Wally Hedrick Interview - His Place - Bodega - February 4, 1998

interviewed by Mary Kerr

(M-Question about where he grew up, etc. before mic was turned on)

-- Pasadena and we had a sort of a social group down there of things --(laugh) sort of acquaintances that went through the, you know, the local schools together. And we had a kind of a --just let me ask you a question--either way is all right with me and I can do--can switch back and forth, etc.--

M-(talking about where he should be looking)--wherever is comfortable--don't worry about it

W--I'm not worried (hah--hah--hah)

Well, my roots are in Southern California. I was born in Pasadena. I never thought I would ever go to college down there but I was inadvertently involved in the Korean War and I got the GI Bill. And some of my friends had sort of scouted out San Francisco previously --David Simspson, John Ryan, some other people which you may or may not have heard of. And we had kind of a social group that involved kind of weekly meetings and we would sit around --I mean--television was just breaking then--and one of our friends had a television set--at least his parents had it and we would go over and look at television and after the evening broadcast was over, we would entertain one another by flashing lights and listening to music. You know, putting cheese graters and flash lights and things--and making things on the wall. Well, it turned out all of these people --were sort of painters or poets and we knew we had to get out of --San Fran --Pasadena and so we asked an artist that we knew--"Where do you go to be an artist?" And he said, "The first thing to do is to get out of Pasadena and go to San Francisco", cause he had gone to the University of California. His name was Leonard Edmundson. And so a friend of mine got in my Model A Ford and we drove up to San Francisco. This was probably 1946 and we arrived on the foggiest --I mean actually I didn't know where we were going and we ended up in Oakland. And so we had to come across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco and this was about midnight. It was the foggiest day I've ever --known in San Francisco that night--I mean, you couldn't see anything. And so the tales about how San Francisco could be a very foggy town turned out to be very true. Anyway, we got to San Francisco and here it was about one in the morning and we were looking for the art school. Now, when I say art school that means what I call the California School of Fine Arts. And we found it--we found Chestnut and we drove up the hill and but the place, you know, was locked up at one in the morning. And so we said to each other, "What are we going to do?" Well, we said--you know, I had never been in a hotel in my whole life but I knew they existed and so we drove to some place and, you know, it turned out it was the Tenderloin. We had no idea what a Tenderloin was. And we went to this hotel and we walked in, you know,--trying to be sophisticated and we said we would like to have a room. And the guy said, "For how long?" And I said, "Well, overnight." "Oh" (Laugh) Well, it turned out we had picked a very well known establishment that rented beds by the hour and sometimes by the minute. The next morning, I mean, we woke up and here was this place full of very strange and wonderful people who were coming and

going, madly. And the clerk just thought we were hilarious, I mean, we had stayed overnight.

But, anyway, to make a long story short, we drove over to the school. We walked in to the patio. The director met us, I mean, we had our canvases and things. We were carrying everything. And the director introduced us to this tall, stately gentlemen--who it turned out, this was Clyfford Still. Well, I had no idea who a Clyfford Still was but later I found out he was a very, you know, well known person and very influential person. And I was introduced to David Park, Elmer Bischoff, --, you know, a whole series of people that turned out later were became an important part of my life. Anyway, we knew when we were shown into this studio--here was this--a guy working on this painting that must have been, you know, 20 by 30 ft and he looked just about like our age and our group and but

here he was obviously he was way ahead of us because our paintings were little. And he was standing there, you know, throwing the paint around. We knew we had found the right place. And so we immediately got back into my Model A Ford and drove back to Pasadena and said we had discovered nirvana or heaven. Again, there is a period where I have to go in the Army and other people do other things and then--but later we all end up in San Francisco. And that that group of people turned out to be the founders of the 6 Gallery. There just happened to be six of them so that's how-why we named it the 6 Gallery. I should probably give those names--

M-Yeah, let's give those names and then say why you decided to start the 6 Gallery--

W-I mean, the name of the gallery was decided at the first meeting of the six members and, I mean, because no one wanted to pick, I mean, we had taken over from the previous owners and they had --they had their name and we had to change that. But no one wanted to come up with a real answer. And so somebody said and I think it was Deborah Rem--well, I should give the members---Deborah Remington, who now is in New York, Jack Spicer, the poet, John Allen Ryan, the poet and painter, Hayward King, myself and David Simpson were the six original members. Now, immediately, we were joined by other people including my--my first wife, Jay DeFeo --a whole group of other people who became sort of sustaining members. We all gave --five dollars a month to pay the rent. And Jay became our acting Secretary and it was always hard getting that $5 from everyone because we were very poor. Well, anyway, those six people were seated at the art school and we lived in North Beach and that was just when things were starting to sort of percolate.

M-Before the 6 Gallery opened you showed your work at The Place--

W-The Place and Vesuvios were are two kind of hangouts. I mean, we would go to Vesuvios directly after class and stay there until (laugh) we were kicked out. It was sort of a --it became social club in a sense that the---Henri, the owner, was sort of --he knew he had something. And he knew that if he could get the Grayline Tours to make it one of their stops, he could be a commercial success. So to ensure that they would stop--we would be given a pitcher of beer and we would sit in the window, looking very Bohemian, under his direction. I mean, he told us we should have beards and we should have sandals and not being too middle class looking and we should be playing chess or

some other, you know, intellectual type game. Oh preferably, singing folk songs. And so that --luckily I could play the guitar and other people could do things and so we sort of entertained the tourists--not thinking anything about it because we were given free beer. Anyway, --that started in Vesuvios and then when The Place opened and there was, you know, Miss Smith's Tea Shop and The Cellar and --several places where artists or artist-type people sort of congregated. You could spend the whole evening there in North Beach for $1 and what that meant was--that was a dollar and 5 cents--that's what it took. That meant you could buy three Rheineer Ales, one in each place at 35 cents a piece and that would be a evening--social evening.

I was living at the Ghost House. Now, the Ghost House--see I don't know if you--do you know about that (M-I know about the Ghost House but I was never there). It was as Sutter and (M-Gough) Gough, yeh. And it was a Victorian mansion at one time. I mean it had ceiling like in here but it was an ornate, Victorian American building that had been converted to studios--by God knows who. But it was cheap. (M-Duncan had lived there and--) Just about-- Yeh all of the poets lived there at one time or another. And there were a lot of musicians and Martin Baer was sort of the reining painter. I mean, he was what we considered the older generation because he had met Picasso (laugh) and that gave him a certain amount of status. But you know, you could get a--you could rent a room this size for $35 a month and there was--it was three stories. There were people who lived in the third story who never came down. I lived on the 2nd Floor for a while. And then the

bottom floor was Martin Baer's studio and one of the first--female impersonator I had ever met lived downstairs. I mean, he was a very famous person in North Beach and he was, you know, and his room had drapery and a mirror that was 11 feet tall. And he always wore a dressing gown. I wish I know his name --but somebody from North Beach would probably remember this--this was one of the most famous persons in the area at that time. But so it --and musicians were dropping by because somebody had a piano downstairs.

