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Warren Wise

Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Javier Arbona
in 2010

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Warren Wise

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Interview 1: July 13, 2010

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Arbona: I am here at Stockton, California, at The Woodsman, the place of business of Mr. Warren Wise, who I am interviewing today. This is Javier Arbona speaking into the mic. This is tape one, and it is July 13, 2010. I thought we could begin, Mr. Wise, by talking a little bit about your childhood. Why don't you just tell us where you were born, and we can take it from there.

01-00:01:00

Wise: Born in San Francisco. Grew up in Contra Costa County, in Pittsburg, California. My parents were both doctors and they came to the area in very slow times, which is in about the 1920s, and were looking for a place that they would possibly be able to do a lot of medical work, because there's a lot of industry in the area—Shell Chemicals, Pittsburg Steel, Dow Chemical. A lot of places. So they ended up doing a lot of accident repair work. There were no hospitals in the area at the time. And eventually they got hospitals going in the area, so that there's one in Concord and one in Pittsburg, eventually.

Arbona: What year did they come to the Contra Costa area?

01-00:02:22

Wise: The Contra Costa area, it was probably somewhere around, oh, 1900. They were both born in the 1890s. And so I'm not sure of the exact date, and I haven't looked that up in a long time. I was born in 1930. September 1, 1930.

Arbona: Was that just as the Depression was hitting?

01-00:03:04

Wise: Well, the Depression was in '29 and '30 and went on through into 1940. But they came somewhere in the twenties and started their practice there.

Arbona: When you were born in San Francisco, was that just because the hospital was there?

01-00:03:27

Wise: Right. At that time, it was almost a whole day's trip to get to Oakland and the ferry. The roads were very skinny, not like we have today. And I can remember my mother going shopping in Oakland and Berkeley and taking almost a day to get there. A trip to San Jose to meet her folks was even longer. Long way around.

Arbona: Her folks were in San Jose?

01-00:04:04

Wise: Yeah.

Arbona: So you got to know your grandparents there, too?

01-00:04:10

Wise:

A little bit. My grandmother was a rheumatic invalid, and I couldn't even give her a hug, she was in so much pain all the time. My grandfather had the business of Patterson-Williams—my mother's maiden name was Patterson. So Grandpa Patterson built the Patterson Playground Equipment Company in San Jose. And you'll still see his equipment all over the west. If you go to Montana, you will find pieces. Though some of the crazier people have outlawed his equipment. He built the jungle gym had special baby seats for babies in swings. So he was an avant-garde in that sort of thing in manufacturing.

My mother went to Stanford. Took care of her mother and put herself through school to become a doctor, which is nigh impossible in the era that she went to Stanford. They didn't want women doctors. The professors didn't want women in the process or in the curriculum. So she was very, very proud of that. My father came out from Missouri and went to Stanford, and they met and married and produced three children, Kent David Wise, who ended up being Dr. Kent David Wise; my sister Patricia Wise Ankney; and myself.

Arbona:

In that order?

01-00:06:07

Wise:

In that order. Well, no. The sister first, then brothers. And then they were so enamored with the fact that they wanted another doctor in the family that they more or less forced my brother into going into medicine. Which in the long run destroyed him. But that's another story.

Arbona:

Really?

01-00:06:32

Wise:

He just passed away two months ago.

Arbona:

Oh, I'm sorry. Did your parents meet at Stanford?

01-00:06:44

Wise:

Yes. They met at Stanford. My father was a general practitioner; my mother was a natal and prenatal doctor. And they practiced together for a long time. And then she took over and did all of the county work, and so she traveled a lot to different clinics, where she would take care of the ladies that were pregnant, and after-birth-type activity. So she was a feisty little lady.

Arbona:

Sounds like it was a very different kind of practice from what it is today. So a lot of home visits?

01-00:07:33

Wise:

Well, for one thing, if I came home and found my father asleep, I was not to disturb him because he had *no* sleep that night. He was out on call all night long. So he was the old-time doctor that went on call. And that changed. Not for him. In fact, in later life, when he retired, he found it very hard to sleep

because he'd trained himself not to. Or be ready to go at any call. And that's what brought us down to the Port Chicago thing.

Arbona: We should get to that in a few moments. But I still just wanted to ask you a little bit more about Pittsburg and where your family house was, and then maybe we can talk about high school.

01-00:08:33

Wise: It was on 408 East 9th Street.

Arbona: Ninth?

01-00:08:37

Wise: East 9th. The schooling in Pittsburg was catch as catch can. I was a dyslexic. No one knew it. My parents never knew that I was a dyslexic. The word was not invented until the late sixties and seventies. And I was designated as a low and slow kid in the public education system. In fact, they did not teach me to read. I got really ticked off and taught myself how to read. It's just pure anger that made me do it, that I couldn't read. And so when I finally got into education, it became very apparent that I had been stamped low and slow on the forehead. And was told I would never go anywhere and never be anything.

So when I graduated in '49, I was held back one year, so I graduated a little bit older than the rest of the people. In '49, started at Delta College, thinking that I was enrolling in University of the Pacific—or College of the Pacific, at that time. And about three months into the schooling, they switched over. The classes were just the same, but they switched us over to being actual college students, instead of junior college students. So they took over the first two years. At that time, or during the war, College of the Pacific was only a two-year school. At which time I acquired by AB in business administration and accounting, and being a dyslexic, ended up to be the worst accountant in the world.

And while I was working for Firestone after graduating, in Walnut Creek, my boss looked over my shoulder and said, "Oh, you transpose." And it was like someone had poured a large bucket of ice water over my head because here was the answer to all of this situation that I'd lived through, not understanding, not catching it, not knowing what was going on in my mind. Because in dyslexia, there's a phenomenon where it plays tricks on you. So being a very lousy accountant, I was ordered by the main boss to falsify the books, on his direction. I went home and discussed it with my wife, and she helped me type up a couple things. One was my resignation. And I had orders from the downtown San Francisco office to do whatever the man said, so I did. I falsified the books in red ink. Typed up an—not accounting, but a situation that described what it would do to the books, and gave them one week's notice and left.

And at that time, I was back kind of floundering around; what do I do next? So I went back to school, finished my GI Bill in San Jose State, and got my master's in industrial education and teaching.

Arbona: A moment ago, I heard you say this word transpose, that the boss told you—you used a word—and it was like a bucket of water over your head.

01-00:13:11

Wise: Yes. It was a realization of what was happening. Again, there was no one looking into this sort of thing until another—this was 1956, and it didn't come to light in the educational field until later. And still, if I stand up in front of a group of teachers and describe what is going on within the mind, they stand up and swear at me and tell me I'm lying. So they can't accept it. The only thing is that dyslexia is a thing that as you grow older, you will grow into it in later life. Such as the seventies and eighties. So in about a month and a half, I will be eighty. Now, it's very, very important when you're teaching children, college and junior high kids how to run machines, and you have seven machines in a class that can kill, you have to point out exactly what kind of tricks their mind will play that says, this is the correct way to do it, and that is the way that you're going to have an accident. So in the long run, I ended up with 15,972 kids by count, and none of them were hurt. So I'm very heavy into safety. I had an accident in the classroom. I left the back door open because I needed some air, and I was getting things ready for a class. They were all in their seats and this kid came in the back door as I was running the table saw, and he slapped me on the back and said, "Hey." And I jumped and put two fingers in the blade.

