

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Ronald C. Wornick
An Oral History

Interviews conducted by
Richard Cándida Smith
in 2011

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Interview #1 July 1, 2011

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01-00:00:45

Cándida Smith: An interview like this, the very first question almost always is, when and where were you born?

01-00:01:17

Wornick: If I may, just for the record, could I first say thank you very much to you, in particular, and to the Bancroft Library and all of the professional staff there, for including me in the oral history project. Thank you.

Anyway, I am, just by way of introduction, I'm going to answer your question in just one moment. I'll get there quickly. As quickly as I can. I'm in my eightieth year, and well aware that my memory is not nearly as reliable as it was sixty or seventy years ago, and so it's especially wonderful for me to have someone to walk with me through as many memories as I can bring back that might be of value to family, friends, or researchers, or anyone else who might have any interest in what footprints I might have left over the last eighty years or so. But anyway, to come back to your question, I was born in 1932, in Malden, Massachusetts.

01-00:02:33

Cándida Smith: What kind of town was Malden?

01-00:02:35

Wornick: Malden was a blue-collar, working-class town. Almost without exception, it was made up of plumbers, carpenters, painters, trades people, and what would have today looked like a lot of pick-up trucks. More likely people who worked with their hands. There was a small community of professional people, as there usually is, but in the main, it was a working-class community.

01-00:03:08

Cándida Smith: But skilled workers. Skilled trades, as they used to call it.

01-00:03:12

Wornick: You could say that, but people who worked for hourly wages. They were very modestly paid. A lot of two and three-residence buildings. Very few single-family houses. Population would have been, when I was born, about sixty or seventy thousand. I think it was 100,000 or so twenty years later, when I left. But they had beautiful, tree-lined streets and a very wonderful, safe, Norman Rockwell, lovely, lovely place to live and to grow up. A lot of playing in the streets, parks. Fabulous public schools system. Really remarkable. I'd like to enlarge on that if we have the time to go back to it. I'm actually very, very proud of having come from that little community. Going back there today, it barely resembles the world that we knew in the thirties. My father did a very, very good job of finding his way there to that little spot. All of our family should be very grateful for it. Malden was a good place to begin life.

01-00:04:35

Cándida Smith: So it was a stable community?

01-00:04:37

Wornick: Very stable. There was hardly any moving in, moving out. The people who lived around us seemed, as I was growing up, to have been there when I was born, and they were there when I left.

01-00:04:52

Cándida Smith: What did your parents do?

01-00:04:54

Wornick: My father was a carpenter, an honest-to-goodness, board-sawing carpenter, a nail-driving carpenter. Did primarily framing work, and many times was on the edge of trying to make his way to a little higher calling, maybe even as a foreman in the carpentry field. He was a very good carpenter, and that may have been his problem. There was a big demand for his skills. He could hang more doors, frame more walls, and do more anything than anybody, and he took great pride in that. He could outwork younger men. He loved working. He got to work early, stayed late. He just was fiercely proud of his abilities as a carpenter. He was a very, very successful carpenter, and loved doing it.

01-00:05:50

Cándida Smith: Was he a member of the carpenters union?

01-00:05:52

Wornick: He certainly was. He was a member of the carpenters union. They met every Friday night. It was a tradition in our home, because my mother and father did not go out. They didn't go to dinners and movies and what have you. They were still living under the cloud of Depression mentality, very carefully putting away their nickels and dimes, and saving. But Friday night was my dad's night out. He went to the union meetings. One of the earliest reasons that I thought the union meetings were interesting is that my father was, by registration and by attitude, a Republican, and he didn't trust anything large—companies, governments, political parties. But he recognized early that he could get himself a little protection in a union. In fact, when he came to this country, he was not of age to get a union membership, and he had to fib a little bit about his age. We always had a little struggle to figure out exactly when he was born. He did get into the union and devoted himself, in a very serious way, for about—I think it was fifty years, because they had a big retirement party for him when he finally stopped working, because he did that for a lot of years, long past retirement years. He never went into an active position in the union, but the union was a big part of his life. He got a union waist-watch at one point, and he talked proudly about what the union had meant for him. As fiercely proud of the union as he was, he was not a socialist or a liberal of the kind that most were who had come out of Eastern Europe and had only known that kind of political background. My father stood out a little bit from most of the other people I saw him with in terms of what he brought with him to this country.

01-00:08:09

Cándida Smith: What about your mother, did she work?

01-00:08:16

Wornick: My father was extremely proud of having captured my mother. I had to grow up a little bit to really even begin to understand this, but my mother was a very, very beautiful teenager in her eighteenth, nineteenth year. She had graduated high school, which, for my father, seemed like a Ph.D., because my dad had never had a single year of education.

01-00:08:47

Cándida Smith: She graduated high school in the United States?

01-00:08:48

Wornick: She graduated high school in Lowell, Massachusetts, which is another interesting story. She had a particular skill with bookkeeping, and had worked a few jobs as a bookkeeper. To my dad, she was just a gorgeous, educated, lovely princess. She read a great deal, and she was very good with numbers. She was completely Americanized. Her father was a fruit peddler—my grandfather. In the family, we use the word “zaida.” The grandfather and the grandmother are called the zaida and the bubbe, the grandfather and the grandmother. Yiddish, but universal in the Jewish families. That’s all they were ever called in their generation. Whatever their name was, they were the bubbe and the zaida, and that was it.

Anyway, the zaida, the grandfather, was completely old world. He had a barn behind his house in Lowell. Horse, wagon. He went out early in the morning to peddle fruit up and down the streets of Lowell, Massachusetts. Fresh fruit. His house had no electricity. It had gaslights. I can tell you, as an eight or nine-year-old, when I would stay there on a very rare occasion overnight, it was terrorizing because of the little flickering shadows on the walls from the gaslights and even the pilot lights. There was one modest piece of indoor plumbing. It was really a trip back into 1880, 1890, to stay in that house. Very traditional way it ran as well, because his wife stood by the stove and waited for instructions. I don’t know if I ever saw her sit at the table with him. He was like a little czar. He would more quickly welcome his congregants from the synagogue because he was president of his little temple—shul, as we called it, an Orthodox synagogue. There was a certain respect for Hebrew and Yiddish and the language and men. It was not a woman’s world. My mother grew up in a home where there was a fair amount of resentment about the gulf in status between men and women, and that becomes pivotal later in her life and in mine, in fact. I don’t know how much detail you want out of that—

01-00:11:36

Cándida Smith: No, go into more detail. That’s interesting.

01-00:11:39

Wornick: My mother had two brothers and two sisters. They all, almost every one of them, had a hard time coming out of the house they grew up in because it was

relatively old world, very primitive and dark and joyless— not very American. It's hard for me to understand what that struggle would have been like. There were significant resentments. There might in fact have been some not entirely healthy genes. Some of those brothers and sisters were not 100 percent right. Some of their children had some dysfunctional problems as well.

01-00:12:25

Cándida Smith: You mean like depression?

01-00:12:28

Wornick:

Yes, peculiarities of that kind and a little more severe. One of her sisters had some time in an institution and needed care. Neither of her sisters had children. One of her brothers was a primitive guy. I don't mean to slander the family except to say that the bridge from the Lowell, Massachusetts, house to the Malden house was a big distance. It's difficult, in retrospect, to understand how my father—I know we were just talking about my mother, but my father, who came here without any education, spoke not a word of English, and taught himself just from newspapers he could pick up on the subway, on the buses, and so on, over time, he became, by his own definition, the Yankee in the family. He had no accent, and he fit in beautifully everywhere. You would not have known where he had come from. A very informed guy, very well read, and he loved his work. He loved everybody. He loved the neighbors, and he loved the birds and the bees and the trees. But the Klain (mother's) side of the family was complicated. Good people, but there were emotional problems there that was a heavy weight on the family in ways that probably don't need to be dealt with in any degree here, but nonetheless, existed.

01-00:14:15

Cándida Smith: It sounds like, though I'm sure you loved your grandparents, that whole household was scary to you in many respects.

01-00:14:24

Wornick:

Well, it was, partly because of age. My father's family didn't exist, so I never really knew anybody older than my father on his side. We'll come to that story a little later. On my mother's side, the whole family was there. Her parents and the rest of their family, both horizontally and vertically. That was the family, fundamentally, that was family. That's what we had to grow up with. Her maiden name was Klain. I still use it as a password to this day. It's a cornerstone in my head. I keep it as an important word.

01-00:15:18

Cándida Smith: How old was your father when he arrived in the United States?

01-00:15:27

Wornick:

Only the Lord, or his mother and father, will know for certainty, but we believe he was born in 1898. He got here about 1917 or '18. We know that partly because we have a ticket from his passage over, which shows the date of his passage. His age at the time of arrival changed because of this union

situation that he was trying to quickly get into. Anyway, my father came here from Kobrin, which is a city on the border between Poland and the former Soviet Union. The broadest way to put it in your mind, if you were to start in Warsaw and go immediately east, about 200 miles, you get to the border. As you pass over the border, you come to the Bug River, and on the Bug River is Kobrin.

01-00:16:51

Cándida Smith: That's in Belarus or Ukraine?

01-00:16:52

Wornick: Belarus.

01-00:16:56

Cándida Smith: So he was born in the Russian Empire?

01-00:16:59

Wornick: Exactly so. Now, we know a little bit about the time he lived in, but the only thing I know that goes back from there is that his father told him that he was—and I've told this story so many times, I remember the telling of it better than my father's telling of it, so I don't know how reliable my memory is on this—his father, my grandfather, would have told my father that he was the fifth or sixth first-born son of first-born sons. In other words, his father had been a first-born son, and the father before that. In the Jewish tradition, that's significant. More importantly, his father was a woodworker and a cabinetmaker. He worked in the churches in and around that area and built the finish work in the churches. My father, probably because it was the only thing he could have known, became a carpenter. Although his father had tried to apprentice him as a watchmaker, which my father was outraged at, that anybody would ask a grown man to sit and do these funny little fussy things. He became a carpenter.

I was my father's first-born son. I bring this up only to tell you that there is this, for me, precious memory, when I think about my father, of being a long chain of first-born sons. One of the miracles out of this, for me, is that even though my father had forbidden me to ever have anything to do with carpentry, because he was determined that I become an American of the kind that was beyond his wildest dreams, as I grew up and began having a little time to explore what kinds of things I could do, I discovered that I had a real calling in the subject of wood. We'll get into that a little bit later, but that's an absolute gift from generations of wood people that preceded me.

01-00:19:20

Cándida Smith: 1917, 1918, Russia was at war. Theoretically, he was of draft age. U.S., in 1917, had shut down immigration from Europe, from countries that at war, so how did he get over here?

01-00:19:37

Wornick:

You're right on target. It's a shameful disgrace, and I'm in the category of millions of young men and women who did not explore their histories as diligently as we should have. Great pity. But what I do recall, what my father was clear about, was that, as the First World War was winding down, he found himself—he'd already been conscripted into the army, but at that time, when the war was ending, he was a prisoner of war on a train. It must have been a German prisoner of war camp—a train, I presume. His assignment was to keep the lamps lit on the train. To do so, he needed a certain amount of oil. The oil was given to him each day as an allotment to keep the lamps lit. It was probably an edible oil as well. It might well have been olive oil or something like that. I'm not sure. Anyway, my father, as he told the story, figured out that he could keep the lamps burning with less oil than they were giving him. He began storing away a little extra oil every day, and began a series of steps of swapping oil for something else. His end product that he tried to make his way to was hard-boiled eggs. When he had accumulated enough hard-boiled eggs to do an honest-to-goodness bribe, he bribed the guard and made his way off of the train and walked back to Kobrin. Now, were my father sitting here, wouldn't you have about a hundred questions to put to him?

01-00:21:55

Cándida Smith: This was probably after the revolution already.

01-00:21:58

Wornick: Before.

01-00:21:59

Cándida Smith: And the breakdown of authority in the Russian Empire.

01-00:22:03

Wornick: I think just before. I don't really think the revolution, per my father's stories, had really gotten very far when he got here. When would the Russian Revolution have actually officially been underway?

01-00:22:16

Cándida Smith: The czar is overthrown in a liberal democratic revolution in early 1917, I think. February. The Bolshevik Revolution is November in the current calendar, October in the old calendar.

01-00:22:38

Wornick: That's the timeframe.

01-00:22:39

Cándida Smith: Of 1917. Then 1918 is open civil war.

01-00:22:44

Wornick: It was probably late '17. We just don't have really good records about this. It was definitely war winding down, revolution getting underway. Not a good time to be there. Would you like to linger on my father in Kobrin for a few minutes? He described Kobrin as a difficult place to be, because although

there was a very large Jewish community, the Cossacks and the White Russians and everybody who was a quarter of an inch higher in authority than the Jews were constantly suppressing them. It was a brutal situation. I can only convey the impressions that he left with us. Clearly, they were not allowed to own their own land. They were not allowed to do much of anything. They were kept out of all the craft guilds, although they did do carpentry, which is a contradiction. I don't know what that was about. That's what little I know about it.

I thought of it as a very, very primitive place, but I later discovered that that view was more my father's view of it than a more accurate view of the city. The reason we came to understand that, was that, in the late 1980s, Anita and I went on a trip to Eastern Europe, to revisit the old Jewish communities in Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary, where there had been tremendous amount of intellectual life of theater, art, writing, music, that had all disappeared during the war and Holocaust. During that trip, walking through countless of these buildings, parks, and neighborhoods, and particularly the death camps, it was the most profound, overwhelming experience, especially for anybody with Jewish genes. But any human being, I think, would respond. It just left us shaken. It was nothing by the way of new information, but it came with an intensity that really surprised both of us.

On returning from that trip, we continued to think about the silence that just ran through all of Eastern Europe, just wondering what would life have been like if those six million Jews had still been there, writing and doing things and making the life that they had made. So we started doing some reading to just make peace with that idea. One of the books that Anita came on was called *From a Ruined Garden*. It turned out that the book had little pieces in it from many of the ruined, now gone communities. Little snippets of writings. We didn't really understand what that was about, but it turned out that a very interesting phenomenon had occurred after the Second World War. When residents of each of these lost communities found one another in cities around the world—they could be only two or three people, or several dozen people—they set up a memorial group and attempted to write the history of the community they came out of. They were called memorial books. So you can imagine, in Montreal or Buenos Aires or Mexico City or Tel Aviv, five or six people, or ten people, from some little village sat down and they accumulated their photographs and they tried to draw a map of the city. Who lived where, when was the city founded. They were just working from their memory and from little scraps of paper they might have. They created a history book; the books are called *yiskor* books. It means “memorial” in English.

In reading *From a Ruined Garden*, we discovered there was a *yiskor* book for Kobrin, my father's city. We went off looking for it and found it in the Yivo Library, the Jewish library in Vilna. Vilna had been given the privilege of printing in Hebrew by the czar. They controlled the use of Hebrew printing in order to control where the Jews lived, but they gave that right, that

opportunity, in Vilna, so Vilna became an intellectual center for Jewish life in that part of the Soviet Union. The library, which was established there, was ultimately salvaged and taken to New York City, and in that library we found a copy of the Kobrin book. On inspecting it, we discovered that it was written in very, very impenetrable, intellectual, very high-class Hebrew. It had been written by scholars. I didn't know we had scholars in Kobrin, which was the first surprise.

We came back to San Francisco, and we set up a little project at the San Francisco Holocaust Memorial Library, where there's a very willing young rabbi, whose name I'd like to get in the record. I'm just going to reach over here for it so I remind myself of some of these names. This is the Kobrin yiskor book. Joel Neuberger. I met Joel at the San Francisco Holocaust Memorial Library, and I asked him to take on this project. He was very enthusiastic about it. We used about four years of his life, and he spoke with a very, very heavy accent. It becomes a little bit amusing, even though the going is heavy if you read the words. Joel would sit every day and read from the Hebrew, and recite into a little recorder in his best broken English a translation from the Hebrew into English. These little discs would ultimately come to my office, where my secretary, Mary Kelly—first generation Mary Kelly, with a brogue—is translating the Yiddish Hebrew disc into typed English. Over a period of about four years, we made our way to a pretty good translation of the memorial book for Kobrin. It has a map, it has photographs, it has a pretty good reconstruction of the founding of the city, going back to the 1500s. Although we do not have records of my family before my father's time—they were all destroyed and we just have no idea what preceded him—probably won't ever—we do know a little bit more about the city of Kobrin.

Kobrin is a touchstone when I think about roots for our family, partly because I'm the male part of the family and because—my father was not any more or less than my mother—but my father had a large impact on me that is important in the telling of this story. I feel that obligation in the chain of history.

01-00:32:20

Cándida Smith: After your father arrived in the States, did he remain in contact with his family in Kobrin?

01-00:32:31

Wornick: I'm told that he did, but the stories were not told in a way that you would expect they might be. It was a whispered thing. My sense is that they were struggling with the obligation to not lose their house, make the payments. They had financed their house with the Federal Home Loan Association, which were terrorizing words in our house. I was born in '32. Very early in the thirties, my parents were really concerned about just keeping food on the table and keeping a roof over our heads. They had a tenant to worry about who had to pay rent as well, and at the same time, meeting their obligations to

get money back to what remained, if there were any remains, of their family back in Kobrin. There were stories about my father having shared a few dollars with his uncle and with his brother, who collectively were trying to send money back. My father was, I think, suspicious that the money wasn't getting back. I'll never know what it was all about, but it was not good. I know my father suffered anguish about that.

01-00:34:11

Cándida Smith: So you had a paternal uncle and a great uncle who had also left. Were they in the United States or somewhere else?

01-00:34:22

Wornick: That part of the story is another one of those little miracles. As it happens, my father's grandmother on my father's side got to the U.S. I do not know how. I don't even know her name. But she got here. The time when she got here would have been interesting to know, because my father did tell stories about going across the Bug River to visit her. She had a shop somewhere and sold something. She had accumulated enough money to get to the U.S. She had two sons and a daughter. One of the sons was my father's father. She brought the other son and the other daughter with her, and they were here before my father. Then, some years later, she sent money back for her other son, my father's father. Whether it was tickets or money, I don't know. The idea was, it was to be passage to the U.S. for them. As it happened, my father's mother was pregnant, at which time she had already four daughters and two sons. This would have been her seventh child. I have pictures of the four daughters and the two boys in their teens. Extremely handsome, a beautiful, beautiful family. She decided that she could not make the trip because she was pregnant, and she had a lot of children who were not really fit to be on their own yet anyway. So she gave the tickets to her sons, her two sons, my father and his brother. So my father and his brother made the passage to the U.S. In 1943—we have pretty good records about this—the rest of that family was taken out in an action that swept through Kobrin and pretty well decimated what remained of the Jews in Kobrin. My father and his brother were the last to make it across the ocean.

01-00:37:18

Cándida Smith: You said your father described himself as the Yankee of the family. That would suggest that he had a different understanding of himself and maybe of Jewish identity than others in the family.

01-00:37:36

Wornick: In fairness, when I hear you say that, I think I should say that more carefully. I think we would have described him that way. I'm not so sure he would have. He would not have described himself probably at all. He was relatively modest about himself. Of our extended family, in every direction, he was the most American, without question. As my life moved on and we started meeting increasingly sophisticated kinds of people, my father could be anywhere, absolutely anywhere, at any dinner table, in any conversation, and

love it. People would gather round him because he loved a good debate and he had a point of view about everything. He was a very good conversationalist.

01-00:38:39

Cándida Smith: Besides belonging to the union, did he belong to any Jewish organizations, like the Arbeiter Ring or Zionist groups?

01-00:38:48

Wornick: No. Another topic that's probably worth a good thirty minutes one day, the Jews of that generation were very, very conflicted about Judaism. The price they'd paid for their faith was so huge, and the pain so deep, they were not ready to share it and pass it on. It was like a wound. Although my father and mother insisted that I have a bar mitzvah, and prepare for a bar mitzvah, and would never have questioned for a moment that they were openly and publicly and proudly Jewish, there wasn't conversation about Jewish history and Jewish studies or Jewish much of anything. A lot of the traditions were apparent at the dinner table, and we celebrated the Jewish holidays, but a lot of especially young men in my generation grew up in a maybe hypocritical environment in which we had been taught to read Hebrew—and to this day, I can read Hebrew. I have no idea what the words mean. In other words, I can recite them. It allows me to stand up with the book in a temple and pray, mindlessly. Had you heard my bar mitzvah, or anybody's bar mitzvah from that time, you would have thought what a wonderful tradition it is, but it was empty. It's only in the subsequent decades that American Jews began to ask the intellectual question about what is Judaism and how is it going to be relevant in my life. What is it about? What is the product? That's now happening as an explosion. Fortunately, on close scrutiny, I'm happy to say Judaism stands up to the test, and so Jews are coming increasingly to embrace the faith.

My mother had absolutely no use for it whatever. She wouldn't go near a synagogue or a temple and didn't really care for faith from that point of view. But my father gradually went back to it as he moved along in his life. In fact, toward the end, the first time my mother became seriously ill, my—

[break in tape]

01-00:41:47

Cándida Smith: Just a second. Okay.

01-00:41:55

Wornick: Toward the end of my father's life, when my mother had to be hospitalized, it really terrorized my father. They had been married over sixty years. They were forever married and lived in one house. They were parts of a whole. He began to return to his faith, and he found a little tiny Orthodox synagogue very close to the house and he started praying seriously. It surprised me how knowledgeable he was about the five books and about the prayers. He fit in down there. They made him very welcome. He was one of them. He became a

religious man, not in the sense that he was studious or careful about keeping all the kosher requirements and so on, but he was clearly trying to connect to God and just make sure that he felt good about being Jewish again. There was a long separation for him in his lifetime, I think, and it left his children, and in some ways my children's children, a little confused about who we are. It took some thinking and some time to repair that. We have worked at that, and that's an interesting story. A lot of our families have tried to find a way to come back to bring our children back in under the tent in a way that will stand up to close scrutiny rather than, just, you do it because I'm telling you to do it. Do it in the same way you might choose to study English or French or Spanish or world history, it would be very useful for you to know your own history and your own family history.

I think we've made some big repairs in that direction. Actually, one of the proudest little endpoints to this part of the story is that, some few years ago, I was able to contribute significantly in time and finances to the starting of a Jewish day school in Foster City, which bears my name. When I go in there and see those three hundred little children, K through eighth grade, studying really for an American life, but at the same time preparing themselves for a Jewish life, it's just a wonderful thing, and a huge change. My father would not have believed the difference between growing up in that day school from growing up in Kobrin. It's only two generations. It's not that far.

01-00:44:57

Cándida Smith: So you did not go to temple regularly?

01-00:45:01

Wornick: No.

01-00:45:01

Cándida Smith: But in order to have a bar mitzvah, you had to have some relationship to the local temple.

01-00:45:09

Wornick: A frightening experience, but probably not unlike others. Every afternoon, or so it would seem to me in the movie, if I were going to do one, after I had finished everything in public school and whatever after-school activities there might be, and it's now 4:30 or so, and a New England gray, cold day, I walked from my home on Garland Avenue to Almont Avenue in Malden, maybe eight or ten blocks. Up on the third floor of this three-decker, Rabbi Irving Levine had a school for young men to prepare them for bar mitzvah. He was a frightening man to me because he sat opposite me at a little desk. He had a ruler, which he was ready to slap you on the back of the hand with if you made errors. His job was to teach me to read Hebrew. He would start with the alphabet. Aleph, bet, ghimel. You'd learn the alphabet, and then you'd learn simple words, and then pretty soon you can read enough Hebrew so that by the time you're thirteen, you can actually stand in front of the Torah scrolls, which are opened up on the desk in front of you at your confirmation, and

read your portion of the Torah on the day that you're being confirmed. It's quite a proud moment. But I had no idea that this rabbi was in fact a published poet and was living on the two little dollars he might get a week, when I'd bring it to him on Thursday afternoon or something. Life is so much more nuanced and complicated when you grow up and can look back on it. Going up those stairs to those moments with him was not an enriching experience, which drew me into the mysteries of Judaism. It was just something I had to do to get through the day, and I did it. It was an obligation to my parents. The singing, dancing, and respect and affection and loving that you see in the Jewish day school today is just galaxies away from that little attic experience. So we're making progress.

01-00:47:38

Cándida Smith: How many siblings do you have?

