

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF WALTER N. MARKS III

by Joan M. Benedetti

February 19, 2010



Walter N. Marks III (Wally)
February 19, 2010

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Walter N. Marks III (Wally) was born May 26, 1961 in Los Angeles. His mother is Suzy Jacobs Marks. His father was Walter Nathan Marks, Jr., whose business, Walter N. Marks Realty Co., was founded in 1928. Wally III's grandfather founded the Beverly Hills real estate firm, Walter N. Marks Inc. and in the 1960s, helped develop the Santa Monica Mall. The family acquired the Helms Bakery in 1956. They provided affordable space for nonprofits and businesses, such as the Jazz Bakery. In the 1980s, Wally Jr. worked to transform the Santa Monica Mall into the Third Street Promenade. Wally's parents were long-time philanthropists and human rights activists.

Wally III, the second of four children, graduated from University High School and then from UC Berkeley, where he studied architecture and engineering. He worked for five years in his maternal family's business, a five-generation liquor wholesaler, the Simon Levi Company. Starting in high school, Wally III unloaded boxcars and worked in the Levi warehouse; after college he became a liquor salesman. In 1988 he "moved over to real estate," joining the other family business. Wally and his wife, Carol, have one son, Aaron, born in 1997.

In 1993, Wally met Patrick Ela, Executive Director of the Craft and Folk Art Museum, through the Miracle Mile Civic Coalition (MMCC), of which both were members. Ela asked Marks to join the CAFAM board. Wally later became MMCC President.

When Wally came on the CAFAM board in 1993, it was in a transitional period. Wally worked with the board to purchase (and sell) the Curson properties and acted as advisor to Board Chair Frank Wyle on the attempt to purchase 5800 Wilshire, which the museum was leasing. Preparing to take over his family's business, he could not have much effect on CAFAM at the time. Patrick Ela resigned in 1996. In May 1997, negotiations to buy 5800 Wilshire broke off.

As CAFAM had to vacate, it was decided to give the library collection away; Marks served on a board/staff committee to place the library. Wally remembers the last board meetings—"it was really a struggle." The museum closed December 31, 1997. It was assumed it was closing forever. But later in 1998, former Executive Director Patrick Ela initiated talks with Al Nodal, General Manager, L.A. Cultural Affairs Department. CAFAM re-opened April 1999 in partnership with the Cultural Affairs Department. Wally was CAFAM Board Treasurer 1999-2008 until elected Board Chair in August 2008. During his tenure as Board Chair, Marks led the growth of board membership, enhanced the board's governance, and focused on fundraising for the museum. After eight years, he stepped down as Chair in 2016, but continues as a board member.

As President of Walter N. Marks Inc., Wally III oversees all operations. In addition to oversight of the Helms Bakery District and its tenants, Marks is an active community leader and supporter of the Miracle Mile area, of which the Craft and Folk Art Museum is still a vital part.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joan M. Benedetti. B.A., Theater; M.A., Library Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Related Experience: Milwaukee Public Library Decorative Arts Librarian, 1967 – 1968; CAFAM Museum Librarian 1976 – 1997. From 1998 – 2012, Benedetti worked to process the CAFAM Records, 1965 – 1997, which are now part of Special Collections at the UCLA Young Research Library. From 2008 – 2010 she conducted oral history interviews with seventeen former CAFAM staff and trustees; almost 60 hours were recorded and transcribed. She is the author of several articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries and the editor of *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, Lanham, MD: ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Time and Setting of Interview

Place: Walter N. Marks III's office in the Helms Bakery complex in Culver City, California.

Dates, time, length of session, and total number of hours recorded: One session was recorded on Friday morning, February 19, 2010, for a total of one hour, forty minutes, and forty-five seconds.

Persons present during the interview: Walter N. Marks III and Joan Benedetti.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the interview with Marks, Benedetti reviewed several biographical and other documents related to Wally Marks III, his family, and his real estate business interests in Los Angeles. She also reviewed the CAFAM timeline developed while working on the CAFAM Records at UCLA. Joan's work with the CAFAM Records, her experience with the other CAFAM oral history interviews (which included several former CAFAM Board members), and her personal knowledge of CAFAM during her 21-year tenure as CAFAM Museum Librarian, assisted in her preparation for the Marks interview.

Editing: Marks was given the opportunity to review the transcript and to supply missing or misspelled names and to verify the accuracy of the contents. Benedetti added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate, and she added information for clarification and deleted some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader's understanding of the narrative. The transcript was edited by Benedetti and Kuwayama for spelling of names and Joan added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate. Both Tomi and Joan also added further information in brackets for clarification and deleted with ellipses some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader's understanding of the narrative. Time stamps have been added to both the table of contents and the transcript at five-minute intervals; the time stamps make it easier to locate the topics in the transcript that are mentioned in the table of contents.

Table of Contents

Growing up on L.A.'s west side; University High School, then UC Berkeley. Three sisters. **[00:05:00]** Marks works five years for Simon Levi Co, maternal family's five-generation liquor wholesale business; in 1988 goes to paternal family's real estate business—properties in Culver City, Santa Monica, and near CAFAM on Wilshire Boulevard. Marriage to Carol; son, Aaron. Co-chair, Miracle Mile Civic Coalition; "Museum Row." Connection to CAFAM is MMCC, director Patrick Ela, who is looking for younger board members. **[00:10:00]** Ela taught him simplicity of craft and folk art. Festival of Masks. **[00:15:00]** Meeting Wyles: On board as Museum Tower planned with Wayne Ratkovich. **[00:20:00]**

Recession makes Museum Tower financing impossible. Hodgetts + Fung to merge 5800 + 5814 Wilshire. Joseph Ventress buys 5800; then charges CAFAM \$17,000 mo. 5800 will be purchased soon? **[00:25:00]** Build-out of 5800 Wilshire for offices and library; museum closed to public 30 mo. while renovation/merging proceeds. 5800 still not purchased; why proceed with merging? Option to purchase 5800; price not set. Ventress assumed Ratkovich would "pay a premium"; will not budge on asking price. **[00:30:00]** 5800 building has large parking lot. **[00:35:00]** 5800 purchase fails; parking lost. Wally assists selling Curson properties.

May 1995: Merged CAFAM opens--gala weekend. **[00:40:00]** Renovated 5814 first floor mostly shop; mezzanine, third floor are galleries. No elevator. 5800 has space for staff, library, storage, and galleries, but CAFAM must vacate end 1997. **[00:45:00]** Frank Wyle resigns as Board Chair; new Chair Bud Knapp. Director Ela resigns June 1996. Bud Knapp resigns August 1996. Frank Wyle again Chair. 1997: Paul Kusserow to "turn things around"; layoffs begin. **[00:50:00]**

CAFAM defaults on lease. **[00:55:00]** Museum closing forever? Wally remembers terrible struggle of board meetings. Remaining staff laid off. Permanent collection auction March 26, 1998.] Marcia Page. Ela's "insight to reach out to L.A. City." Wally helps Patrick negotiate ten-year lease with L.A. Cultural Affairs. **[01:00:00]** January 1999: Wyle resigns again as Chair, Ela steps in. Joan de Bruin. CAFAM re-opens April 9, 1999; Wally elected Board Treasurer. Edith Wyle very ill; sees CAFAM survive. Edith dies October 12. "Edith Wyle Square." **[01:05:00]**

Wally: "most important person . . . was Patrick Ela." Joan de Bruin sick leave; Ela Interim Director. **[01:10:00]** Peter Tokovsky hired January 2003; resigns December 30. 2004: James Goodwin hired. Goodwin resigns. City giving less--re-interpreting lease. Originally City gave \$350,000; now \$90,000; 2010 is last year. Frank Wyle back as Board Chair. **[01:15:00]** Maryna Hrushetska hired March 2005; now has five years' tenure. Exhibitions cost much less. Foundation support renewed. **[01:20:00]** Board increases "give-or-get" dues. **[01:25:00]**

Frank Wyle steps down permanently August 2008. Wally Board Chair. **[01:30:00]** Board meetings now telephonic; using Internet more. Meetings 4 x year instead of 6. Trustees more engaged: **[01:35:00]** Main focus funding. Annual budget goal \$600,000—without City support. Shop generates profit. Exhibitions extended; one less show a year. Staff very hard-working. Wally hopes Edith Wyle would be proud of direction. **[01:40:00]** Wally thrilled to be part of oral history

End of Session--01:40:45

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF WALTER N. MARKS III (WALLY)

Friday, February 19, 2010. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (1 hour, 40 minutes, 45 seconds)

JB: Today is Friday, February 19, 2010. And I'm here in Culver City with Wally Marks III, who is the President of the Board [of Trustees] of the Craft and Folk Art Museum. We're here in his office in the historic Helms Bakery complex, headquarters for a family real estate business that goes back--well, I was going to say three--it is three—OK--three generations. And I'm Joan Benedetti. Was it your father or your grandfather that acquired the Helms Bakery property?

WM: Together in 1972, my dad and grandfather were working together. And it's a real estate company that goes back to the '30s here in LA. And so we were very fortunate to acquire the properties in the early '70s. And since that time, we've been able to develop it into what it is today. We call it a "Center for Home Furnishings and the Arts."

JB: Well, it's brilliant. And it always has been. I was telling you earlier that I used to always come to Plummer's here before we had IKEA. [Laughter] But, no, it's--it's just gotten more and more attractive and more beautiful.

WM: Thank you.

JB: And obviously a lot of that is--is your effort. I've always been amused to—actually--to hear people refer to it as the Helms Bakery. And it reminds me that a lot of people still, I think, refer to the Craft and Folk Art Museum as the Egg and the Eye.

WM: That's true.

JB: Even though the restaurant is long gone and--and it's certainly no longer the commercial gallery that it was. Well, I'd like to go back to the beginning--that is, your beginning--to start off with. Can you tell us when and where you were born?

WM: Born in Downtown Los Angeles in May 1961 at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. And raised in the West Side of Los Angeles.

JB: Now is that what became--

WM: Cedars-Sinai.

JB: Cedars-Sinai, yeah.

WM: Right, it became Cedars-Sinai later. Went to high school--public high school--here at University High School--Uni High.

JB: Oh, at UCLA. No, at--

WM: No, that's UES. Uni is over on Wilshire and Barrington. Public high school.

JB: Interesting.

WM: Grew up on the West Side, and then went to college up at UC Berkeley. Studied architecture and engineering.

JB: Yes, I, I noticed on your resumé that your degree is in engineering, I guess, but you took a lot of architecture courses too.

WM: I started out in architecture, yeah.

JB: So, you thought about being an architect, did you?

WM: I think I just love buildings, and real estate, and good design, and--but architecture wasn't for me, and I--I ended up in industrial engineering. "Operations research," it is called--which is the business of engineering.

JB: Yeah, and, and it's certainly the practical side of architecture, I would say.

WM: I usually say it's "How fast does that conveyor belt go?"

JB: [laughter]

WM: Or how many--how--queuing theory. How many lines at the bank teller, at the bank should you have at different times? And it's--it's engineering. It's wonderful. It's practical.

JB: Yeah, I think it would be fascinating, actually.

