

California State Archives  
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

**CATHIE WRIGHT**

California State Assemblywoman, 1981-1992  
California State Senator, 1993-2000

December 20, 2001, March 7, 21, April 4, May 2, 16, 30, June 6, 2002  
Simi Valley, California

By Susan Douglass Yates  
Oral History Program  
University of California, Los Angeles

## RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None.

## LITERARY RIGHTS AND QUOTATION

This manuscript is hereby made available for research purposes only. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the California State Archivist or the Head, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to:

California State Archives  
1020 O Street, Room 130  
Sacramento, CA 94814

or

Department of Special Collections  
Charles E. Young Research Library  
P.O. Box 951575  
UCLA  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1575

The request should include identification of the specific passages and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Cathie Wright, Oral History Interview, Conducted 2001 and 2002 by Susan Douglass Yates, UCLA Oral History Program, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program.



SECRETARY OF STATE  
**KEVIN SHELLEY**  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

**PREFACE**

On September 25, 1985, Governor George Deukmejian signed into law A.B. 2104 (Chapter 965 of the Statutes of 1985). This legislation established, under the administration of the California State Archives, a State Government Oral History Program "to provide through the use of oral history a continuing documentation of state policy development as reflected in California's legislative and executive history."

The following interview is one of a series of oral histories undertaken for inclusion in the state program. These interviews offer insights into the actual workings of both the legislative and executive processes and policy mechanisms. They also offer an increased understanding of the men and women who create legislation and implement state policy. Further, they provide an overview of issue development in California state government and of how both the legislative and executive branches of government deal with issues and problems facing the state.

Interviewees are chosen primarily on the basis of their contributions to and influence on the policy process of the state of California. They include members of the legislative and executive branches of the state government as well as legislative staff, advocates, members of the media, and other people who played significant roles in specific issue areas of major and continuing importance to California.

By authorizing the California State Archives to work cooperatively with oral history units at California colleges and universities to conduct interviews, this program is structured to take advantage of the resources and expertise in oral history available through California's several institutionally based programs.

Participating as cooperation institutions in the State Government Oral History Program are:

Oral History Program  
History Department  
California State University, Fullerton

Oral History Program  
Center for California Studies  
California State University, Sacramento

Oral History Program  
Claremont Graduate School

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

Oral History Program  
University of California, Los Angeles

The establishment of the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program marks one of the most significant commitments made by any state toward the preservation and documentation of its governmental history. It supplements the often fragmentary historical written record by adding an organized primary source, enriching the historical information available on given topics and allowing for more thorough historical analysis. As such, the program, through the preservation and publication of interviews such as the one which follows, will be of lasting value to current and future generations of scholars, citizens, and leaders.

John F. Burns  
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME 1

INTERVIEW HISTORY . . . . . i

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY . . . . . iii

SESSION 1, December 20, 2001

[Tape 1, Side A] . . . . . 1

Family background—Mother, Catherine Marie Butler—Father, Alfred Robert Marianelli—Growing up in Old Forge, Pennsylvania—Coping with the Great Depression—Ethnic and social make-up of Old Forge—Experiences at school and memorable teachers—Love for math—Parents’ influences on Wright—More on growing up in Old Forge—Politics and economy in Old Forge—First experience of unions—Plans for college and career—More on memorable teachers—Pearl Harbor and World War II.

[Tape 1, Side B] . . . . . 31

More on World War II—Business classes in college—Importance to family of Wright getting a job—More on business classes in college—First job, as bookkeeper at Carlson and Stender Brothers lumber company—Job at Trane company—Wright quits job at the Trane company when asked to train men for jobs she wanted—Job at Acme Fast Freight Company—First experience joining a union.

SESSION 2, March 7, 2002

[Tape 2, Side A] . . . . . 39

More on job at Carlson and Stender Brothers lumber company—More on experience at the Trane company—Wright’s life throughout her twenties revolves around work and home—More on quitting Trane—Differs with

mother about her job—More on job at Acme Fast Freight—More on joining a union—Working conditions at Acme Fast Freight—First visit to California—Decides to make a trial run of living and working in Los Angeles—Concerns about lodging in Los Angeles—Quickly finds job with Superior Oil—Enjoys working conditions at Superior Oil—Finds a place to live—Enjoys life in Los Angeles—Quits job at Acme Fast Freight to move to Los Angeles.

[Tape 2, Side B] . . . . . 70

More on quitting Acme Fast Freight—More on life in Los Angeles—Meets future husband Victor O. Wright—Courtship—Wright loses job when Superior Oil closes its office in Los Angeles—Gets job with a mutual funds company—Her family’s reaction to her decision to get married—Wright’s wedding plans—Plans to move to Glendale after marriage—The Wright’s marry at Mission San Luis Rey.

SESSION 3, March 21, 2002

[Tape 3, Side A] . . . . . 98

More on move to Glendale—Birth of daughter Victoria Wright—Husband Vic Wright loses job soon after wedding—Wright looks for work while pregnant—Buying a home in Simi Valley—Vic Wright gets job closer to home—Simi Valley civic life—Wright attends civic meetings—History of Wright’s interest in politics—Dissatisfied with the performance of the Simi Valley City Council, Wright makes an unsuccessful run for the council in 1972—After losing in the 1974 and 1976 campaigns for the city council, Wright decides not to run again—In 1978 Wright is persuaded by businessmen to run again for the city council—Strategies in the 1978 campaign—Wright wins the 1978 election to the Simi Valley City Council.

[Tape 3, Side B] . . . . . 127

Proposition 13 and Simi Valley property taxes—Family problems result in Wright getting a job with a cable company—More on Prop. 13 and Simi Valley property taxes—Effect of Prop. 13 on local government—Simi Valley mayor and vice mayor are recalled in 1979—Wright becomes mayor of Simi Valley—Conflicts on the Simi Valley City Council—Wright changes party affiliation from Democrat to Republican in 1976—Differences between Republican women and Democrat women—Changes in campaign practices over time—More on

Wright changing her party affiliation—Interest in fiscal responsibility—Support for women from Republicans versus support from Democrats—More on the recall election of 1979—Wright as mayor makes changes in Simi Valley government personnel—Wright on campaign promises—Style of leadership in office—More on changes in government personnel.

SESSION 4, April 4, 2002

[Tape 4, Side A] . . . . . 152

More on Wright changing her party affiliation—Watergate—Republicans versus Democrats—The role of family in Wright’s political beliefs—The role of taxes and economic security in Wright’s political beliefs—The costs to government of untreated social problems—More on differences between Republican women and Democratic women—More on Prop. 13—Subsequent initiatives—Manipulating the system through initiatives and election campaigns—The Bamieh-Totten campaign for district attorney in Ventura County—More on the effects of Prop. 13 on local government—Experience working with budgets on the Simi Valley City Council—Decision to run for the Thirty-seventh Assembly District—Vic Wright’s attitude to Wright’s running.

[Tape 4, Side B] . . . . . 179

More on decision to run—Campaign strategy for the primary—Challenges with funding the campaign—The Republican Caucus does not provide support for Wright’s campaign—More on challenges with funding the campaign—Role in the campaign of local Republican women—Role in the campaign of Wright’s husband and daughter—More on the Republican Caucus’s lack of support—Howard L. Berman supports Wright’s opponent Arline M. Matthews—The Thirty-seventh Assembly District—Final days of campaign—Election night and reaction to winning the election—Hiring staff.

SESSION 5, May 2, 2002

[Tape 5, Side A] . . . . . 210

First weeks in office—Orientation meeting for assembly freshmen—Leadership of the Republican Caucus—Wright’s early political alliances in Sacramento—The Women’s Caucus—Child care facility insurance bill, A.B. 929 (1985)—The Women’s Caucus becomes

more partisan in the late 1980s—Wright turns her back on the Women’s Caucus when they do not support Governor Wilson’s appointment of Marian Bergeson for superintendent of public instruction—Importance of the women’s bloc vote—Republican involvement in the struggle between Leo T. McCarthy and Howard L. Berman for Speaker of the Assembly—More on Howard L. Berman support of Wright’s opponent Arline M. Matthews in the 1980 assembly election—Republican involvement in the struggle between Howard L. Berman and Willie L. Brown Jr. for Speaker of the Assembly.

[Tape 5, Side B] . . . . . 237

Willie Brown makes concessions to the Republican Caucus in exchange for their support—Wright’s committee assignments—Brown’s concessions on committee assignments, reapportionment, and fair distribution of dollars for office maintenance—The reapportionment deal with Brown leads to unusual boundary changes in some districts—Wright’s experience with the Criminal Justice Committee and the Local Government Committee—More on the effects of Prop. 13 on local government—Wright carries legislation for the California Correctional Peace Officers, A.B. 1987 (1982)—Wright’s work with the Commission on Child Support Development and Enforcement—Wright’s 1982 campaign for re-election to the Thirty-seventh Assembly District—Troubles during the election with the Fair Political Practices Commission—Financing and running the 1982 campaign—Husband Vic Wright’s final illness.

[Tape 6, Side A] . . . . . 268

Vic Wright’s bypass surgery, and subsequent decline and death—Wright returns to campaigning after husband’s death.

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer:

Susan Douglass Yates  
Senior Writer, UCLA Oral History Program  
B.A., University of California, Santa Cruz [History]  
M.A., California State University, Sacramento [History]

### Interview Time and Place:

December 20, 2001  
Campaign headquarters for Ron Bamieh, Simi Valley, California  
Session of one hour

March 7, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and one-half hours

March 21, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and one-half hours

April 4, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and one-half hours

May 2, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and three-quarter hours

May 16, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of two hours

May 30, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and one-half hours

June 6, 2002  
Wright's home in Simi Valley, California  
Session of one and three-quarter hours

## Editing

Victoria Simmons, editor, UCLA Oral History Program, checked the verbatim manuscript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spellings, and with the interviewer verified proper names. Insertions by the editor are bracketed. Simmons prepared the table of contents. Yates prepared the biographical summary and interview history.

Wright reviewed the edited transcript and returned it with only minor corrections.

## Interview Preparation

In preparing for the interview, Yates conducted research in the *California Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Statement of Vote*, *Assembly Final History*, *Senate Final History*, and several State Government Oral History Program interviews. Yates also consulted news clippings and Wright's papers deposited at the California State Archives.

## Papers

Wright's papers are deposited at the California State Archives, and are catalogued as the Cathie Wright papers, 1981-2000.

## Tapes and Interview Records

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives at UCLA along with the records relating to the interview. Master tapes are preserved at the California State Archives.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Cathie Marianelli Wright was born in Old Forge, Pennsylvania, May 18, 1929. She was raised and educated in Old Forge, graduating from Old Forge High School in 1947. Wright attended Scranton Lackawanna Business College, completing a degree in accounting in 1949.

After completing her degree Wright began working at Carlson and Stender Brothers, a lumber company located in Scranton. She then worked at the Trane company and Acme Fast Freight, also located in the area. In 1962 she moved to Los Angeles and obtained a job in the accounting department at Superior Oil Company. Soon thereafter she met her future husband, Victor Wright. After the birth of her daughter Victoria in 1964, Wright and her husband moved to Simi Valley. She quickly developed an interest in local politics when she became involved with the Simi Valley cityhood campaign, and after incorporation occurred in 1969 attended all Simi Valley City Council meetings. She first ran for public office hoping to obtain a seat on the city council in 1972. She ran for the city council two more times, in 1974 and 1976, again losing by a slim margin. After the 1976 election, Wright, a member of the Democratic party changed her affiliation to the Republican party. She ran again for the city council in 1978, this time successfully, and served as mayor from 1979 to 1980.

In 1980 an opportunity to run for state office occurred and she was elected to the Thirty-seventh Assembly District. During her tenure in the assembly, Wright served as vice chair of the Criminal Justice Committee, the Hazardous Materials Committee, the Utilities and Commerce Committee, and Ways and Means. Appointed to the Commission on the Status of Women in 1983, Wright served on the commission until 1990. She was also appointed to the Commission on Child Support Development and Enforcement in 1983.

In 1992 Wright won election to the Nineteenth Senate District seat. She served as chair of the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, and vice chair of the Public Employment and Retirement, Toxics and Public Safety Management, Budget and Fiscal Review, and Environmental Quality committees. In her first term in the senate, Wright decided to run for Lieutenant Governor. She won the Republican primary but lost in the general election. Wright left the senate under term limits in 2000.

While serving in the assembly Wright became interested in children's issue, particularly children who were ending up in the criminal justice system. This led to carrying legislation, which passed in 1984, establishing a pilot project in Ventura to help children with mental or emotional problems. Known as the children's Systems of Care, Wright successfully carried legislation which expanded the program and also established a similar program for adults.

Since leaving office, Wright has devoted her time to directing her former constituents to the proper departments of state government with their problems, consulting in some local races, and most of all to her family.

[Session 1, December 20, 2001]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

YATES: Thanks for meeting with me. I'm here, well, not at your home, where we originally planned to meet, but I'm here interviewing Cathie Wright for the State Government [Oral History Program]. And first of all, as I was mentioning to you, we'd like to start at the beginning. So maybe you could tell me when and where you were born.

WRIGHT: It was May 18, 1929, at one o'clock in the afternoon, and it was a home birth, and the place was Old Forge, Pennsylvania, a small mining town between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre.

YATES: For the record, what's your maiden name?

WRIGHT: Marianelli.

YATES: OK. And how about brothers and sisters? Do you have siblings?

WRIGHT: I have one brother [Alfred "Rusty" R. Marianelli] born ten years after I was. He was born on August 22, 1939.

YATES: OK. So tell me a little bit about growing up in Old Forge, Pennsylvania.

WRIGHT: It was an interesting process as I look back on it, for the simple reason that my mother was English-Irish and because of the fact that she had left home

when she was twelve to go to work, and it was as a downstairs maid in a very wealthy home in Scranton and therefore she could live on the premises. So it was a complete break with her family, because her mother [Annetta Butler Gaylets] had been married a second time, and so the father that was alive at that point in time in my mother's life was not her own father but rather a stepfather [Andrew Gaylets] and they were not allowed to sit down at a meal. There were the three of them, my mother and her brother [Alfred Butler] and her other sister [Mary Butler Lane]. They weren't allowed to sit down at their meals. They had to stand for their meals and at the holidays was the only time they got an egg for breakfast, and it was a little difficult. So she was both what I would call strict but also very loving and giving. If she said you were going to get spanked you got spanked, and if she said you were going to get a present you got a present. And she really made the sacrifice in the home, because home and family was everything to her.

My father, on the other hand, was one of five and he was the baby, the youngest, in an Italian family where his mother was his sole support until he was old enough to go to work. And of course he went to work when he was ten years old.

YATES Oh, gee. And what did he do?

WRIGHT: Everything. My father drove a truck—of course not at the age of ten. He helped on some farms. He painted. He did carpenter work. He was very

good with his hands. I honestly believe that if he had gotten a full education beyond the fifth grade, which is what he had. . . . By the way, my mother, eighth grade was her total formal education.

But my father, he could just look at a picture and he could sketch it out and draw it. He would see something and he could take a saw and he could cut the forms. He was great for making extra money at making those decorative shelves for homes. He also created, which I still remember and wish I had, to keep. . . . He made six animals, starting with an elephant. Maybe that tells you why I ended up being a Republican, I don't know. [Laughter] But he made an elephant, he made a camel, he made a rhinoceros, he made a monkey, and he made a lion. And he carved them out of wood, and then he jigsawed them so that they could be put together, and then he had a little train-type thing made with pegs, put them on that, and you could pull them around the house. He did that. Mostly those are the things that he gave away. He didn't charge to make them, not anything dealing with children.

YATES: Now, you mentioned your mother went to work for this family in Scranton.

Did your mother grow up in Scranton?

WRIGHT: No.

YATES: Where was she from?

WRIGHT: She was born in England.

YATES: Oh, OK. So she immigrated, then.

WRIGHT: Well, my uncle was the oldest, then there was my mother and then there was my aunt. My aunt was ten months old when they came to the United States.

YATES: OK. And where did they settle?

WRIGHT: And they settled in Old Forge.

YATES: They did. And now where was your father from?

WRIGHT: My father? Italy. Romano-Toscana. My grandfather was Romano, my grandmother was Toscana.

YATES: And how did he end up coming over?

WRIGHT: He was the last one, and of course my father was born here in the United States. Yes. The first four children were born in Italy.

YATES: OK, and he was born in the U.S.

WRIGHT: Yeah, he was the baby and he was born in the United States. So he was born in Old Forge.

YATES: And for the record, what are your parents' names?

WRIGHT: My mother's name was Catherine Marie Butler. My father's name was Alfredo or Alfred Robert Marianelli.

YATES: Well, how did your parents meet?

WRIGHT: My father saw my mother—in such a small town—and he just liked her, because he was a little bit of a flirt, which is probably an Italian custom, and they went together for five years and then they were married on the sixth of June in 1928.

YATES: And do you remember how old they were when they got married?

WRIGHT: Yes, because my mother was exactly twenty years older than I was, so she was nineteen and he was twenty-three. He was four years older than my mother.

YATES: OK. And so you're the oldest, you said.

WRIGHT: Yes—my brother and me.

YATES: And you have a younger brother.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Ten years between us.

YATES: So what was it like growing up in Old Forge?

WRIGHT: Well, it was interesting, because one thing my mother used to always say, she used to say we were poor people. And I hated the term poor people because I didn't think I was poor, and the reason was that when we started school—of course we didn't have kindergarten, so it was first grade—I had five outfits. Five days of the week and I had five outfits, and I always had what they called the Mary Jane shoes.

YATES: Uh-huh. They're back in style.

WRIGHT: Yeah. That was [what] I would wear for good, and then when I went to school that pair that I had been wearing for good I basically wore for school, and then I would get another pair of Mary Janes. Of course, when I got older I was able to pick out. . . . Cadets once, with the buckle on the side. I remember that I was quite thrilled, because it was different than Mary Janes,

wearing them to school.

YATES: Well, describe a little bit what home life was like. You talked a little bit about your dad and his talents, but why don't you talk a little bit about . . .

WRIGHT: My mother's talents?

YATES: What it was like.

WRIGHT: At home?

YATES: Yeah.

WRIGHT: My mother could make a meal out of nothing. People say I'm a good cook. I would think it was basically her training, although the kitchen was her domain and she really didn't like you getting involved in the kitchen.

YATES: Oh, really?

[Interruption]

WRIGHT: Yeah. My father never made more than \$65 a week his whole life. That was his top pay. My mother would order the roast on Sunday. And you didn't order it by weight, you ordered it by price. She had ninety-nine cents, so that roast for ninety-nine cents was four meals in our home. For example, if she had gotten veal, which was not as costly as steak or the beef was. . . . She'd get a roast of veal, and we'd have the roast and we'd have our potatoes and vegetables and she always made a dessert. There was always some kind of dessert on Sunday. Then on Monday we would have whatever was left over from Sunday's dinner. On Tuesday she would make maybe pot pie, or she

made something that I always loved, and it probably sounds crazy, but she would make waffles and she sliced the veal and put the slices on the waffle and then she'd put hot gravy over it, and then we'd have a vegetable or something like that and that would be another meal. And of course one night a week we had to have pasta for my father or it would have been a horrible thing. Sometimes we had pasta two nights a week, depending, especially if we had chicken, because she could make sauce out of chicken and he was crazy about the chicken sauce—or rather everyone was. When we had the sausage, she put that into it, but that was special occasions [that] we had our sauce made with sausage.

YATES: Now, I'm thinking about the timing. You were born in 1929 and so . . .

WRIGHT: My father said I caused the stock market crash.

YATES: That was my next question, is the Great Depression. How do you think that influenced you?

WRIGHT: My father had a difficult time at that time to . . . Because he always looked very young. Even when my father died he did not look his age. My father was seventy-nine when he died, but he looked like he was about forty or fifty. And so consequently, in these [places] where he would go for work, they wouldn't want to hire him because they were more interested, if they were doing any hiring at all, in hiring men that were married, with families. And when they found out that he was married and had a family it made a little bit

of difference, but it was just that in some instances they didn't believe him and so for a while they had to go back and live in his homestead with my grandmother [Rose Mary Marianelli].

YATES: In Old Forge?

WRIGHT: In Old Forge. Everything was Old Forge. I didn't know there was anyplace [else]. Truthfully, growing up, I didn't know there was another president besides Franklin Delano Roosevelt, because most of my young life that's who was the president.

YATES: I want to come back to that. Out of curiosity, what was the population of Old Forge? Was it a small town?

WRIGHT: Well, I said when I left town. . . . At that particular point in time it was something like 8,200 people and I always said it was 8,199 because I left.

YATES: So it's small.

WRIGHT: It was a small town and people just stayed. It was families. If you happened to have been fortunate to have owned a home. . . . And especially it was the daughters, if the daughter got married they would build on to the house. They would give her a kitchen and a living room. Sometimes not even a kitchen, just a living room and the bedroom, because they'd all cook in the same kitchen. But she would then have the opportunity, because then when the parents died it was usually the oldest one who took. . . .

YATES: Took over the home.

WRIGHT: Took over the homestead.

YATES: So it sounds like your parents were renting. Is that basically true?

WRIGHT: Yeah, rented until I was sixteen. They were renters until I was sixteen and then my uncle, who was older than my father, had this business that my dad was in, working with him. My dad then was a mechanic for junk cars. My uncle was called Doc, although his name was Emilio [Marianelli]. He was called Doc because he could put his ear to the car and he'd listen to it and he could tell what was wrong with it. So they called him Doc. My father worked with him and so there was the opportunity to buy a house and my mother, oh, she was so afraid of getting the bill, of buying the house. So my uncle loaned my father the exact amount of the house, because it was a repossession of the bank. The price of the house was \$2,400. My uncle loaned him \$2,400 and my mother paid him \$15 a month until it was paid off.

YATES: Back to talking about the 1930s and the Depression, you just mentioned a little bit about your dad struggling to have work. What else about that period do you think really impacted you or influenced you? If it did.

WRIGHT: Well, it was hard to say. In going to school, children today kind of compete. If you've got an outfit and it's got a label on it, well then the other child wants an outfit with a label on it and things like that. We were all in the same. . . . The only ones that were considered to be stable and wealthy or rich were a doctor, a dentist, a lawyer, you know, in town. And some of them had

businesses.

[Interruption]

YATES: I was asking about the Great Depression and the impact it had on you.

WRIGHT: Well, as I said, it was hard because you didn't know. . . .

First of all, the one thing I do remember is my mother was concerned I was left handed, and in school in those days you were right handed. There was no such thing as left handed and my mother knew, believe it or not, at that point in time I was a little on the sensitive side, and so if anybody would have scolded me for writing with my left hand I probably would have broken into tears. So my mother took the year which is to a child today the kindergarten stage. My mother taught me to write and she taught me to write with my right hand. So my handwriting is horrible, but the one thing she didn't get by me was erasing. So if I'm writing with a pencil and I erase, I take the pencil out of my right hand, and I erase . . .

YATES: With your left.

WRIGHT: . . . with my left and then I take it back. I cut meat with my left hand and then take my fork into my left hand.

YATES: Right. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: So it's a little complicated.

YATES: Well, back then, yes, being left handed was not . . .

WRIGHT: Well, the desks were straight desks. They weren't made for you to turn

around and write this way. I'm thrilled my granddaughter [Marissa Marie Horn] is all left handed, and she is doing a beautiful job and nobody cares whether she is left handed or not.

YATES: Yes, times have changed.

WRIGHT: Oh, sure have. Well, that was it.

And then otherwise I remember one girl in my class that I was a little jealous of, I have to admit, and only because—and this was more into the high school stage—her mother was a very tiny woman and so consequently her mother would buy clothes for herself and she could wear her mother's clothes to school, which was quite the thing. So along with her own clothes she had her mother's clothes. So she had quite a wardrobe.

But they also had a pizza parlor. Old Forge was known for their pizzas because basically I would say that community, about 95-96 percent of them were Italian and then there was one section in town where the Russian Orthodox lived. Right next to the Russian Orthodox, the Polish lived. There was then, I guess you would call it, the south end of town. We called that Lawrenceville Hill, and that's where all the English and the Irish lived. So we had a mixture in town. And there were two Jewish families.

YATES: But it was predominantly Italian.

WRIGHT: Oh, it was Italian. And then you kind of got segregated by where you came from in Italy.

YATES: Yeah. Oh, really? Oh, yeah.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. I remember Moosic Road. Moosic Road was all the Sicilians.

Because families congregated to families and so consequently that's what it was. In fact, a strange excerpt from my life was that when we got into high school we had our basketball team—made up of students from all the elementary schools around town, which fed into the high school. So Moosic Road had a school. I went to the Annex, which was right behind the high school, and then Lawrenceville Hill of course had a school, and Sussex Street, which is where the Polish and the Russian Orthodox settled, they had a school, and it was kind of worked out that way.

When those teams would come to play the only gymnasium was the gym that was at the [Old Forge] High School. We would go, and we were scared to death of the kids from Moosic Road, because it wasn't bad enough that they had darker complexions and real black shiny hair, but they also wore maroon as their colors, where all the rest of us were gold plus a color. The Annex was gold and blue, because those were the school colors. So we were kind of scared of those kids. And we were told they carried knives, so that kind of separated us. It was funny, because after, in high school, I dated not one but two [Laughter] from the Moosic Road area, so they weren't so bad after all.

YATES: Well, how true were those rumors about them? Not true?

WRIGHT: And you found that out.

YATES: Yeah, when you were older.

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm.

YATES: Well, back to school a little bit. What interested you in school, academically or otherwise?

WRIGHT: Math.

YATES: Math?

WRIGHT: Yes. Math and history I loved.

YATES: And why?

WRIGHT: History, because if you were reading about the times. . . . And there were a lot of swashbuckling movies of course at the time too, like *The Black Swan*, I remember, with Tyrone Power and Maureen O'Hara, and where he tied her to the mast and then he kissed her. Oh! Gosh, that was really something! But it was just a wonderful thing, because when you read a history book. . . . My favorite was *Between Two Flags* by. . . . [F.] van Wyck Mason, I think, was the name of the author. And that was a story between the South and the North. So because you could visualize it in your mind in reading it. . . . Some of the books we had to read I wasn't too. . . . I was never much into. . . . I think it was called *The Last of the Mohicans*. I just read a couple of lines on each page, just enough to get my book report in. But if it was anything with the real history. . . .

YATES: That interested you.

WRIGHT: Yes, because we had quite a bit of history in Pennsylvania.

YATES: I was going to say.

WRIGHT: Just down from us was Campbell's Ledge, where the Indians had forced one of the settlers by the name of Campbell over the ledge to his death, and things like that, so. . . .

YATES: Any teachers in particular that had an influence on you in any way?

WRIGHT: Yes, my first teacher, Miss [ ] Hennigan, she was just wonderful.

YATES: This is first grade you're talking about?

WRIGHT: First grade. Mmm-hmm.

YATES: And why do you say she was wonderful?

WRIGHT: Well, because if we were good in school and did everything we had to do, we always had a little bit of a play time after. And those days we really went to school, started at twelve-thirty and went to school until four-thirty, so it was four hours and it was four hours a day of schooling. And I always wore my hair parted to the side and a bow, and when we would have our races in the classroom, it was to carry an eraser on your head and go all around the room without it falling off, and the other kids said I cheated but I didn't cheat. I couldn't help it if I wore a bow in my hair and they didn't. I'd make sure I'd set it right against the bow and it never fell off.

YATES: Any other teachers later on?

WRIGHT: Yes. The next one I remember is Miss [ ] Hosker. She was my fourth grade teacher and it was more her appearance, I think, than anything else. I always thought that if I was going to be a schoolteacher I would like to look like her, because she always wore suits basically. She always looked so prim and proper.

YATES: When do you think you developed an interest in math and history? When do you remember . . .

WRIGHT: History was for whatever stories we had, I'd say until the eighth grade. And then of course in high school we had to take American history and we had to take European history, so both of those did it.

And of course, for math, it was. . . . Oh, gosh, I think his name was Joe Kuzmick? I can't remember his name.

YATES: Is this a teacher?

WRIGHT: Uh-huh. He could write columns of figures and by the time he got to the bottom he would have the first column added up and then he would start with the second, you know. And he was. . . . Zoom, zoom, and he would write the total answer, and that just amazed me and I wanted to try to do it. And then algebra. I'd like skipping the steps and still coming up with the right answer. It was a challenge of getting the right answer without doing a heck of a lot of work to do it. And to this day when I add a column of figures I can do it better than I can on a calculator, for the simple reason that in adding the

figures you group them in tens, and if you can look at a line of figures that you have to add and pick out your combination of tens, and then add the odds to it. . . . That's what you have to add.

YATES: You got it. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Well, I'll ask a similar question with regard to your parents. How do you think each of them influenced you? You could take one parent or both parents or . . .

WRIGHT: Well, first there was my mother, the things that she did. . . . I can still see her scrubbing the cellar steps, of all things—because those homes had cellars in them—always on Christmas Eve. She had to have her house clean for Christmas and everything else had to be done, so that when she washed her floor that was the last thing she did. But she'd always have to do the cellar steps and have the house clean. And then we had curtains, she would hang curtains. Otherwise we always had paper shades for covering the windows, but then she had these little lacy curtains that she hung. They were hung on Christmas Eve and taken down on New Year's Day. Things like that just amazed me. And the delicious meals, I mean things I'm hungry for, are all things that she made out of nothing. She made out of nothing.

YATES: She was very resourceful.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes. She made things taste so good.

My father, he was a comedian. When he had problems and he had to have all his teeth removed, you'd think he would have been embarrassed and want to stay out of. . . . No, he deliberately—because they had a combination gas station and repair shop, my uncle—my father, he would give you service with a smile. No teeth. Yeah. And he always had a bump on his head, because you had to go down to the pit in order to work on the car, right?

YATES: Oh.

WRIGHT: And he is always bumping his head and somebody would ask him how did he get that and he'd say the toilet seat hit him. Toilet seat! Well, he was always using "toilet water" on his hair and he got the lump on his head. He had a sense of humor and he couldn't see wrong in anybody, and of course I was his child really.

YATES: Well, you were the only child for . . .

WRIGHT: Ten years.

YATES: Until you were ten. So. . . .

WRIGHT: I always believed that if I had murdered someone my father would have said she had a good reason. He would say, "She had a good reason." I mean, he would be there for me.

And he was the one who gave me my allowance. In those days twenty-five cents a week. Well, when I was in high school he gave me fifty cents a week. If I saved for four weeks I had two dollars and for two dollars I could

buy one of those big sloppy sweaters. That's just what we wore. The bigger the sweater the better. You never bought a size less than forty.

YATES: What would you do for your free time when you were a child?

WRIGHT: Basically I was a loner. I played by myself, because it was just. . . . Where you lived, children your own age were not necessarily next door. And I did like basketball, I played some basketball. And of course for baseball—they never had softball—they never wanted me to play on the teams, because I'm left handed and I was kind of wild when I threw the ball. I may have been able to catch it, but they always put me out in center field, because there weren't too many balls hit out in center field, so that when I threw it it didn't make too much difference. [Laughter]

YATES: Well, you mentioned FDR.

WRIGHT: Uh-huh?

YATES: Maybe you could talk a little bit about what role politics or discussing politics played in your family.

WRIGHT: Well, my uncle—that was my aunt's husband, Dick Lane, she married Richard Lane. . . . Pennsylvania is a commonwealth, it's not a state, and so. . . . I imagine they call them towns now, but in my day they called them boroughs. A commonwealth had boroughs. So Old Forge was really a borough. Well, the section of town that he came from, because my aunt lived down in what we called the English-Irish combination. . . . We were all in

where the Italians were, so we lived like in a different council area. There were four men that always sat on the council and what they did, they would take turns. Like my uncle would serve for four years and the other guy would then get elected and he'd serve for four years, and the other guy, and then they'd come back and my uncle would serve again, you know. It was one of those things. They just exchanged positions. So that was kind of an involvement.

And then, of course, the burgess. Instead of mayor he was a burgess. Now I think they call him a mayor, but it was burgess and it was [Bart] Petrini and he was burgess forever. I don't remember anybody else taking his place until after I left town.

YATES: What about within your immediate family? Your mom and dad.

WRIGHT: My mother would not vote. She would not register to vote and she would not vote.

YATES: Why?

WRIGHT: She didn't believe women should. She came from that era. So that made it a little difficult on my father, because in small towns like that you don't get any perks that are maybe offered in the town if you don't have the votes. Like, the woman on the corner down the street from where we lived after we bought our house, she had five children. So she and her husband and five children, that was seven votes in that house. My father only had one vote.

So we even had difficulty from time to time. If the truck was coming down and it was late, we didn't always get our garbage picked up.

YATES: Really?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. Just a natural thing.

YATES: So nobody questioned that.

WRIGHT: Oh, no, no, no.

YATES: It was just the way things were.

WRIGHT: That's the way things were. Yeah. So the minute I became twenty-one—because that was the age—I registered to vote, because I wanted to give my father an extra vote. My mother still wouldn't.

YATES: And what was your father's political affiliation?

WRIGHT: Again, the makeup of the town decided. If you were a worker you were a Democrat. The operators of the coal mines—and of course we had a breaker in town too—they were just Republicans. So you were always fighting, because I had an uncle, my mother's brother, that was a miner and he was in an accident in the mine. And you knew it because the whistle would blow on the breaker. The breaker whistle would blow and you knew there was a cave[-in] or something had gone on in the mine. In fact the street where I lived had a mine shaft at the end and when we had soup or anything we always had to put the handle of a knife under it in order to level the plate, because the house was tipped.

YATES: It was slanted?

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: Because something had caved in?

WRIGHT: Yes. It was the house that we lived in before the house we bought.

YATES: That you bought, right? OK.

WRIGHT: And he was in an accident in the mines.

YATES: This is your uncle, right?

WRIGHT: My uncle. And in that location the hospital had one ward that was kind of owned by the operators and so anyone that was hurt in the mines went to that ward. Well, my uncle had his pelvis crushed or cracked, I don't remember exactly how badly he was injured, but the treatment was such poor treatment that they got that my uncle was crippled. One leg then was shorter than the other and he limped after that and then he couldn't go work in the mines anymore. He had to find something else to do.

YATES: That's difficult.

WRIGHT: Oh, sure. But I mean. . . . And it was accepted. I mean, that's the way it was. You were lucky, because who ever heard of health care? So you were lucky, that if you worked in the mines it was good to be working in the mines, because you did get hospitalization if you got injured.

YATES: What percentage would you say of the community—obviously the men—worked in the mines?

WRIGHT: Oh, in my growing up I would say probably about 50 percent or better.

YATES: OK. So a large percentage, but not. . . . But in the majority.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes, because when the mines were depleted, then the switch took place, and that was when I was in high school, just about that time. Why, it then went to the garment industry, because of New York being so close. So it was the garment industry, so it was the women that went to work. And in one instance I remember one young man, he never worked after that. He had a job with GE [General Electric], in the GE plant, and when they moved down closer to Philadelphia, he never moved with them. People just didn't move out. So he lived home with his parents and he was on disability . . .

[Interruption]

YATES: So we were talking about I guess the economic makeup, that's how you might describe it, of the community.

WRIGHT: And just for an example, this young man, when General Electric moved out of Old Forge. . . . Well, not Old Forge, they moved out of a little town right next to it. I think it was in Dupont, is where it was. He just didn't go to work. He couldn't find work close by. He didn't go. And he could have moved. I mean today they just move all over, but they just didn't do it. Just didn't do it.

YATES: Did you have any political discussions around the dinner table or with your uncle?

WRIGHT: No. No, because my uncle was also one of the volunteer firemen and he was the chief at one time, and so they lived in this little area behind the station where the fire truck was. And we would take a walk down. . . . You could walk anywhere in town. You really didn't have to have a car. Of course, for the prom you wanted a car.

YATES: For your dress. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: Oh, sure, for the gown. But he was never around, because he'd be busy sitting with the fellows out in front, so I was never really close to my uncle Dick, and that was my aunt's husband.

YATES: Of course, you were aware that he was involved in this.

WRIGHT: Oh sure, sure, sure.

YATES: But within your own immediate family, then.

WRIGHT: Yeah. But see, everybody was Democrat practically in town, because the coal operators didn't necessarily live in Old Forge. The smaller operators did, but not the ones that had the huge. . . . So there was no contact.

You just went in, and I had fun because it was machine voting. And so you'd go in and you'd pull the curtain around you, and then you'd have the lever Democrat or Republican, or then you'd have the individual names and you'd know that somebody who was watching the polls was counting, was counting the votes. I mean they always counted the votes, they knew who was going to win beforehand. So they'd be counting the votes to make sure

and I used to like to get them confused. So I'd go there and I'd knock every lever. Even though I was voting straight Democrat I'd knock every lever, so they'd have to really pay attention to what I was doing. [Laughter]

YATES: Well, we don't have too much longer so I thought I would ask you a couple of more questions.

WRIGHT: What time do you have?

YATES: It's about eleven after eleven.

WRIGHT: We can go about twenty after. Do you want to go another ten minutes?

YATES: OK, that's fine.

WRIGHT: Sure.

YATES: I was thinking. . . . What was the expectation for you when you finished high school?

WRIGHT: I wanted to go to college. And there was a little college that was down outside Harrisburg, that was Cedar Crest [College]. It was a woman's college and I really wanted to go there, because at that point in time I really wanted to be a teacher. But we didn't have the money for me to go. And I was valedictorian of my class, I graduated as valedictorian, but the only scholarship was from a woman's group [Victoria Club] in Old Forge. Like they met for lunch and it was the upper class, what my mother called the upper class, and they always gave a scholarship and so it was like \$500. So I thought I was going to get the \$500 scholarship because I was valedictorian,

but I had the misfortune of graduating the same time as the president of the women's club's daughter, and she got. . . .

YATES: She got the scholarship.

WRIGHT: She got the \$500 scholarship. So my mother made enough of a complaint about it—because that was not the way it was ever done before—that they finally gave me \$100. So with the \$100 I could go to what was then a junior college, and it was business, mostly business.

YATES: What was the name of the school?

WRIGHT: Scranton Lackawanna Junior College.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: Lackawanna was the county. Scranton was the main city. And I got the \$100 and so with the \$100 it would pay for my tuition for four months, and I would have to buy my books and everything else.

And so in the meantime, when I was sixteen, right before I graduated high school, I got a job in a restaurant as a bus girl. And three days after I was working there they went on strike. So I got to be a waitress really quickly and I learned what it was to cross picket lines. And the way we crossed the picket line was the owner of the restaurant would pick us up a block away and then he parked in the basement. His daughter or whoever would be coming in that day would park in the basement and so we rode in the basement. There were only two of us that were both bus girls.

YATES: How did you feel about crossing the picket line?