01-00:47:40

Wornick:

I have two sisters. I have an older sister by six years, and a younger sister by six years. My eldest sister is alive and well. She would be about eighty-six now. She lived her life on the East Coast and stayed on the East Coast. She married a plumber, and they had two daughters. They've had a very modest, but a very, very nice life. We were not close growing up, because she was a take-charge daughter. My memory of her is she was born with her hands on her hips and her finger drawn like a pistol, maybe. We struggled a little bit. She was a second mother. My younger sister by six years is living in Seattle. She married—incredible long story—a survivor from an internment camp who came to this country, not unlike my father's story, with his mother, who had kept him alive playing violin in the camps. He, at age fourteen or so, with very little English, was put into a Jewish school, a very traditional Jewish school, in New York. The end of the story is that, in two years, he was speaking English, and in another few years, he was going to Harvard on a scholarship, and then to Harvard Medical School on a scholarship. He went on to become a world-famous oncologist. He was a brilliant guy and a great brother-in-law. Very regrettably, he died very young last year. My sister is a very young widow. They had a wonderful life together. Remarkable story. His story is several books by themselves. As is hers. She went to college and became a math teacher. Very accomplished people, both of them.

01-00:50:10

Cándida Smith: The two of you rose out of the working class and became professional people. Were your parents encouraging you to think that you were going to go to college, you were going to get a professional career of some sort? What was the tenor of where you were supposed to be heading? Particularly you, as the only boy in the family.

01-00:50:43

Wornick:

This may be the most difficult question you've asked today, because it's not entirely knowable to me. Children and parents in that generation didn't have the kinds of conversations that we have today, regrettably. At least in my

family, and I think probably others as well in that generation. I think the answer is different for my mother and for my father. My father could not have told you exactly what he meant when he told you about his ambitions for me, because he really didn't move in that circle. In the eighteen or so years I lived at home, we never had dinner guests. We never had people come to the dinner table or visit on the weekend, other than family. It was a very dark Depression environment. My father was very rigid about my needing to take advantage of this incredible country where you can get out of bed and get on with doing anything you want to do. You just need to work for it. He expected great things for me. It was my job to pick them and get on with them, although, clearly, he imagined me in a white shirt and tie, and doing something professional. He never said straight out that you need to be an architect or an airplane pilot, or whatever he was thinking about, but his expectations were high.

My mother, curiously, who was rather well-read—read a lot of fiction, in fact—I think she hoped that I would get a good job where I could wear clean clothes and go to work and get paid every day, at a nice Woolworth's somewhere, as a salesperson or something. She just never imagined a very big life for me. I never felt good about that. In truth I suspect that my mother had problems about men, which stemmed in part from the way her father dealt with women in her house. This is my view of it. Even though my father came home at the end of the day exhausted and not clean—clean as saintly clean, but soiled from a day's work—the welcome he got from my mother was as if he were not clean. That troubled me, as it does to this very day. He was not treated in a way that I thought he should have been. It never troubled him for a minute. He adored her. Whether his relationship with her and her relationship with men interfered with her relationship with me, I don't know, but she was very close to both of her daughters, and she and I never got along very well, to the very end, to the very, very end. I don't really know why, although I do have to say that she probably deserved a little better treatment from her son than she got from me, because I did not fit in there at all, from the very beginning. It was very difficult. My father seemed to go with that and understand it. My mother did not ever understand it. She was very disapproving.

01-00:55:04

Cándida Smith: You didn't fit in your family?

01-00:55:06

Wornick:

No. I can't tell you how, and I know it will sound like a conceit, but no. This is a mistake. I don't belong here. Maybe I can close my eyes, and it will all go away. I actually had those kinds of fantasies. My interests were girls and music, parties and fun, and what an incredible world this is. There's so much to see and do. I didn't know about working and depressions. No. This was a household that was serious about keeping the floors clean and the shirts ironed. Why would anybody care? It didn't interest me. I don't know. I was

not a part of that group. I had an obligation to look after my little sister, which I carry to this day, and other than that, I needed to get out of there at the earliest opportunity, and did.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 wornick_ron_02_07-01-11.mp3

02-00:00:20

Cándida Smith: Let's shift gears a little and talk about your schools, the schools you went to, and what you got from them.

02-00:00:26

Wornick: Sure, that's a happy subject.

02-00:00:28

Cándida Smith: You mentioned that Malden had a really wonderful school system.

02-00:00:35

Wornick: It did. It's probably important to record. I don't think it was unusual, but the public schools, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, were extraordinary in almost every community in the U.S. that I visited. The discipline was very different than it is today.

[break in tape]

02-00:01:16

Cándida Smith: You were talking about public schools back in the forties and fifties and the discipline. I think that was the keyword that was left hanging.

02-00:01:29

Wornick: It's the part of the experience that comes first to mind because, from the very first grade, everything was done in rows. You would go into school and you'd get in a little line, and you'd march along the wall until you got to the door, and then you'd go into the door in a group and sit down and pay attention. Obedience was just a normal thing. That was part of the school system. It was a pleasant and loving experience, but compared to the disintegration we have in the public schools today, it's remarkable to go back and even imagine that this was going on in my lifetime. There were no pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, as there are today. First grade for me was my first experience in a public school. I went to a school that was only first and second grade. We had two classes of first grade, two classes of second grade. It was called the Judson School. It was actually only two blocks from home, so even though I was just a little six-year-old, I could pretty well walk my way there. Very, very strong impressions. One of the few things I can remember is the oil-stained floors, and the smell of the Lysol and the cleaning, and the pictures of the presidents hanging on the wall, and a clock ticking. It was probably our first walk into an institutional environment. In those days, the teachers were all single ladies, or seemed to be. They had no lives. I don't know whether

they just dropped out of the ceiling. We never knew who they were or if they had a husband or children. It was just a different world. I can't recall ever seeing a teacher actually drive up and get out of her car. They just materialized in the classes, and there they were. Miss Smith, Miss Jones. School was a very good experience for me because it was elevating. I liked it. School felt like a good place. First grade, second grade were great.

From the third grade on, I moved to another school, not very far away, Belmont School, that went third through sixth grade. There we began having experiences with actually playing outdoors on a playground. There was a little elevation of some extracurricular activities and sports and so on. Nothing very remarkable. I would have said that I was probably a little above average student, but not, by any means, special. I knew I was capable of doing well in school and I liked it. Then, in the seventh grade, I moved on to a junior high school, Lincoln Junior High School.

[break in tape]

02-00:04:53

Wornick:

The seventh grade was pivotal in my young life because really two things swept across the horizon, neither of which were apparent to me, but in hindsight, it's clear that there were two major distractions. You might even say a third, but two for sure. One is that I was about thirteen, and becoming a young man in the broadest sense. I was very, very interested in young ladies. It was a whole new category for me. Girlfriends and partying and doing things that you could do in a gang of boys and girls. All seemingly innocent and childlike, compared to the world we live in today, but a lot of pleasure. Having a rat pack of friends became a parade for me that I got on to. It swept me out of other things that might have been taking my attention.

In the second category, I had for years been dealing with a lot of respiratory problems, described very early as asthma, and then other kinds of respiratory sensitivities over the years. Medicine wasn't as sophisticated then as it is today. On one occasion, when I was at home and in bed, the doctor, which, in those days, took care of you, generally, at home. Dr. Paul Norman, an enormous human being, seemed to me, came in, god-like, into my bedroom, and told my mother that I probably needed to do something that would develop my lungs, because if I was going to put an end to these respiratory sensitivities, I should get stronger lungs. He said that she should think about getting me something like—I believe he said clarinet. Or maybe he said cornet. I'm not sure. My mother and father went off. It breaks my heart to think about it, because it would have been expensive for them, but following his instructions, they purchased a secondhand but very wonderful trumpet. It transformed my life, a huge change in my life for the next ten plus years.

02-00:08:18

Cándida Smith: You were thirteen at this time?

02-00:08:20

Wornick:

Yep. I cannot tell you why these things happen, but I picked it up and it was a part of me from the first moment. It wasn't very long before I was racing through the stages of learning and flying through the music books. I don't know how many months thereafter I was in the band, in the orchestra, and discovered that there was a musical side to me that was very important, that I really loved music. A lot of things began opening up for me. In short steps, I started a dance band. Because I was taking lessons at a classical music place, they put me in their classical orchestra, so I was able also to play trumpet in the performances that they had classical orchestra. I'm condensing this. This didn't all happen in the first month, but over the subsequent years, as I made my way through junior high school and high school, music of all kinds—chorus, singing, performing in variety shows, dance bands. I was making a living at it. I joined the musicians union. Music became an overwhelming part of my life. I really took to it like a magnet.

02-00:10:06

Cándida Smith:

So you became a professional musician for a while?

02-00:10:10

Wornick:

Yes, in the sense that I had a union card, but I would not say I ever really believed for a minute that it was going to be a way I could make my living. Plus, my mother and father were not happy about that as a career choice. I don't think they saw it in the way that maybe they could have or should have, but anyway, they might well have done me a favor by disapproving it, because I might have gone in that direction and I might well be sitting in the orchestra pit in some bar somewhere now. Who knows? Music definitely was born in the seventh grade, as well as a very normal instinct for a more full life, of the kind that you could have when you were a young, single male.

I did say a few minutes ago that there might have been a third thing, and that's that if you looked at my grades in the seventh grade, there was a fork in the road. There were a number of subjects over the previous six years that just seemed not to be interesting to me. I might have been following them dutifully, but by the seventh grade, I was independent enough to decide there were things I was going to do and things I wouldn't do. Starting from the seventh grade, I began to ignore ancient history, geography. I had a list of things that were just, "I don't need this." I did like reading, especially enlightening reading, and I loved the math and science classes. My grades went just gradually into a slope. By the ninth grade, I had managed to fail, I think, everything but one class. I've forgotten who that woman was. I think her name was Ms. Danoff. She had decided she liked me and couldn't fail me, so I got a D minus. My poor mother and father did not know what to do with me, because I had become a rebel, and was lost, in a sense. I had confidence that I could be on my own and look after myself, and I really didn't need all this other silliness. Knowing who ruled in Constantinople in 300 B.C. was not going to help me in the street. The things that interested me were things that I could use in my daily life. Not an unusual way of thinking from an

inexperienced, naïve young man. I think other men might have gone through that. I had a worse case of it than many.

To give credit where it's due, the public school systems were just absolutely spectacular in the sense that, in high school, we had Latin, meteorology, aerodynamics, advanced algebra. Everything you could possibly want to prepare yourself for a higher education. As I made my way out of the disaster of the ninth grade, which was just barely so—I never did get held back, because my grades—I could always get them back to Cs when I needed to. By the time I got into high school, I began putting in enough effort to get my grades back up again. Not to levels that would distinguish me as a scholar, but certainly good enough to stay in the top third or so of the class. High school was a very, very formative experience. Great teachers, great education. Great pity that that product isn't available to young high school people in the public schools anymore. I don't know firsthand that it isn't, but my impression is that it is not.

02-00:14:59

Cándida Smith: I think it depends on the community.

02-00:15:01

Wornick: Most of those years were just a story of a young man making his way through to try to find out who he is and what his future might be about.

Just to stay on the music part of this for a moment or two, by the time I was finishing high school, I had gotten enough of a reputation as a musician that I had my own dance band, which was capable of earning pretty good wages, in that I booked my own jobs. I also worked for other dance bands. There was a wonderful system in play at that time, so that all the bands who were playing graduation parties and spring hops and celebrations of one kind or another, were playing essentially the same two or three hundred big band songs that were popular at that time. We called that music boom-chick, in the sense that it was boom-chick-boom-chick-boom-chick-boom-chick, and you danced to it. Because we all played the same several hundred songs, it was possible to go on a dance job. For example, I would sit in, oftentimes, with a band called Gene Dennis. When I did, it would be a band that might be a drum, piano, bass, saxophone, and trumpet. They would play a song, and when it would come to the next song, you would simply give a code signal to the piano player to change the key. This is one sharp. This is three flats. They would just make their way into that key, and I would go into "Blue Moon" or some song of that time. After two notes, everybody knows what I'm doing, and the band falls in behind. So everybody listening thinks we play together all the time. We could be total strangers. There was a large group of musicians making their living in this way, playing in dance bands, sitting in and filling in and making music for a party. It worked very, very well. For a young man, it put a significant amount of money in my pocket. Not huge amounts, but by the

standards of where I was living and the age I was at, it was a very attractive income.

02-00:18:07

Cándida Smith: It would be all disposable income, too, pretty much.

02-00:18:09

Wornick: Yes, exactly. It hadn't occurred to me until you put the question. Right, I'm sure I never reported. Everything was cash, cash, cash.

02-00:18:20

Cándida Smith: It sounds like you played everything that you needed to play, but what kind of music did you enjoy playing the most? What were the tunes or the styles that were most meaningful to you?

02-00:18:35

Wornick: I wouldn't choose between them, because they're both very special and they both mean a lot to me to this day. On the classical side, I had no classical education in music whatever, although by the time I got to college—I'll come to that in a minute—I did begin to do a little music study. In high school, I really didn't know a whole lot about it. We didn't play that kind of music at home. There was little or no music at home. Sitting in with that orchestra and reading and playing the score, the trumpet parts to these pieces of music, it was the first time I really sat in and bathed inside of Beethoven and war horse kinds of pieces of music that would have been played in those days. It was wonderful. It's especially powerful to sit inside of an orchestra and be surrounded by all the musicians. The music just vibrates in your chest. You feel it in your body. You really are a part of it. There's something team-like about it. You have a responsibility to show up and hit it cleanly. I found that very exciting and very respectful, in the sense that people really had a reverence for that kind of music. My instructor, his name was Ed Addleman. He thought that I might have a career in music, and so he prepared me to play Rossini's "Inflammatus," a very difficult piece, and also a trumpet concerto that I performed with the Weltman Conservatory Orchestra at a school of music in Boston. Very old. A hundred plus years old. Jordan Hall was the name of the hall. I forget the name of the school. I responded to that, and to this day, my wife, Anita, and I go to a lot of symphonies. That little seedling stayed with us forever. That was a great gift. The music director in high school also had plucked me out of the group and made me first chair trumpet player. He coached me, and he put me in the junior varieties to compete against other acts. He encouraged me to become a trumpet-playing entertainer. All of these things coalesced to make a music career. I think you asked about the kind of music we played in the bands. It was fundamentally the music you would have heard if you were listening to the recordings of the 1940s, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, that we translated into small bands that played the same music for dancing. Most people could sing along. They knew the music and the lyrics. Sometimes the band would sing the lyrics.

02-00:22:52

Cándida Smith: Did you like jazz, like Duke Ellington?

02-00:22:54

Wornick: I loved it, but I don't think I had the calling. I was probably a little too uptight to improvise. I tried and I was fairly good at it, but I couldn't really rip it the way I could see other people could do. I never just got loose enough to just go for it. We played a lot of Dixieland, but I couldn't just really improvise the way maybe Dizzy Gillespie would have done.

02-00:23:22

Cándida Smith: You knew bebop? You were listening to bebop?

02-00:23:25

Wornick: It came later, but yes.

02-00:23:30

Cándida Smith: You mentioned on the phone, the first time we talked, that you had a job when you were thirteen, a part-time job, from which you learned a great deal. Was that something different than the music career?

02-00:23:49

Wornick: Yes. You introduce a whole category that I don't have on my list of things to discuss with you, but it is probably worth a minute's thought. That first job, I was certainly not much more than thirteen or fourteen, but I would take the bus from Malden, Mass., to Revere, Mass., which was a waterfront city not far away. I was, I think, paid thirty cents an hour to reach into a huge ice-filled container. This was an oceanfront boulevard where there were all kinds of little amusements and refreshment stands. One of these refreshment stands had soft drinks. They kept all the bottled drinks in this tub full of ice. If somebody wanted a root beer, I had to go in there and find a root beer, or a Coke, or a ginger ale, or a Seven Up, or what have you. A mindless way of doing it, but anyway, my task was to find it and get it out, pop it open, and put it up on the counter.

It was very, very satisfying for me to earn some money. Why I chose to do that, why I took that bus and went there, what motivation that was about, I cannot tell you. But I was never, from that moment on, without at least one, sometimes two, extra income employments. It must surely have been what I saw in my father. It just seemed to me that he loved productivity. He loved being useful, making things. You had an obligation to get up out of bed and do something. I probably was conflicted about that because I think I liked the idea of working, but I liked my own choices of what I might do with my time. I don't know. I'm no psychiatrist, and I have had no time with psychiatrists. I don't know if anybody could explain it. I always had a job. Many of them, very, very mindless jobs as I made my way.

That was the very first one. Most of them are very forgettable, as in working in a drugstore, working in a warehouse. Maybe one of the most amusing of the

jobs, as a freshman or sophomore in college, I passed an advertisement for a chemist in a nearby factory. Well, I was no chemist, but I was studying chemistry. I thought I would go down and apply for the job. It turned out to be an asphalt factory. The job required that, after putting on a very long, white coat, I would go up a ladder inside this not very attractive, very dark commercial space—pipes and valves and tanks all over the place—and stand on a big metal rack about thirty feet in the air. I had four tanks around me. I guess I was probably eighteen or nineteen years old, first or second year of college. The task was, very simply, to fill the first tank halfway up with water. When it was full, I'd go back down the ladder and shut off the water. Then I would turn on the steam and start the water up in the second tank. When the water was full there, I would go down, turn on the steam there, shut off the steam in the first tank, because by now the water is warm in the first tank. I would open another valve, which would allow a certain amount of caustic soda to come into that tank. Then I'd go back up the ladder and start up the third tank. By the time I got to the fourth tank, it was now time to run down a ladder, across the factory floor, up to the floor above me, and pour in three bags of some other material into tank one. It was like a Lucille Ball skit. Once this thing is going, I was going at full speed, up and down valves and so on, and the water and the steam and the bags and so on. The last step is to put in—gosh, I don't know. It was some white, gummy stuff. When I was through, you had a tank of black, hot asphalt. Step number eleven in tank number one is to close off everything, open a valve, turn on a pump, and pump this whole tank of asphalt into a huge storage tank out in the back of this plant.

I did this for four or five hours after college, every day for some large number of weeks. One day, the engineer, which means the man who sat by the steam boiler to make sure there was steam for this operation always available, came running in, terrorized, to report that asphalt was pouring out all over the yard and in his office, and that somehow or other, somebody had forgot to check—as in me—on the height of the asphalt in the big storage tank in the back. I had forgot that that also has to be checked, and I overflowed one of those gigantic tanks. For the first, and I'm happy to say only, time in my life, I was fired, and rightly so. I had messed up. I was underpaid by about fifty times what they should have paid for this job. But it was a wonderful experience for me, and after I got asphalt off of my clothes and the smell off of my body, I was glad to put it behind me. That might have been one of the last of those kinds of jobs. The only reason I dwell on this theme of jobs at all is that, to this day, I still don't sit still very comfortably. It's a curse and a weakness of character in some ways. I have a woodworking studio here, and I have gardens here, and I have vineyards here. When I'm here, I am generally very well occupied and relatively productive. If I'm not, I feel guilty about it. This has been the nature of my life. In some ways, I feel that's probably a good thing. On the other hand, I do see a lot of my peers who have learned to be club members and play dominoes and golf, and are at peace with themselves and their friends and families and bodies. I envy that. It's a discomfort to me that I can't do that

better than I do. My father never—well, in truth, he might have had that problem, because after he retired, he would go out for long walks and find job sites and sign on. My mother would scold him. He would work for a month or two and then quit again, and then sign on again. Into his seventies, and he lived deep into his seventies, he continued to sign up for work. He needed to be kept busy. I don't mean to put the blame on my father, but I do think I inherited some of that need to stay occupied.

02-00:32:32

Cándida Smith: Technically, you're a child of the Depression. You come of age as a young man basically at the beginning of the longest economic expansion in the history of this country, a period of tremendous opportunity. That must have affected the way you think about things. If you wanted to do something, you could do it. It wasn't necessarily a question of fear.

02-00:33:06

Wornick: Yes, yes. I don't know that I would have ever seen it the way you and I can see it sitting here today, in retrospect, but there's no question about it. Men were coming back from the war in 1945, and for the next twenty or thirty years, it was just an explosion of everything. Everything was growing and improving, from infrastructure to companies and careers and universities and knowledge. You just pick a path and get on it. It was quite wonderful.

02-00:33:46

Cándida Smith: I wanted to ask you about anti-Semitism at this period, because the twenties and thirties is classically understood as the worst period of anti-Semitism in the United States. In the forties and fifties, it was still present, but at least being acknowledged and maybe dealt with. Was it something that was a factor in your personal experience?

02-00:34:19

Wornick: No. In truth, for reasons that I have no way to explain, it was never a problem for me, ever. I really don't know why. Growing up, we had friends, black and white, and every religious order during the day. From dusk on, dating and serious friends, right back into the confines of our Jewish mentality. I didn't think that was strange. I thought everybody else did the same thing. The language at the dinner table conveyed who we were. My father felt that way, and my mother. But all through the daytime and every activity that we had, we didn't think at all about it. We just circulated with everybody. I can remember, in the earliest years, when I would walk into someone else's house who might have a lot of religious artifacts on the walls, and I would see crosses on the walls and so on. I would pause for a little moment and feel that I had just stepped into a foreign country, so to speak. It was the mindset. In the main, I never heard a word of anti-Semitism all through the public schools and college. I knew all the stories, I read about it. Clearly, we knew which companies, which schools, which clubs. Even in the public school, there was a Jewish fraternity and an everybody-else fraternity. In high school, a Jewish boys fraternity—isn't that interesting?—called Alpha Mu, a group of Jewish

boys. I don't know how unattractive that must have been, but anyway, there was a group of Jewish boys. There was another fraternity in which we were not welcome.

02-00:36:51

Cándida Smith: You were definitely not welcome?

02-00:36:53

Wornick: It wasn't hostile. It was just what it was. It didn't trouble me in the slightest. I don't know why. I can't quite explain that now. It's not very well thought-out. It may have been the world we lived in. It was the world we lived in. It's as if we were all preparing to go in different directions somehow. We weren't, but it seemed that way.

02-00:37:27

Cándida Smith: When you dated, did you date only Jewish girls?

02-00:37:29

Wornick: Yes. In *Goodbye, Columbus*, Philip Roth, fantasized that the more adventuresome girls were probably not Jewish, because Jewish girls, of course, would be so virtuous. If I had an occasional date out of the faith, it would have been unusual, just because we were thrown together socially so much. It wasn't an overt thing. It's just what was. We lived geographically, and social organizations were mostly that way. The dances that I played at were Jewish community center dances. That's the way the world was at that time.

02-00:38:34

Cándida Smith: You didn't play at a Protestant church?

02-00:38:36

Wornick: We didn't get invited, come to think of it.

02-00:38:46

Cándida Smith: You were in high school when the state of Israel was formed. Was that an important thing for you at the time?

02-00:38:51

Wornick: Exceedingly so. Yes, yes, it was. That was 1948, of course. I would have been sixteen. There were several critical events along those years when I just stopped in the street and took a breath. Even though I didn't really understand very much of it, I knew it was huge. The first moment was when Roosevelt died in the late spring of '45. He became president in 1932, the year I was born, so he was the only president I had ever known for the first thirteen years of my life. When he died, at my age, thirteen, it was like the lights had gone out. Of course, the country did go into mourning. It was a tremendous loss. I remember the intense concern I felt about how the world would adjust to the loss of our leader in '45. The second moment of that kind was the end of the war, because all the war years were extremely terrorizing. We had civil defense patrols up and down the street, air raid practices where we would have

to shut out all the lights and pull the drapes down and hide in the dark while the sirens would go off. It would not be unusual to have a dream at night about German tanks coming down my street and doing God knows what with innocent people. War was a very almost tangible terror for us growing up in those years. The stories were just unimaginable horrors. When it was over, it was a cause of great celebration.

02-00:40:52

Cándida Smith: Did you know young men who went off to war and never came back?

02-00:40:58

Wornick:

I did not. We had a few uncles who had been in the service and had come back, but I did not know anybody who had been lost in the war, no. Then, as you say, 1948, which, as profound as it was, was not as well understood as it should have been. The story of what was going on at that very moment was not very clear. The popular press in the U.S. hadn't really covered the plight of all those millions of Jews and their attempts to get into the U.S., to get into Israel. They were turned back everywhere. It was only the subsequent years everybody got onboard and tried to help and we began to understand what was going on with this small band of Jews in Israel.