M-That was when you were also hung out in North Beach--you lived in the Ghost House and you'd go down to North Beach

W-yeh, the Ghost House was sort of between the Fillmore and North Beach. And so, musicians--I mean--the one--Gerry Mulligan loved it there because there was a piano player that knew the chords and he would warm up before he played in North Beach on his way from, you know, from the Fillmore.

Anyway to make--to get back to the 6 Gallery. Anyway, this group of people --we were living in the area around North Beach and we decided--and John Ryan, the poet said, "I know a place that we can hang our work in." Because nobody at that time, at least in the establishment knew that we were all geniuses. And so we decided, well, if they don't know it, we will show it to them. And so John Ryan heard that the --gallery that preceded us--the name escapes me right now--(M-King Ubu) yeh, the King Ubu was going to close and we could get it for $65 a month. And so we said if we could just get six people to give $10 we could rent it. Well, we did with the help of--I want to put some--you know, the instructor at the school at that time, Robert Howard---Neil Sinton, was a local woman who painted and for some reason, she just thought we were wonderful. And so with several other people we managed to pay the rent for one month.

And so our first show was to raise money to put wall board up because the 6 Gallery was like a stable. It was about 100 ft. long but it was only about 10 feet wide. And then at the end of the corridor, it opened up and there was a stage. Somebody had actually built a stage. So we said we'll have a party to raise money--a rent party. So we did. We got a hundred postcards. We mimeographed them and sent them out to 100 people and we had a party. And we lost a lot of money. (Laugh) So we had to --we decided we'd have events. Not only would we show our work, we'll have poets, we'll have dancers, we'll have musicians, we'll have movies and we'll ask them to contribute to the rent. That led to all kinds of things.

And probably, I guess our most--our claim to fame was the night --the famous night when the poets read and--and Allen Ginsberg introduced his famous "Howl" to the world. And by the way, there's a story that goes with that. I've never been able to get anybody to admit that this actually happened but I--I'm working on it. But the way I remember it, I mean, Kerouac was outside out front with a gas mask on, directing people and showing them where to park and getting them in. And every once in a while he would bring in a gallon of wine. The poets were up on the stage and the people were milling around and they began the reading. And then when it became--about half way through the reading--a door swung open. And that door was the men's room. I mean, there's this long hallway and then it opens up into an area about as big as this room which there was a stage and then on one side of this is this door that opens into the "John". And here's Allen, sitting on the "John " with his pants down and he began reading "Howl". So everybody had to turn because he was introduced by Rexroth--and everybody had to turn--and here he was with a spotlight on him, sitting on the "John" and he began reading "Howl" sitting there. And about half way into it, he gets up, pulls his pants up, flushes the toilet and strolls up onto the stage and finishes the reading. And by this time everybody was, you know, (clap, clap) just having a high old time, and it brought down the house. I mean, we were a success. I mean, that was proved because the fire marshals showed up that night because we had --there must have been 3 or 400 people in there. And it was just a seething mass of people yelling. Anyway, we hit the newspapers because of that little affair and the local art guy--Alfred Frankenstein actually was there that night. I mean, I never saw him but

apparently he was there and he was just enchanted. And so he wrote us a little blurb and we'd-- from there on it just, you know, like--it was easy. I mean, all we had to do was, people would--we would have our little meetings once a month and people would come and say, "Well, we have, you know, we have this 3D movie we want to put on or we have some dancers --we have some avant-garde music --we were overwhelmed by people asking us to use the facilities. And it was a little heady for, you know, I was just a young, punk kid from Pasadena. I mean, I didn't know anything about show business or poets--I mean, I always--never trusted poets, you know, I mean they were kind of weird I thought. And then Kerouac's book came out. Everybody immediately went home and read it, you know. And it just became overnight, the talking point of North Beach because everybody wanted to say, "Oh, well, he changed this name to that--isn't that good. And do you remember her"-- I mean, you know, everybody was in it. And we tried to identify whose those people were.

Well, one of our--one of the 6 members was Jack Spicer, the poet and he was teaching at the school, teaching English-- which was strange. He said, "Well, what we have to do is

we have to combine poetry and visual art and jazz. And this--we had a reading where some local musicians backed Kenneth Rexroth and they improvised a 12-bar blues and he improvised poetry. This was probably 1951--it may have been earlier but it was around that time. And this became--jazz poetry became a thing overnight. And then somebody said if we can have improvised poetry and improvised music, let's have improvised painting, simultaneously. And so that led to The Place having Blabbermouth Mouth, which you could--everybody got their 15 minutes of fame and you could do anything and you could do it simultaneously. The Cellar had--it became another tourist thing to go and watch Simon Perkoff (laugh) (M-Stuart) well I'm dropping a name (Stuart Perkoff)--Yeh, his brother is more famous but Simon was a student at the school and he could play the piano and he played for the ballet class. But anyway, the other --more famous Perkoff was one of the early Jazz improvised poet persons. And Simon would sometimes play the piano. But also by this time Miss Smith's Tea Shop had opened up. They'd have live jazz --with 2 or 3 people painting simultaneously and poets yelling at each other, going all the time, you know, from 8 in the evening until 2 in the morning. And the tourists just ate it up. I mean, they just loved it. You know, they would snap their fingers off beat, and they felt like they were doing something.

M- Now, Knute Stiles--

W-Yeh--Well, Knute was a friend of John Allen Ryan's. They collaborated on -- I mean, Knute knew how to set type and he had a small press. And they would make small books--beautiful, little small books by hand and he was also a painter and a bartender. And when Leo opened The Place--Leo Krikorian opened The Place, Knute was one of his first bartenders--there was a whole string of them--who promoted---well, the Blabbermouth Night and hanging exhibitions of local artists all the time. I mean, they had weekly shows, I mean, you know, literally carrying them in and out, you know. But so did The Cellar. The Place is where we went to socialize. I mean, after Vesuvios had become a tourist trap, you'd move on down Grant and you'd kind of leave the tourists on Broadway. And so The Place being off --(noises of pots and pans--Wiggy making lunch) away from that area was pretty much left alone by the tourists so you could in there and sit down and have a beer and talk to your friends and God knows who was going to walk in. You know, who was--and then they might do anything.