WRIGHT: Huh. It wasn't my fight! I mean that was the idea, why should I . . . I was busing tables. Nobody told me it was union, and you had to go through a . . . It didn't bother me at all. So I drove in. Hey, I was getting \$12.50 a week. I worked six days a week for \$12.50.

YATES: This was when you were sixteen?

WRIGHT: I was sixteen on like Wednesday, and Thursday I went looking for a job and Friday I started the job and Monday they were out on strike.

YATES: So you knew then fairly early on that you did want to go to college, it sounds like.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: When do you think you realized you wanted to go to college?

WRIGHT: Well, my mother had a lot to do with that.

YATES: Oh, OK.

WRIGHT: You know? Because she wanted me to be able to take care of myself and like she wanted a better life for me. And it was always a point that you never knew whether I was going to get married or not, because next door to us we had two sisters that never got married and across the street there was one that never did, so maybe I wouldn't get married. But my mother had it all planned. If I did get married I was going to live with them because then I would. . . . It was a blow to her that, one, I left home. I always say I ran away

from home when I was thirty-three. [Laughter] Yeah, and I ran pretty far, because I came all the way to California.

YATES: And why did you think you wanted to be a teacher?

WRIGHT: Basically because of what I saw. They were very respected. I remember before I even started school—so it had to be in '35, '36, because '36 was when I went into first grade—the teachers went on strike, and they went on strike because they had been two years without a salary. The banks were paying them, and so the two years that they were out that they weren't getting paid, the banks were loaning them their pay, and when the banks couldn't do it anymore that's when they went on strike, because they didn't have any income. And I thought of the sacrifices they made and I always felt, as I looked back on it, that they were important. There were two teachers, there were two brothers, Ed Clause and Frank Clause, and of course I'm digressing actually because I'm going back again.

YATES: That's OK.

WRIGHT: Frank was an American history teacher and he made it, oh, so exciting—that was in eleventh grade, he taught American history—because we learned the presidents by saying, “Washington, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Jefferson, Madison, Madison, Monroe, Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Jackson, Jackson.” You know, that's how we learned. It was like a sing song, but we learned our presidents, and so I was impressed with him. Plus, he was a

bowler. He taught me to bowl and he taught any of the girls that wanted to. It was the first time we ever wore pants, long pants, otherwise we were always in skirts. We never wore pants.

YATES: When you bowled?

WRIGHT: It was when I bowled, yeah. He told me it was good because if I fell we didn't want my skirt flying over my head, you know, so that made sense. But he would take us and he would stand on the aisle of the bowling alley, you'd stand right there, right where the keyboard, as they call it, is. He would stand there and we'd have to throw the ball through his legs. Well, he learned that he had to jump when I did it, because I was the only one that was bowling left handed.

YATES: So you did everything else left handed, it sounds like.

WRIGHT: Oh, I did everything left handed.

YATES: Except for writing.

WRIGHT: Except for writing. That's the only thing. And I would bowl left handed. So I was coming down this aisle. . . . And then I never did get very good scores, because the bowling alley in Old Forge was an old bowling alley, so it was grooved. You could drop your ball and it would slowly. . . . But it would go down. You could get more strikes if you were right handed than if you were left handed, because I was working on the plain old side of the aisle that had never been used before practically and so consequently. . . . But I enjoyed

that.

And then Eddie Clause was a chemistry teacher, so I had him in my senior year. He taught chemistry. Fantastic. I was not well suited to chemistry.

YATES: But you liked him as a teacher?

WRIGHT: Oh, I liked him because he was really good. He stayed after class for us to have our lab work, because there was no way to have lab work and teach at the same time. So he would stay after class. And I don't recall ever having an experiment that was successful. We made soap. One of the first things you did was make soap. Mine disappeared. Everybody else got to wash their hands. Finally, at six o'clock at night, which has stood out in my mind, he told me, "I think you know what you're supposed to do and I don't know what's happening to your soap. Why don't you just go home." I never got to wash hands with my own soap.

YATES: So you graduate from high school and, let's see, what year was this?

WRIGHT: It was 1947.

YATES: Well, I should ask before moving on to college, your college experience. . . . Then, of course, World War II was going on, you know, and maybe you could place in context. . . .

WRIGHT: I was twelve years old—it stands in my mind—and I was sitting on the kitchen floor because that close to the fire, it was warm. It was December 7 and the announcement came over—Pearl Harbor—and I remember it. And

what was I doing on the floor? Then oranges came in crates, and I was making a playhouse for myself, for my doll, and I was making it out of this orange crate, and I was cutting pieces of wallpaper, samples in the Sears, Roebuck [and Company] book, and I was pasting my wall because I was papering my house, when we got the news.

And then we got into the war effort, of course, and I went. . . . We had an open field way down from us where people threw their garbage, believe it or not, and our class won the tin can collection. We won it because I would go through there collecting the cans, and if they had any little rusty spots on them or something I would scrub them clean and then stamp on them to take in to school, because that's what we did for the war effort.

YATES: You mentioned hearing the news on the radio. I take it your parents were there too when you heard the news?"

WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

YATES: And what was their response? Do you remember?

WRIGHT: Well, the first concern for my mother was the fact they might take my father, but at that point they were not taking men who had families. So that my uncle—even though he was crippled, in that he walked with a limp and one foot was shorter than the other—he was drafted, because he wasn't married and he didn't have any children at the time. And he worked as a mechanic on the airplanes. He never went overseas. He was here in the United States. So

he went. And the young man who lived next door to us was killed.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

YATES: OK, I was asking about World War II and the impact it had on you.

WRIGHT: Yes, I still remember Clevio Rogo was the first one in Old Forge to be killed in the war. He was a pilot and it was a big to-do. Everybody in town cried, because everybody loved Clevio. He was a terrific young man and I remember I liked him because he was good looking.

YATES: So you graduated from high school in 1947, you said.

WRIGHT: Uh-huh. And in September that year I was still working at the restaurant, and I only worked there until about December of that year, for the simple reason that they thought with me graduating high school I would become a full-time employee, and I couldn't because I was going to go to school.

YATES: And so you said the college was in Scranton. Is that correct?

WRIGHT: Yes. I would ride the bus.

YATES: So you lived at home and commuted in.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Rode the bus. It was like a twenty-five minute ride on the bus and then you walked two blocks to get to the school.

YATES: And what was your experience like there?

WRIGHT: Oh, it was a quite interesting experience, because I took accounting. I didn't take what the other girls took, which was the secretarial course. I took the

accounting course and we had to work. . . . We started out with a set of basic books, because it was double entry accounting. It was what was being taught at that school. Well, at that time that's what they did. They didn't have single entries as they have today. Double entry. And so I went to there. And what I liked about it was the fact that in the accounting they had a lot of ex-GIs. [Laughter]

YATES: Was that your original reason for taking accounting?

WRIGHT: No. It was the math again. If I wasn't going to be a teacher. . . . And that was a given up thing, because we just didn't have the money.

YATES: So you couldn't get a teaching credential through the junior college?

WRIGHT: No. No. Not this one I went to. No.

YATES: Oh, OK.

WRIGHT: I had to go some place where it wouldn't cost me to live and it wouldn't cost me too much for transportation, and then of course, with my driver's license. . . . My father would walk to work and he would let me take the car, and then I would drive, and I just happened to have four boys who rode with me and I charged them, so that paid for my gas. So my transportation was a freebie. I only rode the bus for a couple of months.

YATES: OK. Is this a two-year degree or a four-year degree?

WRIGHT: I got certification for two years, because I did the full year and then I did some night school there, because they did have night classes. And then, even

though it was not in that particular realm of accounting, I went to the University of Scranton at night and that was an all male school, and I took drafting and surveying as a combination course, and I got eight credits there. So they combined that and they told me it was the equivalent of being a . . .

YATES: Having a four year degree?

WRIGHT: Well, no, it was a two year, which was the associate degree.

YATES: Oh, I see. They allowed women to take classes then at night?

WRIGHT: Yes, the night classes were open. Again, it was a very nice class to take, as it was mostly all men.

YATES: How about influences at that point in your life? What about going to college affected your perspective?

WRIGHT: I had a brother coming up and the thought of ever trying to complete four years. . . . The mentality at that point was that the boys had to have the education, and so it was for my brother who was ten years [younger]. I figured if I could get out working and I could help my family, then when my brother would start working he could put money away and he could go to college. And so he did. He graduated.

YATES: Any influences in college at that point in your life? Teachers or friends?

WRIGHT: Not really. Not really.

YATES: It was pretty much you were going from home to school . . .

WRIGHT: Because we had almost. . . . Gee, that room was packed, it must have been

about eighty in the class. And so your big thing was to get that set of books to balance, because that was your whole year. If you didn't have that balanced at the end of the year you would have failed. And of course, that really got me where I balanced to the penny. I go nuts if my checkbook doesn't balance to the penny, and it comes from that, because I had to balance that book. And I had it balanced. They gave you so many entries that you had to make every day and reports that you had to put out and things like that. That was part of the class, because you were taking a double class of accounting and then you got some business math on the side. And you got some. . . . Well, it was like an English course, but it really wasn't an English course. It was business language basically.

YATES: So what happened when you graduated?

WRIGHT: Well, again, I was in the top 95. . . . Above 95 percent. My average was above 95 percent, so consequently. . . . At that point in time the school would place you and get jobs for you. Well, the first one I thought was terrific. I was going to become the head bookkeeper at this one particular business and I was just thrilled that I was going to get this opportunity at my young age. Well, when I got there I wasn't old enough. Now why they had even put the request in at the school for someone to be sent. . . . I guess maybe they thought they were going to get one of the servicemen or something like that.

YATES: So you were about at that point?

WRIGHT: I was just turning to twenty. I was twenty in May and I was through in June.

According to how well you did in school, that's where they sent you out, so by the time I got back to the school—because they would not take me as I wasn't old enough or experienced enough, so they wouldn't hire me—the pickings were kind of lean.

I ended up getting a job as an assistant to the bookkeeper at a lumber company [Carlson and Stender Brothers], and that was a little difficult because there was a double set of books at that particular place. The one woman took care of one set of books that nobody ever saw, because the one who owned the lumber company also was a contractor or something, so he had a contracting business. But the thing that killed me was I would count nails. I couldn't stand the nails and I couldn't stand answering the phone, because no matter how I took a message this woman would tell me that I didn't hear it right. It used to drive me crazy. I thought there was something wrong with my hearing. So I fixed her. I used to change the clock. I kept changing the clock. When nobody was looking I'd move the little hands up. So then instead of quitting at five o'clock sometimes I was out of there by four thirty or something.

YATES: [Laughter] She didn't catch on to that?

WRIGHT: No, she didn't. They bought a new clock. That clock didn't work either.

YATES: And where was this business located?

WRIGHT: In Scranton. And it was a whopping \$25 a week. So \$100 a month was my salary.

Then Trane company, which is heating and air conditioning from La Crosse, Wisconsin. . . . In Avoca, which was just over, you went to Scranton or you went to Avoca. It was about the same distance and they built their plant there, and I went and I filled out an application there and I was hired, and I worked and that was \$120 a month, but there was some overtime involved because it was a new company starting up.

And I went to work for Richard Mello, who had been a bus driver whom they trained, and he had three departments basically under him and that's why I wanted to work for him, because he had the accounting, which was the billing department, he had the credit department, and he also had the routing, scheduling, for the trucks coming in to pick up. So I worked with him. And he enjoyed talking on the phone and going out to lunch with the different trucking companies and things like that, and left me the work. So I got to a point where I was working overtime all the time. I never got out of work before ten or eleven o'clock every night, five nights a week, and then on Saturdays I worked from eight until about six.

YATES: That's a hard schedule.

WRIGHT: It was a hard schedule. I did that for two years, because I thought this place has got to expand. I'm going to get to be manager of one of those

departments. I could look at a company, know what their rating was, and go ahead, and I'd go through the orders coming in and I would approve credit or not approve credit. And it was the same thing in the locations. I would be able to route the trucks.

YATES: So were you able to move up the ladder? Or what happened?

WRIGHT: That was interesting. I did that for two years, and into my third year I was getting kind of tired. I had no social life, nothing. That's why Sunday was my day.

And then the word came down that they were going to start looking at breaking up that department, because you billed the customer, you routed the customer, you credited the customer. So I thought this is it, and then Mr. [James] Trane came in and informed me that they were going to break the department down, and Mello, of course, wanted to keep the transportation end of it, the routing. He wanted that because he was getting the lunches and the gifts and everything from the truckers. And I thought, gee, credit or billing will be fine with me. And I was asked to help them train two young men they were bringing in to be heads of those departments. And I said, well, that's nice. I dropped the pencil on my desk and I walked out. They called me and everything to come back. I said no. I made up my mind. I walked out. That's it.

YATES: That takes a lot of courage.

WRIGHT: Well, yeah, because I was trying to help my family and, you know, I just wasn't going to get paid. It wasn't going to be there. But I just couldn't take it anymore. The fact that I worked so hard and, oh, I was tremendous, I was wonderful. But when it came to give a management job, they just weren't going to do it with me.

And then I went to work for Acme Fast Freight, the freight forwarding company. That's where I really got involved in the union then, because that was union. [Brotherhood of] Railway and Steamship [Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees] was the [union]. And that's when I got into my first line of the new technology.

YATES: Well, I hate to interrupt you, but it's eleven-thirty, so why don't we stop?

WRIGHT: OK.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Session 2, March 7, 2002]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

YATES: Just go ahead, repeat yourself, say something new, whatever you like.

WRIGHT: OK. I just finished an election and I'm not happy with the outcome.

YATES: OK, let's try that.

[Interruption]

OK, great. It has been a busy day after. . . . Well, two days after the election, actually.

WRIGHT: That's why I anticipated everything would be fine.

YATES: Right, right.

WRIGHT: I should have known better.

YATES: You have to get out of the office [campaign headquarters for Ron Bamieh], I assume, as quickly as possible, once the election's over.

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: Well, we were just chatting for a minute and I was recapping what happened last time, because it was December when we met. It's been a little while. Basically we talked about your family background and growing up in Old Forge and then your schooling, and then basically where we finished was you

were talking about your first job, after finishing your degree, at Trane and that you quit.

WRIGHT: We're going to go back and correct that, because in reality after finishing my schooling there was a job that I had, though I could not remember . . .

YATES: Well, I looked at the transcript yesterday and I remember you said that you were sent on a job interview where you didn't get the job, and then did I miss something?

WRIGHT: And then I got the job at . . . All of a sudden the name came to me, it was Carlson.

YATES: Oh, OK, and this is before Trane, then.

WRIGHT: Yes. It was Carlson and it was a lumber company and they were also . . .

YATES: Oh, yes, you did. OK.

WRIGHT: But I couldn't remember the name. It was Carlson.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: Carlson and Stender Brothers was the name of it.

YATES: OK. Would you want to take a minute and talk about that and what that experience was like?

WRIGHT: Yes, because I was up to some shenanigans, as it would have been called at the time. But I had to have a job and so they were going to pay me \$100 a month, where I had been told, if I had gotten this other job, it would have been something like \$250 a month, which in those days was a pretty good

starting salary. So it was going to be \$100 a month and I said, "Oh, gee. That's like \$25 a week." But it was a start. The school had said to me it would be a start for you. It is not what we anticipated you would get but it would be a start.

YATES: What was the position?

WRIGHT: It was to be the assistant to the bookkeeper, but it was kind of a strange set up because they had two sets of books, one set of books this woman worked on that no one ever got to see, so you can figure out whatever that was, and then there was the other set of books that dealt basically with the lumber company.

The job basically was to answer phones and do inventory type things. So you were counting nails, you were counting screws, you were finding out where what two-by-four and such was. And I really seemed to have a problem, because I would answer the phone and I would write down the name of the person that called, and the woman that was basically my boss, my superior, would always find fault. I never pronounced the name right or I didn't get the name right. It was always as though she was. . . . Absolutely she didn't want me there, was my feeling. Well, it didn't bother me, because I really didn't want to be there to begin with, so what I would do is when nobody was looking I would take the clock. . . . It was where I could reach it, so it had to be kind of low because I'm not the tallest person in the world. So I would reach it and I would move the hand.

YATES: You know, I remember you did mention this last time but I somehow missed that this was not Trane. This was this other company.

WRIGHT: Yes. And that is what it was. It was that. And so that I had turned around and I was always getting out of there early. Then somewhere along the line the clock would be adjusted and the next day I would do the same thing. So I was doing it day in and day out.

In the meantime, that's when I heard the Trane company was going to be hiring in their office. And it was a new company, it was a large company, because Trane air conditioning and cooling—air conditioning and heating was their other company—from La Crosse, Wisconsin, was quite a big company. The son of the owner of the company was going to come [and be] in charge.

YATES: And this is also right near Old Forge, right?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

YATES: All these jobs?

WRIGHT: It was this way. Here was Old Forge. If you went to Scranton you went to your left and you went on—passing another couple of little boroughs, as they were called in Pennsylvania—into the city of Scranton. Or you went this way, which kind of was in the southeasterly direction, and you went to Avoca. And of course their business was in Avoca.

YATES: OK. Now, how long were you at the lumber company?

WRIGHT: Just about a year, a year or two. Maybe it was a year and a half.

YATES: So you are still in your early twenties then?

WRIGHT: Yeah. About a year and a half.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: Then I filled out an application and I got called and I got to interview with a fellow by the name of Richard Mello. He had been a bus driver before and had been trained for office work. He had three departments combined. There was production, that was one department, and there was public relations or something, and that was another department, and then he had order billing, traffic, and credit, and I was going to go to work for him. We had a very nice interview and I really wanted to do this job, because now it sounds like. . . . Here's a company starting out and three departments. Where all the other ones were single departments, this was three. This was certainly going to break up as the company expanded.

YATES: And there would be possibilities for movement.

WRIGHT: Possibilities of becoming a manager and that's what I was looking for, advancement. And they were going to start me at \$120 a month. That was \$20 a month more than I was getting on the other job. So I accepted.

YATES: And this position was also accounting or bookkeeping?

WRIGHT: It was in the accounting line, because what it was, was orders. You would take an order and you had to price it and you had to check to find out if the

person who was in sales in the field, what kind of a deal did they basically cut. Because they were always in competition, you are always trying to get the better deal, and so you had to watch your pricing. And so, if it was so much per square foot of heating, how did that break down into the number of units that had to be placed into that particular structure and what the pricing was as compared to what the printed price was on the page and so that was the kind. . . . And then when you had done that and you had OK'd the pricing, then the credit would be checked on the corporation or the company. Of course, as you went through it you got where you knew these companies and you knew their credit was open ended. So there was no problem checking out the credit. But they still had to have a credit initialed. So you would initial for the credit, you would initial for the pricing, once you had checked it out, and then you had to route the shipment from Avoca to wherever.

YATES: To wherever it was going.

WRIGHT: And so it was always truckers picking it up. It wasn't as though you were at a rail site. You weren't, it was always truckers. And we were shipping to California from Pennsylvania. We were shipping northeast, northwest, you know, it was all over the place, all over the country. Texas. And so that's where I got into a little bit of transportation and traffic, as it was called. So to me, I felt that if any one of those three departments broke open I was set. Well, we worked an awful lot of overtime.

YATES: Yeah, I remember you saying you worked, you know, Saturdays.

WRIGHT: Eight o'clock in the morning, and I was there during the week until sometimes ten o'clock at night.

YATES: Wow.

WRIGHT: And then on Saturday I would go on, not right at eight o'clock on the button, but I would be there until at least six o'clock at night. So I really had no social life.

YATES: And you were living at home at that point?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes. So twenty-two or twenty-three years old, you know, you really. . . . In fact, I was twenty-one when I started work there. How I remember that is because. . . .

YATES: At Trane?

WRIGHT: Uh-huh. Because it was ten years [before I left], and we were in the 1960 election of [John F.] Kennedy. That's how I kind of know that it was ten years, because the year that he was shot I was out here in California, so it kind of set up my years in that. . . .

YATES: Oh, OK. So it is ten years before that, you're saying. OK. So 1950, about.

WRIGHT: Around the fifties when I had that job because I graduated high school in '47 and so the two years. . . . So it was about '49 I started working, about a year there. So it was around 1950. So I would be tired and I didn't have much of a social life. But my whole thoughts were that this was my future and I was

going to be really independent, because I was going to have a manager's job. I was with them just about three years when they brought in these. . . . I mean, everybody was working so much overtime they couldn't continue. Production was always on overtime. So really they were starting to expand the plant and they were going to break down this department. And so I was . . .

YATES: Thought that this was your break.

WRIGHT: This was the break. So I'm there sitting at my desk and I've got orders piled up in front of me, trying to get them processed so I wouldn't hold up production and, of course, get in the orders, and then you typed up the orders out to the plant. And we had twelve girls typing, so you can imagine. I was writing the production for twelve typists. So I'm sitting there when Mr. Trane—he was a huge man, Jim Trane, he was the son of the owner—came and told me that they were splitting the departments and they had these two young men coming in, and that I was to help train them as we broke down the departments. So I figured, well, we had two, but which departments? Well, it ended up that basically the credit would. . . . Mello was going to handle the transportation, so that was going to be his job. Well, then, the three departments were already full.

YATES: They were filled.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, I would be training them and then I could probably continue to

work with Mello. So I was going nowhere. And I said, “Well, I’m sorry. I really thought I would get one of these jobs.” “Well, you know, these are young men coming in, they’ve got families.” OK. So I just dropped the pencil in the middle of my desk and I said, “I quit” and I walked out. It was about six o’clock at night and I walked out. I didn’t go back. They called me. They didn’t know where anything was on my desk. I said, “Find it.” I had had it.

Then I was kind of in a little turmoil, because at least when I left the other job I left with a notice that I was leaving and then I walked out on Friday and Monday morning I went into another job. Now I had nothing. That was really. . . . I was really shook up about that. And of course Mother said, “Well, maybe you shouldn’t quit. After all, you had a job. What is more important than having a job?” Enjoying it was part of having a job to me.

YATES: Did she understand that, do you think?

WRIGHT: Not really, because my mother started out. . . . First of all, she was twelve years old when she went into the work force.

YATES: Right, and I’m thinking being through the Depression and everything . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah. I was a Depression baby, so it was the idea that I had a job that was important. You didn’t have to like it, you just had to do it. So that was playing on me. So there were a lot of emotions going on. When I started walking the pavement in Scranton, Pennsylvania—because that’s where the

jobs really were—looking for a job, I was just amazed. You had these women who had legal training and they were making \$20 a week. At least I was up to \$120 [a month]. When I left I was at \$135, but I had so much overtime—because they paid overtime.

YATES: It averaged out probably.

WRIGHT: It averaged out. My gosh, my mother saved money from my own pay to buy me a fur jacket, because I loved fur. I wanted a piece of fur. To me that was the ultimate, to have a fur.

But I thought, “God, this is terrible.” Every place I went. And then somebody said, “You should try Acme Fast Freight,” and I said, “Why?” They said, “They’re unionized,” and I said, “What’s the union to me?” I don’t know, the only union I knew was with my uncles when they were in the coal mines, but my father never belonged to any kind of union. So I didn’t know anything about unions.

YATES: And now why? Was the fact that there was a union there helpful in terms of getting a job?

WRIGHT: Well, the big thing was the pay.

YATES: The pay. OK, and once you got in . . .

WRIGHT: Well, you would get paid every two weeks and it was \$95 for two weeks, and there was a big difference between [that and] like \$25 or \$30. So that really meant something. And periodically you got raises. And then there were jobs

in there that you could get. Maybe you started out down here, but you could get into other jobs. So I applied and I got the job.

YATES: And, now, what was the position?

WRIGHT: The position was what they called accounts receivable or accounts payable.

And it was mostly accounts receivable but it was all. . . . It was all IBM [International Business Machines Corporation] cards, so it was my introduction to the technology. You'd get these drawers of cards and you'd get the list of people who had paid their bills and you would pull the cards. Then, you know, that was nerve-racking, because you could fall asleep just with the cards, you know? But it was a start and wages, and there were obviously other jobs. I would see a job go up on the board and I'd bid on it, because I figured that was all I had to do. I wouldn't belong to the union.

Finally one of the men out of the computer room where all the big IBM machines were. . . . The sorting machines and the punching machines were all in this big enclosed room. It was mostly men that were running it. One of the guys came out to me and said, "You're going to have to join the union." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you're getting a good salary." "Hey, I'm getting a good salary and I don't belong to the union. Why do I have to join the union?" He said, "It's a closed shop. If you don't join the union, you don't work." "Well, how much is it going to cost me?" It would cost something like five dollars to join and I think it was five dollars every two

months. It wasn't that much.

YATES: It wasn't high.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I said, well, if it keeps the job and then I can get other jobs, great. So I went ahead and I joined the union but I didn't just join the union. If I'm going to belong to the union I'm going to find out what the devil they're doing. So I start going to meetings. First thing you know I end up as secretary to the union [Laughter], to the chapter that was there. And it was the [Brotherhood of] Railway and Steamship Clerks [Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees] union we belonged to, because the trains came through us. All the accounting offices and everything for the railroad, DL&W [Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western] Railroad, was in the building, also. So that's got my interest in what was going on with the unions.

I keep bidding on jobs, and of course there was always someone with more seniority. And then they were doing some little bit of expansion and what always got me with the union was they'd come down once a year, they would walk down the aisle, and they would tell you, "Be prepared, we're going to be going out on strike. We're going to get you a raise."

YATES: This was once a year, you said?

WRIGHT: Just about once a year. Maybe it would be a little longer before that, because there were negotiations, but the negotiations would break down as usual.

YATES: So these contracts were basically sort of a yearly thing.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Later on, as I recall, they seemed more into the two or maybe three year. . . . It didn't seem as often. But always we were going to go on strike. Well, then they come back and they tell you, "We got you a raise." Maybe ten cents an hour. It was basically an hourly rate. It would be ten cents an hour more. But then you noticed that a couple of people would be laid off. Maybe later on down the line one or two of them would be hired back, but in the beginning, because they worked with a budget, naturally when the raise and pay went up people lost their jobs. Well, I wasn't too keen on that. It seemed to me that if that person was needed and you raised their pay, they should still be needed. But it was always within the budget for that particular department. Because it was the total accounting department of Acme Fast Freight, whose main office was in New York.

Then they started using me for new programs. When they were going to try something we would work out a program. I'd be doing it for a while, then it would go up as a job. Well, I thought I would naturally get it. Well, no. It was the one with the most seniority who got the job.

YATES: How many people were working there? Or maybe in your department. Is that the right way to describe it? Your unit.

WRIGHT: Well, it depends. There were two sections. The one section was of these drawers of cards and they always came out from the tech room, where all the big machines were going. And then the other part was what they called the

key punchers and they punched the holes into the cards. They started out with new cards and went in order. If something was shipped it went in on the card and had all code numbers and everything. And I stayed over and learned to be a key puncher and then I bid on a job and then I finally got a job in key punching. So at this point they'd take me off key punching and have me do this or do that. Different jobs.

YATES: And then you would go back to the key punching?

WRIGHT: And then go back to key punching.

YATES: The reason I ask is when you were mentioning about seniority I was wondering, you know, if there were a large pool of people there and that was making it more difficult or. . . .

WRIGHT: Yes, there was, when you stop and think. At that point in time I probably knew how many people were there. There were about twenty to twenty-five, but they always had extra key punch machines, so sometimes they went up to thirty or thirty-five people, probably, key punching. And then they had other offices with people in them. Maybe three or four people here and four or five people there. I would imagine in the whole Acme positions there there must have been about a hundred people, but they were on different floors and you never went up to the floor to see. You would be sent to an office to do a job up in one of the other offices and you'd get in and maybe there were only two or three people there, but then there were all the other offices there and at that

point in time you never paid much attention. You were too busy doing your own stuff, you know.

YATES: Sure, yeah. Again, I was thinking more in terms of just when you were applying for positions, what the competition was like.

WRIGHT: Probably just two or three people, but if they had six months more than you then they got the job. So then I thought, "Holy cow." It got a little frustrating. And then it got even more frustrating because I found out I had more years. . . . Because I was there ten years when I left. The more seniority I got, I noticed that when new chairs came in it wasn't new chairs for the whole office. If so many new chairs came in they went by seniority.

YATES: Hold on one second.

[Interruption]

We were talking about Acme and the problems with trying to move up the ladder, basically, and then I was asking you how long you were there. You were there ten years, you said.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was always difficult because, in a way, you almost created the job. And then when you created the job, you couldn't do it. You would have to teach someone how to do it based on what you had done in creating the job, because you couldn't have it because of seniority.

YATES: Now, during the time you were there, was there ever a strike called?

WRIGHT: No. We never had a strike. Oh, it was always a threat, yeah.

YATES: It was announced, but a threat. OK.

WRIGHT: Then they'd come down and say, well, you got a nickel more an hour or ten cents more an hour. So it was "Yay, great." For maybe a dollar you ended up seeing several people laid off. So it didn't make sense to me. And you didn't see that much in your paycheck, either, after they took your taxes out and everything.

YATES: Besides the increase in pay—what, ten cents an hour or whatever—what other benefits did the union provide?

WRIGHT: That was the funniest thing, because in those days it was everybody wanting pay raises. Here was the situation. We worked in this old DL&W station, and the office structure was up over the station. That is where people came in and got on the trains and everything. Thus you froze in the winter time, because it was an old building and the wind just came in through the windows, and you died with the heat in the summer time, because there was no air conditioning. The only place that was air conditioned was where the big IBM equipment was. That's what was air conditioned because of the . . .

YATES: Yeah, you need to keep the temperature down.

WRIGHT: On those machines, yeah. That was it.

YATES: So no working condition improvements.

WRIGHT: Oh, I'm glad you brought that up. This is the other part I used to get a kick out of. If you got sick, there was no place to lie down. There was no place to

sit down, unless you wanted to sit on the window sill in the lady's room. And the plumbing, you'd pull the cord to flush the john. Anybody who would take a break in the lady's room was crazy, because there was no place to sit. You stood around, but it was sometimes just to get off the. . . .

You get a key punch. If you're doing a good job—they used to measure how many cards you could do—at the end of the day you should have at least a box of cards, which was about eighteen or nineteen inches of cards that you had punched. My challenge on it was always trying to change it, so I would punch fewer holes and could duplicate more. So they'd hand me the batch of bills and I'd take the bills and I'd see what was the same so that I could put the same city together, because it was the same code. Some of them, just the nature of the shipment was all the same pricing, so you could put all those together. So I'd take a couple of minutes doing that, but then I just. . . . Or the dates, the month. All the same month, all the same day, same year. The normal card was a duplication of month and a duplication of year and a duplication of your code going into the card and that was it. Like it was four dollars or a lot more, I'd either dupe the whole four dollars or I would dupe all the zeros. That's what I would do, and so maybe I was only punching three or four keys on each card. You would run those cards through your machines. So you got, dah-dah-dah, zoom-zoom, dah-dah-dah, zoom-zoom. [Laughter] The thing goes zoom-zoom-zoom, you're ready to fall asleep.

YATES: I can imagine. You know, I think when I turned the tape recorder off for a second, you were mentioning something about furniture.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: That's what you were . . .

WRIGHT: Let's say you were a key puncher. It wasn't a case of them coming in and if there were twenty machines they had twenty new chairs. Maybe they would bring in two or three new chairs. Well, that was by seniority. And then what you did is you would put your name on your chair, because of the fact that if you took a day off or went on vacation somebody was going to use your chair. So you had to have your name on it so you got your chair back when you got there.

Well, the first thing you know I was at a desk job. Your ruler. . . . I mean whatever equipment you were using, you put your name on it. So one day I thought, "God, I'm sitting at the same window. I've been sitting here now it's ten years. Same window. I've got my name on practically everything on this desk. I'm looking at the same corner." The corner of Lackawanna Avenue and Spruce Street was the corner I could see. "That same cement corner I've been looking at for all these years. [Laughter] I have to get out of here! I'm going crazy!"

So I made the decision then that I was going to. . . . I had gotten myself down to Miami Beach, which was the big thing to go to from Pennsylvania.

And I'd go in November, because the rates were down and they were going in the winter, going south for the winter. I took my vacation and went down there, but I wanted to go to Mexico and go to Acapulco, for nothing else than to see these guys jump off the cliff in Acapulco. And I wanted to go to Hawaii and I wanted to go to California. So I thought, "Well, California is on my list," and I had a girlfriend [Anita Mangano] that had worked at Acme with me. She had married her childhood sweetheart and when he finished college he was in the [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers. He was stationed in San Francisco. Actually she met him up in Las Vegas to get married and then went on into San Francisco and she wanted me to come out. So I went and I went for the two weeks, which would have normally been my vacation. I went out to San Francisco. God, it was like heaven.

YATES: What time of year was it?

WRIGHT: Well, for that, it was the ending of November and the beginning of December when I went out to see her. You left the ice and snow. In fact, we didn't even think we were going to get the plane off the runway in Philadelphia, because you had to go from my home town to Philadelphia in order to get on the plane that was going to the West Coast. And here I am, coming in over the ocean to land at the San Francisco airport.

YATES: And it's a beautiful view.

WRIGHT: Oh, what a view! And my coat is too warm. Everything is. . . . This is

heaven. I'm for this. So I landed. I thought "This is the place. I always wanted to come to California. This is what I am going to do." Well, then, in correspondence back and forth she told me it was possible they were going to be changed, because his job was winding down.

YATES: They would move, I take it, wherever the Corps of Engineers would send them?

WRIGHT: Would send them, yeah, and they were going into Los Angeles. I thought, "Well, this is perfect. I'll go to Los Angeles." It's still California, it's still along the coast. I'll go into Los Angeles, I'll get myself a job, and I'll at least try it, because I would have a friend there. So the arrangements were all made that in the end it was the end of January I was going to go.

YATES: So you had gone back to Pennsylvania.

WRIGHT: I went back. I had my two weeks vacation and went back. And that was my goal. And my mother and father, they thought it was a great idea that I would go out and give it a try. So what happened was, I'm flying out and he gets his notice for transfer. We're still in San Francisco. He gets his notice for transfer, that in forty-eight hours he's got to go to Seattle, Washington, that is where he was going to be, and that she was then to transfer. She would be going up with him.

YATES: So you wouldn't know anybody.

WRIGHT: Never wanted to go to Seattle, Washington. All I ever knew about Seattle,

Washington, was it rained. I didn't want to go to Seattle, Washington. I wanted to be in California. So when I land I find out that I got the note with visitor's assistance. My name is called, and I pick up the note from her, and she is willing. . . . You know, I could come to Seattle. "I don't want to go to Seattle. This is where I want to be."

So I asked them what was the closest place that a woman alone could stay, and of course they named several places. But the one that stuck out in my mind was one that was at Alvarado [Street] and Hoover [Street].

YATES: So you are in Los Angeles.

WRIGHT: I'm in Los Angeles. I'm at the airport and they name a place. And I said, "Well, where is that?" And they said, "Well, that's kind of in the middle of Los Angeles." And I said, "That's where I want to go."

YATES: Was this like a YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]?

WRIGHT: It was run by nuns. No, no, it was run by nuns and that's. . . . You know, being a practicing Catholic, that to me was a good safe harbor place. But it was Hoover and Alvarado.

YATES: OK. So you're at the airport with your luggage.

WRIGHT: Yeah, so I get a cab that takes me out to this home. OK, I get in and the sister is very happy to take me there. I figured I would stay there for the two months, because I came out for sixty days. That is where I would stay.

YATES: I'm sorry, did you have a job lined up? Or were you going to try to get a job?

WRIGHT: Yes. I was going to do the living part and see if I was going to be happy.

And so she starts giving me all the rules and regulations of the house and I nearly choke. My mother was a stickler. I had to be in by midnight. Now, I'm in my thirties by this time. I was thirty-two.

YATES: You were thirty-two, right? You came out in '61. So it was January of '62.

WRIGHT: Yeah. No, it would have been January of '62, because there was . . .

YATES: Oh, '62?

WRIGHT: Now you've really got me, because I got married in '63. So it was the election of '60 . . .

YATES: OK, I may have the date wrong.

WRIGHT: So it was January of '62 that I came.

YATES: Anyway, you were thirty-two, and the rules at this residence were . . .

WRIGHT: As I said, I was thirty-two years old. My mother had rules of the house and I had to be in at midnight, and I mean midnight, not five minutes after. I had to be in at midnight, which drove me crazy. And of course I never signed my paycheck, except over. I signed it when she went to deposit or cash it. My mother controlled all my money and gave me an allowance. So I was really going off on my own in a strange city.

YATES: But did you have access to this money then, now that you were going out or no?

WRIGHT: No. I had an allowance. I got \$20 a week allowance. Now, my mother, yes,

she put money aside and she bought me my fur coat and I got other things like that, but I never did it myself. I didn't sign my check and get cash and spend it.

YATES: Right. But it wasn't also set aside necessarily for, you know, that this is how much you earned.

WRIGHT: My father only made \$65 a week.

YATES: So it was helping out the family.

WRIGHT: Sure, it was helping out. And I had a younger brother, ten years younger than I.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: So it wasn't anything that. . . . But it was just the idea that I was going to have all of this. I got all this freedom. Well, I got a kick. Here I had traveled almost three thousand miles. I get this place where I'm going to stay and one of the rules of the house is that you have to be in at nine o'clock.

YATES: Oh, gee. [Laughter] Every night.

WRIGHT: Every night. Every night, nine o'clock. [Gasps] "What have I gotten myself into?" So, OK, that was a Sunday that I had flown out. Monday morning I bought a paper and I went out looking for a job and I got a job. I got a job at Superior Oil [Company], accounting department, at the corner of Fifth [Street] and Flower [Street].

YATES: How long did it take you to get the job?

WRIGHT: About an hour. I started on Monday.

YATES: Wow.

WRIGHT: I went one place.

[Interruption]

YATES: So you said it took you like a day. You went out Monday looking for a job?

WRIGHT: I went Monday morning. I got up bright and early.

The other thing that bothered me at this home, and it wasn't their fault, it was just because being an only child for ten years. . . . And then even when my brother came into the world I still had my own room.

YATES: Your own space.

WRIGHT: My own space. And when I got there there were all these beds lined up like a dormitory, and you had this one little desk—not desk but like night stand that you could lock things in.

YATES: And that was it.

WRIGHT: Yeah, that was it. “Oh, my God.” I didn't know who was sleeping in the next bed because there was no privacy between. “Oh, God, I have to get out of this.” So I was up early the next morning, asked the directions to downtown Los Angeles and I went to downtown Los Angeles. And I tried a couple of places, but there was Superior Oil, and when I got to the place, I said, “Oh, my God, this is what California is all about.”

Here was this big, beautiful building on the corner, which meant I could

come down on Sixth [Street], get off the bus, walk across the street and into the office. Glass doors with gold handles in the form of S's for Superior Oil. I got inside. The offices, you either had a pink phone and a pink typewriter. . . . I mean, it was all color coordinated. . . . Green. You know, it was wonderful. And you had your elevator. You pushed the button, got on, went up to whatever floor you wanted. . . . Because the whole building was Superior Oil.