WM: It is.

JB: Let's just talk about growing up as Wally III.

WM: [laughter]

JB: Do you have siblings?

WM: I have three sisters. I'm the second in line. All--all of them living in California. My mother and father were born here in Los Angeles as well. My father did pass away this year--last year in April '09.

JB: Yes, I heard that, I'm very sorry.

WM: Yeah. Thank you. We miss him dearly. Let's see--

JB: He was—I Googled him, I have to admit it.

WM: Yes, yeah.

JB: And I was really surprised to hear about his--his very active life as a peace activist.

WM: Yes.

JB: And your mother too, I guess.

WM: Yeah, together. Yeah, early in the '60s and '70s, they were the heads of the Nuclear Freeze effort here in California. And all the way to the very end with my dad, who was very active in . . . [AIT—Americans for Israel and Torah]—and campaign finance reform, as well as strong issues in social justice with Palestinians, Israelis, all the way down to Korean janitorial services here in Los Angeles and Latino services. And he was . . . on many, many boards. And so, we--we have a long history [back to early Los Angeles]. His father, my grandfather--and on both sides--my mom's and dad's--we go back to **[00:05:00]** running, chairing the Liberty Hill organization, United Way, City of Hope, [and the like].

JB: Yes, the Liberty Hill obituary was especially moving.

WM: Yeah. We have long roots, and we feel strongly about giving back to our community. And that's how, sort of dovetailing back to CAFAM, back in the early '90s--I think I got involved in [early] '93. Patrick Ela [CAFAM's Executive Director] reached out to me. Our family owns real estate close to CAFAM on Wilshire Boulevard, and I was just getting involved. I started in the real estate business in 1988. Prior to that, I had five years working in my maternal family business, my mom's side, which was a five-generation liquor wholesaler--wine and spirits wholesaler--called Simon Levi Company. And so I grew up, as a teen--

JB: I was wondering how you got involved with that. Yeah.

WM: Yeah. So, Simon Levi was my great-great-grandfather. And he came to California in the 1860s.

JB: And what were you doing there?

WM: I was peddling whiskey.

JB: [laughter]

WM: I was doing--as a high schooler--I was unloading boxcars and working in--

JB: Oh my gosh.

WM: In the warehouse. And then after college I became a liquor salesman and--and worked my way in. But I left that company in '88 and moved over to real estate. But it all dovetails into selling and--and selling ideas or selling whiskey--it's very much the same.

JB: My son is in that position too at Sony. And it's--I understand what you mean.

WM: So it goes back to just--we have a strong, strong conviction about making sure you give back to your community locally, and getting involved. And so, in--I think it was '93 [that] I was courted by Patrick. I was young, I was energetic, I didn't know better.

JB: [laughter] Thank goodness.

WM: And Patrick was probably looking for new--new board members and young people that were active. And I was active in the rebirth of the Miracle Mile from an aesthetics standpoint.

JB: That I knew about, yes. So glad [for that effort].

WM: Yeah. And there was an organization that I became the chair of--and co-ran--called the Miracle Mile Civic Coalition. And that was involved in the creation of the Museum Row. And the--and becoming a--a lynch pin between the different museums, who maybe didn't talk as much as they should to each other. And organized the businesses and the residential associations [within the Miracle Mile area] to make a cohesive group. And that organization [still] exists today, and I'm still a part of it.

JB: Yes. I, I guess that's what . . . we weren't talking about "branding" at that time, but that really is what you were doing.

WM: Yeah, we--yeah--we did it--which was great. And got all the little things, from the signage on the freeways of Museum Row and--and redoing the islands, and restoring [the original] Miracle Mile [sign]. And we saw that--in the future--rail was going to come here. And improvements were going to come, and people and businesses have, and we're seeing it today. All the fruits of our labor over the last 15 years or so.

JB: Yeah, that must be very satisfying. You're married and you have a son.

WM: I do.

JB: I noticed that he's not Wally IV.

WM: No, but he talks about changing his name. And I said--

JB: Really? [Laughter]

WM: "You have to wait until you're 18." I thought I would draw the line after me, but, you know--so.

JB: Yeah. Any sign that he's interested in the business?

WM: We'll see. I don't--I don't push it. It's up to him.

JB: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I couldn't resist asking that.

WM: It's OK.

JB: Yeah, Tina Nord [Frank Wyle's secretary] told me that you had joined the board in 1993

WM: Mm-hmm, yeah.

JB: Did you know the Wyles at all before that?

WM: No, I had--my connection was Patrick Ela and the Miracle Mile Civic Coalition. And Patrick was a member [of the Coalition] and, you know, an affable guy. And he said, "I want young

- people. I want you to join up.” And I knew Alan Sieroty [who was a California state senator and was on the CAFAM Board].
- JB: Oh yes.
- WM: Who is my--is and was--my dad’s best friend, growing up in childhood. So, Alan was on the board, and that was comforting. And it was--it was easy to fit in.
- JB: Yes. Alan was very supportive [of the Museum]. I knew him early on. So, I was glad to see that connection. Let’s see. What were your first impressions of the museum? And--and I guess I wanted to ask--were you there before Patrick talked to you about it at all? Were you, were you aware of it?
- WM: I’m sure I had an omelet or two [there].
- JB: Good, good.
- WM: We grew up in the city, and went to our museums, and I grew up, you know, as a youth at the Saturday music concerts at the Dorothy Chandler [Pavilion]. And we were civically involved, and culturally involved. But, no I [didn’t] have a strong connection, nor were my parents art collectors by any means.
- JB: Oh, OK, that was going to be another question, yeah.
- WM: Right. **[00:10:00]** My grandparents on my dad’s side collected art . . . and pieces of sculpture, and--and had an eye for it. Mostly modern. So, my connection was about people as opposed to the craft and folk art objects. And I think what really attracted me, and what Patrick taught me about it, and--was the sophisticated simplicity, if you will, of craft and folk art. Things that are one of a kind, not machine made, not duplicated. And again, I think it’s down to the human spirit that’s there. And you can--and some of these pieces resonate from the artist to the eyes that see it. And so that--that attracts me. Today I’m not a collector of it. I do really love wood--I love turned wood. I’ve enjoyed my times at Sam Maloof’s facility. And--and so, those are the objects that draw me--that are drawn to me--and that I appreciate. But I am by no means a collector, and by no means [do I] have an agenda, like--you know--about, where craft and folk art should be.
- JB: Well maybe that’s all to the good.
- WM: I think it actually is.
- JB: It frees you, probably.
- WM: I think it’s—yeah--I have no ego involved here. And it’s about--it’s--it’s--mostly to serve the community and to make sure that there’s a place [in L.A. for this museum]. And I was really also attracted to the fact that, over the years, that the museum was small enough and nimble enough to do things that bigger organizations can’t. That we can turn quickly on a dime,

- make a decision, and adjust. Where, perhaps a bigger organization like LACMA--you know, it's, it's like a big steamship. It takes time to turn. And that's just the nature of it--so.
- JB: Yes, I worked both places, and I know the difference . . . [but] it, actually, it's interesting that [LACMA does] have a lot of the same problems, just on a larger scale.
- WM: Sure.
- JB: But yes. I, I agree about the [advantages of] nimbleness. Did you go to the Festival of Masks when it was still a big two-day weekend?
- WM: Oh, very much. I mean, but . . . only after I joined up, you know--and then [I] helped and participated, and--and enjoyed those times. And prayed that it would never rain. But it always seemed to rain on those October weekends.
- JB: Well, actually, I think--
- WM: Or threatened to rain. (Laughter)
- JB: Yeah, it did threaten. I remember some overcast days, but, but I think it rained only once.
- WM: That's good.
- JB: That it actually, you know, rained things out.
- WM: I think we did [it] every--every year, or every other year?
- JB: Well, it started out every year . . . (and it was October, to begin with). But then when the Olympics came along and they were asked by Bob Fitzpatrick, who was head of the Olympic Arts Festival, to become an Olympic Arts event--that was happening in July. This was for the Summer Olympics in July of 1984. And in order to prepare for what was going to be a much bigger event, they skipped the 1983 Olympics.
- WM: Or the '83 Festival of Masks.
- JB: Sorry--yes. They didn't skip the Olympics. [They skipped] the Festival . . . that would normally have been in '83, and went to a biannual for a few years. I think it was in 1988 that they went back to an annual. But I'm glad that you got to see it when it was really in its--in its glory.
- WM: It was wonderful. The parades, the closing of Wilshire Boulevard.
- JB: Yes.
- WM: The--it was wonderful.
- JB: It, it certainly was. And I was wondering if you ever were a part of the Associates Group. Or, I guess more importantly, did you ever go on any of those trips that the Associates--

- WM: Sadly not. I really wished [I had]. And there was even a conversation today to resurrect [those trips as a] fundraiser--or just to--as an effort for . . . people to make the connection, and for people to appreciate [folk art and crafts]. And we've [talked], actually--you know, recently--thinking about how to do that. It's not [among] our first . . . agenda items, but it is in the top ten, and it's an important one. Because I know that people really valued it. And it . . . brought camaraderie, and appreciation of the other members, and--and it was good.
- JB: You know, for the first few years of those trips--this was Edith's idea, I guess--[she] had each person be sort of the recorder for one day of the trip. And they would put together a kind of scrapbook of photographs, as well as these journal entries. And those scrapbooks are in the CAFAM archive.
- WM: Wonderful.
- JB: And, yeah--they really--they really are.
- WM: So that's something we should **[15:00]** look at.
- JB: Yeah.
- WM: To go back to--should we want to--you know, really pursue this. That would be good.
- JB: I think it would be terrific.
- WM: I think Santa Fe might be our first stop. (Laughter)
- JB: Oh, well, I--I'd be happy to, to help out with that.
- WM: OK.
- JB: So, let's see. Let's go back to when you first joined the Board, and you got to know--do you remember getting to meet Frank Wyle or Edith Wyle--
- WM: Yeah, they were very tall figures in my mind, they--
- JB: [laughter]
- WM: They consumed the room.
- JB: Considering how short they really are, that's-- [laughter].
- WM: But, you know . . . there was definitely . . . there was an age difference. There weren't as many younger people on the Board. I was--in '93 I was 32 years old . . . it wasn't uncommon that most people [on the Board] were twice my age. So I listened a lot. I think I--and helped out where I could, and applied my skill set where I could. And I think I probably followed more Patrick's lead and helped out there. My memory of the '90's is rather vague about exactly what I was doing. But I know I came on just after the museum was looking to expand and build the Museum Tower and the Joint Venture [with Wayne Ratkovich]. And so, as I

- would say--you know--the museum kind of got hit in the diaphragm [when the Museum Tower initiative fell through.]
- JB: Yes.
- WM: And was recovering and figuring out their new way. And there--it was a lot of effort. And I was just there to be a supporter
- JB: I know that you were involved with some of the negotiations with the owner of the 5800 [Wilshire] Building.
- WM: Yes, I was.
- JB: The building on the corner [of Wilshire and Curson].
- WM: Yes. It's John Vis—no—Italian--not John Visconti, that's a separate owner.
- JB: Ventress--
- WM: Ventress.
- JB: --was his last name. I don't remember his first name.
- WM: Yeah. Joseph? Joe? Joe?
- JB: I think it was Joe, yeah.
- WM: And he, unfortunately, I think he recently passed away.
- JB: Oh?
- WM: In late '09. I'm pretty sure of that.
- JB: And he had a partner, a woman. I don't know if he was--she was related to him, but she was Italian also, I remember.
- WM: Well, it was--she was very active in the Italian Cultural Society--
- JB: Yes, yes.
- WM: --of some nature. I'm not sure of the exact name of the organization. [It's the Italian Cultural Institute.]
- JB: Yeah, I should--
- WM: He was actually a nice guy--it was a--it was not a pleasant experience.
- JB: No.
- WM: He wasn't as magnanimous as we would have hoped.
- JB: Yes. Now, I'm going to--I didn't warn you about this--but I'm going to do something I've never done [in an interview] before. Because I think it's important that the story of where we

were just before you joined the board be told. It's been told, of course, by other people that I've interviewed in—in slightly different ways--which has been very interesting. But from a staff point of view, I just want to tell you a little bit about, basically, the year 1992. [Partly] because it was so crucial and traumatic for the whole city of Los Angeles, really. And—really—the [whole] country was still recovering from an [earlier] big recession, which a lot of people have forgotten about at this point. But it was a big one. [And it is the main reason we were unable to proceed with the Ratkovich Museum Tower development.] So, I just thought I'd tell this story, and I wrote down a few things.