M-At The Place, I was talking to Knute and he was telling me--and maybe you could confirm this--he said that he set up a lot of those at The Place because he knew the painters and that--I guess, Jay had her first show there (W-yeh) *Let's talk about who you remember seeing their show in The Place.*

W-In The Place?--Well, Karl Sanzenbach, he lived right above it and his brother played--well, at this time, I was playing a lot of --traditional jazz and there was sort of an inbreeding between --Does Lou Waters mean anything to you?--I mean, he sort of he sort of created what has become the San Francisco style of that kind of music. And there were a lot of kind of followers, I mean--Bebop and traditional jazz were intertwined at that time--was going on simultaneously. Anyway, musicians use to show up at the upper level of The Place. I mean, it was built on two levels and there was kind of a balcony, like the one here, where musicians would gather. And every once in a while, either they

would be playing Bebop or traditional jazz. And Karl Sanzenbach and his brother, as I say, he lived above The Place. And Karl played the sax--the clarinet. People would show up and we would hear--and the music began and he would come down and, you know, we would play. I don't know exactly what to say about that. I mean the people who showed there were again members of--an intermingling between the 6 Gallery and The Place. I mean, Knute was a member of the 6 Gallery but he was also a bartender. And so I think Knute had his first show at the 6 Gallery where Joan Brown probably had her first show at The Place. She was a 17 year old--she was right out of the Catholic high school and she had her first show there. By this time we had we'd become a commodity. I mean, we could raise money. We played opposite Lenny Bruce one night --not the Spaghetti Factory-- that was another place but the Green--(laugh) well, I'll think of it. Anyway, Jack Spicer arranged with this bartender that we would get the take on the drinks for a two-hour period to raise money to pay the rent on the 6 Gallery and all we had to do was is entertain. And Lenny Bruce was the real performer--we were the interim--while he was taking a break, we entertained. And we made enough money for a month's rent that night. I mean, I ran my light machine, Jack Spicer read poetry.

M-Didn't you have one of the first light machines?

W-I'd started that in Pasadena, actually. (pots & pans noise) By this time I had refined it. But it had a keyboard then and had to be performed on. And--it was again the local media we there that night and we hit--and there are existing clippings of that, you know, the reviews of that stuff.

Well, I was living in North Beach at that time and I remember getting a knock on the door and a guy said, "My name is Lawrence Ferlin". And I said, "That's nice". And he said, "Well, I run City Lights, you know, or I'm working--at that time he was just beginning City Lights. And later, he had shortened his name to Ferlin at that time and he was writing art reviews for the Chronicle. A great line he gave--Jay had a show there and he said, "It looked like she backed up to it." (Laugh) Great line. Later, he became Lawrence Ferlinghetti. But the reason he knocked on my door in North Beach was he wanted to be a painter. And I said, "You know, I said well, go up to the art school, you know that's-". And he said, "I don't want to study, all I want is a easel." And, I said, "Well, they have lots of easels up there". He said, "You mean, I just go and take it." "Yeh, nobody will miss it." And apparently, he did. Later, he did open the book store and did a lot of publishing and I see him on television, once and in a while now, you know, telling how it was. But you should ask me some questions--

M-I am but I'm going to do something first (adjusting mic) What I want to ask you, there's stories I've heard you tell in the past--and I've heard it related--great stories--there's two of them----The "Christmas Tree" that was in the Museum of Modern Art and tore up that fur coat, you know--and the other was story was the--Clyfford Still (W-Oh, me painting over a Clyfford Still--(talking back & forth)

W-The Clyfford Still thing was completely inadvertent on my part. I mean, you know, I knew him and I knew who he was and by this time--I mean I should blame this on Jim Weeks, in the sense that Jim Weeks went back East and when he did--to Boston and his -- to show you how intermingled everything was--I mean, his daughter married Andrew

Wyeth's son. Anyway, when Jim Weeks left--Jim Weeks was a painter of the Bay Area Figurative School but his father was Anson Weeks, who led the house band at the, you know, the big hotel in San Francisco--what's the name of it (M-The Palace) no, the big one (M-the St. Francis)Yeh, the St. Francis. So he was a musician as well as being a painter. Anyway, when he left San Francisco, he gave me a whole stack of canvases. He said, "Wally, you may as well have these and paint over them" because that time--I mean, I was a poor, starving student artist and every canvas was something to cherish. So I just took the whole lot and gessoed them, you know, just to blot out the images, not looking at the paintings. God knows what I painted out. I mean, I didn't even want to think about it. Years later, I was looking at one of these canvases and I noticed on the back it said, you know, Untitled, 1947--Clyfford Still. (Laugh) But by that time, it was in the collection of the Berkeley Museum and it had my painting on it. So, when they discovered that, there was much--there was a lot of telephone calls and you know,--"Did you really paint out Clyfford Still." Well, I said, "I guess I did." And they couldn't believe it. Then there were rumors that they were going to remove my painting so they could get the Clyfford Still. (Laugh). But level heads won out so it kind of blew over. But I--it was inadvertent on my part. I wish that I had done it on purpose. It would have been a great gesture but I didn't think of it. It would be like erasing a Rembrandt, (Laugh).

As for the other story-- the Christmas Tree. I mean, that happened just the way it's been described by several people that were there. I made this thing--was a piece of metal assemblage, I guess you might call it that had lots of radios and horns and record players and buzzers and fans and lights. And it had--I'd taken the guts out of a washing machine so it had--you could have these things go on and off in cycles--you know like--as it goes through various stages of the washing cycle and it was tied to all these radios and things. The only trouble with it was --not being an electrical engineer--and I had no idea that anyone would want it to be around any people--one side of it was grounded. I mean, it was hooked to one side of the wall plug and so that simplified the wiring for me. It just means I had to run one wire to whatever the noise-making object was. But it became--They had a show, you know, West Coast Assemblage or something of the sort. And they said, "Well, Wally you have to have that thing in it." And I said, "Well, it's dangerous." And they said, "Well, we'll isolate it so that people can't get to it, you know, put a nice chain around it and we'll plug it into the wall so it can't be unplugged and we'll take care of it. And all you have to do is show up in the Museum with it." Anyway, I did. It took me a day to get the thing going--everything working right and this was in the afternoon, before the opening of the show. And I tested everything and I warned about, you know, don't let anyone touch this thing while its operating. And I set the timer and went home. And I set the timer to go off--start, when the opening began--8 O'clock. Well, about 10 O'clock that night I got this telephone call from the Fire Department saying there's been a problem at the museum. And I said, "Well, it isn't my problem", you know, trying--it turned out there had been practically a riot because the thing had gone off promptly at 8 O'clock. Here all the nice people--all the art people in San Francisco and all the boards of all the cultural things were there. And it went off just beautifully. In fact, I had wired a blasting cap. That started off. And then the siren went on. Now, I'm getting this all this third-hand--I'm being told that this is what happened. The record player started up, the radio went on cue, the bull horn went off and the fan started up. And there was--one of the reining socialite ladies, who had a long fur piece on that evening. And she was backing up to this thing with her cocktail in her hand and this thing--and the fan started and it caught her fur piece in the fan and pulled her into the machine. And apparently the

floor walkers of the museum panicked because they had been told that someone could get electrocuted, and she was one of their big donors. Anyway, they came and shot fire extinguishers on the whole business. The machine kept running cause they had wired it into the wall--hardwired it in and concealed the wires. Finally, one of the people ran in with a fire ax and chopped the wire and it stopped. And luckily the lady was not hurt but she did put up a stout defense. The next morning, I was--a lawyer came--I was going to be sued until he found out that I wasn't there--that I had a signed a release on the thing and the museum had said they were

going to take care of it so I didn't have any legal problems. But it became again one of those instant overnight successes, and I wasn't even there which is the best part. (Laugh)

(We stop to have lunch that Wiggy prepared.)