YATES: So you read about a job and went there to . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah. This just attracted me, because it was accounting. I was looking under accounting.

YATES: So you show up at the building.

WRIGHT: I show up at the building and I said, "My God!" And I had to go to the third floor. I push three and I get on the elevator, and go up to the third floor and, oh, everything was laid out beautifully. So I have the interview and it's to start out as a key puncher. I don't care. I just wanted. . . . There were other things that were on my mind more important than if I was going to be a puncher.

YATES: What was the pay?

WRIGHT: It was \$300 a month and I had come from a case of approximately \$180 every month. Probably the best way to say it is that it was maybe about \$200 that I would have been doing back in. . . . Because it was \$98 something. . . .

YATES: OK. So this was \$300.

WRIGHT: Yeah. So this was \$300. So this was \$100 more a month. It was \$100 more a month. It was in California.

YATES: What about cost of living? Was it more expensive?

WRIGHT: Well, I didn't know at that point. And I had saved some money and I had some money with me. I had about \$100 with me, I figured until I got a job, but this was even going to be faster. So I could start the next day.

YATES: Wednesday.

WRIGHT: Tuesday.

YATES: Oh, you went in on Monday. Got you.

WRIGHT: Tuesday. I was going to start my job at nine o'clock Tuesday morning. Here was the interesting part. You came in at nine o'clock and at nine-thirty was your breakfast break—they had a cafeteria up on the top floor—and I mean breakfast. "How do you want your eggs?"

YATES: So you didn't pay for this. This was all a service?

WRIGHT: So when I found this out I was way ahead, as compared to being back home. So. . . . Had breakfast. Had lunch. And I mean, it wasn't any skimpy lunch. Some days you could have turkey and dressing with all the trimmings.

YATES: Wow.

WRIGHT: You could have fish Friday. You could have choices of fish. You could have soup, salad—you know, the whole bit. And then you had a break in the

afternoon when you could have dessert, anything you wanted to eat.

YATES: So most of your meals were paid for, then.

WRIGHT: So when I went home at night, if I made myself a sandwich, if I had a bowl of soup, that was it. So this was great. And as I said, just down, get off the bus, cross the street, and I was there. So I was in heaven at this job.

YATES: Now what did you do about your living situation?

WRIGHT: Well, that was the next thing. So, I got up Tuesday morning and I went to work, and after work I asked the girls that were there, and one of them [Barbara Shea] became a good friend of mine. In fact, she was the maid of honor at my wedding. I asked where would be a good place for me to live. They said, "You want it to be temporary? You want to sign a lease and everything?" and I said "Yeah." So they said, "You have to go to the Ambassador district." And I said, "How do I know I'm at the Ambassador district?" She said, "The Ambassador Hotel." Two blocks one way from the hotel, two blocks the other way and as close to Wilshire Boulevard as you can get. That is a good area.

YATES: So you can get on a bus and get to work.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, not only get on a bus and get to work but you can also be sure there was a little bit of safety there as compared to some place downtown.

YATES: I see. Yeah.

WRIGHT: I thought, OK. So that night I went and I came and. . . What was the

restaurant? [Ollie Hammond's Steak House] They were all over the city. They no longer exist. Well, the restaurant was right on the corner of Sixth. . . . So it was Wilshire and then the next street over was Serrano [Avenue]. Serrano was the street. Sixth and Serrano was where this. . . . No, the restaurant was at Serrano and Wilshire. The next street over from Wilshire was Sixth, and right off the corner was this place that maybe had about forty apartments in it. I mean, it wasn't a huge apartment building and Mrs. [ ] Krieger was her name, who was the manager, and she rented me what she had, which was a studio apartment. And of course what it was was the one room. The couch just opened into a bed. But I had everything. I had furniture.

YATES: You had a little kitchenette or something?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Little table, two chairs, a little refrigerator. I had everything. I didn't have to buy anything. She loaned me sheets and pillowcases and pillows for the bed. She gave me two plates. And she really. . . . Right off the bat she liked the idea that I was going to stay there forever. I told her, I said, "I'm only trying the sixty days." She said, "You'll stay." So she was a real nice lady, and then even at night she would come over sometimes with something for me to eat, because she was afraid I wasn't eating right. She was a real. . . . She was like my mother away from home. That's what she really was. So I took it and it was \$100 a month for this place.

YATES: It sounds like you were doing well.

WRIGHT: Hey! I'm in heaven!

YATES: Meals covered and a furnished apartment. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: Yeah. You know? And I could get on the bus and I could go out to the beach. So my day on Sunday, my day off. . . . Well, Saturday and Sunday, but Sunday in particular. Sunday I would get on the bus, ride out to the beach, and it would be so hot downtown, but you'd get out to the beach and it was cold. So maybe I'd only walk along the beach. You didn't lie out in the sun. Of course there were people that did, but I didn't, because it seemed too cold to me there. And then I'd go to this little shop just off Santa Monica Boulevard—fish—and I would get these big giant shrimps, pieces of shrimp. Oh, boy. Well, I stunk up the bus coming back. [Laughter]

But I'd bring it back, and that's what I would have for my dinner Sunday night. Either I would just boil them and dip them in ketchup and eat them—because, boy, they tasted so good—or I would make a shrimp sandwich, you know, or I'd try dipping them in egg and bread crumbs and frying them. I had a ball with that shrimp. Every Sunday it was shrimp.

YATES: It sounds good.

WRIGHT: Yep. And then in the evenings I could always find. . . . For theater, I think I saw every play that was playing in Los Angeles then, because I'd go to the theater. I got on the bus, went all the way out to UCLA [University of

California, Los Angeles] to hear George Shearing, who was performing. I saw him.

YATES: Was that at Royce Hall?

WRIGHT: Yes. And then I could get a bus and then get a transfer and go up to Sunset Boulevard. Then it was *77 Sunset Strip*, with Efrem Zimbalist Jr. playing the part. Of course it didn't exist, but there was a restaurant there that is where they did some of their filming. So I went there. Well, the night I went there. . . . Ella Fitzgerald.

YATES: Wow.

WRIGHT: I saw Ella Fitzgerald.

YATES: It sounds like you really took advantage of being here.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I visited all the theaters.

YATES: And you didn't have to be in at a particular time.

WRIGHT: That's right! [Laughter]

YATES: What about developing friends or relationships?

WRIGHT: Well, the first one was this Barbara, and Barbara had been married and divorced twice and she was older than I was. I was like thirty-two, but they always thought I was a kid because I didn't . . .

YATES: That's young still.

WRIGHT: Yeah. But when you are in a situation in a town where everybody's watching out for you, you're kind of taken care of. You don't seem to be streetwise,

basically. I wasn't streetwise. So she took me under her wing. Later on in life I realized. . . . She was an attractive woman, but she was in her early forties and she wasn't the prettiest, and so she kind of used me to bring the guys over to the bar, which I didn't realize at the time. You know, it was just. . . . I just thought everybody was so friendly! Gee! You know?

[Laughter] So anyway.

YATES: Who else did you form friendships with? Or how did you meet people outside of work?

WRIGHT: I didn't. I didn't. Whatever we met. . . . It was basically one night stands, because you would meet these guys, and they were so aggressive. . . . I didn't realize we were . . .

YATES: That was at a bar or a restaurant or something?

WRIGHT: Yeah. You were getting picked up. I didn't realize I was being picked up, and it was kind of funny because at my age I was supposed to be streetwise, see. But I wasn't. But still, you know, I had a pretty good time. And then my two months was up.

YATES: Oh, right.

WRIGHT: And I wasn't ready to go home. So I walked into the office in Superior Oil and I took a two week leave of absence. And they were betting that I wouldn't come back.

YATES: But they were OK with doing that.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

YATES: You didn't have to quit your job.

WRIGHT: But everybody in the office said, "She's not coming back, you know." OK, so I took a two week leave of absence, left on a Sunday night. Actually, left on a Saturday, because Monday I was due back at work. So I went to work on Monday morning and gave them my two weeks notice. I was going back. "Oh!" "No, no, I'm going. That's it, I made up my mind." My mother was ready to kill me. My father said . . .

YATES: I'm sorry. So you hadn't quit your job at Trane, is that what you're saying?

WRIGHT: No, Acme Fast Freight.

YATES: I'm sorry, I mean Acme Fast Freight. So you had taken a leave . . .

WRIGHT: I had taken a two month leave of absence, sixty days, then went out, worked . . .

YATES: Hold on one second.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

YATES: OK. So you were telling me. . . . Now I've got the sequence. You took a leave, left Acme, and came out, and that was your sixty days.

WRIGHT: I was due back somewhere around the first of March.

YATES: OK. But then you took a leave from Superior for two weeks, went back.

WRIGHT: Walked in . . .

YATES: To Acme.

WRIGHT: . . . bright and early in the morning and gave them my two weeks notice. The women around there that had been there, some of them, fifteen years, that was it. They said, "What are you doing? You've got seniority. That means you'll never lose your job. You're making a good pay." I said, "I'm making more out in California." "But it costs so much." Well, it was the kind of job that wasn't costing me money. So I was. . . .

YATES: You were still ahead.

WRIGHT: I was still ahead

YATES: At the job in California.

WRIGHT: And then at this point I had met this young girl that had come up from Atlanta, Georgia. She was about nineteen years old, didn't have anybody and I let her come in and live with me. I don't even remember where I met her. But anyway, I let her. Joyce [ ].

YATES: But this is at your studio apartment?

WRIGHT: Yes. Joyce. So now, \$100 cost me \$50, and it was just absolutely wonderful. There were like two day beds you had. You had two couches that kind of backed up and went this way, with the table at the end. And I had bought me a TV set by this time, because I knew I was going to stay. I got me a little TV set. I went down and bought it used for \$50.

So I had TV. I could walk around the corner and go to the movies if I

wanted to. On Western, which was just a block over from where we were at Serrano, there was Blarney's Castle. So we started going to Blarney's Castle because the food was good. They had a piano bar, which just fascinated me, because in my home town a woman would never go alone into a place with a bar. And most of it was done with Joyce.

YATES: This is your roommate now.

WRIGHT: Yeah. We'd go over there, basically, on a Friday night and we'd. . . . One drink. . . . They wouldn't push you on drinking a lot, you know, so you could have one drink all night.

YATES: Well, you mentioned getting married. Now, how did you meet your husband?

WRIGHT: This is what I'm coming to.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: So we'd go there to Blarney's Castle and then you could sit at the piano bar. The pianist was Henry, and Henry had been in the war and he was a concert pianist in Poland who had come to the United States after the war, but he was with the English air. . . .

YATES: Air corps?

WRIGHT: But it was the Polish squadron of the British [Royal] Air Force. And so then he came to the United States, and he taught music and he played at Blarney's Castle on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. So Friday night was a good

night to go. It was always crowded with people. One drink, and you could. . . . And everybody sang together, and then there was a time at night where Henry would pass the mike around and everybody got to sing their favorite song. So I got to sing. So I'd sing away to my heart's content, and I didn't quite understand it at that point because it was just the idea. . . . I used to use the showerhead as my mike and I would sing in the shower until my mother screamed or . . .

YATES: What would you sing?

WRIGHT: Oh, all different kinds. Mostly show tunes, but all different kinds of songs. And so I would sing, and this night I'm singing "Moon River." [Victor O.] Vic Wright, in the printing business at that time. . . . I mean he was a printer, not that he owned the business, but he was a plate maker—preparing the plates by burning the printed material onto the plate that went on the press—and he worked nights most of the time. So he came to Blarney's on Saturday nights, would come in kind of late, and he was sitting over at what I called the regular bar, and he hears the voice, so he comes over to find out who the voice is, and when he does that, of course, Henry knows him and introduces him to me.

YATES: So that's how you met.

WRIGHT: So that's how I met him. That was on a Saturday night. Now he was all planned to go to Vegas after he left the bar. He was going to go to Vegas and

so he was looking for people to travel with him, and he had gotten one of the guys that was parking cars, one of the kids, who wanted to get married and his girlfriend was with him that night, and so he said, "Well, I'll take you to Vegas if you want to get married," because he was going. So he was looking for people to go with him. He wants to fill up the car, but I didn't realize that because I had been introduced to him.

He thought I could sing well, and he looked like a hoodlum to me, because he had on this black, shiny suit. He had a white shirt with all these little white embroidered elephants on it. He had the black tie, he wore a black hat, he had the rain coat. To me he was Mafia. So he says to me, "Well, would you like to go to Las Vegas?" I said, "Oh, sure," you know, figuring this is the old come on. Now I'm getting a little wiser, see. So I said, "Oh, sure." He said, "Oh, good!" And I said, "Oh, there's one condition. You're going to have to take my friend with me." At that point Joyce was down a few seats at the bar. I said, "You're going to have to take her with me." He said, "OK." Now I'm stuck, because he was supposed to say no.

YATES: [Laughter] Now you are going.

WRIGHT: If I had said, "No, I don't want to go," that would have shown what kind of a person I am. But this way I thought he would say, "No, she can't come," and then I thought, "That's it," you know.

YATES: Right. That was your out.

WRIGHT: That was my out. So I didn't have an out. I said, "Well, OK." He said, "Sure, she can come." I said, "Well, I have to talk to her." So we went to the ladies room. I said, "This character wants to take us to Vegas. I've never been to Vegas. Have you?" She says, "No." I said, "Well, we've got to stick together, real tight together, because I don't want anything happening to either one of us." She said, "OK." She said, "I'm your skin." I said, "All right." So we went back and we said OK. So at midnight we leave Blarney's Castle and we drive to Vegas and we get there in the morning.

YATES: Now, it's three of you? No, there were other people

WRIGHT: There's five, and there was another guy that wanted to go, he just wanted to go to gamble, so there were six of us that went. And when he gets his car, he has got a [Lincoln Continental] Mark III. I thought, "Well, this guy has got money, then. You know, he's got this big car." So anyway, we go in luxury, and there were three in the back seat and so three of us had to sit up front. So naturally he wanted me to sit next to him. I thought, "Boy, you're. . . ." I'm thinking, "You are going to fall flat on your face, buster." But, anyway, we drive to Vegas.

We get there in the morning. He buys Joyce and me breakfast and then he says, "You know, you're probably tired." He said, "We'll get a room."  
[cynical voice] "Oh, yeah." So he goes up to the desk—I can't even remember the hotel—and I said, "I'm not that tired." He said, "Well, I got a

room for you two.” He said, “I got a room for myself.” He said, “We’ll rest until about one o’clock.” He said, “Then we’ll go have fun.” He said, “We’ll do a little gambling.” But then I realized I had two dollars in my purse. [Laughter] It was like the last day of January. It was the twenty-sixth of January, to be exact. We don’t get paid until the thirtieth.

YATES: So you didn’t have any money.

WRIGHT: I didn’t have any money to gamble. I thought, “Oh!” I said to Joyce, “It looks like we’re going to be walking around.” So he gave each of us five dollars to gamble. I said, “No, I’ll only take it as a loan.” He said, “It’s a loan. You’ve got to pay me back.” I said, “OK.” Well, we’ve had breakfast. We had a chance to go in and take a shower and get all re-dressed again, you know. We lay down and fell asleep for a while, yes. We got up, we then had lunch, and he’s picking the tab up on everything. We have lunch and he gives us five dollars to gamble. We go to a dinner show on Sunday night. It was *Guys and Dolls*.

Now, I make money on these five dollars. I’ve now got it up to fifteen. So I try to give him his five dollars back and he won’t take it. I said, “Well, I owe you. You have to. . . .” He said, “Pay me another time.” I said, “Well, you’re going to get your money back. I just don’t take money from people.” So we had a heck of a good time. Now, Sunday night after the show. . . . So we are leaving there about eleven o’clock. You can imagine at what time we

got back. He drops me off. Oh, he said, "And here's my telephone number, and call me tomorrow sometime in the afternoon, because I have to get up to go to work." Because he was working nights, he was the night supervisor in this printing place. I said, "OK. Sure." So I take it. And now how are we going to explain? Because we're getting in like at five or almost six o'clock in the morning.

YATES: And you had to go to your job, I take it.

WRIGHT: And we were going, and these gals in the office would ask what we were doing over the weekend. . . . [Laughter] I'm dying, I'm so tired. But I do, I call him in the afternoon. He said, "Well, I'll be downtown on Wednesday, so I suppose I can pick you up and take you to lunch." I said, "Well, OK." I thought, "That's OK. I'll go to lunch with him." So I went to lunch with him on a Wednesday. And now he says, "Oh, by the way. I've got tickets for the theater on Saturday. Would you go with me?" I said, "OK," because now I'm getting a little more comfortable with him. So we had lunch on Wednesday. He comes and he picks me up on Saturday night to go the theater and the play was *Have I got a Girl for You!* He has a corsage of flowers for me. He takes me to dinner. I can have anything I want to eat, price didn't mean anything. I'm in heaven.

YATES: How old was he?

WRIGHT: He was nine years older than I was. So I was thirty-three and he was forty-

two when we met. He had been married, because as I got more to know of his life. . . . He had his finger missing. This finger was missing, completely off.

YATES: Oh, his middle finger on his right hand?

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: But you didn't know it, because there was enough here. And he had a stub here also.

YATES: On his first finger.

WRIGHT: Yeah, because what they saved. . . . He had gotten his hand caught in the press. And if they had done everything this would all come off.

YATES: The first three fingers.

WRIGHT: So they saved this and they saved this, at least part of it. So these two. So when he was sitting like this you didn't see anything, you never noticed. And he smoked, so he would take and light a cigarette and smoke and everything. He wrote with the hand. It was only when he had his hand opened out like this that you could see there was a little stump here. This was above the knuckle.

YATES: The first finger.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And this was right at the knuckle.

So this got to be a ritual. He would meet me for lunch on Wednesday. I

got to know more about him, found how this happened with his. . . . Why he was in California, when in reality he had been with the state police, he was a captain with the state police in Illinois.

[Interruption]

So that was the one week. Then we are now into February, so he tells me he's going to marry me. You know, I'm no kid. I'm not twenty-one years old and I'm not going to make any mistakes, that's for sure. But I did enjoy his company. And he'd come on Sundays and he'd take us and we would drive down to the beach. It was all the things that I had dreamed about doing, you know. One thing, being in California, seeing all the shows, going out to dinner—because back home we had to have a special reason, you know. You went out to dinner maybe once a year.

YATES: Right. Going to the beach.

WRIGHT: Beach! There was no beach to go to!

YATES: No, I mean, but here.

WRIGHT: Yeah, and to go out and eat, drive along. We drove all the way to Santa Barbara, gone all day, you know. And of course Joyce didn't like it, my roommate, because she was afraid now she wouldn't have a place to stay, because she was working for an insurance company and they paid so little for office. . . .

YATES: She couldn't afford her own place.

WRIGHT: She couldn't afford her own place. So it's coming on down. . . . And by the way, it was a year to the day I had come to California that I met him.

YATES: So this is '63.

WRIGHT: This is '63. And so come February. . . . We had met on the twenty-sixth of January. It's now Valentine's Day. It's the fourteenth. But I didn't worry. Sometimes when he'd call that he was going to come over during his lunch hour—because he worked nights—or something like that, I'd say, "No, I'm going out to dinner with someone," you know. I was trying to keep the idea that I had all these guys on, you know. So he calls me on the fourteenth—I asked him why he wasn't working, he said he took the night off—he wants to take me out to dinner. I said, "I beg your pardon. I already have a date." He said, "Oh, really?" "Well," he said, "By my watch it's a quarter after six and if you had a date you would be on your way by now." He said, "I'm going to take you out to dinner." [Sighs] I said, "Oh, OK. You win."

So he comes and we go to Blarney's Castle, because that's where we met, and before we get there he puts a diamond on my finger. I said, "What's this for?" He said, "I want you to marry me." "Oh." I took it off and I gave it to him. I said, "You're out of your mind. I don't know you that well. I don't know your family background, you don't know mine." I mean, he was Episcopalian, I was Catholic. I mean, every reason I could think of, I was throwing out there. And he said, "No. We're going to. I just know we're

going to and I want you to keep the ring.” I took it off twice. When I took it off the third time, he says “OK” and he went like he was going to throw it out the window. I said, “Wait a minute. [Laughter] Suppose I keep it and think about it.” He said, “If you’re thinking it, you wear it. I don’t want you to date anybody else if you’re going to be thinking about me.” He said, “That’s not fair.” I said, “Well, OK.”

So we get to Blarney’s Castle now, and he showed everybody that he’s given me the ring. I said, “Wait a minute now. Don’t do that to me, you know.” Well, it seemed like every couple that was in that place that night were celebrating their anniversaries. They had all met in Blarney’s Castle and all got married, some only a couple of weeks, some was a year, I mean, I thought, “Oh! What am I up against here?” I was feeling kind of smothered, because there were all these people. There was nobody that said, “Boy, you know, walk away from that one” to me. So then the pressure really was on, because from then on he wanted to get married, he wanted to get married, he wanted to get married.

In the meantime, Superior Oil was going to Houston, Texas, back to the main office. They were taking everything. So I wouldn’t have a job. So I then had taken a job right catty-corner from their building to Wilshire Boulevard. Where the Hilton Hotel is there? Well, they had the office building right next to it, they called it Hilton Office Building, and they

had. . . . Capital Investments Mutual Funds was their title. It was a mutual funds company and I got a job in there as a statistician with them, and making \$25 more a month that I was making at . . .

YATES: So you keep moving up the ladder.

WRIGHT: Salary wise. But it was a little more difficult now, because I didn't have the meals. So I wasn't able to have my lunches and breakfasts, you know. But I was doing pretty good on the dinners at that point. [Laughter] So that was OK.

So he's insisting we're going to get married and I call back home and tell them about this and my mother hits the ceiling. "Don't bring that bum back here," she's telling me, and everything else. So well, I have to make up my mind. There was nothing I could say that didn't have me feeling that I was getting more and more attached to him. But at the same instance it wasn't like it was back home. It wasn't somebody that you knew for years and years and years and the families knew each other and you almost knew this was the guy you were going to marry.

YATES: Now, why did your mother say, "Don't bring that bum back here"? What made her say that?

WRIGHT: Because I said that if I decide. . . . And like this was in June, I think it was, I said to her, "If I decide, I want to come home to be married." And she said, "Don't bring that bum back here," and that suddenly hit me. . . . She didn't

know him, but my mother just felt that I had not fit the pattern that she had for me. The pattern was that I would stay home, somebody was going to knock on the door, I was going to fall madly in love, we were going to get married. And then, because she and my dad would be getting older, the top of the house, because we had a two story, a three bedroom. . . . Because that's what they did back there. Families moved in on each other, you know, brothers and sisters and that. She could settle downstairs, because they could have their bedroom and their little sitting room and their kitchen, and then I could have the upstairs and I would be there. My brother was different. He was going to go off and. . . .

YATES: And she held on to this even though you are now in your early thirties.

WRIGHT: Yes. She always knew I was coming home. And this was the way it was supposed to be. So this wasn't the way it was supposed to be, for my mother. So I mean it was really, really hard, and then I suddenly. . . . And my father, she said, "You're killing your father," because my father and I were like this. [crosses one finger over the other] I honestly believed that if somebody told my father I had killed someone, my dad would say, "She had a good reason." I could do no wrong with my dad. And he had told my mother so much that she was too strict with me, that she would find that sooner or later I'd break away from her. So my mother didn't want to talk to me. I'd get on [the phone] and she'd say to my dad, "Freddy, here's your daughter."

So my father said, "You have to live your own life." In fact, he'd even call me from where he worked. He would call to talk to me. He said, "You have to make your own. . . . If you really care for this man," he said, "you're going to have to decide. And it's all right if you live out there," he said. "Sure I'd miss you. I wish you were here. I miss you when you used to rub the top of my head. There's a lot of things I miss. But," he said, "you've got to live your life. Don't let your mother," he said, "because I told your mom if she got too strict, you'd fly."

YATES: Wise counsel.

WRIGHT: He said, "But I didn't think it would be three thousand miles. But," he said, "you know. . . ." He had a good feeling, you know.

YATES: It sounds like he had a healthy perspective on children, also, and that eventually they do move on.

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm. And I wasn't getting any younger, for God's sake. So I turned around and I said, "OK, Dad," because now I'm thirty-four. I said, "I'm going to make a decision." I said, "When I make the decision I'm going to tell Vic first." So I told Vic. I said, "OK. You win." [Laughter] "You win." He says, "Well, I wanted to go back East and do it." I said, "We can't get married back there because my mother won't. . . ." I said, "She'd really ruin it, because she'd be so angry." She was so stubborn. I have a little bit of her stubborn streak, I know, but she. . . . Because when I decided, then we had to

decide about when. So it was decided that we were going to be married on Thanksgiving Day.

YATES: So you decided this in the summer then?

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was about July, August. Well, it was more into August, in the ending of August.

YATES: And this is '63?

WRIGHT: Yeah, it was '63. I met him in '63, really, because I met him in January, after I had been here a year. I came out in '62, was here a year in '63 . . . That wouldn't have worked out, would it? Because we were married in '63 and [Victoria] Vicki [Wright] was born in '64. So it had to be '62, yeah, because it was after the election. So how . . .

YATES: Oh, well, we can . . .

WRIGHT: Oh, I know! It was when I went to visit my friend, and then it was the following. . . . It was in November of '61. So it was actually '62, January of '62, that I came out.

YATES: And then you met him in January of '63. OK, so you decided to get married and you're going to get married in November.

WRIGHT: Something I would never have done back in Pennsylvania, because the big high school game between Taylor and Old Forge was on Thanksgiving Day. I mean that was just the battle royal. You would never plan anything like that. So I decided I was going to get married on Thanksgiving Day. And

now we had to find out where we were going to marry because I didn't belong to any parish. When I was giving him this whole argument about why I couldn't do it, I was going to be married as a Catholic and I didn't believe in making anybody else practice my faith. And he said, "What makes you think I won't become a Catholic if I wanted to?" I mean, he had an answer for everything. So then I said, "Well, I would like to get married in a Catholic church." And as long as I was in California I wanted to be married in one of the mission churches. I thought it would be nice, because the church there. . . . Was it Bridget? It's right there on. . . . I think it's St. Basil. They even had a seat for the Cardinal now, because it was this old church and they had rebuilt it. It was huge, downtown. And it is right there, about two blocks away from Serrano going east. I went there and the priest would have nothing to do with it. [Interruption]

YATES: You were saying where you were going to get married.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And I went to the church right there, because it was an old church and I thought, well, that would be OK and it would be close for people to come to my wedding. Because I figured the ones from the office would be what I would have.

YATES: So it would be a small, immediate group of people.

WRIGHT: Right. Well, the priest wouldn't hear tell of it because. . . . The fact that Vic was not Catholic, that was it. He wouldn't do anything about it. "No, no, no,

no, no.” So then I really was looking for a mission church. We went all the way up to Santa Barbara. [Mission] Santa Barbara would not do it because they had too many people. I mean the list was like this, because it was a mission church and they had a large parish besides.

YATES: So it was in demand.

WRIGHT: Yeah, it was in demand. So then we went down to [Mission San Juan] Capistrano. When we get to Capistrano—it was another trip down to Capistrano—they couldn’t do it because they were booked, because the swallows come back to Capistrano and they were like booked a year.

YATES: You’re picking all the hot missions.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It would be a year before we could. But the priest there said, “I want you to go down to [Mission] San Luis Rey. You will find it’s another church there in Oceanside,” he said, “very, very nice. And I’m sure Father Caladi would be happy to do it.”

YATES: I’ve been there. I haven’t seen the inside of it because there was a service going on.

WRIGHT: So the next weekend—it was in September—we drive down to it and we talked to this Father Caladi, a peach of a man, Franciscan fathers, peach of a man, made all the arrangements for us and everything else.

YATES: Had no problem with Vic being a non-Catholic?

WRIGHT: Nope. He said, “The point is we cannot marry you inside the altar, but we

can marry you at the altar railing.” And it was. . . . I mean, it was this little old church. The walls were yea thick. It seemed like the center, the church itself, was made about as wide as this room, little benches on both sides, you know. Black wrought iron candles and everything else. So we decided. That’s where it’s going to be and it’s going to be on Thanksgiving Day. My father’s birthday is the twenty-seventh of November and I would be getting married on the twenty-eighth of November. And I wanted my family to come out and my father wanted to come. And Vic said he would have paid for him to come out. But my mother told my father that if he came out to see me get married he might just as well stay, because he wouldn’t have a home when he came back.

YATES: Wow. That’s laying it on the line.

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm. And so he told me that. I said, “That’s OK, Pop. You’re with me. You’re with me.”

YATES: Now, what about your brother? Were you close to your brother?

WRIGHT: Well, there were ten years between us and we had our frictions, you know. For a while, when he was a little kid, he was the baby, I’d play with him and took care of him. But then when he started feeling his oats, you know, then it was competitive. So he played on my mother. The woman, the girl that he started dating, my mother thought she was wonderful. Compared to me she was wonderful, because she lived there with her mother and her father and

then she was going to get married and then they were going to be . . .

YATES: So it was a local person?

WRIGHT: Yeah. So that was OK. What I was doing was not OK.

YATES: I was wondering if he would have come out for the wedding.

WRIGHT: No, because then, you see, he was planning his own wedding. But he was planning to get married. . . . He was going to graduate from school, then, the end of May, and then he was getting married on my mother's and my father's wedding anniversary, which really went over with my mother. And I wanted one of my own. There was always a little rebellion in me, I guess.

YATES: So you're planning this wedding and you know your dad won't be there, which is, I'm sure, hard.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Then I talked to him the night before and he said, "You feel that you're doing what you want to do?" I said, "Yes." I really got to a point where. . . .

YATES: What about Vic's family?

WRIGHT: His mother and father were both dead. He was one of a family of five. There was only one other brother still living and himself. Well, a sister and a brother and Vic.

YATES: So were they going to be at the wedding?

WRIGHT: No. So we were both going through this by ourselves, so to speak. So then this gal who had been my friend from when I first arrived in California.

Barbara Shea Farley, her name was.

YATES: From Superior?

WRIGHT: From Superior Oil. She was going, and in the meantime she'd met this guy and she'd married him [Frank Farley].

YATES: Third time, right?

WRIGHT: Well, this was the fourth. [Laughter] Yeah, fourth. And it was his second, so they were doing OK. They were already married. So he was going to be Vic's best man and it was all right with the priest. He never said "Are they practicing Catholics?" or anything.

YATES: "Are they divorced?" Or any of the things that. . .

WRIGHT: No. He said, "This is the civil part of it." He said it so nicely to us. He said, "You are the wedding. I am officiating. You are saying that you're going to belong to him and he's saying that he's going to belong to you, and you're saying it in front of witnesses. But legally I'm the spiritual witness to it. Your bridesmaid or your maid of honor and your best man, they're the state's witnesses, so if the state doesn't care, it doesn't bother me." Which I thought was really nice.

YATES: It sounds very logical.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Because back in my home town you've got to be. . . . "When did you have your last communion?" I mean there was this whole bit in order to be in a wedding party and if you weren't Catholic, either one of you weren't

Catholic, getting married, you didn't get married in church, you got married in the priest's house. They were strict back there. They aren't now, but in those days. . . . We're talking almost forty years ago. So then it's all set. Now, my dream wedding dress was always to be white satin and I wanted like a little jacket to here because I had a very tiny waist at the time. The rest of me was pretty big, but the waist was small. And I had the skirt come out like a bell and I wanted a fur collar around this, white fur around it, and I wanted a white fur pillbox I was going to wear, and I saw it with all the veiling and everything.

Well, now, I'm getting married and we're having a total of twelve people that are going to be there, that are going to drive down to Oceanside to see us get married, and we're going to have a breakfast down there, because just down from the church was a nice little restaurant. So we're going to get married and have our wedding breakfast there.

[Interruption]

So as I said, we had the twelve people and we had the wedding and then we had the wedding breakfast at this restaurant just down from the inn.

So I decided this was not one to have the long flowing gown and everything else. And at that point I'm thirty-four years old, getting married. So I'm not a kid, you know, I was thinking to myself. But that's what I want. So I went, and just down from where we lived, down Serrano there, was this

little dress shop, and she did some sewing too. She made it for me. If I could get to it, I would even show it you, it's hanging in the back. And it was little spaghetti ties, very plain dress. It fitted in here, bell skirt, in fact, it had like a pleat in the front.

YATES: It was short?

WRIGHT: I got what they call calf-length. And I got the fur and I got a little fur boa.

So she made it very plain here and the fur boa around, white, and the white cap and then we just attached some veiling. So when I put it back on I had like veiling around it. In fact, I can even show you my wedding picture. And it was the white and it was something I could even wear again if I wanted to. So that's what I had made.

And so, I talked to my dad, which was on his birthday, and told him I would be married by this time tomorrow. I'll be Mrs. Victor Wright.

[Interruption]

YATES: OK, so you're going to get married down at San Luis Rey.

WRIGHT: Uh-huh, in a mission church. And we were going to be married at eleven o'clock and that would give us a kind of a brunch type reception. And now we suddenly realize that we've got to get down there. And so I don't have a car, and Barbara is going down with her husband, of course, and the others are going to travel down by themselves. And so now it ends up that Vic and I are the ones that are going to travel together. I don't want him to see my

gown! No way! I mean that's part of the thing, that he doesn't see until you are all done, right? So I make arrangements that I can use Barbara's room, because they went down like the night before. I can use Barbara's room for me to get dressed. So OK. Now I have to get the gown and everything in the car without him seeing it. So I've got it in this brown stuff and everything else, and don't forget through all this that Friday, 1963, is when John F. Kennedy was killed.

YATES: Oh, of course!

WRIGHT: And I thought, "Oh, my God!" You know, "Everybody's in mourning and everything else is. . . ." All right.

YATES: Where were you? Just for a second to talk about that, where were you when you found out?

WRIGHT: Well, because then I was working for this investment company, mutual funds, and the stock market—shoosh!—shut right down. I mean, we didn't. . . . It was just. . . . We sat there in shock. "My God!" You know, because you wouldn't even think of anything like that happening. So, I didn't know what. . . . I called Father Caladi and he said, "No." He said, "Life goes on."

OK, so now we're still going through with the wedding. So I get everything in the car. He has to go take a walk while I pack up everything. And of course Joyce is not too happy, because. . . . "Well," I said, "you've

got the place for as long as you can keep it. I'm not going to say, 'Well, you have to move out.' It makes no difference to me." So I had taken all my things out and everything. We've already got an apartment in Glendale where we were going to live, this little apartment in Glendale.

YATES: Now, he worked in Los Angeles? Downtown?

WRIGHT: He worked in North Hollywood. He worked off of Sunset Boulevard but it was like, go down the Hollywood Freeway and go so many blocks and you were there.

YATES: So Glendale was a fairly central location?

WRIGHT: It was a good location for him. And so we're all ready now, we're driving down. We're driving down and it suddenly hit me. "I'm going to spend the rest of my life with this man." Whew. And I had never gone steady with anybody my whole life. You know, even in school. I liked the idea that when I went to the school dance I had every guy in the place wanting to dance with me, instead of going around with one guy all night. So all of a sudden it's hitting me. But then I was just. . . . So we were very quiet. We didn't hardly talk all the way down, because now I'm thinking to myself, "Now I'm going to spend the rest of my life with this fellow. Boy, it's going to be different. But now I'm thirty-four years old." In fact, now I'm thirty-four really because my birthday was in May.

YATES: So did you feel pressure for the fact that you were older and getting. . . . This

was a chance to get married and . . .

WRIGHT: No, because I never saw it, because I really did care for him. It wasn't what I anticipated. You know how you go to the movies. . . . Ah, your heart beats fast and that's the way the show goes and everything else, and it wasn't. But he was very much like my father and since I idolized my father, and then I was. . . . And you start thinking about all these things just before you get married. And the whole thing I was thinking about was the fact—and maybe as a younger person you wouldn't think of it, but for my age I was thinking of it—that I was going to get married, and it was so much of my father that I saw in him. When, I was thinking to myself, would I be starting to see things that weren't like my father? Then was I going to be sorry I did this? But then I remember my mother saying, “Well, you've made your bed, now lie in it.” [Laughter] So I go, well, this is what I've got, I made me my bed, lie in it, you know.

All this was going on in my mind, and we get there and I go to Barbara's room and I get dressed, and Barbara says, “Ah, that's beautiful!” I carried red roses with a sprinkling of white in them and I think it was baby's breath. It was white baby's breath. And we get there and they've got this little bitty kind of an organ type thing. It wouldn't have been. . . . If you didn't have the music playing, you know. But I'm standing at the back of the church, you know, and I am getting so irritated with this man that I'm going to marry

because he's not even looking at me. You know in the movies they turn around and he stands there just in awe.

YATES: Oh, down at the end towards the altar?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And now I'm in awe at the church because they had just had. . . . The eight o'clock mass that morning had been for John F. Kennedy. So the altar was just flowers. All up to the ceiling, it was just packed with flowers. And all these candles and this old wrought iron glowing. I mean, the whole place was lit up with these candles.

YATES: It sounds beautiful.

WRIGHT: It was a beautiful setting. So I was taken aback by how beautiful this little church was made and I was so thrilled that I went into a little church because we only had twelve people, it wouldn't go into the monstrosity of a big church.

YATES: No, you want something less. . . . But he's not looking at you.

WRIGHT: But he's not looking at me! [Laughter] Barbara walks down in front of me. She's not looking at me. Her husband, who's the best man, is standing next to Vic, and he's not looking at me! I'm thinking, "There's something wrong here," and I am so upset, and the emotion of the minute, I'm starting to get tears in my eyes, and I get to the aisle and I look. . . . I can still see him. Vic is standing there and the tears are on his cheeks. That's why he didn't turn around to look at me.

YATES: He was crying.

WRIGHT: Because he was crying. So it was the wettest wedding I'd ever been to.

Everybody! And then when he did have to turn to me and everybody else. . . . So the best man is crying, the groom is crying, the maid of honor is crying, the bride is crying. And then everybody else, all the other twelve, most of them were crying. Like I said, it was the wettest wedding I ever went to. But that's how the life started.

YATES: Wow. Well, maybe this is a good point to stop. What do you think?

WRIGHT: I think, so you can get on your way off.

YATES: Yes, since we've had a wacky day. [Laughter]

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Session 3, March 21, 2002]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

YATES: OK, why don't you say a few words and we'll see how this all sounds.

WRIGHT: You expect me to only say a few words? You should know better than that.

[Laughter]

[Interruption]

YATES: Let's get going here. We're ready to start. Good morning again. I'm finally here. A little traffic. And just as usual, chatting beforehand, basically where we ended up last time was you were talking about your move to Los Angeles and how you met your future husband, and then your wedding and then your plan was to move to Glendale. I guess what I was interested in. . . . I'd like to talk a little bit more about that background but today get more into your public service. But maybe, before we get into that specifically, you could talk about why you moved to Simi Valley, which was in 1964, I believe.