In the spring of '92, we had been in temporary quarters in the historic Miracle Mile May Company. We had been there for two years. We had had to move out of our [original] building at 5814 Wilshire, because the city had finally insisted that we do some earthquake remediation. So we found the space in the May Company, and it was offered to us free. It was, I think--well it was several thousand square feet. [Around 7,000 square feet was offered to us.] It included gallery space on the fourth floor, office space on the fifth floor, which was the rooftop [level], and we had access to the [outdoor] rooftop for parties, which was kind of fun. And the library was on the mezzanine.

WM: I do remember this, and I'm--it was [because of] the relationship with John--Jim Waterson.

JB: Jim Waterson, yes.

WM: Because he was on our board and he was also the May Company's General Manager or something.

JB: Yes, I don't remember exactly what his title was, but--

WM: It was a--

JB: --he was, he was sort of public relations I think. [Waterson was the May Company Corporation's V.P. of Public Relations.]

WM: Mm-hmm, I think you're right.

JB: In addition to whatever else he did. So **[00:20:00]** --and before we had moved out of 5814 [Wilshire], we had completed a really ambitious building program for what was being planned. It was being called the Museum Tower. And it was a Wayne Ratkovich development that had been cooked up, really, by Ratkovich and Frank Wyle, to utilize the properties that CAFAM owned there at the corner. They owned several--or they owned a couple of properties, and . . . subsequently bought more--and that was part of the negotiation that you were involved with later. At any rate, the assumption in 1992 was that we were going to eventually move into this 22-story mixed-use condominium tower. It was [conceptually] way ahead of its time. It would have been wonderful. The museum was going to have something like 35,000 square

feet of museum space, which was about three times what it had previously. And all of us had been very excited because we were definitely running out of space where we were.

And we [all of the staff] had been involved in developing these plans. That is, not architectural plans, but plans for the spaces that we needed: the building program. So, we thought we were going to be able to stay in the May Company building until that [the completion of the Museum Tower] happened. And it [the May Company space] was free space, and we were pretty comfortable there [for almost two years]. Well, on April 29 [1992] a Native American curator, Sara Bates, was flying into LA [from San Francisco] to meet with us to plan a show of craft objects by contemporary Native Americans, which was going to be mounted . . . in October, to coincide with the Columbus Quincentenary.

I don't know if you remember that, but that was the [500]th . . . anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in North America. Naturally, the Native American community saw that celebration some differently. And we were very aware on the staff of the museum, of their point of view, because we had become active with several museum organizations that--whose members were having their consciousnesses . . . raised about that issue. So, we decided that we needed to develop an exhibition that was--would involve Native American art. At any rate, I mention that, really, partly for that reason--because we were kind of at a crossroads in terms of the vision of the museum--but also because that day was the day that was the start of the riots that had been set off by the acquittal of four white police officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

After the riots, the [CAFAM] staff got together, and we vowed to incorporate those--those lessons in--in our programming, and also in any future staffing--to become a more diverse and inclusive museum. And part of that--that shift in direction--was the development of something we called the Center for the Study of Art and Culture. And that was actually a library program; it was an adjunct to the library program. And we had developed an advisory board that--it was a national advisory board of experts in folk art, craft, and design who had already met once in 1990, just after we moved to the May Company, and [we] were meeting a second time in November [1992]. Well, on the second day of that [November] meeting, the May Company Corporation announced that it was closing the Miracle Mile store, and that we would have to vacate **[00:25:00]** [within 5 weeks] --by the end of the year.

Now by this time, or, I think it was in September, the Ratkovich development . . . plan had been abandoned because of the recession. They had been unable to get their financing. This wasn't the museum's fault; the developer had tried all over the world, I guess, to get financing for that Tower, and it just was not possible. So, when we had to get out of the May Company, the Craft and Folk Art Museum board decided to take a lease option--lease purchase option—on the building on the corner, the 5800 building.

Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung [the firm of Hodgetts + Fung] were hired to design a renovation that would merge two buildings: [5800 and 5814 Wilshire—the original museum building at 5814 Wilshire and the 5800 building next door, to the east, that was on the corner of Wilshire and Curson]. We contracted to pay the owner [of the 5800 building, Joseph Ventress] a monthly rent of \$17,000 a month. It was an awful lot of money at the time. It still seems like an awful lot of money, although maybe not quite as awful as it was at the time. So very quickly, a contractor, Van Holland Construction, did a minimal build-out . . . so that the staff could move [from the May Company] into that building.

WM: 5800--yeah. I remember that.

JB: Right, after we had to move out of the May Company. [Our original building at 5814 Wilshire had not yet had the earthquake remediation done, so it was uninhabitable.] So, we did. But we had no gallery space there, no shop, and no place for onsite programming. We did have the library, which was open to the public [and staff offices]. And the Festival of Masks continued to be produced each October. But otherwise, we had virtually no public presence. We put on a couple of shows at the Pacific Design Center--

WM: Because 5814 was still under renovation?

JB: Exactly, yes, yes. [And not all of the planned 5800 renovation was done right away; eventually there was a gallery and storage space there, but not until the entire merge of the two buildings was complete.]

WM: Right. That's the reason why.

JB: Good, good to remind--

WM: Right.

JB: --us of [the situation at the start of 1993]. We [moved into] the 5800 building, but really only as a place to house the administrative offices [and the library].

WM: You had--you had no programs base.

JB: Not really. Not unless you count the library.

WM: Right.

JB: So--18 months later, in June of '94--and by this time, you were--

WM: On the Board.

JB: On the Board. Construction of the Hodgetts and Fung renovation, merging those two spaces, began. But we had not yet bought the 5800 building. We were still leasing it. And I guess this is where we get to the point where I wanted to be sure that you were--you know--that we were clear about the situation. Because this was such a crucial decision to go ahead and do the physical merging of the two buildings, [when the corner building—which was where the

library and all of the offices were located, had not yet been purchased]. And I'm just wondering if you can tell us, if you can sort of walk us through what went into that decision to go ahead with the physical plan, since we had not actually purchased that building yet.

WM: Mm. What you're asking is, is--I was by no means the lead person involved.

JB: No, I know you weren't].

WM: And I was--because of my real estate experience at that time--I was there to help and try to assess, I think. My recollection is that there was . . . [an option to purchase, but no set price and] that made the 5800 building [too expensive for us] and I'm not sure if that included the apartment [building] on Stanley. Because Mr. Ventress owned--and [had] bought (and my recollection, which was not favorable) . . . those properties from under us--and I was not involved [with that], but I'd heard--before CAFAM could buy them.

JB: Yes.

WM: --as part of the Wayne Ratkovich project.

JB: That's--that's what I've heard.

WM: That they tried to buy the apartment [building] on the west that--just south of the alley [on Stanley] --and the 5800 corner [building]. And he [Ventress] got in quickly because he saw the opportunity. . . . And so he was looking to profit, knowing that there was going to be a big developer, like Wayne Ratkovich, who would have to pay a premium.

JB: Yes.

WM: And that--I think that attitude persisted with us [during] those subsequent years On the--the--

JB: --Ventress's side.

WM: The Ventress side of being a profiteer. Because by no means did he improve the property, or develop it, or do any of--of--any improvements to move on, you know. And I think we struggled at paying the rent at some point, and--

JB: Yes, yes, I think it was defaulted on--

WM: I, I think there was, there were--

JB: --for a few months anyway.

WM: There were issues towards the end. And I just--I remember traveling with Frank Wyle to his [Ventress's] office and [00:30:00] asking him [Ventress] to--you know--trying to find a reasonable median, a common place, a place of--of negotiations that would be beneficial. But Mr. Ventress did not yield to us. And that's my recollection. And I think the museum, too, having lost--gotten capital in endowments or funds in the '90s or early '90s--

JB: Yes.

WM: --to see those funds evaporate, used for permits and plans, fees to the Wayne Ratkovich Company--there [were] people [such as Bob Myerson and the Ahmanson Foundation] that were maybe soured by that experience. I had no direct relationship there, but that's what I had heard. And raising them--and I thought the corner [building] might have been 3 or \$4 million to buy.

JB: I think it--oh dear. I don't [have that information here].

WM: I don't think it's pertinent. I don't--

JB: No, we can--we can fill that in in the transcript later. But I--I think it was closer to 2 million. I mean, it was, it--

WM: Two. Well, it was more money than the museum was able to raise. I think that's the point. And I think that there was concern, like--what if you were to buy it? Could you afford to buy it? One. And then [two], what were you going to do with it? I, I mean, I didn't--I didn't see the Tower project [coming] back.

JB: No. No, that seemed to be completely gone.

WM: Right.

JB: [But the intention of the revised plan was to merge 5800 Wilshire with our original building at 5814 Wilshire.] And they . . . [the Board had been] actively talking to Hodgetts + Fung [as far back as late 1992 or early 1993 about the plan to merge 5800 and 5814 Wilshire]. I guess they put them off [as] . . . they did not sign a contract with [Hodgetts + Fung] right away, I don't believe. They--at least the plans were not drawn up until almost a year later. [5814 was gutted by Van Holland and because the plans relied on the availability of the 5800 Wilshire space, there were no provisions in 5814 for offices, library, or collections storage—and only a very small education space. And we were counting on the large parking lot that was south of the 5800 property; that's the reason it was decided to turn the space in between 5800 and 5814—which had been CAFAM's parking lot—into a courtyard.]

WM: Mm-hmm. Right.

JB: So, I don't know what was going on then. But I--let me just say that, as far as the Tower was concerned, the staff felt a--somewhat of a sense of relief. Although we were very excited by the prospect [of the Tower], we were also worried about the maintenance costs of such a much bigger building.