The moment of the statehood was less profound than it probably should have been, because I don't know that we fully grasped it. Well, I wouldn't have. I was sixteen years old. I had, at that moment, belonged to a little group called Habonim. I have, in more recent years, tried to find out who Habonim was. As nearly as I can tell, it was a leftist underground movement, trying to recruit young men to Zionism. It spread out into Jewish communities all over the country. I liked it because they were doing crafts and met in a place that I liked to go to, in a little area near where I lived. I knew nothing about the politics and gave it no thought at all. It was a mindless experience, which gave rise to my wondering how many other people who had connected to the early socialist connections of Israel without connecting socialism and Israel and got themselves into trouble. Which I probably would have, had I been asked did I ever belong to Habonim. Yes, I did, but did I know what I was doing? Probably not. I didn't get to Israel, however, for another twenty-five years.

02-00:43:37

Cándida Smith: That says something. But you were very busy as well. I wanted, because you met Anita in high school. I wanted to touch on that as well.

02-00:43:55

Wornick:

Anita and I didn't become significantly acquainted for another four years. Anita is four years younger than me. That would mean that when I was a junior or senior in high school, she would have been in junior high school. Only because I had a band—if she were sitting here, she would tell you she knew about my band. Girls, of course, are always interested. In those days, trumpet players were almost as popular as guitar players are today. Anita had an interest in the band, and, she would say, in me. That progressed over the

years. Through my years in college, we had an occasional crossing, sometimes as a date, sometimes just in the same group of people. Toward my junior and senior year, she began dating my closest friend, Herb Wolk. It wasn't until I was out of college and in the army, and I came back on leave a year into the army that I discovered this nineteen-year-old, fully-grown, amazing, beautiful young lady. Very quickly, that became a marriage. That's a lovely story, which I hope to return to.

02-00:45:39

Cándida Smith: We will return to it.

02-00:45:39

Wornick: But it did not really happen in high school, or, for that matter, in college.

02-00:45:48

Cándida Smith: Historians now tell us that dating actually began in the 1940s. It didn't exist prior. So you're part of the first generation that began dating. It would be interesting to hear how it is that you knew what to do. You were all improvising as you were going along. What did dating mean at that time?

02-00:46:16

Wornick: It was an exploration, I think, for both boys and girls. Endocrinologically, we were all young teenagers and feeling things that were new. I can only guess what goes on in a young woman's head and body. The idea of having intimacy and close connection with someone whose fragrance you enjoyed, or conversation you enjoyed, or just the warmth of the body, it was a new experience. It began, in those days, in the most innocent of ways. The first moment when you might actually take her hand, it would be electric. I tell you, your hair would go up. It would be a powerful charge. It might be considerable time before you actually put your arm around her in a way that might not be mistaken for anything but an embrace. The steps that one would take when you were thirteen or fourteen or fifteen years old, I'm sure a fourteen-year-old, as we're sitting here today, they'd be falling down, convulsed with laughter, but this was the world that we lived in.

The friendship you had with boys was very real and very powerful. Those confidences were precious. They were an important part of our lives. But a girlfriend was another whole thing. Only the system that creates the continuity of mankind will probably be able to tell you why that is so, but there's no question that there is a powerful system at work, such that a fourteen or a fifteen-year-old will do anything to find somebody who can get his father's car and scrape together enough money to take a date to the dance ballroom, where there's a big band playing. You go to this wonderful place, in Noriega Park, and you dance to a big band with a ball and the light spinning around at the top, and sit on sofas and private spaces, and dance for three or four hours. Dancing was not an athletic event. It was just hold on and talk to one another dancing. There was a certain amount of taking advantage of where you might reach, but gosh, trust me, nothing very serious at that age. Nothing of any

significance was going on, but it was very important to have a beautiful girlfriend, and somebody whose company you really enjoyed and wanted to be with. There were varieties of kinds. As a boy, I remember there were the girls that you cared about and maybe even thought about as long-term mates, and there were the kind that were clearly dangerous, and who knows where this could go. That was a different date, but that was also something you might plan and work on and even plan on how you could work on it, even though it was 90 percent fantasy. Exploration. Just finding your way into relationships with ladies. It was a wonderful time of my life. I loved it all.

02-00:50:38

Cándida Smith: So you decided to go to college. How did you wind up at Tufts?

02-00:50:45

Wornick: I found myself leaving Malden High School, 1950, with a very ordinary record. I clearly was not going to go to a very distinguished college, and so I enrolled at Northeastern University, which at that time was a working-class college. Later became a university, and a pretty darn good one, but at that time it was a relatively small college and it was catering mostly to returning vets. If you could walk and pay the fees, you could pretty well get in there. I chose to go to Northeastern. Once I got there, other than music, I eliminated every single other distraction from my life. I think I had the maturity then to be able to do that. I worked really hard there. I can't tell you what my grades were, I don't recall, but they were good enough that I applied, after the first semester, to Tufts, and was accepted at Tufts. Mid-freshman year, I transferred to Tufts. It was a huge upgrade in quality of education and the demands on me. From that moment on, I was battling to catch up with how to read, how to study, how to be a student. It was a whole new experience for me. Northeastern, I was able to bang out easily. Tufts was a hard go for me, and I worked hard there. It never got easier, but I got good grades there.

[End Audio File 2]

Interview #2 July 8, 2011

Begin Audio File 3 wornick_ron_03_07-08-11

03-00:03:36

Cándida Smith: You mentioned you had a few thoughts from last session.

03-00:03:58

Wornick: I failed to comment on my summer experiences, which I would like to get in this recollection because they were very important to me. It began, actually, in the ninth grade, the summer of the ninth grade, when a cousin of mine mentioned that there was an opportunity to work, our band, in a place in Framingham, Massachusetts. My cousin was our drummer. The place in Framingham turned out to be the Workmen's Circle Camp. Workmen's Circle was an organization of mostly socialist Jews, who, all over the country, set up these organizations in their own little communities, in an effort to help one another with loans and whatever help they might need to settle in and make their way in the U.S. By the time I was getting out of the ninth grade, the organizations were looking after some very advanced older people who were no longer early immigrants. They had a mini-resort in Framingham, with a lake and dining room and entertainment. I went in for the interview, and fortunately I was able to get my band employed there. The condition for the employment was that I would also have to serve as a headwaiter, which was not an unusual task for a fifteen-year-old. I was very happy to take on that job.

For the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, those four years of growing up, my friends and I, our band, worked at the Workmen's Circle Camp in Framingham. We listened to a lot of lectures about socialism. Most memorable for me would be Norman Thomas, who was a regular there. Practically, without exception, most of the members were of that background, a family tradition that they had brought with them from Eastern Europe. The food was very traditional Jewish food. Work was very hard. We would start early in the morning, setting up tables, serve and break down breakfast, be through by ten, and by eleven o'clock we're back in to start for lunch, and, you can imagine, through the day. Two nights a week, the band played. That was a great pleasure for me. Anyway, those summers were wonderful memories. I made a lot of very good friends. There was a serious amount of dating. Even though we worked very hard and made very good tip income, it was a great memory.

Curiously, the same thing happened as I was leaving high school. I'd been trying to get a regular job as a trumpet player with the Gene Dennis Orchestra, which was one of the most significant orchestras in Boston at that time. Gene offered me a job working as a backup trumpet player, because he only needed two and he had two regulars, at the Berkshire Country Club, up in Wingdale, New York. I got in touch with the country club and determined that I could also be a waiter up there because I had the waiting experience. For another four years, it happens, the four years of college, I worked in the Berkshire

Country Club. That was the same experience all over again, except that these were young people coming up from New York, young singles. Seven nights a week, spectacular entertainment. A hypnotist and comedian. A traveling summer theater and what all. All day long, attending to tables, and dating in the evenings, and free time during the day.

Happily, the income from those summers more than paid for my college experience. It's funny that this should stay in my head, but I remember the numbers. I had two tables of ten customers on each table, and a typical tip was \$10 a week per person. I would get \$100 per table, per week, which was \$200, and I was there for ten weeks, which was \$2,000. I had no expenses whatever. Went up there by bus and they covered all my food and lodgings. So I came away each summer with \$2,000 at a time when the tuition was more like \$450 or \$500 a year. Those summers were very wonderful experiences. I made a lot of great friends. I did a lot of dating. I did a lot of music. I worked hard. I made money. A fulfilling episode for me that I think back on with a big smile.

03-00:09:33

Cándida Smith: The Worker's Circle, the Arbeiter Ring, was an important part of Jewish-American culture, yet it sounds like it wasn't part of your family's life. In a way, it must have been another way of looking at what Jewish life was in the United States. Maybe an eye-opener for you.

03-00:09:54

Wornick: Absolutely. "Arbeiter Ring" is exactly how you say it. The Arbeiter Ring was a small group of people who were holdouts on a point of view that was nothing like what I grew up with in my family. My father was, in fact, a contradiction in that he was a union member, but a very, very independent-thinking guy, and a Republican because he did not trust government. Government had never, in his view, been good for the Jews. Nothing big had ever been good for the Jews. We were better off just left to our own devices. Local government was mostly controlled by the Irish Catholic neighborhoods, and Sunday was very sacrosanct to then, whereas most of his friends wanted Sunday to be a time when they could shop and open their little stores, so there was a difference of point of view about how things should be done. My father thought that the less government, the better, and I'm going to make my way here; just stay out of my way. He was an independent guy in that way, which I totally respected. Nothing about socialism appealed to him.

Arbeiter Ring was an interesting experience, plus, really, the first time I was away from home for any extended period of time on my own, even though it was only for the summer. At age fifteen, that was an interesting experience. I did a lot of learning. I think I did.

03-00:11:41

Cándida Smith: When we left off last time, you were about to enter Tufts. It sounds like that's really where you woke up and became a disciplined student.

03-00:11:58
Wornick:

This would probably be true if you were writing this book. In my life, it didn't actually happen that way. When I left Northeastern midyear and transferred over to Tufts, I was extremely excited about that and very optimistic. In fact, in many ways, it was all very positive, because the upgrade in the quality of the courses was extraordinary. In fact, it was a problem, because it was a smorgasbord of opportunities for me. Suddenly, a lot of things appealed to me that I hadn't really thought very much about before. If you were to pull out my records of those first couple of years there, you will find that I was taking everything from journalism to organic chemistry. In other words, I was still very conflicted. I loved English literature and philosophy. I took a course in orchestration. Whatever I saw, I read about it, and I said, boy, I would enjoy that. I did enjoy most of it, but it was clear to me that the courses I was doing best at were mostly math and science. I might have been enjoying some of the other classes more, but probably not showing the talent that other people had in those arenas. As I made my way through those courses, I was beginning to think that my life is probably going to have to be in the direction of something to do with science.

My father, of course, being the typical B-movie, first generation Jewish immigrant, had already decided that his son ought to be a doctor. He didn't make a thing about it, but it was clear that that was high on his list. It never seemed to me that it was something that I could do very well. I don't know why I thought that, but I didn't. In particular, I always had a hard time remembering long lists of words and names and the kinds of things you have to memorize for chemistry and biology and animal physiology, where it's just remembering hundreds of muscles and where they insert and originate. It didn't appeal to me. How things worked was far more fascinating to me. In fact, the only thing I considered as a career at that very early time was endocrinology. I could hardly believe that the entire body functioned on these mysterious little hormones that move around from one place and the other to your body, and they control everything from thirst to hunger to IQ to attitudes. It was just amazing. But you don't go from there to endocrinology. It was clearly another four, five, or six years after college to turn that into a career.

I would say that the four years of college were spent experimenting and finding my way, and doing lots and lots of jobs. I did a lot of music. I did a lot of playing during the week and weekends. Occasional other odd jobs. Partly because I came in as a transfer student, I never really entirely got into the social swing there. Plus, I was a commuter. Most of the students were living on campus. It took me a little time to settle in there. I had a small group of friends, but it wasn't a great time in my life where I was really making a lot of good friends and doing a lot of productive things. It was something I needed to do, and I was going to do it, and do it as well as I could, but I certainly am not terribly proud that I distinguished myself at Tufts, necessarily. I did not.

03-00:16:18

Cándida Smith: Did you have ideas about what you were going to do after you got your B.A.?

03-00:16:26

Wornick:

In fact, it's probably pretty clear that I didn't. When I graduated from Tufts, instead of going off to a career, I elected to do one more summer at the Berkshire Country Club. It was very enticing, because the income was good and there were a lot of young women. I had a huge gang of very good friends up there that I was happy to return to. Then, when that summer was over in 1954, there was a movement in the government to wrap up the Korean GI Bill, which was going to close, as I recall it, in December of that year. The bill seemed very attractive to me because it provided a modest monthly income, and it would pay for graduate school tuition and other kinds of things. In retrospect, very small numbers, but very large numbers if you have absolutely not a penny in your pocket and no income to speak of. There was a draft on at that time, 1954, 1955. It was drying up, but it was a little chancy. I had been on a deferment because I was in college; I had been able to be deferred through my graduation. There was a possibility that they might notice that I had been deferred and pluck me in, and off I would go. I didn't want that to happen after the bill had run out, so I considered the possibility of volunteering for a two-year term as a regular draftee into the army, but that was just one of the options.

When the summer ended, two of my good friends and I took an apartment in New York City. One was a waiter who worked part-time as a comedian and was extremely funny. His name was Jack Levine. He went under the stage name of Jack Frost. Second guy, Jesse Oliver, had been a bartender at the Berkshire Country Club. He had lost his wife in childbirth. A terrific human being who I was very fond of. He, Jack, and I took an apartment at 130 West Forty-seventh Street in New York City. We shared one double bedroom, one single, a tiny little place right around the corner from the Palace Theater. Not a nine iron from Times Square. Lights blinking, horns blowing. Everything you needed was available outside your door. A very exciting place to be. We settled in there to make our way. Jack was going to find a career in show business, and he actually vanished. He went off on interviews, and from one interview he never came back. He never even picked up his clothes. We were in touch with his family and found out he was okay, but he just couldn't pay the rent or something and just peeled off. Jesse and I continued on that fall.

This is a long way to come back and answer your question when you were asking what was I thinking I would do. I thought I would do something creative, and so I tried to find ways to get into theater or music or writing, or something where something out of my credentials might work. Anyway, as you might well expect, I was just one of I don't know how many millions of young people who go to New York and discover that this is a very naïve plan. In need of continuing to fund our very modest expenses, because we shared—gosh, I think it was maybe eighty dollars a month rent—and we were eating

spaghetti and ketchup on occasion for dinner. We were living very carefully and very close. But I needed some income, and so I ended up taking a job in a fats and oils factory in South Kearny, New Jersey. It was not exactly the glamorous job I was thinking about, but I did enjoy it.

03-00:21:33

Cándida Smith: What were you doing?

03-00:21:34

Wornick:

I was in the laboratory doing oil analysis. They were buying the rendered lard from meat plants. They refined it and moved it off to soap factories. Soap is made from lye and animal fat, and they were making one of the ingredients. I can tell you today, fifty or sixty years later, that the idea of going to work and earning a salary and doing a day's work in a laboratory, I knew I liked that. There was something about that, even though it was certainly not the kind of factory or laboratory I would necessarily have chosen to work in. It wasn't terribly enlightened. I had a very hard time getting them to clean up the lab and shape up their act, because I knew what I thought they ought to do, and they weren't thinking my way. Typical of a young man. But that was a good experience. Anyway, I knew that wasn't going to work for me, and so, to get to the end of this story, I had not found my way, through college, through that summer, and opted to take two years in the U.S. Army. I volunteered, and they took me.

In December of 1954, in the winter of December of '54, twenty or so of us in Malden, Mass., boarded a bus. A dismal day. I don't remember it as being a dismal time, though, although it happened that, for some reason, the twenty of us didn't know each other very well. I think we came from different backgrounds. You would have thought we'd all know one another pretty well, but we didn't. The bus went from Malden to Fort Dix, New Jersey. In Fort Dix, the first of a series of adventures begins. Because so many people had volunteered for the military to get in before the bill expired, they were ill prepared for us. In the freezing cold winter of Fort Dix, they didn't have mattresses, blankets, or uniforms. They didn't have sufficient food. They were unprepared to welcome us there, and it was very uncomfortable. We were assigned to a barracks, and it was cold. The very first night, we were sleeping in our civilian clothes, as best we could on the few things we might have brought along. As I recall, it may have been with a blanket spread out over a metal spring. Not really a mattress.

The only reason I tell you this story is that, when you're moving further away from home and you're on your own, most of the discovery is about yourself. In that first night, I found that there were other young men in the group who were really terrorized. There were one or two who actually cried. You could hear them sob in the night. It was a little spooky because we were in a very, very foreign place where there were very rigid rules. For reasons that I cannot begin to explain to you, because I had not lived a very tough, aggressive

neighborhood life—just hadn't—I do remember thinking, this is okay. I can handle this. This is going to be all right. I, somehow or other, knew that. From that night forward, for the next year or two through the U.S. Army, I prospered in a way that I had never, ever prospered at anything before. In fact, I actually considered a career in the military. It just seemed to work for me.

03-00:25:59

Cándida Smith: This insight came during the basic training period?

03-00:26:05

Wornick:

It did. We were at Fort Dix for a very short time, and then they moved us to Fort Bragg, where I took my first real basic training. I don't know how these things happen, but you're organized into a company of one hundred, and then, under that, into platoons of twelve or fifteen. For some reason, the sergeant who ran the show plucked me out of the crowd and made me a platoon leader. That's about one-thousandth of an inch over the very bottom of the rung, but nonetheless, going to the mess hall, going to the various things we had to do, I marched my little group down to the mess hall. I was in charge of these twelve people. By that time, we were getting uniforms, and we were starting to feel militarily. Although some were fitting in very well, some were not fitting in at all, and some were having serious difficulties with it. It was a terrible strip-down when you have to essentially blow away your hair and all of your identity. You become a number, and they very well know what they're doing. And it's worked very well to get you in a frame of mind where you just do what you're told to do in a mindless way.

Fort Bragg was a good experience for me. I prospered during basic training, and I had a very good feeling about it. In fact, after the basic training was over, I was given a very short leave, a two-day weekend leave, to go back to Malden. Several of my friends had heard that I was thinking about signing up for OCS, which was an officers training protocol. I showed up back in Malden with my fitted shirts and uniform, looking like, this is the new me, guys. Get used to it. This is a good life. I like this. I can really do stuff here. They took me off to a bar in Lynn, Massachusetts, called Conte's. It was a memorable time, which I won't forget. Marvin Lander, Herb Wolk, and a third one, whose name doesn't come into my head, essentially sat me at a table, and their intention was not to turn me loose until I came to my senses. No sensible, educated Jewish boy could possibly put their life in the hands of the military. What was wrong with me? With apologies to everybody who has had distinguished careers in the military—I have the greatest respect for that, and probably would have enjoyed a life had I gone in that direction—but they gave me good reasons to pause and not move too quickly in that direction, and maybe save it for a later time. I should have understood that the people who were giving me this advice were the least qualified to have ever considered a career in military, and so that was not necessarily a good point of view to have had.

Anyway, I came back from that leave deciding I would not be going into a career in the military.

03-00:30:16

Cándida Smith: I see you had two pretty interesting assignments after you got out of basic training. First, you went into the airborne band division, which seems a natural assignment, given your musical skills. Then there was the shift to the laboratory. It seems like that must have been a very important shift in your life, a decision in your life.

03-00:30:48

Wornick: It was, and that four or five month period is very intense. After the basic training, the very next step is I was assigned to head up a water purification team before I got placed in the band. I was still at Fort Bragg. My job was take a crew of four or five people and go into dreadful places where they were going to be doing training exercises. I had to take water out of a swamp or some terrible stream, pump it into tanks and purify it, get it ready for drinking water. Now, I was actually doing a little chemistry, doing a little mechanical pumping stuff, running a little team of people. I was doing it pretty well. In fact, we were getting it done so quickly that we had enough time to go into the nearest towns and do a little visiting. We walked in from there, because it was never very far to the nearest village. I think we walked in. That's how I remember it. I remember that they were hillbilly places, where people would come in with their own jar to get the local brew and sit along a bench on the outside edges of the wall of this little drinking spot. All the rest of my life had been roaming. Now I was, for the first time, doing things, and I was responsible for something. I felt pretty good.

After the water purification thing, I got transferred, as you say, in the Eighty-second Army Band. Glorious thing to happen to a young man, because Airborne, if you're a young, single man, is just the ultimate position in the military. You have the most attractive uniforms. Men and women pause to look at the jump boots and the gear, all the decoration. You look like a great war hero. I thoroughly enjoyed the Eighty-second Airborne, because it had a great band and it had the same discipline that I had grown to appreciate. But after two or three months of this service, a rule was changed that was going to require that the band go through jump school, which hadn't been a previous requirement.

03-00:33:26

Cándida Smith: Parachutes.

03-00:33:28

Wornick: A hundred and thirty musicians, which is how many there were, put in for immediate transfer. Not a one of us had any interest in jumping out of planes. Uniforms, good. Band, good. Jumping, no, no. I put in for a transfer from the Eighty-second Airborne, and I got moved, before New York, to Fort Stewart in Hinesville, Georgia. Eightieth Army Band. The only reason I dwell on this

is that two things happened while I was in the Eightieth Army Band. One was, after settling in there, I spotted an ad on the little board in our barracks that a local dance band was in need of a trumpet player. I responded to that. I was interviewed by a woman named Emma Kelly. It turned out Emma Kelly was operating an all-girl orchestra. I don't think she'd meant it to be, necessarily. She had two daughters who played instruments, and they had friends who played instruments, but they didn't have anybody who played trumpet, and would I play trumpet? Anyway, I signed up for that gig. I became as devoted to Emma Kelly as I've ever been to anybody in my life. She was an amazing lady. She had eleven children. She worked very hard.

03-00:35:29

Cándida Smith: Was she in her fifties? Forties, maybe?

03-00:35:34

Wornick:

I'm going to say forties, because the story ends up when I see her, thirty-five something years later. Anyway, several times a week, I got picked up in her car with a gang of girls, and we went off to do jobs in these funny little towns, in grange halls and what have you. The best part of it is that she knew every song that had ever been written. She was a traveling fake book. Musicians carry a thing called a fake book. You just turn the pages and know what you want to call up next. She had a left hand that could get a paraplegic up on the floor dancing. She just had a piano that moved. People could not not dance if she was playing piano. She made a very successful dance. It was great to be in the band with her.

After I'd been there for a little time, I went on leave in September of that first year. I was still in the first year of the two years in the Army. I went on leave, back home, to Malden. It happened to be at the time of the Jewish high holidays, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. In Malden, the tradition was that all the young people would gather at the temple that the family went to, but it wasn't considered seemly to go inside. The parents did that. The children visited on the street with one another, because we hadn't seen each other in some time. I say children, but young adults might be better. I was simply standing on the sidewalk in front of a temple in Malden, in which I am later to get married, and a young lady, who I had known casually and had actually dated once or twice, came by and asked for a cigarette, or a match, or some such thing. Anyway, that was Anita. I do not stretch the story in the slightest to tell you that I could practically hear the music in the background. I had, in the previous years, been living an aggressive life of a single man. It was fun one at a time, but on balance it was not an attractive lifestyle. I was ready for some homegrown, wholesome, virginal, sweet, one-of-ours, neighborhood girl. She was so beautiful. Anita and I just walked away from the crowd and started talking and walking, and talking and walking. We did that for the next five days of my leave, sitting mostly in Bell Rock Park in Malden. At the end of that leave, we were engaged. The next time I saw her was the night before our wedding, which was on Christmas Day, December of 1955.

03-00:39:23
Wornick:

She would tell you that she had been my band follower, and she'd dated my friend. I think I found her, but she will tell you it was the other way. But it doesn't matter. I'm telling my story. I was very lucky to catch her. The reason I tell you this at that point is because, after the wedding in December, she came back to Fort Stewart with me, and we took a little place off post, and she came out on these jobs with me, with Emma Kelly and the girls, and sat there like a vocalist on the side of the band. We had terrific times together, she and I and the band, and playing in the military band as well. The end of this story, which is worth getting to quickly, is that maybe—gosh, it doesn't matter if I calculate this. I guess you can research it and find it. More than thirty years later, a book is published, called *From a Garden of Good and Evil*, which is a story of a murder that occurs in Atlanta, Georgia, and it involves a lot of notable people in Atlanta. The story is mostly about life in Atlanta, and it's a very, very good book. It became a movie and ultimately a stage play. Anita and I were sitting in our apartment in San Francisco. She saw an ad for a stage play called *In a Garden of Good and Evil*, and it was coming to San Francisco. It included in its cast a woman named Emma Kelly. Well, maybe we ought to see if we can get some tickets and go to see if this could possibly be our Emma Kelly.

