. The Alabam had sort of faded away to the Last Word club and the Downbeat. And so I was standing out

there in front of the club one night—Jefferson High School is over about a block off of Central, two or three blocks off of Central and about four streets down.

They had a football game, and they won and all the kids were coming up Central Avenue on their way home and they were screaming and hollering and shoving and pushing. They were celebrating a big win, and it got kind of chaotic. So then they started to'cause—

At the Alabam they started to stop and stare at the music, they'd hear the music coming out and they would stop and the police say, "Get going! Get going! Get going! Keep going! Get out of here!" It was a big tall black policeman.

And I said, "Well I'll be damned, there's a black policeman out here." And so I just stood there while they ran the kids off.

So he came up to me and said, "Goddammit, I told you to move."

I said, "I'm not one of the damn school children." I said, "I'm twenty-four years old."

He said, "I told you to move, see. Goddammit—Here, put these handcuffs on." He put the handcuffs on me and put me in the police car, big old black policeman, long, tall. I think his name was Bradley. Yeah, that was his name, Bradley.

ISOARDI: Tom Bradley? [laughs]

JACKSON: Tom Bradley, yeah, young dude, throwing me in jail, man. I went down to jail. I had about two drinks that night. I was mad, because I was trying to explain to him when we were in the car—

I said, "Look man, I'm a navy veteran. Here's my driver's license, you can see. Look in my pocket, get my drivers license." I said, "I'm 24 years old, 25—It was in '48 so that would make me 24. I was 24 years old then.

He said, "If you don't shut up, I'm going to take this rubber hose and beat a hole

in your ass, so just keep your goddamn mouth shut."

I said, "Okay, sir, okay."

And they put me down in the jail that night—They just put me in a big pen with a whole lot of men up there—I saw a guy get raped. I came out and said, "If there's a way I could kill that policeman, I sure would." I said, "Oh forget it, let it go." And so—cut it for a minute—

[tape off]

JACKSON: So then I worked at the post office, my brother Billy went back to school. I remember one day my brother was in a car with another fellow, a great saxophone player named Paul Madison, one of the greatest saxophone players in the world, I mean—But you've never heard of him. Just like my brother Billy, you never heard of him. And I know a lot of musicians that you heard of, bought their records—They became big artists. The majority of those great musicians on Central Avenue at that time were never heard of. We knew they were great. All the people knew they were great, but for general public in Chicago—You mention the name Chet Christopher in Chicago, they'd say, "Who in the hell is that?" He was one of the strongest saxophone players we had. We had a whole bunch of people like that.

Somewhere in the back of my head then I said, "Somehow or another I got to make sure these people are known." I was always a pusher, I want to—I see these people: just the girl playing the violin, Ginger Smock; great saxophone player, Paul Madison; my brother Billy and the Jackson family; never heard of, except in small circles. And so Billy and I got, decided to get a—

That was Billy that was still in the car that night. And so he was going to college studying chemistry. And so the way Paul explained it—He said they were parked right on 41st [Street], getting ready to turn and these two policemen, they walk

up—The white cops that walk up and down Central, was right at the curb and they told them to stop the car.

And they was smoking a joint. The joint was in my brother Billy's hand. And Paul said, "Swallow the joint! Swallow the joint!" And Billy was so high he missed his mouth, he tried to swallow the joint, and missed his mouth. And the police opened the door and snatched him out, and he finally got it in his mouth and they grabbed him by the neck and said "Choke it out" So they choke it out of my brother and they got the reefer. They convicted him of a felony then—

ISOARDI: Felony?

JACKSON: Not—I don't know what it was—Misdemeanor, I guess. But anyway, whatever it was, it stopped his chemistry career because he could never be a chemist no more after that arrest.

ISOARDI: After a drug arrest, yeah.

JACKSON: Yeah, a drug arrest.

And so eventually I worked at the post office and I finally bought a home at 400 East 69th Street.

ISOARDI: East 69th?

JACKSON: [affirmative] East 69th Street.

ISOARDI: I thought that was kind of white territory.

JACKSON: See, it was beginning—See, the Negroes started up at Slauson, and out past Slauson, from Avalon on over were mostly white, but this was the beginning of the great exodus.

ISOARDI: Oh, when the housing covenants were eliminated, and then you could live wherever you wanted. People started moving away then.

JACKSON: Well see, they started moving away out of—As they moved away, the

elevation—See, Negroes were confined to Main Street on one side and Alameda on the other side.

ISOARDI: Right, right, and down to about Slauson.

JACKSON: And then Slauson to down to First street. And then after you passed Slauson and drove out to 103rd Street, then it became black again and it was called Watts. So they were just breaking down the barriers then, because I know when I first moved to 400 69th Street, my next door neighbors across the street were all white people. And then we had a colored family here, and one up there.

In other words, the white people were getting big money from us. I think I paid $12,000 for that house. And that was a big house, three bedroom house. And so they got their money and went out to the valley and bought them some mansions out there for $20,000. So they only got ten [thousand] out of us, which was way too much at that time, you know. And so that was the beginning of the Negroes beginning to spread from Central Avenue, and that was the beginning of the death of Central Avenue, because as the Negroes began to buy in where the whites had left out. They began to leave the Central Avenue area, until pretty soon they crossed Western and kept going. And they kept going until they were way over on the West Side, now in all the Negro spots, like the Oasis, club Oasis—

ISOARDI: Oh, on Western? That was on Western wasn't it?

JACKSON: Owned by Gerald Horn. They began to open up black clubs on Western, which was unheard of before, in the early fifties. And Gerald Horn owned the Oasis. And right down the street was Mike's Waikiki Club. Waikiki, on Western Avenue—And then further down, they had the Red Hut—Yeah, the Red Hut. And a little place we used to go on intermissions, called the Fat Burger. A little [inaudible] had opened a little hamburger stand down there called Fat Burger. We used to go down

to get those famous Fat Burgers.

But anyhow, me and Billy started our group together. I was carrying mail for the post office, and working at nights. Then my brother left college and came back to California with a wife and a little kid. And the room that I had rented before I got my house with this lady named Miss MacDonald—My brother and his wife took that same room.

ISOARDI: This is your older brother?

JACKSON: My older brother the one left in San Francisco.

ISOARDI: Yeah so he's back?

JACKSON: Back now, yeah. So when he came back in—

ISOARDI: Where were you before you moved down to 69th where were you living?

JACKSON: Huh?

ISOARDI: Where were you living before you moved down to 69th?

JACKSON: Well I was living on—When I first came down I was living on 46th Street, just half a block off of Central Avenue. And then after that, I moved on McKinley Street and Vernon—Vernon and McKinley. Then I moved to 69th Street, where we had the house and the van.

So my brother came back. He had gotten his bachelor's degree from Hampton University, and he came out to go to school here at USC [University of Southern California]. And so he went down—I said, "Okay, you go and finish your college. Get your master's degree at USC in music." So he took his graduation papers from Hampton and went out to USC to take an entrance examination. You had to take an entrance examination, and so when they got to my brother—

All the other people had turned their papers in, and they said, "You appear Monday for the entrance examination, you appear Tuesday." So my brother got out

there and they said, "We can't accept these papers."

He said, "What do you mean?"

They said, "This is not a recognized school." See, Hampton Institute was an all black school, and they said, "Well, we just don't accept that school," and got real belligerent.

And so my brother is one of those guys that, "Oh well, okay."

And he took the papers and went back, and he came home to me, and I got so goddamm mad.

I said, "Give me those papers." And I went back over there the next day and I said, "I want to take the entrance exam." I said, "Here's my papers, I graduated from Hampton."

They said, "I'm sorry, your school is not recognized."

I said, "What do you mean that school is not recognized? We have one of the highest colleges, recognized all through the United States. Why, in California you used to give those guys entrance examinations, and where did they come from?" They said well they were USC and I said, "Listen, we scored higher ratings than they did in a test." And they start getting mad, and I was getting madder.

So finally they said, "Damn, take the damn examination, you ain't going to pass it no how." She stamped me in and I went back and gave my brother his papers.

[She said] "You go Tuesday for the examination."

So my brother went down there and made one of the highest scores ever made in California on an entrance examination. [laughter]

ISOARDI: That's good, that's good. So he went to SC then?

JACKSON: Yeah, and so he made one of the highest scores on the entrance examination.

So now he's back in town. We had a piano player, one of the greatest piano players, "Snake"—Jimmie O'Brien. We called him "Snake." He played Erroll Garner, he could play Tatum, he could play—He was the greatest. He was working with me and Billy.

ISOARDI: There was a guy who I know did some recording then with Buddy Collette named Jimmie O'Brien, you think that's the same guy? Probably the same guy.

JACKSON: Yeah, that's got to be the same one. That's Jimmie, we called him "Snake." But he was working with me and my brother Billy. Billy's playing tenor, Snake was on piano, I was on the bass fiddle, and we had a little drummer, named Eddie—He eventually ended up playing with Oscar Peterson. Eddie—Eddie Thigpen, was our drummer.

ISOARDI: Oh good drummer, yeah.

JACKSON: Yeah, so that was our band. So when my brother came back, he needed some work, you know. We were working all these little gigs around Central Avenue, and down on Fifth Street, in the [inaudible]. See, Central carried on, when it got to Fifth Street it just made a left turn and it was still Central downtown, but only it had turned into Fifth Street. And they had black hotels, a lot of little black businesses down there. They had several little nightclubs, the Swanee, and some other clubs down there, I can't think of the name of them right now—The Regal and—so we we was getting gigs down there.

We weren't making too much. The average, the union scale was about ten dollars a night, so down there we went and tried to get a gig and the guy would only give us 5 bucks a night. So we took our band down there and five bucks, well that was better than nothing. We took it, you know. If you're going to be a musician you got to go with it, and no place was paying big money except out in the white clubs where they wouldn't

let us go play, because we weren't amalgamated then. So we took the gig down at, I think it was the Regal, for five dollars a night, and went and bought four little Hawaiian shirts, and we went down there, we was dressed good, our little Hawaiian shirt all look alike, and we could—Five dollars and all you could drink. [laughter]

ISOARDI: The magic words.

JACKSON: The magic words, yeah. And then they say, "Well it's just wine." And so we took that job and still tried to look for something better, and about two months after that we got fired.

The cat just came in one night and said, "You're all through."

I said, "Guy, what happened?"

"We got another band."

They were only paying them three dollars a night, he saved a couple of bucks, so we lost that job. Right around that time I had started scouting out of our neighborhoods, into white neighborhoods, and I came up on Florence. Just a little bit off of Main there's a place called the Clover Club.

ISOARDI: Never heard of that one.

JACKSON: Yeah it was up—It was on Florence Avenue. Yeah, Florence, yeah. Florence Avenue between Main and Broadway—somewhere in that area—and it was all night clubs, little white night clubs up here then.

So I stopped in the Clover Club. They had never hired in this neighborhood, but since we were so close to the black neighborhood and the neighborhood started turning black, he didn't mind putting a black band in there. But he didn't want black customers, and they were still getting all mostly white customers. But if a black guy walked in there he would take care of him, but let him know that you're not too welcome here, you know. But he would serve them so that we would save our dignity. We didn't want to

have to walk out there, "You didn't serve my friend how can we play here?" We never had to go through that.

And so we started branching off. We got a good job at the Clover Club. And from the Clover Club, one of the waitresses said, "Hey you guys, I understand you're leaving here in about a week. Do you have any work lined up?" I said "No." [She] said, "Well I know a guy on Tweety Boulevard, [who] has got a club called the Borderline Club" And we went out there and auditioned for the Borderline Club and we got the job. It was owned by a guy named Louie Marable. He's still living in Long Beach. He later went into cars.

So Billy and I—And then my brother, we'd put him in the band and we went to work out there. By this time Ed Thigpen had left us, so we got a drummer named Rudy Pitts, who was a fantastic drummer: throw sticks all up in the air, go around. He had one act where he took water glasses and put them on the table while he did his drum solo. And he'd be playing "Lover—" We'd be doing "Lover," [sings] he'd get up off his drum, beating on the tables and get to the glass and play. [hums tune] Every night he'd get to work early and get them glasses put just the amount of water in them to—

ISOARDI: Get the right sound, cool.

JACKSON: That's when we started working the white neighborhoods. And we started getting so popular out there—the place was packed every night—that our boss Louie Marable said, "Harold they got a big building down on Washington and Atlantic. Just a big empty building." He said, "I'm thinking about taking that building and making a night—After hours spot out of it."

I said, "Well, yeah, but what about the law?"

He said, "Well, hell, they got the Jack's Basket Room. They let him stay open. I think it's just a matter of a little pay-off you have to give to—So he said "Okay." So

he said, "Let me look into it."

So a couple weeks later—We had been there about six or seven months and Louie was so happy with the band—

I know one the shake dancers, one who became famous, named Patty Vegas. She was his waitress. We called her Trudy, but years later she came on to be [known as] Patty Vegas—one of the greatest shake dancers that had sixty-sixty-sixty-six boobs.

Finally Louie bought the joint.

He said, "We're going to open this place at two o'clock in the morning, and we'll call it the Nightlife Club." And so we opened the club. They said, "Its going to feature hot music and cold shaking." That was the feature, and, "We'll sell you the water, you bring whatever you want in your pocket." So by the first month, man, nothing really happened there—nothing. And so finally word began to get around, [inaudible] was sneaking in.

And then this friend of mine named Robin Bruin was a disc jockey at KGFJ. [He] came on—

He said, "Man KGFJ got all this time at night, and they don't know what to do with it,'cause your regular programming is over." He said, "And I'm the disc jockey there all this night, and we can get this time for a hundred dollars a week."

So Louie said, "Okay, I'll buy the hundred dollars a week time."

So Robin Bruin came out, set up the radio station in the night club.