WM: Obligation, and--

JB: Yes.

WM: Yeah, for not--I think our budget at that time was a million and a half, a million eight--

JB: Yes.

WM: Budget-wise. And obviously something three times larger is not necessarily--it might be more than three times as much the budget--to keep it going. And so we didn't have a history of that.

JB: No.

WM: And we--I don't think the museum had a strong history of fundraising those types of numbers, seven-figure numbers.

JB: Oh no, I don't think so. [But there had been several gifts to the Capital Campaign that were in that range.]

WM: No. Right, so, it was--

JB: In fact, I think it got up to that point primarily through grants.

WM: Mm-hmm. That's right.

JB: Some of which went into an endowment, I guess. But not--nothing significant--as far as the endowment.

WM: Yeah, they--I think the reason why the Tower project was good for us financially--I would assume--was that the museum was . . . going to get their airspace for free, and not have a lease or mortgage payment.

JB: . . . I thought that was the understanding.

WM: --and that--the profit on selling offices and condos, kind of residential--was going to almost self-support the museum. And . . . the museum was the art component of that project and it makes a lot of sense. And it's something that is a good model for other sites around any city.

JB: Oh, absolutely. And I guess the idea, originally, came from a very similar project that was done by what's now the Museum of Art and Design--used to be the American Craft Museum.

WM: Mm-hmm. In New York.

JB: In New York.

WM: Right.

JB: Who had a [similar] situation with the Museum of Modern Art.

WM: Yeah.

JB: At any rate--so that was all understandable--[and then] the Tower project [went]--

WM: Sideways.

JB: --was not going to happen, yes. [Laughter] But--and when we heard about the merging of these two buildings, that seemed to be a great idea. And--

WM: I remember the [talk about] bridges and the--

JB: Well, that, yeah. [Laughter]

WM: There [were], you know, all sorts of design considerations--making it accessible to wheelchairs and--and people with disabilities. Because--

JB: 5800 had an elevator. 5814 did not at that time.

WM: Right, so we were—and there was a lot of good effort to come up with a doable plan.

JB: Yes.

WM: You know, we lacked parking.

JB: Yes.

WM: That was one of our other issues.

JB: Well, that was another issue . . . because we had a parking lot. It was a small one in between those two buildings. I don't think--I don't think it held more than 12 [spaces].

WM: You mean where the courtyard is today?

JB: Yes. That was our parking lot.

WM: That was actually parking originally?

JB: Yes, that was our parking lot.

WM: Mm. For me it was always a courtyard.

JB: Well, I'm glad you [laughter] . . . have such pleasant memories.

WM: Yeah.

JB: But you know the--the point is [00:35:00] that when we heard about the idea of the courtyard being developed there, that was fine, because we were going to buy the 5800 building. And the 5800 building had another property in back of it that was part of it. I mean, it wasn't a separate property. It had, attached, this parking lot, which held about 30 cars, or maybe more.

WM: Maybe, my recollection--We owned a house and a duplex behind the alley.

JB: Yes.

WM: And are you saying that there was a parking lot before the house and duplex?

JB: No. [Actually, yes, it was "before" the house and duplex, i.e., north of them.]

WM: That was a part of 5800?

JB: It was behind . . . behind [5800 and 5814]. It was--it was actually, literally south of where the museum is today.

WM: Closest to the alley?

JB: Yes. Yes.

WM: But then we owned the next two parcels, which was a duplex--

JB: Yes.

WM: --and a single family home.

JB: We definitely owned the little house. That's where the . . . library was--

WM: Right, and--

JB: --to begin with.

WM: Yeah, I remember.

JB: The duplex, I guess, was bought later.

WM: Yeah. I assisted in the selling of those properties [sometime between 1996 - 1998].

JB: Yes, I thought so.

WM: That--so that was my assistance in working with it and--and finding a seller. Because we couldn't continue.

JB: Yeah.

WM: And we needed the money.

JB: Yeah. Well, those were very important. But this parking lot that belonged—I understood that it was attached [to the 5800 building] --that it was actually owned--

WM: That makes it--yeah, right, same owner.

JB: --by [the owner of 5800]. And, I mean . . . in a way, that was worth more than the office building. So, when we--when our parking lot was transformed into a courtyard, we weren't concerned at all, because we had this other wonderful parking lot [just across the alley]. And parking in L.A. is very, very important. So, when we lost the 5800 building--when that was given up--

WM: We were forced out, yeah.

JB: --we were then without a parking lot completely. Well, you know, I guess my basic question is just about the decision to go ahead and merge—to do the physical merging of those two buildings. It--the assumption was--I guess by everyone--that the 5800 building was going to

be purchased. But it hadn't been yet at the time that the construction started. And, so--just talk about that a little bit. Was the feeling just so positive that we were going to go ahead—[that the building would be purchased]?

WM: I think that's accurate. I mean, I think we assumed that we're the natural person [i.e., organization] to lease the corner, and But, as you mentioned, and I--I recall now, you know, there was a default in the lease arrangements. There were cash issues. I assume--I mean--I'm a little fuzzy on that. And I wasn't involved [at that time] on the Board as a treasurer . . . involved in the direct finances of the operations. But it fell apart. And I think--and Joe Ventress wanted to sell it at a certain price--and it was more than we could ever afford. And he sold it, you know, sadly, to another individual.

JB: . . . I do want to go back and talk about happier times. But I just--it occurred to me, you know, Edith had begun to be ill about that time. I don't know that anybody really--realized how ill she was. But I know that Frank was concerned about that. And that [situation] must have, you know, [figured] into the picture somehow, [and perhaps have affected Frank's mental state at that time.]

WM: Perhaps.

JB: At that point.

WM: Yeah.

JB: So--the new [renovated] Museum did open in May of 1995 with a gala weekend. We called it a "homecoming celebration," and we really felt that way.

WM: Yeah, it was beautiful. And the shop was gorgeous . . . everything was designed--it was really well done.

JB: I think so too.

WM: And I remember that party. I think we had--well, didn't we have the big party in the back parking lot?

JB: Yes! [That was the parking lot that was still available to us as part of the lease on 5800 Wilshire.]

WM: We tented it.

JB: There was a big tent. And--

WM: It worked well.

JB: It--it worked very well. It was really a great celebration. Edith spoke, as well as Patrick. [And there was a dinner.] And--that was Friday night. And Saturday was Members' Day. And I remember working at a table out on the sidewalk. [And Sunday was the official opening to

the public.] And it was--it was so celebratory and exciting. So [00:40:00] you remember that--

WM: I do, I do.

JB: The--you want to talk a little bit about what the building looked like? The whole complex?

WM: Afterwards? I mean, after the renovation?

JB: After the--yes. At the reopening.

WM: Well, at the reopening--I think, I remember the tent, I remember the, the party. I don't think we had our elevator in place.

JB: No, we didn't.

WM: I think that was a secondary commitment that we had to do.

JB: Yes, and I'll want to talk to you--

WM: Sure.

JB: --about that later, too.

WM: And, yeah. I—I--'95--15 years ago! [Laughter]

JB: Yes. Well, there was a--

WM: Maybe I had too much punch that night.

JB: [laughter]

WM: I--I doubt it. I was--yeah. I just remember it was--I was new to the board--it had been a year or so, year or two on the board. And I--I was just a participant--by no means, you know, in a leadership role of--of the organization for that event. But it was a wonderful celebration.

JB: And [having] that building on the corner really made a tremendous difference. Another aspect of the design for the new--well, the new old building--

WM: Mm-hmm.

JB: --of the renovated original building at 5814—was that [when it opened in 1995] it did not have any office space in it. All of the offices were in 5800.

WM: Right.

JB: So that opened up a great deal more gallery space in 5814.

WM: Well, 5814 really got renovated completely. Stairwells that were in the center of the building, and I remember--

JB: It was gutted, completely.

WM: Gutted. I remember the restaurant being—[had been]--on the mezzanine.

JB: Yes.

WM: It was really rethought, reinvented. The whole building. It's--the [original] architect [had been] the architect for the Ahwahnee Hotel.

JB: Yes, yes [Gilbert Stanley Underwood].

WM: In--in Yosemite [in 1927].

JB: Yes.

WM: So, you know . . . the motif of the building was unique for Wilshire. Probably not characteristic of what a museum could be, but it is what it is, with its slate roof and, and brick.

JB: Oh, I think--

WM: It was charming.

JB: --most people are charmed by it.

WM: It was charming.

JB: Absolutely, yes.

WM: It's charming. So, you know--we were able to get a wonderful third floor gallery. And a . . . good secondary gallery on the . . . on the mezzanine. And back offices behind that mezzanine.

JB: Eventually, yes. Yeah. [The offices were not built out for several years.]

WM: Right. And the stairwells made sense, and the exiting, and the whole plan. And the shop, the built-in cabinetry by Ming Fung was beautifully done.

JB: Oh, beautiful.

WM: Well-thought-out.

JB: Yeah.

WM: And . . . the courtyard with this movable gate, this wall gate that rotates, which was great on paper--I don't think it practically worked as well as it--

JB: Apparently not, yeah.

WM: It was just a little too awkward.

JB: Yeah.

WM: But the idea was good. It was . . . really a good, adaptive reuse of an old building with no parking, and the courtyard was--was new-found space.

JB: Though we didn't know at the time.

WM: At the time.

JB: We thought we [would continue to have access to the large parking lot in back].

WM: But for me, I always thought [CAFAM] had no--no parking. But we had the parking on Stanley [Avenue]. [Later we leased spaces in a lot Stanley that was owned by the American Lung Association.]

JB: Yes. . . .

WM: It was helpful. So, I thought the [renovated] building was wonderful. Yes--it was much smaller-staffed. I think we weren't--

JB: Well, at the time, in '95, we still--

WM: It was the same [staff] level?

JB: We had a large staff. [By comparison to later.] Yes.

WM: Same level?

JB: Yes. [There were about 15 on the staff, several of whom were part-time.]

WM: So--other than that--I think it was a well-done renovation. You know--so--

JB: Oh, absolutely. It--

WM: But [without the 5800 building], it is a much smaller space. We had 11,000 feet on 5800, I believe. [And that was still available to us in 1995.]

JB: Yes.

WM: I—I think it was, yeah.

JB: Yes [in the 5800 building] we had all of the offices [and the library on the second floor] plus another big gallery on the first floor.

WM: And that was the time that you and I had to relocate the library. And we went on that wonderful [field trip].

JB: Well, that was a couple of years later. Yeah.

WM: Was it a couple years later?

JB: Yeah, yeah. [In 1997—after we lost the 5800 building and before the museum closed at the end of the year.]

WM: But we--but we couldn't--we had no room for it [in the 5814 Wilshire building]. I think the point is—we had no room for the same library that had been collected over all those years.

JB: That's right. [When we lost the 5800 building at the end of 1997, there was no room for the library to move into the renovated 5814 building, but when we had reopened in May 1995, we still occupied the 5800 building and there was plenty of room in the 5800 building.]

WM: So, I guess a couple years later, [that was] one of the many things we had to . . . [rethink].

JB: Yes.