Arbona: Oh!

01-00:16:24

Wise: So I have the results of that. Principal got all upset and decided he was going to cover his fanny, so he wrote it up that I put my hand in the blade on purpose. [laughs] Well, that's the way it goes. Not everybody's got all their ducks in the correct row. So that's about the background. My father, in 1930, the day I was born, purchased a ranch on Mount Diablo. And we used that for recreation and fun and growing animals and growing things and riding horses. So we went there on weekends and took care of the place. And eventually, I took over that ranch and managed it, in 1960. Eventually, picked up another ranch here in this county, and it was producing 100 tons of ruby cabernet wine grapes. And every time you pick up something new like this, you better dig down and do your research and do your reeducating yourself to make sure that you're doing it right. So I've managed two ranches for quite a long time. Had six full-time jobs, basically, for twenty-two years. Wow. It's hard to think of that.

So in 1960, my wife and I got to talking. We said, "We're not going to put our children through college with a teacher's salary." So I went into real estate.

And then I talked her into becoming a broker, and eventually we opened our own office, which we closed down in '92. In '85, I retired from the school district, at age 55, when they closed my shop down. They said, "We don't need you anymore. We don't want this being taught." Which is really the saddest time of my life because when you're teaching, and from that type of a venue, you have a fantastic opportunity to change kids. And so at that time, they used my shop, and everybody else's shop, for a dumping ground for all the kids that were causing trouble. And that's fine with me because those kids, I could make a change.

And eventually, I developed a two-day lecture on what I call mind traps, which are talking about dyslexia. And the kids accepted this so broadly that I could take kids that were getting D's and F's, and when they realized that they were dyslexics, I could bring them to B's. Now, that angered the main office people. And I remembered back to the time when they stamped my forehead with low and slow, and I remembered, too, the fact that they didn't want me out of it. Which became a shocker, a real revelation, actually, that this was happening. And so when they came around and said, what the H-E-double-toothpicks are you doing with these kids? And you have no right to do this. And I said, "But they're improving." They said, "Well, don't you understand? We want to keep them that way." They actually said it. Which is amazing. The average educator does not want to hear this, and they don't want to realize that. But I was able to take all those kids through the shop courses and keep them safe and get them to understand. Because there are lots of things that can happen with machines, such as kickbacks. Trying to flick a piece of wood away, thinking you can out flick that saw blade that's running at 126 miles an hour. You can't do it. It's faster than you are. So once you get these ideas across, the class really settles down, and you can handle the good, the bad, and the indifferent kids that come through and really have success.

When I retired, I made a point. They gave me what is known as the golden handshake. So they had me testing at all the different little schools all over town. And in so doing, would meet some of my old students, as I got around. Especially since I'm out of the classroom and I can really move around town. As I meet old students, at that point, 64 percent were in woodworking. And I'd meet them all. But to me, that was fantastic. If there was a way I could go back and meet them again and count them up again, it would be even more fantastic to see. Because it's surprising how much you've actually done in somebody's life, in preparing them. Which is really neat. Really, really neat.

Arbona: I still remember just about all my teachers, I think. Now, these graduates that you're talking about, this is in the Stockton area?

01-00:22:10

Wise: In this school district.

Arbona: In this right here.

01-00:22:13

Wise: Yeah.

Arbona: And I apologize for my own ignorance, but we're actually now in San Joaquin County?

01-00:22:21

Wise: Yes.

Arbona: That's what I thought.

01-00:22:23

Wise: Which is Stockton. What I call Stockton Undignified School District. Well, I've never seen such idiots try to run a school district. You can't talk to them. No light bulbs go on over their head at all. Everything is destroy, destroy, destroy. President [George W.] Bush didn't help us at all when he put in No Child Left Behind, because in so doing, he really locked out the kids that are the low and slow. And those are the ones that most interest me. And I always had a feeling of understanding. Because a lot of teachers go through college and they're taught by college professors, and they're taught, 'I'll tell you once; I will not take time to tell you again. If you can't listen, that's tough.' And I found that when I give a lecture on wood or equipment or anything, that I know that there are people out there that aren't getting it. So I always try to approach it from more or one, or even three different approaches, to see if I could get through to that person, that it went—*ching*—over their head. So that was very important to me.

And one of the finest teaching experiences I had was having about a five-year stint with all deaf, totally deaf students. And when they first brought them to me, I thought, oh my God, I'm in big trouble. I don't sign. And I soon learned that pantomime works great, and we got along fine. And I found out that when a child hits another child that's deaf, it's the only way he can get their attention, so don't get upset. It's a very normal thing. And as long as you're not all uptight about it, you can get some teaching done. And I had more fun with those kids, and got across, because—and I found out that—it shocked me—I'd never have to repeat. You get the idea one time across, you never repeat it. Because they are so intent on what you're trying to get to them. Where the other kids, the normal kid is kind of just, well, lazy. The head is swirling around on other things, wishing he could get out of the class to go have a smoke somewhere. [they laugh]

Arbona: I think we should come back to the school district as we move along. Obviously, it seems like it's a very major chapter in your life. But I wanted to see if we can go back to the period of the war and when the war broke out, if you remember when the Second World War broke out.

01-00:25:58

Wise: Oh, yes. Yes. Japan invaded China. And there were cigarette or sports cards about the war. And they were artwork; they weren't pictures, camera-type pictures of the war, but they were drawings of what was going on. And that truly upset my mother. She confiscated anything I drug home that was like that. She was really upset. And we kept sending steel to Japan, and she kept saying, "We're going to get this back as bullets," which ended up to be true. So the war hit in—I don't know, when was Pearl Harbor?

Arbona: Forty-one?

01-00:27:11

Wise: Forty-one, yeah. [sighs] Yeah.

Arbona: Around that time, late '41.

01-00:27:18

Wise: And I can remember being at the ranch, listening to a portable radio that gave the announcement that Pearl Harbor had started I was up in a cabin, and I ran down the hill to tell everybody that war has broken loose. And my brother went into the Merchant Marine, and was trained at Hunters Point, in the Bay Area. And he went off to sea as a Merchant Mariner, officer. He had dropped his last year of high school and entered Stanford to go into medicine. Then he had to drop out of that and go into the Merchant Marine. When the war was over and he came out an MD, he was drafted because the Merchant Marine service didn't count. So he ended up in a MASH unit in Korea. I ended up on a ship off the Korean coast, with the Coast Guard. At which time we were right near a very large Russian submarine base. And the captain thought there was a submarine and we went chasing it and—

Arbona: You can also move that, if you want.