ISOARDI: Oh, broadcast live?

JACKSON: Yeah broadcast live—Nightlife, that was the name of the club.

ISOARDI: Geez.

JACKSON: So we came on that night. He said, "Ladies and gentleman, coming straight to you from the Nightlife Club, the sweetest place in the county, cold chicken

and hot music, Robin Bruin and Jackson Brothers Band!" And we hear [hums song]. Man, in about a half an hour cars start pulling up in that driveway. We looked out, man, the place was packed in just about a hour after he put the broadcast on. So he kept broadcasting. Just think, man, that time you could buy for a hundred dollars a week. So Louie kept the time and we broadcast live for about three months, before the night club come. Then we got so packed that we could add any music we wanted to. This will be fun.

So one of our friends from Gary, Indiana, went to school with me and William Marshall, and Charles, [his] name was Sigmund Galloway.

So Galloway came out and said, "Harold, man, I love California, but I can't stay, I don't have any money."

I said, "Come stay with us. You just have to get your gear. Come play tenor with us."

So we expanded the band and we had Chuck Norris on guitar, kind of one of the greatest blues players that ever played—Billy, George Collier, and Rudy left to join the Treniers—Rudy Pitts, the drummer— So we got Wayne Robinson, who ended up later on playing with Lionel Hampton. He just got out of high school, still eighteen years old, and had one of then great big old drums you know, old time drums, and they had all the musicians' names written all over. He came in there with that ugly set of drums—And this man could take a solo. He could drum, man, like nobody waiting. We are still buddies today. That cat could play the drums, man, really play.

So we start packing them in. So finally Louie Marable said, "Shit, I don't need this radio time no more—a hundred dollars a week." And Robin Bruin said, "Man, this guy's crazy." He said, "I got my crowd. Now that this place is built up, we don't need the radio time. That's a hundred dollars in my pocket." And so Robin looked at him.

I said, "Hell, just meet me by that time," and at that time I could see. I said, "Yeah, I'd like to but I don't have no advance money." I said, "We need about five hundred a piece."

And he said, "Well, I don't know what to do."

You know who bought that time?

ISOARDI: Bought?

JACKSON: Bought the time from that radio station. Bought that extra time he had. John [Dolphin]—Dolphin's of Hollywood. He had a little record store up on Central.

ISOARDI: Oh, that time slot that you guys had—

JACKSON: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And that's when he launched—His thing took off then.

JACKSON: That's right, he bought the radio time and brought his—From the front of his store the cat named Huggy Boy—See, so John Dolphin bought that time. Then Robin Bruin and me, we didn't take it, you know. And that's how John Dolphin became famous, because, man, cars start pulling all around and facing the street. He got factory cars pulling in at four o'clock at night. Just like we had previously done at the night club, he did for Dolphin's of Hollywood.

ISOARDI: Did your business drop off when you let that go?

JACKSON: No it didn't.

ISOARDI: It didn't—? You still had—? You built up a good fan base, then.

JACKSON: Yeah, we built up a good fan base, because we were out in the Hispanic neighborhood and most of the customers were Mexican. Very few Negro people, until they begin to find out about the club, and then they start hanging out. Lionel Hampton used to come out and sit in with us on the drums. I remember one night [Cecil "Big"]Jay McNeely came out there, see, and it was dog-fight-dog in those days, trying to keep a

dig, you understand? And so Jay—We hated Jay. We loved the way he played, but we hated him.

ISOARDI: Yeah, but he'd take a gig.

JACKSON: Yeah, because he'd get on the floor and wallow all in the floor, and then the other boss will be asking you, "How come you don't wallow in the floor?" You see, that bastard he comes out to the nightclub—You know my boss, "Oh, Jay McNeely's in the house," so usually we fixed it. Usually, I wouldn't—He ran up to me all excited, the boss, [he'd] say, "Harold, Jay McNeely's in the house, Jay McNeely. Hey man—Say, can't you get him up here and do something?" That's my boss.

I said, "Uh oh. This looks like he trying to gig old Jay." And so I said, "Okay," called him up there. So I went out there nice because he still had that record going. He had the one record—

ISOARDI: "Deacon's Hop," the big hit he had?

JACKSON: "Deacon's Hop," [hums] That was a great song man, we used to play it, and so Jay came up there, he wanted to play "Flying Home" or something like that, and he told us A-flat. You see, my brother graduated from music.

He just said, "Be natural, be natural." So we—he came out there, my brother gave a big introduction and he came out—And he turned and looked at him, he said, "Blow Jay, blow!" He came, natural, man. He stuck up the house that night. He said when he went down on the floor and did all that they began to give him a little hand. Man, he walked off that stage with [inaudible] but we kept [inaudible]. He couldn't find it. I never said nothing about it. He never did say anything about it either, but—

ISOARDI: That's funny.

JACKSON: So I tell you what, see—

ISOARDI: You want to break it now.

JACKSON: Why don't we call it a day and we'll go at it another time.

ISOARDI: Yeah, cool.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 26, 1999

ISOARDI: Interview with Harold Jackson, tape number three, August 26, 1999. Okay, Harold you wanted to begin this time by I guess reading an excerpt from a book you've written on Central Avenue.

JACKSON: Yes I do, and I want to describe Central Avenue as we saw it in the forties and the early fifties. This is Central Avenue, busy, unsure, where the unhappy dwell, the bargain hunting crowds, the hungry hens, touching the goods, some only to feel and wish, this is Central Avenue, laughter, babies crying, radio's tuned as loud as possible to be heard over other radios with the same free advertisement in mind. It also has the smell of fish and chips, hamburgers, garlic and onions, and on hot days the streets smell of other cooked foods, all mixed in together. Central Avenue has its winos and bums and took to them as they took to it. Central Avenue has no shame, no pity, and most of all no rest. Under the shuffle of feet, the scene that trotted endlessly. Weaving her way along Central Avenue is a little seven year old girl named Dimples, and we will talk about Dimples later on in the book.

Okay, that's a little idea of Central. And did I say chitlins and cornbread and the beans and ham hocks—? All those smells—Cause in every—

In the forties, when I came here, I came here in the forties, 'forty-two, I just—The navy sent me out here on my way overseas, but then I never got to go overseas because at the time the navy sent me out, we were real sailors. We were not the mess cooks and that type of person. It was the only black that ever joined the navy, up till 1942, was mess cooks and waiters. But we came in with the brand new branch that

were taught mechanical engineering, gun mates, ship mates, and all the trades of the navy that you see today. We were the first to go through that trade. And so, when we finished our training at Great Lakes, at Camp Robert Smalls, which is an all-black recruiting station, they shipped us to California, to San Pedro, to the base called Section Base. There were 150 of us that were shipped to Section Base in San Pedro. And we did our duties there, and they put us on small craft pilotage. Pilotage means when a ship comes in from overseas, and this is war time, they would come out to our breakwater, up maybe seven miles past before they get into Los Angeles Port. We would get on our small boats, which is called pilotage, and take our captain out to sea, past the breakwater, and we would meet the ship, seven miles at sea. Our captain would climb up the ladder of the ship while we lingered to the side, and when he'd get to the top, we would pull off, and he would guide the ship through the mine fields and on into the San Pedro Harbor.

ISOARDI: Yeah, right. You told us about that last time.

JACKSON: I did? Okay, stop me when I get back into repeating.

ISOARDI: Yeah, really. But—

JACKSON: Yeah, and when we had a liberty we would come into Los Angeles, and that was my first experience with Central Avenue. I remember it was all red cars then. We had all red cars. It cost a nickel to ride the street cars in Los Angeles. And we would get off the red car on Alameda, which the blue line is running up there now, and then we catch the streetcar and go up to Central Avenue. That's where the parade—It was like the [inaudible] Street, in Louisiana, Fillmore Street in Frisco, 47th and Southparkway in Chicago, Lennox Avenue in New York—it was that same type of feeling. And all the great musicians had come through there, years before me. Louis Armstrong had come through there.

And our main source was that we had a big hotel up there called the Dunbar

Hotel, Alabam—They later called it Alabam, and they had a Dunbar Bar which featured Lorenzo Flennoy and another blues singer, which I think we talked about.

ISOARDI: Yeah. We know about a number of musicians who came off Central Avenue, but in your career you met so many musicians on Central, you were such a part of the scene. Are there people that maybe didn't record as much or didn't get written up as much that we should know about—great players?

JACKSON: One of the greatest players of the Central Avenue area was Melba Liston, and Vi Redd, and Clora Bryant—Now these are people that weren't mentioned too much, because they had a prejudice against lady musicians. And these were all lady musicians of the great caliber—Dizzy Gillespie caliber. Clora Bryant was a fine trumpet player, and Melba Liston one of the first trombone players, and Vi Redd—Her father was a musician, Alton Redd, he played drums and vibes, and he taught his daughter, and she was one of the finest alto saxophone players in the world. And she played—She just told me that she didn't play Central too much, she played more special engagements, she was more interested in college and taught around the colleges and things like that, but the rest of us were struggling for life on Central Avenue. After I got out of the navy, well when I was in the navy I used to go see Ginger Smock at a place called the Last Word club, at 43rd and Central, and she was playing there with one of the finest jazz organists I've ever heard, and a piano player named Mata Ray, and Nina Russell, and Ginger joined that group in about 1942. And they had one of the baddest, toughest trios you ever want to hear. Mata had a foot like a bass fiddler, she'd walk that foot and play that bass, man, you could see a genuine—Be playing that fantastic jazz violin. Her idol was Stuff Smith, and so she patterned herself after Stuff and he was a great—You know Stuff was one of the greatest jazz violinists to come out.

Matter of fact he might have been the first, but Ginger was the first lady jazz

violin. She's a very beautiful girl, tall, long beautiful hair, cooper skin. A very, very talented lady who, later on in life, I would marry. At this time I was just a sailor saying, "Lady, can you play 'Tinkle Tinkle'?", and she'd play [hums tune], until I'd give her a dollar. Man I missed that dollar, but it was worth it to hear her play that in those days. This is in '43.

And then anywhere from Slauson and Central Avenue, you could start walking there and you could walk until you'd have hamburger stands you'd have little restaurants then you'd have night clubs, Dynamite Jackson's and you'd walk on down Central Avenue, you'd come up to 42nd and they had a little club called the Memo, that was very popular, and Herb Jeffries was staying in California, and he opened up a club on Alameda, on Avalon Boulevard called the Flamingo Club. Now this is the early forties when he opened up this Flamingo Club, and it did very well during those days, and up the street from him, on San Pedro and just about Jefferson they had the San Pedro Club which did very well. It was pretty large place and it featured dancing, good jazz music. I suppose I mentioned that Nat King Cole also played the Last Word Club, but the Swanee Inn was where he really got his fame.

ISOARDI: That was on La Brea wasn't it?

JACKSON: Yeah Swanee Inn was on La Brea, somewhere between Santa Monica and Beverly Boulevard, somewhere in that area, on La Brea, and I told you the story of how he started singing didn't I? And the guy asked him to sing and Johnny Miller and all those guys took stock. Yeah, I explained that part of the Nat King Cole's story, and I used to go see all those guys, never dreaming that four years later, or three years later, I would be back on that scene playing with them, because I was a sailor then, you know. But after I got out of the navy, my brother moved to San Francisco, and I moved to San Francisco, and by that time my youngest brother was coming out of high school and he

had been studying in high school, and we got him a teacher with the San Francisco Symphony. And I went to school under the G.I. Bill, the San Francisco Conservatory, and I also took bass lessons from Philip Korp who was with the San Francisco Symphony.

ISOARDI: Right, yeah, we covered that last time.

JACKSON: Well, eventually we started getting little gigs around San Francisco. Pretty soon we started getting the best jobs around San Francisco. First we were on Fillmore Avenue. We were at a place called the Rendezvous. And I told you Jack's Tavern, and the Rendezvous—Cal Tjader was working in that same block on Central between Post and Sutter. Up the hill they had the California Club. Then they opened a brand new club called the New Orleans Swing Club, where Kid Ory, from the old jazz, a bunch of guys, was the leader at the Kid Ory club which was a very popular spot,'cause they played strictly New Orleans jazz. And my brothers and I branched out from Fillmore, over to the International Settlement, and then up to where they call the Irish Strip, right where the cable cars made their last turn and came down to Market Street, and then they would have to turn around and go back.

That area was called the Irish area. And we worked at a club called the Irish for about a year or so there. And that was the strangest—That's where I first got to learn Irish people. Irish people are funny, man. They like to fight, you know. They drink and like to fight, and you think they're going to kill each other, and they damn near would, but as soon as they fight was over they get a glass of beer and go back to the bar and be hugging—you'd think they was best friends for life. Me and my brother would be so afraid, you know.

Then we crossed the bay over to Oakland and I can't—Some of the, I can't think of some of the clubs over there right now.

ISOARDI: I think last time you mentioned a few of them.

JACKSON: Okay, good.

ISOARDI: But we covered most of the San Francisco stuff last time.

JACKSON: So then after that my brother, oldest brother, decided to go back to Hampton Institute, and that's when I decided to come down to Los Angeles, and that's when I seriously got involved into music. I remember when I first got here—I got here in 'forty-six—they had a very serious band that was practicing down on Avalon and Vernon, and that's just one major block away from Central Avenue, and I used to go over and watch those guys rehearse.

ISOARDI: What band was that?

JACKSON: Gerald Wilson.

ISOARDI: Whew, yeah.

JACKSON: Gerald Wilson and his band, and all those big musicians. I can't name a lot of them. Roy Porter was in that band. I'll think of other names as I go and I'll insert them. And that was the beginning of his band, of Joe Wilson.