WM: --and I remember the wonderful journey we had--

JB: Yes.

WM: --going to various institutions [that had indicated they were interested in adopting the CAFAM library] and interviewing them. And I learned a lot about the city, the places I'd never been.

JB: I enjoyed that very much. And I was really impressed with the time that you put in, you know, doing those field trips to different libraries, as well as reading all those proposals, which we got. I was quite amazed at the time.

I had a lot of friends who were art librarians throughout the city. [All the librarians that responded were in the local chapter of ARLIS/NA—the Art Libraries Society of North American—of which I had been a member since 1977.] And I just got on the phone after it became clear--even before the decision to close the museum happened--it was clear that we had to find another space, as you said, for the library. So I just got on the phone and started calling my friends. . . . We did ask for written proposals. And we got eight proposals **[00:45:00]** from--not from the Getty--they were in the middle of [putting up] their [new] building. [The Getty Center opened in 1997.] But [we got proposals] from the L.A. Public Library, from UCLA, and USC. [And from the Beverly Hills Public Library and UCLA and LACMA.] A number of other places. And, and so that was very heartwarming.

And the library, of course, eventually went to LACMA. And the archives, which I've continued to work on, went to UCLA. [The processing of the CAFAM records at UCLA Special Collections was completed in 2012.] And the oral history project, which we're in the middle of [now], really came out of that, out of working on the archives. But--again, we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves. I wanted to mention a few things first.

After the merging of the two buildings and the reopening in 1995, Frank Wyle, who had been [Chairman] of the Board through all of the Capital Campaign, and so on, felt very confident, apparently, that things would be looking up. And a new Chair was appointed--Bud Knapp, do you remember Bud?

WM: I remember that. I remember Bud. Came from the magazine world.

JB: Yes.

WM: Yeah. And it [his tenure] was short. I think it was a year at best.

JB: Yes, I think you're right. [Frank Wyle resigned as Board Chair and Bud Knapp was elected Chair on July 20, 1995. 13 months later (August 28, 1996), Knapp resigned and Wyle resumed the chairmanship.]

WM: The hope [was] that he would, you know With all organizations, there's--as they say--the "founder's syndrome." But [in] passing the torch [to] Bud . . . there was a lot of hope.

JB: Yes.

WM: A wonderful civic leader, and . . . someone who had deep pockets. [It's good], you know, . . . to bring on new people, new blood, and really promote the museum and get to the next level.

JB: Yes. So [laughter] we kind of, were in a honeymoon period then, I think. [Laughter]

WM: That's a good way to put it.

JB: But within about a year, by, by--certainly by late 1996--things seemed to be kind of falling apart. We'd--we'd always--I worked there for 21 years altogether. And certainly, all of us that had worked there for a long time had experienced budgetary crises. I mean, some people thought it was constant. It wasn't really constant. But it certainly recurred. But this was worse than anything we had ever experienced. It seemed there was no money for--for anything. And we were all very aware of the amount of money that was being spent on--on that monthly rental. And suddenly--at least to me, it seemed sudden--but being on the board, I suppose [for you], it wasn't so sudden: after 21 years as director, Patrick Ela resigned in June of 1996.

WM: Was that the year? OK. And I think, for him, it was 20 years. [Ela was hired in October 1975, so it was almost 21 years.] I think he had taken it [as far as he could] --I mean, you know . . . there's a life--it was a lifespan. I mean, there's a certain cycle.

JB: Yes.

WM: And it was time for him. Yeah.

JB: Yes. I--I . . . think a lot of us wondered, you know, why he hadn't moved on before that--just because of--of the longevity.

WM: And I've seen it in lots of other business applications, where someone says, "If I don't move on now, I'll never leave. . . . I can still do something else in my life-- I'm not [done]," you know. But it was— [his leaving] was heartfelt, I think. You know, [he had the] institutional memory--wonderful individual, extremely knowledgeable.

JB: Yes, and there's--

WM: Locally, nationally.

JB: Yes. There's something--there was something, and I guess still is--about the Craft and Folk Art Museum as a--as a culture, in and of itself. [Laughter] I mean it--it was a kind of family.

WM: Very much.

JB: And when you've invested that much of your life in something like that, it--it is hard to extricate yourself.

So--Bud Knapp resigned in August of that year. And Frank took over as chair again. Paul Kusserow was hired as Director at the start of 1997 to (we were told) to try to turn things around. Actually, layoffs began [laughter] quite soon after that. So--in May of 1997--now we're getting close to the point where we're talking about forming the committee to find a new home for the library [00:50:00] and so on. But I think that you were involved more actively at that point in trying to help--one final push to try to get the 5800 building purchased.

WM: Yeah, that's probably accurate.

JB: So can you tell us anything about that process, and what that was like? It couldn't have been a happy process?

WM: No, I--I remember having lunches with Frank and with Mr. Ventress. I remember going to his home.

JB: To Ventress's home?

WM: Home. Yeah--in the Valley. In Sherman--I think it was Sherman Oaks or Encino. And it just--it [had a stone wall fence with an Italian motif]. My--my recollection is, it just didn't go very well. I--I really--I'm sorry, I really don't have a strong memory. There weren't--I was really more of a lieutenant helping Frank. But my--my recollection is--it just--I--I think there was also a question of where we were going to get the money from. I--I don't know if it was then, but [since then] we've--we found it difficult for--lending institutions to give money to a nonprofit--just as a traditional loan, like you would for a commercial piece of property. So [we had to] raise the money from within. And I just didn't think we had the history--or the wherewithal--besides the Wyle family, which had been so magnanimous.

JB: Well, I was going to say--of course, the Wyle family had given so much over the years.

WM: Well, my recollection is the homes we bought on Curson [Avenue] were probably initially bought by the Wyles, and then donated to the museum.

JB: Yes, yes that's right.

WM: You know . . . those were, you know--it's real money, real things.

JB: Oh yeah.

WM: So, I--I don't have a strong--that last ditch effort, as you described it. I, I don't have a strong memory of--I don't think it was a, a long protracted effort. I think it was something in a short time period, and we were not fruitful. It just wasn't going to get far. And I remember,

- vaguely, I remember the--the lease documents, and the default notices, and . . . the threats--or the idle threats--[by Ventress] about "You better do this." And, I think we just--
- JB: Yeah. I think his son was involved at some point. Ventress's son was involved at some point.
- WM: Maybe. It--it was too bad. It really was too bad, but, I--I don't have any specifics.
- JB: OK. Well, I guess when--when we realized that that building [5800 Wilshire] was--
- WM: Not in our future.
- JB: --not in our future. And that meant that we had to vacate that building. Well, by that time, I had survived the first round of layoffs. But I think it was March or April of '97, I--my head was on the chopping block too. And there was talk about what to do with the library. Martha--[laughter] Martha Lynn--the curator [who was hired by Kusserow], had the idea that we could take half of the library--and this was before--actually before the decision to close down 5800. She thought we could just put [half] the library books in the various offices and pack up the rest of them, and--of course, I wasn't going to be around to take care of it, and there was no one else that could, you know, even inventory whatever books would go into these offices. It was--it was not a practical plan. And I had—I knew that if the library was packed up in boxes and put away in storage, it was going to disappear [forever]. So that was when we formed the committee that you were luckily--luckily for us--you were involved in.
- WM: Me too.
- JB: You know, Elizabeth Mandell [who was on the CAFAM board] was supposed to be on that committee. In fact, she was very instrumental, in a good way I--I think in retrospect--in convincing Edith [to find another home for the library]. She didn't--Edith did not want to get rid of the library.
- WM: It represented--it was more than just a library to Edith and to you--you know, so.
- JB: Oh yeah, I think so.
- WM: Maybe it was [kind of] the heart of the [museum].
- JB: Well, you know, the basic--the start of the library was a collection that had been put together **[00:55:00]** during the Egg and the Eye [gallery] days.
- WM: Oh, of course.
- JB: Partly Edith's books--but others that had been given by support groups. So she had the idea, in her head--even though she didn't talk about it much--but the idea of having a research facility of some kind was--was part of her grand plan for a long time.
- WM: It was a good--yeah, it was a good one.

JB: And so, anyway. Elizabeth Mandell, who had been the owner of a very important L.A. craft gallery (and those papers [the papers of the Mandell Gallery] are at UCLA also) convinced Edith that the time had come to try to find another home for the library. If she really--if Edith really wanted the library to live on--it was going to have to live on somewhere else. And that was when we got together and started looking at proposals from other places. [Elizabeth Mandell passed away suddenly on June 16 before the library committee actually met.] And we've talked about that already, so--is there anything else you wanted to say about that?

WM: No, no. It was . . . what was said is sufficient.

JB: So, I guess the next thing I wanted to ask was just what you remember of that last, the last few months before the museum closed. Did you think--as the staff certainly did--that the museum was going to close forever at that point?

WM: Well, leading up to it, I remember the--the Board meetings and--and everyone around the table, and trying to figure out marketing efforts, membership—increased enrollments--how that would translate into enough dollars to cover our expenses.

JB: There was talk of--of the restaurant being reborn.

WM: Yeah, there was. And there still is. Even to this day.

JB: [Laughter]

WM: Even, even 10 years--12 years later. There was some real effort about putting up money. We needed money to make money. I think there was some real hesitance to put up tens of thousands of dollars. I-- I think there was an issue of confidence, for sure.

JB: That's a good way of putting it.

WM: I think that it would have been naïve for all of us to say we're going to put up hundreds of thousands of dollars--which was needed as a marketing campaign to get it out there--to increase membership. And I think it was also part of the discussion that . . . membership alone is not enough to run a museum. And we were . . . [seeing fewer] grants . . . at that time. So . . . our budget-- I'll say [it had been] a million six--was being shrunk, had shrunk. And there were expenses that were being pared down, as you mentioned.

JB: Yes.

WM: So we were reducing our, our— [costs and] I think we were probably down to a million or a million two at that time And it was--it was a struggle. It was . . . really a struggle. I--I said earlier, it's like being hit--hit in the diaphragm. I think it was— [the problems were] . . . still related to the Tower project. And I think [they were] just the ripple effects after the rock hit the pond. And it just took those [couple of] years of rippling out to [get] to the demise of--of what it was. I would not say the complete demise, because we didn't--we were--we were like a phoenix.

JB: No, but at the time--I mean--

WM: We were--at the time--there was a moment in--I think it was '99--'98, '99--when we closed for a few months.

JB: Well, it was the end of '97 [when all of the staff except for the Shop was laid off; only the Shop remained open through the end of January 1998]. That's--

WM: So, it was, I'll say, early '98 that we were closed. And, and if I can move forward on that?

JB: Yes, please.

WM: You know, I was early on--I think, I recall it was Patrick's--

JB: Yes.

WM: --effort, and Patrick's insight--to reach out to the City of L.A. And Alfred--Al Nodal--

JB: Yes.

WM: --who was the head of Cultural Affairs--and said, you know, "You need L.A. — [the City of L.A. doesn't] have a presence on Museum Row. The County does--the Petersen just had maybe been" --maybe that's about [the] time that it was private. There were other museums, small ones, around. But this was an opportunity for the city to have a foothold. And I think it was a good selling point, and I was involved in the negotiations on the lease.