WRIGHT: It would be '65. My daughter was born in '64 and she wasn't quite a year old when we made the determination we were going to move.

YATES: And of course you had a child in between those. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: Oh! Yes.

YATES: So go ahead. Talk a little bit about what happened and why you moved here.

WRIGHT: Well, the point was that Glendale was with Vic's keeping, because he was a registered Republican. Although we had a lot in common, I was still a Democrat. And so he wanted to move to Glendale. It made no difference to me.

YATES: Because Glendale had a reputation as . . .

WRIGHT: A heavy Republican registration there, which, in the little bit of political experience I had had back East, we didn't pay any attention to things like that. It just wasn't done that way.

YATES: Actually, I'm surprised, because I hadn't thought of somebody moving into an area specifically for that reason.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

YATES: You think more like Orange County or something. But I know Glendale had a conservative reputation.

WRIGHT: Yes, and Vic's work was in Hollywood. He had been living in Hollywood and of course that was a little bit of a wild town and very liberal, and so he just didn't like the contacts he would make both in business and that. So he decided that he was going to work there, he wasn't going to live there. So that's how we got. . . . And actually we really moved into an apartment that was right on the border line because it was right off of Los Feliz [Boulevard] and then Colorado [Boulevard].

YATES: So west side.

WRIGHT: Yeah. West side, yes. And then I became pregnant and we had a little girl and I hadn't quite decided what I was going to name her. But *The Big Valley* was a thing on TV at the time, and the woman that played the young daughter, [I think] her name was Lisa on the program, and I liked the name Lisa and there weren't too many Lisas around. So I thought Lisa would be a nice name for her if she was blond. But on the other hand Vic was very dark haired, and I thought if she was dark haired then she should be named Victoria. So when she was born the first thing I said was, "What color is her hair?" [Laughter] And they told me she had black hair, dark hair. I said, "Well, then, that's Victoria." So then she was named Victoria Catherine Wright, very regal, I think.

But then being in an apartment, Vic, his thought was that a child should have a yard to play in, so he wanted us to get a home. Things were not easy. We weren't flowing with money.

YATES: Well, let me just ask you. Did you continue working up until the time you had Victoria?

WRIGHT: Well, see, he was funny. When we got married in November we were going back East to see my folks, even though it was going to be quite the meeting. And so Vic didn't want me working. He was going to be the breadwinner. He was going to do it all. So I quit. I quit the Friday before Christmas.

YATES: This was the mutual funds company that you mentioned?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Quit on Friday, started out Friday night to drive across country and get to my home by Christmas Eve. Well, we didn't make it until Christmas Day, which wasn't too bad given what went on. I mean, the car broke down. You know, it needed service and everything else. We just got out of California. Gila Bend in Arizona, that's where we spent the weekend.

YATES: Oh, because your car had broken down?

WRIGHT: Because the car had broken down. And the most exciting thing they had was a drive-in movie and we didn't have a car. So it was one of those things. But that's what we did. And so we drove across and then we got there. Then when we returned in January, the first week of January . . .

YATES: And what year now is this?

WRIGHT: This would have been. . . . Vicki was born in '64. It would have been January of '64.

YATES: OK, '64.

WRIGHT: January of '64. We got back in town and we got in late on a Sunday night, and he got up the next morning to go to work and it had been declared bankrupt while we were gone. It closed. It had a sheriff's sign on it. In fact, Vic was fortunate. He was the only one that got his vacation pay, because he had taken it for our trip back East.

YATES: So here you are, the two of you with no income.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And then I went to the doctor's and found out I was pregnant, which was a big help. So I was trying to get a job and he was working, going into different printing shops where they needed help.

YATES: He could pick up work that way?

WRIGHT: Yes. So maybe he would work two days one week and two days another week, but it wasn't. . . . You know, it was really tough trying to get organized for a job. In fact, it was like the ending of February, so it was after Valentine's Day, that he then got steady employment. So I went out looking for work and it was kind of hard, because just then you were just married and they were checking on whether or not there was a pregnancy involved or not. The last time I tried was like, oh, it must have been about May, because I was still trying to get a job, and they could tell I was pregnant. And of course I was saying no, that was my natural state, that was my shape, but that wasn't working out too well.

YATES: So you really felt like you couldn't get a job if you said you were pregnant?

WRIGHT: Yes. And I didn't get a job, because in one instance, in what would have been a very good job, they wanted me to take a physical. So that wouldn't have helped. So I ended up not working. But I was collecting. And, in fact, Vicki was supposed to be born in the first week of November and she came early. She came in September. She was born on the sixteenth of September, and I was signing my check so my husband could cash it at the hospital.

[Laughter]

YATES: So when you say collecting, do you mean unemployment?

WRIGHT: Unemployment. Because I was still viable for work. At least I still felt I was viable for work. Nobody else seemed to, but I did. So as long as you showed that you were out looking for work, and I could show them I was looking for work.

YATES: Now, where geographically was your husband working at this point?

WRIGHT: He was working in North Hollywood.

YATES: He was, still? OK.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Quite a bit of the printing shops were in that general area and so that was where he was working. And so she was born and then he wanted us to buy a house, and then, you know, we just weren't. . . . But he had his GI, so he thought. . . . We had a couple of hundred dollars in the bank, and so with that and the fact that he had a GI we could get a house.

YATES: So he served in World War II then?

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm.

YATES: Of course, because you said he was a few years older than you were.

WRIGHT: Nine years older than me. So we started looking. That is how we would spend our Sundays, we would go driving around looking for a place. Again, we were within Glendale. But Glendale was just. . . . Because what you were buying was older homes. They would need repair. I mean, if you walked

into a house and you saw a picture in a very odd place on a wall you knew darn well there was something wrong with that wall. Or a big throw rug, you know you would have to re-carpet or something. So you were in that kind of process. So we weren't doing too well.

I happened to open up a Sunday paper and saw these homes where you didn't have to put anything down, and they were taking GI, so I thought, "Hey, maybe this is the place to go!" And I liked the idea of having a new house. I didn't feel like cleaning up somebody else's, because one thing I had done is. . . . Because of the fact that we needed extra money, I was. . . . We had the one little apartment, and then we moved into this, oh, it was like a studio apartment. It had two bedrooms and bath upstairs, and then a semi bath with a sink and a john downstairs. And it was seven units and . . .

YATES: So is this a little bit like what would be considered a town home situation now?

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: Where you could purchase it?

WRIGHT: Well, you couldn't purchase it. You were renting it. But what happened was they wanted somebody on the premises and so since I was in my condition that I was in, why I got to work on the premises and so we got reduced rent.

YATES: So like a manager of the complex.

WRIGHT: Uh-huh. So we got a reduced rent and then anything we did. . . . And so I

ended up cleaning up the apartments before anybody would move in and sometimes we'd go. . . . Because it was in a situation just off of Colorado Boulevard and Chevy Chase, and people would be there for a while and they'd move. There was constant moving, so there was always an apartment up, almost monthly. So as long as I had my receipt I got to deduct anything I spent on the cleaning and so they would give me a little bit extra on that, and so sometimes we got our month's rent free, which was a big help.

But we still spent our Sundays going out roaming around looking and finally I opened a paper, I saw this, and I thought "Hey!" This was just a little bit distance from where we lived—it seemed, on the map that they showed in the paper.

YATES: I was going to say, Simi Valley to Glendale seems a little bit far. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: Yeah. But it was right off the 101 [Freeway], you know, what the heck.

YATES: It's about, what, thirty miles maybe?

WRIGHT: About thirty-five miles. And the thirty-five miles, what kind of miles were they then? You came across the 101, you got off at Topanga [Canyon Boulevard], and then you came and you did the winding Susana Pass Road. I started to laugh, and I laughed so hard that tears were rolling down my cheeks, which didn't help Vic. He said, "You were the one that picked this place!" Because of the fact that we were just like driving for ever. I said, "You would have to pack a lunch in order to get to work!" [Laughter] If you

would have to go all this way up. . . . Because it was a winding road down, and then you came down here off of Kuehner Drive. But it was coming down through the mountains to Kuehner Drive.

YATES: You couldn't just hop on the freeway and be on your way.

WRIGHT: No. It was coming down Kuehner Drive. So we got here and we looked at this housing tract and we looked at another housing tract, but the idea was that the other housing tracts were farther into Simi, which meant that much more distance. And there was the Fountainwood, which was just up off of Tapo Street. It was a beautiful home, but it didn't have anything with it. You were going to buy drapes and be doing carpeting and everything else. It was all extra. But these homes here, they had a package in which you got drapes, you got the carpeting, you got air conditioning—they were even doing the gardening, you got your whole landscaping done, it had a block wall around it—for a brand new home. You could move in, period. So we decided that was it and we didn't need a big house. So we got the three bedroom.

YATES: And the plan was that Vic would commute to North Hollywood.

WRIGHT: Vic would commute to North Hollywood, yes.

YATES: That seems like a hard thing to do.

WRIGHT: It was. It was, because what happened was. . . . We came out on a Sunday.

YATES: And it was fine.

WRIGHT: We moved in on a Saturday, it was fine. Monday, when he went to

work. . . . You drove down Alscot [Street], so you came along on Menlo [Street] and then turned right. . . . Well, if you were going straight down to Alscot to get on L.A. [Los Angeles] Avenue, to make that turn into Keuhner. . . . Because that was the way to go. Otherwise, if you came down Keuhner you'd have to stop and try to break into traffic. It was easier trying to break in at Alscot. So he would leave at five o'clock in the morning in order to be at work at seven-thirty in North Hollywood.

YATES: Wow. That sounds familiar. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: And I'd sit, because we only had the one car. There was no place I could go and nothing I could do. And of course again it was OK, because I had plenty to keep me active with the baby. And I made some curtains, because the drapes were there . . .

YATES: In the living room?

WRIGHT: Yeah, and the two drapes in those two rooms, like the front of the house.

YATES: Bedrooms.

WRIGHT: Yeah. That's what you got. So I made my own curtains for the other rooms, drapes. And then we had a bedroom and we had a table and chairs for here and we had a living room. That's all we had. So the easy thing to do was find pieces of furniture that were unfinished and I would finish them. I was staining, painting, so I had enough to keep me busy.

And then I got into artificial floral arrangements and selling them. I used

to have Christmas in October, when I would put this whole house. . . . I would design and set them all out and people would come and order. I remember one time I had a hundred cherubs I had to make, which I sat on the kitchen floor and did them. So I was busy and I was making extra money, which was helpful. Of course, Vic never did like that idea, because he felt like he wasn't doing his part.

But that drive was just. . . . And when I had to go to the doctors or something like that I'd have to drive him to work in the morning. So I would get up with the baby at five o'clock in the morning to drive him over, come back, make my doctor's appointment, and then I would have to go pick him up. And that is when I learned to use timers on my stove, because I'd put dinner in the oven and set it to start cooking at a certain time and by the time we got back, dinner was ready.

YATES: So did Vic continue to work in North Hollywood for quite some time?

WRIGHT: Yes. Yes, and then he did move closer, in the [San Fernando] Valley. He did get a job in the Valley and it was off of Roscoe [Boulevard] and Canoga [Avenue]. There used to be the White Fronts. . . . Do you remember White Front?

YATES: No.

WRIGHT: There was a store, it was called White Front. It was like a big wholesale [store], like Wal-Mart or something like that. It was White Front, and behind

that was a whole kind of industrial area and the printing shop was back in there. Then he moved out with that. And the best part is that he went to work for the same guy that had declared bankruptcy earlier on.

YATES: Oh, he started up again.

WRIGHT: Yeah. He had started up. He got himself organized and got back into the business.

YATES: So that is what was going on.

WRIGHT: That is what was going on. In the meantime we had people coming to the door with petitions for cityhood.

YATES: Oh, of course. Simi Valley was unincorporated.

WRIGHT: It was unincorporated. It didn't incorporate until 1969.

YATES: Now, remind me, where is the line for Ventura County? You're in Ventura County.

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm. The line is. . . . Next time you are coming down the freeway, after you pass Topanga watch for the sign and that's . . .

YATES: I've probably seen it, I'm just . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah. That's the line. It will say Ventura County line and if you're coming the other way it will say L.A. County line. It is just in around Rocky Peak.

YATES: Anyway, you were saying that people were coming to your door with petitions for cityhood?

WRIGHT: Cityhood, yeah. They were going for cityhood and it failed. I didn't sign the

petition.

YATES: When was this?

WRIGHT: This would have been about '65 or '66, because they tried twice. I didn't sign because I was perfectly happy with everything the way it was. But then as you start seeing your property tax and you're on a very tight budget. . . . In fact, Vicki, when she was nine years old, she was still crying because she had never had a store bought dress. I sewed like mad, because I could buy a yard of material and make her a very pretty little dress. Maybe it would cost me a dollar and something for the yard of material. So I was doing that. So I was still making her clothes.

YATES: So property taxes were on the rise.

WRIGHT: On the rise. So that's when they came around again and I got involved, because then I read the whole thing and decided it was a good idea.

YATES: Now, what would cityhood do for you, for example, in terms of property taxes?

WRIGHT: Well, we felt that we could have more control over what was going on, because they were collecting our taxes but you drove down L.A. Avenue and it looked like shantytown.

YATES: So it was basically control at the city level versus the county level.

WRIGHT: Yes, because this wasn't as populated as the old cities of Oxnard, Port Huenumbe, Ojai, Ventura. That was the seat of the population. Now the seat

of the population is Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, and Moorpark. Previously, it was that end.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: So all the goodies were going up there.

YATES: The west. West of here.

WRIGHT: And if you wanted anything you had to drive all the way to Ventura to get it. So that's why it sounded like a good idea.

YATES: So, I'm sorry, you said this is then around '69?

WRIGHT: They started up again around the ending of '68.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: Yeah, around the ending of '68 pushed for it. And what they did was cut out the areas that had the highest vote against cityhood and that is why part of Sinaloa is not the city. And then you have up off of Tapo Canyon, that area in there was not in the city. Of course, it's been annexed. As it's being developed, now, it gets annexed to the city. But at that point in time it wasn't in the city. So they cut out those areas.

YATES: So continue with how you started getting involved— interested and involved?

WRIGHT: Well, I got involved because I was the type of person. . . . I never voted on anything I didn't read. I didn't say, "Well, what are you going to do about this?" and then vote that way. I had to make up my own mind. And along

with that I wanted to be sure that this was something I got involved in, in cityhood. And now if we became a city I wanted to be sure that it followed through on the commitments.

So my night out was the Monday night council meetings and, as I said, we became a city in. . . . October of '69 is when it was official. And I felt pretty good, because I had listened and talked to them and had met people who knew them and such, of the people that were running for [Simi Valley] City Council. So the five people that I selected to vote for for city council, four of them were elected. So I was feeling pretty good. I felt I had a vote on that council. And I would go to the meetings and that was my night out. Monday night was my night out. Vic would come home and he would take care of the baby and I would go to the city council meetings, because I really was getting involved, enjoying watching it. And one of the biggest things that always stuck out in my mind was these five people swore they weren't going to take a salary, it was going to be their civic duty, and one of the first ordinances they passed was giving them a salary. [Laughter] But we were a general law city and so under those circumstances it's population basically that controls the amount of the salary.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: So they didn't take that much, \$250, but it was still the idea, that they already got one back. The seat wasn't even warm they were sitting on and they went

back on the first campaign promise. And I just saw things they were doing that I didn't think they should be doing and I started speaking out, and I did that from '69 to '72. I never missed a city council meeting and then never missed the [Simi Valley] Planning Commission. I was getting two nights out a week. I got Wednesday out, too, for the planning commission. And of course these meetings would run until two o'clock in the morning. Vic was going crazy.

YATES: Yeah. I was going to say. I know how this works.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Now, just for a second, before continuing on with that. . . . Prior to this point, where you're getting interested and involved, how interested were you in politics?

WRIGHT: Well, that goes back to. . . . My first taste, I guess I should say, was when I was in eighth grade. I ran for class president and in those days girls didn't run for that kind of office. You could run for secretary, but not for class president. But I ran for class president. I didn't want to be secretary. I wanted to be class president. I got two votes, myself and my girlfriend. So I guess that was my first taste of it, you know. It kind of leaves something there in your mind, but to ever think that I would actually run for a political office, I never gave it a thought. Because first of all I came from a small town. I came from Pennsylvania, where the politics are very structured.

YATES: Yeah. I remember you talking a little bit about the control element.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes. And I finally. . . . Things were just. . . . Everything I was saying they weren't doing. They just weren't paying any attention.

YATES: This is back to the current time, to Simi Valley City Council?

WRIGHT: Yeah. They just weren't doing what I thought they should be doing and there was such an uproar. We became a city in 1969 and immediately one of the first things they were going to do is have their own police department, instead of being with the sheriff. And Vic, having been a police officer. . . . Their discussion, what kind of a budget they were going to have and what they were going to do, oh, he was crazy. Well, if you ever pay any attention to any of the Simi Valley history, you will find out that their very first police department wore green blazers with an emblem on the pocket, did not show a gun or anything. And I had said that I wouldn't stop for anybody in a green blazer. How would I know? You could have worn a green blazer, because you didn't have a gun, you didn't have a badge. You had an emblem, like if you belonged to the yacht club. So it didn't go over too well.

Plus the fact that they took the whole fleet of CHP [California Highway Patrol] discards, as we called them, because they were all cars that had over fifty thousand miles on them. And they were burning out and everything else in hot pursuit. It was just. . . . So it was a farce. And we had said not to do that and gone to city council meetings. Even my husband got up on that one

but they did it anyway.

YATES: So I know you first ran in 1972.

WRIGHT: Uh-huh.

YATES: So what precipitated that? I mean you talked a little bit about what was going on, but anything in particular?

WRIGHT: It was the idea of the police. It was the sanitation department. It was a privately held sanitation facility and they weren't expanding for the growth. The city bought it and they were going to expand and they were going to do what they were going to do, and we were going to pay for it. That didn't set well with a lot of people because that was added expense and most of these people came into these homes at that particular point in time on a shoestring. So it was chaos.

And then, if that wasn't bad enough, we didn't have enough businesses in town. Anytime you wanted to buy anything you had to go on a winding road over into the other valley. And we were fighting for a freeway, but that wasn't going any where either, because [Adriana] Gianturco was the head of Caltrans [California Department of Transportation] under [Edmund G.] "Jerry" Brown [Jr.] and, of course, she believed that if you build a freeway you get growth. The fact that growth was already coming in didn't mean anything to her. So there was that battle going on. It was just a multitude. . . . And I was speaking out and whatever I was saying people

were agreeing with me.

YATES: Now, Gianturco is later, though, right? Jerry Brown was elected in about '76, I believe, because [Ronald W.] Reagan served until. . . . Or '74. Anyway. But, yeah, I get the point.

WRIGHT: This was still a battle, about getting the freeway in here, and of course that was one of the reasons you moved in, was the idea there was going to be a freeway, and they showed you where the freeway was going to be and everything. We were in an ideal location. If you were going to work for getting on the freeway, anyone would be here.

YATES: Do you remember when you decided when you wanted to run?

WRIGHT: I really never did decide I wanted to run. What happened was. . . . And I can still see him. His name was Frank [Montoya].

YATES: We can add that later.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It'll come at two o'clock in the morning. "Yeah, that's the name!" He was going to all the meetings, Frank was, and they had been after my husband to run for office, because he was the past police officer. And there was an officer [Richard Ostler] on the board, on the Simi city council, who was a police officer. He was a police officer down in Culver City and he sat on the city council, so they were trying to get my husband. There was no way with the work he was doing and how he was working. He couldn't take time off from work.

And I was going to all the meetings. I was up on what was going on. I'd walk in the city hall on Friday and get my full packet of the city council agenda and all the back up material on everything else. At first they didn't want to do it, but as a member of the public I had a right to have that, and so I went in and I took it. And so they finally would set it aside for me, and it was only those things that would be going into executive session that I would not get a copy of. And I'd read it, and I'd go over it, and I'd examine it. So if I thought something was wrong. . . . And I pulled things off on the consent calendar on them, too.

And so one time I was sitting and Frank is sitting next to me. I said, "Would you look at what these stupid people are going. . . . Where is their mind?" And he said, "Well, you think you can do a better job?" He said, "Why don't you run for office?" I said, "I never gave that a thought." "Well," he says, "you should, if you think you can do a better job than they're doing." And I said, "At least I have some authority behind my statements anyway." This way I was just a squeaky wheel. I didn't like being a squeaky wheel. I wanted to make changes. So I said, "I think I will."

So I came home that night at about one o'clock in the morning and I said to my husband, "I'm going to run for city council." He took a deep breath and he said, "You know, I think that's a good idea because I can't run." But I think he thought he was going to tell me what to do, because he had the

experience, right? He never got to tell me what to do. He would go ranting and raving and I'd completely ignore him and I'd do whatever I thought was right to do.

YATES: So he was supportive of your running.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. He was supportive. So in 1972. . . . It was going to be the first run after cityhood, because we became a city in '69 and so in 1972 all five seats were up. And so I ran for city council.

YATES: Now, at this point you are still a Democrat politically?

WRIGHT: Yeah. I didn't know this town was Republican. It basically was Republican, but I was Democrat. It was a nonpartisan office, so what difference did it make? Most of my friends were Republican, but that didn't make any difference to me, because usually what we discussed we agreed on. So I ran in 1972 and we had a big fund-raiser. I had about \$800 and that's what I ran my campaign on. That was it. And I walked precincts, every day I went out with my little girl in the stroller and I was doing it.

YATES: I was wondering what other types of support did you get?

WRIGHT: Not too much. I got like friends' support, neighborhood support, and I thought that was enough because I was the same as they were. But I didn't get business, because they were having enough trouble fighting with the ones that were on there. What did they know what I was going to do?

YATES: Now, was everybody who was currently on the council running for re-

election?

WRIGHT: Yeah. They were.

YATES: OK. So talk a little bit more about that campaign.

WRIGHT: I'll take it back. Les Cleveland, the one who was the first mayor of Simi Valley, he didn't run.

YATES: But everybody else did.

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: So they were basically incumbents.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And the business community had worked with these guys even though they didn't like what they were doing. They figured it could be worse if they got somebody in there that didn't know what they were doing. But I didn't see that. Because I was talking about the sewer system, I was talking about what had to be done with the police department, and I was talking about sign ordinance. So I ran and we had an election and I came in sixth. So the five. . . . And although they did elect some new people, I wasn't one of them.

YATES: You just mentioned walking precincts. What else did you do as part of your campaign?

WRIGHT: My husband, through his printing, made some brochures and that for me, so I had brochures to pass out and we managed to get the use of a couple of billboards. But I didn't have any radio. You know, I didn't have anything.

YATES: Were there any speaking engagements at that point amongst candidates?

WRIGHT: Well, there were candidates forums, yeah. And I loved being in the candidates forums.

YATES: Did you?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: Why did you like it?

WRIGHT: Because my name is Wright and it went in alphabetical order. [Laughter]

YATES: So you thought that gave you an advantage?

WRIGHT: It did. It did, because I was listening to what everybody else was saying.

You had ten or twelve candidates and you would listen to them all. And so when you [spoke] you had something different to say. You may have been talking about the same subject, but you could have different things to say about it. If it was a good idea what the first fellow spoke about, the second one would agree with him on that and it kind of went that way. And then you would just pay attention and listen and when it got to your turn and you were last, you could upset the whole thing by talking differently and talking about solutions to issues and not just maw-mawing what the other guy had said was a good idea. And so I was feeling pretty good and everybody saying was "You're going to win! You are going to win!" Well. . . . I didn't!

But there were enough people still supporting me that come 1974. . . . Now 1974 was going to be a situation where you would have the two highest vote getters in 1972, with four years. . . . The other three would

serve two years.

YATES: Oh, they started staggering them.

WRIGHT: That's right. So I got staggered in '74 with the fact that there would be three people running for office. So the three people ran for office and I decided I would give it one more shot because, oh, I got support. They all wanted me to, all these people. You know they talk about "Oh, everybody wants me to run!" Well, it's the people that surround you that are talking about it, but there are people that live in those other houses, way on the other end of town or off onto the side streets that aren't paying one bit of attention and aren't. . . . They're going to vote for the familiar name they see on the ballot. So I ran in 1974. I did a little bit better but I still came in fourth.

YATES: Did you do anything differently?

WRIGHT: Nope, because one thing that I would not do, which a lot of fellows did, I would not put my house in jeopardy, nor would I put my family in jeopardy by taking money from the house or from the. . . . So if I raised \$700 I ran on \$700. I raised \$800, I ran on \$800. And I pretty much would come with around \$800, because it was the same people giving me money. And I ran a campaign and I came in fourth.

YATES: What help did you have in your campaign?

WRIGHT: Well, there was Ann Oliver and there was [Thomasina] Tommy Criger. Tommy died in '86, but there was. . . . It was like housewives. There was the

fellow that was working up at the club that was up on the hill, that was active in the Republican party, and he worked with me. In fact, all the people that were working with me were Republicans. I didn't have any Democrats working with me, which was kind of funny. But, again, I wasn't partisan.

YATES: What happened in the '76 campaign, then?

WRIGHT: Oh, the '76 campaign was really something. Now it was only two running and everything I'm saying is starting to show. I mean there's chaos with the sign ordinances. The business community is now starting to come alive. They gave me some money, but I still couldn't get up there with the kind of support that you really needed. You had to get some of these people that would drop off from supporting the incumbents and I wasn't getting too many of those. But I still felt good about it. So in 1976, when all the dust settled I was in third place. Twenty-five votes. Jean Seamans—she just died a couple of months ago—put up the money for me to have a recount, and we had a recount. And I lost by twenty-five votes. But it was different votes. Very, very interesting.

YATES: What do you mean there were different votes?

WRIGHT: Well, what was happening here in 1972. . . . Just to show how people are creatures of habit, in 1972, that first election after cityhood, you were voting for five people, in 1974 you were voting for three, now you come in 1976 and you're voting for two. My votes were on ballots that were null and void

because they had three punch holes in them. People who went to the polls in 1976, enough of them voted three instead of two to have those ballots thrown out.

YATES: Oh, I see.

WRIGHT: So some of them, some of the ballots, it was quite clear it was just a miscount and so I did pick up votes that way. But what I picked up I lost on the ones that. . . . Because on the largest majority of those votes that were being cast as three one of the votes was mine.

YATES: So it just got thrown out.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was thrown out. It was null and void. It had three punch holes, it was only supposed to have two. It wasn't like I can tell you, "Oh, my God! It wasn't fair!" That was it. It was twenty-five. But it was my third time. Three's a charm. That's it. Nobody cares what I am saying. They're not listening to me. All right, I'm not going to do it anymore. Why should I jeopardize my husband, what he goes through when he doesn't get fed on time, my daughter coming home from school, and things like that. It wasn't worth it. So I didn't.

But in 1978, then, the business community had broken off from the [Simi Valley] Chamber of Commerce. It was a businessmen's council, is what they were, because the Chamber of Commerce was taking money from the city. They were getting money from the city to maintain their expenses. Well,

were they going to buck the city council? Sure, they could be cut off. So the business community was then really getting up in arms and a whole group of businessmen pulled out and became the Simi Valley Business Council and they were, more or less, the doers and shakers in town that had done this.

So they came to me and they wanted me to run. And I said, "No. I'm not going to run." I said, "How many times do you think I'm going to bang my head against the wall and come away with nothing? I'm through. This is it, finished, done." Well, they came back again. Finally I said to them "OK. You raise the money. I'm tired of scrimping and saving and trying to raise money for a campaign." They said, "OK, we'll raise the money, you run." Eight thousand dollars.

YATES: Wow.

WRIGHT: What a campaign!

YATES: So they did the leg work for you in raising the money.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Now, you know, one thing I haven't asked you about, and it could be asked with any of these races, is what role, if any, was played by any local party organizations? None?

WRIGHT: The only thing I would say is the Republican [State] Central Committee [of California], the Republican women's club [California Federation of Republican Women], they would look to see what the registration was and

they would vote for the Republican, except for one woman who was a Republican who always went with the good looking man who happened to be a Democrat on the city council.

YATES: So if there was any activity it was the Republican groups.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Not any Democratic groups.

WRIGHT: No.

YATES: OK. Well, so in 1978 they raised the money. . . .

WRIGHT: We had radio, newspaper ads. . . . We didn't go to TV, because that was kind of a crazy thing to do, because you would be paying enormous amounts of money for it to hit the L.A. area and you just wanted to hit Simi Valley. So we didn't use that.

YATES: How prevalent was it to even use TV ads at that point?

WRIGHT: It wasn't. It wasn't because . . .

YATES: City council?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Not only that, but also the fact that the only thing you had here was cable, really, and to run with the cable station. . . . It wasn't as prevalent as it is now to be on cable in those days. So that was even kind of a waste. So we had signs. We had signs up all over. Everybody was putting a sign up in their yard. You had the newspaper, you had the radio, and you had signs. And you had billboards, because billboards hadn't been outlawed at that

point yet. You had all that. So I came in with the highest number of votes.

Now, normally coming in with the highest number of votes, it would have been just a foregone conclusion that you would be the mayor, because in '69 Les Cleveland came in with the most votes, so Les Cleveland became the mayor. He was mayor until '72. In '72 [Theodore] Ted Grandsen came in with the most number of votes and he was the mayor. In 1974 [James] Jim Smith had the most votes. He became mayor. In 1976 [William] Bill Carpenter had the most votes. He became mayor. So 1978 I had the most votes.

YATES: And what happened?

WRIGHT: I didn't get to be mayor.

YATES: Why is that?

WRIGHT: Well, here was the person who was standing before you week after week for the last ten years telling you everything you're doing is wrong, you know, and why would you let her be mayor? But the community felt they had voted me as mayor when they saw I had the most votes.

YATES: Was this an informal agreement?

WRIGHT: No, because it's a general law city and by general law city, it is the city council that selects the mayor. And it's mostly ceremonial, although you do have some say about the agenda, what will be on the agenda or not on the agenda.

YATES: I just wasn't sure, because I know in some cases the council votes for you, but I didn't know it was necessarily based on whether you got the most votes in the election.

WRIGHT: No, no. But they did that because it was an easy way out for them.

YATES: Right, I see. You know, up until that point how many women had been on the city council?

WRIGHT: There was only one, Ginger Gheradi and she got recalled after . . .

YATES: So she was on the council when you joined it?

WRIGHT: Uh-huh. She was one of the winners in '74.

YATES: And why was she recalled?

WRIGHT: Well, she and Bill Carpenter, they both were recalled because of the sewer issue. Yeah, because 1978 was the passage of Prop[osition] 13<sup>1</sup>, and I was sitting at the council at the same time, and I was in agreement that if we were going to . . .

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

YATES: OK. So you were talking about the sanitation issue.

WRIGHT: That was the big issue that year.

YATES: For that year?

---

1. Proposition 13 (June 1978) tax limitation.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: I meant to ask you, actually. . . . You could talk some more about the sanitation issue, but of course, as you mentioned, Prop. 13 was that year, and so maybe you could talk a little bit about what the main issues were for the city.

WRIGHT: You see, as a general law city we had no property tax. That had been one of the key [things] with becoming a city—like Los Angeles has a city tax and they have a county tax—that we would not have a city tax. But that also put us in a situation that the city, for its income, had to rely very heavily on grants, sales tax, all those little bitty bits and pieces pulling together for the city to survive. So when Prop. 13 passed there was nobody on the city council supporting Prop. 13.

I did support Prop. 13, because I knew what was happening in my own home. I would have lost the house that year, because in the meantime, since '72 to '78, my husband had gone on total disability because he had such a bad heart. He just couldn't go to work anymore, and of course that was not making for a very happy home life, because now he was not the sole support and I had gone to work.

YATES: Where were you working?

WRIGHT: Well, in 1972 I was working for cable television—it was teleprompter at the time. I was selling cable, and I was also doing the news show. I was up on

camera with the news show and they were so sure that I was using all of that, like I was in conflict with being on the city council. So I didn't do the news show anymore, but I did. . . . From '78 I didn't do the news show anymore, but I was still sales. I was still selling cable. So I was selling cable television.

YATES: Go back. So you were talking about the property tax situation here.

WRIGHT: So that was one of our problems, that we didn't have a property tax, and so the county had control. Of the property tax of the county, they were doing whatever they could, throwing programs back to the cities, for the simple reason that they couldn't fund them as they had in the past, because now they just couldn't turn around and do the budget and then raise the couple of mils on your tax in order to cover the program. They had to live within the budget.

And we had control of the sanitation district. That was a part of the city. In fact, the city council sat as the board of the sanitation district and also the board of the water district, and we were in the process of upgrading and expanding the system. So we had to have the money. And we could live within the amount we were paying then. I think it was five dollars a month, was what each household was paying, and we could do that all right, because we had new homes coming on line all the time.

But we were concerned that with the passage of Prop. 13 you'd have to go

to the public and ask them to raise their rate, which they wouldn't do. But if we raise the rate with the little caveat that if we didn't need it we would reduce it, that would give us that window. It made sense to me, because I could see what was happening. We had about the best sanitation system, I think, in southern California, because what happens is, the home owner now, today, if you're paying whatever rate you're paying. . . . First of all, it's on your taxes. The county collects it and gives it to the city or to the district. What you had was a situation where it's the developer that's going to develop a tract. He pays connection fees to that sewer system. Each homeowner doesn't pay for that expansion as it would have been if you were paying on a day to day basis. So we always had like two accounts. The one account is the five dollars you were paying a month, and that was going to be your maintenance. The developer fees that were paid were for the expansion of the plant and we had a program that—I don't think it's changed—like every three years it was to be looked at. And the plant was set up so that it could expand, and so that's the way it was. So in 1978 the smartest thing to do was to increase the rate until we saw where we were, because we could always go back.

But when we did that. . . . And plus the fact I was not made the mayor, which everybody thought I was, it was like it played a part in it. It wasn't a major thing that "Oh, boy, they're going to recall us because they didn't

make Cathie Wright mayor.” But it was just the culmination of the whole thing. And a group got together and they ran a petition and they decided to knock out the top two, which were Bill Carpenter, who was the mayor, and Ginger Gheradi, who was the vice mayor. So those two were the ones that were recalled.

YATES: And then they had another election?

WRIGHT: They had an election in August, and that’s when Elton [W.] Gallegly was elected and Greg Stratton.

YATES: Uh-huh. And in the meantime you became mayor?

WRIGHT: And so what happened was that the minute the petition qualified for the ballot they all put their heads together and decided to make me mayor, because they figured they could quell the whole thing and that would quiet everything down. It didn’t. People had their minds made up to start out with. They got recalled by more than they ever got elected by. So that was. . . .

YATES: You know, I’m curious. Having been in the position of the person who attends the council meetings, and is critical of what’s going on and how they’re handling things, now you’re on the council. How does that experience jibe with being the John Q Public or whatever, and now being in an elected office?

WRIGHT: Well, I can’t talk for other people, because so many times people run for office, especially local office, [because] some issue bothers them and they

run for office. And they've never gone to a city council meeting before, they've never done anything, but they run for office. If they get elected, they've got a lot of catching up to do. I didn't have to. I had been reading the agendas for the last eight years.

YATES: I guess what I'm trying to get at more is what you're actually able to do once you're on the city council.

WRIGHT: Well, it was interesting. Because, you see, I was sworn in for office. They didn't select me. We passed the ordinance in June which increased the sanitation fees.

YATES: So you were elected in March, is that right? OK.

WRIGHT: And that was in June, and of course the recall was done in. . . . Just about . . .

YATES: I'm trying to remember, was Prop. 13 June or November?

WRIGHT: That's what's got me. I think it was June.

YATES: I do have my . . . [checks notes]

WRIGHT: So the following year we had no election. It's when we had the special election.

YATES: Prop. 13 is June.

WRIGHT: June?

YATES: Passed in June of '78.

WRIGHT: That was it, it had just passed. It was to take effect on July 1, and so that's why we had to make a decision in that last week of June. We passed an

increase to \$7.50.

YATES: Now this is back, right, to the sanitation district?

WRIGHT: The sanitation district. As the board we voted it in and then as the city council we ratified it.

YATES: So really it was a response then to Prop. 13's passage.

WRIGHT: Yes, because we weren't getting anything. The county dog catcher, we had to handle that. There were so many things that they were passing on to us. The animal control. Oh, I mean it was really going to hurt, so we were at least going to take care of the sanitation, because we thought that was the most important. And so it was July, and then it was August. I'm trying to think, because it seems to me it was '79 when Elton. . . . Because we never got . . .

YATES: That you had the special elections?

WRIGHT: It had to be '79, because this was all going on and then the uproar, you know, it was November of '78. That was not when the recall election was held. So it had to be '79. I know what it was, the recall election was in April of '79. So now we're sitting, three people, and I'm sitting as mayor.

YATES: So this is over a year later, then, after being voted in.

WRIGHT: Yeah. So I start moving on what had to be done.

YATES: You mean once you became mayor? Or just in general?

WRIGHT: Well, when I became mayor there were a lot of things—I shouldn't say

always, but there were so many things—that were a 4 to 1 vote. In other words, when they made Ginger Gheradi the mayor instead of me, it was on a 4 to 1 vote. I voted against it because I did know what the people were thinking. I knew the feel with people, because I was the only one that was in town all day long. The other four were off doing their jobs, which was understandable. They were doing their jobs, but they weren't here, in town. So I knew the feelings and I had to warn them, but they would cut their little deals in between, and then Ginger Gheradi sat down with me and told me that I had no control of what was going to happen. It was all decided that she was going to be the mayor. And I could vote, and I said no.

YATES: Now, these dynamics that are going on on the council, what role did that play, do you think, on how you functioned as a council?

WRIGHT: Not too bad. Not too bad, because the sanitation district, some of the developments, there was pretty much consensus on the council, but if there was any way they could needle me they did it. And of course I'd ask for something on the agenda and Ginger wouldn't put it on. And of course they made [William] Bill Baker, who was elected at the same time I was, they made him the vice mayor, mayor pro tem, whatever you want to call it, and for that they got his vote against me. And I did some lobbying with these guys, but I knew it wasn't going to work and I didn't care. I just knew I wasn't going to go along with it, because to me, people in town thought that I

was going to be a strong voice on the council. Well, all I had to do was vote for Ginger Gheradi for mayor and I was no longer a strong voice on the council for them. So I made sure that I was going to keep my position and I was going to be able to look at myself and look at the constituency I was representing and so I voted against her.

YATES: But you don't feel it played any part in your effectiveness at all, as a member of the council? Or it enhanced it?

WRIGHT: No, because of the fact that there was so much turmoil going on at one point. . . . Bill Carpenter, as the mayor. . . . We went into recess for a few moments and he got me in the office with him and he said, "What is going to satisfy these people? What can we do to stop this?" He said, "You seem to know. What can we do?" And I told him what he could do. I said, "It isn't so much the sanitation and it isn't so much everything else that's going on."