And then my brother came. [He] had gone to Seattle. My youngest brother had graduated from high school and gone to Seattle with Jay McShann and I didn't see him for about seven or eight months, and one day I came home and he was at the house. Great saxophone player, Billy Jackson. That's my brother. And in the meantime I was carrying mail, and so when Billy got down here I said "Shoot, Billy, let's get out band back together." So we did and the first job we got was at the Samba Club.

Central Avenue runs all the way down to Fifth Avenue, and then at Fifth Avenue it makes a left turn and continues, but it's called Fifth Avenue now, but it's still actually Central Avenue, because all the clubs just make the turn on Central and go up Fifth Avenue, and they had clubs like the Rendezvous and the Samba Club, was the one.

I remember my brother and I took our first job up there for five dollars a night, and all the wine we could drink, and we got with us a young guy that was one of the greatest guitar players in the world, but you never would know it. He stood there so artificial, no personality, no movement, and it'd be time play that guitar [makes musical sound], and looking at you like he was a preacher.

ISOARDI: Who was this guy?

JACKSON: George Collier. His name was George Collier, and he was the brother-in-law of Ernie Freeman.

ISOARDI: Oh, a fine player.

JACKSON: And so yeah, oh yeah, Ernie, fine player. And Ernie was playing violin and saxophone.

ISOARDI: Really? [laughs]

JACKSON: Yeah, so we stole George from Ernie. We was making this five dollars a night, and another band came in and took our job, they worked for three dollars a night.

ISOARDI: Dog-eat-dog.

JACKSON: And I was carrying mail and playing music, so I came to the crossroads. I said, "Either I'm going to be a musician or I'm going to be in the post office." And so when I made up my decision I said, "Well, I may never make much money playing music, but this is what I love to do, what I want to do, and it's what I'm going to do. So if I have to starve to death, so be it, and truer words were never spoken. So—

[tape off]

ISOARDI: Now we're on.

JACKSON: So me and my brothers branched off and so finally we went up to 42nd and Central where they had the two biggest clubs, two most active clubs which is the Last Word Club—It was on the east side of 42nd Street, between 43rd and the Downbeat,

which was on the west side of the street, diagonally across from each other.

So my brothers and I auditioned in 1947 at the Downbeat club, and we got the job. So we became housemen at the Downbeat club, where we ran into a lot of artists. Linda, this girl is a great blues singer now, Linda—

ISOARDI: Hopkins?

JACKSON: Linda Hopkins, yeah she was Linda Hopkins. She was a little skinny, beautiful little girl. She came in, she said do you all know how to play "Jelly, Jelly," and we say "Sure." And then she was leaning towards being a jazz singer, she wanted to be a jazz, you know, [hums tune] [sings] "I'm Beginning to see the light." Yeah, that was one of her big songs, yeah Linda. That's way before she jumped strictly into the blues. She was just a young kid then, about 21 years old. Linda Hopkins, and several other stars that we backed up there—

And we were right next door to the Alabam and they still had the big show going. I think Johnny Otis was the house band at the Alabam. They had tap dancers, they had the big show, they had tap dancers and comedians and singers. I mean top bird singers. I remember once a young girl named Dinah Washington came out while we were at the Downbeat and she sang at the Alabam. And more names up there in those days. Oh they had one little guy I'll never forget. His name was Tucker, and Tucker didn't have any legs—

ISOARDI: Oh, was his name Monroe Tucker?

JACKSON: Monroe Tucker.

ISOARDI: Piano player?

JACKSON: Piano player, yeah. He didn't have no legs, and he's a drunk, but he can play the hell out of the piano. But then you know everybody would kind of run because when he had to go to the bathroom, he'd ask one of the band guys in the house, "Hey,

can you take me to the bathroom?" That part was okay, but man he drank so much he smelled like a distillery, it was kind of hard getting old Monroe up to the piano. He had—Monroe was very active in the jazz part.

After me and my brothers left the Downbeat, we were one of the first black bands to infiltrate the white neighborhood. We got a job out at the Red Feather, the Red Feather was out on Figueroa Street, it had a full show, shake dances and everything, and we were the house band out there, at the Red Feather.

We'd been there about six months, and one day our waitress said, "You know I live out in the area, out in Whittier area, and they had a place called Borderline. It's an all-white place, but I think you guys would go over good there."

And so we went out and we met Louie Marable, he was the owner, and we made an audition for him and he liked us, and my brother was still in college, and we got a piano player to work with us. He's one of the baddest piano players I've ever hear. I mean this man was so great. His name was Jimmie O'Brien, and we called him "Snake." So Snake was on piano and old quiet George Collier [was] playing the yellow headed guitar, and we had a loud and fantastic show drummer named Rudy Pitts, have you ever heard of him?

ISOARDI: No.

ISOARDI: No? Okay. Rudy Pitts and my brother Billy played the tenor sax, and I played the bass fiddle. So when we opened the Borderline for the first few weeks we didn't have anybody coming in to see us. And after awhile people began to come in, they began to see us. They began to like us, and then pretty soon after about two months that place was packed every night.

And I can still see that frown on my boss's face, "Goddamn, Harold, man, business sure is bad tonight."

I said, "Louie, we need ten more dollars, I said we need ten more dollars a piece, you know we was making ten dollars a night, so he raised us.

He said, "Harold, I've got to pay ten dollars, man?"

I said Louie, you can't even get to the bathroom, this place is so packed, I said give us ten more dollars, and so—Louie Marable, he's still living incidentally.

ISOARDI: No kidding.

JACKSON: I mean this is kind of a—in a few more years you're going to be a club owner yourself, right?

JACKSON: Yeah.

ISOARDI: You're going to buy the Last Word.

JACKSON: Exactly, yeah.

ISOARDI: And then the shoe's going to be on the other foot—You're going to be seeing things from a different side, aren't you?

JACKSON: Oh man, you ain't gonna believe.

ISOARDI: How did you become a club owner?

JACKSON: Well, that's every musician's—

ISOARDI: 'cause you've never done anything like that, you've been playing in the bands until this.

JACKSON: Just playing in the bands, but then—Let me finish the Borderline first.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah. Yeah, go ahead.

JACKSON: Worked the Borderline, and we got along with Louie very well, he loved us, still do. I call him once in awhile.

And so Louie said, "Harold they got a big old barn-looking place down on Atlantic and Washington, it's all in the Mexican neighborhood, and the *pachuco* neighborhood—" We used to call it *pachucos*.

So he said, "I want to open it, and I want to—After I close the Borderline, I want to go down and open up this place and have all night music." Which was one of the first—Not the first, because Jack's Basket Room was the first all night place, down on Central Avenue.

I know a very dear friend of mine was in a band named King Perry, was working down there. We went to school together. At Jack's Basket Room—And in a few, just a couple of years ago they had a movie out called "The Lady in a Blue Dress"—

ISOARDI: "Devil in a Blue Dress".

JACKSON: "Devil in a Blue Dress".

ISOARDI: Yeah, I saw that.

JACKSON: With Denzel Washington.

ISOARDI: Right. You showed me a picture last time of—

JACKSON: Yeah and Denzel heard about me, and heard I'd owned the Last Word Club. He called me to come in and give him some technical advice on how Central looked and what they did and so forth, and about Jack's Basket Room. And I told him that Jack's Basket Room was a chicken place with jazz music, and so—I said but they only had one thing different, they served the chicken in a basket.

ISOARDI: Oh that's how it got the name.

JACKSON: That's how it got the name Jack's Basket Room, yeah. And so when I went to see the movie, he did have that scene, and they were serving the chicken in the basket just like I told him.

And so Louie decided to open this place. We worked out there and the same stuff: two o'clock in the morning we got there. We got off of my work at one thirty and we beat it up the highway, up Atlantic Boulevard, and we'd get to the job and it had a big stage, a big huge place. "Cold Chicken and Hot Music—" that's what they called it, but

we didn't have anybody in that place. For the first month, we didn't have anybody in this place, and then a friend of ours named Robin Bruin was working at KGFJ radio station as a disc jockey.

He said Harold, "I've got a dead spot from two in the morning to six in the morning and they can't find nothing to put there, so they let me have that time for one hundred dollars a week." So he said, "If you guys wouldn't mind, we would like to bring the radio station out to the Nightcap where you guys are playing."

We say, "Hell man, that's a great idea." So he came out on a Wednesday night, and had his first show coming from there on a Wednesday night. He set up all his mikes and everything, and we hit it.

He said "Ladies and gentlemen, coming directly to you from the Nightcap Club on Atlantic and Washington, Harold Jackson and the Jackson Brothers Band," and we'd hit it—"Flying Home." [hums tune] And we did hit it, and played the "Pachuco Hop," which was one of Joe Houston's big numbers. And so we started playing, and he was sitting over there by himself in the corner, and we on the bandstand by ourselves and the boss is walking around pulling his hair out, and all of a sudden, the doors flung open and there were hundreds of people, getting in, they were shoulder to shoulder trying to get into this place to hear this music. It reminded me something that Louis Armstrong said to me. Louis Armstrong and I were very good friends.

Louis told me one time, he said, "Harold, when I first came to the West Coast around 1924, or '26, somewhere around there," he said "At the Orpheum Theatre, they would have lines three blocks long trying to get in to see us. You see, but all these kids, the white kids and everything hanging around. They wanted to learn how to play this and play that and play this. Pretty soon they learned how to play our music. The next time I came, there was hardly anybody in the house,'cause the white boys was playing

jazz almost as good as we were. And in some cases better, those young kinds like Harry James." He said "You guys better watch yourself, because you all got a thing going with this rock and roll."

And don't let nobody tell you that white people invented rock and roll. That was way out before they even thought of it. If you don't think so, just think about Louis Jordan: [sings] "Rock em, I'm going to rock this boogie, rock 'em, rock a boogie." Man, he had all kind of rock songs, which people would jitterbug and dance to, and those are the kinds of things that kept us happening.

Well, our career at the nightclub lasted for a long time. Rudy Pitts left the band we had a—Got a young kid with a big old drum that looked like a twenty-five inch drum with autographed names all over it. It was a monstrous looking thing. But Rudy Pitts had to leave, going back east, so we got this kid and he has become like my own brother. He lives in Mexico now. His name is Wayne Robinson. Don't forget that name. Wayne Robinson was one of the greatest show drummers I've ever seen. Throw sticks all up in the air and catch them while he was in the double flam. He'd be drumming, and then after that everybody in the band would put the instruments down while he was doing his solo, and we'd pick up a piece of his drum: I'd pick up the snare, my brother would pick up his tom-tom, and somebody else would pick up—not the base, we didn't carry the base—and some other part of his drums, then we march on through the whole house, beating on the drums, beating on the tables, beating on the dancers, and it was really a show within a show. And then we had another guitar player named Chuck Norris, you ever heard of him?

ISOARDI: No.

JACKSON: One of the greatest blues guitar players ever, man this man was fantastic blues. So he joined us at the nightcap. Then Wayne left us to—Oh, when we left the

Nightcap, Central Avenue was then beginning to move: San Pedro, Main Street, then it made a big jump to Western Avenue.

ISOARDI: So this is getting into the fifties, huh?

JACKSON: Getting into the early fifties, yeah. The fifties. So they opened a club on 37th and Western called the Oasis, club Oasis. That's where Jerry [Gerald] Horn was the owner of the club.

So the Jackson Brothers—We didn't get too much respect from the jazz musicians because they wanted to play straight ahead Dizzy [Gillespie]-type jazz. But, see, we would mix it in with—We would play a little jazz and we would play a little blues. Then we'd throw "Stardust" in and "Blue Moon", and that type of thing. Then we'd play Mexican songs. We'd play Rambas and Sambas, and the jazz musicians wouldn't compromise—it had to be straight ahead Dizzy, where you didn't recognize—If you recognized the melody it was a big disappointment. [laughter]

ISOARDI: When does this start happening in the music? I mean, when you're first out here on the west coast, when you first come out here, I mean there's just, it's all swing, right—? It's one music, but within a couple years you've got R&B, you've got bee bop, you've got all these different things.

JACKSON: No, no. It wasn't all jazz and swing, see when I first came out here that's when Nat King Cole first made his hit record in '43: [sings] "The monkey took the buzzard for a ride in the air, the monkey thought that everything was—" And he had that, but before him Louis Jordan—See Louis Jordan was the one—"Chicken Shack"—See, he had all these rock and roll songs.

ISOARDI: Yeah, strong back beats, the whole bit.

JACKSON: Strong back beats, and he was the first to introduce rock and roll, really. Then we had other blues singer—great blues singers back east named Wynonie Harris,

and guys like that were really—

ISOARDI: T-Bone Walker, was that who it was?

JACKSON: Oh T-Bone. T-Bone was a fantastic guitarist, and his big gag was he'd take the guitar and put it behind his ear and play behind his head while he boogie-woogied his knees on down to the floor. He'd just boogie and play the guitar on the back of his head, and he was one of—Well you have to give T-Bone—He probably was the daddy of all blues guitar players, T-Bone was.

ISOARDI: So your music sort of drew from all these influences then.

JACKSON: We drew from all them points, but mainly like—One of my bosses was a Jewish guy he said, "Hey, I want hot music, hot music. Play hot music."

He'd come around and we'd be playing, [sings] "Sometimes I wonder why he leaves his lonely night." And his name was Lou and he owned the Downbeat.

And Lou would run back, "Oh no, oh no. Hot music! Hot music!"

We said, "Okay Lou." And then we'd get hot for him, play "Flying Home", the "Deacon's Hop", Big Jay McNeely's—

ISOARDI: Big hit with that.

JACKSON: Big hit with that, with the "Deacon's Hop".

ISOARDI: Well, are we up to the point where you buy the last word?

JACKSON: No.

ISOARDI: Not yet?

JACKSON: No, no, no, no, no. The Last Word was synonymous with the Curtis Mosby Brothers.

ISOARDI: Oh, Esvan Mosby used to run that, didn't he?