JB: Oh, great.

WM: With a ten-year lease [for the building] with--you know, with the City [of L.A.] --it was--well, I think it was well-crafted. It was thoughtful. We probably didn't appreciate the nuances of the City efforts and their . . . unions, and all the other issues. But it was a viable [01:00:00] plan, . . . and so the museum was only closed for a moment, as I would say. I'd say it was months, not a year.

JB: It was 14 months. [February 1, 1998 – April 9, 1999.]

WM: Was--was it actually over a year?

JB: [laughter]

WM: Well, it was still months. [Laughter] But it was closed [at the end of January 1998] and we were able to reopen [on April 9, 1999]. And we were able to get funds from the city, and we were able to--I think--reconstitute a new museum with an Executive Director from the City staff. [Joan de Bruin, former head of the Folk and Traditional Arts program in the City of L.A. Cultural Affairs Department, was appointed CAFAM Director on February 11, 1999.]

JB: Yes.

WM: And Patrick was still involved. He took over, I think, as Interim [Board] Chair, if I recall. At some point, he came in or--well--no, I take it back.

JB: He did at some point. No, he did. . . . Let me just [review]: [Frank Wyle had resigned as Board Chair in January 1999, a few months before the City/CAFAM partnership began; Patrick Ela then stepped in as Interim Board Chair. Then when de Bruin became ill in April 2001, Ela took over as Interim Acting Director while continuing his post as Interim Board Chair.]

WM: Yeah, I'm--I'm moving too fast.

JB: No, no, I mean--I want [to know] your feelings . . . and thoughts about [all of] this. The only reason that I have any specific--you know-- knowledge of the timeframe is because of the work I've been doing in the [CAFAM] archive [which is in Special Collections at UCLA].

WM: Right.

JB: I wanted to mention that Edith was very ill at this time.

WM: Rather ill, yeah, she was.

JB: But the--one of the wonderful things about Patrick's idea, and about the successful resolution of that when it came--was that Edith was still alive. And she--so before she died, she was able to know that the museum was going to carry on.

WM: And I don't know what year it was, but we were able to get recognition [for her] on the street--

JB: Yes.

WM: --and [created] the [plaque on] Edith Wyle Square.

JB: Yes.

WM: But I don't--you, you'll tell me what year that took place.

JB: [The plaque proclaiming the corner of Stanley Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard as "Edith Wyle Square" was placed there on November 16, 1999; Edith Wyle had died one month earlier on October 12.]

But she was there [on April 9 when the museum re-opened with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the partnership of CAFAM with the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department; Al Nodal, L.A. Cultural Affairs General Manager and John Ferraro, City Councilman, were in attendance.]

WM: [It was] all part of that City [of L.A.] effort--

JB: Yes.

WM: -- [at a] joint venture. And to recognize Edith as she was--you know--at the end, towards the end of her life.

JB: Yes, yes. And that was a wonderful memorial celebration that was held for her. Were you able to come to that?

WM: I did.

JB: I always thought it was great that it was held in Hancock Park, because, of course, that was the site of the Festival of Masks for so many years.

WM: Yes.

JB: So— [to go back in time again a bit]: there was . . . [on March 26, 1998] . . . an auction that took place [at Butterfield's] of all of the permanent collection of the museum.

WM: Yeah, objects, yeah.

JB: And that was definitely a mixed--

WM: Sure. For all the obvious reasons.

JB: Yes, yes. It--one thing that--were you able to go to [the auction at] Butterfields at all?

WM: I didn't, I didn't. I remember the auction and the book [the auction catalog], and--

JB: Yeah.

WM: --the process. But I didn't involve myself.

JB: Well, of course it was a very sad time. One thing that struck me--because I did go--not only to the auction, but to the preview--where they had everything laid out in an adjacent room [for several days] before the auction--was that we had never had the space to have even more than just a small portion--

WM: I see--to see everything.

JB: Yes, to see--

WM: --at one--one time.

JB: Exactly. And it was very impressive. It wasn't very well-displayed, and some of the objects, you know, were obviously soiled and, and somewhat in disrepair. But they were--there were very good things there. And the--the breadth of the collection, within the span that the museum had set out--you know, we had discussions over the years: "What should the museum be collecting? *Should* the museum be collecting?" [Laughter] And it was--it was never really resolved. But somehow or other, over the years--largely through Edith--but also through some very big, important donations over the years—it accumulated. I've just been working, actually, in the archives, on the accession records for the permanent collection. And it's really amazing. It was several thousand objects.

WM: Well, I remember a lot of them crammed into the duplex behind us.

JB: Oh, yes. It was--

WM: You know, just piled in. And--

- JB: It was outrageous. We had no storage space.
- WM: Yeah, it was [our "dirty little secret"].
- JB: Party because there really had not ever been—and--and I think probably couldn't [01:05:00] have been, given our--our budget and so on—an assertive, positive attempt to really take care of the collection.
- WM: I think there was hope [that] with the Museum Tower we were going to have [enough space] for--
- JB: Oh yes.
- WM: --a proper, you know, air--quality, or air-quality-controlled . . . room.
- JB: Absolutely.
- WM: You know--and that was going to--it all made sense.
- JB: It did.
- WM: It made a lot of sense.
- JB: All of this made a lot of sense at the time.
- WM: Mm-hmm.
- JB: And Marcie Page, who was the Registrar for a long time, really did her utmost.
- WM: She did.
- JB: Edith, I remember, called her "the conscience of the museum" at one point, because she was always insistent that things were done in the right way. But of course, she was fighting, you know, physically, [the limitations] --
- WM: Yeah.
- JB: --there just was not the space for it. Before we go on--and we've just talked for a little bit more than an hour--so I think we're going to finish up in good time. But we've been dealing with such really sad times, and I think it's amazing that you stuck with it all this time--when there were many others on the Board and the staff that fled the sinking ship. [Laughter] But you must have had happy memories of some of that time too, and--
- WM: Well--
- JB: What, were some of [those] things? Some of the--not just events--but people that you met that--
- WM: I think the most important person in my continued relationship with the museum was Patrick Ela. And Frank [Wyle]. But with Patrick, and--excuse me--that was no--he wasn't a father figure because he wasn't that much older than I am, but, you know, 15 years or so. . . And I

had my father, I had both grandparents, it wasn't as if I was seeking that kind of relationship. But just, I--I have a sense of stewardship in my DNA, if you will. And I--you know--we were still doing exhibits after--

JB: Oh yes.

WM: --when the City came on. And I remember the wonderful--the Ford Foundation had an exhibition that they sponsored that came through our museum . . . I'm blanking on the name, but hopefully you would have it in your records. [The CAFAM records at UCLA do not include any documents past 1998.]

WM: And, and we did a wonderful Mexican silver exhibition that brought a lot--

JB: That silver show was--

WM: --was beautiful.

JB: Gorgeous.

WM: Gorgeous. And we've done a lot of things. We've also--we evolved. And, I--I don't want to get ahead of ourselves. You know--there was good hope with the City. And we want to honor that contract. And yes, a lot of people did leave the Board, and there weren't that many people left. And I . . . was still active in the Miracle Mile. I think I just felt--

JB: That was a very fortuitous association--

WM: Yeah.

JB: --for the museum.

WM: Yeah. Well I just think that--and Patrick, I think was-- There was a city employee, and I, I'm trying to remember her name, who was the Executive Director [initially, after the City partnered with us].

JB: Joan de Bruin.

WM: Joan--Joan de Bruin.

JB: She had been head of the Folk--

WM: Right, of—right.

JB: -- [and Traditional] Arts Program with the City.

WM: Right, so it was a natural lateral move [for her] to take this over. And the city liked [how] this was going, because they saw their places in San Pedro that could be sister organizations, and other parts of the city. And to come up with this satellite model. Joan wasn't the--public and private institutions are vastly different. And Joan comes from a public mindset, whereas we were private. And I think that ultimately wasn't going to work out and be as nimble as we

- needed to be. And things were dwindling--I mean, funds and abilities. And I think Patrick came in after Joan stepped down.
- JB: Yes, well, she took a--a sick leave for almost a year.
- WM: Oh, that's right. That's exactly right.
- JB: And that was when [Patrick] took over as Acting [Interim Director] --
- WM: He came back and he said, "I'll be an interim, but I'm only here for a short period." And--
- JB: Right.
- WM: --that [turned out to be] at least a year or so. And--he did it out of loyalty, not out of--you know--financial need, ego need. It was none of that. It was, like, "Well, wait. I got us into this City deal." And--and that was OK.
- JB: What did the board think of that, when--?
- WM: When Patrick [took the Interim Director position]? I don't--I think we were pleased. I mean, we had someone who had, you know, depth of historical knowledge and insight, and--
- JB: Knew the museums. Yeah.
- WM: --and was talented, and, you know, so. We were pleased to do it. And we always knew it was interim. And we took a serious stance . . . I don't recall [when] exactly, but in '01 or '02, **[01:10:00]** [we began] a serious search [for a new director].
- JB: Oh yes, I remember that. [The search began in April 2002.]
- WM: We did a very legitimate job, we did--we followed museum guidelines to the T, and did a wonderful job, [with] the City, on the search to find a new director. And we did find someone.
- JB: Yes, Peter Tokofsky [who was hired in January 2003].
- WM: Mm-hmm. And a young man, you know, energetic. And that didn't last as long as it could have.
- JB: No, he was a folklorist. So, he came, basically, from academia.
- WM: Yeah. So . . . that was, you know, we tried that. I was very engaged. I was very active at that point on the Board--not just in the search, but in the continuation. And being that Peter was slightly younger than I [it] hopefully made the relationship of a peer. It didn't work out, as we all know, and we searched again. Yeah.
- JB: Yes. Well, the second search wasn't as extensive as the first.
- WM: It, took a--
- JB: James Goodwin. I guess there was--

WM: Yeah.

JB: --someone else that was hired, and then they backed out--

WM: And James was a seasoned veteran in the--in the art world.

JB: Yes, he had been with the Pacific Design Center--

WM: Right.

JB: --for a long time.

WM: And a lovely gentleman, a lovely wife. Talented individuals.

JB: Yes, she helped a great deal, didn't she?

WM: Yeah, she did. And I'm blanking on her name, but I can--I can get it for you if you need it. [Susheila Goodwin.] Anyway, so--and that [the Goodwin appointment came from] an association with Patrick. And it was really an interim [solution]--let's find someone quickly. And it actually became almost more of an independent contractor relationship, where we retained [Goodwin's] company. It was for--you know--reasons for taxes, and things like that, which were fine. But it didn't--I think--my recollection is that [he didn't have] both feet . . . stuck in the ground. And as much as James helped, I don't know how much [his] investment was here in the ground to keep making it happen. Because we were really struggling--each year we were trying to make our budgets, and--

JB: Yeah, the City was gradually giving you less and less money, I believe.

WM: Yeah, and that was painful. And they were reinterpreting the lease agreements, and reinterpreting--even though I had good relationships with our City Councilmen and--with Al Nodal--and Patrick as well--things got untenable with the City. And it was only the City saying, "We can't do the--what we--we're reinterpreting, and that's the way it is going to be." And it was very one-sided, and we did the best that we . . . could with it. And they--and it kept getting worse, subsequently.