To make the story work, I have to take you back to the very last time I saw Emma Kelly. We were leaving Fort Stewart. We were cleaning out our tiny, tiny little apartment, trying to put everything we own in the back of a 1950 Buick, an old Buick, beat-up. I was leaving behind a bookcase that I had made for the apartment. Emma asked am I going to leave that, and I said, "Emma, if you have any interest, I'd love for you to have it." She said, "I won't take it, but please let me buy it." "Emma, I cannot let you buy it. Don't even think about that. It's offensive. It is yours. I would be thrilled for you to have it." Back and forth we went. Well, she very well knew that anything she might hand me would probably be gas money between Washington and Boston. Anyway, she won the argument, and she pressed a bill into my hand, which, to my shame, I did accept, and she took away the bookcase.

Now thirty-something years later, I was walking backstage after the performance, watching Emma Kelly play the piano in this stage play. There was a line of people waiting to see her, because she had become something of a little star in this show, and people knew about her because she had so much talent and a record of knowing every song. You can't name a song that she won't just pound out for you, and the lyrics. She just knows it all. Anyway, when I finally got up to her and got to the front of the line, she just swept me into this warm, sweaty embrace, and said into my ear, "I have your bookcase. I still have your bookcase." How she could have remembered me and remembered the bookcase? That's how remarkable a woman she is. That was one of those precious little experiences that occurred when Anita and I were first married and we were in army.

When that period in Fort Stewart was over, I got transferred, for reasons that only the army will ever understand, to New York City, to the First Army Area Medical Laboratory.

03-00:44:19

Cándida Smith: You didn't apply?

03-00:44:20

Wornick:

I did not apply. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know why I was going there. They must have seen I had a bachelor's degree from Tufts and all these science courses. I don't know. The military has its own way of doing things. The laboratory director was a very, very enlightened guy. I wish I could remember his name. He offered me the opportunity to spend one day in each laboratory. Make my way around and come and tell him which one I liked. The very first one I went to was doing a pregnancy test for WACs [Women's Army Corps]. You inject frogs with urine, and it was called the Aschheim-Zondeck test. The frog's urine was tested. Anyway, that did not seem like a way to spend my time in the military. I went through a number of those laboratories.

Somewhere around the fourth or fifth laboratory, I went into a place where there was not a lot of work going on, and it didn't even look all that much like a medical laboratory, but a great bunch of guys. A very short conversation quickly revealed that I was, for the first time in my life, in a food laboratory. Hello, what's a food laboratory? Well, they're testing all the food for the First Army Area that got offered up under a contract somewhere. It could be anywhere from butter to 10,000 pounds of beef or macaroni. Whatever. The army bought it. A sample came in; it had to get tested. Then they approved it, or not, according to the specifications. Everybody in there was very competent at their job, and the head of the laboratory was a man named Colonel Earl Kingdom, who became an early mentor for me. I picked that laboratory. I loved working in there. I worked closely with Colonel Kingdom. He started loaning books to me. That became the moment when I saw the gates parting. I knew that there would be a way to take science, as it mattered to me, and bring it to the food industry, which was not about blood and disease, but about very creative, wonderful, artistic, more free form. It went all the way from beer and wine to bakeries. People who became professional at it could be dropped on a tropical island and build a factory to preserve or create anything from canned to frozen, dehydrated, whatever. You just were completely competent in everything from microbiology to nutrition and heat transfer, et cetera, et cetera.

That's where the career was born, while I was in the army, First Area Army Lab. I decided that's what I was going to do, and ultimately I was discharged from the army, from that last laboratory in New York. That would have been the end of my two years in the military, by which time I had been married.

Anita and I had a wonderful time in New York because that was, of course, New York. Not a bad place to live if you're in the military.

03-00:47:51

Cándida Smith: Do you remember any of the projects in this lab that were of particular interest?

03-00:48:01

Wornick: What makes them interesting is, the curious way that life works, not too many years later, I became a defense contractor. I was producing goods and selling them to the military, and samples were going off not to that laboratory, but to other laboratories, where they were subjected to the very same tests that I had run in the New York laboratory. I could not have ever imagined that life would work that way. I couldn't see that far ahead around the curve, but that's the way it turned out to be over a ten-year period.

03-00:48:39

Cándida Smith: I noticed—I think it's on your website. It says that your interest in freeze-drying began while you were working in Atlanta. Is that fully correct?

03-00:48:53

Wornick: No. If that says that, that would be inaccurate. That didn't occur until a good deal later, at MIT, when I'm at graduate school, and then a remarkable adventure in United Fruit Company, which really started the business part of the career.

03-00:49:10

Cándida Smith: It sounds like your work in the laboratory was interesting, but routine testing.

03-00:49:19

Wornick: Extremely routine, very routine, yes. I was doing fats and oils analysis, net weight analysis. Very repetitious. It was clerk-like work. There was nothing creative about it.

03-00:49:36

Cándida Smith: You were twenty-two years old, twenty-three?

03-00:49:40

Wornick: Yes, exactly. Twenty-three.

03-00:49:44

Cándida Smith: What was Anita doing after you got married? Was she working?

03-00:49:48

Wornick: She did. She took an office job with Prudential Insurance Company in New York. We were two young working people. Life was very good. We had a basement apartment on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. We loved the little grocery nearby. Life was good.

03-00:50:13

Cándida Smith: When was your first child born?

03-00:50:17

Wornick: That would have been Kenneth, and he was born in December 1957.

03-00:50:33

Cándida Smith: You were a graduate student at the time he was born?

03-00:50:38

Wornick: Yes. I want to be sure to mention here that when I came out of the service and returned to Malden, to find a way to get a graduate education of some kind in food science, food engineering, I had lined up three or four schools. Cornell and University of Georgia. I've forgotten one or two others. Anita said, "Why not MIT?" I remember saying to her, "Goodness gracious. I don't know, honey. MIT is probably a little beyond my reach in terms of capability and affordability." I don't know what she said, exactly, but it was a positive response: "You're here in Boston. You can practically walk there. Why don't you put them on a list?" So I did. As it happened, MIT made a very large play for me, for reasons that I will never understand, but mostly it grew out of a very good interview I had with them.

03-00:51:57

Cándida Smith: You left the army. You moved back to Malden. I presume you were not living with either of your parents.

03-00:52:04

Wornick: No. We took a small apartment in Malden.

03-00:52:10

Cándida Smith: You probably had a part-time job, or you were living off of your GI Bill?

03-00:52:22

Wornick: Well, let's think. I'm losing track of the time here a little bit, Richard, but there was really no break. I went from the army straight into the—

03-00:52:44

Cándida Smith: That was two years in the service. You would have gotten out—?

03-00:52:47

Wornick: In December. I must have gone in midterm. I think I did go in midterm because I graduated midterm. The head of the department was a classic old scientist named Bernard Proctor. He'd written, goodness knows, half of the books that were then in use in food science. I didn't understand that, but MIT had attracted some very, very first-rate people there. We had a really good interview. I don't know why interviews work or don't, but this one definitely worked. We sat and talked for a long time. He might have discerned that I had a real passion for the field. I couldn't even tell you why I did, but I did, and I knew I did. Bernard Proctor, head of the food science department, MIT, put a little checkmark next to my name, and I became an MIT student.

03-00:54:03

Cándida Smith: Did you have a fellowship?

03-00:54:06

Wornick: No, I did not. I paid full tuition.

03-00:54:10

Cándida Smith: Which is pretty expensive.

03-00:54:11

Wornick: It was, but between the summer job and the military support, it was affordable. Anita and I lived in a very decent little apartment.

03-00:54:29

Cándida Smith: In Malden?

03-00:54:30

Wornick: In Malden. Not living the high life, but I certainly didn't feel deprived of anything.

03-00:54:38

Cándida Smith: Also, you had small children.

03-00:54:43

Wornick: All of this happened pretty much at the same time, exactly. Kenneth was born, and our second son arrived about a year and a half later.

03-00:54:58

Cándida Smith: A young father with two small sons.

03-00:55:00

Wornick: So I was in graduate school. Anita was not working. Well, she was working, but not getting paid for it. Those were intense years.

03-00:55:14

Cándida Smith: But you had family support.

03-00:55:17

Wornick: We had intellectual and compassionate support, but not financial support.

03-00:55:23

Cándida Smith: Baby-sitting?

03-00:55:25

Wornick: That sort of thing, yes. Both families were very nearby. Anita's mother was very supportive. My mother was always available when needed. Anita's father was on the edge of some not good things financially, and actually it took a very bad turn, ultimately, for him.

03-00:55:45

Cándida Smith: What was her family background?

03-00:55:47

Wornick: Her father was a wholesaler to drugstores. Small wholesaler, local wholesaler, but it had been a good business for him. They were country club, a big, single-

family house. I thought I was marrying way upstream. As things turned out, my father, who saved probably four dollars a week, left himself and his wife in much better retirement than my father-in-law got even close to, which was a lesson about something that maybe is still in my head to this day. He loved his work, and he was very careful with what he earned. Anyway, we lived in Malden. We lived well, but we didn't get financial support. I did take on additional jobs while I was a graduate student.

[End Audio File 3]

Begin Audio File 4 wornick_ron_04_07-08-11

04-00:00:27

Cándida Smith: Your graduate program at MIT, could you give a sense of what the topics were that Proctor and other faculty and the students were most interested in at that time?

04-00:00:43

Wornick: Sure. First of all, the people with whom I was working is worth reporting because the faculty was a group of not more than eight. Every single person on that faculty was a nationally known person for having played some significant role in a creation of some part of food science. Some would say that the father of food science had been Dr. Prescott, who had a heavy hand in creating Underwood Deviled Ham, another interesting coincidence, a military food product that was used in World War I. Deviled Ham, to this day, is a product that is in commerce all over the world, and especially, by the way, in the Pacific Islands, where the military left it behind and it became a part of the regular diet. As a new student there, the head of the department gave me the assignment of driving Dr. Prescott back to his apartment every evening. I had the great privilege of having little conversations with Dr. Prescott as I would take him back to his apartment, two or three in the afternoon, when he'd finished his tasks. That was very, very heady for me, because if I was going to be in the field of food science, I was sitting with a star.

Prescott's protégé was Bernard Proctor, who was then head of the department. Proctor's protégé was a man named Sam Goldblith. Professor Goldblith was my advisor, and he was at my right hand all the way though all my years at MIT. He became a very close, lifelong friend. He was a very, very remarkable guy. Very well connected with industry. He did a lot of consulting in major food companies, and he was able to introduce me to lots of people. He could make connections, pick up the phone, and do all kinds of things. His particular interest was in food radiation. He had a gamma laboratory set up in the building, and that was one of the categories available for study at MIT.

04-00:03:36

Cándida Smith: What's the purpose of food radiation?

04-00:03:42
Wornick:

In every example of dealing with any kind of food preservation, there are three things that you need to deal with. Oxidative changes—things that have open double bonds like fats can rancidify. Second thing would be enzymatic changes, which are the living, functioning parts of the cells. If they continue to function, they will destroy the food, ultimately. The third being microbial. Gamma radiation, done in the right circumstance for the right food, will eliminate, or at least pasteurize, the microbes, most of the bacterial things that could be on food. You could do things like milk in a thin film, and you just radiate it, and you could stabilize it. Well, it turns out—this is one of the lessons that I learned slowly—is that it's very easy, as a food scientist, to get caught up with the magic of things you can do. It would be a very good idea to have a partner in the marketing field every time you're about to take a step. Also in that laboratory there was another faculty member—I think his name was Marcus Karel, who had a specialty in freeze dehydration. I found that really fascinating, because you could take anything, from a fresh rose to a strawberry or ice cream, and freeze dry it and stabilize it.

Anyway, the picture I'm trying to create is that, for the first time in my life, I'm in the company of very, very prominent, experienced, wonderful faculty people. A small student body. I don't think we were fifty in the class, total, divided up into a lot of subsections. Every possible thing going on in food science was going on there, and they were on top of it all, every new packaging development, every new preservation technique. It was very exciting to be there. Food companies were coming in to deliver lectures about things that they were working on. One which will play back into the story a little later is that, on one of the graduate lectures, Dr. Robert Decareau from Raytheon Company came in to tell us that they were converting their radar from the Second World War into a gadget called the Radar Range, which you could cook with in the kitchen. They were inviting our interest and participation in what the Radar Range might do in a home kitchen.

The student body, by the way, was equally remarkable, from my point of view, because, almost without exception, they all went off into— Well, "all" may be too strong a word. Many of them went off into interesting careers. My most immediate bench mate in the laboratory that I worked most often in was named Zeki Berk. I discovered him, twenty or thirty years later, as head of food science at the Technion in Israel, and subsequently he moved up from there. I don't recall whether he went all the way to the top, but he became one of the senior administrators at the Technion. I did have the opportunity to visit him there. Norbert Wiener, who was inventor of cybernetics, would often wander into the laboratory where I'd be working. He always walked in with his hands behind his back, like he was thinking or studying or just observing. He would engage you in small conversation. It was a big step up for me into a world in which people were making history and studying very exciting things. It was everything I could ever possibly want. The course material was exceedingly difficult because it was dependent on a lot of science-science, of

the kind that I really had not had as much as I should have had, had I known I would be going to that kind of a graduate school. I'd had enough to be able to get through, and I did get through, and reasonably well, but many of the fellow members of the department had come through MIT and taken a lot of the technical courses. There were some moments in some of the classes where I was on the edge of terror because I just was not going to be able to get what they were up to, but I found a way. I was clearly over my head for some of that.

Secondary to Dr. Goldblith, there was a professor named John Theodore Roosevelt Nickerson, who, happily, was the professor who was most down to earth. If you were in a course that required you to do a blackboard, solid blackboard, of calculations on how to determine the $F_{\text{sub O}}$ value for the temperature at the center of a No. 10 can in order to be certain that it had been sterilized for botulism, he would, as I remember it, help you understand that you can remember what you need to remember, and you'll still be able to do this. If you know the parts that matter, then you're going to be fine. He helped me across the bridge a few times. I always found that to be true of the sciences anyway, which is a powerful lesson. The example I use with my children and grandchildren is that, when somebody tells you that, for example, one side and two angles, if they're congruent to another side, and two angles in the triangles are congruent, you don't have to memorize that, because if you can picture that, the length of the side and the fixing of the two angles, you've got the triangle locked in. It was the same thing with this $F_{\text{sub O}}$ problem, which was a very difficult process to get in your head if you were not MIT-trained, and I hadn't been. Anyway, I was equal to that task, and got through that course and through a lot of other courses, and did a tremendous amount of learning.

The major problem at MIT, for me, was trying to pick and choose from among all of these things, because you cannot just do everything anywhere you are. Bernard Proctor would take you aside at the end of every semester, look at what you've taken, what your performance had been, probably talk with a few of your professors, and then he would say, "Well, next semester, I think you probably need a little more p-chem, and maybe another course in heat transfer, and why don't you do one of these, and take a graduate course in this, that, and the other thing." I never knew what was coming, but it was always very welcome. On one occasion, after my second son was born—and at this time, I was going fulltime to school. I had two little ones at home. My wife was a very, very young mother, and somewhat overwhelmed. The money was not stretching far enough. Professor Nickerson got a part-time job for me in the school. A theory had been advanced that you can determine how many hours a fish has been out of the water by measuring the amount of trimethylamine in the aqueous solution in the eyeball. They needed a student to do the thousands of replications of taking eye fluid, doing the measurements, laying it against time, and reporting this business. I took that job. It was probably paying forty cents an hour or something, but I think the minimum wage was only thirty-

five at that time. Marc Karel, another one of the professors, had another assignment, dealing with the permeability of packaging films, and I had taken that one on too.

My car was getting old and rundown, and I was getting rundown. Things were getting to that point where I might have been close to the edge of my limit to be able to produce. I would get home in the evening. I don't know whether my footsteps did it, but the crying would start as soon as I made my way up the stairs. My wife was desperately in need of relief. I had a tiny little closet that I'd slid a desk into, where I needed to get in and have two or three hours of quiet time to do my homework for the next day at school. It was already late because I'd spent time on my part-time job. So things were very tense at home—I don't know about tense, but they were difficult, and probably not what we should have done. It was mindless of us to take on so much, so fast. Good thing we did it when we were young, however.

Anyway, at the end of the semester in—I guess it was May 1958—Bernard Proctor and I sat down for our little conversation. He told me what kinds of things he thought I ought to do when I came back in the fall. I must have explained to him that, as much as I needed this and wanted it and would love to keep going, I was winded, out of breath, out of money, and out of spirit. He said, “Well, isn't it so that this is mostly about money?” I said, “Well, yeah, in the main.” Money could certainly be a big problem-solver. He said, “Either Sam Goldblith or I will make a couple of calls, and we'll see if we can't get you a pretty good summer job.” He came back to me a few days later and said, “We've got a perfect job for you. It's going to be right nearby, in Norwood, Mass. You have to go out and do an interview. It will be with the new head librarian at the United Fruit Company basic research laboratories, in the old Governor Forbes estate in Norwood, Massachusetts.” I paused thinking, librarian? I didn't get it. But he understood that I needed money, and I presumed that this was going to pay some very impressive amount of money.

I went out and applied for the job. I did the interviews, and I was hired for the summer to work in the library there. Subsequently, I'll come to that, United Fruit Company picked up my tuition and made things very easy for me back at MIT. So this all became an escalating good path.

At the very beginning, my job was to read all of the biology abstracts and the chemical abstracts, which were thick volumes that came out every month, in which they published the reduced version, one paragraph long, of every paper that had been previously published. Considering how we get technical information around today, it was laughable, but that was how it worked then. Anyway, my job would be to sit at a desk and pull out these things, page after page, that related to the fifty or so major research projects going on in the company so that these précis could be delivered to the scientists and they would see what was happening in their areas in a more convenient way. I would simply do the grunt work for them. It had nothing whatever to do with

food science. It did not pay a remarkable salary, but it was the most I had ever made. I don't remember the number right now. It certainly took a lot of pressure off us. Given that I did no class work all that summer, and really just went to work at United Fruit Company every morning in Norwood, I had an opportunity to renew my energy.

04-00:19:27

Cándida Smith: Did the job end or did you continue on a part-time basis?

04-00:19:32

Wornick: Well, the plan was for me to just do it for the summer, and then somebody else would come in to replace me. I was not there but three or four weeks when some other things happened. I actually did go back to MIT that fall and continued with United Fruit Company. Starting from the fall of that year, I was a fulltime student and a fulltime employee. I abandoned most of the part-time jobs.

04-00:20:21

Cándida Smith: This is '58, '59?

04-00:20:23

Wornick: I think '58.

04-00:20:32

Cándida Smith: How did you develop a thesis project?

04-00:20:40

Wornick: Sam Goldblith and I sat and visited about a number of options. I remember saying then that I wanted to do something that would be pertinent to commerce. In other words, whatever I can determine in this thesis, something I can find that might not have been known before, should be useful to people who are in this business so that they can build on it and it would become a trail that other people might follow. Well, that's a pretty tall and not a very modest objective, but nonetheless, that was what I'd asked for. Of the list of options that we developed, the one that I selected was in the category of frozen food. Clarence Birdseye and others had already very well established that if you can get food down to temperatures of maybe 10 degrees Fahrenheit or so—in other words, well below the 32-degree freezing point—that you would immobilize bacteria, oxidation, enzymes, and that foods would, in the main, be preserved. But they were also aware that frozen food didn't come out as well as one would have hoped, because there are things going on while it's in storage. So people were poking around to see what kinds of things were going on. The most obvious one, of course, was the well-known principle of freezer burn. You could clearly see that the moisture in a frozen food drifts away from the highest temperature to the lowest temperature. If you've got a freezing coil in the back of a freezer, whether it's in a frozen storage or in your refrigerator at home, the moisture in that package of food will all pile up on the freezer side of the package. Then when you open it, you'll find that

little white snowy dust in there, which has all come out of the food. That's a gross observation. There were more subtle observations going on.

The thesis, to get to your question, which I settled on, was to determine the oxidative changes. In other words, what goes on in the lipid component, the fatty component, of frozen vegetables in storage, and the three vegetables were chosen because of the differences in fatty content, ranging from corn, which is very high in oil, to spinach, which is very low, and a third one, which somebody will have to pull out my thesis to remind me. There were three vegetables. So for about a year, I would buy and test fresh samples and put them in frozen storage at different temperatures, come back in fourteen-day increments, extract the fats out of these, of which there are tiny, tiny portions available, and measure oxidative changes in the fatty portion, and put little dots on a chart and graph, and keep writing what I did. The best part of that, from my point of view, is you get to set up some just wonderful glassware. You can take a place in a laboratory, and you have all these different things set up. When you come back to it each time, you can very quickly do a distillation or an evaporation or a condensation. All these different things that need to be done in order to get yourself out to the final numbers. Doing it twenty times in a row is tedious, but setting it up and doing it and getting real numbers is exciting, and knowing that you might be the first person who's actually tracing the rate at which corn oil oxidizes at 20 degrees, or 0 degrees, in corn, in storage—it's exciting. Okay, it's probably not as exciting as somebody doing brain surgery, but I did feel as though I was in virgin territory, doing something worthwhile. I looked forward to making this information public.

A subpart of this was to introduce an antioxidant into the vegetables. Of course, in dinner conversation, subsequent years, I discovered that the idea of putting something called BHTA in food is thought to be a heinous thing to do, and most people find it awful. I have to challenge them to understand that we live very well, and all the foods are very well preserved. You can get fresh lobster in Chicago, and the milk doesn't turn rancid and the bread doesn't mold. It's a pretty good world we're living in, and people are not dying from botulism, but there is a price to pay for that. Okay, I'm the enemy, but we're trying to get the food to you in the best way we can. In some cases, it's better than others, of course. The use of an antioxidant in the thesis became the point, that you could, in fact, introduce an antioxidant during the blanching of the vegetables, because vegetables do need to be blanched before they get frozen, in the main. Most of them. So antioxidants were being recommended in my thesis. That's the work I did for graduation, which turned out to be a master's degree, which was a very good decision. I probably would have stayed there continuing to study, and god knows where I would have gone had I done that. I probably would not be a very good teacher or scholar. I don't know. I was probably too restless for that. Once I got to United Fruit Company and got involved in real business opportunities, and knew that I could wrap things up with a thesis, I elected to do that.

04-00:28:16

Cándida Smith: This is 1959?

04-00:28:20

Wornick: I think it was '59.

04-00:28:21

Cándida Smith: When you finished the thesis, you decided to work—or you were offered a fulltime job at United?

04-00:28:27

Wornick: I already had a fulltime job at United Fruit Company. It was really just doing what I had to do to wrap up at MIT.

04-00:28:37

Cándida Smith: The thesis, from your perspective, it did have some practical commercial implications what you studied?

04-00:28:45

Wornick: Well, it did, but I don't want to overstate that. I had expected the phone to not stop ringing, but of course the world is a very big place. The idea of using an antioxidant in this situation was not actually going to have thunder and lightning happening all over the university campus or anywhere else. It was a very good exercise in having a hypothesis that says there are changes and I think we can control them. Proving that there are changes and then controlling them. That's not bad for a master's thesis. I felt pretty good about it. Getting it into words and getting it all written up and into hardcover was almost as hard as doing the work. That was not an easy task.

04-00:30:00

Cándida Smith: Having a fulltime job, how did it affect you, Anita, and your children. Did you move from Malden closer to your new job? You had more money. Did you buy a home?

04-00:30:25

Wornick: Oh, goodness, no. Oh, no, no. Buying a home was a little bit in the future. Not that much in the future. When the second baby arrived, we had to move to a second apartment, and so we simply moved to another apartment in Malden. There were some expectations of some help from her parents that unfortunately didn't materialize, but we managed. It wasn't that horrible, because I did have a pretty good income from United Fruit Company, relative to my requirements. In that apartment, for the first time, we found ourselves surrounded by mostly all very young couples with children, all starting careers of one kind or another. I began bringing members of the United Fruit Company staff, other scientists, back home for dinner occasionally. We felt as though we were settling in, and life was pretty good. It was definitely a strain for the marriage, Anita would tell you, if you get time with her. We had an unwritten understanding that every option was on the board except divorce. Murder was going to be okay, but divorce was not one of the options. It was very trying. She was definitely not prepared to be such a young wife and

mother. I didn't know what I was doing. I was doing whatever I could do. It was mostly instinctive. I hadn't a whole lot of time or energy to do anything very well. But it seemed like everybody was in that boat.