JACKSON: Esvan, very dear friend of mine. See, before he ran it, his brother Curtis Mosby ran it. And, see, Esvan at that time was running the Last Word Club, because

Curtis got put in jail for some income tax thing, and so Esvan Mosby took over the Last Word Club, and he became known like Grant is known in Hollywood as the mayor of Hollywood.

ISOARDI: Oh the mayor of Central Avenue, that kind of—?

JACKSON: Yeah. Well, Curtis Mosby was the mayor of Central Avenue, and for years that was his title, the mayor of— In the meantime my drummer William Robinson left and went back with one of the most fantastic rock groups [that] ever rocked, strictly rocked, and that was the Trenier Twins. They were back east making all the big scenes there. Matter of fact they were one of the first real all rock groups that there were, and they were making a lot of money. And so when Wayne and I had become very good friends, so when Wayne—

Oh yeah they had invented a new bass, called the Fender bass. And Mr. Fender, Leo Fender, knew about our rock group up at the Nightcap Club.

So he came over to me one day and he said, "Listen I've got a new bass I just invented and I wish you would try it." He said, "I won't charge you anything, I'll give it to you." He was saying, "I got this fender bass amplifier to go with it."

And so he gave me one, and I was so happy because see the place had become so crowded that you just couldn't get in the place and it was fantastically crowded every night, and my brother was playing the piano and the drummer was playing loud, the guitar player was loud and I was back there beating on the bass fiddle—

ISOARDI: Nobody could hear. [laughter]

JACKSON: Nobody could hear, blood was coming out of my fingers, and my brother leaned over to me and say, "Hey Harold why don't you play your bass, man?" Lord, I almost was in tears. And so it was a couple of nights after that when Mr. Fender brought me this bass. And I came back a couple of nights later, and I left my upright bass at

home, and I brought this Fender Bass. And when I came in the club, the band started off at our regular thing, the groovy thing, [sings] "We might play fast, we might play slow," the groovy thing "So we rip it up, beat it up, jump and shout" and we start playing and I said— [makes thumping sound]

I turned that thing up about half way, and my brother leans over to me and say, "Hey, can you turn the bass down a little?"

I turn it all the way up, I turn it all the way up , I said, "Now I'm playing my bass."

ISOARDI: [Laughter]. So you had one of the first Fender basses.

JACKSON: Had the first. Leo gave it me, and then he would call me and ask me about it and how is it working.

And I said, "Well, I'm blowing combs out of this amplifier. It's not made to take this bass." But he tried to correct that, and I told him that g-string was out of line, so when I hit a g-string open, and hit an octive lower, there'd be about a quarter tone off, so he corrected that.

Now my friend joined the Treniers, drummer Wayne Robinson. So he's back playing, he's playing with them. And so he told the Trenier's, "Say, I know a bass player out in California named Harold Jackson." He said that guy's got one of those little electric basses, man." And they only had a—They had a piano, bass, drums, I don't know why they never got a guitar—Piano, bass and drums, and a saxophone. Don Hill played sax.

And so they said, "Can we get him?"

He say, "Yeah."

And so the Trenier's sent for me to go to New York, and I went to New York. And I opened up that bass. They were so happy. I stayed with those guys about four

years. And then that's when Ginger Smock—We were going to get ahead of my story again.

Before I got that I told you we got the job at the Oasis. After we left the Downbeat we got—After we left the Borderline, then we got the job at the Oasis as the house band for Jerry [Gerald] Horn. While we were at the Oasis, we were house band and other acts would come through—big acts, the name acts—to draw the people, and we would just stand back, you know, keeping the live dancing and the show—

We put on a floor show, too. And we had this white girl that came with us from the—Named Linda Merrill. She was one of the most fantastic dancers I've ever seen and she came with the show. And we had a tap dancer named Gene Bell that worked with us—Gene "Taps" Bell. Later on, he would go on to work with Milton Burl on his show many times, one of the greatest tap dancers. I got a picture of him around here somewhere. And he was on our show. Then we would call the main act out. And so we worked with Nellie Lutcher, she was a feature attraction.

Then one week [Cecil "Big"] Jay McNeely came out, and he was the feature attraction while we played the house band. And he'd come on and do a twenty or thirty minute show, then we went back to house band. We'd do two shows a night. Nellie Lutcher, and Billy Eckstine, then came Dinah Washington.

I never will forget Dinah because I was emceeing the show and I said—We had just finished our regular show, and—Oh, and Ginger Smock came to work on the show, that's how I got to know her. And that's when me and Ginger fell in love. So she was doing an act—She did three songs on the show. And so, Dinah Washington—It was her turn to come on, and I was announcing.

And I said, "Ladies and Gentleman, at this time we'd like to introduce to you the star of our show, and the star of any show in which she happens to appear, Mercury's

biggest recording star, Miss Dinah Washington."

And she came out there and she said, "You little son of a bitch!"

ISOARDI: What?

JACKSON: Yeah she said, "You little son of a bitch, what the hell do you mean calling me Mercury's biggest recording star?"

She had a weight problem. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Oh gee. Touchy, touchy.

JACKSON: And so we started cussing each other out in the middle of the floor.

I said, "Well you fat, big old black—" And we was just throwing words.

She called me, "You no-bass-playing motherfucker."

And so, while we were there the fire door was on this side. Well, some guy on the outside was trying to get in. He thought that was the main door, and he kept pulling and pulling on the door, pushing. Finally the door flew open and he fell across the whole room, and landed right in front of me and Dinah Washington, and that broke up our argument. Boy I was fuming. I walked away from that bandstand, and she started singing, [sings] "I saw those harbor lights", and I had to sit down.

I said, "Oh my God, that woman can sing so pretty."

One night she was up there singing and Nellie Lutcher walked in the front door and Dinah was in the middle of her act, and all of a sudden we heard the harmony part coming from the—Nellie Lutcher was doing her act, and we saw the harmony part coming through the front door. And Dinah Washington walked in singing harmony to Nellie. Nellie had the mike; Dinah has such a voice she didn't need a mike, nor did Billy Eckstine.

And then another group came there called the Sixty Minute Men, Billy Ward and the Dominoes Billy Ward and the Dominoes was the house band at that Oasis. So

he came in.

His musicians were not allowed to come out of the dressing room, they had to call him Mr. Ward. And so we were still the house band so—I was a devil's advocate, 'cause they had Clyde McPhatter with them, and a big bass player named Dave. I can't think of Dave's name. And so I came out way after the show was over, walking around and I went back to the dressing room.

I said, "Clyde, man, there's three fine chicks out front, and they want to talk to you, and they want to talk to Dave." I said, "Come on, open the door." He peeped the door open and saw these two beautiful women sitting out there.

And Clyde say, "Shit, to hell with Billy Ward." He went on out there, you know, and he went on out to talk to the girls. Billy Ward fired him right there on the spot. He didn't do the last show that night, he fired him. This was on a Saturday night, and they had to open again Monday night 'cause they were there only two weeks. [He] fired Clyde McPhatter right on the spot, say, "You, out. Get out." And we thought he was crazy, this Billy Ward guy. And so Monday night, everybody's looking forward to Monday night 'cause Clyde was a big star. He'd had this "Mercy Mercy Baby," come when the swallows come back to Capistrano, he was—And Dave the big man that sang the six—"Well look at you—", the Sixty Minute Man, fired both of them. And so we came back—That Monday night we came back to work and Billy Ward—We sitting and the show went on, everybody looking at everybody, and Ginger did her spot and everybody did their spot, so now everybody called on the stars

I said, "Now I would like to introduce to you Billy Ward and the Dominoes, and he ran out on stage man and didn't miss a beat. He had the greatest thing you could ever think of [inaudible] his name was Clyde McPhatter.

[tape ends].

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JACKSON: Yeah, it just came to me now. The singer that he brought to take Clyde McPhatter's place was Jackie Wilson.

ISOARDI: Two fabulous singers.

JACKSON: The two most famous in the world. And, man, I mean, he brought another bass player to sing the Sixty Minute, and they didn't miss a beat man, they didn't miss a beat. And so those were the Oasis days.

And then around that time is when my brothers decided they wanted to go on the road. They went to San Francisco and they went up to Sacramento. I told you the story about Ray Charles already, didn't I?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

JACKSON: About how he came to the house and everything—?

ISOARDI: Right.

JACKSON: Okay. And so my brothers wanted to go on the road and I didn't want to go on the road. They left and I stayed here. I had a very beautiful girlfriend, Ginger. And so about two weeks later I stopped to go into a chili place, and this big tall guy came up to me.

He said, "Harold, Harold Jackson." He said, "Man, I been looking all over for you, my brothers want you."

I said, "Your brothers?"

He said, "The Treniers."

I said, "What?"

He said, "Yeah, they're back in Philadelphia, man. They want you to join the

group."

And I just had a rob—Somebody robbed my bass and robbed everything, you know. And I said, "I don't have anything, they robbed my clothes."

He said, "Man, go out to Hollywood, see Gaby Lutz, and Heller."

Now Gaby, Lutz, and Heller are three big agents at that time. I'm going to show you who Heller is: Heller signed Liberace up when he was just a kid. Seymour Heller. Till the day he died Seymour Heller was Liberace's manager, and he was also manager for the Treniers. So they told me to go out to Seymour Heller's office. I went out there and they gave me $400, told me to catch a plane back to Philly [Philadephia] and I did. And when I got back—

Some of the happiest days of my life [were when] I joined the Treniers. See, the Treniers got lots of girlfriends. And man, every night we'd get back to the hotel—There'd be girlfriends coming up the elevator in shifts. I said, "Man, this has got to be heaven: I'm making all this money, I'm a top star." And so we was going to play for a benefit for a Catholic school, and I guess we must have had five or six hundred kids or maybe a thousand. And so the Treniers all drove into the back, and I was new with them, so I saw those girls standing out front. I said, "Aw man, I'm going in the front door." So then I started in the front door. I had my tux and everything on, and man this mob came at me: they tore my tux off, they tore my tie, they tore everything off. And I was running in the place in my drawers. I go running in on the bandstand in my drawers. The Treniers said, "Where your clothes?" I said, "Those people took my clothes, outside." I stayed with the Treniers and we had some magnificent times.

ISOARDI: How long were you with them?

JACKSON: I stayed with the Treniers about three or four years. And then, till we got booked back, we was at the Apollo theater, the Treniers. And they said they got this guy

on stage called Kewpie. His name was Kewpie. If you bring a new act into the Apollo theater, and you start bumming, Kewpie would run on stage and kick you off. And everybody, when they did their first act at the Apollo, was scared shitless.

ISOARDI: I'll bet.

JACKSON: And so that night, we came, and they called down, "Treniers you're on in fifteen minutes." We all come running downstairs, and we went on. Of course, the Treniers, you know, they're great, man. You know, everybody going to love them. So we start. We went out there and did our act, and on our third show I went down to do an act and I looked down the front row and there was Ginger Smock sitting in the front row.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

JACKSON: Yeah, she done flew all the way from California to be with me.

ISOARDI: She missed you.

JACKSON: Yeah, right, so she's sitting in the front row.

ISOARDI: Didn't trust you on the road, maybe?

JACKSON: No, she—And I had two girls at the hotel. Me and Wayne had either two girls at the hotel waiting for us to get back, you know. And I say, "Oh, my God." I called the hotel and told them girls to get out of there. I called the maid [and] told her to clean up my room 'cause my wife was coming from the East Coast.

ISOARDI: Oh you had been married then?

JACKSON: Yeah. No, we weren't quite married then; we got married—So we left there. We went to Miami every winter for three or four winters, and then Wildwood, New Jersey, which is heaven for any musician. There are all those beautiful ladies.

And then we came back, we was booked into Las Vegas at the Riviera Hotel. We were one of the first, black lounge acts to go there. Lena Horne had broken the color

barrier in Las Vegas then, this is in about '52. And we came in because our manager was the manager of Liberace. He opened Liberace in the main room and we got to work the lounge.

And so while we was in Vegas then, that's when Ginger and I got married. And so we stayed together about three years, and then her work began to take her—She joined Steve Gibson and the Red Caps while I was still with the Treniers. But first we got married and started our own little group—it didn't work. So she went back with Steve Gibson and I went back with the Treniers for a little while. Me and Ginger came home and started a little band, and it didn't work. But, anyhow, we broke up, and I started a four-piece band with Wayne Robinson. He had left the Treniers. And with Clarence—I'll think of his name in a minute—And one of the greatest saxophone players, named Paul Madison, myself, and my nephew Ronnie, who was playing the drums.

ISOARDI: Maybe you could talk a little bit about Paul Madison, not many people have said anything about him.

JACKSON: Paul Madison—Well, in my consideration, he's one of the greatest saxophone players that ever lived, and he never got recorded. Paul, he was sort of like [Charlie] Parker. He wasn't in dope or nothing like that, but he never had no money. I always had to buy a horn for him. We was the same size, so I let him use one of my tuxedos I had got for the Treniers.

But then—That's when we broke the [San Fernando] Valley, because the Valley wasn't hiring many black musicians. By then the amalgamation of the black union on Central Avenue had amalgamated with the white union on Vine Street. And so we were the first blacks in the valley, the Jackson Brothers, and my little group. We worked at the Lido, and my black brothers worked at the Rag Doll, and we began to break into

places out there. Well it was during this period that the agent came to us and said Perez Prado was coming to town, and he was going to be working at the Orpheus Theatre with Dolores del Rio. They were the feature attraction, and Cooper, a disc jockey named Cooper, was going to be the emcee of the show. And so they wanted to call it a battle of rock and roll against Latin. And so the first day on the show, Perez Prado brought that twenty-four piece band out: fantastic band with Dolores del Rio.