Even today, we're in the last year of our relationship [with the City]. What we once got was \$300,000 or \$400,000 a year from the City—it's now down to \$90,000. And this is the last year that we're going to be able to get 90. And--they did that, honoring the contract, but that's the end of it. And that's all. And in the future, going forward, [funds from the City] will only be by submission of grants. And as of today, the City is acknowledging another 3,000 people had to be laid off--including fire and police.

JB: It's been draconian.

WM: And they're--and we don't have any confidence in getting much [from them]. And many times, the Cultural Affairs Department has been on the chopping block as an entire

department. And their budget has dwindled, recently--only \$12 million for such a large city. So we scratch our heads.

JB: Yes, it's a scary time for anybody associated with the City.

WM: So--so James, I think, was with us for well over a year.

JB: It's about a year, I think, yeah. [Goodwin was hired February 1, 2004 and left in January 2005.]

WM: Yeah, but it--my memory--was it just--there [were] some health issues . . . and I think [it] just came to an end. Again, a sputtering, if you will, of finding the right person.

JB: Yes.

WM: As a director--as a director.

JB: Right.

WM: And the Board--there were still the same board members. I don't think we lost anyone [when Goodwin left], but we never really gained new people. There was no "Let's find another Bud Knapp to take over as head." Frank Wyle came back as Chair of the Board reluctantly. He didn't want it--he [had taken] it as an interim. He really recognized the founder's syndrome and wanted to say, "I don't want this to happen," but there was no choice. I became a "first lieutenant" to him and really helped him. I got involved as treasurer, I think, in the year 2000 [actually 1999; Marks held that post until 2008.] And--and very much involved in the financial record-keeping. And we went through some issues of things not properly filed with the government. And--just things that slipped--fell through the cracks because we didn't have the depth of staff members that [there were during] your tenure. And it was just--there was a lot to do. As a small museum, you still had . . . big responsibilities.

JB: Well, I've been quite **[01:15:00]** amazed at what has been accomplished with this barebones staff under Maryna. [Maryna Hrushetska was hired as Director in March 2005.]

WM: Yeah. She's coming up on five years in March of 2010. And I think she has done a wonderful job. She is a businesswoman, comes from the business world. Investment banking and the like--European-born. Yes.

JB: Yeah.

WM: Grew up in Chicago [in a Ukrainian-American family.]. And talented--and she and I work very well together, figuring out how, on very little programmatic budget, how she gets programs done. What once was \$15,000 to \$40,000 or more in exhibition costs, we are now doing for a fraction of that. Our most expensive exhibitions may be \$15,000. But most of them are under ten. And they look wonderful.

JB: Oh yes.

- WM: And they are taking a different look at what craft and folk art is, from what it was in the '70s, and '80s, and '90s.
- JB: Well I, I actually wanted to ask you about your take on that. Comparing what you remember of the direction that it was going in with--
- WM: Well, again, I'm not a collector.
- JB: That's OK, just--
- WM: And I do know that there is--
- JB: What differences do you see?
- WM: There's been lots of discussion about whether we [should] pursue a more educational and institutional museum relationship—following--you know—what, historically, the museum had been [doing]. [Or go toward] a much more popular, . . . Non-academic museum. And I think we've done a little bit of both, but we have definitely moved away from the academic side of what a museum can be. By no means are we looking to do popular shows just to bring in people--and those are discussions [that are ongoing]. But they are thoughtful about craft and folk art, and the human journey, locally, and nationally, and internationally. And it's ranged from . . . photo exhibitions from . . . an Armenian, which may never--would never have been [done in] the 1980s or '90s Craft and Folk Art Museum . . . because But . . . photographic images may not be traditional craft or folk art objects. . . .
- JB: We did have some photographic shows too. But I think that Maryna and her staff have actually engaged even more directly with world--world issues.
- WM: Yeah, they are--the human issues.
- JB: Yes, yes.
- WM: Social justice issues. She's, you know--she did a [show of] Palestinian clothing--textiles. Yes, it, it upset some people. And that's good. . . . I don't think--if you don't have, if you don't have arrows on the backside of you--that means you're not leading. And--and there's some . . . trustees, or members that [have] said, "This is not the museum that I remember or that I want to be a part of." But, OK. We moved on.
- JB: But it's a--it's a--living museum.
- WM: Yes, it is.
- JB: And I think that's what Maryna has done--is to really make it be part of today--what's going on today.
- WM: Yeah. And, and that's a good thing for a museum--to evolve.
- JB: Oh, absolutely. . . . It's--it's essential these days.

WM: You can only--you can only count on two things: death and taxes.

JB: Yeah. [Laughter]

WM: So, we had to keep re-inventing ourselves. And we did it on a shoestring budget. There were many times we came at the end of the [fiscal] year--and we got a miracle in May or June One year the County said, "We have some extra money, and we're giving you \$50,000 to do certain things." And it saved our--our bacon. So--

JB: But if you hadn't-- if you hadn't evolved to the point where they could see that you were worthy of it, that wouldn't have happened.

WM: Recently, we got a three-year commitment from the James Irvine Foundation of \$150,000.

JB: I'm so glad to hear that.

WM: To do "Folk Art Everywhere" . . . [a project to place craft and folk art objects throughout L.A. County in everyday places like barber shops, bottegas, laundromats, etc.].

JB: They [the Irvine Foundation] funded the library, primarily.

WM: Yeah, yeah.

JB: They're a great organization.

WM: Yeah. And, and that's a major commitment in today's environment.

JB: Oh, yes.

WM: And we've been, we're getting recognition [from] the Annenberg. There's been a lot--several major, major foundations [that have supported us], and I wish I had them on the tip of my tongue. But I think you know of them.

JB: I've--I've heard of some of the grants.

WM: And so, it's been--it's really good. And even--we've heard--we had our outs with the Getty regarding some issues in the past. But we have heard that they're keeping an eye on us. They're watching us. And that's a--

JB: Good.

WM: --really good thing to hear. Not that they're going to do anything financially, but, you know, it's a good thing because they--

JB: It doesn't hurt to be on the good side **[01:20:00]** of the Getty. [Laughter]

WM: Well, they, they like to support L.A. institutions.

JB: Yes.

WM: The Annenberg Foundation included us this year in a leadership seminar that--you know, they selected us in particular--that they want to see us succeed. They want to see--and we've been really working on governance, under the last year or so--straightening up our bylaws, straightening up our committee structures, getting commitments from our trustees to really take a stake in this.

JB: Yes.

WM: We've increased our "give-or-get" Board dues--

JB: Oh, good.

WM: --to a substantial number, which--

JB: Good.

WM: --may not be in favor with everyone, but it's part of our institution.

JB: Oh, I don't think it changed [at all] for many, many, many years.

WM: No. For years, it was such a small amount.

JB: Yes.

WM: So the museum is--you know, we're--we're a corporation. We may be a nonprofit corporation, but we have obligations to the U.S. government and to our taxpayers, to act and have responsibilities. And that's our governance. And we are doing that, and we have been doing audits for the past--at least six or seven years--which is something that we didn't do for many years.

JB: Well, they got postponed. [Laughter]

WM: But we've [now] been doing it rigorously.

JB: Oh, great.

WM: Every year. Because we recognize how valuable it is, and the checks and balances. And to be, you know, to legitimize, again, after being closed for those 14 months, as you said--and people keep--they do say, "I remember when the Egg and the Eye. . . ." They also did say, "Oh, are you still open?"

JB: Yes.

WM: And that was a hard thing. One of the failures of closing, [even temporarily], is, "I thought you were closed."

JB: Yes.

WM: We have gotten more press and ink in the *L.A. Times* than ever over the past five years, probably because of the innovative and provocative shows and exhibitions and outreach. . . that we've done.

JB: Well, you have to have a public presence.

WM: Yes, yes.

JB: And in the competitive environment today among, you know--you're competing not just with other museums, but with everything else, all the--

WM: --time.

JB: Time, exactly--I, I want to ask you something. You brought it up a couple of times, in a way. You--you have served, and continue to serve, on a number of different boards. And I'm just wondering--some of those are nonprofit, and some of them are--

WM: No, they're all nonprofits. . . .

JB: Actually, I didn't mean to ask you about the difference between private and nonprofit. What I meant to ask you about was the difference between, really, museum boards and other kinds of nonprofit boards. And I know you've--I guess this is the only museum board that you've been on.

WM: Yeah.

JB: But do you see that there are some differences in what you're dealing with?

WM: Subtleties. I mean, trustees are responsible to make sure the mission's being carried out. Some museum [boards] only deal with the executive director, that's their one employee. And all they are [there for] is to make sure the executive director has guidance, has a place to have a safe area to talk to--talk about issues. But not to get involved in the day-to-day activities.

JB: Right.

WM: Well, our museum, I think [because of the small number of staff members], needed more [trustee] involvement. And we are involved in more activities than, say, the [board] of my son's school, which is much more traditional. But fundraising is a primary goal of all board members. And I--I would--I'd leave it at that. I don't think a museum--we're still a corporation. We still have to file our 990s. We still have more stringent obligations today, this year, more than any in the past. Because we're a corporation, [we] just happen to have a nonprofit status. Most corporations in America are "nonprofit" right now. They're not making any money.

JB: [laughter]

WM: But that's another issue.

JB: That's another issue.

WM: So--so I don't think there's a real--a big difference at all. . . .

JB: You know, going way back to the Egg and the Eye gallery days, it was supposed to be a commercial enterprise.

WM: That's my understanding, that's right.

JB: But, you know, the more I delved into--I wasn't around during those days [1965 – 1974]. I started in 1976. But the more I heard about the Egg and the Eye Gallery days, the more I realized that it--it really operated as a nonprofit. Not legally, but--

WM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was--

JB: It never made any money. . . . but it was wildly successful as a social venue.

WM: Yeah.

JB: And as an educational venue. But Edith was always, you know, more interested [01:25:00] in the educational aspects and the aesthetic aspects than she was in making money.

WM: I think the restaurant brought people to the museum, yes.

JB: Yes. So, it made--it made complete sense to turn it into a museum.

WM: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

JB: Let me ask you about something we skipped over. It was really important to the staff. That's the installation of the elevator in the 5814 building. I guess you were involved with that a little bit.

WM: I was. It was an obligation with the city contract, that within a certain timeframe, we had to install this elevator, because they needed to make it ADA-compliant. We, we--it was designed to be adjacent to the existing building, not take up space [inside the museum]. And it's in a viewable structure, if you will, so you can see--

JB: Yes, it's beautiful.

WM: It is. It doesn't get used very much, luckily, but--

JB: Really?

WM: Well, I mean, we--it does get used--but not--

JB: Oh.

WM: But it's only two stories, so it's not--

JB: Well, I think it would be three if you count the mezzanine. [Laughter]

WM: That's true. It has three, three stops. So that, yeah. It got built by Van Holland in [around 2002]. And it was an obligation, and we fulfilled it. . . . In our contract, we had to raise a certain amount of money every year to match what the city was giving us.