04-00:32:28

Cándida Smith: I presume you were working eighty-hour weeks?

04-00:32:34

Wornick:

They were unbelievably long workweeks. In hindsight, it's like people who get out of the army and then tell you ten years later, or twenty years later, what a wonderful experience it was, while in the army, of course, they griped about it every day. I think those were good years. I look back on those days with a smile when I think about them. They were very trying, and we worked very hard. There were moments that bordered on it's so bad it was funny. On one occasion—this comes to mind—driving from United Fruit Company back to our new apartment in Malden, in my increasingly old Buick, the floor boards had rotted out. I had plywood in there and the tapestry was hanging. That was a pretty ugly car, but it kept us going. In those days, I would change the oil, and I had to sand the armature from time to time because the generator would quit catching. Anyway, I was driving back from United Fruit Company to Malden on a winter night. Coming down the highway, I was very low on gas, and I hadn't noticed it. As luck would have it, I ran out of gas as I was heading into a gas station, but I was not in it. I was still on the side of the road, just off the gas station. People at the gas station, including the gas station attendants, saw what happened, and they all very kindly came out and pushed me into the gas station and up to a pump. I reached into my pocket to figure out how much gas I was going to buy and I discovered I had no dollars. I had change. I used the coins to call a friend back at the laboratory, to see if I could get him to come down to the gas station and bail me out.

This is too painful to linger on too long, but one thing or another, I did not reach him, and I went through two or three quarters. In those days, you got three minutes, and somebody would say, "Oh, you're looking for Ken Norton? I'll be right back. I'll find him for you." Click, bong, another quarter. You started all over again. The line was busy now. Anyway, the change was gone, so I finally told the gas station attendant my problem and offered my watch. God knows what the value of this watch was, but I told him I went by here every day, would he take my watch and I'd be very happy to make him whole the next day. I just needed enough gasoline to get back to Malden, probably a dollar, two dollars. I don't remember now, of course. Anyway, he was not very happy about any of this. He took the watch and he put in that amount of gas, and I got back in the car and turned the key. The ignition went [makes sound effect]. Nobody would dare write this story, but I actually lived it. Why this battery decided to have its last gasp at this moment, I don't know, but I could not get the car started. Possibly because the fuel had gone low enough that it got a little silt in the fuel—I don't know, but anyway, I could not get it started.

The gas station attendant was now furious that I was stuck in this space for one dollar worth and the people needed to come and go. So I pulled a latch. At that time, you'd have a big handle that you pulled back. He came out in front of the car to pull the hood up, and I didn't get out in time to tell him that only one side of the hood latch stayed connected when you pick it up. He had to be careful. So he picked the hood up and it went over the side of the car and clanged down on the ground, making this tremendous noise, upside-down. The hood of the car was now on the ground. I had some gasoline, I had a dead battery, I had a very, very unhappy gas attendant, who now had to give me a jumpstart on the battery in order to get me out of there and help me get the hood back on the car, which we did. I ultimately got myself together and drove out of there, back to Malden.

Now, my children and friends will tell you that, to this very moment—I could prove it to you if you were to ask me—I hadn't prepared for this moment—but from that day forward, I have never been without as large a roll of bills in my pocket as I could ever manage. I hope I'm not talking to a wide audience here, but I carry hundreds and hundreds of dollars in my pocket, in cash, all the time. I just am so fearful of ever getting in a situation that will be my undoing. It was so humiliating, so painful, so disrespectful to everybody around me, and so inconveniencing, so unnecessary. There's a certain dignity in poverty, which you can live under most of the time. Those moments were not dignified. Anyway, that was supposed to be an amusing story, but it was a strong little moment in my life. I could reach in, in this pocket and take out probably \$2,500 today, on a chance that you might need it before this interview is over.

04-00:39:10

Cándida Smith: With United Fruit Company, you start there in '58. When do you leave?

04-00:39:14

Wornick: It's just about ten years, maybe eleven, later.

04-00:39:21

Cándida Smith: So '69?

04-00:39:22

Wornick: Yes, exactly.

04-00:39:24

Cándida Smith: So '58 to '69. Next time, we will pick up the very long story of some things that happened, and then begin tracing your movement up the ladder.

04-00:39:41

Wornick: It's my first gainful employment in solving real life, real work problems. I just accidentally happen into a very exciting atmosphere with some real interesting problems, which became a project for me.

[End Audio File 4]

Interview #3 July 14, 2011

Begin Audio File 5 wornick_ron_05_07-14-11.mp3

05-00:01:34

Cándida Smith: Today, I want to go back to United Fruit Company. You mentioned last time how you got a part-time job there, and then you said there's a long, involved story of how that turned into a fulltime, permanent job. Perhaps we should start with that story.

05-00:01:55

Wornick: We begin in Boston, Massachusetts, 1958. Two separate circumstances were about to cross a little bridge for me. One was that I was ending a third semester of MIT, with the head of the department giving me a uncertain answer as to when I was going to be ready to graduate. He would let you know when he thought you were okay to carry the credentials. I needed more, and I was not happy about that. As I think I mentioned previously, he had offered to find me a very good summer job that would provide a little financial aid. He and his associate professor, Sam Goldblith, who later became my thesis advisor, came up with an idea of a job at United Fruit Company.

A word or two about United Fruit Company. In 1958, the little I knew about United Fruit Company at that moment was that it was a huge international company, mostly with operations in Central America. Hundreds of thousands of employees, a gigantic company. A great shipping fleet. They had ships going all over the world and to Europe. International Telegraph Company, with very, for that time, advanced communication systems. Primarily a tropical agriculture business, in fact almost exclusively bananas. There were other things, but it was probably 90 percent plus banana. That was about all I knew. Among people who looked at it from a business point of view, United Fruit Company stock was thought to be more like a bond than a stock, in the sense that it had a huge amount of cash, it had always delivered very reliable earnings, and it was held by a lot of—to use the colloquialism—schoolteachers, as we would say at that time, who were putting away their little acorns for retirement. United Fruit Company was thought to be a very safe place. As I began looking more closely at the company, I discovered that the board of directors was a very distinguished board, none of whom I ever expected to know. I think the chairman at that time was George Peabody Gardner, and other similar names of prestige families in Boston were on the board. I believe in the summer that I went there, Tom Sunderland was then president. He'd been president, I believe, of Standard Oil. A very competent executive.

Anyway, none of that mattered. I had a summer job and a place to go and a chance to make what I thought was going to be a lot of money. It turned out, when I got to the interview, that the Fruit Company had been attacked by a very serious disease. They called it Panama disease because it had broken out

in Panama. Essentially, it was a soil-born fungus that was causing the fruit plants to drop, wilt. It had spread from country to country and was threatening the profits and the survivability of the company. An effort was made to add an additional research resource to the company. They had research departments all around the tropics, but in this case, they found a property in Norwood, Mass., that had been the home of Governor Forbes, an ambassador to the Philippines, a beautiful, beautiful gated estate. Lovely, big lawns and mahogany walls. A magnificent building. They turned it into a basic research laboratory, and then brought in the very finest scientists they could find in agronomy, plant pathology, and entomology. All of the agricultural field sciences. Their task was to come to grips with this Panama disease and understand it.

All of this was going on in Norwood, Massachusetts, barely an hour outside of Boston, south of Boston. I was then living slightly north of Boston, in Malden. I went to Norwood for an interview, and I was introduced to a young woman. Ms. Andrews was just how I was addressing her. She was head of the library. What she asked me to do was go through chemistry and biology abstracts and find those abstracts which would be useful to the various scientists in the laboratory. I could direct them to new scientific articles which would be cutting across the field that they were working in. It's hard to imagine how difficult it was in those days for people to keep in touch with their field; it was very clumsy. I don't think many of them had the time to read the dozen or so publications that were coming out for their field. Anyway, it was abstracted, and I was to be an abstractor of abstractors. I created a journal with a format where they could actually tear out the little abstracts. They could go to their own little part and tear them out. It was paying me enough money that the tension was out of my life. That was my job, and I was going back and forth to do that for the summer, from Malden. I continued to take some courses that summer because I really needed to get on with my degree.

One of the nice things about the laboratory, was that, at noontime, almost all of the scientists would gather in this gigantic library, in the Forbes estate, with their brown bags, and have a little colloquium about what they were up to. There would be a discussion about various things that were happening, and anybody that might have some little breakthrough or something important to say would report it to one another. It was very interesting. The distribution of bodies around that lunch-table was pretty much self-assigned by rank so that the best-known, most widely published scientist had two arms on the table, and people of lesser rank made their way a knee-distance back. I don't know what I was doing, but I was probably standing. I'm sure I could not have been at a lower rank there, but the opportunity to hear them all talk about their work, together with the abstracting work that I was doing—I don't think I'd been there a month when I got the feeling that they were all buried down in some very obscure basic research places, which were probably going to take years to get to where we needed to go. I had an idea that it was possible to come at this problem with a much shorter, much more direct, impactful

approach, but it would have been ludicrous for me to raise my voice in this lunchroom, which I did not dare to do. There were probably forty Ph.D.'s, and I don't know how many more other degrees in that room.

After a day or two of thinking about it, I went to the head of the laboratory. I knew I was stepping over a very considerable line to go all the way up to him. He would have been my boss's boss's boss's boss. But anyway, I asked permission to share with him this little idea I had, and the idea was very simple. The disease was caused by a fungus that was in the soil, and it would make its way into the root. The root system is a great, big ball. The botanical word would be rhizome. It's just a potato that's maybe a couple feet across, and lots of little nodes around it that puts out a new plant on a regular basis, and that's how the bananas are actually grown. In farming them, they just cut back, and one is allowed to go. It takes about nine months to maturity. In the meantime, another one is allowed to come along right behind it to get ready for the next plant. Once that rhizome is diseased, the next one is going to be as diseased as the first one. If you have a diseased rhizome, there's no way out of this problem. The theory I had was that if you could prove that the amount of heat it would take to kill the fungus—the name of this fungus I have never forgotten because it was so important to me. It was called *Fusarium oxysporum cubense*.

Anyway, this fungus, if I could show that I could destroy it with less heat than would destroy the tissue, the root material, then it would be possible to destroy the fungus with a heat treatment and then make sterile root stock. So you could take individual nodes, which would be sterilized, and put them back in the ground. We already knew that we could sterilize the ground. That fungus requires oxygen. You would flood the field and keep it under a foot of water for some period of time until the fungus died out. But then you've got to find sterile rootstock to replant. The theory was, I was going to do two things. One, separate the node out, then take some tissue out of it and take fungus out of it. Grow the fungus separately, measure the viability of the tissue, and start doing what would be called thermal death curves. In other words, determine the amount of time at different temperatures it takes to kill the tissue and to kill the fungus. The secret trick in here that I had in the back of my head was that an acquaintance was then working at the Raytheon Company, and he was introducing a thing called the Radar Range. Raytheon had been a very big radar company during the Second World War. They realized that it was a wonderful way to heat things uniformly. When you use these microwave devices, they don't heat by conduction, which means that, instead of having to heat the root material, from the outside, and wait for the center temperature to come up to the death temperature, which would require the outside temperature to have way too much heat—we'd never get it sterile, or if we got it sterile, we might have killed it, and then we have dead tissue, which would not work. With microwaves, we can find a way to do it uniformly across this tissue by moving the tissue in the microwave field and using the right geometry of the piece.

The lab head thought this was a spectacular idea. He was very, very aggressive in assuring me that this was very worth doing. In twenty-four hours, I had, for the first time in my life, a laboratory, a budget, and a secretary/ administrative assistant. Very quickly, I ordered a very large industrial microwave. I brought in a thing called the Warburg respirometer, which is a wonderful way to measure the breathing of a piece of tissue. In very short order—I would think maximum two or three weeks—we were able to come up with thermal death curves for both a slice of the tissue and the fungus growing on the plates. Miraculously, the gap between the two was large, so large that it was abundantly clear that we would be able to take nice pieces of node out of the rhizome and run them through a microwave oven, and sterilize them, and still have live tissue. I began imagining railcars in the tropics that would go through these tropical anana farms, and we would bring in the rhizomes, cut them up, and sterilize them. Anyway, in my head, it was going very, very fast. I was imagining that this little laboratory down in a basement in Norwood was going to save United Fruit Company, and this was quite a turnaround for me. I'd come there on a part-time summer job. Anyway, it was a very exciting time, and I worked very, very hard at this project.

The very next thing that happened was more important. The gentleman who was the vice president for research was a man named Jesse Hobson. He'd been at Stanford Research Institute. A very distinguished scientist. One day while I'm in the laboratory, a portly guy with a tremendous presence, in a black suit, black vest, very well dressed, unlike what I was used to seeing come in—because people did come often on tours to see my little microwave thing. They wanted to see water boil and an egg boil and these things. We had little tricks to amuse people. In comes Jesse Hobson, and he had very pointed questions to ask, and I really wasn't sure who he was, but he was clearly in charge. I could see that just by his presence, and I just let it go at that. He'd heard about the work, and he came down to check it out. By the time that day ended, he and the head of the lab, whose name, I'm terribly sorry, has gone from my head, but I remember he'd come from Beech-Nut Foods, proposed that I go on fulltime salary. They would pick up my tuition, and would I consider just abandoning any future education plans other than closing up my degree at a master's degree? Because there was some uncertainty about how far I would go there. I wasn't really sure about that, but a master's was fine for me now that I had a real challenging project and an income. United Fruit Company became my life and my career the moment when Jesse Hobson left the office on that day. Not a historic moment for anybody but me, but it was a profound time in that little lab.

Anyway, the rest of that story, those sterilized rhizome nodules went into greenhouses, which were built—tropical greenhouses—in the snow of Norwood, Massachusetts, to grow bananas. Our little plants started growing. By, I don't know, September or October of that year, it began to look like this was going to be a serious piece of work. The other thing that was happening, I

found I was able to use people working for me effectively. I noticed that almost everybody else was writing their own reports and not doing things in a very efficient way, in my not so humble judgment. Having a secretary to whom I could dictate, and get things done quickly, was a whole new experience for me. I'd never had any help, and it was a tremendous empowerment. I was feeling like there was an endless amount of things that you could do if you could engage people in projects. I liked that feeling a lot.

05-00:21:05

Cándida Smith: You were twenty-seven, twenty-eight, at the time?

05-00:21:07

Wornick: Yes, exactly.

05-00:21:11

Cándida Smith: Considerably younger than the other scientists?

05-00:21:15

Wornick: Yes. There was a small chill there, which I tried to deal with by inviting them back to my very modest home in Malden. We had some to dinner. They were all very wonderful guys. I'm sure, in retrospect, that they thought some lunatic had been turned loose in their lab. They were classical basic scientists. I was doing a mechanical approach to solving this disease problem.

05-00:21:47

Cándida Smith: The thermal differential, was that applied in various United Fruit farms around the Caribbean?

05-00:21:57

Wornick: No, because at the end of the story, in La Lima, Honduras, a geneticist named Louis Roth had been working on the same problem, and he was doing it genetically. At almost the exact same time, he came up with a banana variety which was disease-resistant and sturdier. It didn't blow down as easily in windstorms. It made better fruit. It practically jumped in the box and put on its own labels. It was thought to be an amazing variety. He named it for his daughter. Her name was Valery. In fact, the bananas in commerce today are Valery. They had been Gros Michel. In the space of one phone call, I went from imagining myself on the cover of Fortune Magazine to a laboratory full of equipment that was not going to be needed anymore. But it was a great experience.

Happily, I was transferred from the laboratory into the company headquarters building in Boston, Prudential Tower, which was a comfortable move because it got me closer to Malden. An increase in income. I was placed on a ventures team. I believe the president of the company, by that time, had become Jack Fox. Jack Fox was a very creative marketing guy who had most of the role in creating frozen concentrated orange juice, the Minute Maid Orange Juice Company. He was now president of United Fruit Company, and he was trying to diversify the company from its traditional business. He put together a small

team of five people whose job was to find opportunities, appraise them, buy them, and manage them.

05-00:24:38

Cándida Smith: Existing companies?

05-00:24:40

Wornick:

Yes. Existing opportunities. I don't know. I was a very junior person. The assignment was not handed to me, certainly, in that format. The head of that team was a man named Pete Harris, who'd come from W.R. Grace. He became the first mentor in my life. He went searching inside the company for somebody to go on that team who could handle the food company, food processing, food science kinds of things. Pete recruited me to the team. Pete Harris, Ron Wornick, three other guys who represented finance, marketing, and sales became a team, whose job was to look around and find things that would work inside United Fruit Company. The first assignment that came my way on this new little team was a thing called freeze dehydration. Pete Harris had met a man named Dr. Henry Wager. He was an OB-GYN in Montclair, New Jersey. He had run across the process of lyophilization, which is the same meaning as freeze dry, but that would be the scientific or medical term for it. It's used for preserving blood plasma and other kinds of medical situations.

Henry Wager had the idea of setting up a company to use freeze-drying in the food business. He'd puzzled through the opportunity and settled on the idea that it would have to be a high-priced food so it could bury the likely high cost of doing the drying. That food turned out to be shrimp. The shrimp capital of the world would have been South Texas in those days, or New Orleans. He hired his brother-in-law, Ray Rubelt, a postman, to go down to South Texas, find a plant, turn it into a freeze-dry operation, buy shrimp and freeze dry it, and try to make a business out of it. They were just underway there, in a very small way, but they were doing it. They were actually freeze-drying shrimp and offering them for sale.

05-00:27:25

Cándida Smith: How did freeze drying differ from regular freezer-food food?

05-00:27:34

Wornick:

Freezer food is wet frozen food that you would thaw out and eat. Freeze-dried food looks very much like the same thing you start with, whether it's a flower or a strawberry or a beefsteak. It doesn't change its shape or color very much, but there's no water in it. You can ship it. You can preserve it for a very long time. It's very light. It's complete dehydrated. It was a remarkable phenomenon. There was a lot of press at that time suggesting that this freeze-drying phenomenon was going to sweep the food industry. It was going to replace canning, and freezing it would be the new, big process. There were five or six major companies that were looking seriously at it. I think Pete Harris thought this might be a great diversification and a new venture for the

Fruit Company. Pete Harris made a deal with Henry Wager and purchased their little startup plant in San Carlos, Texas, which is out in the nowhere-ness of South Texas, maybe ten miles or so north of the Rio Grande River, the border, essentially, with Mexico.

05-00:28:55

Cándida Smith: Near Brownsville?

05-00:28:57

Wornick:

Brownsville was the next nearest city, but Brownsville is further away than the border because it's more south as the border trends south. But Brownsville would be the next nearest big city. Subsequently, McAllen, Texas became a very big city, also near the plant. Pete Harris sent me down there to take care of things. Just check it out, shape it up, get it going, see what we've got. He'd really not understood very much about what he bought. That's one of the wonderful things about Pete Harris. He had tremendous trust in people, mostly reliable instincts, and a little, at the same time, naïve. I don't know. It was a part of his gift. I don't know how you can explain him, but I had great respect for him. He was a terrific human being and always very nice to me. Previous to this freeze-dry thing coming on the screen, he had sent me off to study business ventures in New Zealand. He was treating me as if I was a seasoned business executive. I most assuredly was not. He was teaching me or training me, I don't know what was in his head, but I certainly was learning. Working for him was a tremendous gift. Anyway, quickly I went. I moved my wife and two little children. We went down to South Texas, we rented an apartment, and I set myself up.

05-00:30:40

Cándida Smith: Approximately what year is this?

05-00:30:43

Wornick: Probably about 1960, possibly, '61.

05-00:30:46

Cándida Smith: You'd been with the company approximately two years? Maybe a year and a half?

05-00:30:52

Wornick:

Probably two years. The plant that I found there was a Laurel and Hardy comedy sketch. It was not to be believed. The man in charge of quality control was a retired guy with no education, no understanding at all of how you do measurements or control. They were testing whether or not the products were sufficiently dried enough by actually opening up the cabinets, removing a sample, and I remember—Mr. Wright was his name—he would hold a sample against his cheek to see if there was any ice left in the shrimp. This was his quality control method. Well, that plus every person in the plant, and every procedure in the plant, was Dark Ages. All very, very nice people, but there was nothing there that would have passed anybody's muster for professionalism. I spent about eighteen months putting in upgrades in the

accounting department, in the purchasing department, in freight and shipping, in the quality control areas. A terrific assignment for a young man, a great chance to make my way. Some of this, I did intuitively. Some, I don't know.

05-00:32:37

Cándida Smith: You were plant manager at this time?

05-00:32:38

Wornick: I was essentially responsible for the place.

05-00:32:43

Cándida Smith: And you were responsible to the central office in Boston?

05-00:32:46

Wornick: To the Boston office. Pete Harris was my boss. Once we bought that company, I believe that the company called Pete Harris's division United Fruit and Foods, because it was assumed that it was going to become a food operation. Maybe Pete had conveyed that mission to his boss. I'm not sure. I know I became an employee working for Pete Harris in a division of the company called United Fruit and Food, and it started with a venture team and became that company. Anyway, that plant finally got cleaned up. I should add that I brought in all new equipment. It was a very considerable change, because it had been an old fruit and vegetable cannery that had gone bankrupt. The thing to take out of this is that I was in my twenties. I was out on shrimp boats, telling boat captains that they had got to keep the shrimp iced better because they were going to get melanosis in the shrimp, which are little black growths in between the shell segments, if they don't keep the ice right. It was a wonder they didn't put a hook through my heart and send me over the side. I was an arrogant little kid out of MIT, trying to make a business out of this little United Fruit and Food Company. Which was good if you're young and you think you can do everything. Anyway, I loved doing it, and I think Anita mostly enjoyed her time in Texas. I know the kids did.

05-00:34:48

Cándida Smith: How long were you there?

05-00:34:50

Wornick: We weren't there very long. It was less than a couple years.

05-00:35:00

Cándida Smith: Once the company was doing what it was supposed to do, you were recalled back to—

05-00:35:05

Wornick: To Boston. Subsequently, I made regular trips there. In those days, it wasn't easily done. It was Trans-Texas Airlines, which was a DC3, and it was a long trip to get to South Texas. Anyway, it was fine, and it was a very good adventure. Now, back in Boston, this little freeze-dry company was doing okay, but Pete Harris had put on a huge staff of people by this time. Home economists, product-development people of various kinds. He enlarged the

laboratory supporting the freeze-dry plant. I had a hand in executing some of that, but the chances of our ever turning that little freeze-dry business into a successful business were pretty thin.

05-00:36:19

Cándida Smith: Why was that?

05-00:36:20

Wornick: Well, because freeze-drying had a very limited market other than freeze-dried coffee and very unique applications in the feeding of the military—they use it as a field ration in large no. 10 cans to make very quick instant food when they set up a field station to feed essentially B-rations. You still go down a line with a tray and take food out of a tray. Not eating by yourself, as in C-rations, but B-rations used a lot of freeze-drying through a lot of years. That little company supplied a number of products, including shrimp, to the military. They also did some ingredients for people who were in the instant-soup business and other kinds of instant things, fruit cereal and what have you. Wherever you needed something dry that was especially high quality.

[interruption]

05-00:37:44

During this period when this little company was just a strange appendage in this large United Fruit Company, it was slightly uncomfortable, at least for me, because I didn't believe that this freeze-drying process, much less the products we had, or would ever have, could justify the size of overhead that Pete Harris was assembling in the hopes of making a gigantic food business. We had slightly different views about that.

05-00:38:23

Cándida Smith: There must have been, then, other facilities besides the shrimp-processing plant in Texas.

05-00:38:29

Wornick: There were not. As a matter of fact, what began to happen, and I'm not certain of the dates, but either before or after the next change, which I'm going to come to in a moment, the Fruit Company started doing some other non-food processing acquisitions, which were not processed through Pete Harris's venture team. They purchased A&W Root Beer and J. Hungerford Smith and Baskin Robbins, possibly some others that are not coming to mind. What was significant about that is that they were assigned to other places in the company and run outside of the Pete Harris empire.