And they began the act, they said, "Now you heard the Latin, now you hear the rock and roll." And so we run out with our little four pieces. [laughter] And we started playing. I was playing a song called "Wild, Man, Wild." [sings] "Wild, man, wild" [makes musical sound] and the band's supposed to get— [sings] "Wild, man, wild."

And the piano [player] hollered, "Hey Harold, the organ ain't on." He was playing organ.

I said, "Get on the goddamn piano," [sings] "Wild, man, wild." So we didn't go over at all. And so I said, "Oh shit. What are we going to do?" And we went—The boss is there looking at us. And so Paul had his sax case there, and the boss—The owner of the theater came in the room, and Paul had just snuck a bottle of wine back in his suitcase, and we were sitting there talking serious about how we were going to make the show better, and all of a sudden his sax case opened and the bottle of wine roll out and landed right at the feet of the boss.

So that evening, I said Paul, "Here's what we're going to do." Right across the street was California Music. We went and bought the stock music to "Flying Home"; we bought the stock music to "Harlem Nocturne." [hums] Then I ran out to my brother's house. My brother's an excellent writer. He eventually graduated from USC [University of Southern California] in music. So I said "Jack, when Perez Prado do his act and we come on, we're only out there for about four songs, so just drop the curtain

and his band is still sitting back there." And so I said, "Can you make me an arrangement of 'Wild Man Wild' for a twenty-seven piece band?" And I gave him all the pieces, instrumentations of Perez Prado's band. And so the next day we went down, and my piano player went down and talked to the guys and said, "Hey, man, since you guys are just sitting behind the curtain, you know, when we came out, can you follow these arrangements?" We gave them the stock to "Flying Home" and the stock to "Harlem Nocturne." And—You know what I mean when I say stock?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

JACKSON: The stock music, for the big band, you know. And so that night, when they say, "Now you've heard the Latin music, now here's rock and roll." And I walked out and say, "Wild, Man, Wild," and Perez Prado's band say—[loud musical sound] I said, "Oh, yeah, what is this a diva jumpman?" We—

ISOARDI: So they played the—

JACKSON: They played the arrangement.

ISOARDI: For the whole band? All right.

JACKSON: The whole band, and then I say, "Now we're going to play 'Harlem Nocturne'." And those guys are so happy that day,'cause they've been playing that Latin mess so long, man. It gets to be—So we played "Harlem Nocturne", and Perez Prado, by that time he was out looking—"What are you guys doing? What are you doing? What are you doing?" And so on the end we would go out with "Flying Home." I think I played a little bit of that the other day while you was over here.

ISOARDI: Oh, well, you were playing a version with Chet Christopher.

JACKSON: Yeah right, but Paul was with us then, and Paul—

ISOARDI: And he'd just take off on it—?

JACKSON: Oh man, he took off just about as—He was different than Chet. Chet was

fast like Dizzy. Paul was more like Don Baez or something,'cause he hit a lot of low notes. He said—[makes musical sound] He'd go down and get the bottom of that horn, you know, and he would go out that way. We had a little step that we did we called the crooked leg. When you're going out on the last course of "Flying Home," we had little step that went [makes musical sound] and so we was dancing off stage when I left. And so when the show was over, Perez Prado was fuming. He came up—

ISOARDI: [laughs] What'd you do to my band?

JACKSON: Yeah. "What is this?"

You know, we say, "Perez, look, everything's going over great. They love your band playing "Flying Home" and stuff. So why don't we just make it an integration?" I say, "And when we get to the last eight, that part where we do the crooked leg step, you know, then why don't you come out front and join us with Dolores del Rio and we all do the crooked leg together, and go out together."

He said, "Hey, that sounds okay."

So the next show we did it like that, and the people loved it. Alex Cooper was the emcee. Alex Cooper said, "We're no longer going to call this the battle of rock and roll and Latin, we're going to call it the integration of Latin and jazz." Rest me up a minute.

[tape off]

JACKSON: Now while we was at the theater with Perez Prado and Dolores del Rio, our act went over so good after we got Perez Prado and the crooked leg step with us on the final sixteen bars of "Flying Home," when we was getting our rock and roll show off the stage, it went over great.

So the next day Perez came to me and said, "Your drummer—" He said, "I got an idea." He said, "I want to mount your drummer way up on the left side of the band,

way up, elevated over the band. Then I want to mount my drummer, way up elevated over the right side of the band, and the organ's going to be under them. See, 'cause when I open my show I want to black out, and I want fluorescent sticks on them. I'm going to give the drummers fluorescent sticks, turn the fluorescent light on. And my drummer's going to hit first. And he's going to play about eight bars and then, wham! They're going to switch it over to your drummer. And then they're going to have a jam fest before we come in—Bam! And then we get [makes musical sound], and then the latin music would come in."

Man, that went over so great. I mean it was coming man, and they weren't expecting to see what was coming over. They had Louie's drummer, you know, and he was playing, and the sticks was all glaring and everything, and then the light went off and "Bam—!" Right over here. Then he came on, our drummer. And boy it was—He wanted to take the show with us all over. He wanted to take it with us. He really loved us after that, you know. We just four of us—I wish we had a guitar. But anyhow I just wanted to get that extra part in about Perez Prado.

Well, one thing led to another and for some reason, like I was telling you about this saxophone player Paul Madison, well words won't describe it, you know. And Chet Christopher also was another great, great saxophone player.

ISOARDI: When did he come out here? When was he playing?

JACKSON: Chet came out when—Well let me go on a little farther with the story. So we lost our piano right after the Perez Prado gig, and we needed a piano player. Well, my brothers were still in town then, so I called my brother Wilfred.

I said, "We need a piano player for our little group."

He said, "Well, they got a girl, her name is Dimples, and she can play and she can sing."

I said, "Well, we got a gig. We need her right away." So I called Dimples, and Dimples went to work with our band. And she was everything. She was fantastic. She was married, had two little babies, one six months and one was nine months. But had a husband that was a cocaine addict. So we played our little gig every night, and then I kind of noticed that she was kind of noticing me. And I was kind of noticing her, 'cause she was beautiful, you know, Dimples is very beautiful.

And so then we started going together, playing together and going together, and then Dimples and I got married. So we got married. When I came back from the Treniers, I was with the band but I wasn't doing—I was renting an apartment or something, and all my brothers had all bought houses, you know. So, about a year later I got a check from Seymour Heller from the time I was with the Treniers. The check was for five hundred dollars.

I said, "Oh I'm going to buy me a car."

And my brother said, "No you're not." My baby brother, he said, "You going to buy you a house."

And so he took me out into deep, into the hardest part of Watts that you can get into, Alameda and 106th, and that's the heart of Watts. And they had two houses on the lot, and my brother got it for me for 500 dollars down. And so that's where—And I loved that place. I was so sick of the New York and the night clubs, and the smoke and all that crap you know. And I was out—I had my little farm there, and that's when Dimples came to work with the band. She saw that I had this little place, and she wasn't doing too good, and has these babies, and her husband had left her. And so we got married, and Dimples moved out to Watts with us. And so while we was out to Watts—

ISOARDI: When was this, Harold?

JACKSON: Huh?

ISOARDI: When was this?

JACKSON: This was in about nineteen—1956. And right after that is when I got the Last Word. So by getting this property—And I kept it about six or seven months. There were lots of properties out there. They's moving houses off the freeway and putting them in Watts: good houses, stucco houses.

ISOARDI: Oh, you mean as they were putting the freeways in—? They were—Ah, they'd move the houses down to Watts.

JACKSON: To empty lots in Watts. And so you'd go by, you'd see six houses sitting on a lot, but nobody would by them.

So I said, "Dimples, lets check this." And so I went to check it. And we had good credit.

They said, "Yeah we'll sell you those houses. You won't have to put anything down, you got good credit."

And so we got those houses for practically nothing. And so we eventually ended up with eighteen houses. We had about nine in Watts and then we had another nine over on the Westside, and West 60th street where we had bought a new place. And then we did so well that we bought—See all the millionaires, the white people, used to live all in the central neighborhood, all on Western Avenue, up near Washington Avenue. They had mansions up there.

ISOARDI: Yeah, up around Adams? Beautiful homes.

JACKSON: Oh yeah, they had mansions. And so they decided to build this Santa Monica Freeway. As they built the Santa Monica Freeway, they went straight through the mansions. Those rich guys wanted to get the hell out of there, see, because Negroes were beginning to move into the West side of town. And so they wanted to get out of their nineteen room mansions. So Dimples and I was able to grab one of those

nineteen-room mansion, [it] had nine bedrooms and eight baths.

When I worked the Last Word Club years ago, there was a man—The Mosby Brothers did not own the Last Word club, it was a man named E.J. Porter, black man, who was a real estate broker.

ISOARDI: Oh I always assumed the Mosby's owned that, they didn't? Esvan just managed it for this guy?

JACKSON: They leased it from this guy. And by the time we had went to work at the Last Word club, Mosby was all out. They couldn't pay the rent, so he had to take it over, and he was about 75, 80 years old, Mr. Porter was. That was back in 1951 when we was working there.

And so he came to me and he said, "Harold, I'm too old, I cannot manage this place." He said, "I'm just wasting my nights up here, and I really don't know that much about the business." He said, "But I do have a budget." He said, "If you can make this place go and work on a 1500 dollar a month—a week—budget, then I want you to run it, because you know about this business and you're young and everything."

I said, "That'd be fine, Mr. Porter." And so the next night I was supposed to take over the club, we were standing out front talking about my takeover. My brothers were going to be the band there, and we already had a bartender and all that set up, and we all figured we could come in under his budget and still make what we were making, and maybe a little bit more.

And so we was standing outside, and a man came in with his wife and another girl, and before you know it, it was all hell breaking loose on the inside of the club. And so they got the parties out of the club. This man was fighting with his wife.

And so Mr. Porter said, "You have to leave son."

And He was an old man, he was about 75—Hell look, I'm almost 75 now. And he said,

"We can't have this kind of stuff around this club," and the young man swung at him, Mr. Porter. Well I was standing right next to him so I leaned in and caught the punch, and I beat this man down there to the sidewalk, and he just lay there flat, out. And I panicked,'cause—And I immediately ran and then all of a sudden the crowds came from everywhere. You know, Central is still full of people. They came all around, they was parked around. I was peeping through the back alley, and the ambulance came.

The man was still laying in the same spot where I left him and so I went around to the back door and asked my brother, "What's going on?"

He said, "The man's dead Harold. You killed him."

And I said, "Oh, shit."

And so my girlfriend was working across the street at the White Owl, a restaurant on Central Avenue, right across from the clubs. So I went over and told her to get her things, "Let's get—" And I had a '47 purple Cadillac—gorgeous car—and we jumped in that car and took off and I went to Indiana. And I never—

Now back to the story where Dimples and I got married and we ran all this property and I said, "I want my own nightclub now. It's time for us to have our own nightclub."

So Dimples said, "The Last Word Club's been closed two or three years, how you going to get into that?"

I said, "I know the person who owns it, his name is Mr. E.J. Porter. He's got a real estate office on Avalon." And so I went over to see Mr. Porter. He hadn't seen me since the night of that fight.

He said, "Harold, I'll never forget that night. You saved my life, you know."

I said, "Mr. Porter, I want to open that club, me and my wife."

He said, "Ah, hell. You don't want to open that club, it's a lot of headache." I

said, "No, we really want to open it."

He said, "Well, I'll have to draw some kind of agreement. What do you think would be a good price?"

I said, "Well, we don't really have that much but would you let me have it for two hundred dollars a month—Lease it for 200 a month?"

He said, "Yeah, I'll let you lease it for 200 dollars a month."

He said, "Come down tomorrow. I'll have my lawyer draw up the papers." And so the lawyer drew up the papers and we went down the next day and Mr. Porter and I sit there, and my wife, and we sign a lease for 200 dollars a month, which is nothing.

We didn't have our liquor license and everything. So then that was our problem, getting the liquor license. So we finally got those, and I did remodeling, put drapes all up on the wall and everything.

ISOARDI: So when did you reopen it, about '57, '58?

JACKSON: [Affirmative] 'Round there, yeah.

ISOARDI: What's the Avenue like by the late fifties? I mean if you're doing this there's still action down there right?

JACKSON: There's all kinds of action down there. The Mexicans hadn't taken over the Avenue. It was still all black.

ISOARDI: And there were still a lot of people—? They hadn't drifted away to Western and other places?

JACKSON: See it was just the expansion. Most people you know, dressed up and everything, they want to go over to Western,'cause it's high class. You know there's more class, Sammy Davis—See, when we was on Western at the Oasis we worked with Sammy Davis Junior—The Will Mastin Trio, actually, and Sammy Davis Jr. (featuring Sammy Davis).

Those kind of acts were going through, so people were going towards society, see. So when I opened it I made it all—It was a beautiful joint. It had curtains, draped curtains from the ceiling. I went in there and spent about six months remodeling and painting, put new carpet down, getting the air conditioners fixed. Then I opened a restaurant there also, called the Triple A Restaurant for my daughters, April, Antoinette, and Alisha. I called it the Triple A Restaurant.

And so opening night you couldn't get in that place'cause my brother in law, Redd Foxx, did a freebie. He did a freebie for me for that opening night. Joe Williams, the blues singer—See, I wrote a song called "Los Angeles." I'm the only one who wrote a decent song called "Los Angeles."

ISOARDI: Yeah, you told me that.

JACKSON: And Joe Williams had recorded it. No, he hadn't recorded it then, but we were good friends. He was working over on Western, on Washington Boulevard, at a place called [inaudible] or somewhere, and Joe Williams promised me that he would give me a freebie that night too. So that night we opened. We had a packed house, you couldn't get anywhere near it, you know. It was just packed, and my wife, me and her had the band—And then we was filling up with all these beautiful Central Avenue people. I think they all came that night, all the people that I knew from Central, trying to give me and Dimples a start, you know. Redd Foxx was there, that was my brother-in-law, and Elvis [Vi] Redd was there, and Melba Liston, Clora Bryant, everybody was there. And so we got off to a fabulous, fine start.