YATES: You're referring to the recall?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Because now they were in the throws of a recall and what could they do to change it? I said, "You can't, you know, because. . . ." And then there were the sign laws and the businessmen were going nuts. You are supposed to have all these what they call monument signs. Like this.

YATES: Low.

WRIGHT: Well, the kids would kick them, for God's sake! But if you were running for office you could put a big sign up any place. That was the ordinance they

had. So I said, "You've got to change the sign laws, you have to come to some kind of agreement with the business community, because you want people to shop, your livelihood depends on sales tax. And what are you doing? You're killing the sales tax because this community doesn't have what the San Fernando Valley has and people are going to drive over the hill."

YATES: You mentioned to me, I think, that you changed your party affiliation.

WRIGHT: That was in 'seventy-six. That was right after the election of '76 that I changed.

YATES: OK, so when you ran in '78 you were a Republican?

WRIGHT: Uh-huh.

YATES: And what role do you think that had in your winning?

WRIGHT: I think it had something to do with it, because now I had the Republican women that were supportive. Some of them weren't.

YATES: Talk about that a little bit. What role did they play in your election or campaign or whatever?

WRIGHT: The one thing that I see, the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats as far as the women were concerned, and yet the women in the Democratic party seemed to have more clout than the Republican women do, is the fact that the [Republican women] are organized and they are the grunt people. They were the ones that would do all the typing for you, they were

the ones that would stuff envelopes, they're the ones that would run phone banks, they're the ones who would go out and walk precincts. So that was a big arm. . . . Today they're not. . . .

YATES: As active?

WRIGHT: As active in that regard, for the simple reason that there's too much technology. Now you have a devil of a time getting people to walk precincts. I mean, you can get kids to do it, but . . .

YATES: You think it's because of what you're able to do now online?

WRIGHT: Oh, sure. Well, not even online. The fact that the mailings are . . .

YATES: Oh, sure, of course. Right, you're not sitting there typing and doing things.

WRIGHT: Right. You can just. . . . It's just a whole different ball game. And before you'd strain over doing any kind of a brochure, because that was about the extent of a local election, would be that brochure.

YATES: That was your big cost?

WRIGHT: Yes. You wouldn't do a mailing. And then you'd do any advertising, like your signs and that, so that's where it was the hands on type. But today you mail. I mean, I'm amazed at the mail that comes in the mail for a city council race. We're realizing that's the way it is, the mail. So you can mail and you can respond to an issue almost overnight with a mail piece—as long as you have the money, of course. With the mail piece you don't need these people walking precincts, but you want to put up some kind of a presence, so you try

to walk precincts. But you can't walk the whole place yourself because most people running for office today, too, they still have a business or something that they're involved in.

YATES: Now, back to changing your party affiliation. . . . Why did you decide to change it?

WRIGHT: I'm trying to remember the guy who was on the Democratic ticket for president back in '76.

YATES: Yikes! I can't remember. You said 1976?

WRIGHT: Yes, 1976.

YATES: And, I'm sorry, what was he? He was a Republican?

WRIGHT: No, this was a Democrat. I mean he gave the election away before he even got involved in the darn race.

YATES: I'm sure it must be totally obvious and I'm blanking for the moment.

WRIGHT: He was an ambassador to Japan, too, after. . . . God, I can see his face. Mon . . .

YATES: Not [Walter F. "Fritz"] Mondale?

WRIGHT: Mondale!

YATES: Oh, OK, I was about to say Mondale, but then I was thinking vice president.

WRIGHT: Yeah. No, Mondale.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: Mondale. I mean, God! I could no more vote for him. . . . It was

just. . . . And that was the same year I got drummed out of the Democratic club, because. . . . They had a little Democratic club here in town. I went in one night, and for me. . . . Ye gads! This was between the '76 and the '78 elections. And there they were. They were ready to really do me in, because I had supported [Lou] Cusanovich, who was a Republican for the [state] senate, against Sabrina Schilling, who had such a screechy voice I couldn't stand to have her speak, let alone vote for her to put her into office. So I was having all those kinds of qualms, but I wouldn't change my registration in '76, because I felt. . . . I was running for office.

YATES: What was your connection to the Democratic club up until that point?

WRIGHT: I belonged to it. I belonged to the club and I was going to the meetings and everything and [John Kenyon] "Ken" MacDonald, who ran for [Ventura County] Board of Supervisors, he was a Democrat at that time and I carried his literature.

YATES: How strong an organization was it?

WRIGHT: It wasn't as strong as the Republican. That's how you knew the town was Republican. To this day, the Democratic organizations, you don't even know when they meet, because basically it's a Republican community.

YATES: So continue with why you changed your party affiliation. Mondale . . .

WRIGHT: Mondale was just such a weak, weak candidate and I just couldn't. . . . I said, "I can't support this." Because you were supposed to go out and walk

precincts and carry literature for him, and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it.

YATES: You mean as a member of the Democratic club?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And then plus the fact. . . . The most outstanding thing was, because I was so active, and I ran for office and everything else, and I was always at the city council meetings. . . . Adult education was having their graduation . . .

[Interruption]

YATES: OK. You started to talk about adult education.

WRIGHT: Adult education, immigration. . . . They were having the citizen[ship classes], so you'd have these people that had taken their classes and everything else and they would become citizens, and now they were going to have kind of the idea that you have to register to vote and what party would you register for. So they had me come to represent the Democrat viewpoint and they had, oh!, here the name goes again, and I can see her face. [Nancy Bender] Anyway, she worked for Cusanovich as his field representative here, and so she was an active Republican in the community, and so they had invited her to speak on behalf of the Republican viewpoint. I happened to arrive a little before she did, and I got up and spoke of why I was a Democrat, and she walked in about halfway through. She sat there, and when she got up she said it was very difficult for her to explain about being a Republican, because everything I was

saying was why she was a Republican.

So I had to reevaluate, because I wasn't comfortable with some of the issues. I just wasn't comfortable. And so I decided OK, and so. . . . There was [Francis] Fran Davidson, who was on the central Republican state committee. He was always trying to get me to change, because they were one of my good supporters, he and his wife Margaret. And so they were talking to me, trying to talk me into changing, and I was going to change my registration. But that hit me, you know, the whole thing, because here there was supposed to be a difference between the parties, but everything I had been talking about, why I was a Democrat, was the reason for her to be a Republican. So I did have to give it some thought, and at that point I then told Fran that as soon as the election cycle was over I would change, and that was in '76.

YATES: I'm just thinking this is in the late sixties into the seventies, and the rise of the woman's movement, and I'm wondering—let's see, how I can phrase this?—how that jibed in your mind with. . . . I'm thinking, the Republican party, you tend to not think of them as much being the voice of women, and Democrat. . . . You know, these are somewhat stereotypes, but I'm wondering what your thoughts were.

WRIGHT: No. Mostly with me it was the idea of family, taxes, and wasting money, because I never wasted money. As far as I'm concerned, my whole life I

never wasted a dollar. I was very, very careful how I spent money and. . . . Those were the things.

YATES: That were important for you?

WRIGHT: Yes. And the idea that if you were in a government, OK, you're not spending your money, but you're spending somebody else's money. That's even more of a responsibility. And so it was things like that. And I would see maybe a good issue with the Democrats, but it was the way they were going about doing it and it was just. . . . Raise taxes to do it or spend more money or take money from this and spend it here, and that bothered me. So that's where I was at.

YATES: You mentioned, when you ran in '78. . . . So by then you're a Republican or you're a registered Republican.

WRIGHT: In '78 I was a registered Republican, '76 I was not.

YATES: Right, and in that particular case the business community supported you, and of course traditionally you think of the business community as being conservative. Again, that is sort of a blanket statement. And I guess I'm still wondering how do you think being a female candidate was in terms of Republican support versus Democratic support?

WRIGHT: Oh I didn't get any from the men.

YATES: In the Republican party?

WRIGHT: The Republican activists, let's put it that way. The "activists," I mean they

wore their label, "I'm Republican," yeah. No. But the business community, yes.

YATES: But those were males, right?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: OK. But anything outside of the business community in terms of somebody being a Republican?

WRIGHT: The political community, no, I never . . .

YATES: But you won.

WRIGHT: Yeah. I think I won because of a lot of Republicans then, especially within the Republican federated women, voted for me that normally would not have voted for me, because of the fact that I was not a registered Republican. And that's one of the first things they ask, and that is why we had such a difficult time in this district attorneys race<sup>1</sup> that I was into, because they saw it as a primary and they weren't about to come out, because in the primaries, you know, you don't come out for one candidate or the other because of the fact that you wait for the general, when you are going to fight the Democrats.

YATES: Were there any other factions or groups in the community that were active politically? I mean, basically you described the business community, the

---

1. Race was between Ron Bamieh and Greg Totten for district attorney in Simi Valley. Election held March 5, 2002.

Republican clubs. Anything else that might characterize what was going on in the city?

WRIGHT: Well, the Chamber [of Commerce] happened, with . . .

YATES: But you said the business community split, right?

WRIGHT: Yes, they split, so that was like a weak support. The best support was from the Business Council rather than from the Chamber of Commerce. In fact, one of the things I did constantly was tell them, you know, "If you're going to represent the business community you've got to become independent. You cannot be taking money from the city." They'd come in with their budget, a \$15,000 budget—\$15,000 they got for the Chamber of Commerce. It was crazy.

YATES: A couple of more questions and then we can wrap it up. I think this might be a good point, because the next time we meet we can start on the [California State] Assembly and why you decided to run for the assembly. But a couple of things that occurred to me. . . . I'm always interested, when somebody served at the local level, how that experience has impacted their experience at the state level. Where did you find your interest developing, do you think, in regard to issues? When you were on the council? I mean you've talked a little . . .

WRIGHT: It was local government, because there were things you'd want to do or where you felt you should have had support from the state government that you

weren't getting.

YATES: And, of course, you came in with Prop. 13, so that was a whole other. . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah, that was a whole other thing. You were looking for ways in which to support your community without doing it with raised taxes. The last thing you wanted to do was put it on the ballot to put a property tax on in the city. I mean not only would you not have won, you probably would have been run out of town, to do that. But one of the things I did is I said, when that recall started, and then they were voted out of office, and we were only three people on the council. . . . I had Bill Baker, who voted against me for mayor, originally, but then of course when they were trying to save Bill's and Ginger's hides, why they decided. . . . And the other one was [David] Dave Rees.

YATES: This is the period in between the recall and the next election?

WRIGHT: The recall, which took place in April, and the election that took place in August. In that length of time I got the city manager fired, I dropped the contract on the city attorney, did not renew the contract with the city engineer.

YATES: Hmm. How did that go over?

WRIGHT: I got the votes, because these guys were scared out of their skins. And I said, you know, at least the group that ran the recall did it with the idea of not crippling the city council. They gave us the three votes. They could have recalled the whole council if they wanted to. And I had voted for it—an

increase.

But one of the things that I always did, right up to the day I left office, I never made campaign promises. If I saw something was wrong I said it was wrong. If I thought I had a solution I'd say what my solution was, and then you either accepted it or you didn't. But I didn't say, "Vote for me and I will do this, this, this, and this." All I ever said was that I would do the best job I could. And if you disagree with my vote I'll sit down and talk to you anytime and explain why I did what I did and why I voted the way I voted, and in so doing you could either agree with me or disagree with me. And if you disagreed with me, well, fine, because there would be another issue where we would agree.

But I can't represent a total community—or in the legislature a total district, I cannot represent everybody in that district—and only cater to the few that are telling me what I'm doing wrong. So I feel that this issue you may disagree with me, but the next issue you would agree with me. Just remember that I'm always going to do my very best. And that was it. And so I never had any problems saying, "Gee, I promised them I was going to do this. Since I promised I'm going to have to." No.

YATES: What did you learn, do you think, I guess particularly in the role as mayor, in terms of your style of leadership?

WRIGHT: That you had to be precise in what you were going to do. If you said, this is

the issue, this is my resolution to the issue, then you better stick with it. So I kind of like to have everything in a row, all lined up, as to what I'm doing, so that when I make that vote, or when I push the issue, I know I'm not going to change. I'm not going to change my way, because if you are going to go. . . . Then I'll say, "Oh, yeah, I'm glad you said that, because I hadn't thought about that," and the first thing you know you're weakening your position. You had to vote, you had to be precise in what you were doing. And if you wanted something on the agenda you better make sure you had all your ducks in a row on it.

YATES: Was this something that you already had when you went into office? Or is this something you learned?

WRIGHT: No, I already had that. It was just exercising it. Because it's fine, you know, if you're sitting there and saying, "Well, they should be doing this," but you didn't know what the conversation was with staff before they came out. You didn't get in on that. You had what the issue was before, and you could go back and you could do some research work on it if you thought it was necessary, or you could pull something off the consent calendar as a citizen, but you weren't privy to all the conversations. So there were sometimes when you were saying, "Oh, they should have been doing this," you weren't so sure what they had as information that was going to cause them to go to the other side or the other way.

YATES: How did the dynamics of the council change once you had the next two people on the council after that election in August?

WRIGHT: Well, they were new coming in, and so consequently they had never been active really. Greg Stratton had been active with the Jaycees. Elton was in real estate, and the main reason he ran for the city council at that point in time was because he wanted to do some development on his own piece of property that he couldn't get done. And he was right, the city should not have been involved in it, so he had a good issue that he ran on, no question about that.

YATES: So how were you able to work with these individuals?

WRIGHT: Oh, because they saw me. . . . I was still the mayor and there wasn't going to be any change made at that point. The change would have been the following [election], which would have been in 1980.

YATES: Is there anything you want to add? We can always, next time we meet, talk about your experience on the city council. My approach here has been mostly kind of getting at the more abstract parts and maybe tying that in to your public service later at the state level. We can always come back to comparisons.

WRIGHT: Well, as I said, we changed city managers. We had to buy out his contract.

YATES: Uh-huh. And why did you want to change the city manager?

WRIGHT: Because I saw the city manager not making decisions. If I hire you as a manager you have certain responsibilities. I want you to follow through on

your responsibilities. He wasn't doing that. You had the head of human resources, you had the city engineer, you had all these department heads, and every Monday morning they sat around the table and they were deciding. "Your department, you should give this guy a raise. You should fire. . . ." They were all helping you decide. So when it came down to it, it wasn't your decision. So when he got done, whatever the city manager was carrying to the city council, it wasn't his decision, it was the consensus all the time, and you can't do that. You can't do that. If you're a manager, department is doing something wrong, you've got to change it, and he wasn't doing it and that was the problem. And he didn't have to take the blame for it, because he didn't make the decision. If it went wrong it was the management team that made a mistake, not him. I couldn't take that. It drove me up the wall.

And then the city attorney. Peach of a guy, but if we were discussing something and in my own feeling we shouldn't do it this way, but because two or three of the city council wanted to do it that way, he would find a way in which they could manipulate it and make it legal. Well, no. You can do it this way or you can do it that way, but don't try to bend over backwards basically trying to manipulate the law in order to make us be able to do what we want to do, because somewhere down the line we're going to get sued for it anyway. And so that's what bothered me.

And the city engineer was. . . . Nothing got done without his final approval

on it. There were projects all over the city. Stearns Street overflowed every time it rained, water coming down. We had development coming in, which was the Indian Hills development. There was that program before the city council. . . . If you were going to approve it, part of the problem was from them. Why should a little fellow who's been living in his house on Stearns Street for the last twenty to twenty-five years suddenly be hit with a couple of thousand dollars for a drainage system when it isn't his property that's doing it? Should he pay something? Yeah. He should pay for the work that's going to be done in front of his house, but he shouldn't be paying for the extension or the increased capacity you have to make within the system. That's not his fault. And so that was what got me.

And they would just sit on it and sit on it and sit on it while all this hassling was going on, so nothing was being done. You'd drive down L.A. after a rain and you went all the way around on the other side to be around this big puddle of water, or you drove through it. You don't have it now. And it was ironed out, yes. And did each piece of property pay something towards it? Yes. But the largest drain-off was coming from that development and continued to be coming from that development. As it would, even more so.

YATES: So did these changes in personnel affect the things that you wanted?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. Within that three months we approved the bulk of the general plan, although we ran against the city manager's desire to put everything on hold

until after the election for two new people on the council. We did the general plan, we passed a budget. The city manager at the time was going to delay the city budget until we had five people. I said, "Uh-uh. The people in this community gave us three votes. Those three votes are going to have to agree. So there's going to be maybe more of a tussle, but you're going to get a city budget that is going to be ready on the first of July." And we did.

YATES: Is this a good place to stop for now?

WRIGHT: OK.

YATES: We can always come back to something.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Session 4, April 4, 2002]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

YATES: OK, great, let's start. Good morning again, more formally.

WRIGHT: All right.

YATES: What I want to do is follow up on our last session with a few questions, and first I want to go back to your decision to register as a Republican, because we were talking about a couple of different things there and I wasn't clear on the timing. You mentioned being bothered by Walter Mondale being a candidate for president for the '76 elections, and I was blanking because I was thinking Mondale in 1984, when he ran against Reagan and lost. But in looking at some information about him, I saw he did explore the possibility of running for president in '73 and '74. So first of all, is that what you were referring to or were you thinking of someone else?

WRIGHT: No. This was the candidate. The candidate was selected for the '76 election.

YATES: But [James E.] Jimmy Carter [Jr.] was the nominee.

WRIGHT: It wasn't Jimmy Carter. Because in 1976 is when I changed my registration.

YATES: OK. Is it possible you were thinking of someone else?

WRIGHT: We are forgetting I was running for city council in April—the party candidate

was selected in August.

YATES: Because I read that he explored the possibility and then decided it was a no go, and then Carter was nominated and then of course asked him to be his running mate. That was how I saw the sequence of events. Well, it's not really critical, I was just curious.

WRIGHT: No, now you've got me. Because I know that it was a point of my being. . . . As a Democrat, going to be supporting this fellow who was running for presidency and I was. . . .

YATES: Not happy.

WRIGHT: No. "God, where did they pick up this one?" And I just. . . . There was that friction.

But since I was running for the city council I was not going to change my registration in the middle of the election season. So I told them that after the election in November. . . . And that was to Fran and Margaret, because they were the ones who said, "You know, you're not a Democrat. You don't think like a Democrat." And I said, "Well, I am, you know." I said, "But I'm being more and more uncomfortable being in the party because there's too many things I disagree with, major things that I disagree with, so that I'm going to have to do some soul searching." So the day after the election in November—and I think if I go through some of my papers I'll even find my registration, because I saved it—there's a knock on the door and it was Fran.

He said, "It's the day after the election. You said you were going to change your registration."

YATES: This is Fran Davidson?

WRIGHT: Yeah. So I said, "OK, OK." And I did. And I changed my registration to Republican.

YATES: Well, I want to get your take. . . . Continuing with what was going on on the national level, thinking about events during that time, of course there's Watergate and [Richard M.] Nixon. He resigns, of course, in 1974, and I'm just wondering how Watergate and his resignation influenced your thoughts about the Republican party.

WRIGHT: Well, it didn't, because I really thought in this manner, that I was looking not at the politics of it but I was looking at the man, and I was saying to myself, "This is stupid." You know, you're the number one in the United States and all this is swirling around you. The smart thing you do is use the media, and you go on TV and you say, "I realize these mistakes were made. I'm sorry. I'm responsible, because I am the leader of the party and of the country, and I'm sorry for them and I beg your forgiveness. But I'm going to look into this thing and I'm going to find out exactly who started it, and they're going to pay the price." And then pick one of your top guys and he takes the fall.

That's the smart way, to me, that you would have handled it. Instead of, simply out of fear or what, that you start. . . . Tapes are missing, erasing tapes,

changing your story. You know, if you're telling the truth, you don't get to change stories. But when you're changing everything so much and going around. . . . It just got worse and worse and worse, that he put himself in the position. . . . I don't think he would have ever had the threat of the impeachment over him, nor would he have had to resign. You just blame somebody. Pick him out and, you know, make him pay the price.

YATES: Even if you're directly involved in it or there's a connection?

WRIGHT: Even if you were directly involved it. I don't think that he was directly involved, because I've watched over the years, and I'm more and more convinced. . . . Those in position have these people around them for advising them, and if you have advisers who are looking to keep themselves in the power circle and they come up with some really harebrained ideas and if you say, "OK, that sounds pretty good. Go ahead, do it," you're responsible for it. How they do it, you're also responsible for it. Even if you don't know how they're doing it, you're stuck with it. And I mean that's to me the kind of position he was in. Because I don't really believe that Nixon said, "Now, here's what we're going to do. We're going to do this, this, and this, because I don't want. . . ." I don't believe that happened.

I believe what happened was, it was things were going on and we've got to find out, you know, really what's going on and here's a good idea, we're going to do this. [Inaudible] We'll investigate and we'll find out. So part of

the investigation was the break in, and I think that's how it happened. Did he know all the details of it? No. He just probably said, "OK." You know, "Find out. If you think we need that information, find out about it." And I just think that's the way it happened.

YATES: But he did know about the break in. I mean, afterward.

WRIGHT: Oh, sure! He knew about it and he said, you know, "One headline and it will be over." Well, it wasn't one headline and over. So the more it goes and the more you respond and you're not responding right, and the people that are around there say, "Wait a minute. That doesn't sound like. . . ." And the first thing you know you're changing your story. And you're always trying to keep it from going any further and all you're doing is causing it to fester, and it grows and it gets worse and worse and worse and worse.

YATES: So again, how do you think that influenced your thinking about the Republican party in general?

WRIGHT: It wasn't, because at that point in my life I was not thinking of the overall, I was thinking of locally. And so locally I liked the people that were in the Republican party and I liked what they were saying. And my research. . . . And of course, my husband being Republican, when I'd ask questions about, "Now why. . . ." You know, he always had some pretty good, logical reasons why it was done. It made sense. And the people that I felt more comfortable with were people that were registered Republicans here in

Simi Valley than I was with the ones who were registered Democrats. They seemed off the wall, some of the things they wanted to do. And of course as far as the local is concerned, when—Sabrina Schilling, I think—ran against Cusanovich. . . . Cusanovich was such a good man. I had met him. I really thought he was a nice man, and honest. He drove back and forth almost every weekend from Sacramento—he lived in the Thousand Oaks area—simply because he wanted to keep in touch with his constituency, which I thought was wonderful. And he hated flying, so he drove.

YATES: Oh, gee. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: So I mean that was really something, and I admired him for having that kind of a commitment.

YATES: Well, you just touched on something there, about having problems with the issues related to the Democratic party, and I was seeing. . . . Some of this you brought up in the last session, when talking about going to the adult education forum and speaking to the Democratic point of view—or why you were a Democrat, I should say—and then Nancy Bender spoke to the Republican and said there wasn't a difference, really. I know you mentioned that your main concerns you listed as family, taxes, and wasting money, but maybe you could expand a little bit and try to get maybe to your political philosophy, how it developed or evolved. What the issues were specifically that you said you couldn't relate to.

WRIGHT: Still to this day I say the same thing. First of all, about family. I think we are responsible for the next generation. We create that generation, and we should take care of them and we should nurture them and we should see to it that they get the tools for them to take over, because they're going to. We're not going to be here for ever. And that was my feeling and that's where I got the family.

As much as I wanted to be more active in the political—I was active enough, but even more so—I had a difficult time because I had a child and I tried to work everything around her. It was around her schedule, not my schedule. I didn't want her with babysitters. I didn't want to be calling somebody at the last minute to come and watch her because I had to run here or run there. So I was even taking her to meetings with me, which was always, you know, a kind of will it work out or won't it work out type of situation. As I've seen with taking Marissa, my granddaughter. It was the same thing, I took Marissa with me.

But there was that really deep seated feeling I had, that we're producing the next generation and so consequently we should prepare them to take over. That should be the whole idea of it. So that's where I got the family orientation from. It seemed to me that the Democratic philosophy was let the state put money into programs to take care of these kids or whatever, you know, and not the family. To me, I think that if there was any help needed, it was the need to help the family in order to help the child. So there was that.

And as far as taxes, I watched right here in Simi Valley when we bought this house. We bought our house, first of all, under the GI Bill. We had to have \$300, it was all we needed to move into this house. I had \$300 in savings, that was the \$300, and we moved into the house. We had worked it out where, by having an impound account, which meant our taxes and our insurance on the house would be a part of our payment every month, and when I worked that out it was, oh, just about what we were paying for rent on an apartment in Glendale. It was a couple of dollars more, but we could swing that couple of dollars, because now it was going to be ours and we were going to have this tax deduction. Which we didn't have. You couldn't declare your rent, but you could your interest on [a mortgage]. But what I had planned when we moved in. . . . Each year it was going up. The insurance was constant, the interest and principle were constant. It was the taxes. And when you start paying more for taxes a month, then you're actually going towards your interest and your principle. That's scary, and that's what was happening. It was just going up, up, up, up, up, up, up. I was scared to death we were going to lose the house.

And there was no earthly reason. . . . It was the way they assessed the property. In the Westdale Estates, which is what this was, I had a three bedroom house—three bedrooms, two baths—on a lot with only a partial wall to distinguish between the others, and then next door to me is a four bedroom,

and over here was a five bedroom. Well, the house up the street, he puts a little block wall in front of his place, it increases the value of his property. I get my taxes raised! Somebody changes the landscaping or paints or whatever they do. . . . Whatever they do to that piece of property, if they sell it, whatever they sell it for, that automatically affects the value of my house and therefore my taxes. I'm not getting anything else for it. I didn't say, "OK, great, now I've got a park down the street and I can take my daughter down there to play, or I've got service that comes to my door and I can hop on a bus or something." Because we only had one car. My husband took the only one to work. I had nothing in my hand and yet this was going up and up. And Vic was on a fixed income, as far as his job was concerned, and it was the frustration, the taxes. So that was it.

YATES: But, you know, I think of the tax reform—after which of course there were several occasions where there was an effort made to try to pass some kind of tax reform—and it failed.

WRIGHT: The tax reform that was tried in the legislature I learned through the process of being there.

YATES: Well, I'm thinking of the one specifically that Reagan proposed that failed.<sup>1</sup>

WRIGHT: Oh, uh-huh.

---

1. Proposition 1 (November 1973), tax and expenditure limitations.

YATES: But go ahead.

WRIGHT: It was just a situation where taxes. . . . There was never anything that said, “Well, this year we’re going to hold it constant.” And then of course it was coming from the county level, but it didn’t make any difference, you still had to pay it. There was never anything about “We’re going to eliminate this program” or “We’re going to modify this other program” or whatever we were going to do in order to stay within [the budget]. It seemed as though we just made the budget up and then we raised the taxes to make the budget.

YATES: Right. And of course there was a huge surplus at that point.

WRIGHT: Yep.

YATES: Tying back into Republican and Democratic philosophy, my understanding is that at least with the tax reform effort—and I’m thinking also about what was appealing to you about the Republican party over the Democratic party—was a lot of Republicans did not support Prop. 13, because they felt it wasn’t the best way to go.

WRIGHT: No, which is another point. You want less government and that means that you want individuals to make more of their own decisions. And I agree with that wholeheartedly, except it comes to a point that—what I find, and that’s where the parties kind of blend and then separate and blend again—is if you don’t take care of a certain group of people, they get into trouble, it is going to cost you more to keep them off the streets. So it would be far better to do

some investment up front and let them pay their own way down the line. So that's where you kind of see the haziness, and you really don't realize it when you're sitting in your home and you're paying more taxes and nothing is changing. I had this house broken into—crazy—in through the bathroom window. I still can't figure how the guy got in, but he did.

And just the whole thing. You're paying more money and we didn't have a freeway to get out of here. We were told there was going to be one. That's when you start getting involved in government. At least for me, it was how I got involved, because I've got to have logical answers as to why we are doing things this way.

YATES: Well, I want to come back to that. I have a few more questions about tax reform, and Prop. 13 specifically, but maybe it would be better later on, when we get more into your assembly period.

WRIGHT: Prop. 13 wasn't passed until 1978.

YATES: Right, and then what happens with the state-local relationship as a result. Another quick follow-up question I had was you talked a little bit about the Republican and Democratic women's clubs in Simi Valley and you characterized the Democratic women as seeming to have more clout. That the Republican women were more organized and did the grunt work.

WRIGHT: The grunt work, yeah. They did all the grunt work. They certainly did.

YATES: So why do you think the Democratic women had more clout?

WRIGHT: Because it was, if you were looking. . . . When you start out you have this idea what government is all about and what the whole idea is—democracy—and you find that there's a group of voters. There's the men, there's the women, there's the liberals, conservatives, and you just go down the line, and those are favoring one program and others are favoring another program, and the first thing that you see is all these divisions. Well, they're there. You know, you're trying to appease everybody, but what you find out is that there's a way—and it's even become more refined than it was then—of finding out what is the point at which you garner these extra votes. And of course what was happening is that the Democrats have always managed to get their groups and they always have something to please the groups.

The women were this idea of being equal. Well, I never thought I wasn't an equal, so that didn't make any sense to me. But that to me was the drive, and why you saw a lot of women going into the Democratic party, was because they were looked upon as being equal. And there's always something. They were always going to get their equal rights, equal rights, equal rights. Well, that was a political thing. We say it, you vote for us, and then forget about it. Two years, then we'll be back and we'll go through the whole process again. It was the same thing with the taxes. The state had the opportunity to make a difference and every election year you heard the big issue, that the Republicans were for lowering taxes, the Democrats were for

the programs for women, for children. So that's where the division was.

So on the Democratic side I really feel that they never got into a position of being organized as we have now. The women now are organized, but they try to organize under non-partisan titles, like NOW [National Organization of Women] is a woman's group and then there's. . . . I'm trying to think of some of the other groups that are basically Democrats. Very few Republican women belong to these organizations, but they cluster them together and they're more on what we call the liberal.

But now it's the liberal and conservative, and as I see the ballots today are trying to get the in-betweeners. I'm liberal—maybe I'm considered liberal—when I'm talking about what I see with single mothers because men don't take the responsibilities, or I see children being brought into the world and yet no one thinks about what it takes to nurture a child. And so I'm kind of liberal over here, figuring if people aren't going to do it, we as a whole are still responsible for the next generation. We have to do something. I don't mean just do anything and throw money at it. I think it has to be well planned.

YATES: Well, sort of the reverse, I guess, perspective on the Republican women's club. They were organized.

WRIGHT: They were organized and they go back years and years and years and years and years.

YATES: But would it have been at this other level you're talking about, which is what

was going on in the Democratic women's club? Why couldn't they get to that point?

WRIGHT: Well, because to me they didn't have a charter, they didn't have anything to fall back on. You see, with the Republican women's club, if you look at it, the Federated Republican Women, they have their individual. . . . Simi Valley has a club. At one time Moorpark had their own, but they joined with Simi Valley because they were small. Thousand Oaks has one, Camarillo has one, Fillmore has one, Ojai has it, Ventura has it. That's the areas, OK. Now, those groups all come together and there's a county federated and then there's a southern division and a northern division and then there's a national [National Federation of Republican Women]. Women were always recognized as being able to do all the work but not getting any of the credit for it, as I see it. And that's what it was. And I came to this whole thing thinking, well, I get elected, I'm an equal. And that's been my battle right along was that I be considered to be equal. I walked on that floor of the legislature, I had a vote.

YATES: OK. Are you ready to move on?

WRIGHT: Well, sure.

YATES: We can come back to some of this, because I want to get back to women, the Republican party versus the Democratic party, and why it seems there are many more Democratic women who have made it to elected office

historically.

Now, when we finished up last time we were talking about a number of your experiences on the Simi Valley City Council. You talked about, one, how you became mayor and then some of the issues, the sanitation district, the water district. And one thing that occurred to me in talking about Prop. 13 was that in '79 Prop[osition] 4 passed, the Gann initiative I believe it was called.<sup>1</sup> So I'm wondering if you can maybe talk about what impact that had on local government—and maybe there's not a clear distinction, it's cumulative—and how you were able to do things.

WRIGHT: It's hard, because they start all blending in together. The pure Prop. 13 made sense and I think, of all initiatives, it was the beginning of this crazy thing we go through now. Every time somebody doesn't like something, we pass an initiative. But it was well thought out. Because you take two people—basically [Paul] Gann and [Howard] Jarvis came together—and it was a very simple approach. But in being a simple approach there should have been a lot of hang ups, wherein it would go to court and it would be challenged and half of it would have been wiped out. But it didn't happen with Prop. 13. Prop. 13 withstood the challenges. So to me that was a good initiative.

---

1. Proposition 4 (November 1979), limitation of government appropriations.

It was brought forth by people who were so frustrated. For almost eight years they were going to the legislature and asking them to do something about property taxes and it wasn't being done. And maybe the simplest thing was a piece of legislation passed that gave some criteria and steps as to how you determined the property value, if that's what you're going to use in reference to taxes. They did a lot of talking and it would be the big thing, and after the November election it was off the books until two years later when it was back on again. So this was what was going on.

YATES: So this was around 1980?

WRIGHT: To me it was like 1972, it seemed.

YATES: Oh, oh, I see, you're talking about earlier efforts.

WRIGHT: Yes. All these efforts going on. So finally in 1978 you had an initiative that absolutely was grass roots, at level ground. It started out right down at the bottom and people just worked it. It went on the ballot. There was no great publicity, publicity against it, but you never saw a lot of money being poured in to the passage of Proposition 13. And it passed. To me that's the perfect intent from Hiram [W.] Johnson, when he devised and was part and parcel of setting up the initiative process for giving people a relief, and a way to go and do it, and it worked.

Now you have corporations made of consultants that do nothing else but scour around and see what they can find, because if they don't have a couple

of initiatives on the ballot they are going to be out of business. So it becomes a business thing. If you've got the money they'll run any kind of initiative for you, because, one, they'll buy the signatures. So you buy the signatures and you buy the publicity and the whole program that goes into getting this on the ballot, and then look at the amount of money that's spent.

YATES: Right. No, I know the initiative process has gone out of control basically.

WRIGHT: Sure, it's out of control, but to me there's a simple way to rein it in. It has to be something. . . . Give it, well, five years—I don't exactly know what number I would use—where there has been an attempt to put it through the process, because when you have it going through the process as a piece of legislation, you can amend, you can adjust, and if it fails this year you can introduce it again. And then you can tinker with it and you can work with it and you can have a consensus. And you build a consensus. Then, when you have the consensus on that piece of legislation, you run it as a piece of legislation and get the votes. The governor would sign it. It would be something you work with. Will it have some bugs? Sure. So it's your piece of legislation, you should have oversight on it. You should know what's going to happen, and if you see something going wrong with it change it, improve it. And that's the way the process should be.

But with an initiative, you put it on the ballot. If there's a typographical error in it, it goes.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: And you can't do anything about it but run another initiative to improve it.

Term limits, for example.

YATES: Yes.

WRIGHT: Term limits was the worst. Not the idea, but if it had gone through the process, if the people would have been really willing to sit down and work out a consensus as to what they wanted to see. . . . Because there are people in the legislature that—age, ability, personality, whatever you want to decide upon—shouldn't be there. And maybe they should serve a term or two and then be gone.

YATES: But they can also be voted out of office.

WRIGHT: Yes, they can be voted out of office. But we've turned the voters off. Instead of working with the voters, we turn them off. We are so interested in just getting the votes to win, and then absolutely manipulating the system legally, and there's no way to really say you can change that.

I'm turned off right now on Ventura County because I worked so hard on the Bamieh campaign. He was a good man. He should have been elected district attorney. Greg Totten did not deserve to walk into it. But you had [Michael] Bradbury, who had been out there all that time and he'd done. . . . The things that Bradbury did in that office, I mean, it would take three chapters, but he's. . . . They pick you. "Now you do things my way and

I'll see to it that you get to be there." So here's Greg. Greg couldn't have done the things that he said and did in his campaign if he had been truthful. Yet he picked everything apart of Ron's.

Ron made a simple statement, he had never lost a felony case, and it was true. The hit piece comes out from Totten listing all the misdemeanor cases. Well, when you're starting out in a DA's office, you're going to start off the bottom. You get all the little crap that nobody else wants. Plus the fact that it's probably difficult to even get any kind of a case out of it. And so the first thing you know you're losing cases. Every case he listed was the first two years that Ron was in the [office], but he never said they were misdemeanors. He just said he lost the cases. So he was lying, Ron wasn't lying. But Totten, if he did all he said he did. . . . He was handling the budget of the district attorney's office. Then why wasn't he held accountable that that budget has never been balanced in the last twenty years? It was never balanced. Why wasn't he hit on that? So it is this kind of thing. So you get the votes and now you're in office.

YATES: Well, it's interesting to hear about your perspective on why Prop. 13 passed, but I guess I'm still interested in the reality of what that meant in terms of revenue for the city, to have things to work with.

WRIGHT: Well, what happened then, it also hit at the same time that the state was starting to have some problems. And now, for those who were disgruntled by

Prop. 13 and wanted to make some changes. . . . Like the school district was so afraid they weren't going to get money. Oh, they weren't going to get money because of the fact that this was going down. Well, there would have been a different look. If they had just left it the way it was, it would have been a different look, in my opinion. This is all my opinion.

There would have been a different look in land use and planning. Because what is property tax? Property taxes increase with more development. That is where the property taxes come from. I have a piece of property and I'm not doing a darn thing with it. I'm just going to hold on to it, but it's never going to raise in value. The only time it raises in value is when I sell it and the other person decides to develop something there. So the whole issue locally should have been that the local government would have to look at the way they handled land use and planning. That was the key. They didn't see that and they never got to see it until, really, now it's like kind of too late. But what did they do? They went to the state. The state had some extra money, the state bailed them out. That was fine.

And I think it was appropriate, because when cities were looking. . . . And of course I was in the same situation, because now I'm on the city council, with the fact that we're going to need funding for different programs, and all of a sudden we have to have a budget ready on the first of July. Prop. 13 passes in June. We're kind of up the creek as to what we can do. So that the

state came in and bailed the communities out, that was fair. They had the money. It was fair for them to do it, but there should have been some strings attached to it. There weren't. It was just giving them money and they'll go away.

In the meantime the schools are looking at the reduction in the property tax, which means less money going to the schools. So what do they do? They go to the state government too. So now the state government has the opportunity to oversee and "We're going to make it uniform. All the schools are going to be the same." Well, it's hard to make all the schools the same. They should have the same funding per child, but from there on in, the schools locally have to make decisions. In an area that has nothing but Spanish speaking youngsters they have to deal differently than with an area that has been dealing with those that are very able to work out because they are mostly all English speaking.

YATES: How did Prop. 9, do you think, add to this situation or take away from it or however you want to describe it?

WRIGHT: Well, I forget Prop. 9.

YATES: Did I say Prop. 9? I meant Prop. 4. Excuse me, the Gann initiative. I'm sticking to tax reform. Sorry.