Well, then another moment occurred in my career. I was taking a flight back from New York to Boston one day on the Eastern Airline shuttle. I walked down the aisle, saw an empty seat, dropped into it, and I turned to my right, said hello, and sitting next to me was Jack Fox, president of United Fruit Company. Well, we talked about non-business things for a couple of minutes, and then he leaned in for what I could tell him about what was going on in the

division. The impropriety of the question was apparent to me, but I wasn't certain whether that was my decision to make or his. I remember being puzzled about this a little bit, because the question should be directed to my boss, not to me, but he chose to direct them to me. Was I going to just tell him, "Well, I really can't comment," or was I going to give him honest answers? I went somewhere in between, but I certainly leaned in the direction of trying to tell him what my honest feelings were. He left that discussion, when the plane trip was over, knowing that my view was that the freeze-dry operations in Texas were a lovely little company and could probably pay their way for a very long time, but unless something extraordinary happened, which I did not, at that time, see on the horizon, we probably ought to trim back all of the overhead and make it a nice, lean little profit center, and let it make a little money. Just mark time until we could find something to grow it with, because carrying that gigantic overhead just didn't make sense to me.

I don't know actually how I said that to him, but I certainly was not secretive about it. Anyway, a week later, the Fruit Company cleaned house, and I became president of United Fruit and Foods. I was given the assignment of running what I chose to make the surviving part of the business, which was truly not a very significant business. United Fruit Company was a huge company. This was a trivial little pimple, and a very braggy name, United Fruit and Food Corporation.

05-00:42:39

Cándida Smith: What year would this be?

05-00:42:44

Wornick: The promotion was noted in the *New York Times*, and I have a lovely clipping of that. I think it would have been '67.

05-00:42:53

Cándida Smith: So you'd been with the company nine years, then. Maybe eight.

05-00:43:00

Wornick: Eight or nine, starting from that summer. Probably nine. By which time, I was feeling like a seasoned division manager. I thought I could run that pretty well, and I did. I put in a very, very good general manager who could really run the thing on his own, a man named Tom McCaffrey. He had been a division manager for the Fruit Company. He did a spectacular job of running that company. I didn't need to run it from Boston, Massachusetts. It needed to be run as a profit center from Texas, and that's what he did. Subsequently, to move on with my career, Jack Fox proposed a new slot for me, which he called director of corporate development, as I recall it. The assignment was to screen all of the ventures that were in cubbyholes all over the nooks and crannies of all these divisions of the company, try to find the best ones, line them up, evaluate them, and put some serious money against the best ones, maybe stop spending money on some of the other ones, professionalize the way we were growing our internally developed opportunities.

05-00:44:43

Cándida Smith: So you were moving from the food processing division to corporate headquarters?

05-00:44:49

Wornick: Well, actually not, because the team of people that I had to assemble to do that was more than we had room for in the office space we had in Boston. So we took offices in Westwood, Massachusetts, and I think there might have been, I'm not certain, but maybe six or eight of us, in various disciplines of market research, statistics, finance. We began assembling information, and it was probably a waste of stockholders' money for a number of reasons. We never produced anything worthwhile out of it. Those ventures, in hindsight, need to be kept local. You cannot corporatize creativity. If there's some guy on a loading dock whose got some brilliant idea to change the way we load bananas, he needs to deal with it right there. We were not going to be able to do it in Boston, Massachusetts. Most people were covetous of their own little plans and ideas anyway. We probably wasted a couple of years and a good deal of money on the idea of prioritizing new investments for the company.

05-00:46:22

Cándida Smith: Did you have any pet projects?

05-00:46:24

Wornick: I did. But my pet projects were of the kind that appealed to me personally. For example, I tried very hard to get Jack Fox interested in real estate. Goodness gracious, it just seemed to me Boston, Massachusetts—just look at all this expansive land all around the place. There was one particular huge site, where, incidentally, the Kennedy Library is now, just south of Boston. It was underpriced, but Jack Fox thought, we're a company that makes things, ships things, sells things. He was a marketing guy. His big contribution to the company had been the branding. He put these little Chiquita stickers on bananas to bring up the quality. Real estate was, quite frankly, not a Brahmak venture. Anyway, not very much came from that division. I was paid well, enjoyed it, and worked with very good people.

About the time when it was becoming clearer that this was not a route to another big step for me, the word began to buzz through the company that there was a possible unfriendly takeover of the company lurking in the shadows. Most miraculous to me was that it was a man named Eli Black, who was a rabbi. He had abandoned the pulpit. He and two other men, Morrie Kaplan and Mort Broffman, the three of them, led by Eli, had already bought a number of companies, and they kept buying and trading their way up. They were doing it with a principle that was unheard of at the time, but today we call it a leveraged buyout. Oversimplified: you borrow the company's stock from various people and agree to give it back to them, and pay them a higher price for it, after you've used it for a little time. You're going to do that by putting the company in play to run its stock price up. If you can't get the higher price out of the market, you're going to use the company's cash to pay

off some of these obligations to stockholders. It's a great deal more complicated than that, but that's the essence of it.

Anyway, once Eli Black, this man who I'd never met at that time, came public, the Fruit Company began to work on this thing, but there were two schools of thought. One school of thought, and I could remember hearing them voiced in the corridors, Vic Folsom, the chief counsel of the company, was saying—I think I've got this fairly accurate—"This is just not going to happen." Eli Black's company was called AMK. AMK was not capable of making this purchase, and their offer was just not going to carry the day. Others thought that we needed to be way more aggressive.

I had absolutely nothing to do with this. This is just water cooler conversation that I'd be hearing. In the next six or eight or nine months or so, eight or nine major companies get in a battle for United Fruit Company, primarily because we were trading at a multiple that was way too low for us, having not so much to do with our earnings at that moment, but the fact that we had a very long established profit curve, and we had a huge amount of cash in the till. While I don't remember the number, it would have been hundreds of millions. That would equate to billions today. It's forty-five years ago, fifty years ago. It was a company that could be acquired. I think the stock was trading at maybe five or six times earnings, or some very low multiple like that. I'm not reliable on this number.

The end of the story is that all the other competitors for the company, of which there were a number who were very public, one way or another, withdrew their offers. Ultimately, AMK, Eli Black, acquired United Fruit Company. On the day that he came to Boston to actually have lunch with the board, I was at that lunch, as were all the tall, gray-haired Boston Brahmin, distinguished business members of our board. A wonderful, spectacular board. Sitting in the middle of the power side of the table is a very small rabbi, slightly rounded shoulders, very modest, having a very small presence, looking very calm, not the least bit nervous, and surrounded by a lot of very WASP-y Boston executives who, to the last man, were facing the fact that they were going to be making new career plans, as probably would I. The luncheon was written up in a very good book by Tom McCann, who was then the PR director at United Fruit Company, and a good friend of mine. We came up the line together. Tom is a very good resource for all of this. He wrote a book called *An American Business*, which tells the story that I'm covering from 30,000 feet.

Eli Black totally changed the way the company was run. A company of that size had, I don't know, eight to ten horizontal lines in the table of organization who would be making decisions. Eli, Morrie, and Mort drew almost all the decision making back to Boston, and they ran it like a small family business. It was, in some ways, demoralizing. People who were used to having authority and respect became uncomfortable. The whole mood and environment in the

company was changing quickly. I had a couple of meetings early on with Eli Black, in which I confessed to him that I knew I was a cost center, and he needed capital, and that I would very well understand his closing my development department, which would, frankly, have done me a favor, because I really didn't have any great opportunities for him. I made the argument that, as soon as he got his debt straightened out and the balance sheet turned around, he would probably need my services and that he probably ought to keep the best of us around for a while. He suggested that that was not the case, but he never said to me, "No, clean out your desk." He just said, "Well, I don't think so. That's probably nothing that we're going to want to do." I suspect he was doing the gentlemanly thing and giving me time to make other plans. I'm going to guess that's what it was. Anyway, that's more or less what happened. I met with him twice. Never succeeded in getting a commitment from him that he would put the development department in his future planning.

On the train going home one evening, because we had, by that time, moved to Sharon, Massachusetts, I decided that what I ought to do would be to buy the little freeze-dry plant down in South Texas.

05-00:57:06

Cándida Smith: The shrimp plant?

05-00:57:07

Wornick: The shrimp plant. I could probably buy that and run it, and be in business for myself instead of being an employee. There was a man in the company who had the assignment selling everything saleable in the company, and that was, at that time, the biggest job in the company, because Eli was trying to raise money. I went to him with my proposal, which I essentially had done in the sketchiest way because I just needed to get some sense of whether it was even possible. He suggested to me that it probably could happen, but that it would be very awkward for him and for me to have this negotiation while I was an employee of the company. That I ought to think about not being an employee of the company and then submitting the offer. He'd be very happy to handle it. I don't have the exact date, but it was about ten years or a little more after I joined the Fruit Company—

05-00:58:19

Cándida Smith: It was 1970, is what your website says.

05-00:58:23

Wornick: Okay, 1970. I don't know how this all happened, but there was a resignation. They took it. They were very, very good to me. I think I had about a year's salary, so there was no great pressure. Or maybe it was a month for every year I'd worked, or something like that. I then went off on the very simple task of raising money to buy a business. Right? Of course, wrong.

[End Audio File 5]

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06-00:00:18

Cándida Smith: So you needed to find capital to make an offer on this plant?

06-00:00:25

Wornick:

Exactly. The amount of money that I needed—I do remember this number—was \$300,000. Had I mortgaged my sons and everything else I had to raise all the available cash that might have been available to me, including some United Fruit Company stock options, which had given me, the first time, some chunks of cash—I probably had something in the order of \$20,000 or \$25,000 that I could have raised, but that would have been scary to part with, because it was the only money we had, period, and I was now unemployed. So I was out looking for \$300,000, and doing something again that I had to create my way to do. I was so inexperienced. In hindsight, I wonder, one more time, why I hadn't brought next to me a professional who would have known how to do that and could have helped me make my way. Arrogant young man that I was, I just set about doing it. That's my life. I'm going to have to live with that.

Not surprisingly, it didn't go very well. Easiest thing to do, of course, is to approach every person you know of means. I went straight after my father-in-law's friends, all of whom had what seemed to me to be significant businesses because they were members of a nice country club, and they had private homes and nice, new cars. They were not nearly sophisticated enough to grasp what I was offering. I don't mean to demean them, but I was clearly wasting my time. This was well before everybody was doing venture capital and deal junkies were all over the place. It was just a much quieter time. People were opening individual little stores or a little factory to do something. It was not the world that we know today that goes from startup ideas to great industries so quickly. What I was trying to raise money for was a freeze-dry process that had succeeded, but not wildly well. It had not been big. There were three or four companies doing it. United Fruit Company was one. The little excitement that I could add into this thing was that we had developed a line of instant salad mixes—egg salad, chicken salad, tuna salad, these kinds of things—which I had a very strong hunch could go very well in the institutional food market because it takes a lot of time and trouble to do all that mixing and dicing. It's very labor-intensive. We could provide these products in big containers, and all you'd need was another container of water. You'd let it sit for fifteen, twenty minutes in the refrigerator, and then ten minutes later with mayonnaise, and you're in business. I can guarantee if you use a No. 20 scoop, you're going to get so many portions. It was a nice cost-control and very good quality.

I next moved up to banks. I went to all the banks in and around the Texas area, within reach of the plant, thinking that they might like to invest in their own community. In telling the story, it seems hard to understand how much time it took, but to make the first presentation, to follow it up, to go to

meetings, each one of those banks probably took a couple to three months. In the meantime, my income was starting to run out. Kenneth, first born son, was about to have his bar mitzvah in December of that year. Anita was already beginning to urge that we start making the plans for the celebration. For sure, we were going to do it, but it was not very good timing in terms of paying for it and having the time and capacity and intellectual energy to do it. I remember that being a difficult time. Anyway, as I was coming into the second half of 1970, I had not raised any money at all. It was getting damn difficult to get anybody to pay serious attention to me. I continued on in that exercise into the spring of the following year, and I had already done some interviews for taking a job with three companies. Two of them were in New York, and I liked the idea of working in New York.

06-00:060:08

Cándida Smith: Food industry?

06-00:06:10

Wornick:

Food industries, and I would have been research director in those companies. It's now May of the next year, which would be '71, I think, and very early spring. I met somebody in New York who had a lot of highly placed friends with deep pockets, who did a lot of banking and investing. He invited me to go on a sailing trip, just to sail, out of the Seawanhaka Yacht Club, in New York. The America's Cup, New York Yacht Club Harbor. I'm just sitting on the rail, essentially, of a sailboat, with a bunch of other guys, hanging. Sitting next to me was a guy named Palmer, chairman of the board of Citibank New York. The bank's names have changed so many times, I'm probably not exactly right about this. Anyway, he was keeping me engaged in small talk, and pretty soon I did what I had been doing to anybody, whether it was sitting on a bus or falling out of an airplane. I made my pitch. I made my pitch so many times, if you bumped into me, I would make it to whoever you were. So I made it to him. He said, "Gee, that's interesting. Why don't you send that to me, and we'll take a look at it." A lot of people had said that to me, and here was another banker. He gave me his card, and I got back to Boston after that little outing in New York and sent him the package.

He apparently hit it with one of those "please handle" stamps and sent it to whoever he sent things to, who sent it to somebody else with another stamp, and it made its way down I don't know how many layers of that bank, and it ended up in a brand-new little office on Madison Avenue, a little startup SBIC, where a young man who had just graduated from Dartmouth College was working maybe his third month in the bank, looking for startup investments. A guy named Bill Reilly. This document landed on his desk that had started out at the chairman's office. So he called me. He was in New York, I was in Boston. He said, essentially, "I don't know who you are, but your loan and my career is sitting on my desk. I need your body up here with this document soon. How fast can you get to New York?" He could see that

his visibility in the company was going to have a lot to do with how well he responded to this document from Palmer.

Bill Reilly was a very creative, can-do guy. Another man that I have a large obligation to. Very quickly, at least in my judgment, relative to everybody else I had to deal with, we put together a plan in which the bank agreed to loan \$300,000 and take back 50 percent of the company in warrants, which they could exercise at, I don't know, a penny each or something, as warranty against repayment of the debt. Once the debt was in place, I wrapped up my transaction with United Fruit Company and brought news to Anita that we were moving yet again, only this time, probably forever, to operate that company in McAllen, Texas.

I have been telling people for years that when we left Boston, we were on a last name basis. Anita did not think this was a very good idea. She had not known McAllen, Texas, as a residence. She'd lived there, in rented apartments, motels. Now we were going to go there to live. I bought a house. We moved in. I bought a car. We did the things you would do if you moved to a new community. McAllen, Texas, turned into one of the most spectacularly wonderful social experiences of our entire lives. Anita would tell you this. When it later developed that we needed to leave McAllen for the next opportunity, she did not want to go. We were welcomed into the country club, partly because we had a high-visibility company. It was a larger employer in town. The banking I had done was with the McAllen Bank, run by Glen Roney, who became a very significant man in my life and was a major force at the country club. We found ourselves pretty soon settled into the social network of the community, and Anita loved that because we had a lot of friends and a lot of things to do. Our kids suddenly were looking at horses and motorcycles and a whole new way of life. Ken and Michael loved it.

06-00:12:22

Cándida Smith: They were how old when you moved?

06-00:12:23

Wornick: Oh, goodness. I would have to calculate that. Junior high school, I would guess, about.

06-00:12:33

Cándida Smith: This was '71, '72?

06-00:12:34

Wornick: Ken was born in '57. He would have been fourteen. Michael would have been twelve. Jonathan was six or seven. Jonathan didn't care very much for it, but the older boys liked it a lot. Life was very good for us there. For the first time in my life, I was not reporting to anybody. I had a payroll to make, and we had to earn it. It was a whole new experience. Nobody is prepared for being responsible for the lives of everybody who comes to work every day, and looking in their faces and know that they have wives and children and

obligations. This is not you're going to get paid no matter how this works out. *Nobody's* going to get paid if this doesn't work out.

06-00:13:32

Cándida Smith: So you were a small businessman.

06-00:13:36

Wornick: Absolutely. Absolutely, right.

06-00:13:39

Cándida Smith: You came in to United Fruit essentially a journeyman scientist. You left an entrepreneur. How much of a scientist were you during the bulk of your career? Was science something that remained important to you and to what you were going to do, or was it something that was gradually being replaced by management skills?

06-00:14:25

Wornick: A question that would be hard to answer in a simple way, because I think the answers are yes to all of your questions. Obviously, I did not live my life as a scientist, and I would not pretend to be a scientist today. I have no regrets at all about the peculiar career path I took. I didn't understand it at the time, but looking back at it, I was probably a great deal better at having a vision and managing people than I ever would have been sitting in a laboratory, doing multiple replications of some process over and over, until I'd got it demonstrated enough times to record and report. By that, I don't mean to demean what goes on in a laboratory. It's just a different calling. I'm probably too restless for that. I think I'd make a better research manager.

06-00:16:13

Cándida Smith: Did you have any other research projects after the irradiated rhizomes?

06-00:16:21

Wornick: I was always fairly close to product development. To this day, I read the monthly MIT tech magazine. I read scientific things. My philanthropy at this point in my life is mostly about medical causes, I will tell you that I've gotten heavily involved in the science of the ailments that I'm dealing with. I find that, whether it's plant pathology or bacteriology or what have you, once you've broken the code of those things, you can walk into a laboratory, even today, and talk about gas chromatography, or the new kinds of—which have moved on by eons from where we were, but all the science is still fundamentally the same principles.

06-00:17:40

Cándida Smith: In the freeze-drying business, were there health issues or spoilage issues that had to be solved in order to make the business profitable?

06-00:17:56

Wornick: No. In fact, the benefits were rather profound, because in freeze drying, you take the product to a moisture level at which you could have absolutely no enzymatic or microbial growth of any kind. It's always packaged in an inert

environment with some gas like nitrogen so that there's no oxidative or any other changes likely to be going on. Freeze-dried foods are in fact so safe that, during that period of time, I was approached by NASA to make astronaut food. We did that for a time. It turned out to be such a distraction, because 90 percent of what we were getting paid for was to fill out forms and documents for various agencies of the government, because they had incredible standards, which it probably should have. You cannot afford to make someone sick on a flight when they're that far from home. But freeze dry fits that very well.

One very quick story about that. Making a speech one day, I think to the Institute of Food Technologists, about freeze drying, just to do something dramatic, I placed a large briquette of vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate ice cream on the lectern that I had freeze dried. Somewhere in the speech, I identified what it was. It got a fair amount of press, because why would anybody freeze dry ice cream? It was a silly thing to do, but it worked in terms of making it a topic that we could use as an example of how far you can go with this process. The numbers of things you can do. It is actually almost endless, which was part of its problem, because you need to stop before you do it and ask yourself, does the world really want it? Most of the time, they did not. Anyway, because of that little exercise, freeze-dried ice cream was then offered to the astronaut feeding program. It became a very popular staple in the NASA program, and to this very day, freeze-dried ice cream is still in the NASA program. In a number of places around the country, most importantly at the Space and Science Museum at Washington, there's a gift shop there that still sells freeze-dried ice cream. It is still available around the country. We stopped doing that after a few years. It was just a distraction.

06-00:21:11

Cándida Smith: Consumer expectations are an important part of any business, I would think. In this case, you have what people think tastes good or what tastes normal. Was this an area that you had to research while you were at United Foods, and continue working on how to develop a product that consumers would say, yeah, this is tasty, or tasty enough?

06-00:21:44

Wornick: Yes, we absolutely did. That was always the hurdle, and that became the hurdle that actually measured the outer limits of that process, because you would always be put up against the next available opportunity, which already exists in a can or in a frozen product, or in a bottle. There's something out there, and we've got to be better than that, or more affordable, or more convenient, or more delicious, something that would allow you to nudge the other product out of the way.

“Nudge” is an interesting word here. It's a profound thing to say about the food business. Every other major industry can be grown to the limits that you can interest people in spending their money on it, but the food industry is very finite. You eat three meals a day, plus a few snacks, and that's it. If you eat

my product, you do not eat somebody else's product. So anybody who comes into this industry has to recognize that whether it's space on the shelf or your place in the industry, you're going to have to take somebody else's place to make a place, other than the modest growth in population, in the business. That comes down in particular to when you're introducing a new product. Whatever it is, it's going to need to be better than the product that you're going to have to go up against in the same marketplace. Freeze drying, as astonishing as it is, and very remarkable end product, it really only works for campers and boatmen and the military. People who just need that step-up in quality, but will tolerate the idea that it is going to be better than canned food and not as good as fresh prepared food, and much more expensive than canned food. It just never developed the huge place in the food industry that was expected of it. Even now, it's still a significant part of military field feeding, and an ingredient in a lot of foods, but major food products in distribution, not very many to speak of.

06-00:24:22

Cándida Smith: Did United Fruit have contracts with the defense department for freeze-dried food?

06-00:24:28

Wornick: They did—

06-00:24:30

Cándida Smith: So when you bought the company, you were acquiring some defense contracts?

06-00:24:34

Wornick: Oh, no, they didn't have them at that time. At the time we bought it, they did not, no. That came some number of years later.

06-00:24:41

Cándida Smith: So that was your doing?

06-00:24:42

Wornick: Yes, it was. It wasn't a brilliant thing, but it came about quite normally, because the government was looking for it and we were in the business.

06-00:24:52

Cándida Smith: We'll get into that. I did want to also ask you a little bit more about Pete Harris. You mentioned him as one of your mentors, an important mentor. Was there a difference in the way a corporate person thinks from the way an entrepreneur or a small businessman has to think? Was there a culture shift in business as we move out of these monster-sized corporations dominating the economy for, by that time, almost a century?

06-00:25:44

Wornick: I think the principles are not that different. If your question circles around Pete Harris, the reason that I dwelled on that a little bit was that, if I were to recite the five or six men to whom I have a huge debt for their having placed their

confidence in me, and suddenly they were allowing me a huge step-up in my own responsibilities and income and whatever modest progress there was in my lifetime, in the Pete Harris case, it's the only example where I was never able to really provide payback. I always, to this day, have some probably not inaccurate guilt about Pete having been moved on out of that job and my having been put in it. Jack Fox was absolutely ready to make that change. It could not have been a more innocent happenstance that I found myself sitting next to him. I don't know if he ever would have come to talk to me about it. Did I breach a code of ethics in doing that? Did that play a part in my getting the presidency and Pete losing it? I don't know. I probably did Pete a favor—he may never see it that way—because that company, doing what it was doing, was never going to go very far. It would not have, had we not come on to some other opportunity a little later. Doing what it was doing, it needed to be just run very carefully, very tightly, and not be fussed with, because if you load up with a lot of expenses on the chance that you would make profit, you probably will never get there.

06-00:27:59

Cándida Smith: I wasn't necessarily personalizing it on him, because his name doesn't show up in the literature I've seen about United Fruit, but there was a consistent drumbeat that, by the mid-1950s, the company was top-heavy, it was spending too much on a lot of things, not generating the income that it used to, and finding it more and more difficult to make decisions. So it had become a dinosaur, as several historians have referred to it. This was all apart from the public-image problems that surrounded United Fruit Company.

06-00:28:45

Wornick: Well, I'm not sure I'm qualified to have an opinion on that side of it, because I didn't spend a whole lot of time researching United Fruit Company's market value for its stock. It probably, from the inside, would have been deemed to be possibly clumsily managed. On the other hand, Jack Fox, I think, had done a terrific job by introducing boxed fruit and branding the fruit. Herb Cornell, his executive vice president, was probably one of the most gifted managers of men that I had ever worked for. I would credit a lot of things I try to do to Herb Cornell, just from following his model of grace and decency and patience. He came out of the Dillingham Corporation in Hawaii. It always felt to me that he was still in Hawaii. He had this presence, as if there was a ukulele player next to him and he was still moving in the Hawaiian air. He just had a very calm way, which I loved about him and respected. I don't know. It may well be that the company earned what it got. It was taken over. Its demise, ultimately into a very undervalued and devalued private company, happened pretty quickly. It's hard to imagine how that mammoth company fell apart.

In terms of the first question that I think you were reaching for, which is what the difference between being in a small company and a large company, the major difference has always seemed to me that, in a large company, not

entirely true, but, at the top of the best companies are usually extraordinary people. They are just the gifted people who have made their way as the cream to the top of the business. If you have the luxury of being able to work with or for of those people, you're very likely to meet similar kinds of people and do some learning. That is not available to you if you're working in a much smaller business. I've always advised children and grandchildren, everybody who ever comes to me for counsel about career, to go to the biggest and the best-run company you can possibly find. Go to Johnson and Johnson or IBM. Of course, they don't. They go off now into a garage somewhere and strike a couple of stones together and make a spark. They come back a year later and they want to know if I want to buy some stock in their billion-dollar company. The world has changed. But when I was coming through those corridors, there was a thing called professional corporate management.