01-00:29:10

Wise: No, I didn't want to drag it off. Anyway, ended up to be a whale. So I was on a destroyer escort for the Coast Guard, seventeen months at sea. All over the Pacific, a big loop, starting out off of Hawaii. And we would stay in what was called an ocean station, which was ten square miles of just bare ocean. We'd stay there for thirty days, be relieved by another ship, cruise to another ocean station and stay there for thirty days, on around the Pacific, in air-sea rescue and weather. And of course, now they've got satellites, so they don't have to do any of that. But if a plane went down, we were there for rescue. If a ship had trouble, we were out there for rescue, also. So they covered the Pacific pretty well. Ended up in Adak, Alaska; were sent out of Adak at flank speed, which was about nineteen miles an hour, to a Panamanian registry freighter that had lost its propeller 1,000 miles west of Seattle. And we stood by it two to three weeks; I'm not sure of the exact time. And we began to break up. It took us two and a half months to weld the ship back together in Mare Island, before we got home. There were heavy seas. We took fifty-four-degree rolls.

Three more degrees and we would've flipped over. It was a scary time. We welded all the main deck hatches closed, dogged them down and welded them shut.

Arbona: On the high seas.

01-00:31:27

Wise: On the high seas.

Arbona: Wow.

01-00:31:30

Wise: Yeah. It was really scary. And [laughs] anything—a crescent wrench, a coffee cup—in heavy seas like that— So here's zero; here's your deck; here's forty-five; here's fifty-four. Or fifty-three. Swinging back, those things jump off of the table or wherever they've been left, and they come at you at 100 miles an hour. [laughs] So you can't have any debris around. You find out what's loose really fast. I had a stanchion chain break, with me hanging on it and falling over. Scared me to death. I thought we were going down. Then we had to weld it to the deck so it wouldn't get loose, put a hole in the side. Or get into the switchboard, the electrical switch. I was an electrician's mate aboard ship. So my life has been varied.

Arbona: Yeah. I can see. During the war, your family had a house in Pittsburg, but you had a ranch nearby. So one reads today so much about the scarcity and whatnot. But did your family turn to the ranch for sustenance?

01-00:33:11

Wise: No. That ranch was for relaxation, to relieve pressure from working, be athletic. We eventually ran cattle on it. So when I took over, I was running cattle on that for the family. And then I had my other ranch here in this county, with the grapes, wine grapes.

Arbona: But the wine grapes came later?

01-00:33:48

Wise: Later, yeah. '74.

Arbona: I see, yeah.

01-00:33:58

Wise: Well, we'd gotten into the real estate business, and I found this place for sale and purchased it. And before we were through, we had seven houses.

Arbona: Wow. What happened to the Ranch in Mount Diablo?

01-00:34:21

Wise: The state and the people around became very vehement that we should not have been there, and we were under attack by the avid people. There are

certain phrases I want to say, but I don't want to put them on tape. We were under attack by one lady, who was going to come in and take an inventory of everything that we owned, house included. And you couldn't get rid of her. She had no rights, she was just a private person, but she wanted that part of the mountain to be park. And eventually, the state came in and ran us ragged, and finally, we sold it. And I sold it to a son of a fraternity brother of mine, and he turned around and sold my ranch to the state three months before close, which is illegal, and acquired \$350,000 more out of it.

Arbona: Oh, because he moved it around so quickly.

01-00:35:46

Wise: And as a real estate man, I was kind of arrogant in thinking that nobody was going to get by me. [laughs] Well, he did. So the ranch is gone. It's under state control. The kid I sold it to saved the house, the barn, the pool—which is just a rocked-in cement dam—kept all the beautiful section of the ranch, and then gave the rest to the state. But the fix was in. The fix was with the county, who wanted us out. And the state wanted us out. And a state park wanted it. There was a lot of hanky-pank going on, and you couldn't control it.

Arbona: Now, I was wondering about your high school years and what that must've been like during the war.

01-00:37:02

Wise: Well, that was something else. Camp Stoneman was put in, a big Army camp point of demarcation to send troops off into the Pacific. And so guys that came there were pretty sure they weren't coming back. And you couldn't let women out in town at night, like you could normally without the camp, because the guys would—it was a big kind of a rape situation that was happening. So the whole societal thing closed up around women, and they weren't allowed out much.

Arbona: And that's the way it was for your sister.

01-00:37:57

Wise: For my sister, right. Didn't do much, didn't create much for school environment. I only got into the autoshop; I didn't get into the woodshop. I knew I was mechanically inclined, and I knew that I had interests that way, especially electronically. So that's the way things flowed there. I wasn't uneducated, but I wasn't overly educated from that system that went. Because they all sent me off with, you'll never make anything of yourself. So I still had the words written on my forehead, the low and slow. But I have succeeded quite well.

Arbona: [laughs] Now, living in Pittsburg, you had Camp Stoneman nearby; you had Port Chicago a little bit further?

01-00:39:25

Wise: Right.

Arbona: A little bit farther out?

01-00:39:27

Wise: No, it's about six miles north.

Arbona: From where?

01-00:39:34

Wise: The topography was what created this situation with the people, in that when it blew, the earth tremor that shook the houses and broke doors open, then seconds later, after people had time to get up out of their seats, go to the window, the blast hit being—. This is what they have always said, that it was reflected off the hills across the river and pushed back into Pittsburg. And so that night when it hit—I've forgotten the time—it blew me out of bed. I ended up on the floor. And I can remember the window curving over my bed. I was laying right under the window. And it curved in about that far and then it popped back; it didn't break. And I couldn't figure out what was going on, so I went downstairs.

My mother and my brother were going through nautical stuff so that he could become the Merchant Marine guy. All of a sudden, all the people started coming to the office. And that was a line of people, three people wide, for two and a half blocks, approximately. Way down past the church and the old hotel. And they all came to the office; there was no hospital. All the doctors were just inundated with people. So my mother and my brother started working on people, and I did kind of crowd control to get them to move quietly and easily through the office. And they were fixing people up until quite early in the morning, that night. And it was a mess. There were people in line that were in total shock. I think everyone at the whole carnival that was in Port Chicago at the time it blew was standing in line out there. One gentleman had a trained dog—it was dead—in his arms; he wouldn't let go of him. And he was waiting to have my mother and brother take care of him. I was thirteen. It's only a month and a half—was that the thirteenth?

Arbona: Mm-hmm.

01-00:42:38

Wise: So it's actually on this date. So in a month and a half, I'd be fourteen. But late that night, they came through with a loud speaker car, big loud speaker on the top, and they were asking for drivers. And I asked my mother, while she was working on somebody, if I could go be a driver; I was tired of blood. And she said, "Okay." And so I left and went out to this car and we went off. And they took me to a convoy of trucks. I don't know how many there were, but they were dump trucks and other flatbeds. They gave me a dump truck. I was

thirteen. Nobody asked me my age, nobody asked me anything, just, can you drive this? And go.