WRIGHT: Oh, well, yeah, the Gann initiative. Now they started to see that the state in the beginning was going to be tinkering: So they decided to make sure that in

their tinkering, that if there were any more surpluses, that it was going to go back to the people. So that was the origin of Prop. 4. So you get all of this the state has, building up all this surplus and wanting to start handing it off to other governments, the best way to handle that is to make sure that if they have extra money they have to give to the people first. It fits all the different pitfalls. And that was Prop. 4.

YATES: Now, let's see, you became mayor in 1979, correct? And of course you ran for office at the state level. The election was in 1980. So tell me, how did the opportunity arise to run for. . . . It was the Thirty-seventh Assembly District.

WRIGHT: It was fascinating, because I can remember after the election in 1978, and I won, I drove around the streets and realized that I was responsible. And after working with a couple of hundred dollars a week as a budget and now I'm dealing with a couple of million. "My God! How am I going to decide?"

Then you get to find out that in working with budgets the amount means nothing, it's what it's being spent for. Then you have to devise a formula or whatever you want to call it, as to how much of that pot of money you had is going to go into the important. . . . Just as you pay your mortgage first and then your car payment and then, you know, you go down the line of your priorities, that's what you have to have with government. And the amount of money doesn't mean anything. I went then from, I think we had a ten or eleven million dollar budget in 1980, to a couple of hundred million dollars in

budgets at the state level, and the first thing you know they're into the billions. And that really doesn't mean anything when you are looking at the number of people that are to be served and what the program is doing.

The key to keep anything within sanity is to constantly to have some kind of oversight, where you monitor. The legislature should do more monitoring and less bill passing, to be sure that a program is doing what it started out to do. Don't pass a piece of legislation, it goes on the shelf, you pat yourself on the back, and you go on to something else. You have to watch what you've done to see how it can be improved upon. If it's working and it's good, then to improve it so it will be lasting. And so many programs are so out of whack that they don't even know what they are spending the money for, and it's always the brilliant mind that will finagle some way to get more money out of that pot than they're supposed to get. So there's always that battle going on too. And so that was the whole thing.

So when I was sitting on the city council I was so thrilled as to what I could do for this community. I saw what I thought were the problems and I wanted to change what the problems were, and that's why I talk about the sanitation, things we had to do. It was going to be costly, but we had to be sure that we were getting a real bang for the buck as far as the taxpayers were concerned. There were roads that had to be repaired. There were businesses that had to be brought into Simi Valley, jobs into Simi Valley. And that's what I was really

intent on. And then suddenly Cusanovich is retiring. He's decided to retire.  
[Robert C.] Bob Cline seemed like a natural. He had been in the assembly for  
ten years. He's going to run.

YATES: For the senate seat?

WRIGHT: He's going to run for the senate seat. That makes sense. So he's running for  
the senate seat and now this assembly seat is open. Now my husband is totally  
disabled and it's very difficult. . . . What I was doing at that particular point in  
time then, I was selling insurance. It's all commission and you have to put  
time in to make commission.

YATES: So you weren't connected to the cable company any longer.

WRIGHT: No. I wasn't connected with the cable company, because what had happened  
with the cable company was I was out every night on sales, and that was really  
horrible because it was constant pushing and it got really hard. And with my  
husband in his condition it was nothing for me to drive in the driveway and  
see the ambulance taking him out. And there was my daughter

YATES: He had a heart condition, is that right?

WRIGHT: Heart condition, yeah. And I had my daughter that was left with her dad. And  
then he had . . . . You know, it was just . . . . It was just a mess, and it was so  
much pressure on me that I had to get some kind of a job that gave me hours.  
So I knew from this hour to this hour I would be working.

So I had the opportunity, because I was much involved in bringing the first

skating rink into Simi Valley, so I got to be manager there. And I thought, “This will be perfect.” Well, it didn’t turn out to be perfect because Monday . . . . You closed the rink on Monday. But Monday was fine, because I was into the situation of going to meetings to keep up, and that was my Monday night. But I couldn’t even do that sometimes, because of the fact that they had private parties on Monday nights, so the rink wasn’t really closed. It was closed to the public but there were always the private parties. So you had that. And then you had to stay after, and then you had all night skating on Saturday night, and then you had . . . . Just in order to make the business work and . . . . It was too much, too much, just too much. I couldn’t do it.

So right after I got elected, right then, I decided to change my position. I left the alley and of course, having just won . . . . His name was [ ] Shevlin, that’s his name, was the one that was the office manager for New York Life [Insurance Company] in Ventura. So he was looking for agents and he gave me this glorious picture of the agency, and they would help me get my credentials, because I had to have a license, a state license. So I had to go to school for it, and then I got my license and my license was basically for life and health insurance, that was what I was going to be involved in. And I thought this was easy, because now I would have the flexibility of hours, with being on the city council and trying to make a living, because I could spend my days trying to sell insurance and my nights working. But then they started

to clash too, so it was hard. It was hard. So when the job opened and I realized . . .

YATES: The assembly seat?

WRIGHT: Yes. I realized, wait, actually, I hated insurance. I hated selling insurance. Because life insurance, you know, you're selling people, and young people aren't interested. The only policies I ended up selling were baby policies, five and ten thousand dollar policies to families. That was kind of lucrative.

But I really loved getting into the nitty gritty of the government and helping to make it work and setting policy. I absolutely loved it. And I thought, well, my biggest frustration was again that we had no control over what the state would tell us to do. And as a general law city you didn't have a charter, so whatever the state said, that's what you had to do. So I wanted to do something and make some changes there. So on the basis of the local government experience . . . . And I really had more experience than just the time of sitting on the city council, because I had been going to council meetings since 1972, so I knew the innards. But I even knew more of the innards, now, things that you weren't privy to . . .

YATES: Right, but once you're on the council . . .

WRIGHT: But once you're on the council you were. And I said to Vic, "And I'd get paid for it." I'd have a salary, instead of going crazy at the end of the month trying to make up policies or sell policies in order to make the income I needed to

keep this house. And so I said, "Well, what do you think?" Well, he loved it, because Vic had been involved in politics back in Chicago where he came from. And he would have run for city council if it wasn't because of his health, because he was biting at the bit.

YATES: So he was supportive?

WRIGHT: So he was supportive. He was supportive and he wasn't supportive, because he was supportive for me to run, but he wasn't supportive of the time away from the house.

YATES: You mean for running?

WRIGHT: Yeah, for running. Then, when I got into the assembly, I mean I was gone four days of the week, and then when I came back I had things I had to do here in order to maintain my presence in the community.

YATES: Well, that's what I was wondering, because once you get up there, of course . . . . It's one thing to run for office, but then if you win . . . . [Laughter]

WRIGHT: But I had been going then . . . . Being on the city council, being the mayor, I had been back to Washington [D.C.]. Of course I was familiar with Washington, because I came from the East. But going to Sacramento, the trips to Sacramento on different things . . . . And then when I was the mayor, in that one span of time, I think it seemed like almost every week I went to Sacramento for something. And so I was coming in contact with these people and I was familiar with the process, not necessarily all the nuts and bolts of it,

but it wasn't something that I walked in to cold.

I knew, and I knew what the sacrifices were that were going to be involved, and I thought I had that worked out with Vic. But as his situation grew worse he just couldn't tolerate it, and he tried to do everything he could to make me feel guilty because I was taking time away from my daughter and I was taking time away from him. It was amazing. And so I finally got a fellow in town that would take him out to breakfast every day that I was gone—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday—because Vic really couldn't drive at that point. Take him out to breakfast, and help him get dressed, because he always seemed to need help. He could do it, but it seemed like the more he drained on me the more contented he was, and rather than listen to his shouting and that, I just went ahead and did it. I'd be in my office—and then I had the office over in Northridge, because that was kind of the center of the district at that point—and I'd get to the office at nine o'clock and I'd get a call at nine-thirty to come over and make his breakfast. He couldn't even scramble himself an egg.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

YATES: OK, so back to running the first race.

WRIGHT: So that is kind of getting ahead of keeping this in continuity. At that point the salary was \$28,000. I didn't know you got per diem, I didn't know you got a

car, I didn't know you got health coverage, I didn't know you got insurance. I didn't know any of this. I ran because I saw that while I was killing myself trying to make \$30,000, I could make \$28,000, a sure \$28,000, doing something I loved doing. So I said to Vic I wanted to do it. He said fine, he was fully supportive. He just thought it was terrific, because it was something he would have liked to have done, but he knew he couldn't, he couldn't run, so it was great. But he was still pulling on me, even during the campaign that first time out. And he wanted to have charge of it.

I was running on the fact that I was the only one of the candidates . . . . There were six in the Republican primary, and I was the only one that was an elected official running. There were two attorneys. You know, they always like to get their names on the ballot and stuff like that, more for business for themselves. And then there was an elderly gentleman from up in the Santa Clarita Valley who was retired that ran. And then there was Hal Bernson who had just won in '79 on the city council, and he had control of the Republican assembly over in the valley, and so he had his aide Greg Smith run. So he was backing his aid.

And here I was an unknown from Simi Valley. But I wasn't unknown, because I got my name in the paper every Monday night. See I was sitting on the council, and now I'm the mayor.

YATES: Now, you just mentioned your husband wanted to manage the campaign.

What did you do about who managed the campaign?

WRIGHT: Well, there was a young man—I can't even remember his name now—that worked in the club that was at the top of the hill. It was a card club and he worked there and he was very active in the Republican organization here in town. And he said, "I've got somebody for you." And I said, "Well, no. I'm going to work with the same group that I worked with." There was Tommy Criger, who was my treasurer and she remained my treasurer, and I was getting these people together. He said, "That's fine to have, for your people to work for you. But you need a consultant." I said, "Consultant!" So I had to give that some thought and then it made sense. I didn't know the Santa Clarita Valley. I didn't know the Valley, the San Fernando Valley, and that was part of the district. I didn't know the people in Fillmore. I only knew Simi Valley. At that point Moorpark, too, I didn't know, because it was unincorporated at that point. So I knew Simi Valley, but I didn't know these other areas, and I wouldn't even know who to go to over there to talk to, to ask for help. So it was an idea that made sense.

So he brought in this man by the name of Chris Nelson that was willing to work for \$5,000 for the primary, which was horrendous for me because I didn't even have \$2 at that point. But he got me through all the things I had to do, like reports that had to be done, what I could do and couldn't do, and he worked with my treasurer and everything. He was a good guy at that point.

YATES: So he had the knowledge, you're saying, to help you work through the system of campaigning.

WRIGHT: The system of campaigning for state. Because I was in the city council. It's not your next door neighbor, your friend down the street, that come together. And they help you run the campaign, and it's good to have somebody with oversight, because you may get a brilliant idea and actually it would do more harm for you than good, you know, when you are talking about the other areas.

So we had to do a poll, so we had a poll done, and I needed money, so the only thing to do was to have a fund-raiser. So I was going to have a fund-raiser and I wanted to charge. . . . I figure I could only have one fund-raiser, because now we are into almost March. So I had one fund-raiser, a hundred dollars a plate dinner in Simi Valley. And everybody was saying, "You're going crazy! They don't pay anymore than \$15 to go to a political event!" I said, "I can't help it. I've got to make, and my goal as to make, \$25,000." "Oh, it won't be done, it won't be done." Well, we did it. Of course, I have to admit, there were a lot of people that were doing business before the council that bought a table. But the point was I made \$25,000 and I guarded that with my life, because that had to be spent in the last three weeks of the campaign.

So the only thing I had for me was brochures that because of Vic's connections . . . . Because he was in printing at the time, had been in printing,

so he still had his connections. He could get people that would do printing and that for me at a very reasonable rate, and so the only thing I had to worry about was signs. For signs we went with Cog's, because they put the signs up and take them down after, so that would do. We'd take care of that. And then the other thing was mailing. I had to do some kind of a mailing, because I'm only getting six people. Well, it was good, because three of the six of us really . . . . The name was on the ballot and they were going around talking to people like if they were running for city council.

I had to get to know these other areas. So it was with that help that I just had to start going off on my own. So up until the last two weeks of the campaign, basically it was me. I went to the Chamber of Commerce. I went to just anything that a group of people would get together at. I went round and round and round, and that's how I did it. And then to do with the mailer, and then when my signs went up Hal Bernson, with the group of his guys, went and tore all my signs down over the Valley. So I called him up at city council and took him out of the council meeting and told him I wanted my signs back. I knew he did it. He said he had nothing to do with it. He said they were all illegal signs anyway. Well, that was beside the point.

YATES: Now, you said that the \$25,000 was for the last three weeks of the campaign, so . . .

WRIGHT: It would be printing . . .

YATES: This was for the primary.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It would be the printing, mailing, all the things that you do. And of course my signs, the signs going up, and everything else. But then I got that I needed more money. I needed \$5,000 and I didn't know where I was going to get it, except that we did have \$5,000 in a savings account. And I took it and I gave it to the committee, because I needed that. That was so important. Well, what happened was that when Vic found out that I had cleaned out the savings account . . . . Because I had this gut feeling that I could win, and if I won I knew then I was going to raise money, because the Republican party would come in and help me, right? The Republican party did not come in and help me, but that's another story.

YATES: We'll get to that. We'll get to that.

WRIGHT: Yeah, we'll get to that.

YATES: So we're still talking about the primary at this point.

WRIGHT: Yes. This is still the primary, so there's \$5,000, I take it, and Vic is. . . . I mean his blood pressure is shooting up. I'm afraid he's going to have a coronary right then and there. I said, "I'll see what I can do." Well, in the meantime he calls a fellow that was involved in some land development here to loan him \$5,000. Loan him \$5,000. Well, the guy does. He loans Vic \$5,000. Vic hands me the check. I said, "What's this?" And he tells me. He said, "Now you can get the \$5,000 back." Well, we had already spent the

\$5,000. But it was on paper. When you get right down to it, it's paper. But I was green. I was green about state regulations. So I took the \$5,000 that [Robert] Bob [Levonian] had given us or loaned us and I put it in to my savings account and that took care of Vic. The money was there. He'd always say, "Something is going to happen to me and you're not going to have any money." He was going on and he was driving me crazy with that stuff, because he was always dying. He was dying every day. So that took care of that. So I won.

YATES: The primary.

WRIGHT: The way I won . . .

YATES: I mean you won the general, too. But the primary. . . .

WRIGHT: The primary. I will always remember that primary. That was the height, to me, of grass roots because it was basically. . . . I was out in the boondocks walking precincts, knocking on doors. In fact, when they needed a check to be signed. . . . Because Tommy Criger was the treasurer, but I cosigned, and what would happen is that Tommy wouldn't write a check because she didn't want to see how. . . . She never saw so much money all in one place and she wasn't going to write any checks for you. I said, "I have to spend." So I can remember being somewhere in the San Fernando Valley, up on the street, when this car comes breezing up to me, with the check book for me to please sign a check. Because Tommy wouldn't sign it, but if I signed it then she

would. So for me to sign the check in order to get my mail out. . . . That's what we were working on.

YATES: So if there's any one thing in particular that you can identify, what would it be, that you think was the important key to your winning the primary?

WRIGHT: Very simple. I always say to anybody, "If you're going to run, do a poll first in the district and find out what the thinking is of the people." In this instance I only had to worry about what the Republicans were thinking. And it was government, and the fact that I had some government experience meant more to them at that particular point in time than anybody else, so I dwelled on the fact that I was the mayor of Simi Valley. And over in the Valley they constituted that to [Thomas] Bradley. I was the mayor. I mean, I had a big important job, right? [Laughter]

In the campaign later on that we ran for the general, it was funny. . . . Because we had passed our budget, which was after the June primary. We passed the city budget and now we're working under Prop. 13. I mean, that's a big thing. So I go in a piece of literature that I was working on and we say—and it was true, the facts were true—that we had reduced our budget by 6 percent because of Prop. 13. But we had increased our police department by 10 percent. It sounds good, doesn't it? The 6 percent was like a couple of thousand dollars and the 10 percent was one police officer added to the force.

YATES: But that worked as far as helping you.

WRIGHT: And I mean, that was the whole thing. So that was what was getting people, was the fact that I maintained a budget under Prop. 13.

YATES: So is that, you think, the one thing that really distinguished you from the pack?

WRIGHT: Again, it was the experience, it was experience in office. And then I had proof of what I had done because I could show them the figures.

YATES: Were there any times at that point that there were forums or anything?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah! And I loved the forums. I absolutely loved them.

YATES: Yeah. I remember you said you liked them because you came last. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: I came last. I'd listen to these guys and I'd mentally make notes of what they were saying. And they were so off the wall.

YATES: What were the key issues? You mentioned government and I guess the result of Prop. 13, but what other issues were at the front in terms of the Republican party at the primary level, on what you guys were focusing on?

WRIGHT: It was pretty much that. That was it.

YATES: Just that.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes, because Prop. 13 was a big Republican issue.

YATES: So was it how it was going to be dealt with once it was passed that was the issue or what?

WRIGHT: No. It was to insure. . . . See, about having somebody with local experience

running was the fact that I wanted to make sure that the state wasn't going to come in and take money away from the locals, because they still had their services to perform. And to keep them from passing legislation that would be detrimental to the local government. That was one of the big issues. And of course, again, don't raise taxes. To this day it is don't raise taxes. Nobody wants to spend money. They want to make it but they don't want to spend it.

YATES: [Laughter] You have to spend sometimes.

WRIGHT: Yeah, and the point is, to me, that you have to be able to understand what you're talking about, know what the issue is, to know that there's no other way.

[Interruption]

YATES: OK. The campaign. What I wanted to ask you about now is, once you won the primary how much money did you think you were going to need to raise? And how did you do that at that point?

WRIGHT: You mean for the general election?

YATES: Yes, for the general election.

WRIGHT: Well, it was strange, because everybody said "Oh!", you know. . . . Chris took me up to Sacramento to meet all the guys that were in charge, and of course we had the Prop. 13 babies there, in charge in the assembly.

YATES: And who are you referring to?

WRIGHT: It was [Patrick J.] Pat Nolan and Ross Johnson and . . .

YATES: When you say in charge, you mean of the Republican Caucus?

WRIGHT: Caucus, right. And Carol Hallett. . . . Which I thought was great, a woman was the. . . . But when you got there. . . . Not right off, you didn't walk in and realize what was going on here. It was [Paul V.] Priolo, who was from Thousand Oaks, who was the Republican leader, and when you're in a house of eighty and you only have thirty-one or thirty-two people in your caucus, you can't even stop a two-thirds majority vote. So you've got to negotiate if you want to get anything, right? Well, these guys come in and these bucks that came in under Prop. 13, they were out to take over the world. So it was kind of a consortium, I guess you would say, came together and decided to put Carol Hallett in that position, and so her little group around her were all these Prop. 13 guys. And so after the primary. . . . And, by the way, one of the six that was run. . . . Why am I all of a sudden forgetting his name? John. John what?

YATES: I have the names.

WRIGHT: Do you?

YATES: Hold on. About the election. This is the primary.

WRIGHT: John [C.] Allen. John Allen was the one that was put in by the caucus.

YATES: Oh, the mayor?

WRIGHT: No. John was put in by the Republican caucus, these guys, the Prop. 13 babies. They picked John Allen. He never showed up at any events during

the primary campaign.

YATES: So they'd been supporting him for the primary?

WRIGHT: Well, John Allen was a friend of—in fact I think he went to school with—Pat Nolan. So they had selected him. He never showed up. He only showed up at one forum, and his claim to fame was the fact that he had all these dogs barking at him while he was walking the precincts supposedly. You never saw him anywhere.

YATES: So back to. . . . You were trying to get support then from the Republican Caucus? Is that what you're trying to do at this point?

WRIGHT: Well, I'm saying. . . . I was just told, you know, once you get out of the primary the money will come, because you get it from the Republican Caucus. You get it from all these Republicans

YATES: And who said that to you?

WRIGHT: Chris.

YATES: Chris did. Your manager.

WRIGHT: Yeah. He said, "You'll get money." Well, I had \$40,000 spent on my primary. And I don't have any. . . . It wasn't a lie, I don't have any money. And I'm going along thinking, well. . . . And he gave me a whole list of people to call. I'm not getting much enthusiasm about getting any money and why not? Well, this is supposed to be a Republican district, so you really don't need a lot of money to win and this Arline [M.] Matthews, this was the

one that was with the beef boycott. I mean, that was her claim to fame, and so she . . .

YATES: She's the Democrat.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And John Williamson was a Democrat. These three Democrats. I mean, look at the votes she got over these other two guys, as compared to where I come in here with my breakdown.

YATES: Right. Well, then you had more people.

WRIGHT: Yeah. That was it. So this was the whole thing. And it was just amazing, I'm not getting any money, and so finally I said, "I'm going to have to hire a fundraiser person." I have to hire. Well, how am I going to hire? Well, it was very nice. What she would do is she was going to take a percentage of what was raised in that month. So I didn't have to pay her. [ Brandt]

YATES: How did you find her?

WRIGHT: Again, Chris put me in contact.

YATES: So a network, basically.

WRIGHT: Yeah. But the thing that bothered me is that I was the one who was on the phone all the time trying to raise money. She'd give me this list of names. Then, if any money came in from these people, she would take a percentage of it. Well, she didn't raise it. She had a list of names for me to call. It wasn't as though she called and then got the money. I was calling. So I didn't particularly like that route, but that's what I had agreed to and that's where I

was. So finally, in the end, everybody's loaning me money and I end up \$100,000 in debt. But the campaign got \$100,000.

YATES: I was going to say. That was your target, was to raise \$100,000?

WRIGHT: Well, yeah. That was what I would need.

YATES: Because that's what you thought it would take.

WRIGHT: Yeah. In between there I'd raise some money, but when the dust all settled I was in debt. But I had won.

YATES: [Laughter] Well, what about at the local level? What was the support from the Republican women, etc.?

WRIGHT: Oh! I mean, these are the people that. . . .

YATES: What did they do for you?

WRIGHT: At that point you didn't have the idea of all the technology they have today in order to put out brochures and put them out with timing. We were there on a Saturday, stuffing. We had got the printed material and they'd put it in order for us by precincts, and at our headquarters we had people stuffing them in the envelopes and sealing them to mail them, to get them out for the election on Tuesday. But you knew that you got something mailed on Saturday, it would be delivered on Monday. Today you can't be too sure about that. So we were [mimes licking stamps], putting stamps [mimes putting stamps on envelopes]—is the way they were going out. I mean it was just. . . . And that's why it always stands out for me as being just the greatest.

YATES: You know, I didn't ask you. . . . To maybe come back to your family a little bit and the role they played in the campaign, for instance whether your daughter or husband helped out in any way?

WRIGHT: Uh-uh.

YATES: No?

WRIGHT: Oh, she was kind of . . .

YATES: She was a teenager.

WRIGHT: She was a teenager. She was kind of enthused that I was running for office. It meant something. But there were sacrifices that had to be made for me to run and she didn't like making the sacrifices, and because my husband didn't like making the sacrifices either. I was supposed to be home and prepare dinner and do all the things and keep the house in order and get the clothes washed. You know, I was doing everything and I was running for office and I was still trying to sell insurance.

YATES: It sounds complicated.

WRIGHT: I don't know how I did it, because. . . . He was getting disability. He was on disability, so he was getting a social security check, but it was never enough. It was five hundred and some dollars a month. I couldn't even pay. . . . If I paid the mortgage that was it. So I had to work. I had to work. And when you're on commission, if you don't sell you don't get anything. I wasn't getting a salary, and that's why this looked like the right thing for me to do,

because I loved it. For the first time in my life I was going to have a job I loved and I was going to get paid for it.

YATES: Right, but you didn't realize that you'd go into debt to do that, probably.  
[Laughter]

WRIGHT: No, no, no.

YATES: You mentioned that because of Prop. 13 what was going to happen with funding between the state and at the local level was the issue leading up to the primary. What about during the general election?

WRIGHT: The general election, it was still the point. People were very sensitive not to raise taxes, and this Arline Matthews was a little fly-by-night. I mean, she was. . . . But she was right in trying because at that point in time you had Howard [L.] Berman and you had McCarthy, Leo [T.] McCarthy, fighting for the speakership [of the assembly]. And that year, '79 and into the election, they couldn't get the Democratic Caucus's support. So Leo McCarthy was basically the speaker just because he was there. He didn't have enough votes, really, to hold it, but Howard Berman didn't have enough votes to kick him out. So Arline Matthews was Howard Berman's candidate and he poured money into her campaign, and that's why the campaign cost so much. It wouldn't have cost so much. That's why people were saying, "Well, you know, you don't need the money. You're going to win because you're a Republican."

YATES: It was because you knew she was getting that support?

WRIGHT: She was getting that financial support.

YATES: That you weren't getting at the state level.

WRIGHT: That I wasn't getting. That's right. She was getting it.

YATES: Or from the state group.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was the Berman machine at that time and he was into a lot of races, but he was trying to pick up the votes for speaker.

YATES: You know, you mentioned earlier, when you were talking about starting to campaign, how of course you were known in Simi Valley but not in other parts of the district. Maybe you could take a minute to talk about what the district consisted of at that time, in terms of communities, and also just describe the people, the work, the business. Briefly, just to get a feel for what it was like at that point.

WRIGHT: Well, at that point they only had two cities in my district, Simi Valley and Fillmore. Moorpark was county and that was here. So it was Moorpark, Fillmore, Piru, and Simi Valley. It was the Ventura County section. And that's why these guys over in the Valley just disregarded. . . . There wasn't enough people over here to worry about.

YATES: So what part of the Valley did your district cover then?

WRIGHT: Chatsworth, Northridge, Granada Hills, Canoga Park and. . . . Yeah, because I didn't hit Woodland Hills. Canoga Park, that was pretty much it. Oh, and the

city of San Fernando. I forgot about that, but that was in there too. And then you shot up into Santa Clarita, which was all unincorporated and went all the way out to Acton—but I didn't have Acton.

YATES: So the district didn't go out to Ventura?

WRIGHT: No.

YATES: OK. It was that other. . . . The Fillmore-Santa Paula area?

WRIGHT: No. Santa Paula wasn't in my district. It was crazy. It was Fillmore and Piru. It was Simi Valley and then it was the San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita.

YATES: OK. So talk a little bit more now about the constituency and that kind of thing.

WRIGHT: Well, there were more registered Democrats in the Valley than Republicans. But it was close enough, because Democrats, in order to maintain a district, have to have at least 47 or 48 percent of the vote, wherein Republicans can win and hold a district, at least at that time, with between 40 and 41. And so over in the Valley there were more Democrats than there were Republicans. Up in the Santa Clarita Valley there were more Republicans than Democrats. Fillmore was more Democrat than Republican, but Simi Valley and Moorpark were more Republican than Democrat. So all in all it was about 41 percent Republican. I mean, it was considered to be a Republican district. Even though there were more registered Democrats, it was still considered to be a Republican district. So that's why I couldn't raise the money, and even

though they were pouring money in by Howard Berman they couldn't see any way where Howard Berman could take it, but you never know. You know, stranger things had happened, so you really had to work it.

YATES: So you raised the funds basically in small amounts to get to that?

WRIGHT: Small amounts.

YATES: How much did you raise, do you think?

WRIGHT: Well, I'd have to go back and look at my reports. I just know that we spent \$100,000 and I was close to \$100,000 in debt. I probably raised maybe about as much as I raised in the primary. That is probably what I raised for the general.

YATES: Well, just to continue a little bit with the theme of describing the district, what about the economic aspects of it? Business, what people did for a living?

WRIGHT: Well, Simi Valley didn't have very much, because most of the people in Simi Valley, and Moorpark for that matter, were going over into the San Fernando Valley to work or down into Los Angeles to work. I mean it was all going that way. The major employer in Simi Valley was the school district. That was it. Moorpark didn't have any. Fillmore, all of Fillmore's people were going over to the Newhall center for their jobs. And so Santa Clarita, there was a kinship as far as Santa Clarita and Simi Valley were concerned, because there were people who wanted to get out of Los Angeles. They either came over the hill into Simi Valley or they went up the I-5 [Golden State Freeway]

and shot off at the 405 [San Diego Freeway], and shot off into this whole magic space that was out there. They were building like mad up there.

YATES: I should have looked at the map again, but I assume at this point there was no agricultural activity going on?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: There was?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. There was Fillmore.

YATES: So you had that constituency too, then?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And of course where city hall is today, here in Simi Valley, it was orange groves. So farming had its place. I wouldn't say it would have been the number one. In some parts of the district it would have been number one, even out in the Santa Clarita Valley they had their area, but there were more horses than . . .

YATES: Than raising crops.

WRIGHT: Than raising crops, yeah.

YATES: Anything else that you can think about the district that I haven't asked you about that you think might be useful to describe?

WRIGHT: Well, one thing was, except for the far east end of the San Fernando Valley, most of it was white. There wasn't any heavy Hispanic population. There wasn't a heavy black population. They were scattered. We had a black family living behind us for a while. A peach of a guy, his name was Kelly. My

husband was always teasing him about celebrating St. Patrick's Day, because his name was Kelly.

YATES: But predominantly Caucasian is your constituency at this point?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Mmm-hmm.

YATES: So in those final days leading up to the general election, what was happening? What were you doing?

WRIGHT: I was doing pretty much what I was doing in the primary. I was just going out and walking precincts and trying not to spend as much money, trying to keep money that we had, because we had a budget as to how many mailers we thought we would have to do. We knew we couldn't compete, and that's why the whole thing with my budget was such a great thing, because [Ira] Reiner. . . . The Berman machine had this great system where they could take mail and what they did was they targeted it, and one of the greatest things they did was to make a mistake in my race, because they turned around and the portion of that particular brochure they were mailing out had. . . . One part of it was Simi Valley's, the other part was the San Fernando Valley, and the third part was the Santa Clarita Valley, and they got them mixed up. So, for instance, if they came to Simi Valley and they said, "Don't elect this woman because everything she is going to do is for Simi Valley," well, Simi Valley was thrilled.

YATES: Yeah, they sent the mailer to the wrong community.

WRIGHT: Yeah, they sent the mail out wrong. Sent the mail to the wrong community.

YATES: So that helped.

WRIGHT: That helped. And then a piece that was put out by Reiner. . . . Ira Reiner, who is the attorney in L.A., was part of this machine, and they did a hit piece on me saying I had lied about the budget and all this stuff. And so we couldn't retaliate in the way of a mailer because that wasn't in my program. I couldn't say, "OK, let's do this, because I'll just go get some more money for it." So we got the media behind me and I went right down to Reiner's office and I threw the city budget on his desk for Simi Valley and showed him where it was 6 percent reduction and showed him where it was 10 percent for police officers. The fact that it was one police officer. . . . We were looking at dollars. So it was 10 percent.

YATES: And you got media coverage coming out?

WRIGHT: And I got media coverage. The eleven o'clock news on channel 11, channel 13. Yeah, I got coverage.

YATES: But in a more roundabout way.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Not actively going for the TV coverage.

WRIGHT: Right.

YATES: So how did you think things were going, right up until the last minute?

WRIGHT: I was kind of scared, but I still had this gut feeling that I was going to win. I

just felt I was going to win. It wasn't right that I wouldn't when I worked too hard for it. And so we sat here, and I couldn't have any big party. I didn't want to have a party. I had learned from my city council. . . . No, no party. We sat here and Chris called in and said, "You've won." I said, "The polls. . . . All the votes aren't counted," and he said, "You've won. I'm telling you. The trend is that you're winning." And Arnie Steinberg had done our poll, and Arnie Steinberg had a list of exactly how they were going to come in in the primary and he listed what was going to happen in the general, but I didn't want to believe it, because I was afraid if I believed it I wouldn't work hard enough for it. And so we sat here, five o'clock in the morning, all the polls were closed, all the votes were counted and I had won.

YATES: How did it feel?

WRIGHT: It felt terrific, but I wanted to see it in print. [Laughter] So I mean, the next day I was a zombie. Happy, and then a little scared, because I was going to be leaving my family and it's in a month's time. You win the election and it's the first Monday of December you're going to be sworn in. You've got to have an office, all of a sudden you're getting all these calls about places where you can have an office, and furniture, well, you get the furniture from the warehouse. There is a warehouse down south here from the assembly and you get your furniture.

And hiring people. Who am I going to hire? I had this wonderful idea that

I would have somebody from Simi Valley. Because I was going to get three people. So I was going to have somebody from Simi Valley, somebody from Santa Clarita Valley, and someone from the Valley, and it was how I happened to hire Catherine Morrison to be my chief of staff.

YATES: That brings to mind, then, the person who. . . . Was it Cline you mentioned who left the assembly?

WRIGHT: Bob Cline. I should have said he was a big help to me, because he lost.

YATES: I was wondering what role he might have played.

WRIGHT: Well, what he started doing, because he was feeling. . . . He was burned. He was burned by the members of the Republican contingency in Sacramento.

YATES: Uh-huh. The caucus.

WRIGHT: Yeah, because they got Ed Davis to run. Ed Davis ran. And it was the chief of police, tough on crime, right? And running against Bob Cline and Bob lost. And so it was Ed Davis then that was running. So with that, Bob had just lost, he'd served the district ten years and he'd worked hard, and to think that he couldn't get the votes for it. . . .

YATES: What about on your transition to the assembly? What about his staff or anything?

WRIGHT: Well, Catherine Morrison was from his staff when I hired her.

YATES: So who did you talk to about how you were going to do all of this?

WRIGHT: Bob.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: He explained it to me. And Cusanovich was a big help to me too, his office.

In fact I used Cusanovich's office in order to go in and have interviews for my staff, for hiring a staff. And I hired—and I didn't realize it at the time, it was kind of funny—all women. I hired all women. I hired a woman—wrong selection—from out in Santa Clarita, because all she wanted to do was hold hands and pray. But Catherine Morrison was the one that I put in charge, and she had good administration abilities, because she had done a lot of the grunt work for Bob. And I wanted to hire someone from his office, because I wanted to show that it wasn't a battle but it was a smooth transition, and so that worked out well.

And Bob started toning down, because he was really kind of hurt—you know, that was it—when he lost in June. So any proclamations that had to be presented, I presented them for him. In fact, I was like his representative, going to all the different chambers of commerce and the Kiwanis and all the different organizations that you have. [Inaudible] I was going to do everything.

YATES: So what was the time frame in terms of getting the staff? Did that take a long time? Did it take a short amount of time?

WRIGHT: Well, my staff in Sacramento was the hardest, because what you got was a binder like this of all the people . . .

YATES: For the tape, it's like a foot, over a foot.

WRIGHT: Yeah. For all the people that are available for jobs as transitions take place, people leaving, either because they lost or because they're fired.

YATES: So these other names that you mentioned are at the local level or at the district level.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: And I hired a girl [Derene Curtis] from Simi Valley. I hired her because she worked for the council, worked for the city manager. I hired her and she stayed with me until about two or three years ago she left. Most of the people that I hired were with me a long time.

YATES: But it was more difficult to get things set up at the state level.

WRIGHT: It was in Sacramento, because I wanted someone with experience, and so when I started interviewing I knew that I was going to get at least two. Because don't forget, now we had Democratic control, so all the Democrats got all the staff and all the committees and the whole bit. So I knew that I had to get someone and I needed somebody who was going to be loyal to me, so I talked to—God, I can't remember her name now—that was Cusanovich's secretary. [Virginia ] She had been in the capital for years and she was retiring, because with Lou going she didn't want to work for anybody else. She was an older woman and so she gleaned out of this book that they handed

me about a dozen people, for me to pick two.

Well, right off the bat I had one woman come in, I interviewed her, and then another woman come in a little later and I interviewed her. And here they worked together and they wanted to go together. They just weren't going to work if. . . . If they weren't together they wouldn't take the job. And to me it looked like, well, sure, if you're not doing the work the other one is going to cover for you, you know, and I didn't want that.

And then it was Jamie Kahn and she was working in Priolo's office, but she was like number three on the list. And she came and she wanted to work for me, and it was the funniest thing. I looked at the way she was dressed. I said, "Oh, my God!" She had high boots on and a long skirt. I mean, she was really kind of hippie, I thought. But there was something about her I liked, because I said to her. . . . Well, the first two questions I asked each one of them, because I didn't know what they were registered, I would ask them if they were registered Republican or Democrat, and if they said they were Democrat I said, "Well, would you mind working for a Republican?" Because I didn't want somebody who was going to be backstabbing me. And then on the other hand, if they had been working for a man, how they would feel about working for a woman? So there was that thought process we went through.

So Jamie Kahn. . . . The young man then at the time, Tom [Dey], who was in charge of the Republican Caucus, he had suggested I interview this Jamie,

because she wasn't even on the list, and so she came in like kind of on lunch hour. And in talking to her, when I asked, she said no, the reason was she wanted to work for me. She wanted to work for a woman. She'd read up all my background and everything else and just how I won the election. She just wanted to work for me. That was it.

YATES: Was she a Republican or a Democrat?

WRIGHT: She was a Republican, but she's what I call one of the liberal Republicans, but what the heck. But basically on paper she was Republican. So we got into a conversation about one thing and another, and I just liked her. But I said to her, you know, I have some other interviews. And I said, "I tell you what." There was this place just down from the capitol. I can't remember the name of it, because it's changed hands so many times. But I said, "I'll meet you there for a drink at five o'clock, because I have to have time to make my six-thirty flight home. So I'll meet you at five o'clock and I'll give you my decision then."

YATES: This wasn't Posey's [Café], was it?

WRIGHT: No, Posey's was behind the capitol. This is like what I would call in front of the capitol, because L Street was kind of the big street.

YATES: And it hasn't changed names, so. . . .

WRIGHT: It's on Eleventh [Street], and I think it's got its third name change now and it's a little place. Right now, if you're ever in the capital, they usually have tables

and that out on the sidewalk. The sidewalk, half out in the street, because that section of Eleventh isn't open to traffic.

YATES: Right, right. I know what you're talking about, yeah.

WRIGHT: It's about two doors from the corner of Eleventh and L. Brannan's. I think it's called Brannan's now.

YATES: OK. Anyway, so you agreed to meet her there.

WRIGHT: Yes. And I made up my mind, but I went ahead with the interview of everybody else. I decided I was going to hire her and I didn't care whether I had a second person at that point, because I was getting too close to being sworn in.

YATES: So this is all happening between the election in November and. . . .

WRIGHT: Between the election in November and I think it was the first of December. If it wasn't the first, it was the second of December.

YATES: OK. So you only had about three weeks or so.

WRIGHT: About three weeks. That's all you have. And so I wasn't just going to rush into hiring anybody. So I went ahead and got an office down here. It was a storefront that I got over right on the borderline between Northridge and Chatsworth. I believe the address was Chatsworth. I know the building. I can point to it. It's right off of De Soto [Avenue]. And it was Catherine Morrison and it was. . . . Who was the other gal? Oh, Tommy! I brought Tommy in part time, because her husband said, "Please, do something with her, she's

driving me crazy."