M-Let's talk about the Fillmore Bldg. and tell me the address.

W-Jay and I had been living in North Beach. Anyway, our tenure at that place came to an end, and we were looking around for a cheap place to live and Paul Beattie, who was --he later became more unobscured; but, at that time, he was completely obscure, was a local painter who had moved into this building at 2322 Fillmore and he was going to move to another place. And he offered me to take over his tenancy, and we couldn't resist cause we went over and saw this building and it had 14ft. ceilings and was built on the classic San Francisco style of apartments with bay windows and then everything in a row behind it, with, you know, big sliding doors and big rooms for $65 a month--a 7 room flat. So Jay and I took his place. At that time there were three other flats that formed like four corners and there was a flat at each corner and two floors over a dry cleaner. The --After we moved in there (M-adjusting mic) After we moved in, people would come and they would say, "Oh, what neat places. Gee, if any of them ever gets vacant, give us a call." Subsequently, some of did. And the first person of our little group that moved in was the McClures. And they moved above us. We had the lower right-hand place and they moved in above. This was in 1957 just about the time Jay was beginning "The Rose." When the McClures moved in, we obviously had more--the poets came over a lot and there was a lot of bongo drumming and chanting and humming and--recently--in fact, I've heard somebody recorded us. I mean, there are existing recordings of these sort of spontaneous musical drumming, poet things. But Christopher MacLaine, was--again, he was a poet at that time, was a beat--a great believer in group improvisation and so a lot of stuff --lot of stuff went on in our front living room. But, as time went by, people--Joan Brown and Bill Brown moved in. Jim Newman, he had the upper left-hand flat. He was running the Jazz Workshop at that time (M-the Gallery--the Dilexi) yeh, and so there was a lot of artist type people. Jim had the distinction of having a Grand Piano moved into that apartment. That was a major occupation--or major preoccupation. So there was things going on all the time. It got to where the wall between Joan Brown's place and Bill Brown's place and ours--we just chopped a hole in it so we didn't have to go out the front door to communicate. It was an unwritten rule that you didn't go through the door unless you yelled. (Laugh)

But as that Jay was starting the well, the first version of "The Rose" and that was installed in the bay window. She blocked off the two front windows and the light came in from the side, which sort of explained the existing photographs of that--how it was

done. It went through several stages. I don't know if you want to talk--do you have some questions about--

M-First of all, I remember--and I don't know whether I can trust my memory--but I thought the walls were painted black--

W-There was a stage when part of her studio had black walls. There was a big, sliding door between the front bay window room, which was probably a living room at one time--and then there was big sliding doors that ran the length of the apartment which I'm sure it was a, you know, sitting room or maybe a dining room--which we just folded back the sliding doors--but, at one time, that front room was--had black walls because it was where the Christmas tree--one of the Christmas trees were. It was a 14ft. Christmas tree because Jay was into Christmas trees. (M-She never threw one out.) (Laugh)--Well, she collected them. And after Christmas was over, she would turn them upside down and nail them to the ceiling. So here, you would walk into this room and here there would be all of these upside down Christmas trees that are all dried and all the needles have fallen off on the

floor. I mean, I'm sure--I never thought much about it but I'm sure people walking in--the landlord just about had a nervous fit the first time he came in there. That's a whole other--(laugh--)

But there was a real sense of unity and sort of --I think the building sort of vibrated with all of these mixed personalities. Jim Kelly and Sonia Gechtoff, who subsequently were there when her--Sonia's mother, Mrs. Gechtoff was running the East West Gallery. So we, you know, the 6 Gallery, the East West and then the Spatsa were all down Fillmore in the Marina so all we had to do was just walk--drive or walk down the hill and everything was right there. So it was a perfect location. It was really strange living (M-and also the Batman) yeh, and the Batman just down the street. And had the cable car line that turned around right there where the barbershop was. It was really like a little neighborhood. And finally, I -- later, I found out that Paul Beattie lived around the corner. I mean, he had moved away and moved back and he didn't say a word. But I discovered him one night because I had built a set of stairs up to the floor and I was exploring. And I saw a telescope sitting out on a flat roof--just to the right of our place and I went over there and it was Paul Beattie sitting there with a telescope, looking at the stars (laugh). But anyway--

(Sound off for a while--talking back & forth)
M- Let's talk about the deck--

W-As I say, I made this set of stairs so I could get up to the roof because I had this idea that I could fly kites from the roof. I can't explain why I wanted to fly kites from the roof. But anyway, I got up there and I discovered Paul Beattie and you could get to his house over the roofs. And finally, the telescope--he said, "Take it." He didn't want it any more--he was going to move to Marin or up the coast or somewhere. And so I said well, I have to have a place to have this telescope so (another adjustment) just to back up a little bit, as I said at the beginning, we had the lower right-hand corner apartment and the McClures lived upstairs and Mike and Joanna decided they had to move. I don't remember the reason and so --at great peril to my financial condition, I rented theirs. So

Jay and I had two flats--two 7-room flats stacked on top of each other. And by having the upper part you could almost see the coast from there. And I thought, Gee, this is really great--I should get up on the roof and we could, you know, watch the ocean. That was my, you know--the illusion I had. And anyway, I built a set of stairs, up through the airway and you could go out on the roof of the airway and climb up these stairs up and you would be in the V made by the two roofs of the two apartments. And so I got some plywood and built a deck on three levels on one side of this big V. And I got some windows with glass in them and put a wall of windows to break the wind all away around the thing, as a kind of way of controlling the (noise) amount of wind. Anyway, this deck became again another center of social activities, not only that I could fly kites from it, I could set off fireworks. A this time I was building--the Christmas tree in the backyard of this place. And I had arranged these big bins--wooden bins that if--at that time there were steel cans for beer cans. I mean, there all aluminum now but at that time they were steel and you had a little can opener to open them. But they came in various sizes. There were 8 oz, 9 oz, 11 oz and then big ones. And they were different colors. A case of beer was $2, by the way, so we could afford, you know, to buy a case of beer very easily and then take it up on the deck and as the can became empty--the game was to throw them and get them in the right bin. That's down two stories, by the way, to where the bins were in the backyard.

Well, that building faces onto one the early high-rise apartments in North Beach--I'm sorry, not North Beach--Pacific Heights, and it's a very classy hotel that right down that looked right down on our little escapades. And so after about a month, you know, we had wild freedom of taking our clothes off and standing in the sun and romping--(A side stops)

(B side on audio starts after short recorded stuff off TV--only a couple of seconds)

looked right down on our little escapades. And so after about a month, you know, we had wild freedom of taking our clothes off and standing in the sun and romping around on this deck. The police showed up and the vice squad was going to shut us down. They had--the landlord was there, the police, the --a guy had taken some movies from the building and the cops played the movies-- and it was nothing--nothing, you know--Except here were people having a good time. And these people who lived in the high-rise just couldn't tolerate that. I mean, it just grated against them that these young people were having so much fun and they couldn't, you know, be part of it. Anyway, nothing came of it. I don't remember the guy's name but our landlord said "It's none of your business". I mean, he stood up to this--these people and they backed down, and we never heard another word, you know. So the festivities continued and we had about a party every weekend. It was the Friday afternoon party.