We took the convoy down into Port Chicago, and they loaded stuff into my truck. They never let me out of the truck. And they just kept throwing stuff in. And the convoy then switched around, when it was loaded, and went to Camp Stoneman, to their garbage burning facility, and we dumped whatever was in the trucks in the back, in this incinerator. Could've been parts of people, could not have been; I'm not sure. I suspected it was parts of people. To this day, my mother never knew that I was in Port Chicago. I never spoke of it. I think they returned me in that same car, about eight o'clock the next morning. And I just showed up back with them.

Arbona: The next morning?

01-00:44:56

Wise: The next morning.

Arbona: And then it wasn't discussed much around the house.

01-00:45:05

Wise: No, how to repair the house. The fact that—we didn't lose any glass, but we did lose doors that were just ripped out of the house and a chimney that fell off, a two-story chimney that fell on the ground.

Arbona: You're driving around in this truck. What was the condition of the other houses that you'd see?

01-00:45:36

Wise: That time of night, you couldn't see much. Just what your headlights would pick up. I knew that I was driving into Port Chicago—I had been there before—because it was a just teeny-tiny town of Port Chicago, which wasn't much; there was a movie house and a few other things. Wasn't anything that was on any agenda. I know that my father had gone there to be a doctor to people, on call. But other than that, we didn't really frequent Port Chicago all that much, so I couldn't tell you. Actually, as far as I understood, the town was not damaged all that bad.

Arbona: Yeah, that often gets written, that the town itself was not in as bad a shape as I think some reporters tend to think nowadays it was.

01-00:46:43

Wise: Well, the reports of how many died were extremely high. And then the news reports kept shrinking it down, and nobody was positive whether it was actual truth or the government just kept reducing it and reducing it, that it didn't want it to be high.

Arbona: Who was keeping track?

01-00:47:11

Wise: Well, if pieces went into my truck and they went into the incinerator, nobody was keeping track. There was no chance for identification, if it was parts.

Arbona: Now, your parents had the house, and the office was attached?

01-00:47:30

Wise: Next door.

Arbona: I see.

01-00:47:33

Wise: Yeah. Across the lawn. Still there.

Arbona: Were soldiers also showing up for treatment that night of the explosion?

01-00:47:45

Wise: No. I don't remember seeing them. They were all civilians. And the shock effect was so great. Meaning their mental condition was pure shock. They didn't know how badly they were injured. They were just standing in line for help. And I'm positive that went on to other doctors' offices. My father was in Concord. I don't know whether Concord Hospital was even built by then; Pittsburg wasn't. But he was over there taking care of somebody else. He was on a call. And we didn't see him until the end of the next day. We don't know what he did; at least I never heard.

Arbona: So he was up that whole night, then, all the way to the next night.

01-00:48:58

Wise: Yeah. Same with my mother, in a way. She was still working when I got back.

Arbona: Would you have an estimate of how many she saw or how many people came through the office?

01-00:49:17

Wise: Oh, there was just no way to take names or anything. They didn't care. They just 'let's take care of you.' It was like a triage. Which is a new word, a new concept, came out of Korea. But it was just take care of as many people as possible. Some of them just sat on the sidewalk. Didn't want to move. My father would catch me either playing in the backyard or working in the shop, and he'd roll down the window—and he'd be stuck for somebody to come help him—and he'd scream at me to come in and get scrubbed up and I'd have to go in and assist, at that age. I very rapidly found out I didn't want to be a doctor, because I hurt as much as the other people did.

Arbona: So you acted as a nurse for them sometimes.

01-00:50:34

Wise: Yes. Right.

Arbona: Wow. What was different for your brother?

01-00:50:45

Wise:

For him? I don't know. They put a lot of pressure on him to become a doctor. And eventually, they were sorry they did. He had actually eighteen years of med to become a surgeon, a certified surgeon. And the war interrupted that, with the Merchant Marine; and then the Korean War interrupted that, so that really put him off track in his residency. And so he lost months of residency because he was drafted, and had to come back and start residency all over again. So he ended up with eighteen years of formal college to become a surgeon. Tragedy struck. My parents were asked by Johns Mansville to install an x-ray machine, which they did in the early twenties, and used it right through forever. And it had a very, very strong tube, whatever tube that creates the rays. It wasn't anything that had been upgraded or new or anything like that, and they took chest pictures for Johns Mansville for years and years and years and years. My father never had any formal training on reading x-rays; he taught himself. And whenever he ran across a man that looked like he was in big trouble, he would send that x-ray off to Chicago, the home office of Johns Mansville, and tell them that this man was in trouble. And they never answered him back. Not once. And they sent out a memo to the company to never tell the man that he was ill, just put him in a different spot in the company or in the plant. And that eventually, after all the lawsuits hit, there were 111 lawsuits against the family for medical malpractice, for \$11 million each. And that's a figure I've never multiplied out to figure out how big that figure was.

My father became ill and all of the suits dumped on my brother. I used to come home from school and help my mother develop x-rays and produce them. And so went through all of that. And we lost the first suit because everybody thought that my brother was lying, on the jury. The second suit was thrown out. The third suit, we sued Johns Mansville, because we found the interoffice memo that said, "Don't tell the man he's ill." And so doing, we won the second suit against Johns Mansville. At least my brother did.

Arbona: Now, this is somewhat of a tangent, but also, since you mention x-ray, and I was thinking before about Port Chicago, I was almost curious about the pattern of injury. Were people coming in with broken bones? Or how were they getting injured?

01-00:55:11

Wise:

Glass. Glass in their faces, chests and eyes. Bleeding profusely. So they get up and go to the window, boom, the glass hit them. Not a good thing. Not a good thing. I didn't see any broken bones. They were ambulatory, they were able to walk. But in shock. Kind of a stupor.

Arbona: If people were losing blood back then, did your parents have blood supplies?

01-00:55:59

Wise: No. They didn't. All they did was patch them up. If there were things that needed sutures, [they'd] suture. Stop the bleeding, send them on, get to the next person. Yeah. For a long time, instead of crowd control, I ran the autoclave, in that I had to sterilize sutures.

Arbona: How would you do that?

01-00:56:33

Wise: It's an autoclave, where you take them up to a high temperature and pressure, and sterilize all of—

Arbona: The needles? I'm sorry.

01-00:56:44

Wise: Needles and knives and—oh, heck, my memory's slipping. The pinching tools; I've got some of them here. Where you have to pinch off of a vessel and get it sewed back.

Arbona: Wow. Wow. Well, I think we're almost at the end of this tape, so I think I'm going to—

01-00:57:23

Wise: Is it a disk or a tape?

Arbona: It's a digital tape. So we can take a little break right there and I'll just pause this so we can change.

Begin Audiofile 2 07-13-2010.mp3

Arbona: This is tape two of the interview with Warren Wise, and this is Javier Arbona. Today is July 13, 2010. Tape two. And we were just having a brief conversation during the switching of tapes, about your experiences getting straight A's. So even though this is a little bit of a jump in topics, I thought that this would be great, to hear more about how you worked at San Jose State.