YATES: She wouldn't sign the checks, though.

WRIGHT: She wouldn't sign the checks. [Laughter] Yeah. But, yeah, she was going to be part time. All she was going to do was my scheduling, so she'd come in in the morning.

YATES: So you felt like basically you could have this Jamie Kahn be the main person for you?

WRIGHT: Main in Sacramento. So I decided she was going to be it and that was it. So I just hired her. And she worked with me until they gave her the golden handshake, which was a couple of years ago, when they gave the golden handshakes. She went out because she wanted to do lobbying and she is a lobbyist now.

YATES: I'm curious. How old was she approximately at that point?

WRIGHT: She was about thirty-two, thirty-three.

YATES: So youngish.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Well, you know, I think this is a good point to kind of stop, and then we can pick up with being actually in the assembly, in legislation and committees and all of that.

WRIGHT: Well, it's interesting.

YATES: Oh, yes.

WRIGHT: Because they always have a caucus dinner the night before the swearing in. It was on that Sunday night and they brought him in. [Willie Brown, who the caucus leadership had negotiated to give him all our votes for speaker in exchange for staffing based on ratio of members. This meant we got more staff and a Republican vice chair for every committee.]\*

YATES: Well, we'll come back to that.

[End Tape 4, Side B]

---

\*. Cathie Wright added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

[Session 5, May 2, 2002]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

YATES: We were chatting for a minute before we turned the tape on about where we left off last time, and basically you discussed the 1980 campaign fairly thoroughly and the election, and then that period right after you won the election, and I guess before you were sworn in, how you staffed your office.

WRIGHT: I staffed my offices.

YATES: Both in Sacramento and in the district. So what I thought we could do is keep going with that and talk about that early period when you first arrived at the assembly. I think I did ask you but I'm going to ask again, when you first arrived, after you had been sworn in and everything, what happened next? How did you learn about how things functioned?

WRIGHT: They had a, I guess you could call it, seminar or a meeting, because the freshmen, upon Monday, which I believe was the first of December that year. . . . Monday we were sworn in. Well, then the house is recessed until after the first of the year. But for the freshmen coming in, the new group, they go through a process for two days. At least then they did a process for two days, of basically learning the ropes. And it was interesting because. . . . I'm

trying to think of the gentleman. He had a local government piece of legislation, because he was a former member of the legislature. I can see his face and I'm going to forget his name. I'll have to think about it.

YATES: What role did he play?

WRIGHT: Well, he was brought in. He was then in lobbying. He was one of the lobbyists and he was brought in because. . . . Knox.

YATES: Oh, John Knox.

WRIGHT: John [T.] Knox. He was brought in to give us a run through of what happens and everything else, but that's how it should be, because when you really get into it there's all these little bends and turns, and you always have to be watching the other guy to see what he's going to do, because he'll try something, get away with it, you know, or something like that. Of course it depends on who the leadership in the house is, and Democrats will do things differently than Republicans. So the Democrats were in control and so things would be a little different. But that wasn't discussed in this, this was just straight. . . . How you get ideas for pieces of legislation, how legislation is then introduced and what your process is, and what the different committees stand for and what their area is.

YATES: Who led the seminar, if that's the best way to describe it?

WRIGHT: It was Knox. I mean, he was the one who was brought in. Because there would have been, I would imagine, some difficulty if, say, we had brought in

[Richard] Richie Robinson to do it, because he'd be very jaded to one side. And you wouldn't bring in a Republican, because then the Democrats wouldn't like the Republican. So even though Knox's affiliation was either Republican or Democrat when he was in the assembly he still was an outsider at this point

YATES: Because he was out of office.

WRIGHT: He was out of office, and he really had no axes to grind, and so he was trying to give you the straight scoop. And then you were introduced to the people who served at the desk.

YATES: How do you think he did?

WRIGHT: Well, I thought he did quite well, but I just thought there had to be more to it, because I had been, I thought, fortunate enough that I was not coming in green. I had been sitting on the city council, even though I was only there two years before I ran for the assembly. I had made trips to Sacramento.

YATES: Right. That reminds me. Who did you make connections with at that point? Because you mentioned meeting some people. That your campaign consultant. . . . Once you won the primary election you had gone up also.

WRIGHT: Yeah. It was the so-called leadership of the Republican Caucus, that's who I met. So I got to talk to Carol Hallett, but she wasn't too interested at that point, because she would let the other ones within her leadership. But we talked to her and she was very nice to me but made no commitments on

anything. I would say Ross Johnson was the same way, because he was one. Pat Nolan seemed a little more friendly towards me because, one, I had beaten his. . . . There basically was a group of them. Their chosen one to run against me, Allen, John Allen, that they thought was going to be the assemblyman, one of their group.

I beat him, of course, so Pat was more friendly, because he was trying to woo me into the real conservative group—which wasn't hard to do, because to this day I have some very hard conservative principles. But in the same instance I find myself at odds with them on many occasions, because I couldn't see this constant, oh, it wasn't a battle, but it was always the idea of trying to get something on the other side so you could defeat them. But it was just the way you did it. You know, to me it was just working hard and showing that you had more to offer. That was the way to go and it just wasn't working out that way.

So I had that, and I know I talked to Dennis Brown, because he again was one of the ones in the leadership. But that was about all, because at that point there wasn't. . . . Again, you could see there were only about thirty out of eighty that were Republicans, so there weren't that many to go around to. What you wanted to do is get to the ones that were considered to be in the leadership, for the simple reason they in turn would be talking to people that could get you funding for the campaign. So that was basically what it was.

So the name that stood out to me at that point was of course Carol Hallett. I was impressed with her, being a woman and being the leader of the caucus. But after you got in, on the inside, you realized that it wasn't through her hard drive or anything like that that she got it. It was putting the numbers together to dump Priolo, whom they didn't want. Particularly the hard conservatives. Priolo would be one that we would call more moderate but he was a conservative on Prop. 13. Because they were considered the Prop. 13 babies. They were more of the hard core conservatives, and that's what they wanted in the leadership, was the hard core conservatives.

YATES: Well, back to how you're getting oriented. And you have this seminar, or whatever you want to call it, for two days. What role did the Republican Caucus play in helping you to become oriented?

WRIGHT: Hmm. Not too much. Not too much. At least I didn't feel they did too much. I always felt a little bit on the outside, but then I thought, "That's because I'm new, you know." No one ever asked me what experience I had or what I did or anything like that before. They didn't seem to care. So that's what it was. It was kind of like you were there, and if you were going to take sides within the caucus, why you take the side where you could get something. Although they didn't have that much to offer because again, they weren't in the leadership.

YATES: Well, who did you start to get to know and develop some kind of—I don't

know what the right word is—relationship or rapport with in that early period?

WRIGHT: Gee. It was hard. Within the caucus, as far as the women are concerned, it seemed to me that Marian Bergeson. . . . Because she had already, as they would consider it, made the mistake of making a commitment to Howard Berman, rather than going along with what the caucus leadership had decided they were going to do, which was support Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.]. And then Marilyn Ryan was in the same boat. And Marian La Follette was very hard to get too close to, because she was very aloof. But then she had money. She more or less paid for her own campaign to get into the legislature. So it was all these different. . . .

So you kind of sat back. And I was a loner my whole life. You know, at one point an only child. For ten years. I was ten years old when my brother was born, so that I was used to playing alone, going to things alone and that. So it didn't bother me to be alone, to be like kind of a loner. I wasn't too much of a loner. The ones that I really enjoyed talking to. . . . I liked [Gerald N.] "Jerry" Felando, because he was such a loudmouth [Laughter], fly off the top type of guy, you know, that I just enjoyed him. And I liked [William J.] Filante, but he was kind of a strange one for the caucus, because here he was, a Republican who was holding a seat that was predominantly a Democratic stronghold. So it was the things he did to maintain his seat that the conservatives particularly didn't like. So I kind of liked him.

And so you just went along, you know. For a while you would be with one, kind of close to one, and then you'd shift off and go to another one, which was good, because I got to get to know them all. But the one I came the closest to was Teresa Hughes, who was a Democrat, and a black Democrat at that.

YATES: And how did that happen?

WRIGHT: I'm trying to think. I think it was the fact that. . . . I don't remember if I got on the Education Committee that. . . . Oh, I know what it was, it was because she was involved with one of the committees that you weren't supposed to want to get on, because there was no ability to raise money on the committee. I think she chaired that committee at the time. And we just hit it off. And it seemed strange when you think of it. But, basics, she was from back East, New York. I'm from Pennsylvania. She's an only child. I was close to being an only child. So she was a little bit of a loner at the time. And she's Catholic, I'm Catholic, you know. There were all these ideas and she came from close by. She was Los Angeles, as compared to Marian Bergeson, who was from Orange County, and Marian La Follette. Although she was close by, but as I said, she was a little aloof, kind of hard to get buddy-buddy. And then Marilyn Ryan was from down in the San Pedro area.

YATES: At what point did you become aware of or become involved in the Women's Caucus?

WRIGHT: Well, I would never have wanted a women's caucus. I didn't believe in a women's caucus or the black caucus or the agricultural caucus or all this, because I thought it was bad enough trying to work within two caucuses. Either you are Republican or Democrat, and that was enough, to me, for caucuses. All this branching off really got to me.

They had talked about it, and it had evolved from the fact that the women would meet at least once a month and have dinner, and it was always at some member's house. So one time it was like Sally Tanner's place, another time it was Teresa Hughes, and another time it was Diane [E.] Watson and such. And you went to their place and they prepared the meal and then the next time it was one of the others, and so there was so few women that you probably went through the whole year at one person's house and in some instances you . . .

[Interruption]

YATES: I was asking you about your initial interaction or introduction to the Women's Caucus.

WRIGHT: Oh, the Women's Caucus, OK. So then that's what it was. We didn't get very much into legislator type things. It was like going out for a social evening for the women, because there were so few of us.

And then. . . . And he's mellowed over the years, but [Bill] Lockyer, oh, he had a temper! I mean he'd flip just like that, and I think a lot of it was to do. . . . When you realized that he was going to school to become an attorney

and in the legislature and naturally was part of the leadership and such. And so where we really took off was. . . .

Well, actually we took off a little before that. We did get involved in a piece of legislation. It was at a time, with the insurance companies, and people who were having child care in their home, were being dropped by their insurance companies. And, you know, it was horrendous, because child care was getting to be one of the number one issues, although nobody wanted to admit it. But it was. And so we had a situation that we were trying to deal with, and we tried to come together as a group of women to talk to the insurance people and we weren't getting anywhere with them, and so it was decided that we were going to carry a piece of legislation that would prevent them from dropping insurance coverage on a home. Because in order to have child care you had to have insurance. So I had a piece of legislation. . . . I think the number was [A.B.] 900, but I'm not sure.<sup>1</sup>

YATES: What year was this? Do you remember?

WRIGHT: Well, it had to be between '82 and '84, because Doris Allen was now in the legislature.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: And so in alphabetical order Allen was the number one. [Inaudible] So I had

---

1. A.B. 929, 1985-1986 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1362 (1985).

this piece of legislation and I said, "I'll give it up." It wasn't earth shattering, what I was doing, and so I gave up the legislation for the women to come together and put legislation together, and we did and of course we put everybody on the legislation in alphabetical order, so Allen [Laughter], it was Allen's bill, and it was funny because she didn't know what the bill was all about. You know, there were so many hands in on it. So we put the piece of legislation together that basically prevented insurance companies from dropping insurance on anyone that had child care facilities.

YATES: So explain how that first came to your attention, the issue.

WRIGHT: The issue came to our attention because we had people going crazy. You know, you had a woman who was taking care of maybe three or four youngsters in a home and all of a sudden she didn't have any insurance. And in most instances if you have a mortgage you have to have insurance. So she'd have to give up taking care of the children in order to keep her insurance. And so it was brought to our attention. I think there were several of us that had people calling us . . .

YATES: Constituents who . . .

WRIGHT: With the issue, and so that's how it started. And so then we had the piece of legislation, and the women stuck together. At that point I think it was like 14 votes grouped together between the Democrats and the Republican women, and we had all the women voting together. It really stood out. So that kind of

started a loose coming together for a woman's caucus. As I said, I was not that keen about all these separate caucuses so. . . . I went along with it as long as they didn't get into a discussion on legislation, because you've got to get to know the people.

Then we had the situation where Lockyer was the chair of the Judiciary Committee in the senate side and Diane Watson sat on that committee, and I mean he just came unglued one day with her. It was absolutely. . . . It was degrading, it was disgusting, the things that he said to her—there, in open session of a committee. He would have never done that, even if he was angry. . . . With a man he would never have said the things he said to her. And so we just decided, boy, that was it. And so we really came together.

And then we started having meetings. We'd start out almost every week, I think it was a Wednesday morning we did it, and we would have it in the lounge for the senate side and we came together. And then we did it really official. We had a chairman—I think we called them chair, yeah, the chair of the Women's Caucus—and I went religiously. I went with them.

YATES: When that situation happened with Lockyer and Diane Watson—let me see how to phrase this—what were you now discussing at those meetings that was different than before? What were your goals or hopes?

WRIGHT: Then what it was was we were seeing ourselves that we could be a block of votes. And these guys would just run over us, you know, but then they'd be

asking for votes and wanting you to support something. So we decided that as a group. . . . But I made the commitment I would stick with them, but they had to understand that if it was something that I disagreed with, that I wouldn't get up and speak out against it on the floor, but neither would I vote for it. If I didn't believe in it I wouldn't vote for it. So I wasn't just going to support legislation because it was a woman carrying it. I wasn't going to do that and I told them that and they understood. And then, beginning there, we basically did steer clear of what would be down out opposites, for instance anything on abortion, or women's rights things. We weren't going to get heavy into that and we didn't for a while.

The real culmination, when I turned my back on the Women's Caucus and never went back to it. . . . And, oh, they begged and pleaded now. I wouldn't do it. There were things that I agreed with them on on issues and I voted with them on it, but I didn't go to any more meetings.

YATES: When was this?

WRIGHT: This was when [Peter B.] Pete Wilson appointed Marian Bergeson

YATES: To be superintendent of public instruction.

WRIGHT: Public instruction. I mean, she was a good person to have. She had been a schoolteacher, she had been not only on her local school board but she had been on the state school board association [California School Boards Association], she had all the credentials. I thought it was an excellent choice,

and here was the chance. . . . Because we always talked, oh, it wasn't political, it wasn't political. The Women's Caucus was not going to be political.

Well, it turned out. . . . And [Deirdre] "Dede" Alpert was the chair at that time and I went to Dede and said, "I want us to have a meeting so we can come out in full force and make it a unanimous support of Marian" for the position that the governor had appointed her. And this was the first time, one of the first instances. . . . It started with [Daniel E.] Lungren, where they were going to have. . . . Before it was only the senate approval you had to have, and then they started with the senate and the assembly having to vote for these appointments, and so I just thought it was perfect if you had all the women signed on for Marian.

And Marian was a likely candidate. Now, I know if it was me, there would be reasons, because of who I didn't vote for when they wanted me to [Laughter] and I guess perchance to happen to be kind of independent, that they could find reasons. They could say, "Well, we won't support her because she did this or she did that," and I would understand. But Marian wasn't that type of a person. Everyone liked Marian. She was kind of low-key and just steady doing her things, so everybody was in support. I just thought it would be a hundred percent. But I wanted to get it on the record that we would do it. And they delayed and they delayed and they delayed the meeting.

YATES: The Women's Caucus meeting?

WRIGHT: Yes. They delayed the Women's Caucus meeting and finally when I kept pushing it we did have this meeting. And I was just amazed at the women in that caucus. There were some of the freshman women coming in, because that was the year that we really had quite a number of women. They just tore Marian apart. And she's sitting there.

YATES: I'm sorry, was this at the Women's Caucus meeting? That meeting, not the assembly?

WRIGHT: No, no, no, no. And they. . . . I was just shocked. I said, "Well, this is it." I said, "Then you are not truly what you call yourself, a women's caucus." I said, "I just don't want to be bothered with it. That's it." Because I thought it was dead wrong what they said to her and about her, and their excuses. And then when they started the interviewing process. . . . They had the meeting and you came before the committee, and usually it was the Rules Committee you would go before, and instead they had a special committee<sup>1</sup> set up to interview Marian, as to whether or not they were going to support her. And these women, I'm telling you, I can still see them get up on the floor, not only in committee. . . . I would have either been very, very angry or in tears, and Marian just sat there and listened to them.

YATES: What do you think the reasons were for why they voted the way they did?

---

1. A joint committee of the senate and assembly for confirmation.

WRIGHT: Oh, well! First of all, Delaine Eastin was suddenly becoming. . . . You know, she wanted to be the chair of the Education Committee. All of a sudden she was coming out on education, education, education, and she hadn't been before, so you knew she was planning to run for superintendent of schools. And so Marian, had she received the appointment, she would have been basically the incumbent running for election and it would be hard then for Delaine then to run against the incumbent, and it would even be harder because that is one of the positions that isn't partisan. You know, you don't list them on the ballot as Democrat or Republican. They're just on the ballot. And so Delaine really did a hatchet job on Marian and she had the support of the. . . . Then it became Democrat, Republican. So you had all the Democratic women going along with it, except in the senate. In the senate I knew that Teresa Hughes would have voted for Marian. Diane Watson voted for Marian. She would have had her votes in the senate if it was just the senate.

And I do believe that's why the hierarchy of the Democratic Caucus, both in the senate and the assembly, then pushed and proved their point and got the legal interpretation, which naturally because they're the controlling party. . . . Even the so-called attorney for both houses, he gets voted on by both houses every time around as to—that's [Bion M.] Gregory—whether or not he's going to continue to be in that position. And so he came up with the. . . . Which I always think is fun when you watch attorneys, they can come

up and find out and get a legal opinion that will agree with what the majority wants to get, and that's what they did.

And so with that then she had to get both houses to vote. So she never got to be voted on in the senate. She got to be voted in the assembly.

YATES: Right, and was defeated.

WRIGHT: And then again it was just, down the line, party. But it was the idea that it was the women, and women that didn't even know Marian. You know, I come in as a freshman, I would never get up and speak out against someone for an appointment. I may vote against them because I didn't think they were capable or whatever but I don't think I could get up and speak on all the problems or what her faults were, as these women did, picking on her because she voted for a budget that cut education. Give me a break! It had to be a two thirds vote. She was not the only one that was doing the voting for the budget, you know. And usually, when you are voting on the budget it's not the breaker of your career. No one holds budget votes against you. It's individual pieces of legislation more than voting for or against the budget that causes you to loose your seat. But they spoke out about how she voted against education, how could anybody be head of a department who couldn't even support education's budget and. . . . Oh! And her character. Oh! I shut it off. I tried to follow it when the hearing was in the assembly, and then I shut it off. I couldn't stand it. So that's what did me in.

YATES: Right, with the Women's Caucus?

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: I think it splintered pretty much after that.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

YATES: And then there was discussion, I believe, of a Republican's Women's Caucus and a Democratic Women's Caucus?

WRIGHT: And for a while they did that, but then you lost your. . . . If you had any power or any control whatsoever you lost it when you broke it up along party lines.

YATES: So it sounds like most of the nineties, then, there wasn't really a women's caucus as it had been before.

WRIGHT: No. Not a formal women's caucus, no.

YATES: And back to the situation with Marian Bergeson for a second, you talked about the situation in the Women's Caucus. What role do you think Willie Brown played in that, if any, as the leader of the assembly?

WRIGHT: It never came up. Because he was the leader, there was no question about it. And there was one thing about Willie, if he's given his word to anybody he would stick with it. So I would imagine that early on he had given his support to Delaine and therefore he would do everything he could to see to it that she had the advantage going into the campaign.

YATES: Do you think there was. . . . How do I word it? The Democratic women, did they feel caught in the middle, do you think?

WRIGHT: I would imagine some of them did.

YATES: If Brown is pushing Delaine Eastin?

WRIGHT: I would imagine. But, see, it had no bearing on Teresa Hughes.

YATES: Right, I was thinking that it's women in the assembly, not the senate.

WRIGHT: But at that point . . .

YATES: That's where the numbers were anyway, right?

WRIGHT: Yeah, the numbers were in the assembly, as far as the Women's Caucus, because that was quite a group of women that had come in at that point. And I don't know, except it's just like everything else. It's your appointment to committees, it's your chairmanships, it's what little. . . . How should I say it? They're not perks, but you want something special, and whether you're going to get it or not, or you want to get a piece of legislation on a committee that not too many people are supportive of.

YATES: So that may have been on their minds? But you don't know for certain?

WRIGHT: I don't know for certain. I can't say somebody said, "Oh, gee, I would like to vote for Marian, but I can't because I have this piece of legislation" or "I would like to, but Willie asked me not to or else I'm going to lose my chairmanship." No.

YATES: Right. Nobody would verbalize that, probably.

WRIGHT: No, of course not.

YATES: You know, back to the situation that you described, one of the events that

solidified the Women's Caucus, being the Lockyer-Watson situation in the committee, and it sounds like the Women's Caucus thought the power would be in the votes.

WRIGHT: Yes, voting as a block.

YATES: Right. But I guess what I'm wondering is whether you discussed as a group how you were treated in general, or in these committee situations if you felt there was discrimination, or, you know. . . . For example, that Lockyer would never have yelled at a man the way he did at a woman. I was wondering if that ever was part of the discussion at all, in these meetings.

WRIGHT: Well, you know, we didn't make it a big push, because we knew what the guys were like.

YATES: So you thought really the best thing was the bloc in terms of . . .

WRIGHT: It was the bloc vote, yeah. It was the bloc of votes that you had. For instance, right now in the senate today. . . . There's forty members in the senate, ten of them are women. I think it's up to eleven now. I'd have to check the book again. But I know there's at least ten.

YATES: Uh-huh, and they're all Democrats, right?

WRIGHT: Right now they're all Democrats, yeah.

YATES: You were the last Republican woman.

WRIGHT: I was a Republican. I was the only Republican woman for six years.

YATES: Wow. Well, I want to backtrack to when you first came into the assembly and

you mentioned, as part of your other discussions, about the speaker situation with Berman and. . . I guess I should say McCarthy and Berman, and then it's Berman and Brown.

WRIGHT: Well, McCarthy was the speaker.

YATES: Right. But by the time you came in, that initial battle had taken place, right? The McCarthy-Berman situation?

WRIGHT: No, because it was happening in the Democratic Caucus. It was like a tie.

YATES: OK. So talk about what the situation was like when you came into the assembly.

WRIGHT: OK, when I came into the assembly, I knew, from just reading the papers and that. . . And they were wondering when there was going to be another vote and the Republicans wouldn't touch it, so it was the Democrats had to fight it out themselves. So McCarthy was the speaker. There weren't enough votes to throw him out. So Berman couldn't get the majority of votes so he could call a caucus meeting and basically vote McCarthy out of the leadership. He couldn't do it. But also McCarthy's trying to increase his base or hold on to his base, and so he's not doing anything to. . . How should I say. It was just a situation where nothing was getting done, really, because nobody was stepping on anybody's toes. There was always that, McCarthy trying to hold his leadership, trying to enforce his leadership so he would be a strong leader, and he couldn't. And the Republicans weren't going to do anything to help

him, and Berman was attacking and nitching away at him all the time. I mean it was just. . . . The whole year before the election it was like in limbo, and that's when it started.

And of course Berman with his brother, and they were a little farther ahead than anybody else, as far as I guess you would call the technology is concerned. So there were a lot of things they could do, that they were doing. And so Berman started getting people. . . . Just like I went to Ross Johnson. Now, maybe if Ross Johnson said to me, "Well, I can support you if you would come out in favor of me being the speaker" or something such as that, I'd say, "Gee, you know, if he kicked a couple of hundred thousand dollars, I could win the campaign. Yeah, that's no skin off of my nose. I'll do it." OK. Fine. So it was a commitment then, for the vote. And so that's what was going on between McCarthy and Berman.

YATES: Explain a little bit more what you just said about Michael Berman and the technology and helping garner votes. Is that what you're saying?

WRIGHT: No, the technology was a way they could run campaigns, you see? He was getting very powerful. It was almost what we'd call machine politics.

YATES: So getting the candidates in the . . .

WRIGHT: I'll give you an example, just in my situation alone. I was running against Arline Mathews.

YATES: Right. I remember you mentioned that. That she was his . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah. She had given a commitment to Berman. So Berman was funding her.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: And not only were they funding her, but they were doing her mail program and that's how I said they had. . . . At that point it was just coming into being, where you could spot mail and you'd poll and you'd find out what the feelings were. So in my situation Simi Valley didn't like the [San Fernando] Valley, because everybody moved to Simi Valley to get out of the Valley, you know. So there was that little bit of friction between them. So you'd tell the Valley one thing and you'd tell Simi Valley something else. The Santa Clarita Valley would get told something else. And they could break the mailing down. Previously to that you mailed a brochure and then you'd mail some more mailers, and you'd have some flyers and that trying to say how great you were. But in this instance they were able to divide it up and put out mail. . . . And that's what I laughed about, the fact that Simi Valley got the piece of mail that said I was going to do everything for Simi Valley and they shouldn't want to vote for me for that reason, because you weren't going to get your fair . . .

YATES: I remember you mentioning it. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: That was so funny. You know. . . . "God! Thanks! Mail it for me again!"

YATES: Continue with what was happening with the speakership. McCarthy becomes clearly out of the picture and then it's . . .

WRIGHT: Well, McCarthy, then, there was a mad rush, especially after the primaries, and I really wasn't. . . . I believe it was even in the paper in 1980. It seemed to me there was a discussion about when the dust had settled after the primary it was that Berman had a candidate or more that he had been able to pull out of the primary. That would mean that when they went into session, after the general election, that McCarthy would be out. He wouldn't have it. Berman would probably have it.

So what the Republicans were concerned about was that McCarthy and Berman were such that. . . . They were both pretty much alike. You know, they didn't want to run McCarthy because he'd make promises to you and then not follow through on them. They didn't want Berman because he did the same thing, so the Republicans decided they'd better see if they couldn't get someone else, and especially because after the 1980 election you were going to have reapportionment, which was a big thing, and so you didn't want either McCarthy or Berman. OK. So they had to find a candidate. Now, they couldn't put up a Republican because a Republican was never going to get the votes. You were looking to get the. . . . Let's see, you had to get to the magic number of 41.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: And so Republicans alone couldn't put a Republican in. So you really had to pick a Democrat that really wanted it and could pull votes out of that caucus,

away from McCarthy and away from Berman. So that was all the maneuvering that was going on.

YATES: When you actually got there?

WRIGHT: Well, when I got there it was already decided.

YATES: OK. So these are observations you had during that year when you were running for election.

WRIGHT: Right, and then you were noticing what was happening and it was kind of a question. I don't think it ever appeared in the papers, but there was a kind of question who the Republicans were going to support, because in the end, if someone couldn't come out of the Democratic Caucus with 41 votes, it was going to need Republicans' votes to do it. Who was it going to be? And it was always the thought it would be between McCarthy or Berman. So that was the whole thing, but it was. . . . When you got to Sacramento, and it was on that Sunday night, before the floor session on Monday, that we found out what the leadership had worked on.

YATES: The Republican leadership?

WRIGHT: The Republican leadership, because Willie, well, Willie had been there a long time.

YATES: And now this is. . . . Carol Hallett is the minority leader?

WRIGHT: It would be Carol Hallett. Yeah, it was Carol Hallett and it was Ross Johnson and Dennis Brown and Pat Nolan.

YATES: Yeah. There's a chart I gave you<sup>1</sup> of many of those names.

WRIGHT: Yeah. The '81-'82. . . . Let's see, who else would have been up in that group? Dennis Brown would have been. I think [Robert W.] Naylor worked in on that too. Oh, [Charles R.] Imbrecht, I know, was kind of involved in that. And it was finally decided. I don't see anybody else who would stand out in my mind.

YATES: OK. But they were the ones leading the . . .

WRIGHT: They were involved in the Republican Caucus.

YATES: . . . support for Brown.

WRIGHT: Well, that's how they narrowed it down, because they figured Brown would pull in all the black votes and he'd probably get some of the Hispanic vote. And then he had some people like [John] Vasconcellos and some of the others that had always been close buddies with Willie, and so it was putting those votes together. And so Willie worked the Democratic Caucus, and Carol and Ross Johnson and those fellows, they were working out what was going to happen in the Republican Caucus.

YATES: Did you attend meetings at that point? This is all done before you . . .

WRIGHT: I'm not a member.

YATES: OK. So this is before you're an official member.

---

1. Referring to seating diagram from the 1981-82 *Assembly Final History*.

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: I am nothing until I walk on that floor and raise my right hand. And there were only about thirteen. . . . Well, I can tell you who was in my group. [Phillip D.] Wyman was there, [Stan] Statham was there. [Wally] Herger was one, La Follette two, Wright three, [William P.] Baker four, [Ernest L.] Konnyu five, [Gilbert] Marguth six, [Don] Sebastiani seven, [John R.] Lewis was eight, Larry Stirling was nine. I guess it was nine out of that class Republicans.

YATES: When you say in your group, do you mean freshmen?

WRIGHT: Freshmen, that were elected in 1980. It was nine of us.

YATES: OK. So in '81, when this is happening, you guys are not, since you're not sworn in yet. . . .

WRIGHT: Well, it would be '80, December of 1980.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: No, we weren't sworn in.

YATES: OK, when all of this was coming to a head.

WRIGHT: Yeah, that was the group that basically, I would imagine. . . . Now this is my own thought process, that who was there in the caucus knew what they had to do and it was to contact. . . . Which I was contacted and told that the caucus had come to this decision and we were to. . . . And we had a meeting. It seems

to me we were called into Sacramento previously to inform us that they were working on picking someone other than. . . .

YATES: So this is before the session started in January?

WRIGHT: Yeah, and that they were going to try and get some concessions in order to get Brown the votes. I didn't know too much about him, so it didn't make any difference to me. What was going on, I figured these guys had been there, they knew what they were talking about. But then you took Ryan, Bergeson and . . .

YATES: [Jean] Moorhead?

WRIGHT: No. Well, Moorhead changed her registration.<sup>1</sup>

YATES: I thought it was after this, though. I thought she was one of the three.

WRIGHT: No, it was three votes we were down, and the three votes we were down were Ryan, Bergeson, and Dave Stirling. They were the three that had committed to Berman early on. They would vote for him.

YATES: So when this all happens—Brown becomes speaker when you come in—what then were the dynamics, if you noticed them, in the Republican Caucus? Since you have some people who split, who supported Berman and not Brown.

WRIGHT: Well, I'll tell you. I just couldn't understand it. I can remember getting up and speaking. "I don't understand it!" You know, you have a vote. I couldn't

---

1. Moorhead was a Republican, 1979-1982, a Democrat, 1983-1985.

figure out why they were so down on Marian Bergeson and Marilyn Ryan and Dave Stirling, because they had been honest, they said right from the very beginning they had made that commitment, and they were going to stick with their commitment, because they wanted to give Willie 33 votes. Because that's where our caucus was then, thirty-three, but then at that point. . . . I believe she did it before we took the vote, Moorhead did.

YATES: Change parties?

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: I'd have to check on the timing but . . .

WRIGHT: I think it was right after the election. So the election was [held], and then she changed to the other party.

YATES: I may have kind of not have this straight in the timing.

WRIGHT: Yeah, the brain only holds so much. [Laughter]

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

YATES: OK. I was asking you, then. . . . You're talking about the McCarthy-Berman and Berman-Brown situation that you were observing more as an outsider, but then once you're there—and we know that several people voted for Berman, the rest voted for Brown—what the dynamics were, and you were talking about how, for example, Marian Bergeson was treated in terms of. . . .

WRIGHT: Well, Marian was treated quite badly, I thought, because I didn't see why that

was important. There were the votes there for Willie, you know, but it was the commitment that was made by the leadership of the Republican Caucus that they would deliver the Republican Caucus to Willie, and Willie had to make some concessions. There were three concessions.

Starting right off. . . . And what the devil did we call it? That one committee took so many different name changes. But it was Public Safety [Committee]. That is all I remember, it was Public Safety, because we had a Judiciary Committee in the assembly, where in the senate it was just Judiciary [Committee], period.

YATES: Right.

WRIGHT: But I became the vice chair of that committee, and I got all the assignments I asked. My number one thing was Local Government [Committee], of course. They keep telling me that I can't get on it. You wouldn't want Local Government, because no money could be raised there, but I wanted Local Government.

I wanted. . . . Oh, I wanted the budget, which was then Ways and Means [Committee]. I wanted to be on Ways and Means, but then I found out that you had to be senior. So the senior members got budget, and I thought it was because it was such a fantastic committee to be on, and then found out later that that's where all the money could be raised, because every piece of legislation that required funds went through Ways and Means. So it was the

idea of how much money you could raise, and if you sat on Ways and Means you were supposed to divvy up money to the caucus for the battle that was going to come up. But on this, and. . . . What other committee?

YATES: I've got the list here.

WRIGHT: From the assembly?

YATES: For the first . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah, because gosh. . . .

YATES: So Criminal Justice is the one you're talking about?

WRIGHT: Criminal Justice, that's the one I was talking about, yeah.

YATES: So that committee would have been originally split into two committees, right? Public Safety and Criminal Justice? Does that sound right? OK.

WRIGHT: So I got this vice chair of Criminal Justice. I also got the vice chair of Consumer Protection and Toxic Materials [Committee], and. . . . Local Government was the one I really wanted.

YATES: Well, talk about how you obtained your committee assignments.

WRIGHT: Oh, well, you were given a form to fill out and you said what committees you wanted to serve on.

YATES: And whose form was this? From the majority?

WRIGHT: The caucus. Because, see, what would happen is that if I wanted a position on a committee and Pat Nolan wanted it, well, then by seniority he was going to get it, because he was buddy-buddy with Carol Hallett. He would get it.

YATES: So how did you end up becoming vice chair of a committee in your freshman year?

WRIGHT: Because it was one of the deals that was cut with Willie, that every member of our caucus, every committee would have the vice chair. Because, see, before this you didn't have to show, you didn't have to show up at the committee, because the chair was a Democrat, the vice chair was a Democrat, the numbers was divided down so it was more Democrats than Republicans on the committee. So where could you go? So what was done, it was then when they made the decision—or at least Willie made the commitment—that, one, every committee would have a Republican vice chair, and committees would be divided according to the percentage on the floor. So if there were 33 1/3 percent Republicans on the floor, then one third of the committee would be Republicans.

YATES: That was the promise.

WRIGHT: That was the promise. That was the commitment. And of course the other commitment—that always, later on, I got a kick out of—was the fact that he would take care of the reapportionment. We would be taken care of, we didn't have to worry about it. But he didn't say how he was going to take care of us, because my district. . . . Oh, God, when I think of the driving I did! I wonder how I didn't end up dead, trying to get to meetings, because I was a person who if I made a commitment I was going to be there.

YATES: So you're talking because the boundaries changed?

WRIGHT: Oh, shoot, did they ever change! I mean, they didn't just change to take into consideration population, which is the determination, but they were changed as to. . . . For example, when I ran for office . . .

YATES: In '80?

WRIGHT: In 1980. The Thirty-seventh Assembly District was Simi Valley and Moorpark and Fillmore and Piru and the unincorporated area, which didn't have anybody in it anyway, on the east corner of Ventura County. Then it went into Los Angeles County and it was Santa Clarita Valley, it was Granada Hills, it was Chatsworth, it was Northridge, it was Canoga Park.

YATES: It kept the same number, right? You didn't have a different. . . .

WRIGHT: Right. The number was changed in 1990.

YATES: Remind me, when did that reapportionment go into effect? What election would this have been?

WRIGHT: It would go to the election of '82.

YATES: OK. So that quickly. OK, I'm thinking of the ten years before, where it took I think several years before an agreement was made.

WRIGHT: Well, 1990 was a battle, because we threw it into the courts and let a panel of judges make the determination. But the 1992 election was still according to the reapportionment plan.

YATES: Go back to this promise number two from Brown, the reapportionment. What

was the understanding of what he was going to do? Not carve up districts or. . .  
..

WRIGHT: Well, that's it, he wasn't going to carve them up. Well, he didn't. You know, he didn't really carve them up. I mean, the Thirty-seventh District was a Republican district. There was no question about it. It was just the way he did it.

YATES: You know, I'm just remembering . . .

WRIGHT: Because there were other areas of the state where they wanted to pick up Democratic seats.

YATES: I should refresh my memory on this. The reapportionment actually is done at the congressional level? No. Because wasn't [Phillip] Phil Burton heavily involved?

WRIGHT: Well, that was because of the power of the Democratic party.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: Democrats were in control of the state. Yeah. The Democrats were in control in both houses.

YATES: I'm just wondering how much power Brown actually has in having a say over what happens, is what I guess I'm. . . .

WRIGHT: Because it will go out of the state assembly and out of the state senate and be signed by the governor of the State of California, the reapportionment plan for the State of California.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: And so this was the whole thing, so putting Willie Brown as speaker meant Willie Brown would have control of that reapportionment, which he did.

YATES: So you feel he fulfilled that promise?

WRIGHT: Well, he didn't sit down and. . . . The agreement was never, unless it was beyond the members of our caucus knowing, that you would have all these seats, and then where there were seats where there might be some discussion, well, we'd just let them be tossed up for grabs, where maybe a Republican could win it or maybe a Democrat could win it, and that really hard cold breakdown as to how it was going to be. And so I think that's what Republicans thought. It was just going to be a real fair reapportionment they were going to get. They figured there would be some tweaking done, you know, for certain members of the Democratic Caucus, but they never anticipated what it was going to be.

I mean, I walked in and [Richard J.] Alatorre was the chair of the Reapportionment Committee. Gee! When I walked into his office, invited into his office to see my district. . . . And I was even interviewed, to ask me what I wanted in my district. I said, "I don't particularly care, because it's people of the state of California." The only thing, because you're supposed to live in your district, I would like my home in my district. I don't want to have to move, because I own my home. So I want wherever Simi Valley is, that

will be my district. "Oh, don't worry about it!"

Well, yeah, I didn't have to worry about it, but it went from the description I gave you to Lompoc, Buellton, Solvang—that's all the northern part of Santa Barbara County. I had to drive through the other part of Santa Barbara County to get to my district up there. And how did they make a connection? Down through the Los Padres [National] Forest, it came down. Well, there was nobody living up in there! So by bringing it down that way and bringing it on down, then, I had Ojai, which was a joy, because you always had to go off the 101 and get over into Ojai. So I had Ojai. Did I have Santa Paula in that area? No, I wouldn't have Santa Paula. Why? Well, Santa Paula was heavy Democrat. So they gave me Ojai, which was predominantly Democrat, and they gave me Fillmore, which was predominantly Democrat, but it was really close and there wasn't that many people, you know. They could be overpowered by other sections of the district. Of course, Fillmore had Fillmore and Piru. But I didn't have Moorpark.