JB: Oh yes, uh huh.

WM: And I think in the years--with the elevator--we were able to get a credit [with the City], because that money was being used to build the elevator. And that was fine. We did it, and it worked out, you know. Which was good. And--and it was important because, for those in wheelchairs, or blind, they--you know.

JB: Absolutely.

WM: Not that the blind people really come to the museum that often. Can I take a quick pause?

[Pause in recording.]

JB: Yeah, I--I just, I can't help but mention that the lack of an elevator was a very big deal for anybody that had to work on installations at the museum. And how they ever got some of those pieces [up the stairs]! I remember one show of wood sculpture that had some enormous pieces that somehow got lifted up to that third floor.

WM: That's true. It did help, not just the disabled, but also bringing [in] product--objects.

JB: Yeah, yeah, it was just--

WM: I remember [in thinking about] connecting 5800 and 5814 . . . there was also an elevator incorporated with the [preliminary] design. So, I think this was a modification of the elevator that would have been built as an alternative in case we didn't get [5800], because that had the elevator, and the stairwells were going to be acting as the access for both buildings, if you will.

JB: Well, I know there was talk of an elevator for a long time, and then of course they were hoping they could use the 5800 elevator. [That was another thing that was lost when we lost the lease on 5800.] But, anyway. It was--it was great [news] for any of us that had experienced [the Museum] before [laughter] the elevator [was installed] to--to know that it was there.

So, Maryna was hired in early 2005, and . . . she took it in--in the direction that we've been talking about. Frank Wyle finally stepped down in August 2008. . . . I, in fact, was interviewing him just at that time—in that summer of 2008. And he had spoken about [stepping down from his position as Board Chair] several times; he had wanted to do that. And I'm--I'm wondering, did he talk to you before the formal announcement was made?

WM: Years before the formal announcement.

JB: [laughter] Yeah.

WM: Wishing me to be more involved, and to step up, and--and I had said, you know, "I'm in--I'm in the sunshine of my own career, and the amount of time—" and I said, "To do this properly-- I didn't feel that I was the right choice." I mean, I had the right energy and probably the intellect to help support it, but to do what a chair needs to do in fundraising, and taking people to lunch, and breakfast, and dinner, and attending events, and being a public face out there, I--I just, it wasn't--

JB: --having interviews. [Laughter]

WM: Having interviews. But--but also fundraising. And I said, "You know, my peers are in their 40s, and not necessarily [having] the ability to start giving away or designating funds, or--you know." So, I didn't, I don't think I--I had that strength. And I--and he knew that, and shared it. And when I did accept it--and to do it, I had said to the other members of the Executive Committee and the Board, **[01:30:00]** "If I'm taking this on, I need all of you to be my lieutenants here, and each of you to take up things that I'm not able to do as well as--as others." So, you know, I've taken it on. And it's fine. And I acted as, you know, co-chair, he would always say. And enjoyed being included in his adventures with other people, so they could see a, a succession, you know, a plan, or, you know. Much like a father taking his son to the meetings and grooming him--so. That was always endearing, and I enjoy all my time with Frank, you know.

JB: And he's still on the Board.

WM: He's still on the board. Chair Emeritus, I believe. And, you know--when he was on the board, he was able to have Tina Nord, his personal executive secretary, be our secretary for the Board. Which was fabulous--and her talents of keeping meticulous records.

JB: Yes, I really relied on her for a lot of [the background for the archives work].

WM: She's been great. And so that's--that was--that's where it is. Today we are--we have embraced more technology, and [we have] meetings telephonically and [are] doing more demanding [work] with the Internet, because we [now] only meet four times a year (down from six), and rely more on our committee structure, which goes back to our governance. And, you know, [we've been] demanding more from our trustees for the last, probably ten years. When we came back in '99, the trustees were not as engaged. And [engagement is] a mandatory thing if this institution is to continue.

JB: Yes, yes.

WM: You know—and to thrive, so.

JB: Well, I'm very glad to hear that you've been taking the lead on that.

WM: It couldn't go on--it can't operate in the same way it operated 20 years ago.

JB: No, no. So, it's been a year and a half that you've been Board Chair. And how's it been?
[Laughter]

WM: How's it been? . . . It's probably been the same as it's been the last five years, you know? We struggle to make our budgets, but we somehow, [by] some miracle, something always happens, where we're able to make our funds. We were able to [do it] the last two years. We've had a positive end-of-year balance, which is great.

JB: Wow. Yes.

WM: We do have--this is our last year with the City, which is [now giving us] only \$90,000. We've been able to do more annual outreach [such as year-end giving], annual gift-giving, and this year we raised close to \$40,000. That's \$40,000 more than we had a few years ago on an annual appeal. And the generosity of the Wyle family helps that--they do matching funds, which has been great. So . . . the \$40,000 is worth \$80,000. So, we're—we're going to do it. It's just-- it's a struggle. It's a struggle that institutions [foundations and cultural agencies] are not giving as much money, although we have had some [grants].

JB: Oh, especially right now [during this recession].

WM: Yeah. Right. It's true. I mean, we--we're out there, we still have applications in [to] foundations. But most of our research [is that] . . . individuals . . . is where the money comes from. And one of the things we're really focusing on is trying to find a handful of individuals, non-trustees, and really focus with them, and try to make them a relevant member, and find that link that they can have with the museum to say, "I want to support this museum. I don't want to see it, you know, stagnate." So, I think that, rather than doing a broad appeal, we're doing a much more strategic, narrow, focused appeal. For heavy gifting, for large gifts.

JB: I think the idea of reviving the travel [activities]--

WM: Yeah.

JB: --the trips could be one part of that.

WM: My quick assessment when I talked to Patrick about it--because he was involved [with the Associates group].

JB: Oh yeah, he led a couple [of trips] for them.

WM: --was that it, it wasn't necessarily a large financial gain for the museum.

JB: Yeah, I guess it--

WM: But it was more of a [matter of] cohesiveness that brought trustees and others [together] and [led] very active members to appreciate [the museum and what it was about].

JB: Well, of course, those trips always involve going to collections, either private collections or--or institutional collections. So, it gave people who maybe didn't know ahead of time what we

were talking about when we talked about folk art and crafts--it gave them a--a real hands-on and personal experience of that.

Do you have some goals for the next five years--other than just hanging on [financially]?

WM: Well, we've really tried to raise membership. We have **[01:35:00]** not been successful with that. Not that I want to bring up negative things. We, we've never really thought that, "Gee, why can't we get to a thousand or two thousand members." Museums have struggled between charging \$20 admission, free admissions, or zero. Or nominal.

JB: Yes.

WM: There's a philosophical difference. Right now, we are really just looking at funding. That's our major goal. We have a \$600,000 a year annual budget, and that's our goal to get it--and meet it.

JB: Without the City support, that's--that's tough.

WM: Yeah, and we--it's not easy. So, our goal--we, you know, I'm worried programmatically. Our program committee has strong leadership. I think that people recognize [the value of] the shows we've done, the publicity we've gotten. The number of attendees is growing. Every year attendance is more than the prior year's. Our shop is wonderful.

JB: Yes.

WM: It—it thrives. It makes—it--it actually pays rent to the [museum]--I mean. . . there is profit from the shop that goes to the museum operations. So that's very positive--

JB: Yes, the shop has always been a wonderful--whether they actually contributed [funds] or not--it's been a great attraction.

WM: Yeah. For years, it didn't contribute. Not that it--it just, it just didn't make enough money.

JB: Yeah.

WM: It, it was self-supporting, but [couldn't contribute] additional [funds].

JB: Yeah.

WM: So our goal is, is to continue with our programmatic efforts in the same theme. I think using--not social justice--but the human experience, linked--

JB: Yes. That's a good way of putting it.

WM: --linked with folk [art] and crafts. And trying to find that relationship locally, regionally, and internationally. And so I'm pleased about that. Our shows are--like other museums--extended for a longer period. We're doing one less show a year. It's a budgetary issue.

JB: Yes.

WM: We have a loyal staff, probably the same way that you had.

JB: Oh, you have a great staff.

WM: Yeah, so--

JB: I think that's really a, you know--

WM: Hard working.

WM: Yeah.

JB: --a secret to success--is the staff.

WM: Yeah.

JB: And they've been with Maryna--most of them now--for almost--

WM: Yeah, just normal changeover. They don't earn enough money.

JB: No.

WM: We work on that. But they're devoted, and they know that working in the arts and the museum world you don't [make a lot of money] --it's not the same as the private sector. But there's a great deal of love and appreciation.

JB: Yes. And there is--in a situation like that--you have an opportunity as an individual staff member, since you are also the "head of the department," in that situation--to be somewhat entrepreneurial in your approach.

WM: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Have you thought about moving to another location? Have you ever thought about--?

WM: Lots of things.

JB: --selling, you know, cashing in your [equity]?

WM: There's lots of ideas. I think when "L.A. Live" [an entertainment complex in the South Park District of Downtown Los Angeles, and the Grand Avenue Development Project were being built] downtown, there was an idea: should--is that new--the new future center of L.A.? Because if our approach is really wide, it's not [just] the West Side of Los Angeles by any means.

There's been questions about the name, Craft and Folk Art. Is that--is that where we are, is that--our image? Is that what we want to be? Should it be something else? We are, we've engaged--we've gotten *pro bono* work this year from McKinsey Company to do a strategic plan with us, to work on these vision issues. So that's wonderful. We're doing that. It's part of, again, the governance issues. And legitimizing the organization, and . . . [being consistent with] our 501(c) (3) status. Those are all major moves. We--we're looking to

always have more board members join us. We--we look to gain one or two every year. So, I--I have, I have hopes for that. It is not going to be easy.

We--we recognize we have a wonderful past. When we've gone to--when Maryna and I have gone to the Annenberg Leadership [meetings], and we talk about being 45 years old, all the heads turn. Most [other institutions] are five months old, or five years old--you know? So we have a great deal of pride, and we carry our history lovingly with us. And mostly with Edith. I mean, I think that's, you know, our founder, our matriarch. And evolve with it. I would like to hope that Edith would be proud . . . of the direction that we've gone, and, [of] keeping it going.

JB: I'm sure she would be. I'm sure she would have something to say about everything.

WM: Well, that's natural. . . .

JB: But--I'm sure that she would be thoroughly happy that-- [the museum is] still there . . . and still offering very positive and--and entertaining and important programs. Do you have any other [01:40:00] final thoughts?

WM: Mm. Well, I think it's wonderful you wanted to record this. I think it's something that could easily have been lost or filed away. So, I'm--I'm tickled, and I'm glad to be part of the dozen or so folk that get to [comment and reminisce about CAFAM].

JB: Well, I'm thrilled that you were willing to do this, because this carries us into the present--and into the future--in a way that, really, I don't think anybody else that I've talked to [could].

WM: No.

JB: And [eventually] it will be available at UCLA's [Center for Oral History Research]. Thank you.

WM: You're very welcome.

JB: And good luck.

WM: Yeah. And we need it. And thank you very much. Appreciate it.

[End of session: 1:40:45]