02-00:00:52

Wise: Well, I left the Firestone business and immediately enrolled, so there wasn't much of a transition. I went back to college and finished a master's degree. At which time, after learning that I was dyslexic, or having the realization that my mind was playing tricks on me, all of a sudden you find that there are tricks to keep it from happening. Such as numbers. Now, first of all, go back. Dyslexia is different with every person; it's not the same. With me, I cannot keep a beat. So musically, I'm in trouble. Musically, dancing, I will stumble. And so I'm not good at dancing. Especially with my wife, because she wants to lead; but that's neither here nor there. I only had one girl in high school that I could dance with, because I don't know whether she understood or what, but with her, there was no stumbling at all.

I cannot remember a number. If you give me a number, even one digit, I'm in trouble. I must write it down. If the number is drummed into my head over and over and over again, such as my service number, I can give it to you; or my original home address, I can give it to you. But most numbers don't stay. If there's something that distracts me, the number is gone. So there are tricks to handling that. You instantly write down that number and you carry it with you. Let's see what some of the other tricks are. I should've written this down so that I had them on paper.

First of all, the most important thing is to come to the realization, for kids and adults, that you have a problem. And for those children and adults to understand that there isn't another person on this earth that doesn't have a problem, or two or three. And I would send them out on campus and say, "Go see if you can find out what the principal's problem is." And that really tickled the devil out of them because they could go out and start thinking about other people having problems, and not this, oh, my God, I have a problem. Which seemed to help, because once the realization—and once they begin to make coming up with their own tricks of counteracting what I call mind traps—If you're working a table saw, you do not work with the end grain against the fence, because it will create a chatter. The piece you cut off will now jam in that board and come back and hit you, traveling the same speed as the blade—and the blades traveling between 124 to 128 miles an hour—and hitting you. And if you're the right height, it hits you in the crotch. And it doesn't matter whether it's a man or a woman; it hurts. And you don't want that. And if you're cutting a very thin, little thin strip, it looks like this is the way it's done. You don't do that because that can come out of there and be kicked back as a missile—which is a thin—like an arrow out of a bow—and go through. And I used to demonstrate how it could happen, and make it happen, so the kids could see it and believe it. Otherwise, you talk about it and it doesn't get down inside their heads so that they understand. You wouldn't stand in front of a batter and give him a bat and say, okay, hit me in the crotch as hard as you can, because that's the effect. So you need to know what will work and what won't work, and you need to understand that whether you're six or sixty it will look correct that you do it that way. You'll *want* to do it that way. And you will be mesmerized in looking at a blade and actually feel yourself wanting to put your hand into it. So all of these things were very, very important to me. And the kids understood and could catch on.

02-00:06:40

Now, the dyslexia thing, though, is—to give you an example, there was little black gal that came through junior high with me. And three years later, here she comes into the parking lot and she says, "Mr. Wise." And I said, "Yes?" And she said, "I've been looking for you." And I thought, "Oh, God, I'm going to die." And she's no longer a little girl, she's a big girl. And she ran over and gave me the biggest hug I'd ever had. And she said, "I want to thank you." She says, "It didn't dawn on me until my freshman year in high school, what was going on. I was still getting D's and F's." And she said, "The light bulb went on and I understand what you're talking about." She says, "I no

longer get those grades. I'm a straight-B student." And when things like that happen, it really cements your idea of teaching.

Arbona: When you were at State, what coursework did you take, first of all?

02-00:08:07

Wise: Well, they had a very good shop program going, which the other schools did not have. So I went into the industrial education field and went through theirs, and at the same time, picked up two teaching credentials and [pause] masters. The brain is going. Am I waving my arms around too much?

Arbona: No, that's okay. [laughs] That's fine. Now, did you use the tricks that you mentioned, in the program, to kind of—?

02-00:09:00

Wise: Well, this is in the early stages of my experimenting with coming up with tricks to keep myself going. And it's hard to say. You go to college and you're in with professors, and you don't bring this subject up. You don't say, "I'm a dyslexic." Of course, when I started at San Jose State, the word didn't exist. Or the theory didn't exist. And most of the things that I see written about dyslexia are all screwed up. Because the person was not a dyslexic who wrote it. And it just amazes me that they don't want to hear about dyslexia from a dyslexic. But it took a long time, the principle of, a long time to be able to stand up in front of a class and say, I have a problem. And you've seen me do this; you've seen me misspell a word on the blackboard and you've seen me turn around and ask the class, is that right? I said, "That's a trick. And you'll tell me, no, that's not right; you just screwed up." But they wouldn't say it like that, they'd just correct it. And they say, oh, you're just playing tricks on us. You're seeing if we're awake. Well, not really.

So it took a while for me to be able to grow the intestinal fortitude to admit that I had a problem. Because, as I was mentioning earlier, it is used as a club. You have a problem, therefore—the main boss at Firestone stores, he asked me, or ordered me, to falsify the books because he realized I had a problem. But we didn't discuss it. And I wasn't into discussing it back then because I didn't realize it until later. The principal threw the door open and let it slam against the wall. He was mad. And he says, "You *never* tell anybody you have a problem. *Never, never, never, never.* And this is going in your file." And I told him, "First of all, you don't walk in here, raise a problem, noise, agitation, shake up my students and scream at me. If you're going to scream at me, you're going to do it in my office. So you get your GD tail out of here." And he didn't like that. Tough. That was my bailiwick, and he had absolutely no right to come in there and try and disturb it. So he and I went round and round. Basically, I'm on the kids' side, I'm not on the administration's side. So I was told over and over again that I was not a team player. I told him I was on the correct team; he was on the wrong team. So that's the way it went.

Arbona: When did you get married?

02-00:13:06

Wise: 1953. We've been married fifty-seven years now, as of June 3, 1953

Arbona: Congratulations. That's quite a milestone. That is a long time.

02-00:13:26

Wise: Yeah.

Arbona: And that was when you came back from Korea?

02-00:13:32

Wise: No, I got married, took a short honeymoon, and went to sea. Yeah.

Arbona: And what was that like?

02-00:13:48

Wise: Oh, it was tear jerking and—we had met at college. Her father was a dentist, doctor-dentist. And he was positive that his daughter was marrying a doctor. And then when I came back from the service, I had to inform him that I wasn't going to be a doctor. [laughs] And there were some bad feelings there. But it worked out. He never knew that I was a dyslexic.

Arbona: Your wife's father.

02-00:14:35

Wise: My wife's father.

Arbona: Your father-in-law.

02-00:14:37

Wise: Father-in-law. His name was Steninger, S-T-E-N-I-N-G-E-R.

Arbona: Did that change the relationship with him, after you told him that you weren't going to become a doctor?

02-00:14:56

Wise: A little bit. A little bit. But both of my children are adopted. You heard me say dysfunctional family. So my father tested my sperm way back, just about the time I got married, and never told me that I was sterile. So we went through eight years of trying to have children, then said, "Well, this is ridiculous. We want children, we'll have children." So we went and adopted, a boy and a girl. Now we have six grandchildren, three girls and three boys.

Arbona: Wonderful! How did adoption work?

02-00:15:54

Wise: Kind of crazy. A lot of interrogation. Trying to figure out whether they wanted to give you a child or not.