But then later we were putting acts in there and the place began to fall. I wasn't selling much food in the restaurant, the place began to drop. They had—Dynamite Jackson had a little place up the street called Dynamite Jackson's—Sawdust on the floor and everything, and selling beer. That place was packed every night, and I was fighting

for customers. As a matter of fact, it got so bad at the Last Word club, that my wife and I had to go to work for Al Deetch out on Sunset Boulevard at a club called My Desire. And he also had the Body Shop, where they had all the shake dancers, Al Deetch. So, me and Dimples went out there, so we could play the band at our club. Larry Hearn at that time owned the Larry Potter's Supper Club. No, not Larry Potter's—Memory Lane.

ISOARDI: Oh, what was Santa Barbara then.

JACKSON: Yeah, around Santa Barbara. And so Larry let me have a juke box and everything to go in there. And so one night Larry—Me and Dimples was trying to keep the club going, and we put everybody there to manage it, and nobody—

Even Curtis said he'd manage it for me, and he tried it till he said, "Hell, I can't do nothing with it."

So we had to work to make this money,'cause we was working around five or six—Seventy dollars a week, me and Dimples just doing a duo.

And so I remember Larry Hearn asked me he said, "Harold, how you doing?"

I said, "I'm doing fine."

He said, "You got any music?"

I said, "Yeah I got a band."

I said, "I got a six piece band." He said, "How much you paying them?"

I said, "Thirty dollars."

He said, "Thirty dollars apiece?"

I said, "No, thirty dollars for the whole band." [laughter] Five dollars apiece. I told the guys, I say, "I can't pay you nothing guys, but you can drink all you want, and if you want to rehearse and practice, you know—"

And I had some good musicians. So one time we tried to rejuvenate it, we got

B.B. King. That was way before he was big, as he is now. He was working night clubs then—getting a good salary, but working night clubs. And we got him in for a couple of Saturdays, and that did do pretty good then. But eventually I had to drop the Last Word Club.

ISOARDI: When?

JACKSON: I dropped the Last Word Club in 19—What was it about 19—?

ISOARDI: Before '65?

JACKSON: Yeah before '65, 1962, 1962—It was right after Nancy Wilson had a hit record out I wrote called "Tell Me The Truth." It was our biggest hit record. I remember'cause we was driving to the Last Word club, me and Dimples one day, and we heard this song come on the radio, and [sings] "Tell me the truth is it over now?"

Dimples said, "That's me! That's me!"

I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "No, that's not you Dimples, that's Nancy Wilson."

She said, "Nancy Wilson—? That's my song."

I said, "I know."

I said, "Don't panic, it's copyrighted."

ISOARDI: [laughter] Yeah, the check is in the mail.

JACKSON: Yeah, the check's in the mail. Yeah, and so we watched the song until it went up to nineteen on the billboard. We had nineteen with a bullet.

ISOARDI: And looking back Harold, do you—Why do you think Central Avenue declined?

JACKSON: Well it was natural progression.

ISOARDI: People just moving away and expanding?

JACKSON: No it wasn't that. At the same time Central declined—The decline came

because there were twenty thousand Mexicans a day coming across the border. Now all that was black before, see, but then the Mexicans had to have a place to sleep. They'd spill over Boyle Heights, you know. They spilled over Boyle Heights, just coming in so fast. So they began to integrate into that, but that wasn't the key reason why Central failed. See, the key reason was that Central was Central. Like I told you about the chitlins and the beans and corn bread, but now they going—You can find a steak over at the Oasis, and you're seeing Sammy Davis Jr., Billy Eckstine, Dinah Washington, so—And the white people began to move out and the blacks were buying in there, and so they began to move, into—

ISOARDI: Yeah not much left.

JACKSON: Into a much better nightclub atmosphere, and a much better life over there and then that was the next Central. It just moved. Nothing happened, it didn't die—It did now because as far as blacks on Central, now they're a rarity. You go to Central now you don't see nothing but Mexicans, because they're all gone now, and even up to Western Avenue they're all gone. All Western is as dead as Central now. There is no place now—Maybe two or three places in the whole city, where you can go hear decent black music. It's all—The time changes. Televisions came in, you know, and then people began to stay home looking at television, and then when the VCR's and all that stuff began to move in, and then these giant theaters and—All that was a tear down for live music.

ISOARDI: Yeah, truly, yeah.

JACKSON: And live music became a thing of the past. That's the reason—Back in 1968 I kept thinking about all these beautiful people I know, and some of them had began to die, you know.

And I said Dimples—That's the last thing we did together before she passed

away. I said, "Let's open a studio, a recording studio. I'm not so much interested in being a big mogul, studio mogul. I'm more interested in the posterity of all these people we worked with and know, like the Paul Madisons, the Chet Christophers, the George Colliers, guitar player, the Chuck Norrises and all these different people that played such great music on the Avenue."

And then so then Johnny Otis' son married my daughter.

ISOARDI: Which son?

JACKSON: Uh—Johnny had a lot of sons.

ISOARDI: No kidding, there was—

JACKSON: I think Johnny had every pretty black girl that ever interested him. [laughter] I don't think there was a white bone in his body. He didn't want nothing unless it was brown.

ISOARDI: True.

JACKSON: And he's a Greek.

ISOARDI: Yeah. So there was Shuggie Otis, Nicky—Shuggie, Nicky—

JACKSON: Yeah, he had troubled kids, yeah. He had a lot of troubled—And then he had three or four more other kids by different people. And then he had this son, his name is Daryl Brown, by a waitress that worked with him at the California Club, or at the Barrelhouse, you know, Johnny's—?

ISOARDI: Oh, down in Watts?

JACKSON: Yeah, out in Watts. See all that was going good too. They owned at that time the Barrelhouse. And Bardu Ali was managing Johnny Otis.

ISOARDI: Right, right. You became a club owner in the fifties or so, but what was it like being a club owner down in Central Avenue during its heyday? Was there any kinds of mob connection, or was it just kind of small stuff or—?

JACKSON: No, there was no mob connection. People always thought it was a mob connection.

ISOARDI: These were mostly small individual owners that ran all these clubs?

JACKSON: This was a real estate agent, a black real estate agent, that owned that land from the beginning. He was not in the nightclub business, so he leased it to Curtis Mosby, the Last Word Club. And then when I went to work for the club after Curtis and Esvan couldn't make it go, they closed up. It had been closed for a number of years, and so when me and Dimples were doing so well—We had a lot of property in real estate and our credit was excellent, then I told Dimples I knew the man that owned the club. It was E.J. Porter. He still—I consider him one of my best friends. He'd be about 110, 115 now. And I went to his office on Avalon and sat there and talked, and he hadn't seen me since that night he was going to give me the club and I thought I killed the man. The man didn't die incidentally.

ISOARDI: Oh he didn't?

JACKSON: No he did not die, that was my brother, one of my oldest brothers, I think—

ISOARDI: Panicked a bit.

JACKSON: He wanted to be band leader.

ISOARDI: [laughs] Wanted you to take off? "Hey little brother, get out of town, now." [laughs].

JACKSON: "You done killed that man, now get out of town, here's two hundred dollars and take the tires off my car. He had Royals, U.S. Royals on his car, so I put them on my purple Cadillac, and I took off and went on up the desert, me and my little girlfriend.

ISOARDI: Geez. Tell me about Chet Christopher.

JACKSON: Chet Christopher, yeah.

ISOARDI: Was he a local guy?

JACKSON: No. Chet Christopher came out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and he was pretty well known around that area where he came from.

ISOARDI: So when he came out here he was already grown—A practicing musician?

JACKSON: Yeah, oh yeah. He was a practicing musician, but the strange thing about Chet Christopher was he could not read not one note of music.

ISOARDI: Geez.

JACKSON: But that's him you heard on the tenor saxophone.

ISOARDI: That knocked me out. I still tell people about that.

JACKSON: I have never heard anybody play it like that. Not the way he played it.

ISOARDI: That was a kicking "Flying Home." I couldn't get over that.

JACKSON: And he could play anything. The man had perfect pitch and he—When I first started studying music, my teacher told me, "I will tell you, Harold, when you have arrived. When you can play on your instrument what you hear in your head, you are a musician."

ISOARDI: Yeah, true.

JACKSON: And some of us never accomplish that.

ISOARDI: Yeah that's a real gift.

JACKSON: And so Chet could do it automatically. He was doing it since he was twelve years old. Somebody gave him a horn and he just went and started playing it, didn't know what the hell these notes—But he had a perfect ear, a perfect pitch, and so he could hear a chord and he could take every note in that chord and dissect it and put it on his horn. And he had a cute way of playing real super tempos and all of a sudden he was [hums quickly] and then he would throw in [hums more slowly] you know, throw in little ditties that you recognize for just about four bars, or he may throw in just any popular song, a little ditty like that.

ISOARDI: But he never really hit it big though, or did he?

JACKSON: No, I took him to Hawaii with me in my later years, and he was sensational over there. But as far as a record, nothing like that. No, only musicians knew him, and feared him.

ISOARDI: I believe it after hearing that "Flying Home."

JACKSON: He walked in—Matter of fact Dimples and I was working at the Tiki when I first met him, and I had this song—"Los Angeles" was out then'cause it was after '63— About '63 or '64 we was working at the Tiki—Not the Tiki—

Yes, we were we were working at the Tiki, which was Ginger's old stronghold. See, Ginger used to—That was her home, even before blacks were playing—While blacks were on Central Avenue, Ginger was on the white side of town playing at the Tiki, her and her trio.

But we was working at the Tiki and this guy came in with a saxophone looking all raggedy and everything. We had a pretty classy little act, trio, me and Dimples, and he came in and said, "Man, do you mind if I play one."

I said, "Yeah, yeah. In a little while."

And we played another set and by the end of the set he come and say, "Man, can I play a song with you guys now?"

I said, "Oh man, In a little while."

ISOARDI: He's not going to go away [laughs].

JACKSON: He said, "I heard that song you all did about Los Angeles." He said, "I'd like to try that, you know." I said, "Man, how's this guy going to try Los Angeles—? He don't even know it." And so finally it was getting about one o'clock at night and we quit at 1:45, and so he came up and we came back on the set for the 1:00 set, the last set.

He said, "Man, do you mind if we play some now?", and I looked at Dimples, she looked at me.

She said, "Yeah, come on and play one." And we got up there and we played "A Train," "Take the A Train." [hums] Man, and when he hit the first note we knew he was somebody. Dimples glanced around at me and I glanced at her, and he took off. And then he wanted to make sure we going to notice, so he took off. He played "A Train" till everybody was screaming in the house, and then he took off walking, walked all around the house, all along the bar.

ISOARDI: He was going to make an impression.

JACKSON: He took a little bit from Big Jay McNeely and walked all across the bars, and came back and sat down. Bill Jones and Bill Hudson were owners of the Tiki at that time. As a matter of fact they bought the Tiki at the same time I bought the Last Word club, but they were on Western Avenue, so they did well. And man, when he got through, we just stood there in amazement. I said, "I never heard nobody play like this, even Charlie Parker."

ISOARDI: Wow. When was this?

JACKSON: Huh?

ISOARDI: When was this?

JACKSON: '63. And he had just been out here, and he wasn't working nowhere, and so he said, "Can I play that Los Angeles song? I want to play that, man."

We said, "Okay, okay." So we played our Los Angeles song and when we played our Los Angeles song, he played that thing more prettier than I can imagine when I wrote it, and he knew it. And so—We became close friends, until the day he died.

He was laying right there on the couch there, until I couldn't keep him no longer.

He had cancer of the throat, and he had a choice—This is three years ago. He had a choice. The doctors told him they could either cut his tongue out and make a hole in his throat he could breathe in—it was coming through his neck, the cancer—or he could just wait and die.

So he said, "I'll just wait and die." And he was going out to the General Hospital.

And so I said, "No man, I can't let you die like this, but I understand you not wanting to take your tongue out."

He said, "I won't be able to play. What's life, you know—"

So I said, "For the next two months while you still can play, I want to record everything I can on you. Everything." And so we did. We stood in the studio and I'd go in there, and I'd play the piano and the drums and then set it up for him. Then he'd crawl up off the couch and go in there and play. And then it got so bad that he couldn't—He had a tube going in his body where they had to feed him through a tube. And I got him off of that General Hospital and got him on Medicare where he could go to any hospital, so he ended up going to Cedar Sinai and—

[end of tape]

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 26, 1999

ISOARDI: Interview with Harold Jackson, tape number four, August 26th, 1999. Okay.

JACKSON: So Chet got so sick—If you look on my wall here you see, "Happy birthday. Chet, Wayne—" That's old Wayne, that was the Treniers, we all came here one day— And that's Hack, and then Johnny Fair, great guitar player, another one of my friends.

ISOARDI: Fears?

JACKSON: Johnny Fair. Great guitar player. He's still one of my close friends. We still do some things together. And that was a "Get well, Chet." Well, he lived two years after that, and then in 1975 I had an offer to go to China in September, but Chet was still here with me so I had to turn in down. And then around November of '75 they told me that he could no longer stay here'cause he had to go on a machine day and night. And so then he took—They left December and I re-contacted people.

They had me opening at the Peninsula Hotel in China as a single piano player'cause after my wife Dimples died, I quit trying to get a band together'cause by that time bands were hard to keep working, and singles, were getting—Single piano bars and all that. I sang well, and even though I was a bass player I knew all my chord functions and so I was able to play piano and sing, and I became quite good at that.