By the way, totally different ethics, by a wide margin, than we see today. The idea that any of us would ever do anything to embarrass or blemish the company's name would have been unthinkable. Unthinkable. I don't know who you could trust today. The world has collapsed somehow around the ethics of business. It's not the purpose of this interview, but I'd like to establish, in the years when United Fruit Company was struggling with itself, these were highly principled people, really trying desperately hard to do the best they knew how to do for the stockholders. Truly, that was their objective.

06-00:33:00

Cándida Smith: Did you know Thomas Sunderland?

06-00:33:02

Wornick: Not very well, because he was at the very top of the company when I was at the very bottom of the company. As I had come up a little bit, Jack Fox came in, and I did get to know him very well. I knew Tom Sunderland. He was a little out of water at the Fruit Company. The argument was made that if you're a good manager, you can manage anything, and he was clearly a good manager. Managing the Fruit Company was not his calling, I think. Jack Fox, I believed, was a very much better president than Sunderland was, if I can go on record with that.

06-00:33:43

Cándida Smith: You mentioned that you knew Thomas McCann fairly well.

06-00:33:52

Wornick: A wonderful storyteller, an Irish raconteur, a wonderful man with language. Public relations was his field. He was very good at it. He could represent anything or anybody. Did I learn about marketing? I probably have never learned about marketing. I would have to admit that that's still a great, big puzzle to me. I've never been good at that, and I will probably end my days not being good at it.

06-00:34:33

Cándida Smith: For someone who hasn't learned about marketing, you seem to have done pretty well.

06-00:34:38

Wornick: Just some intuition.

06-00:34:48

Cándida Smith: Of course, you didn't really know Eli Black. The tragic ending, did that come as a surprise to you?

06-00:35:03

Wornick: It was a surprise to everybody. Absolutely everybody. He ran the company, I would think, for three or four years before his death. By that time, although nobody but Eli would know the real story, there were three or four major problems. They were in trouble with the government over several issues, one of which was—I don't know what it's called in law, but the company routinely is required to make payments to various heads of state in various Latin American countries in order to be allowed to stay there. Which will probably raise your questions about how do I feel about United Fruit Company. It was not unusual, I'm told. I'm not a witness here. We had to do what we had to do to get along there. Eli Black, coming from probably an ethical, a rabbinical background, had trouble living with what he was being accused of, which was an unattractive, at least from the federal rules point of view, transgression of making payments. I wasn't there, but I think he had very significant troubles taking on the responsibility of running this very large company, which was probably not his calling, and willingness to share responsibility and provide assignments to people in a fashion that would work in a large company. Eli was probably troubled by lots and lots of things on the day when he finally packed up some encyclopedias in a briefcase and made his way to his office in the Pan Am Building, I believe, Midtown New York. Up the elevator, into his office, broke out the window, and stepped out the window and took his life. I've never met anybody who would say they saw that coming, including Tom McCann, who stayed pretty close to Eli Black, even during that time. No, it was a surprise to everyone, and a terrible shame.

06-00:37:41

Cándida Smith: Did you travel much while you were at United Fruit?

06-00:37:46

Wornick: I did. I traveled a great deal. I traveled almost perpetually. There was always something that had to be done. Some trips were spectacular. Jack Fox asked me to—it might have been Pete Harris, I'm not sure now—but anyway, to go to every freeze-dry plant in the world and see what they were doing. Well, they were in Denmark, Ireland, London. They were just everywhere. Anita and I took off for four weeks on a first-class, all-expenses-paid trip, thanks to United Fruit Company. We quickly established a very wonderful and effective agenda, where I had an appointment every single morning somewhere, and inside of a couple of hours I could interview the owner or president and tour

the facilities, and then, on the way back to my hotel, I would dictate off a tape with my observations and conclusions, get it in overnight mail, and the rest of the day was left to get to the next place or enjoy where we were. So we had an incredible trip.

06-00:39:13

Cándida Smith: You had a direct understanding of state-of-the-art in freeze dry. Was there anything you saw that you said, well, this is something we've got to do for sure, or, this is something we've got to avoid?

06-00:39:30

Wornick: In fact, no, I came to quite the opposite conclusion. We had decided early on, back when I was first sent down there as an employee, to put in equipment that was made by a Chicago company called Varudyne, and the essence of the process was to get the water out of the food, out of whatever you were freeze drying, in the quickest, most efficient fashion, which is to say you have to have a condenser nearby that is colder than the food product. It's like freezer burning, if you will. You get the moisture to move from where it is over to this other place. The way the process was run by the Varudyne Company was the very best. Everybody tried more complicated mechanical things. I don't know today, but I have a strong hunch that nobody has ever improved it, or it would be in the press. I would have known about it.

More importantly, what I was finding is that everybody was struggling with their product development and marketing. It's a spectacular process. For example, in Ireland, it had been built by the government. They just wanted not to get left behind so they put in a huge plant and said, let's start freeze drying some of this. Well, they never found exactly the thing. In London, it was a division of the Nestlé Company. A lot of big companies didn't want to get left behind, and so they were diddling with it. It was not about science or technology. It was always about the marketplace and a product that worked in that process. I would say that even to this day, nothing very significant has come out of it. There are a lot of processes like that. Irradiation is another very good way to process food and keep it fresh and reduce the microbial load. If you look at it as a scientist, you could get yourself worked up about using gamma radiation in the food industry. It has been tried for cleaning up spices, and it's used occasionally for milk, I think, in Europe. But in the main, it's a very fringy thing that is not important. It happens that the food industry has come on a lot of things that look promising. Canning, freezing, pasteurizing, low-cost dehydration, as in drum drying and air drying, those kinds of things, persevered. All these other fancy processes, to date, have not really made history. Not yet, anyway.

[End Audio File 6]

Interview #4 July 21, 2011

Begin Audio File 7 wornick_ron_07_07-21-11.mp3

07-00:00:20

Cándida Smith: Towards the end of the last session, you had mentioned that while you were at United Fruit, you had numerous ideas about how the Right Away plant could be run better than it had been, but not much ability to implement those ideas. But come 1971, you're the owner of Right Away, or at least the person responsible for the company, what did you do to change the way it functioned?

07-00:01:22

Wornick: It helps, at least from my point of view, to be able to see what's happening in the Wornick family as we get off the bus, so to speak, in McAllen, Texas. In 1968, we had contracted to build a brand-new house for ourselves, the first time in our lives, ever, in Sharon, Massachusetts, which was, to our point of view, the finest place in the United States to raise a young family. Great schools, a lake for boating, just wonderful people, and forty-five minutes from downtown Boston. Anita was very involved in countless organizations in town. When you get to talk to her, she'll fill it in, but I remember the League of Women Voters among many others. She had urged me to get involved as well, so I was heavily involved as chairman of the Republican Town Committee, and moving up the line on a warrant committee. This was a town government city, where we ran everything ourselves, which was very interesting, old New England style, and very effective.

Anita and I were completely tucked-in, with great friends, building a new house, and there were two forces beginning to cross in space here. Force one was that we were settling in on the theory that some wonderful things were happening at United Fruit Company for me, because I had been on a fairly attractive trajectory for some time. In the meantime, my trajectory was beginning to curve over a little bit. I was not sure I really saw it that early, but it didn't take too long after that to begin to see it. Not too long into that slump in the curve, the business of United Fruit Company—

[interruption]

07-00:03:44

Cándida Smith: You were saying you had an idyllic life in Sharon, Massachusetts.

07-00:03:47

Wornick: Life seemed to be just absolutely perfect. At the very same time that this life was getting even more solidified, more comfortable, more connected, the Fruit Company was being gradually put in play on Wall Street. It was sliding in the direction of there being a bidding battle for its stock. I've already told you the story about how it became, at least in my memory, the first major leveraged buyout, successfully transacted by Eli Black. In very short order, I found myself going from an optimistic attitude about a long-term connection with

United Fruit Company. Incidentally, in the fifties and sixties, it was not unusual for someone to spend an entire career in the same company. If you kept getting promotions and good signals, you might very well live out your life there. Moving around with a house and cars and children and what have you was a phenomenon that came a good deal later. There was an opposite force coming at me that I hadn't entirely recognized. When we moved into that house and began landscaping and doing the things that one would do for furnishing and so on, we were still believing that we were going to be able to make a life right where we were. As it happens, the other plan was stronger than our plan. Ultimately, as I've already detailed in a previous conversation, it became clear to me that we were going to have to leave the Fruit Company in order to be able to negotiate for the company that I thought I might be able to acquire and run on my own. A completely outrageous idea, but this is where the seedling of an entrepreneurship is born. Somebody has an idea that, somehow or other, I can make this work. I did have a very strong, and rightly so, instinct about running a business, which I believe proved correct, but raising the money was way underestimated.

After I had agreed to hold my negotiations with the company until they provided severance arrangements, I left the company. I began renegotiating with the company, and in the meantime, I went to work looking for capital. I won't take you through that again, except that it took over a year of going around, wearing out the knees on my trousers at every possible opportunity to find the funds. In the very early spring of—I think it's now '71—we finally were able to construct a deal with Citibank New York. Their transaction provided us \$300,000 in a loan, and they took back warrants for 50 percent of the company. I'll come back to that at a later time, because that turned out to be a very good investment for them and for me. From that point, we severed our connections with Sharon, Massachusetts. We sold the house, we sold the cars, we had goodbye parties, and off we went to McAllen, Texas.

07-00:07:26

Cándida Smith: So this was not viewed as a temporary move with the idea of returning back to Boston?

07-00:07:32

Wornick: Not at all, because I was about to take ownership of an ongoing business, which meant there were a hundred or so employees, there was a payroll. There were all kinds of obligations to suppliers and customers. The very first thing you discover when this moment happens is the difference from delegating that responsibility inside of a large corporate world, which has to be done, because that's pretty much the way the machinery works. You need to be there every day and people need to see you every day. So from Sharon, Massachusetts, I purchased a house in McAllen, Texas. A house just then being completed in construction from a man who had been our insurance agent for the company. There was a little network of friends there. By the time we arrived in McAllen, we were able to move into a house. We picked up a station wagon,

and off we went to a brand-new life pretty quickly. It's very easy for me to say now. I can tell you that my wife was on a last-name basis with me by this time because in her mind, leaving Boston for McAllen, Texas, was not a clever idea. She learned, however. It was not very long after that that both she and I absolutely, totally fell in love with the lifestyle of South Texas, in particular, McAllen, Texas.

The strongest impressions that follow are the incredible hospitality as we arrived there. We were a fairly large business in a small community, but by no means predominant. Still, lots and lots and lots of people felt the need to welcome us into their various organizations and one thing or another. The children were all well greeted. It did not take very long before we settled in. From the point of view of lifestyle of the family, the second thing I was quick to observe was that doing business there seemed to be considerably easier than anywhere I had ever seen, actually, in the U.S., because people were very genuine and reliable. If they were just going to say, I'm going to come at two o'clock this afternoon to fix the washing machine, they would be there at five minutes to two, and it got fixed. You got used to that. It was a different environment, a considerable upgrade. As Bostonians, we were kind of closed and snippy, private people. We had to relearn our behavior in South Texas, which was, I like to think, not a hard thing to do. They made it very easy for us.

So that was on the social side. On the business side, a number of things became important immediately. One was, everywhere that I looked up close, in terms of what we were buying and spending money on, appeared to be improvable. I could cut costs, not in every single line, but there were a lot of places that we hadn't looked closely in a long time and needed to. I was able in not too many months to push down a lot of our operating costs. The same thing was true on the revenue side, by just paying closer attention to some details.

I don't suggest that the people who were there previously were incompetent. They absolutely were not, but there is a distinction between it being your own money, your own company, and caring as an employee. We were able to get the business quickly into good enough shape that, even though I had very elaborate plans for cash flow during this bridge time, which is the scary time when you go from startup to running everything, and you've just got to be sure the cash flow is there to pay the bills you've got to meet, it turned out that we never used more than just a little less than \$100,000 of the \$300,000 I had borrowed. So \$200,000 of the \$300,000 was never drawn down. We continued to build cash over the subsequent months. From that early time on, the business was doing very well. In addition to that, I was then active in an organization called IFMA, which is a food manufacturing association that has a lot of senior executives from most of the food companies. I was out traveling to see our customers and a lot of new people who I thought should

be customers of ours. With the traveling and the new everything, it was a frenetic but positive and wonderful year.

There was one black mark in there. Before buying the company, I flew down to McAllen, Texas, and had a very real negotiation with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, who were the union in place in that factory. The local representative was a man named Benny Campos. Interesting that that name is still in my head with no difficulty. He and I both understood that as soon as it changed hands, he could come for a brand-new deal. He had that opportunity. If title changed hands, the union contract provided that he could start from a new contract, possibly even a new election. He had a lot of rights available to him. I had obtained a document from him. As I recall it, it would not have been called a contract. It might have been called a letter of understanding. Very naïve on my part. Two or three months after I was there, Benny Campos arrived with his new demands. I proposed to him that we had agreed that we were going to continue until the conclusion of the current contract. I needed that assurance to just move ahead without any surprises. I think the contract still had a year or two to go. Anyway, we could not agree that he had agreed, and he pulled everybody out of the plant. They all went on strike.

I had no experience in dealing with a union, much less with a strike. It was a scary time, because they went into the surrounding fields, literally lit bonfires, and had member meetings, chanting songs. We had gone from what I felt was a fraternal environment—I know we often get accused of misleading ourselves about how patrimonial we are to the employees, but in any case, they had been revved up into believing that they were being taken advantage of by some Yankee. Things got pretty ugly. They then went so far as to—oh, broken glass on the driveway, loudspeakers and all kinds of threatening stuff. Anyway, at some point, I guess I just decided I'd had enough. It was probably a couple weeks of downtime. I had a very wonderful guy there named John Dent, a treasured employee. He was given the task of renting buses and bringing employees in from Harlingen, Texas, about thirty miles away. With security forces and whatnot. We decided Texas was a right-to-work state, and we were going to keep going. If they wanted to be on strike, they could be on strike. I saw no reason to be humbled by what I thought was very devious behavior.

The end of the story is that we got the factory going quickly and rather well. Gradually, over time, many of our employees who needed the job wandered back in and began working in the plant, even though there was a strike on. The Amalgamated Meat Cutters filed an action with the NLRB, and we had a hearing that was delayed some time. It might have been a couple of months after that.

[Interruption]

07-00:18:00

Cándida Smith: You had an NLRB hearing.

07-00:18:02

Wornick:

We did have an NLRB hearing. The officer, the judge, whatever they're called, listened very briefly to both sides. I strongly suspect that he had studied this case in some depth before he got there because he ruled in my favor so fast that my head spun. I thought we were going to spend the day in the hearing room. That was the end of that. They've been on strike now, I guess, forty years. We never resolved the issue, except NLRB said that we had not broken any rules by insisting that they had broken their contract.

07-00:18:46

Cándida Smith: So you then were able to operate the plant without a union contract?

07-00:18:51

Wornick:

We did operate without a union contract from that day to today. The plant subsequently closed when we moved to a new plant. but that plant remained nonunion. You would expect me to say this, but we had a very good workforce. I think they were very well taken care of. I'd like to think so.

Anyway, as that year wound down, and I was getting my cash flow under control, the workforce under control, and the customers under control, for the very first time in my life, I was thinking, "I'm in business. I'm in charge of my own business. I can grow it. I can not grow it. I can do whatever I choose to do." It was an exhilarating, wonderful feeling, which I had never had before. I was never uncomfortable as an employee, but I think I always wanted to have my own way. After a year or so, it began to feel like a very comfortable path to be on.

Just about at that juncture, when I could not be less interested in any other opportunities, I received a phone call from a man named Robert Shetterly, who was chairman of the board and president of the Clorox Company. He told me that he was calling from Oakland, California, that he'd heard about me, that he would like to invite me up to Oakland for a visit, and how would I like to work in a bleach plant, as he put it to me, which was actually not a good word choice, because I pictured a bleach plant, and that was an easy question to answer. I didn't know what job he had in mind, but there wasn't one that was going to appeal to me. In not too many more minutes, I came to discover he was a very charming and wonderful human being. He became one of the important men in my life. Anyway, our first conversation revealed very quickly that we were not going in the same direction. But he had a private plane and he frequently took trips to Nantucket. He said, "Well, just think about it. I think we're doing some things up here you might find interesting. I'll stop in McAllen one time when I'm heading East." This is a major detour. Not too many weeks later, there was a phone call, and he was making a date. Suddenly, I got a team of about twenty people trying to vacuum my carpets and put drapes on the windows, sharpen the pencils, make it look like we were

not a South Texas funky little business but proud of where we lived and worked. Bob Shetterly showed up, actually, at the front door of our home, and we had dinner together. I toured him around the plant, and we sat and talked.

I learned a number of important things while we were sitting there visiting. One was that he and a group of several dozen other people at Clorox had all been employees of Proctor and Gamble, but Proctor and Gamble had been named in a monopoly situation where they had too much of the market in bleach, and it resulted in a consent decree that required Proctor and Gamble to divest itself of the Clorox brand. Proctor and Gamble gathered up a group of people and sent them to Oakland, where the major bleach plant existed. There were other plants around the U.S., because bleach doesn't ship affordably. It's a very water-intense product. They took temporary offices on Hegenberger Road, at the edge of Oakland, and they settled in. This would have been, I think, around '67 or so. Immediately upon them getting out to California and settling in, Proctor and Gamble, in order to preserve the laundry detergent category, created and introduced a new whitening product, which was called an enzyme detergent. It was very effective. It worked very well, but it didn't work if you added bleach. The bleach would kill the enzyme. So the bleach business, sodium hypochlorite was going to go away as a product if Proctor and Gamble prevailed.

The story was remarkable to me, as I heard it told. I began to understand that Proctor and Gamble was one of those companies that really and truly trained its people in the most thorough and professional way. Whether you were in sales or marketing or purchasing, freight and traffic, you were the best at what you did, and you could move from your position to any other position with the same title and do exactly the same job anywhere in the country. It was a little like the military in the sense that people dressed a certain way and they behaved a certain way. As it's been described to me, it had a very strong appeal to me. In terms of managing a business, I liked the sound of that. Robert Shetterly seemed to speak well of it, as I got to know him in these conversations, and his thinking about the company. I was very taken with the way he was running his business, because he was using Proctor and Gamble tools to deal with Proctor and Gamble, so to speak. What makes this telling worth the telling is that he beat Proctor and Gamble at the laundry detergent business, and the enzyme detergents had to fold their tent and go away. Clorox bleach maintained its position in the market. I would like to think because of superior marketing and strategies, and goodness knows what skills. All that preceded before I was there, but the story was relayed to me.

Now I was beginning to see, at this point, that Clorox was a bigger environment than a bleach factory in Oakland. Also, Bob, as he became known to me ultimately, had sent to a number of his friends a job description, or a person description, of somebody he wanted to hire to handle some new companies that he'd either already started to buy or was thinking to buy, because his plan was to diversify quickly and end up where he had a big office

tower in the middle of the city, a big company, a big plane, and everything as big or better than Proctor and Gamble. He was like a football coach. I sat listening to him. I thought, "It's a lot bigger than what I'm doing down here in South Texas, and he seems awfully competent." So he did get my attention. Also, at that time, Clorox was trading at an unbelievable multiple. I don't remember the number, but it would have been in the thirties. Maybe thirty or thirty-five times earnings. He proposed a transaction that would have been an exchange of stock, a pooling of interest, it's called. I get Clorox stock, they take my—whatever we called the company then—Right Away Foods, I think—and it's tax-free. You just swap shares. It's not a taxable transaction at that moment.

07-00:28:14

Cándida Smith: So there were no capital gains?

07-00:28:15

Wornick: No gain to anybody. It was just a book transaction.

07-00:28:29

Cándida Smith: Did you have stock in your company?

07-00:28:31

Wornick: In my company? Oh, sure.

07-00:28:37

Cándida Smith: Was it a publicly-traded company?

07-00:28:38

Wornick: No. You open another story that I'll only do a couple sentences about, because it's a very old story. When I first bought the company, in order to get the complete attention and loyalty of two or three senior people, I gifted them some shares in the company, with an understanding that there could be more, based on certain incentives. It didn't take a week or ten days to discover that I had partners. I could hardly make a decision that they were comfortable with. It is very clumsy, and it was a horrendous mistake. The luxury and joy of being able to have a board meeting all by yourself on the way home in the car is totally gone if you've got to negotiate with three other people who are employees. So I bought those people out, I bought their shares back, and became 100 percent owner of all the stock again. Then we set up profit sharing and retirement and other kinds of things, which I'll come to a little later down the line, because that didn't become pertinent until some years later. Bob Shetterly had got my attention, and I went to San Francisco once or twice for visits with him. I was beginning to think, "This could be interesting. I may need to make this change."

07-00:30:14

Cándida Smith: Was he interested in Right Away for freeze drying, or was it you personally that he wanted?

07-00:30:23
Wornick:

He had sent out a position-description to a few people, many of whom happened to be co-board members of mine on IFMA, the food manufacturers association. At least two of them wrote back to Shetterly, saying, “You’ve just described Ron Wornick. That’s your guy.” Well, that was enough for Bob Shetterly. Now, it was just totally wacky happenstance that he happened to write to some friends of mine, but they were Proctor and Gamble people who I knew through IFMA. He decided that he was going to get me into the company to do what he wanted to do. His idea was that I was going to have the job he had envisioned for growing his business.

07-00:31:38
Cándida Smith:

The diversification was going in directions that were not bleach products?

07-00:31:46
Wornick:

Exactly. In other words, he was envisioning not only a household products division, which was a major existing division and is the company today, but another division, which would be a diversified division, primarily with a food focus. He had already entered into negotiations with a number of companies, which I’ll come to shortly, because by the time I got to work there, I was already inheriting things that needed to be absorbed into the company and managed, the first and most major of which was the Martin Brower Company in Chicago.

Anita was not happy about moving again. San Francisco could have been Tangiers as far as she was concerned. I don’t think if she had ever been there. Anyway, we did go to San Francisco. We struggled mightily to find a house. We found one in a community that looked a little bit like Boston, called Hillsborough. Great, big, old, Boston-like homes and nice, well-gardened lots. We went into one house in particular. When we went into the front door with the broker, we’d exchanged one of those glances that couples that have been married for some time can do. I’m saying to her, this is it. This is just perfect. Four bedrooms, each with its own bath, plus a master bedroom. We had a place for all the kids, a guest bedroom, a big living room. I was adding it all up in my head. Affordable price. Her look said, I wouldn’t live in this house under any circumstances.

So we walked out and ended up in a delicatessen in downtown Burlingame on a cold winter night. It was apparent at that moment that this could all unravel if I couldn’t make the family comfortable in San Francisco. It was also clear to both Anita and myself that we were looking at buildings, and that was a frightening thing. It’s not about buildings. It’s about a place and friends and some familiarity. We’d been so spoiled in McAllen that this was terrorizing. It was clear we were going to move in and just rot wherever we moved, because nobody would ever know. I made a phone call to the local temple, and it just happened to reach a urologist whose wife was the roommate of my attorney’s wife in McAllen, Texas. So we sat in their living room and she urged us to come over and visit with them. Inside of ten minutes, we discovered we had

countless friends in common, and Anita's anxiety about the community came down considerably. I promised her she could do whatever she wanted by way of decoration, and we moved on to buying that house and getting on with our lives in Hillsborough. I needed to get to work pretty damn fast. The train was running under my feet, so to speak. So we moved to Hillsborough. A couple mornings later, life began anew for us in San Francisco, now with the Clorox Company. A major change was that I had a little bundle of stock security instead of a company that I own. It was a different mindset, but it seemed to me a very good bet to make at the time, and that's the one we made. The next chapter opens on the subject of Clorox.

07-00:36:24

Cándida Smith: Could I ask before that, in terms of your involvement with the Jewish community, was there a Jewish community in McAllen, Texas, that you could participate in?