M-Wally, do you remember a party that you had, which wasn't on the weekend, and Les was trying to get your attention 'cause I had to go to work the next day, you know, I had a day job--you know, it was like Monday night and the Jass Band was playing real loud--and he kept yelling, "Be quiet" but no one could here him (laugh) and he got out and between the two things(places)--he didn't have anything on but he had a hammer (laugh)

W-Well, there was a fire escape up front and you could get from the upper apartment--did not have a wall through them--had a hole through the wall. The lower one did. But, usually the- all the social activities went on one the upper two floors because the lower floors had been converted into studios. I mean, they went through various stages. But, by this time "The Rose" had gotten so it couldn't be moved. And so the lower floors became the permanent studios, and we lived in the upper place and that's when and this was the opening to that roof part. And so there were some very elaborate parties -- The memories are kind of flooding back into my mind. Its almost overwhelming. But at the time, I mean, one of the high points of one of the parties--I think it was Jay's birthday--I made her a dress that had Christmas lights on it. This was back--these lights came from Italy, I mean, we have them now--you can see them in this room. But at--this was in 19--probably '61 or 2, the little tiny light bulbs were a rarity in the United States. And I had this string I got at an Italian supplier in North Beach. And I rigged it so it would run off a little battery and so here she had this black dress with Christmas lights all around it and on it and a little battery pack. And she wore this to the party and we would turn the lights out and she would dance. And here it was like a dancing Christmas tree. The high point of the evening was when she threw her birthday cake at me, and I went like that and it hit on the wall behind me. And I said, "It missed." And then I straightened up and fell right on top of my head. (Laugh) Well, ask me something else--

M-Do you remember Ed Moses, when he lived there--

W-Yes, he always was --Ed Moses was a very mysterious person at that time. He's still mysterious. But, I mean, he was always around but he didn't--he wasn't as party-loving as we, I think. Again, he was there and, you know, but he was always in sort of the background.

M-He was there with his wife and a couple of kids. And one time he got mad at Avilda, and according to Les, threw a chair out onto Fillmore Street.

W-Well, yeh, that did happen. There was an occasion when one of the windows fell out. I don't know if it was the same occasion but the wind blows pretty hard in that area, right off the Bay or off the ocean. And this is an old building. In fact, one of these days I have to go back there and see that place because it was amazing--I mean, I took at walls and you'd that the would have--I mean, the landlord would have just--the paint was that thick on the floor where Jay was working on--I mean, when we left there, they had to come in and practically rebuild the building. But, luckily, no one--we didn't get sued. I mean, you

know about moving the painting. We had to tear out the front of one of those windows and the Bekins came with their big forklift and took this 2-Ton thing out of the front of the building.

M-Well, the guy that ran that--there was a manager or a lawyer that managed the building may not have been the owner--he actually liked the idea that artists lived there and he kind-of kept the rents low there and let them do what they wanted. After he died, that's when things changed--this is what I understand.

W-Well, that may be--all I know is that when we --towards the end of our (laugh) of our --I mean, Jay and I were having our--you know, some personal problems but basically some of the stories we hear about Jay were not exaggerated. I mean, she could smoke three or four cigarettes, simultaneously. And she could put down a quart of brandy a day, and she could drink Italian coffee, interminably. But then--then the cigarettes she smoked were--were --the Giroux--you know, they come in a blue thing and they're French, I guess and they're like a cigar. And as I say, and then she was using white lead, which is a poison and we knew it and she knew it. Her hands were soaked in white lead and she smoking cigarettes and drinking brandy and staying up all night--working on the painting--I'm not saying she was carousing. And then, at that time I was nominally the supervisor of the evening school of all things. And so I worked (laugh)--I mean, it's hard for me to say that with a straight face--but my job was to kind of run things until 10 O'clock and then, you know, we went home. It was usually a little later for me to get home. And one night I came home and Jay was up on the 2nd story throwing --maybe this is where some of that--I mean, throwing things out the window, aiming at cars. (Laugh) And I said Jay, "You can't do that." And she said, "Oh, yes, I can." And she (laugh) and that led to our sort of leaving San Francisco. I mean, we escaped to Fairfax or somewhere.

M-Well, when I live there which was '62 to '64--we moved to New York and Bill Dubin--I never--we never saw Jay completely sober. (Um)*--she always seemed very nice, etc.*

W-Well, Jay was --I'm sure sooner or later she will get her just reward. At that time she was living sort of a double life in the sense that her father was a respectable medical doctor at Stanford Hospital. I mean, he taught,--he was a teacher in the School of Medicine and also he had his own practice. And Jay would go down there and we would visit this, you know, like for Thanksgiving. And I was --I represented a part of life that was not respected at Stanford--let's put it that way. And so I was continually being accused of being the, you know --of dragging her down to my depth. Only, it was never that way, I mean, you know, it was--she could live in two worlds simultaneously--Palo Alto and San Francisco. I mean--her father gave me a Cadillac because he thought we should have a nicer car (laugh). I mean, it had headlights that dimmed itself when it saw another car, I mean, at this time this was rare. You could push a button and the windows would go up and down. It had air conditioning. It had a radio that you could control with your foot. So I took my welding torch, and I cut the whole back out of the thing and made it into a pickup truck. I had the only registered Cadillac pickup truck in the world at that time. (laughing)

M-Where did you and Jay meet?

W-That was part of the contention, I mean. Here, her parents had sent her to Cal because Daddy had gone there. And--with much trepidation because they're little darling was going up there to with those, you know, to Berkeley where, when her father had gone there was a nice, staid university. But, by the time they--middle 40's and late 40's came along and Jay was a Freshman there, you know, things were starting to warm up. And so with great trepidation they sent their daughter off and she --it was fine. As an undergraduate--this is before I knew her so this is all hearsay but from good sources, she was the perfect student. All of the professors just loved her because she worked hard, she was serious--she was

talented, she was a romantic--she had European heritage. And at that time, you know, Hans Hoffman was practically running the place. And at least, what they remembered--he was only there for only a summer session but he--between Earl Loran and Cezanne and Hans Hoffman and his--the people who followed him, she got this kind of unique European kind of background in the arts. So the fact that she and I got together was just--wasn't understood by any of the people at Cal. But it's getting a little provincial. To tell you how we got together. The former owner of this place, Bill Morehouse, who was a local painter, was living in Berkeley. And he told me that he had met this woman that he thought I should meet. And she--at that particular time she was in Europe on a traveling grant. And I thought why would I want to meet this woman who is in Europe. Well, anyway, a couple of months later, Bill said to me, "she's back." And I said, "Well, that's nice, what's her address." And he gave me this address on Milvea, you know, I didn't know where the building is. You know, without telephoning or anything I just went over to this place. And I got out of my car and walk up to the door and I--and somebody said, "Hey you, down there." And I look up and here's Jay, hanging out the upstairs window. And she said, "Just bring it on in.", you know. And I said, "Bring what in." And I noticed there were a pile of one by twos leaning against the door. And so I just assumed that she meant bring in the one by twos. So I got them on my shoulder, walk in, walk up the stairs and, you know I say, here's your one by twos. And she said, "Okay, well here's your money." And she starts giving me this money and I said, "Well, you know, I don't know what I called her--young woman or whatever-- I'm not delivering the wood." Anyway, she said, "Well, then I'd better not give you the money." And I said, "Well, but--" I couldn't think of anything to say except I looked over and here was this refrigerator with the door open that was full of underwear. And all I could think to ask is, "Why do you put your underwear in the refrigerator." Well, within six months, we were married and she had moved to San Francisco to live with me.