And so, I got an offer to go to the Peninsula Hotel which is one of the most famous hotels in China, it was the hotel that—When the Japanese conquered Hong Kong, they used the Peninsula Hotel for their headquarters, for all their generals and

everything. They had a big fountain outside, and everyday they would execute someone outside in that fountain, cut their head off. And it had quite a bit of history for Victorian, British Victorian, because the British ruled that island for so long, you know. And then they lost it during the war and then they got it back during the Second World War.

And then in December I went down to see Chet New Year's Eve, Christmas Eve. I took my lady friend with me, and we said goodbye to him in his bed. There and I was in Japan, I mean in China, two months, and I got the news that he had died. But his music is all over this house, everywhere. I've got at least five, six albums on Chet.

Charlie Parker was his idol, and he could play as well or play—Well, you wouldn't be able to tell too much difference when the two played, and he had a little more—But he was so—I think I liked Paul Madison even better because Paul—Chet played the Parker style, you know, which is more high tenor, [hums] but Chet would hit the bottom of that horn which would rattle your bones and the next minute he's up there with Parker.

ISOARDI: Wow.

JACKSON: I recorded a lot of things on him, too. And he was living in Hawaii for the last twenty years. And so me and Chet we fixed up—I fixed up an album of all the things that Paul had did and we sent it—We was going to send it to him for Christmas, and before we sent it to him he died in Hawaii.

ISOARDI: Oh, too bad, too bad.

JACKSON: And so the main reason for me to put the studio together, was not, like I told Dimples, to make a dynasty. I wanted to record all these great people that worked Central Avenue, and worked around, you know, like Vi Redd. But see, I didn't get to record Vi because she had her own recording connections and so her history is set because—Gosh she told me she lost a lot of that music—And Clora Bryant and she had

hers, had already her things—But Teddy Edwards, I don't know if you've ever heard of Teddy—?

ISOARDI: Oh yeah.

JACKSON: Teddy did most of his recording here.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

JACKSON: And then Bobby Day. You know Bobby Day?

ISOARDI: Sure, I know who he was.

JACKSON: [sings] "He rocks in the treetop all night long, hopping and bopping and singing his song". That's Bobby Day. But Bobby—They cheated him so bad when those songs came out in the early 'fifties that he finally got released from these different companies. So he came in my studio and redid all of those songs that made him popular.

ISOARDI: Did you ever release them?

JACKSON: He died right after he finished them, and I got it here on my shelf. So I got all these people.

Ginger Smock, oh Ginger was such a great, great classical jazz violinist. And see, like, I got all of Ginger's things on the shelf. Because now then when I ran into—

When I did try to go out and present some of this stuff, I ran into the same old thing that I used to run into years ago. There would be some young white kid, nineteen or twenty, that you had to get by him to get in the studio and you never could. Because if it wasn't three guitars with the bam bam as loud as you could play it, they weren't accepting nothing like that, and even now they accepting less—Even all black—They don't even put new black music out anymore, because what they did is—They [are] going back to the fifties and sixties and putting out black music that way. But if you walk in with new black music, they're not accepting it. So they wiped black people out, they stole our rock and roll from us and we don't have nowhere to turn.

When we was kids, man, I listened to great musicians, you know. And so we studied hard to be musicians like them. But nowadays you take young black people today, they are into this rap music which calls for ex, nothing, musical ability, you see. And so no new group of black musicians are coming through, and so that's why it's so important that I'm giving you this interview and other people are giving you this interview because what you're doing, Steve, you are preserving something of ours that is dead. And if someday maybe one of these young black men may go to the library and see that, it would be good if they could hear that too. Now I'm prepared to give you some of the things they could actually hear.

ISOARDI: That would be great.

JACKSON: As we get a little deeper into this thing. And I don't know what else I can—

ISOARDI: Well do you have any final thoughts, anything you'd like to say about Central, why was it important? If somebody were to say why should we remember Central, why was it important, what would you say?

JACKSON: Well Central Avenue was born not too long after the war, I mean the Civil War. Lots of blacks, once they were freed, like my great grandmother, well her people moved to Tennessee, which—Freedom was just as bad there.

My mother's biggest fear when I was a kid was, "Harold, if you're walking down the street and you see two or three white people coming up the street, get off the sidewalk and get in the street, because if you don't they might hang you to a tree." So she went to that.

Luckily, my father left Tennessee and he left my great grandmother there. And in the Depression of '32, when was food hard to get, my grandfather had built a sort of a mansion there for black people. He had several little room houses which we didn't get

but three or four dollars a month for. But it was enough to keep us in bread, milk and food. And we had cows and things like that. And I had the chance to sit on the front porch and talk to my great grandmother. I didn't realize how important that was to me. Because I have an excellent memory, I remember the things she was telling me about slavery, inside slavery, before she was freed. And her name was grandma Harriet, and she married the Bakers. I don't know what her slave name was because she married—Her husband was a Baker. I imagine he was a slave of the Bakers, but I don't know what her maiden name was as a slave. She was a slave for thirty-two years, and every time I look at this regal lady I think that's where—You asked me when you first came here where it started: it started there. That woman came out of slavery and started the Jackson family with her children, with my father's mother and so forth down the line. I think that's where we—And I'd like for people to know- I want to know more about—I want people to know more about her, too.

And so Central was an offspring of slavery, because when all these rich people lived in California—Rich people don't like to clean up behind themselves. And so there were job opportunities here for blacks. When they came to Los Angeles and to Central Avenue, well they put one side—They said, "Well we got all the choice land, let them have Watts out by the railroad tracks. And Central Avenue ain't too far off the tracks, and so they can have that part. Just don't come in our territory. Leave Beverly Hills—Go out there on the streetcar, clean up the houses, take care of the children." And for those that were richer, they had a house in the back that the maids would live in with their children, and the husband would be the chauffeur, and so forth. But the others, at five o'clock in the evening, caught the streetcars and came back, the old S-Line, the Central Line, and they would come back into this area that we called Central. That's where they all had homes: beautiful, manicured homes.

And so to any other part of the country, Central was like heaven, because where I came from it was ice, snow, toilet was out back, fifty feet from the house. If you had to pee in the winter time you'd either try to make it fifty feet out in four feet of snow or you got to the back porch and pee of the back porch. [laughter] And so, like I tell everybody, "We still got two houses in Gary: front house and the outhouse." So we ain't too bad, even though the richest group ever to came out was the Jacksons, came out of the same territory we did, you know. So that would have made Central so important.

Not only that, the weather—When I first came to Central, man, you could smell the flowers. I mean when I first came here in '42 and everything was electric, you know, electric cars, electric streetcars, electric everything. The air was just beautiful. There was no crime. There was some crime, but not much. In other words, very few people had cars, so if you want to take your girl to the show, you just go get on the streetcar, go to the show. And she lived five or six blocks from the streetcar line, you just casually walked her home, and then come on back. And nobody bothered you on the streets or anything like that. It was just a beautiful place and these people had manicured homes, little patios. They would throw parties out there. And it was a high class place.

We had the best entertainment in the world [that] would come through here. We had Duke Ellington, I got a picture from when Duke Ellington came here. Fifty cents to see Duke Ellington. And the Count Basie and all the bands of that time sooner or later came here. Lionel Hampton lived here; he lived here on Central Avenue. And Lionel used to come out and jam with us all night.

And another good part about Central was that after you had done your job as a musician and finished at two o'clock, then you would just take your horn and you were free. And we always had some after hour place to go where the musicians let their hair down. They didn't care about requests, we just go out there to play what we felt. And

this was a feeling that I don't think I'll ever see again. I know I won't. I used to be right in that crowd with them. I'd be happy to get my turn on the bass. [Charles] Charlie Mingus and all those guys was hanging out, Buddy Collette, and all those guys.

Matter of fact over down at the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767] the other day I said, "Get me my fifty year card."

And they said, "You don't get a fifty year card." They said, "You've only been in this union since '53, since they amalgamated it."

I said, "Don't you give me that jazz, because I was a dues-paying member of the locals to the federation [American Federation of Musicians, Local 47] since 1946."

ISOARDI: Yeah, and under the amalgamation agreement they had to count those years, too.

JACKSON: Yeah, they didn't want to count that.

ISOARDI: Yeah, they have to though.

JACKSON: Yeah, but see'cause once they're amalgamated that means they took all our treasure and put it into theirs, and so they were—Anyhow, why refuse a guy that's been playing music sixty years a fifty-year pin?

ISOARDI: No kidding. What'd you think about the amalgamation? Were you in favor of it?

JACKSON: That's the worst thing that ever happened to the union.

ISOARDI: No kidding. Why is it the worst thing?

JACKSON: It was another way to wipe the black musician out.

ISOARDI: You mean sort of get swallowed up into a huge organization that you—

JACKSON: Swallowed into a huge organization that showed no benefits, gave you no benefits. There was nothing beneficial about it—We had started breaking down white clubs out in valleys, like the Borderline was way out in the white neighborhood. The

Nightcap was way out in white—Four or five years before the amalgamation—And so we only had to sign a contract with the owner, bring it back to the black local, and that was it. But see, once we joined the white local, they put a freeze on all the jobs. You'd go to the bulletin board—The only ones that got those jobs were the choice few: Buddy Collette, Marl Young, which were instrumental in getting the union transferred.

And when I went to get my gold pin the other day, Serena Kay [Williams] asked me, "Were you in the union when Marl Young was in the union?"

I said, "Well sure I was in the union when Marl Young was in the union."

She said, "Well, he joined the union in 1950."

ISOARDI: Well he didn't get out here until forty something—

JACKSON: I said, "Well then, I must have been in the union five years before he joined." But since he started all the amalgamation and everything I took for granted that he was an old time—Like Buddy Collette- I know Buddy, you know joined way in the—

ISOARDI: I think Buddy joined in 1940.

JACKSON: Yeah, right. Somewhere around there.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Marl I think might have joined in—He was in Chicago before he came out here in '47. Maybe he joined in Chicago initially. I don't know.

JACKSON: Yeah, maybe he joined in Chicago and transferred out here, but she said but they had him on record as 1950 out there. And they had me on record as 1950, and I said, "No."

ISOARDI: [laughter] Really.

JACKSON: I played many a gig out here in 1950.

ISOARDI: Yeah, truly.

JACKSON: And so, I feel very proud that me and my brothers, and people like us, had

to go out into these white neighborhoods.

And one of the most miserable times we had to go into white neighborhoods, to play our music, was when they had the 1965 riots. And so I refused to stay home. My wife—I was married to Dimples then—

And Dimples said, "What do you think, you think we should stay home—? They out there shooting and killing and everything."

I said, "Dimples we have been so good, where we work, the people out there love us. Let's go." And we went, and sure enough the people loved us, but there was a thickness in the air you could cut with a knife. That was a very bad mistake for us to go that night.

ISOARDI: Were you still at your place in Watts then?

JACKSON: Hm?

ISOARDI: You and Dimples were you living in Watts then?

JACKSON: No, no, we was living in the nineteen-room mansion then. We worked up to the nineteen rooms.

ISOARDI: Geez—hard driving around that night, those nights?

JACKSON: Well, it wasn't so hard to get to the white neighborhood, but once we got into the white neighborhood every car that passed us would look at us strange like, "What the hell you doing out here?" And so when we got to our own club where we had been working there for a year, that was a strange atmosphere when you walked through that door, because at that time—You turn it on man, it was the most sickening thing that has ever happened, ever, ever in my life. That's the most dramatic thing that ever happened, because for so many years—

I mean, when I was in the navy, they had prejudices in the navy. You could work with these white fellows, 'cause I had ratings. You know, I was a fireman, first

class. I was in diesel mechanics. When we got to the chow hall, way back there in the black corner, you had to go where you couldn't see all the pretty girls go by. Sometimes Ginger Rogers would come out to visit the sailors and the white sailors' barracks up there. Well, we could look out the chow window and see all these Rosie the Riveters and all that, and, you know, it was just not much nice atmosphere.

So we made up our mind at the barracks that night that we was just going to take the next seat that came in the cafeteria, and so I did that. And the other guys, the other black people behind me went back to the black corner and left me sitting there, and I was the first sit-down striker in the navy, in war time. And I got fifteen days—thirty days' bread and water for that. And luckily—I could have got a lot worse, but the papers, *The Pittsburg Courier*, the black papers got ahold of the story, so they didn't want to push it too hard. Besides that, Joe Louis had just donated over three hundred thousand dollars to the navy, and they didn't want to hear about a navy not being able to eat right.

ISOARDI: No kidding. Well, Harold any final thoughts?

JACKSON: Is there any way—I think you should need to know a little bit more about Dimples.

ISOARDI: Oh what would you like to say? What should we remember?

JACKSON: Because Dimples was one of the greatest artists that sat down to the piano. She was a little tiny girl, about five feet three, weighed about a hundred and five pounds. But when she played that piano, she played like a man. I mean she played like a man and she could play jazz at any tempo, she'd be right there making riffs. And not only that, she was beautiful. And she had two sisters that she wanted to carry along into—There's no reason that woman shouldn't have never been one of the greatest, because she could sing like Whitney Houston, and she could play like Erroll Garner, or George Shearing, or—She could pick any style she wanted. If she wanted to play—I got

an imitation she did. She did imitations of George Shearing, Margareta King, Sarah Vaughan, and Dinah Washington. She could do it all. Dinah was jealous of her. Dinah would come in—She played behind Dinah and all those other artists and they would look, see this little beautiful, little black girl from the ghetto. She came all the way from the ghetto, which inspired me years later'cause when I—See, Ginger and I never had children, so when Ginger and I were divorced, and I told you Dimples came to work with my band and we eventually got married, she had—The baby was just six months old, little Antoinette, that's my daughter.