Arbona: Was that through a church or an agency?

02-00:16:09

Wise: Agency. Children's Home Society, which is out of Sacramento. And it's really strange that you are asked into a room with a brand new baby, and say, "Do you want this child or not? Tell us now." Whoa. It's kind of a shock. And you haven't had time to pick the baby up and cuddle it or anything. And so we looked at each other kind of strangely and nodded our heads and took the kid home. And went back for a second child two years later, and went through the process again. And looked at the child and nodded to each other [they laugh] and said, "Okay." And we took the child home and we've had two great kids. And you always wonder, since they're not yours, what didn't pass through. And what was there was passing through from someone else? You never know. My daughter did, at one time, go back and look up her family. And she found her mother, and then eventually the father. And the father ended up to be a twit. A guy I don't want anything to deal with. Couldn't keep it in his pants. So, when you go back and you find the original birth parents, you're opening Pandora's box. Because she met the mother. The mother was very ill with also ALS, which is Lou Gehrig's Disease, and eventually died of it. And she went back for a short time and kind of took care of her. In Louisiana.

Arbona: How early on did you tell the kids that they were adopted?

02-00:18:39

Wise: Instantly. You were chosen. You're ours. Over and over and over again. You don't play that game. I had a friend, a girlfriend in college—excuse me, in high school—that was Catholic. And she wanted to become a nurse. And as we graduated from high school, the priest said, "You're going to become a nun because I say so." And she said no. And he says, "If you don't become a nun, I will tell everybody in town you're adopted." And they never had told her she was adopted. And it split the Catholic community in half, in town. Half were going to kill him and half were backing him up. But he pulled a boo-boo. He thought he had the power. And power, a little bit of power, is corrupting. Not a lot of power, a little bit. And I find that over and over again. So power over somebody—teaching is power. Medicine is power. It's how you handle it, how you deal with it, how you don't corrupt it. You don't gain anything from the students. And there's no way to gain anything from the students, other than acceptance and the good feeling that you've done a good job. Anybody who wants to have the power of anybody else is telling me, in my own personal thoughts, that they're dishonest. And I want nothing to do with them. I don't care whether it's principal, mayor, president of the US; I don't trust them. Because the power is a very greedy thing. So those are some of my problems that I have to live with, because that's the way I feel.

Arbona: So in a way, telling the kids right away that they're adopted is a way of not holding that power over their heads.

02-00:21:34

Wise:

That's right. Yeah, do as I say or I'll tell everybody you're adopted. That's so gross. Truly. And then letting it go so long to where they're hurt. Why didn't you tell me? And so we never had to ask each other whether we wanted it that way; that was the way it was going to be. They would know that they were adopted and that they were ours. You make them feel as loved as you can. And love is felt through speaking. You talk to each other. It's communicated more with speaking than any other way. Hugs can be phony. Telling the truth is the most important.

Arbona:

So was that anything that the adoption agency ever suggested?

02-00:22:52

Wise:

No. No. No. Well, everybody's in their own little bailiwick. And they do their own thing, and sometimes they never think out of the box, of the consequences. Such as, University of Davis professors told all the farmers in this area that the trees needed zinc, and recommended they take a zinc wedge and drive it into the tree. Well, it didn't drive very well because it's very soft. And the war hit in '41 and actually, '40, zinc became a precious metal because people pretty well knew that the war was coming. And so the farmers said, well, I need zinc in this tree; they told me that. So okay, I'll drive galvanized nails into the tree. Okay, turn the tape off.

[audiofile stops, re-starts]

02-00:24:08

I'll start over.

Arbona:

Okay.

02-00:24:10

Wise:

Do you want me to hold this up?

Arbona:

Sure. I'm going to try to zoom out so that we can get an image of that. Okay. So Mr. Wise here is going to show us sort of a science experiment, in a way.

02-00:24:30

Wise:

Yeah. This log was brought to me by a farmer, and he wanted me to mill all his logs into lumber. And we nipped an end off of it and we turned it around and we found that. It had twenty-two nails. Can you see them in there?

Arbona:

Yeah, I think it's very visible, actually. I can even zoom in for an image, but we can see them.

02-00:25:04

Wise:

Since the farmer did not have zinc wedges that he could make, he went to galvanized nails. The only thing that the university didn't think into was the fact that this guy is a hypochondriac. And each one of these nails cut the cambium layer when it was driven into the tree, and so the production on this tree decreased over time. Now, this farmer brings this in, and we show him

this and he says, “Oh. I helped my dad put those in there.” I said, “How many acres?” He says, “Oh, a lot.” I said, “How come?” “Well,” he said, “we put those in every graft limb.” So when they grafted an English on a black, there were three to four limbs of grafts. And they put twenty-two nails in every grafted limb, for forty-seven acres.

Arbona: Wow.

02-00:26:32

Wise:

Nails at that time, in the forties, came in kegs, wooded kegs, like a wine barrel only smaller, if anyone can remember those things. Okay. Now, what I’m saying is that no one thought further to think where their zinc wedges are going to end up. And in actual truth, when the log came in with zinc wedges in it, they were easy to cut through. They never made a noise, because it’s very soft; it’s like lead. Very shiny. And those wedges were never absorbed at all. They never did any good at all. So technically, at the time of this revelation of putting zinc into a tree, they did not have the technique for putting it in through the leaves or through the roots, which they now have. So that’s easy. But it didn’t exist then. So consequently, as I was running this sawmill here, we ended up with hitting sixty-five pounds of iron per year. So we had to extract nails, iron and other things that were driven into the trees, all because Davis said the tree needed zinc.

Arbona: This is all work in your sawmill.

02-00:28:19

Wise:

This is the work in the sawmill, yeah. Which is the profession that I’m doing at the moment. And so I have to sell off—I’m jumping ahead.

Arbona: No, but maybe we can jump back to when you opened the sawmill and we can—

02-00:28:43

Wise:

Well, when they took my classroom away from me, I had always wanted, on my main ranch, to have a mill that I could turn fallen trees wood into lumber. And so I retired from the school district at fifty-five, and opened this in 1985. And the criteria, as I was mentioning earlier, we only took dead or dying logs; or only if they came down fresh for roadway or construction or something like that, that we’d take a fresh tree. So basically, we ended up being a recycler. And so our designation with the county is an agricultural wood waste recycler. And we’ve done that now for twenty-six years, except that the state changed the laws on Workman’s Comp, and Workman’s Comp designated me to being the same as Georgia-Pacific, a monstrous sawmill with tremendous amount of risk, and that I had to pay the same rates as the large sawmill, just because of the word ‘sawmill.’ For that reason only. And so we tried to work with them on that and they refused. So after twenty-six years of milling wood and having absolutely exquisite wood that would have been burnt or thrown in the dump, we’ve had a great life of producing probably the best wood that this county