M-Did she tell you why she put her underwear in the refrigerator?

(W-Probably)(Laughing)
But the irony--there is a kicker to this story. I mean, later I found out that all of the--Well see, they have this--the art department at the University has this traveling fellowship that's has always been --had, up to that moment, had always been given to a man to do the big-- do the grand tour--the continental grand tour. Every year, their most brightest male student would get this thing and travel to Europe. Well, her professors got together cause, I don't know for what reason--anyway they got together and they somehow managed to give Jay that fellowship. The first time a woman had ever had it in the history of the university and got her on the boat before anybody found out. That's how she got the name Jay--JAY. Because she could send back letters and sign checks and things with Jay and not Joanne, which was her name. And be non--whatever that word is and not give up her sexual identity. And so she spent this year in Europe and just, you know, produced a lot of work and, you know, the work now is being assembled and will be shown. But when she first got back, that's when I met her. And that's when I was introduced to Jay's work. I mean, I'd haul--I had to haul it around in my car cause it was on heavy cardboard and a pile this--was a couple of hundred pounds. You know, I feel like I've contributed to Western culture by just hauling this stuff.

Anyway, to make the real kicker to this story. Later, after I've got my degree at the Institute, I didn't want to go to work so I tried to go to graduate school because I had the

GI Bill so I went to San Francisco State. Now, San Francisco State is a very nice place but you wouldn't want to go there-- at least, at that time cause it was a teachers' college is what it amount to. But so I could get my checks, I had to enroll in this graduate thing and take education classes cause they didn't have a major in Art. But you could become a teacher with a special secondary or something. Anyway, I had a brief case, I wore a suit and a necktie and took the graduate record exam. I took the swimming test, I mean, I had shots, they were going to make a teacher out of me. And I went into this evaluation--you know,

you would walk into this room and this person would be sitting at a desk and they'd say, "Your tie's not straight. You've got to comb your hair better. You're fingernails are dirty. --you lisp--you don't speak clearly." I mean, they evaluated you to see if you were going to, you know, be a good teacher. Anyway, and I took classes like Educational Psychology and in one of these classes, we would sit around a table like this and we would-- before the professor arrived, we would sort of carry on and talk. Well, to my right was a nice lady who said that "You know I live in Berkeley and I commute over here but I understand you're in the art field and do you know a woman by the name of Jay DeFeo?" And this--I was married to her. (Laugh) And I said, "Well, yes, I've heard of her." And she said, "It's all, you know, the story in Berkeley that this San Francisco beatnik has stolen away Jay and taken her off as his sex slave to San Francisco. (Laugh) Well, I mean, I strung this along as far as I could and finally I told her. And it turned out that this nice woman was a close friend of Jay's and you can see the involvement of this, I mean, getting the other side of the story, literally because there was resentment by people in Berkeley that I had stolen away their honey and --and which I did. (laughing) I never quite got through that program, by the way. (laugh)--That was before the poetry workshop and all that.

M-There's another good story--you know, when they had that--"The Rose" thing (at the Art Institute)--the story about de Kooning--

W-Oh, I mean--that hap--whew--(M-That's a good story) Do you want me to relate it. (M-Yeh, I love that story) Because Jay and I were well ensconced in 2322 and she was well along with "The Rose" and a--I was again based on the assumption that everyone understands that I would go over to the Art Institute and fulfill this function of running this--it was called the evening and Saturday school. And one Saturday one of the teachers there in ceramics was Ron Nagle. That doesn't matter except-- I said to Ron, "Okay, we get off at 1 O'clock--we're having a few people over for a little party and do you want to go." And he said, "Sure." And we'll stop by and get Manual and Joan and bring them over or, you know, they'd come over in their car but we'll let them know we're having this party." So we drop in at Manual and Joan's, which they were living in North Beach. And we open the door and here is this--I mean here is Joan, Manual and this other person were rolling around in this bed. They were just drunk out of their minds to begin with and, you know, much flailing and carrying on and Manual says to me, "You got to help me get rid of this guy. He--He's after Joan." And I said, "What do you want us to do?" You know, this guy was big, you know, big guy sort of. "Well, we got to get rid of him. Why don't you take him over to your place." And I said, "Well, okay." I mean, you know, I didn't know what was happening. We were cold sober and here were these drunks. And so at that time, and I still have it by the way--I mean, I have this Austin Healy, open roadster car. We get this guy and we walk him downstairs and we

put him on the hump in the middle--between the two seats with the top down and, you know, Ron says to me, "You know, I think I recognize this guy, who is he?" And I say, "I don't know." And we take off from North Beach and we're going through the Broadway Tunnel and this guy stands up and says, "I'm Bill de Kooning!" And screams and just about fell out of the car. And I said, "Is he-" I mean, and we pull him back down and we get through the tunnel and we go along Broadway and make the turn on the left -- the left turn onto Fillmore and I said, "Do you think this guy really is Bill de Kooning?" And Ron said, "I don't know, you know, what are we going to do with him." Well, there turned out there was an all points bulletin--put out from--Bill de Kooning was visiting the West Coast--he had relatives out here and he had--they had had some sort of soiree and he had disappeared--down the Peninsula and how he had gotten up to San Francisco and found Joan and Manual, I've no idea. And all he was saying is, "Get me a woman". You know, that was all he would say, "Get me a woman." And so here we had this drunk and here was this party going on, you know this, complete bedlam. And we walk in with this guy and Jay says "That's--you've got Bill de Kooning there--is he--did he come to my party." (laugh) And he says, "Get me a woman", screaming at the top of his mouth and so, you know, to calm him down, we said,

let's put him in the studio, you know, cause here was this party going on and this guy was this complete drunk. And so we take him and put him in this chair, facing "The Rose", which is pretty far along at this time. This is probably '62 or 3 or 4. And he --he sat there for four hours and didn't move, just looking at that painting. And when the party was over, his relatives came and picked him up and he didn't say a word the whole time. I mean, you know, he just sat there, mesmerized. Later, we heard that he had asked where he was, what he was doing and was he in New York. He thought he was in New York because he didn't think that anyone on the West Coast could make a painting like that. So I mean, it was a mixed compliment. But that was basically what happened.