She's in her thirties now. Antoinette has one of the most beautiful voices you ever want to hear. She's a Barbra Streisand type. So when we were trying to get Antoinette a break, all the white guys at the studio tell her, "No, you don't sound colored enough." And they wouldn't—She never really made it. But still, I got music in here that if you listen to—She'll make it. I went so far as when—I loved Princes Diana, and when Princess Diana died, I wrote a poem, I wrote a song, which—I actually had written a song before, but I changed it. It's called the "Theme to a Yellow Rose." And I recorded that, and I had my daughter sing it. It's the most gorgeous song.

And I took it to one record company, and while I was over there they were—To listen to this song I put all this work into—I wrote two songs for Princess Diana, I wrote the "Theme to a Yellow Rose", and "Sleep Tonight in Heaven," both very good songs. And so, when I took it over to this one company, it's a black company over here—It was the only one that was willing to listen to what I had, so I took it over there. While they were trying to listen to my song they were recording some black cat doing rap, and he was talking "Ah the mother fucker, down there, I saw this bitch on the corner" and they're trying to hear [sings softly] "The theme to a yellow rose" and I said, "My God, let me out of this place." And so it's still sitting there on shelf. The most beautiful

song—I think it's more beautiful than "Candle in the Wind." It is, there's no doubt about it. I'll play it for you. That's what I was working on last night.

So back to Dimples. Dimples always almost made it, then they would drop her. I remember Hanna-Barbera—I went out to Hanna-Barbera. Milt Rogers was the A and R man there. And this was back thirty, almost forty years ago. But they had Pat Boone, who was their biggest star, and they had just bought into Hanna-Barbera, which was doing cartoons and, you know, a lot recording stuff.

And so, I first stopped at Verve Records. Verve had a little place on Sunset Boulevard, and I sat there and I took out Dimples' things that I recorded on her. She had some gorgeous things, arrangements by H.B. Barnum. She had one song with 32 violins on it, and I still got all of that.

So Verve Records said to me—I don't believe it. See, "We had Gloria Lynn. Gloria Lynn is our biggest singing star. We had to drop her." They said, "Gloria Lynn came to a session in New York. We had thirty two musicians there, and the 32 musicians—"

She walked in and said, "Aquarius is not sitting right with Sagitarius, and Aries said not to record nothing." And she walked out, leaving them all the band with 32 musicians.

And so they said, "Out with this nut!" And, "Oh my God, let's—Got to go home, my God." They were crying,'cause she was selling records big for them you know. And so when I walked in and played this stuff for them, the man looked at me and said, "Oh my God, Harold, my God. What kind of deal do you want?"

I said, "Well, we have our own recording company and we have our own publishing company."

I said, "The main thing I would like to do is lease—We'll record it, but we'll

lease it to you."

He said, "How many albums can you give me a year? Can you guarantee me four?"

I said, "Yes, we can guarantee you four or more, you know, according to how the records sell." So that was the first place I stopped in that day. So I said, "I got such good vibes from Verve records, let me just stop one other place."

So I went up to Dot Records, right next to Music City, where they sell music right there on the corner of Sunset. A few doors down you walk upstairs to Dot Records. They had Pat Boone, [inaudible] records all over the place. They were big, and Milt Rogers was the A and R man. And I carried a tape. I didn't believe in those little dubs they used to carry. They used to tell you to bring us a dub because they want to see what it sounds like on a car radio. They wanted it to be scratchy like it is on the car radio. And I said, "No, too much work and too much money. I'll bring my tape recorder, and you can play it on the tape." So I took my tape recorder, and I played the same thing I played for Verve Records.

Milt Rogers looked at me and said, "Well, the girl is good. We do quite a few demos out here. Do you think she'd be interested in doing any demos?"

I said, "Of course."

So he said, "Well, give me your phone number." And I gave him my phone number.

And it was Friday evening about four or five o'clock, so I said, "Ah, hell with it." I said, "I got a good deal with Verve Records. Let me get back home and tell my wife." And I got back home about six, my wife was gone. So she got back just in time for us to go to work. We was working at the Tiki then. That was Friday, so we worked Friday. I was telling her about this deal I had with Verve Records, and she just looked at me as

if she was looking through me. And so I tried to talk to her when we got home.

She said, "Oh I'm busy," you know, something, didn't want to listen. Monday morning came and the air was so thick you could cut it with a knife. She say, "Harold I want you to take me somewhere."

I said, "Okay," so we got in the car and we headed out to Hollywood. She wouldn't tell me where we were going till we go to Hollywood. So we got to Hollywood. She said park right behind Music City.

I parked behind Music City, and she said, "Come on." We walked around Sunset Boulevard and started going up to Dot Records.

I said, "What are we going up here for?" I said, "I was up here Friday, and the guy said he didn't like the material I brought, and he didn't want—"

She said, "I know."

So we walked in and as we got to the door he said, "Hi, Dimples."

"Hi Dimples? How do you know her?"

And so he said, "Hi, Mr. Jackson, come on into the office." So we went into the office. They had a big square table and they had about eight or ten white executives sitting around the table, and Milt Rogers, the A and R man was sitting at the end of the table. They said, "Mr. Jackson we had Dimples bring you in because we wanted to let you know that we signed her for seven years."

I said, "You what? You what? I was here Friday and you said you didn't like our music."

"Yeah I know, but we signed up for seven years."

I looked at Dimples, her head went down. I said, "You signed her for seven years?"

So they say, "Yeah."

I said, "Well I guess there ain't nothing I can do about it." I looked at her and she wouldn't even look at me. And so I said, "Okay."

So they say, "Well, we're going to take all this material that you brought up, and she's going to be a superstar."

I said, "All that material I brought up here?"

They say, "Yeah."

I said, "No, that's my material." I said, "I paid for the sessions, I wrote the songs and I have copyrights on all of them."

"What?" Then they look at Dimples.

She said, "Yeah, that's right."

Then they got belligerent. They said, "Well look, Mr. Jackson, let's face it, ain't nothing you can do with it, because we have her signed up for seven years."

I said, "Yes there is something I can do."

They said, "What can you do with it?"

I said, "I can take it home and set it on my motherfucking shelf."

And I turned and walked out the door. And when she got in the car—Two months later we divorced. And they put one song out on her, Dot Records and Hanna-Barbera. They put out, "Guess Who" it was Jessie big song. [sings] "Guess, somebody loves you, guess who guess who." And what else did they put out? "What's New Pussycat?" And that was Tom Jones' biggest hit. Ain't nobody in the world can touch it, no one should dare touch it. They put Dimples out, and they spent over $3,000 on her first session. Had her come in and [inaudible] make the arrangement for "What's New Pussycat?" The damn thing hit the floor like a bucket.

ISOARDI: Course it did.

JACKSON: Tom Jones—Nobody gonna touch that. And so that was the end of

Dimples and I—Marriage and everything, which—I still loved her—Still loved each other, but I couldn't stomach going up there with her to this company again, so that's when I went to playing the single piano. But she is still great, and I still love her, and she's still the mother of my three children. So years went by, and I went on to single and I did well, did very well.

And all the houses we had—I said, "Well, you take one house—No, I'm going to take one house." I said, "I'll take this little place over, this little rental place which is here, and you can take the rest."

She said, "All eighteen?" I said, "You got all eighteen houses."

The lawyer said "You gonna sign for that?"

I said, "Where are the papers?" She drew up quick papers and I signed over all the houses, eighteen, except for this one. And we had another pretty nice house up on Buckley Avenue, which is Angeles Vista: four bedrooms with a swimming pool and all that, and I say that's for you and the kids. We had lost the nineteen room mansion by then. We didn't lose it, the city bought it. We were condemned.

ISOARDI: Why'd you give her eighteen? Why'd you give her all but one?

JACKSON: Well I'll tell you, Steve. Dimples and I would come in from work, I'd take off my clothes, I'd get into bed, the phone would ring: "Mr. Jackson, this is 2616 73rd street. The toilet's stopped up and water's running all over the house." I'd have to get out in my car and drive out there and unstop the plug and I'd find a baby diaper would be in the bottom of the stool. Everyday, every night, almost every day. And then in the day times, for instance, one tenant would move in the house,' cause at that time rental—

They had so many houses to rent, that's for all the Mexican's that got here, that houses—Rental—That was another breakdown of the black people on Central Avenue and the area, because people were so anxious. That's when they started building these

apartment buildings. You know homes went out the window and these little apartments start popping up, six units, eight units, ten units and all that. They tear the house down, then build an eight unit, and they had to put signs out there, "First and last months rent free," just to get a tenant in there.

ISOARDI: So it was just getting rid of a nuisance for you?

JACKSON: [affirmative] And so six months later she called me and said, "Harold will you please go out to 2505 109th Street and pick up the rent?" I said, "That's your goddamn property." So they foreclosed about a year later, on everything. And I was happy because I had this house. I didn't even want this house, I rented it, went out to Hollywood, got me a nice apartment with a swimming pool and everything, went to playing the single piano, and started living the good life. Then I went to Hawaii and stayed ten year—five years. Living the good life.

But anyhow, Dimples and I were close friends, you know'cause— It was just a matter of a black girl trying to make it, and knowing she couldn't make it unless she had to go into a white man's world to do it. And I was in her way. And in a way I was in her way,'cause they didn't want to hear nothing I had to say. So I got out of the way. And we still became friends, we still going together. And then one day I told her Dimples get up out of this bed. I said, "We have three beautiful daughters. Let's be friends, get on with the business of raising our daughters and cut out the hanky panky. You go get who you want and I'll go get who I want."

And the music went on the shelf. So after they made that one record, that was it. They didn't put nothing else out, and she had—It took her five years to break the contract. And so I was sitting up here one day and I was thinking about all that. And I said, "Even though our marriage was sour, there's no reason in the world why Central Avenue, the world, should not know about Dimples Harris Jackson and her talent." And

so I wrote a book. I wrote a book called *A Theme to a Yellow Rose*, dedicated to Dimples. It starts off when she's a little girl, three years old, four years old, going to—With her mother—Like that was the only jobs negroes could get here then was washing clothes and ironing.

She went to take the clothes back to the white people that she had washed and ironed, and she heard the little girl on the porch. They had a big wide porch went all around the house. And while she was standing on the porch waiting for her mother, she heard the piano. And so she walked around to the window and peeped in. There was a little seven year old white girl, playing "Claire de Lune" on the piano, and her heart went out to the piano right then. So she asked her mother, "Could I get a piano like that mother?" But her daddy was a drunk, he didn't have no job and so forth, so—And I built the whole story from her being a little black girl standing on the porch to Carnegie Hall, where she finished her career, in Carnegie Hall.

ISOARDI: That's quite a tribute, quite a tribute.

JACKSON: Tribute to her. And it's *The Theme to a Yellow Rose*, and I'm getting ready and this—I started this in 1960 and I finished it. I caught myself finishing one time then I thought about all the pictures. I want to put all the pictures in, because this book may never sell, but these pictures will show Central Avenue. It will show the people, the guests, the stars, and this—This is my brother, that's my brother, that was the Jackson Brothers Band, and so forth on down the line.

ISOARDI: Well, along with that now you've got this interview Harold, to—

JACKSON: Yeah I got the interview, this is good.

ISOARDI: All right.

JACKSON: And this tells a little bit about my history, a little history of Central Avenue, which we all loved. It was pitiful man.

I was the last one to see Central die, 'cause I walked in my nightclub on New Years Eve. Well, we had to work that night, 'cause I was working to support the club. And so on New Years Eve we did our job, and I came back to close up the club, the Last Word club, and I checked the cash register. We took in $1.97 and there was ninety-seven cents in the cash register: we took in $1.97 and the bartender stole a dollar. The only way out of that is some guy came up and said, "I want to buy this club from you." So I sold the club to this Winifield or somebody.

I let him use my license, 'cause he gave me five thousand, and said, "Can I use your license, and I'll give you a profit of what's coming in?"

I said, "Okay," and so he stayed there two months, and he got wiped out. So I told it again to another guy for five thousand, and he got wiped out. I sold the club three times, and they all got wiped out. Then I sold the license, and I went back to Mr. Porter and I said, "Mr. Porter I know I'm on a lease to you,"'cause at $200.00 a month I took a five year lease, you know. I said, "I'm not going to be able to make that club work and I can't pay the lease."

And he said, "No, forget it. Forget it, Harold." And then I went by about six months later and the club had burned down. There's nothing there—

ISOARDI: Was that '65, was it '65 when it burned?

JACKSON: Yeah, somewhere around there.

ISOARDI: And that was the end.

JACKSON: That was the end of—That was the last decent place that Central had to go, and it died in my hands, in my arms.

ISOARDI: Harold, thanks very much.

JACKSON: Okay, and I'm sure there's a lot of musicians out there I didn't mention.

ISOARDI: Well we can always add later. All right?

[tape off]

ISOARDI: Okay, you want to add something here?

JACKSON: Yeah just one other thing. I kept getting around to it—I never did get to it, but one thing I wanted to say about my recording studio was that lots of these people that I've talked about in this book had no way whatsoever of ever getting anything recorded. And my whole idea for putting the studio together was to record these people, at no price. They'd never paid me nothing—they had nothing. But I've got some of the greatest music ever recorded, from some of the artists that you probably will never know about except for the work that Michael's doing, and the work that I did here in this studio'cause I worked day and night—

ISOARDI: Michael? Who's Michael?

JACKSON: You.

ISOARDI: Oh, Steve. [laughs] That's okay.

JACKSON: Sorry, Steve, Steve. The work that Steve's doing is to preserve some of this history for the young black generation that's coming through, and the generations that will be coming through after. In my case I'll have music that they can hear and stories of these people, and in Steve's case he'll have a documented—At UCLA, stories about these great, great musicians that were never known or heard, or became famous, that were an intricate part of Central Avenue. That's about all I got to say.

[tape ends]

GUIDE TO PROPER NAMES