has ever seen. And in so doing, and going off to another tangent, which the sawmill is, from all the other things that we've done, we had to do new learning. So we had to go to drying school, because you can't sell a wet piece of wood. And I went to the University of California's Forestry Products lab and took their course, which only told you how to dry soft wood, instead of hardwoods. And so the University of California came up with another course, a two-week course or such, which ended up, when I got there, to be exactly the same course for the soft wood as it is for the hardwood. And they advertised it as being for the hard wood and that was what I was going for, to see if there was anything I missed or anything new. Because the University of California told me, well, you'll just have to convert it over in your head from hard to soft, or soft to hard. So I purchased a vacuum kiln, which is absolutely fantastic for exotic woods from other countries, and developed a solar kiln for the local woods, which is slower, more time-consuming, but turns out 100 percent better wood than the vacuum kiln. In fact, the vacuum kiln, on the local woods, we lost 40 percent due to downgrade, because of the speed at which it works. So we learned very rapidly that wasn't the thing to do. And I acquired a forty-foot con-x box, which is an overseas container box that go aboard ships, and set it up here and used it as a drying kiln all those years, and turned out absolutely fantastic dry wood, between one and then two inches thick. The thicker woods take longer. And so a rule of thumb is one year air dry. Takes one year air dry to be dry enough to be usable. Well, that depends, because each species has a different moisture content while they're still green or in growth. So we set up the other kiln and we dried through the winter, on cloudy days.

Arbona: Is that the solar one?

02-00:33:51

Wise:

That's the solar kiln. And it worked like an absolute jewel because it seemed to—and we have no proof—that it seemed to relax during the night. The wood just relaxed, because it went cold and the heat dissipated. And then it warmed up the next day. And it took six months to dry a load of wood. And we were able to load the box eight feet wide and nine feet high, for forty feet long. So we just *stuffed* it full of wood and dried. And we didn't have to have any fans. All we did was open the doors and let the moisture out. And as soon as the ceiling got dry, we closed the doors back up again. And so about two to three times a week, we let the moisture out. And turned out that we had fantastic wood. We also found that the thickness of cut stock—and we were producing stock that was one inch, two inch, three inch, six inch, ten inch. And in so doing, we found very rapidly that it took time. And the time compounded. So one inch is, for one inch thick, one year; two inches is two and a half years. Eight inches, fourteen years. And we have eight-inch thick wood. So basically, no one else around has wood that thick and dry available. Which became a very large help to us. And this is one of the reasons why the University of California thought we had flipped completely, and they wanted us to do thousand-board-foot units and stick with one thickness only.

Arbona: Oh, I think that fell off, your microphone.

02-00:36:16

Wise: Okay. I knocked it off. So another era.

Arbona: So that brings up a question of when you started this business—twenty-six years ago, right?

02-00:36:36

Wise: Yeah.

Arbona: Was there a lot of discussion in the air about recycling wood? Or was this an idea that was somewhat unique to this region or this area, when you were getting into the business?

02-00:36:50

Wise: Well, that's a very good question, in the fact that it's unique to this area. Concord was called—no, there was a city next to Concord called Walnut Creek. And Walnut Creek had a lot of walnuts and a lot of walnut production. The only thing, after the war, all the homes were built in all of the orchards. They left all the old trees around the homes. And eventually, the trees developed a virus, which was called blackline. And the blackline virus was blown up through Marsh Creek Canyon, over the pass by my ranch, and down into Brentwood. And it hit the valley and it went south and north. Mostly south. And it hit this area very badly because it was an airborne virus. And it hit the tree at the bud; it went down, infected the tree and went down the cambium layer; got to the graft where the tree was grafted from English to Black; girdled the tree, killed the top; and the stump was left, trying to stay alive and putting out suckers like crazy, or little cambium layer growth. Or actually, Medullary Ray growth that was out.

You could drive down the road and see which trees were affected, or infected, because the tops were dead down to the graft, and the rest was trying to stay alive and putting out a lot of growth, and wasn't making it. And so those trees were taken down, ripped out of the orchard. And so we got a lot of logs of the black walnut. Not so much the English. English went for firewood. So we knew that this disease was going to create a problem and kill off trees, and we knew that we had to acquire as many logs as we could get our hands on, to try to save the material instead of having it burnt in a pile. And they've changed burning, so now it's illegal to burn here. So they take and grind the tree up, roots, dirt, rocks, everything; they stick it in a big grinder and it chews it all up and spits out chips.

So all the big beautiful trees that have been around are gone. And going fast. Because there's more than one grinder now around that's just grabbing every tree he can get and grinding it up into chips. So we were lucky to get in at the beginning of the—not the beginning, but about the middle of the blackline disease. And the blackline is very, very prevalent in the wood as you cut it, so

it shows exactly what happened and how the tree died. So we were able to recover just under 20,000 logs—of all sizes; we didn't turn anything down—and turned it into lumber, and had a humongous supply of fantastic woods.

We found that we could not hang our hat on just one item. You probably notice that Burger King went to breakfast because they couldn't hang their hat on just lunchtime hamburgers. And now they've gone out to coffee and all sorts of things. Well, we ran into that concept here, and so we started importing exotics, which we have an exotic locker. And we've sold a lot of exotics and dried a lot of exotics. And they go through the vacuum kiln. And I've dried tons and tons and tons of material. I don't know the exact count of tonnage. Board foot I can tell you, but not tonnage. And when you load a thousand board feet into a vacuum kiln of ebony, which is the Gaboon ebony, the black ebony from Nigeria. You have tons in there. There's a lot of weight. But the vacuum kiln works so well I can take out dead, wet wood that's come in right out of the tree, down to 12 percent, which is bottom, in thirty-five days, sometimes forty, with the vacuum kiln. And I can guarantee that I will not destroy one board. Not one. It goes through fantastically. If I put walnut in there and try and speed it up to thirty-five days instead of six months, I've got junk. I'll lose 40 percent.

Arbona: Were customers asking you for recycled wood? Was there a kind of environmental—?

02-00:42:48

Wise: Actually, no.

Arbona: —consensus? No?

02-00:42:51

Wise: No. They were happy to see that it was recycled. The county has still not figured it out.

Arbona: And did you ever market it as—?

02-00:43:16

Wise: Recycled?

Arbona: Yeah, as having some kind of environmental—

02-00:43:20

Wise: No. No. Now, the—well, let me start again. The species of wood that is found here in the valley is called claro. Spanish word meaning clear. Probably—and we can not find any reference to how that got onto the wood—we think it was put on by the Catholic priests that started the missions, that used the wood and just called it claro. That may be true; that may not be true. But we have a word for our walnut here. It has more figure, it has more color, it has more character than regular eastern walnut has. And when I first started the business, the

people back east said, oh, you've got that gosh darned claro, and that's junk. Well, that changed over the years. And finally they said, "We've got to have that claro; please ship it back to us. Because we find it has much more character than anything else."

Arbona: And folks were using it to build what?