M-There was another story when Jay and you were in that Sixteen Americans Show--everybody who was in it was mostly from New York and you could have went because you had the tickets but you gave them away--let's talk about that--

W-Well, I mean, it was just as simple as, you know--I was naive and Jay was even more so. And the idea of--we always thought Dorothy Miller was a figment of our imagination. This woman had come and selected this work and then she left. And then we said, well that was interesting, I mean I wonder what that lady--it wasn't even Miss Miller--About six months later, this--these letters began arriving, saying on such and such a date the packers will arrive and you should have this stuff all ready to be crated and we'll get it on the road and all this. And then people would come and talk to us and Jay said, "Well, maybe there's something to this--maybe this person was a real person." And Dorothy Miller--maybe--I mean we'd never heard of her--I mean I'd never heard her. And--but that doesn't mean anything, I mean, just means how out it we were. But later we get a letter from her saying, "Well, we expect to see you on such and such a date and you'll be flying into New York on whatever day and included a couple of First Class -- and we just ignored it. Actually, we gave them away to another couple who were going back to New York and they went to the opening and said they were us or whatever the English--that they were us--that they were we. And that's it, --it did happen, I mean, we were so--Well, of course, I wouldn't go there now either so it doesn't really matter. Actually, we were against New Yorkers. I mean, by that time, I think I sensed that things

really didn't happen the way all of the art history books related them, I mean, about contemporary artists. Because, you know, Jackson Pollock was a Californian. But when you talk to a New York person, you wouldn't--you don't get that sense, I mean, Jackson--(M-He really had that Western sensibility) exactly and Pollock--Pollock Pines is --that's his family. And he was brought up in Los Angeles and in Northern California. But it doesn't matter--and also in Nevada but there is a --I think by that time we had sensed that --that we were on the outskirts and something was going on in New York but there was also some things going on in San Francisco. And it was like two different worlds. It was sort of like if, you know, if the discovery of the atom bomb was not any --didn't happen in any particular place but it happened simultaneously in several places. And it took the United States, you know, and its production ability to make it a viable thing. But the discovery was done in Tokyo, Paris, Rome, Schnectedy, and Russia--almost simultaneously by a group of people. And I think it was --it was sort of like that. But we did sense that the New Yorkers and people, who were of the media didn't see that way. It doesn't matter but see I have an opportunity here to express this other side because as you said earlier, I mean, we had happenings long before New York even used the word. We had action painting that subsequently became abstract expressionist. I mean, I could list--George Stillman, who I thought was a great painter but see he's completely--nobody knows who he is. His early works preceded--you know they were in the early 40's, and they were as contemporary or as avant-garde as anything that New York produced. But because they didn't have the media (M-or the writers) they're not known. But they did exist --that's the important thing. (M-It was a small group--the only people that knew about it--very underground) It was a very small group, yeh, that's right.

M-But then, there was another aspect that came out of that underground thing, is the fact that commercial stuff that went on in New York very quick, didn't ever happen here--maybe a little bit down in LA--

W-But it really doesn't matter. I mean, the important thing that people do what they do and the results--I mean, they get their just reward. (Laugh) I think.

M-Well, in the long run, yeah, while some remain always obscure.

W-Well, I like the idea that a person can do what they like to do. If I have a sense of what it is to be an American. I mean, we have a lot of failings and a lot of weaknesses and we do really strange stuff--it allows people to do what they if they can survive. And survival was something that that whole generation had. I mean, everybody knew how to put a penny in the fuse box, if you know what I mean. I mean its a way--if PG&E shuts off your gas, everybody knew how to turn it back on. And, you know, I'm not giving away any secrets. There are ways of stopping an electric meter. Everybody in San Francisco knew how to do it. I'm amazed that PG&E survived. (Laugh) But the whole--I mean as I've got you here, I might as well pen you down. This business of being beat. See I don't --I don't really think that was what--how people felt. I think that was part of the media's way of explaining what was going. Now people were into Zen Buddhism and a lot of people were very serious about their --exploring their minds and that --all of that but I think basically they were doing what they wanted to do. And we have that --and followed through instead, of you know, just doing it on weekends and working at the

bank. Because, when I first met Allen Ginsberg he worked at the Bank of America and wore a suit (M-white shirt) yeh, but soon as he decided he was going to be a poet, he put aside that suit and tie and never went back to it. And that--I think that--that's important. A person can make a decision and then despite, the country, the family, whatever, you can do what you want and you won't starve.

M-You could figure a way to do with you life what you want to do without making the compromises you might feel you have to make--

W-Exactly, you know, we could--anybody can sell out. (Laugh)

M-Well, like Les said when he knew he was dying of cancer, "Well, at least I didn't waste 40 years working in an office."

W-Well, I had some pretty good role models, you know, along--you know, David Park, when he was in the hospital. I mean, you know, he had cancer and he would lay there and draw. (breathing) And that, you know, that kind of story sounds like somebody wrote it for Hollywood or something but when you see somebody do it, that's impressive. Well, I think I'm finished--

3/4/98 - Excepts on audio tape only--taken from handheld camera shots (Wally in his studio and driving his Austin-Healy out into his yard)--other comments made were not relevant to the subject of the documentary)

M- question about the New Mission Gallery

W-Well, it fits in with our earlier discussion of the flag painting that John Coplans. He was at town in that period and the New Mission was run--as far as I know the people who ran it are still with us. Ummmm--(Louis Cervantes) Exactly, Cervantes--Louis Cervantes and he had a lady friend who was--I'll (Sue Ann from Texas) Laugh. (Me) I see them as a couple. I mean, here was Louis and then this--his blonde girlfriend and they, you know, rented this store front on Mission Street and had a series of exhibitions. I remember that the show I had --the --you had to be 21 to go in. (laugh) And the series of drawings that I told you about was in an alcove with a beaded screen and it said, "No minors allowed." And caused--actually we had a great opening. Because I bought a case of gin and we made one giant martini with Joan Brown's help. I mean, she had a martini glass that was 2 ft in diameter and stood about 3 ft. off the ground and we poured all of these gin into this thing--I'm sure it held 4 gallons, at least, and we had big olives (laugh). Manual made some fake olives cause he was making edible things at that time. And big skewers on the olives. And everybody drank right out of the big martini glass, with their hands and later they were just slurping it like--you know, let's see if we can, you can --what do you do for apples--you dunk (laugh)they were dunking for ice cubes. It was quite a show. And it almost got on Channel 5. I mean, the guy came down and they had cameras all set up. And he lifted the beaded screen and saw what the work was and got onto the phone and said to his boss, "We can't get--we can't shoot this stuff." That was about the period when "Howl" was being published and all the anti-pornographic stuff was going--there was court cases. They were trying to put--who's that comedian (M-Lenny Bruce) Lenny Bruce. He was our touchstone at that time and his trial was going and everybody in San Francisco, you know, the bars--everybody was trying to be as straight as possible.