YATES: Right. So it sounds like the Republican party didn't get quite what they had hoped for.

WRIGHT: That's right.

YATES: And what was number three? I think you said there were three things. The committee assignments, reapportionment . . .

WRIGHT: Committee assignments [of] chairmanships, and fair distribution of dollars for

us to maintain our offices.

YATES: And what happened with that?

WRIGHT: It worked out pretty well. Willie was good on that. I mean, those were the commitments he made, that's what we got. I even had a consultant for me on this Criminal Justice Committee, which normally, before, even if you managed to have a vice chairmanship of a committee, you had to deal with the Democratic staff. You didn't have your own staff, you know, someone you could rely on.

YATES: Right. Well, maybe talk a little bit about your experiences on your committees in that first session, perhaps, if it stands out.

WRIGHT: Let's take the Criminal Justice just for a moment. Now, I was told that Terry Goggin was hard to get along with.

YATES: He's the chair.

WRIGHT: And he's the chair. I checked with our caucus to find out—I mean, like the staff of the caucus—what exactly does a vice chair do? Well, you'd run the committee if the chairman wasn't there, and in many instances some of the chairs never were there in their committees. They were off doing other things or they had conflicts between committees. I was fortunate that even with my list of committees I didn't have any conflicts. So it wasn't the case where you had two committees meeting at the same time in the same day. So I was quite pleased with that.

So I went to meet Terry Goggin, because to me you start a meeting, you start it on time. So the meeting was supposed to start at one-thirty, this meeting was supposed to start at one-thirty. I said, well, how much time do you want to give yourself, if you're held up coming to a committee, for me to start the meeting if I'm there and I've got a quorum to start the meeting? He went through the ceiling. He said, "It's my committee and I will start the meeting. The meeting doesn't start until I get there." Sometimes you sat there until two o'clock, waiting for him to come. So that was the first thing.

So I went to Willie and I asked him about it. He said, "Well, if you have a quorum, you can go ahead and you can start the committee." Well, that's all I had to do. I started the committee. So then, Levine. . . . What is his first name?

YATES: Mel.

WRIGHT: Mel Levine. He was on that committee, and Goggin would consistently give the gavel to him. And I'd be sitting there. He would never give it to me, to run the committee. So one day—it sticks out in my mind—Mel Levine was not there and we had this witness in front of us, and Goggin's at the back of the room talking to a group of people, and this fellow is kind of like "Where do I go from here?" The chairman's not sitting there and nobody appears to be chair. So I said, "Have you completed your presentation? Are there any questions?" And Goggin at the back of the room says, "I'm the chair of the

committee." I said, "You're not even sitting here listening to these people."

He said, "I don't have to be. I can chair from the back of the room." I said,

"You can't even chair when you're up here, let alone the back of the room."

And this is all on open mike. [Laughter]

YATES: How terrible!

WRIGHT: We were shouting back and forth at each other.

YATES: So what happened?

WRIGHT: [Laughter] Willie came in. I guess Willie was hearing it on his squawk box.

He comes in and he says he wanted us two to go out to breakfast together and try to get this thing ironed out.

YATES: You and Terry Goggin and Brown.

WRIGHT: No, no, Brown wasn't. . . . No, no. [Laughter]

YATES: Just the two of you.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Just the two of us to sit down. He said, "Work this out. You know, you're going to be working together for two years."

YATES: So did you do that?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. We went out to breakfast.

YATES: And how did that go?

WRIGHT: So that day, like on a Thursday we were to do that, and then Thursday of course is session on the floor, and so Willie came down and he said, "Did you get everything ironed out?" I said, "Yeah. We have a lot in common." He

said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Yeah. We're both Catholics. And that's it!"

[Laughter] Apart from that we were both Catholics, nothing else in common at all. So it was just one of those things. But to Terry Republicans were like the plague.

YATES: So after the breakfast what happened? How did things go?

WRIGHT: Same thing.

YATES: It continued in the same way.

WRIGHT: Yes. Then he complained and said I threw a pencil at him, and I didn't. You know, sometimes just the way you drop your pencil, it will flip over, and of course I was sitting [where] there was only a consultant between us, and it went over on his side. Then I was supposed to have thrown the gavel at him. I said, "I didn't throw the gavel at you. I handed it to you and you dropped it." [Laughter] "I just went here. . . ." [mimes handing him the gavel] You know? But he would still say I threw it at him. But I mellowed out a little bit. I thought, what the heck. I mean, I'll just do my thing and he can do his.

YATES: You mentioned wanting to be on the Local Government Committee. As a member of that committee at that point, what were the main issues that you were dealing with in that initial period? Because I'm thinking about . . .

WRIGHT: Well, there was a lot of discrepancy between. . . . Just by size it's going to happen. No matter what kind of plan you devise, you are going to have Los Angeles, because it's just so large. . . . But what I was seeing happening was

that people just didn't seem to have an understanding that there was such a thing as charter cities and general law cities. Of course Simi Valley was a general law city. At that point in time there were thirty-three general law cities in the state of California. The number is less now, because some of them have gone to charter.

But under a general law city you are basically an arm of the state government, pretty much like the counties are. You are ruled by the law of the state in a general law city. And so that was our biggest problem. And if you had cities that didn't have a tax base. . . . Like Simi Valley didn't have a tax base, because one of the commitments when we became a city was that we were not going to raise taxes, you know. That was the big thing. And off the top of my head, I can't think of all the others that were. . . . But Thousand Oaks was a general law city, Simi Valley was a general law city, Moorpark was a general law city. Camarillo, I think, is still a general law city. And so they didn't have to divide their tax dollars up or programs or that.

That's why when Prop. 13 passed the biggest problem for these no tax cities was that where either the state or the county was providing services they could drop them, pull them back, or throw them in your lap without money for them. The biggest thing here in Simi Valley, because of our wide open spaces at the time, was animal control. We were going crazy with animal control. Well, that was a county program. Well, when Prop. 13 passed, the county

dropped the local programs and left each city to take care of their own.

YATES: I imagine that this would have been a tough time for the Local Government Committee.

WRIGHT: Oh, it was, it was a tough time. But I was the only voice there, because either they never were involved locally, didn't know anything about local government, or they were representing Los Angeles. And so they were looking out for their community and I was looking out, not only for Simi Valley, but all no tax cities, especially the no tax cities which happened to be general law cities. So it was kind of a hard time there for a while.

YATES: Anything about that first session at those other committees? We don't have to go through all of them, but is there anything else that sort of stands out to you?

WRIGHT: Well, yeah, because the Consumer Protection and Toxic Materials, with Sally Tanner as chair, was a newly formed committee. And I don't know anything about toxics, really. That first go round we had more informational hearings than we had actual legislation going through, because it was just something starting out, it was an issue that was starting to surface. And it was the assembly that first had a committee such as this. The senate didn't have one. Then later on the senate did. So in my twenty years in the legislature I was always on one of the hazardous waste or toxic materials committees.

YATES: You know, one thing I didn't ask you that I was curious about, going back to when you first came in to the assembly, is what were your goals? Or what

were you hoping to accomplish?

WRIGHT: I was hoping to accomplish something for what we called the no tax general law cities.

YATES: OK. And what form was that going to . . .

WRIGHT: See, what happened when Prop. 13 was passed. . . . It was taxes, they were being shut off from local government base, like the county base.

Why did Prop. 13 pass? Well, if you were sitting, especially my sitting here at this house. . . . We had moved in, now I had my husband ill, I was trying to work to make the mortgage payments, and they weren't really so severe at that point in time, but every time you turned around it was your impound account that was killing you, because the counties form their budget and then they raised the taxes on the property to pay for the budget.

Your house was assessed. Well, the evaluation of your house didn't deal with what you did to the house, it depended on a house like yours in the area. And the one thing that really got me. . . . We moved in, we didn't have a gate on our wall. We bought the package deal, because without a freeway Simi Valley was not some place somebody ran to to buy a home unless they were looking for a good buy, you're on a budget. We were on a budget looking for a good buy. We wanted to get out of an apartment. We came here. We bought this house because you got landscaping in the front, you got a block wall, we got drapes at the front windows, and we got carpeting. That was a

good start, coming from an apartment.

Well, it was a long, long time I didn't even have a gate on this wall. But the fellow up the street that had a three bedroom like I have put a different kind of wall around his and put a little fence on top of it and did some other decorations. And then he sells the house. He sells the house, naturally, for more than he paid for it. Well, now, all of a sudden, the value of my house goes up, because of what he did and what he sold it for. So it wasn't based on what you had as property, it was what somebody else who had something like it did to their property. God! If you put in a swimming pool, naturally you'd sell a house for more. Well, I didn't have a swimming pool! Why was my tax the same as his?

YATES: So how did that translate into the type of legislation you might carry at that early period?

WRIGHT: Well, that was one of my points. I was looking at that. Plus the fact that the cities that had no taxes, when the state pulled money they got cut off. And the state gave some relief to local government. They didn't worry about the no tax cities. No tax cities didn't get backfilled. The county got backfilled, but the cities didn't. The cities that had taxes, they got backfilled, but the cities that didn't, didn't. So Simi Valley didn't, wasn't getting anything from the state. And so those were basically the things.

So every time anything came up, it was always to watch what the formula

was, to be sure that no tax cities. . . . If we didn't give them anything, don't take anything from them. And that was the biggest battle then, when the budget was in deficit in '92-'93, in that area right there, right after Wilson came in. They were coming up with these formulas where they were going to take money away from us. "No. You didn't give us anything! We've got additional expenses because the county dropped programs." So if we wanted to keep it up, to satisfy our constituency, we had to find a way to pay for it, because we weren't getting money from the county with it and we didn't get money from the state, so now why were you going to come back with your formula and take money away from the city? It wasn't fair. You didn't give us anything? Don't take anything away from us. So that was what the biggest battle was and that's what I well knew, because I had sat on the city council.

YATES: So did you carry specific pieces of legislation that had to do with this? Or was this sort of a watch dog role you felt like you were playing?

WRIGHT: At that point legislation wouldn't have helped.

YATES: So it was more protection to see that . . .

WRIGHT: It was protection to see that the pieces of legislation that were coming through were cities that were trying to get money without going to the people and asking for a vote for an increase in property tax. That's where it came in.

YATES: OK. Where else did you find your interests. . . . I know you've talked about things that you were interested in, you know, the tax issues, family. Where

else did you find yourself sort of developing an interest in terms of legislation?

WRIGHT: Well, in the judicial, the criminal area, I did. In fact I kind of smile at myself. I carried the first piece of legislation for the California Correctional Peace Officers Association.<sup>1</sup> They weren't the California Correctional Peace Officers Association at that time in reality, because they didn't have much in membership. They weren't any power at all. But they had legitimate issues and it was dealing with, basically, what would have been an LVN [Licensed Vocational Nurse] position. They wanted that, because the prisons where they were located, they're not close to hospitals. If somebody gets injured, you know, you have to call in a doctor, you have to transport them to a hospital or something like that, and they wanted to be able to do some sort of medical service, where before they couldn't, and so that was to give them that classification for that. And, oh, everybody was down on it. It took me two years to get the piece of legislation through, but I did. That's why they thought I was great. I was wonderful.

But as they grew stronger, they lost sight of what they should have been doing, and right now Correctional Peace Officers don't think I'm great. Because, hey, I was ready to put them out of business if I could have. I was

---

1. A.B. 1987, 1981-1982 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 299 (1982).

really angry with them, and you can see . . .

YATES: This is in the nineties you're talking about?

WRIGHT: Yeah, the latter part of the eighties and nineties, yeah. Well, look what they're doing now. The Correctional Peace Officers, they've got themselves a very powerful PAC [political action committee]. These guys put money in. And, you know, they do put money in because they're getting money out of it, and sometimes the fellows that they have working in these institutions shouldn't be there.

YATES: Well, I noticed that you carried legislation—quite a bit—having to do with spousal support, and I assume that developed during the [time you were on] Criminal Justice? Or is that later?

WRIGHT: Well, that came out of the '82. . . . I think we had meetings '82, '83, and on into '84. [George] Deukmejian created a commission.

YATES: Oh, yes. Let's see, sorry, I'm looking at a list here. It's the Commission on Child Support Development and Enforcement?

WRIGHT: Yes.

YATES: OK. Talk about that. How did you get on that commission? And this is, what, 1983?

WRIGHT: Well, I think the appointments were made in '82.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: In '82 we started meeting.

YATES: How did you end up being appointed in the first place?

WRIGHT: Hannah-Beth Jackson. That is how I got to know Hannah-Beth Jackson. She was appointed on that committee. My name was put in by the caucus for it and that's how I got on it, and I did carry a lot of legislation in that area. In fact, I carried about thirteen pieces coming out of that committee, because. . . . I can't even think who the other. . . . There had to be a Democrat on that.

YATES: Yeah. Was this commission set up so there were public citizens?

WRIGHT: Yeah. It's one of those commissions that are set up by act of the governor with a certain purpose and to come in . . .

YATES: So a portion of the members come from the assembly, a portion come from the senate, and then some are appointed?

WRIGHT: Yeah, outside. There were judges sat on that. There were such as Hannah-Beth Jackson who were family law attorneys. Yeah, we went round and round on that one. And I carried the piece of legislation where we garnished . . .

YATES: Wages?

WRIGHT: Well, not only you could garnish wages, but it was the point of the tax structure, you could go in and put claims on their income tax.<sup>1</sup> I carried that.

---

1. A.B. 1689, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1463 (1984) and A.B. 1681, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch 1007 (1984).

I'm trying to think. I had, as I said, thirteen pieces of legislation at the time—boy, my mind—that were all dealing with the child support. And strictly because a guy didn't want to pay, he didn't pay. Period. And so we got quite heavily into. . . . There were always those on the committee too that represented single mothers, and they wanted to take the guy for everything he was worth. But the fellow was only making so much a month. You can't take three quarters of his wages away from him, when in reality as a household he would be doing the support of the family, but you wouldn't have two homes that had rents to be paid on them or mortgages to be paid on them. You wouldn't have transportation that would necessarily mean for two separate families to go in different directions. Because that's what was happening. So it was to pay a fair portion of his wages and it was trying to work that out. And I did battle on behalf of women in some instances and then battle on behalf of the fellows that paid, who took the responsibility.

I got even more into it later on because of my daughter, seeing what her husband, or ex-husband, did. Baby two months old and he walks out on her and thinks \$50 a month is enough to pay for child support. Give me a break, you know, \$50 doesn't do it.

YATES: So later on you had personal experiences that . . .

WRIGHT: I had a personal experience that I could talk about, yeah. But I also saw situations where you had fellows that my daughter had dated before she

married [Christopher] Chris [Horn], that he did more beyond what even the order was. Larry [Panatoni] was only supposed to pay something like \$100 a month for two kids, but he bought their clothes for school, he had them on his medical plan at work, he had them every other weekend, and if anything happened he'd rush right to where they were. He was the epitome, I thought, of what you would consider a fellow that wasn't a millionaire, that he was making sacrifices because he was making child support payments and doing additional for his two girls. That was the ideal situation.

But you had so many fellows that. . . . And then if they got married again, then they had a new family and the old family, and you had to do some balance between that, too. Because you say, well, the gal should have known when she was marrying him that he had these kids to support. Well, that's true, but in the same instance they started a family, that other child deserves some support, too. And I did battle with Diane Watson, because she wanted them to have to pay for their college education up until the age of twenty-five. So if they wanted to go beyond, you know, and get their master's degrees or something like that. . . . Well, if it's in a home where in reality that father would never have been able to support them so completely for them to go to college, why would you expect then that he would have to when he's out of the home? I wouldn't ask him to do any more than he would have been capable of doing if they were living together as a family.

YATES: And this was a specific piece of legislation you're talking about?

WRIGHT: That she had. Yeah, that she carried. I wouldn't vote for it.

YATES: This was later, when you were in the senate then, obviously.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Well, you know, I thought maybe we could wrap things up today by kind of bouncing back to. . . . You have another election coming up within two years of when you're first elected, and how that . . .

WRIGHT: That's a telling election.

YATES: OK. Talk about that. Talk about it.

WRIGHT: Well, see, when you run for office, whatever you did for me at the city council level. . . . Someone else runs and it's whatever activity they have within the community. They have to have some basis for why they're running for office and what they intend to do that the person in office or the person you're running against can't do. So for me, I had some of that background. But now it's a different thing, when you're running for re-election.

YATES: You're the incumbent.

WRIGHT: You're the incumbent. Now, what votes did you take? Because your opponent can go to the records and see how you voted and can make an issue out of it. So that's what it was in 1982.

YATES: I was just pulling out the information on the [California] Secretary of State *Statement of Vote*, to see who was running against you at that point. So you

had one Republican.

WRIGHT: [C.W.] "Dick" Stine was the one, yeah. He was the one, yeah.

YATES: He was the Republican.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: So how was it? How difficult was it?

WRIGHT: Well, see, it was funny, because I had two things going at that particular point in time. When I was running in 1982, one, I was running this new district. The only part of the district that I had represented before was Simi Valley, Northridge, Chatsworth, Granada Hills, and then I only had a part of Canoga Park.

YATES: Now, as you described it, it's now moved north.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And I only have that part of the Santa Clarita Valley around the 15 [freeway], going out to Lancaster, because now I've Lancaster and Palmdale. So Lancaster and Palmdale, heavy concentration of voters that I had never been to. That I had, up in Lompoc and Buellton and Solvang, never been to. So now I've got to go here, where it takes me two and a half hours to get into Lompoc.

YATES: From here?

WRIGHT: From here. Two and a half hours. I've got an hour to an hour and a quarter, maybe even an hour and a half, depending on traffic, to get out to Lancaster and Palmdale. So if you go out there, that's five hours. If you go out this

way, it's three hours. Here it was fine, you know, fifteen or twenty minutes here. Simi Valley, I could even walk to some of the places I would have to go if I wanted to.

YATES: So how did you deal with this new district?

WRIGHT: So I had that with the district, plus I had the fact that someone here in Simi Valley had complained that I had received money under false pretenses or whatever else, and so I had the Fair Political Practices Commission. With that—good old Michael Bradbury—I had the district attorney jump into that one too, because he was a great one and always has been for getting into these political [situations], where he thinks he can make hay for himself. And so I had him investigating me too at the same time, and I had my husband in the hospital. He had surgery in March of '82. He died in July of '82. So the Democrat sees me as a weak candidate, because I've got a full plate. Plus I've got a record now I'm running on, of how I voted on what issues. And they can take a simple little issue and blow it out of proportion in a brochure.

YATES: So how did you deal with this new situation then? Having a different district, you have the Fair Political Practices Commission, you have the issues.

WRIGHT: And the best part was the \$5,000. I mean, it was just the craziest thing. Vic was in great upheaval and all he was thinking about was that he was dying. And I kept telling him, "No, don't give me that. You're going to be around for a long time." You know, trying to bolster him up. But we had \$5,000 in a

savings account. God forbid I took any money out of that. And so when I was running, and this was on the 1980 campaign . . .

YATES: I remember you talking about that, yeah.

WRIGHT: You know, and I didn't even think!

YATES: So this investigation by the Fair Political Practices Commission was over that?

WRIGHT: What's happening was started in this window between my primary. . . . Well, just before the primary and then just getting to the general.

YATES: OK. In '82?

WRIGHT: In '82. And so they come out in September with a fact that I had laundered—basically what they were saying—money because of the switching around, which seemed very simple to me.

YATES: Because somebody had given you the money, right? And you put it in your savings account?

WRIGHT: They had written a check to my husband as a loan, and I put it into my savings account, because I had pulled that \$5,000 out. That was in the primary of 1980 that I had done that.

YATES: So the problem was that you put it in your personal account, then.

WRIGHT: That I went ahead, because I didn't think anything of it. It was given to Vic. The savings account was in his name and my name, so I just put it into the savings account. To me it had nothing to do with the campaign.

YATES: So how did you deal with that, I would call it, negative publicity?

WRIGHT: Oh, well! My God! The only thing I could do is say "Yeah," you know. I tried to explain as best I could. The best part is, when you went to the Fair Political Practices Commission. . . . I had to hire an attorney, which I really couldn't afford. Because you go to the Fair Political Practices Commission and the chairman of the committee, the Fair Political, at that time was a blind man. So he was taking the information that he was getting from the staff, and the staff was bound and determined, because again it was Democrat-Republican, you know. It knocked me out.

And so what I had was trying to keep it. . . . And in July they wanted to have a full blown hearing and I was supposed to be there on the twelfth. The twelfth was when my husband died. So that was postponed. So it was postponed, and it was getting closer and closer, and what the attorney was trying to do was trying to get it after the election. But in September it came out. I can still see the articles in the paper, you know, that I was being fined. They wanted to fine me. They had up to \$19,000 for a \$5,000 switch, because they were sure. . . . Because then it came out, votes that I had taken on the city council, and this gentleman happened to be involved with a piece of property here and I had voted in favor of being developed. Well, I had all the facts in front of me. I voted on what I had in front of me at the time, and the best part of it was I wasn't the deciding vote. It was something like 4 to nothing was the vote. But anyway they could twist it. . . . So you can imagine what the

literature was, coming out at me.

And, of course, then Willie thought he could get me, because I would be distracted because of that and the fact of my husband dying. But actually the campaign was the best thing in the world for me, because I didn't have time to think about Vic.

YATES: How did this campaign, the '82 one, compare to the '80 campaign in terms of raising money?

WRIGHT: Oh, I could raise money. I was able to raise money.

YATES: What about the Republican Caucus in this election?

WRIGHT: Ah, two people in the Republican Caucus helped me. Pat Nolan gave me money and so did Bill Baker.

YATES: OK. There was some support but not much.

WRIGHT: Yeah. No, I was basically consumed by the campaign and in the end it was good, because I was on the road so much trying to get to these areas and meeting people. And I'm a pretty good people person, so I was able to make friends in these areas and they were inviting me to things to come to. It was just the constant. . . . You had to be here, and then within two or two and a half hours you had to be over here. So you had to find a way to get from Lompoc all the way over to the Lancaster area, and things such as that. But then I had a friend that had a little plane, and he would hop. . . . Because Lompoc had an airport and Palmdale had an airport, so I could be back. . . . So

I was doing that. Where the guy Stine, who was president of the community college [Antelope Valley College] out in Lancaster, he had a mobile home. And so he was driving back and forth, but he could never get there ahead of me, because I had the fact that I had someone who would fly me.

YATES: What, if anything, did you do differently in this campaign than you had done in the '80?

WRIGHT: No, not really.

YATES: So basically the same strategies?

WRIGHT: It was just about the same strategy. And in fact, the crazy thing. . . . I had a consultant, and we had spent money to do a polling to find out where I sat, and it was looking pretty good. Even with all the garbage that was being thrown at me, it was looking pretty good. It was kind of just to maintain what I was doing.

Then he turned around and he wanted to do a mailer at the ending of September, like a questionnaire, and I said, "No. I'm not going to spend my money for that." It would cost about \$15,000. I said, "I'm not going to do it." I said, "We just did a poll and we spent money on that. And I have no staff to tally the poll. What am I going to do? How am I going to sit and tally it?" This mail starts coming in, I don't have enough people to get them to tally and then give a report, because if you're going to ask people questions and they're going to give you answers, they want to know what was the outcome of the

polling that you did, of the survey that you did. I said, "No, I can't do it." I said, "It's going to be more out. That's just the mailing, that's \$15,000. I'm not going to do it."

And then he gave me this whole big thing about he was one of the best consultants I could have gotten and that he could have run a gorilla. And I said, "Fine, go find yourself a gorilla, because you're not running my campaign." And this is a little over a month before the election!

YATES: The general?

WRIGHT: Mmm-hmm. So who came down was Tom Dey. In fact, he's a lobbyist now, but he was head of the staff of the caucus, and he kind of took over. And so I did get that help from the caucus. It wasn't in dollars, but basically in help. And actually, in the end, it was one of the best campaigns I ever had.

YATES: Why do you say that?

WRIGHT: Well, I had. . . . Laubacher, who was on the Board of Supervisors in Ventura County at the time, his daughter, Lisa Laubacher, worked in the Republican Caucus, so she came down to help. Jamie came down—from my staff in Sacramento. She came down to help. Then I had my staff here that took time off from the state to work on my campaign. And we had one guy, his name was [Robert] Bob Campbell. He works in Washington, D.C., now.

He had such a good sense of humor, and between him and Lisa. . . . Lisa was like on site, working on site. We started doing our telephone calling. He

calls Stine's mother and asks her to vote for me, and she tells him who she is. "Oh," he said, "that's understandable. You don't have to tell your son. You know, when you go in to vote, and he's got. . . ." And we were hysterical. It was all that stuff. We had kind of a bond between us all, this common cause of getting me reelected. [Laughter] And we just sat there after that phone call and we just howled, him talking to. . . . And that's what he was doing. He has a good sense of humor. But I never forgot that call, that call to Mrs. Stine asking her to vote for her son's opponent in the race. [Laughter]

[Interruption]

YATES: OK, we can wrap this up.

WRIGHT: Yeah.

YATES: Anyway, so the election . . .

WRIGHT: So I beat him. I won.

YATES: Well, on just a final note, it must have been very difficult, though. You had your husband, who. . . . I know he'd been ill to a certain extent, right? For quite some time?

WRIGHT: Well, ten years, basically. It was in 1972 that he was told. . . . He became totally disabled. He couldn't work at all. He couldn't even take the garbage can down to the curb.

YATES: But something must have been happening in that period in 1982, since he passed away in July.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, it was the fact that he was. . . . He used to eat nitrogen tablets like they were candy, because he was always having pain. He was always in pain.

[End Tape 5, Side B]

[Begin Tape 6, Side A]

YATES: You were just saying, to wrap up about your husband. . . .

WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, I was trying to sell insurance, because that's what I was into at that point, trying to sell insurance, which means you had all of these appointments. And I would go out on an appointment and I'd come back and an ambulance was taking him to the hospital.

YATES: Right. I remember you saying that.

WRIGHT: Of course it would be the Simi [Valley Hospital]/Adventist [Health]. Well, the Simi Adventist would take care of him and then they'd ship him over to the Vets [Veteran's Administration hospital]. And then finally the decision was made that the only thing that could help him would be that he'd have to have surgery.

YATES: Bypass surgery?

WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, it was quadruple bypass, is what they did. But that's what he would have to have, was the surgery. And it wasn't that great an advantage. It wasn't like you had a 90 percent chance.

YATES: Yeah. Things have changed dramatically since 1982.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes! It has. And it was at the Veteran's hospital they decided where it

should be. So they send him to St. Vincent [Medical Center], and on the fourteenth of March, 1982, he had open-heart surgery. And the doctor came out. . . . The surgery was like four hours, and I was back and forth because. . . . It was on a Friday the surgery was done, but I had an appointment that I had to keep because I'm in this campaign, I've got to do it, and then back to the hospital. By that time he's out of surgery. The surgery was successful, quadruple bypass.

So I'm sitting there in the recovery room, and it's a room where, oh, I think there were about six beds. They'd be there and everybody would be hovering over them and the first thing you know they'd have them sitting up on oxygen, breathing themselves, and then they'd take them off and put them back into their room. Well, at the end of the day, the surgeries that were performed, Vic was still in that room. He was in that room the next day, Saturday. He was in that room on Sunday. He just wasn't getting there. And I could see the look on his face. He couldn't talk, but I could tell that he was getting very depressed, because he knew there was something wrong.

So I asked the doctors. They said, "Well, no. It's just the fact that it's taking his lungs time to come back." Because he'd had rheumatic fever and of course he was a smoker, so he did have problems with his lungs. He never admitted to any problems with his breathing, but he did, and it was just going to take a little longer. I said, "Well, can he be put in a room?" I said, "Here,

it's very depressing." I said, "It was depressing for him the first day. It's more depressing now, because of the fact he's got these people that are operated on. . . . He was operated on Friday. He's got people that were operated on Monday that are out and he's still in there, and could you please, please, if it's at all possible, put him in a room, so he feels like he's progressing?" And so they did.

Well, he's still on life support, basic breathing. Then the next thing I know, I'm in Sacramento and then there's a problem, and then I fly down. I was in the middle of this Judiciary Committee meeting and then I had to leave and get down and go back. So I'm missing votes and that's not going to do me much good. People don't understand. So your husband is sick, so why did you miss a vote on a very important issue? You know? So I was back and forth. So I did pretty good. I managed that I didn't miss too many votes that year. But it was still rough.

And I was so tired. I'd fly down on Thursday night and I'd go to the hospital, right direct to the hospital. Well, I had a teenager that was getting a little on the wild side. I was trying to control that issue.

YATES: She was still living here?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

YATES: In Simi Valley?

WRIGHT: Yeah. She was living here in the house. She was here.

YATES: And when you say the V.A. hospital, I assume you mean in Los Angeles. Or is there one near here?

WRIGHT: No, the V.A. over in Sepulveda.

YATES: OK.

WRIGHT: The Sepulveda hospital is where he was. It was from there that he went to. . . . He did go to the hospital in West L.A. But he was there maybe a week at the most, a week or two.

YATES: The one in L.A.?

WRIGHT: In L.A., yeah. What is it called? Wadmore? Right there on Wilshire anyway. [James W. Wadsworth Building] And he went, and then it was from there that they sent him over to St. Vincent's, which was there on Alvarado.

YATES: Oh, right, right. You mentioned that. OK.

WRIGHT: So, it's come down on Thursday. I have a change of clothes in the car. Come down on Thursday, over to the hospital. . . . Well, if I didn't have any place to go I would just stay at the hospital. When I'd have to leave I'd then go to my office, go through everything that had arrived and what all the problems were for the four days while I was gone, make notations on what kind of a letter I wanted written here, what I wanted to do there and that. And I wasn't even seeing the staff. And then on Friday I'd have my schedule and try to do everything I could do from the hospital, because I'd go immediately to the hospital on Friday morning. And then, with the change of clothes I'd have, if

I had to go to some cocktail party or something in the evening, I would do that. And then I'd get back to the office to finish up between Thursday and Friday, and for the coming week. And then, Saturday, OK, wherever I had to go. But it would always be from the hospital that I was doing it.

YATES: Sounds tough.

WRIGHT: Sometimes it would end up that I hadn't even eaten all day and I wondered why I had a headache when I came home. And so then Sunday night I would leave here, go over to the hospital to see him, and then leave from the hospital to get the plane.

YATES: To go to Sacramento.

WRIGHT: To go back to Sacramento. So it was that constant. . . . Oh, it was rough!

I made a commitment with Vic. A long time ago he'd wanted a light blue suit and I'd come across a light blue suit. And I bought it and I took it to him and I showed him, and he wrote—scratched on the pad—that it was the suit that he was going to be buried in. Oh, I needed that! But, anyway, I said, "Nope. This is what you're going to wear when you walk out of the hospital." So I left it hanging in his room.

Then he was getting that they could have him off the respiratory for up to four hours, and so our aim was for him to be off the respirator for five hours. Well, when he struggled for five hours and then he was back, it was only two or three hours he could be off the respirator. So it was that back and forth.

My birthday is May 18, so he promised me that on my birthday he was going to call me and wish me happy birthday without. . . . Because when he's on the ventilator he can't talk. So, honest to gosh, he calls me and he wishes me a happy birthday. "Well!" I think, "Great!" We were over the hump now. It would take time, but we were over the hump. But when I get back down, uh-uh.

Now first thing you know they did the trach[eotomy], and then it was. . . . I mean it was horrible to see, when they're suctioning that out all the time. Well, the next time, next week, I managed to last four days up in Sacramento and then I came down on Thursday. I get there. Now they're feeding him through a tube. They've made a cut in his stomach, they're feeding him through a tube. He's got bed sores now. I said "What! Something has to be done." Well, then they've got a special air foam mattress that they put him on, but I could see he was deteriorating. And yet they were telling me, "Well, as soon as we get him off the respirator. . . ." Well, now he's like skin and bones—his legs are, you know. He can't walk, he can't talk, and I'd come in to the room and he'd go. . . .

YATES: Wave you away?

WRIGHT: Now he's waving me. . . . He'd tell me to get out of here. Because now he's blaming me, because he would have never have had the surgery if it wasn't for me. But he agreed to it. I didn't agree. He signed the papers for the surgery.

I didn't. But now it was my fault, which was the common practice in this household. My daughter does it now. If something goes wrong it's my fault.

I feel like I'm the Jewish mother.

YATES: So during all this you are running for re-election?

WRIGHT: Re-election.

YATES: Yeah. That's difficult.

WRIGHT: Yeah. And so then it was, as I said, I had been over there and he had a shunt.

They put a shunt in this arm because they thought he would have to go on dialysis, because his kidneys were failing too. He'd probably have to go on dialysis. So they had a shunt in this arm for him to go on dialysis, and I was told by the doctors, don't let any [Inaudible] put any kind of a needle in that arm. Well, this arm was like a pin cushion.

YATES: His right arm?

WRIGHT: Yeah. And they were always taking blood. God, they were checking blood all the time. I said, "How does he have anything left, when you're constantly checking it?" And finally the big thing was, I get this bill from St. Vincent's Hospital. Because his coverage was gone, he had no more coverage. It was \$2,000 a day. Of course, today probably it's even more, but then it was \$2,000. Oh, my God! I can't keep that up. So I asked, could he be transported back to the Sepulveda Veteran's hospital? Well, he could be, but the Wadsworth Veteran's hospital didn't have any place for him. So I called

the Veteran's hospital. I knew the head nurse at the Sepulveda Veteran's Hospital and she said they probably could get him in intensive care, which was where he should be. So it was planned. It was the eleventh, which happened to be a Monday.

YATES: The eleventh of. . . .

WRIGHT: July.

YATES: July.

WRIGHT: Now that he's going to be transferred over to the Veteran's hospital. And I'd asked our doctor, Dr. [Cesar] Julian, to go over and see him and tell me what was going on, because I was getting tired of being told that if he just got to this point, when I could see him going down, down, down. So we get him over. I'm with him at the hospital. They put him in the ambulance and I'm following the ambulance to the Veteran's hospital, because we get it cleared to get him over there. So now I owe St. Vincent's close to \$5,000 at that point.

We get him over to the Veteran's hospital, but just before we get there we're coming up the freeway, and all of a sudden they put the siren on and they go speeding. I thought, "Oh, my God! What happened?" And I'm following them. When I get there they said they'd let me know, they'd let me know. Well, he'd had a heart attack. Well, how? He'd had surgery! He had surgery for the heart! But what they don't tell you is that you've got to have a strong heart to be on this equipment, because that's wearing, because his heart

was healing.

So he comes out of the heart attack, they bring him back. So they brought him back and I go into the room. I'm sitting there and I'm watching, his breathing is so normal. I think, "Hey!" You know? But he's just lying there. His eyes are half open. He's lying there and the doctor comes in to put something at the arm. I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going to. . . ." I said, "What are you going to take blood for, and why that arm?" He said, "Well, all the veins were closed here." I said, "Well, why are you going into that arm? You were told never to do it!"

YATES: The left arm.

WRIGHT: Never put a needle in that left arm. I said, "Now why are you doing it?" He said, "Well, it doesn't really matter." "It doesn't matter? Why are you telling me that?" So I called Dr. Julian and Dr. Julian talked to them and then he called me back and he told me. He said, "What you're seeing is the ventilator. The rhythm, the constant rhythm, it is the ventilator. If you shut off the ventilator there won't be any breathing. It's the ventilators that are doing the breathing. He's not. He's not breathing." I said, "What should I do?" He said, "Well, you've got to make up your mind." I said, "Is he so far to a point that no matter what you do you cannot bring him back, not even to what he was like in March before he took the. . . ." He said, "No." I said, "So what do we do?" He said, "Well, you're going to have to make the decision." So then

the doctor at the hospital spoke to me and he said, "You know, we can't. . . . We cannot shut off the equipment." So I said, "Well, OK."

Then I called Vicki. We were now around midnight then on the eleventh, and I called Vicki and I said, "You've got to come and see your dad." She said, "Mom, I'm so tired." She hated the hospital. It was a drag to get her there. I said, "Well, Vicki, it's this way. You are going to have to come now and say goodbye to your father." I said, "I cannot do it for you. You've got to have that peace with yourself. You've got to get over here and you've got to come now." And so she walked in, she finally came. She walked in and she saw her dad and she talked to him a little bit, and then she said, "Well, I better get going, Dad. Goodbye, now." And he. . . . [gestures] The head nodded a little bit, but not much. I think it was maybe just some nerve reaction. And so then she left, and then I said to the doctor, "OK." And I walked out, and it was the twelfth of July and he was gone.

YATES: Tough decision.

WRIGHT: [Sighs] But I wouldn't want anybody put in that position for me, so I think we'll make that decision beforehand. Because it's very difficult. It's very difficult. Because with all the miracles of medicine you don't know. If I did it today, what happens tomorrow? If I give him one more day. . . . And I think basically that's what was happening from about two weeks after the surgery, I would say from the first of April. The whole thing was just give him another

day, give him another day, give him another day. It got worse. So I had to do it. So that's what happened.

YATES: I'm sorry.

WRIGHT: That was on Tuesday morning. Then I immediately made all the preparations. I had to do that. I remember Dick Ostler, he was a city councilman that had left the city council, but we always had these headbangers, he and I. He had been a police officer down in Culver City, and so he and Vic had some kind of a love-hate association because they were police officers. But he was a Republican and Dick was a Democrat, and so they had those clashes they were having all the time. But he came to the house when he found out Vic had died. He came to the house and he stayed. He was here early in the morning and he stayed until late at night with me.

And I went down and I made all the arrangements, and I made the arrangements for Thursday, because I didn't want anybody looking at Vic, because I didn't know how he was going to look. You know, he got made up. And he was right, he got buried in his light blue suit.

So I had all that done and then the funeral was on Thursday and Friday I started rearranging the furniture. I got all these clothes out of here. The chair that he always sat in I gave to a friend of his, got everything, moved everything around so it was different, took all the pictures down. I've never had any pictures hanging of him or anything else. I just put that all away.

Bottom drawer. . . . Marissa got into it, and I don't know, she jammed the drawer—I can't get it open—of my armoire, where I put everything that's Vic's that I think that Vicki might want to have later on. So I did that and I closed that drawer and that was the end and that was it.

And then I had to get back to the campaign. That's why I said it. . . . I had those couple of days that I just got everything out of me, and at that point I would go out. . . . Because we had him over at Oak. . . . I don't recall what they call the cemetery, but it's right there, right off of Topanga. You go down Topanga and across Devonshire. It's right in there. Oak Park, I think is what it's called, Oak [Wood Memorial Park]. That's where he is. I have him in a mausoleum and I went ahead and I got the thing, there's a space there for me. I haven't been able to sell it off yet. So it's there.

YATES: OK. Well, why don't we, on that note, wrap up for today?

[End Tape 6, Side A]