02-00:44:54

Wise:

Furniture. That is the hardest question to answer because everyone has a different need for wood. And you have to try and figure out, and produce wood that will fit their need, whether it be furniture—you're not going to put walnut in planters because it will rot and go to pieces. You don't use it on boats all that much. It's just a good furniture wood. It depends on what you're doing. Gunstocks is another area we produce for. We have a lot of turners, which are people who work with a lathe. And so we have a showroom of nothing but wood especially made up for them. And they're delighted to find it and have it made up into bowl blanks, ready to go. And turners become addicted to turning. And so once they start turning, they end up to be a turner for life. Manufacturers, all sorts of things. People making blanket chests, hope chests, jewelry boxes. I have people that are making urns for ashes of people who've passed away. It just is unbendable; it just goes on and on and on.

Arbona: Ships? I don't know, are they building ships around—

02-00:45:43

Wise:

Well, not with walnut. Yeah, there are ships being built here. Because we're a seaport. We're an actual seaport. Anyway, it's been the joy of my life. I've been able to really immerse myself into not really becoming an exact expert, but close, in woods. When I was growing grapes, we had a very, very hard time marketing grapes as such, because there are certain outfits that have control of the wine industry, and you were not able to market through them unless you were able to just give them the grapes. The situation was really bad. So I sold all of my crop to Canada. And did well that way until I ended up having a few accidents that I did not wish to have and realized that I was doing too much, because I had six full-time jobs going at once. I was teaching school, running this mill, running two ranches, doing real estate at night, managing property in three cities, and taking care of my mother on the way to death.

Arbona: That's way more than one person wants to or can handle.

02-00:48:33

Wise:

Yes. Well, especially since one ranch was fifty miles that way and the other ranch was thirty miles that way. So I found through experience and knowing other people that had the same problem, it was time that I started paring back. And I got rid of the grapes and I got rid of—well, of course the school, they closed my classes down and I couldn't teach anymore, other than here—which ends up to be a classroom in itself.

Arbona: Well, we're getting kind of far into this tape. Well, we still have some minutes left, but maybe we can just kind of wrap this one up. Well, one thing you could do is, if you think there's anything else that we've missed, we could go back and, if anything strikes you as incomplete that you wanted to say— Because we've been on so many topics. [they laugh]

02-00:49:54

Wise: I know. It's like a shovel full of manure.

Arbona: Well, it's a good smell, manure. [laughs] Otherwise, I also had in mind the question of when—just in what you were talking about right now. You're talking about trying to run all of these businesses. And it occurred to me to ask you, and I was curious, was your wife also helping you with all of this? Or did she also have her own career?

02-00:50:29

Wise: Her career developed into taxes. She did taxes for people. So she became a really very highly praised—she became the broker of the real estate office, so we worked at that until real estate became very dirty. You couldn't keep the buyer and the seller honest, you couldn't keep the bank honest, you couldn't keep the inspector honest, the roof inspector, the foundation inspector—they were all cheating. And therefore, when I put my foot down and said, you're not going to do this, I got a very bad reputation as being the bad guy. And eventually, we said, this is no more fun. Because it *was* fun to start young couples out into houses, and it was fun to see them grow and their families grow. I happened to teach in a very good era, in that I could collect my students and take them with me on trips with my family, heavily supported by my wife. We were strictly partners, all the way through. She supported me and I supported her. And we were able to do this. I've taken her places that she never would've gotten, in trips to different things. And she's grown with me.

We used to do wood shows, which are really tool shows. San Francisco, San Jose, San Mateo—all around—Phoenix, Los Angeles. We would go down with 4,000 pounds of wood and set up a booth and sell wood. And that makes you a huckster, like the rest of the people there. And they travel all over. They actually travel from state to state to state, to these different shows. And we just signed on for the shows that were in the area. We did Phoenix; that ended up to be a disaster. And we did those wood shows until it was no longer profitable. And did them as advertisement, to get people to realize that we were here. But once you're a huckster, they don't believe that this facility exists. So they don't come. Maybe I'd hit 3,000 new customers a weekend, but they wouldn't show up here. So it didn't work out as advertising.

Arbona: How did you and your wife first meet?

02-00:53:44

Wise: College. I went away to sign up with the Coast Guard. And I ended up at the Coast Guard office down near the Embarcadero, at San Francisco. And they

said, “We’re not taking anybody. Go home.” And I said, “Oh, my goodness. I came down here to sign up. What am I doing?” And they said, “Well, why don’t you go sit in the lobby out there and wait.” And so about an hour later, this guy comes out and he says, “Okay,” he says, “you’re in.” And he points to the guy sitting—there were only two of us. And he points to him and says, “You’re the first man in the Coast Guard Reserve.” And he points to me and he says, “You’re the second man in the Coast Guard Reserve, ever.” I said, “Well, fine. What do we do now?” He says, “Well, we swear you in and you go home.” So for a year, I had to go to Coast Guard training and meeting down at the Government Island in Oakland. Yeah, Oakland. And that got kind of tiresome and school—I went back to school and met my wife. We kind of knew each other before, but we didn’t get together until we started going out. And so I asked for permanent duty. And I wanted to get it over with so I could get back out, eventually, and go back to college. And so that’s the way it happened. I spent two years and about six months in the Coast Guard, and came back and went back to college and finished my degree. And being a dyslexic, she helped me. Because things, at that moment, were not working too well. And so we’ve been partners and worked together and—taught her to ski, taught her to camp. Her people were San Francisco people that were very white glove.

Arbona: Her family.

02-00:56:17

Wise: Her family wasn’t into that. And she has enjoyed all of those things with me and all the trips that we’ve taken, and all the kids that I drug along with my kids and my family. Which today would be a sexual thing and would be out, totally not looked on as being good. So I was lucky to be in an era when that was okay. I could do it, and make friends and keep friends. I still have friends that I’m in touch with that are sixty-five years old now, that I had as students. And we still communicate. I try and keep in touch with all of them. Some of them fade off into the nether land and it’s hard to keep track of them. But it’s been a wonderful life.

Arbona: Quick question. Do you keep in touch with people, like today, over email? I know you have an email address that you’ve given me, but—

02-00:57:31

Wise: Well, typing is out. So if I have to have an email done—if this finger goes down, this finger goes down. Now, back when they tried to get me to play the piano, I had my knuckles rapped often because it didn’t work. So typing is verboten. It’s one of the things I can’t do. And that’s one of the things—I tried to teach kids that if there’s something you can’t do, put it aside. Concentrate on the things you can do, things that you’re good at. Don’t worry about what’s going to come down the line, because it will come. You’ll get into college; you won’t know what classes you want to take. You want to get rid of all of the garbage that they’ve put on you, and then you can concentrate on what

you want to be or do. And you may end up getting a degree in one thing, going and getting a degree in something else.

Arbona: Who knows?

02-00:58:38

Wise: Not a problem. It's the people who demand that you know, are the ones that are causing all the trouble.

Arbona: We're going to run out of tape on this one.

02-00:58:49

Wise: Okay.

Arbona: Looks like it's already flashing. Okay, well, why don't we—

02-00:58:55

Wise: It's already three o'clock.

Arbona: Yeah, it's already three o'clock. Let me hit the pause button here.

[End of interview]