M-Do you remember another opening where a sculptor knocked out Sue Ann?

W-Doesn't ring a bell.

M -I wasn't there--just heard about it--got out of control--

W-There was a time when somebody got locked in a bathroom and broke the door down but that's-- I mean, too complicated a story. (laughing) Just too complicated. Anyway, it would drag some of my friends in. (laugh)

M-Louis Cervantes and Sue Ann?

W--almost said her name. In fact, I saw her name. She's an exhibiting painter in the city cause I saw her name fairly recently.

M-If you think of it, tell me--(W-I'm sorry)

M-I never knew it.

W-Is Louis still around?

M-I don't know--Carlos Villa--wasn't he part of that gallery at one time?

(Wally was unsure but thought he was)

Wally starts up his car and drives the Austin-Healy into yard -

W-(engine noise) British racing green and it was made in 1954--4 cylinder engine and was one the first--now the MG was, you know, the first but this was sort of the second most popular one. I saw it in a catalog when I was in Korea and I said I've got to have one of those. So when I got back, I bought it. I've driven it (me) a 187,000 miles. (noise)

*M-Do you drive it very much now--(*W--in the summer) *In the summer, yeah, cause it has no top*

W--that's why I wanted to bring it out so I could dry it out because it gets damp in there--everything is rusting. But its--I mean, its dependable. I kind of like it --it looks like it aged.

M-They're fun cars to drive

W-Yeah! (Engine off) I mean I was going to get a MG which was a 1949 MG but there just wasn't any--had big wire wheels in the back big wire wheels. This one was made for racing

M-How fast would it go.

W-Well, I had this one at 110 once and it had a red line--the speedometer goes to 120 and I don't doubt it. (laugh) I mean it scared me at 110.

M-you don't have to lay down in these like some of those

W-(laugh)--Well, it's pretty low and your legs are straight out in front of you and so your feet are right next to the engine. (M-great windshield)

Yeh, the windshield, you can raise it. This is its--this is its so-called racing position which means you have to wear goggles when you're (M-Yeah because bugs fly in your eyes) driving it, yeh.

M-You didn't ever try to race it--

W-No, I went a 110 at the flats--mud flats.

M- Question about Von Dutch (Kenneth Howard) (talking back & forth about science fiction writer--Wally mistook my question on Von Dutch--

M-The Von Dutch who I was thinking of was this guy who did car stripping--Von Dutch Holland

W-Oh, Oh--I misunderstood you--That story is completely true. I lived across the street from a drive in East Pasadena and he and his fellow (laugh) hot rodders met there every night. But see they were--he was a little older than I, at least, it seemed that way because

they had cars and I think, I was driving a motorcycle at the time. And so all I could do is go over and have a chili-size --I don't know if that means anything (M-it does, chili with--) and sit next to these guys (M--just say the name Von Dutch, etc.)--that part of it is sort of myth and I wish I could, you know, tell you started that myth but as I say, I was a younger guy and the idea of talking to Dutch would be like me talking to the Pope. You know, say, "Hi, Pope". It wasn't that way--these guys were tough, I mean, from my view point. And they lived in Rosemead (laugh) that was the roughest part of Los Angeles--Los Angeles County at the time. And they didn't go to school. They spent most of their time in cars. And when I say car that meant taking a Model T Ford from 1907, a roadster body

and putting a gigantic Cadillac engine in it and then they would turn it over to Dutch who would then sandblast the body, get every piece of rust and then fill it in with lead, not bondo, so that this body would be re-created. And then as I say, here they would have a 400 horsepower engine with a Model T Roadster body that was about--and it was just about as high as this car. I mean, they were completely modified and then they would take these out to the dry lakes for racing but they were used socially. That's why I say, I mean, the Drive In--about 9 o'clock all of these roadsters would come roaring down Colorado Ave. (Blvd) and pull into this Drive In and the Drive In had girls with skates on--they had little skates with little skirts. And they had little things that clamped on the side of your--you had to have an open car--a tray. And you could just sit in your car or on your car. Everybody stuck as close to your car as possible because they were very protective of them. (laugh) That's why I was in awe of these people because if you scratched their car, they'd probably do you in. And if you cut one of them off--and they didn't like motorcyclists anyway. But I do understand--I mean, see this car has never been pinstriped but that was a high art at that time in Southern California. And it had to do with all the swirls and things and if you look at some of my early drawings, spirals and all that stuff, is derivative of it. But I wished I could say, you know, that I could slap him on the back and say what a great guy you are. But all I know is what I sort of heard while sitting eating my chili size.

M-The thing that I had heard about him was that if you brought him a car to stripe--you would bring the car in and leave it there. He didn't really tell you how much it would cost or anything--you just left it there. You didn't tell him what to do. He did whatever he felt was the right thing to do. He did the job and when it was finally ready--which took him forever--you'd bring (W-and you didn't dare call up and ask when it was going to be ready*) yeh, right --you didn't hassle him or push him into when it was going to be ready--when it was finally ready, you brought over some booze and then he would give you a price which it would be not very much, I guess--* (W-And those kind of myths arose, its amazing) *--and incidentally, he died very penniless in poverty in Santa Paula* (W- I'm sure) *--really on his uppers, so to speak--but the myth--*

W-Seriously, I wish I had a better story to tell you but he was one of those--He ranked right along with Paul Klee at that time for me. But there were a whole lot of people in that category. There were people who did engines, and there were people who did--knew how to re-spoke a wire wheel. These were all celebrated individuals in Southern California, who could do something so well that money was not even an object --it wasn't a part of the process.

M-Well, It wasn't important to them either.

W-That's right. They could do something that was unique and they appreciated and obviously the people around them appreciated it.

M-They liked the process of doing it too --that was the other thing.

W-And I'm sure that the process continues and I see "Rods" driving by once in a while now on the highway and the same kind of person is--is usually driving them. They tend to get a little more mature now but there are some younger people who are building hot rods again in Santa Rosa. I mean, they want them for the--it's almost sort of the social--a car that you can't buy (laugh)you have to make it. Or if you're a rich man's son, you can other people make it for you, you know. (Laugh) But the roots of hot rods is really Americana. In the sense that in 20s and 30s you could get a Model T Ford for just moving it. I mean, people would give them to you just to get rid of them. And people got Model T Fords and they wanted them to faster. (M-I had a girlfriend who had a Model A) Well, a Model A--that was the next step and a lot of Model A's became hot rods. I had a--this is real bragging on my part--I mean, my first hot rod was a Model T that had a Model T engine in

it but it had what was known at the time as a rajo head, which meant that it was a overhead valve addition which means it was the equivalent of the engine in this car. And this was in a car that was made in 1909. Again, that went 97 miles a hour--one of the fastest Model Ts in Southern California. I almost hold a record. (M-You raced it then.) Then I got snookered into motorcycles--Harley Davidson. Its the classic story--the 1934 Harley Davidson. Then I went to a 1929 Harley Davidson and this was in the 40's. Here I am, driving these vintage automobiles and cars. (laugh) (talking back & forth)