07-00:36:40

Wornick:

In McAllen, Texas, there were about sixty or seventy Jewish families, in a community of about 60,000, just a tiny, tiny, little Jewish community, but very, very closely-knit. They were very welcoming to us, and we made lots of friends in that congregation, in addition to the rest of the city. We really had a very ecumenical life there. On the other hand, when we got to Hillsborough, and I didn't know a soul, I called a temple. I said, "Is there a part of this town where there's a Jewish community or some place where we could find our people? I just need to make a connection." I know people think that Jews all know one another all over the world, and I'm not even going to deny that. There may be something to that, because it does seem, somehow or other, that when we find one another, there's a way to connect. But one of those temples, I reached a schoolteacher who told me that she'd been hired by a man named Dr. Katz, a urologist. I asked for his phone number, and I called him. His wife answered the phone and invited us over. She said, "You must come here. It will be a blessing for us. Just come straight now. Irving will be home from making rounds. He'll want to meet you." We didn't know that we had anything in common, but we sat down in their living room and discovered we had a lot in common and a lot of friends in common. That little, yes, Jewish connection, was a significant bridge at a time when it was a cold winter night in December, in a strange city, and we probably needed just a little lantern swinging in a window that would help us get over a bridge. It looked like we were being opportunistic and maybe foolish to give up our good life in Texas. We needed a little courage that there would be a life at the other end of this decision.

07-00:39:20

Cándida Smith: You had your temple. Did you start to become involved in the JCF or other Jewish organizations?

07-00:39:28
Wornick:

Yes, we did. It was the way to immediately make friends and connections through the Jewish Community Federation. The federation had a peninsula division, in which we became active. I became chairman of the Hillsborough part of that thing. I don't remember all the details, but Anita in particular got involved in countless things. It wasn't too long before I found myself on the Federation Board, and then on Jewish Community Relations Council, the Jewish Vocational Guidance—alphabet soup of very worthwhile Jewish organizations in the city. Very quickly, I knew people everywhere.

Since you've raised the subject, I'll stay on this one minute longer for that part of this audience that might have a small interest in how Jewish connections work. When I was in San Francisco for the very last time to close the deal with Bob Shetterly, he'd asked that I go around and meet all the members of the board before he would execute the agreement, which I was very happy to do. He had a very distinguished board. Not sure I'm going to be able to do this. Amit Solomon was chairman of the Crocker Bank. Ben Cansell, president of Potlatch. Gene Trefethen, chairman of Kaiser. Emmett Wert, president of Mills College. Ten or twelve really very distinguished, competent gentlemen. Every one of those visits was very, very pleasant to me. While I was doing that, Clorox had an ad agency for years, and the owner and chairman of that ad agency, who had the Clorox account, saw me coming over the horizon. He took me to lunch at Trader Vic's, where those kind of lunches happened in those days, and he gave me tremendous counsel about the company, who all these people were, who to be careful of, who to be a little extra kindly to, and what have you, in the most polite and statesman-like way. He wasn't doing anything mischievous at all. He was working in the best interest of the company and of me. He was in getting me a little more confident in doing what I was doing. Bill Honig. Honig Cooper Harrington was the ad agency. Bill Honig and Miriam. A little bit of a Jewish trust and connection. We do find each other. I don't know that that's any different than any other men's club or any club of any kind. People of a like point of view find each other and help each other in some way. It's a wonderful thing. It's always at work. It was definitely at work when I got here to San Francisco, and remains so to this day. Anyway, we need to start talking about what I find at Clorox.

07-00:44:24
Cándida Smith:

Shall we move on to Clorox? You were in charge of diversification into food. Was there a focus or strategy?

07-00:44:39
Wornick:

No, I think Bob Shetterly hoped for me to provide the strategy. Now, I'm telling you when I'm thinking back on it now, not what I might have thought that time. What he told me then, when I got to work that first day, was that, look, these are the things that are in play: Martin Brower, the distribution company; Prince Castle, which is a food service equipment company; a bag company that I cannot, for the life of me, think of the name of. You'll never

come up with this one, but it's the name of a small town in the South that the company was physically located in. In addition, B&B Mushrooms, Nesbitt orange drink, a steak sauce. It was a potpourri of stuff that had either been there or had recently come in over the gunnel, but the biggest thing by far was the Martin Brower acquisition.

Clearly, my first obligation was to get my hands around this stuff and see what had to be done. The obvious thing at Martin Brower was that there were lots of things changing very fast there. I really needed to get heavily involved there. It was a very recent acquisition. Martin Brower had been owned by one family, the Perlman family. Perlman, Sr., was a very, very close friend of Ray Kroc, the McDonald's founder. They had huge trust between them. Ray Kroc had gone to Perlman, Sr., and he had explained to him that he was unable to grow his business because he couldn't get consistency from chain to chain. The French fries might be a little different. The hamburgers were provided from a different supplier. Everything was different. Each unit had to have a janitorial supplier, a canned goods supplier, a fruit and vegetable supplier, a meat supplier. All these different suppliers were coming and going, night and day, dropping things off. There was an inventory control problem. All of these things had to be dealt with for Ray Kroc, and he was hoping that Perlman, who must have been a very bright and creative guy, was going to be able to deal with this. I hardly knew him. I never really got to know him because he had a very promising young son who he left in charge of the business, and he left town with his check and was never heard from again. I don't think I ever saw him. His son was a very competent guy and a very nice guy. His job was to maintain the relationship with Ray Kroc and the McDonald company.

Problem one was to build other relationships with McDonald's. We were very vulnerable to have this very thin little thread between somebody who's gone and this major customer for which we'd paid a lot of money to this company. Second problem was we were going to have to, in pretty quick order, solve his problems, which was a sizeable order. Third, the then-existing company really didn't have the people, the office space, or the equipment to do this. In fairly short order, I brought in a guy named Robert Cowan, from Simplot Potato Company. A solid, experienced manager, and already in the frozen French fry business, which wasn't a bad thing to have. When I say brought in, there's the usual business of doing job descriptions and people searching and interviews and what have you, but we settled on Cowan and then fed him the assignment of finding appropriate office space and starting to build an organization. One of the things he did, which proved to be absolutely brilliant, he asked for the most talented salesman in the Clorox Company. Shetterly parted with this guy, a very young, attractive guy who I had never known before. We sent him off to McDonald University. It's a school where new franchisees go to learn how the business operates. Sixty or ninety days later, he's graduated summa cum laude from this McDonald's U. He totally ingratiated himself into the McDonald's management very quickly. Thanks to him, to Bob Cowan and his whole strategy, inside of the first year, we were beginning to move into new

offices. We had a new arm across to McDonald's, and things were starting to fall into place.

Also, we had a CFO at Martin Brower, who I made a huge bet on, and he turned out to be very, very productive. He managed the job of converting cash registers into real-information computers so that when people checked out of a restaurant, instead of punching in \$1.95, they would just hit one hamburger, one Coke, one French fry, what have you. That would calculate the check for them, the tax and so on, so the bill could be rendered while they were checking out. More importantly, this enabled us to keep track of the inventory that was being depleted behind their restaurant from their own inventory storage and helped us accumulate a list of the things that they were going to need. We could begin to think about how we could construct a one-stop shop where we would bring a truck up to the restaurant and drop off manager's hats, pencils, and diced lettuce, ketchup, ground beef, absolutely everything. They have one delivery, one time, and they put it away and they get one invoice and every McDonald's gets the same supplies. That was the theory, that was what we set out to do.

To test that, McDonald's selected a Martin Brower warehouse in Atlanta, where they apparently had enough units close to the warehouse to do a test of this system. Somewhere probably around the second year of our ownership of Martin Brower, we did the full-on test in Atlanta to see if we could make this work. By the time we got to running the test, I think partly because the company had a lot of Clorox people in it then, and it had a lot of very competent people remaining from Martin Brower, it had stepped up in its way of doing business. A lot of clever things were happening that hadn't happened before. We were cutting down costs on everything. When I would go there for a review about what was going on, I can remember hearing that we would be the first food distributor in the U.S. to have new trucks that have a windshield on them to blow the air over the top of the square cab behind the driving cab, and that that cut down, I don't know, 10 percent in fuel consumption or something like that. That's a big cost if you're distributing food.

07-00:53:30

Cándida Smith: Especially after 1973.

07-00:53:34

Wornick: Even in the handling of goods, we got to where we could take French fries that were arriving from a railcar and turn them around in the yard instead of actually running them through the warehouse and having them sit there for three weeks. We were turning French fries over practically into the trucks that were heading to the restaurants. Slight exaggeration, but the turning of inventory was going up and up and up, so we were having less and less capital tied up in inventory. The customer was increasingly happy with the unification of quality in their business, cost control in their business, less tension on both sides. We were starting to feel very proud about that. Other

customers were beginning to ring our doorbell, asking for what was then called one-stop shopping. That became a runaway, absolute runaway, food business at Martin Brower.

While that was going on, the other divisions were all playing into this. So, for example, one of the next major projects that had been assigned to us—Ray Kroc still wasn't getting the absolute uniformity he wanted out of French fries in every unit, even though we were delivering absolutely uniform French fries to every unit. But they had to go through a fryer. So Prince Castle, one of our equipment divisions, went to work on that, and they came up with a brilliant computer system, a very tiny, modest computer, that said you can throw as many French fries as you want in a basket, pull the handle down, it goes down into the fat. This little computer recorded the amount of temperature drop in the fat. That meant it knew the mass of temperature, the gradient that had gone through there. If it was one pound at this temperature, or twenty pounds at some other temperature, it all integrated. You could come to the endpoint automatically, and this little basket just popped up when the French fries were finished. Whether you threw in two pounds or twenty pounds, within some limits, you were going to get the same French fries every time. That device swept across the McDonald's chains and further led to the esteem we were receiving from the McDonald's organization.

In the first two or three years, everything about this was very good. It was however extremely distracting. I had no time to be thinking about long-range missions and acquisitions, or other things to do. This thing was growing \$100 million a year or more. I don't remember the numbers, but it was huge. But black clouds were on the horizon that I didn't see. Sitting here today, looking back on it, I wonder at my own naivety. It's too bad we don't get to go back and redo all these things. I should have been seeking counsel, because I missed a few opportunities.

07-00:57:17

Cándida Smith: In solving these problems, did you have to be hands-on, or how much was it a question of you finding the right people for the tasks?

07-00:57:26

Wornick: At this stage, it was at least 90 percent the second option. I tried to stay very close to what was going on and know what was going on. Bob Shetterly had, by this time, moved me from vice president to group vice president and put me on the board. I think that happened in the first twelve months. So I was having a lot of meetings with subcommittees of the board and subcommittees of the executive committee of the company. We were hard at work at eight o'clock in the morning, in Oakland, if we were not traveling somewhere. There was no chance for me to be doing anything hands-on. Plus, when you've got that many companies and that many people, you have a totally different kind of job to do. You just have to know who you can trust, and you must have systems in place to keep yourself informed with reliable reports,

and then you have to do the travel time. You've got to show up wherever you need to show up.

Bob Shetterly never went anywhere that he didn't go into the local grocery store and check the Clorox bottles on the shelf to see what the broker was doing in that marketplace. You don't have to do every supermarket in the United States, but if you do one or two on a regular basis, first of all, the word is around that they know you're doing that. So I tried as best I could, not to be a nuisance, but to stay on everybody as much as I could. It was a thin line, because, in Clorox, everybody understood that there was a military reporting system, and they lived with that. In the food business, especially the food service industry, there are a lot of cowboys. Individual people who run companies, and they're spirited and independent. You cannot fuss with them too much before they get a little peevish about taking away their authority or their responsibility and the pleasure that they're entitled to in their job. I did what I could, but I would not suggest to you for a minute this was a hands-on job. I've forgotten the numbers now, but there might have been 2,000 people in the division among all the companies in the division.

07-00:59:48

Cándida Smith: That you were supervising at some level?

07-00:59:50

Wornick: Something like that.

07-00:59:56

Cándida Smith: It sounds like, while most of your attention might have been with Brower, you had other—

07-01:00:04

Wornick: Not several dozen, but a half dozen or more. They took maybe 10 percent of the time, because they were mostly well managed by good Clorox people and they were not threatening to either become big opportunities or to embarrass us. They were being very carefully managed, and they were sleepy businesses. What I was hoping for was that there would come a quiet time when I would be able to go back to Shetterly and get his vision. As soon as I could get this train to stay on the tracks.

[End Audio File 7]

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08-00:00:25

Wornick: The first signal that not everything was vertical was that, in my meetings with the executive committee of the company, and especially at board meetings of the company, there seemed to be some difficulty in comprehending the nature of my division. The retail products part of the company was all expressed in a language called stat case, statistical case. No matter what it was—it could have been a six pack of ginger ale—it was expressed in units of one case of

bleach, so to speak. Everybody understood what a stat case was. The profits on a stat case were huge. I don't think there's any secret in that. A bleach business is an attractive business. It takes a tremendous amount of sales expense, marketing, and distribution. There's a lot of cost involved, but fundamentally, it's a very attractive, one-of-a-kind product, not unlike the banana business that I'd come out of, which was a very unique, one-of-a-kind product business. And some similarities, in that United Fruit Company had a very difficult time converting its acquisitions into United Fruit. Countless books have been written on this subject, that an acquiring company tries very hard to impose its competence, since, by definition, it's the stronger of the two entities.

In the case of United Fruit Company, that wasn't especially well done. In Clorox, we were having some difficulty with our growth because the growth was of a completely different kind than they were used to looking at. In the simplest of language, the food service business was generating huge sales increases, in the hundreds of millions, but the profits would have been a fraction as a percent of sales that would have been seen on the other side of the company. The company was organized so that there was a group vice president in charge of retail, Chick Weaver, and Ron Wornick was a group vice president on the other side of the company. We both reported to the same executive committee, the same committees of the board, and to the board meetings. Their presentation looked like all the P&G presentations and the Clorox presentations that they'd been looking at for years. Mine looked bizarre. We didn't have stat cases. We had return on capital. How much money am I using and how much money are we making? If you looked at it that way, we were a very attractive business because we were not using very much capital. We were turning inventory countless times a year. Even though the margins were relatively small, because it was a distribution business, a service business, if you will, not a retail product, that's how you do it. It was better to make 1.5 percent and make it thirty times a year on the same dollar, than making 30 percent on one sale a year. Anyway, there were a lot of raised eyebrows everywhere with this. Not because they were opposed to it. I think everybody was uncomfortable about how we were going to mix these cultures. The real difficulty, the major difficulty, which very quickly became apparent, was on Wall Street. It looked like the earnings per dollar of sales was going down while the sales were going up. Only those people who were making the market in Clorox stock and who were talking to our CFO and who were inside the business really understood why.

One day, in New York, I was walking on the sidewalk with Bob Shetterly, and we were talking about this very subject. He asked me did I have any thoughts about how we could deal with this in a way that would make both opportunities work well under one roof. I said, "They really are two different kinds of stock, two different kinds of people, two different kinds of investments. Maybe we just need to think about them in that way." He said, "How would you do that?" I said, "Gosh, this is over my head, but, I don't

know, maybe you just divide the company in half and you issue new stock for one of the divisions.” Well, a very loud horn should have gone off in the street right then, because that was a very stupid thing to say to the chairman of the board. I did not know what I was talking about. What I should have said is, “Why don’t we bring in an investment banking firm to look at this? They probably will have some really good ideas. I’m a food technologist way over my head, and I have no idea what to do about it. I’m doing what you asked me to do, and it’s beginning to feel like it doesn’t fit in real well around here.” I don’t know that I said that, but anyway, that’s in fact what was happening. That was one slippery slope that I was beginning to recognize. Approximately, this would have been maybe my third year there, because that was the steep part of the growth slope from Martin Brower, as I recall it, as well as other fast food chains coming into play for us.

But there were other things happening as well. The Henkel Company, of Düsseldorf, Germany, a major household products company in Europe—as I recall it, their biggest product was a laundry detergent called Persil—they were essentially the Proctor and Gamble of Western Europe, a big, big company. They acquired somewhere in the order of 12 or 15 percent of Clorox.

08-00:07:51

Cándida Smith: Of Clorox?

08-00:07:52

Wornick:

Of Clorox. It began to look like one or the other of us was going to be making a play for one or the other. It was over my job description to think about that. Because I was on the board, and because the board had a lot of thinking to do about these things, I found myself spending a fair amount of time ripping back and forth to Düsseldorf for meetings and tours of plants. That was a real distraction for me. They very generously kept me as a part of their small group of two or three people who were responsible for hospitality, probably because I had some food experience. I was used in their circle. That was not a burden, I assure you. Anita and I considered that one of the most exciting adventures of our lifetime. The Henkel family and their lives in Europe, their homes and their castles, their property—the whole thing was quite a privilege to have any part of that.

I had a very full plate, and that was another distraction I really did not need at that moment, on top of which I had created a huge distraction for myself. Over the previous three or four or five years, I had been making my way up the line in the board of directors of the International Food Service Manufacturers Association, because I had great esteem for them. It enabled me to pick up the phone and, on a first-name basis, call the president of General Mills or Kraft Foods, or anybody, pretty much. They were all very well connected in this organization. The organization primarily existed for that purpose, to get people connected. Anyway, my turn came, as I went up the line, to become

president. I went to Bob Shetterly with this question. I said, “It’s a good chance for a lot of visibility for us in the food industry, and connections and what have you, but it’s going to be a huge distraction. I don’t know if we should do it.” He said, “Do it. Absolutely a great thing to do! We’re going to love it.” So I did do that. He very generously agreed to pick up the cost of a PR firm called, then, I believe Rooter and Finn. A young woman joined my staff to help get me radio and TV spots. I would preach about restaurant food or whatever the topic was. I had a lot of work to do at IFMA. Big quarterly meetings. A lot of speechifying to do. There was a change in the way the organization was running because we had a professional manager there that was from an old school and we were changing it to a new, younger, different manager. So IFMA became another big distraction of my time.

Then Bob Shetterly asked me to become chairman of the local chapter of National Alliance of Businessmen. Bob was a very community-minded guy. One of the most community-minded I’ve ever known. He took every need of the East Bay, Oakland in particular, very seriously. The National Alliance of Businessmen had the project of convincing thirty or forty other major companies to identify certain positions in their company, and then we would bring in disadvantaged people who were ex-offenders and what have you who had been screened through other organizations. Then a big brother in the company would be assigned to help them get out of bed in the morning, get on the proper clothes, get them to work, get them used to the idea of earning a week’s pay, and seeing what it might be like to live a different life. Very worthwhile thing to do, and I gave that a big bunch of energy. The reason I’m running through this litany is that I was running out of horsepower. In fact, I had run out of horsepower. I did the best I could for as long as I could.

When I joined the company, they were in temporary offices on Hegenberger Road, over near the Oakland Coliseum, but Bob had in mind his Clorox headquarters. He arranged for the big tower in downtown Oakland to become the Clorox Building. Clorox took over the top half of that building on Broadway. A group of five or six of us occupied the top floor. I had a magnificent office. I had an art budget. I had little buttons that would open walls where I could get to my staff people. There were a lot of people in the other thirty-nine floors, and I was on the board and the executive committee, and I felt that pressure. I didn’t know whether I was capable of it or not, frankly. I might have had some doubts at that time, but I was doing everything I knew how to do, to do everything that I was being asked to do. In that space, you could feel the quiet confidence that was going on in the retail products part of the company. It was very polished, very systematized, very organized.

One of the major things I had to do between Clorox and McDonald’s was to keep a fairly wide path between them. The McDonald’s company prided itself on hiring and promoting a different kind of people, mostly less educated but trainable. They wanted people who could be trained to run a restaurant, and then maybe run a second restaurant. When they would have meetings, or have

group meetings, or have a spectacular, once-a-year birthday party for McDonald's, it was all about things that were nothing to do with Clorox. It was different behavior. There was a lot of partying and drinking and smoking and the rest of it. They were very different cultures. That was irksome for me too, because Bob Shetterly was the most courteous, gentlemanly guy you will ever know. He was a three-piece-suit guy, an English major, a gentleman, top to bottom. I don't suggest that McDonald's people were not, but it was totally different personnel.

Anyway, maybe in the third or fourth year, things were becoming a bit strained. Add to that that, for reasons that, to this day, make no sense to me, my other group vice president, who was in the next office to me, Chick Weaver, must have assumed that I was in his way, somehow or other, that I was between him and the presidency. These are my words, not his, but his behavior suggested that. He became difficult with me, even though I'd always respected him, as I do now, and I thought we had a good relationship. But business gets to be tricky sometimes when the stakes are high. At the very end of this time period, when I'm pretty much out of ideas and horsepower—and I had never agreed to stay for an indefinite amount of time—I had one of those meetings with Bob Shetterly which you don't want to have because he expected you to do your job and tell him about the good news. You didn't walk in there with your personal problems. You could, but you did it reluctantly. I did tell him that I had stayed beyond where I had intended to stay and that I felt as though I had done a pretty good job, and that possibly it was time for me to just move on. He said, "Won't hear of it. Out of the question. Let me tell you two things. One, things are not the way they seem." Those were his very words. I, to this day, do not know what that means. He's gone, and I don't know what that meant. Secondly, he said, "You are working too hard. You need to get out of here for at least a month. Take a leave of absence. Everything will get carried on here somehow. We'll manage. Go away, do whatever you want to do, and come back and you're going to see it altogether differently."

I did do that. I came back and delivered the same report. I, somehow or other, felt that I was in a company that was primarily a retail case goods company, I was going to have a very hard time blending my food service opportunities and the little companies in that area into this retail products company. Plus, I would have been the last person in the world I would have chosen to be president of Clorox, and I would have turned it down had it been offered to me. I don't believe I could have done that job. You really needed to have been in the retail business for a lot of years, and probably been at Proctor and Gamble. I didn't have either of those pieces of experience. What Shetterly meant by things are not how they seem, I don't know, although after I left and they did a number of reorganizations, he became just chairman of the board, and they brought in a new president. The new president was not my counterpart, Chick Weaver. It was somebody from the outside, which maybe was what Shetterly was thinking all along. I don't know.

Anyway, that turned in to be a ferociously intense, fast, four and a half years of life in a large corporate environment, which was very worth doing, but not an easy assignment. In retrospect, I wish I had lifted myself up just a little higher from the day-to-day obligations, put a few more people in there, sought counsel from other professionals, and behaved a little differently than a small business manager, which is probably what I was doing in a large business. They subsequently unloaded almost all of that part of the business. Not immediately, but a couple years later, Martin Brower went to somebody in England, and a lot of other stuff just dripped away. It's fundamentally a consumer case goods household products company, and they're good at that, *very* good at that. I oversaw a little detour that basically didn't work.

08-00:22:54

Cándida Smith: In both United Fruit Company and Clorox, you were working in a tangential unit that was not doing what the corporation knew how to do. Most corporations at the time probably believed that diversification was essential, because that seemed to be something that many American companies were attempting to do at that time, for better or worse.

08-00:23:36

Wornick: There were many that were for worse and some that were for better. I think history will show that the more separate they were kept, the better they were. You need separate profit centers and separate attitudes, separate points of view in the separate divisions. Thinking that you're going to be able to combine the products on the same truck and make everything wonderful isn't going to work unless they are in the same industry. If you've got another household products company, go for it. A food service distribution company in a household products company, I don't know how to make that work.

08-00:24:22

Cándida Smith: Of course, you were a food technologist. You did not have an MBA. I would imagine that not all of the senior executives had MBAs, but that probably a good number of them did. Was the lack of an MBA a handicap in any way? Was there a culture that the MBA provides, at least for operating in a corporation?

08-00:24:55

Wornick: By any definition, I was not formally educated for the career I mostly had, which was in business management. If you do it instinctively, you may get some of it right. It doesn't take too long before you can read a P&L and a balance sheet, which I was doing very successfully in Texas, by the way. Talk about hands-on. I could actually call the guy bringing things to the company and discuss what he was bringing and what we were going to pay for them. In a big company, managing is an entirely different story. No, I wasn't prepared educationally for that job. I don't know that I was prepared even in terms of personality, I think I'm somewhat an autocrat in terms of gathering information and discerning what I think is the sound thing to do, and then putting my energy into trying to get everybody on the same page to do it. I

don't spend nearly as much time as some people will spend on the consensus process. That's certainly been an obstacle for me. Not a huge one, but among the obstacles, that would have been one.

08-00:26:43

Cándida Smith: When you left Clorox, I would guess that you landed on your feet, just because of where we're sitting right now. What were the options open to you?

08-00:26:54

Wornick: Well, I truly wanted to be left alone. I was physically exhausted. This would have been the mid-seventies, so I would have been, oh gosh, maybe forty-four or forty-five years old. I didn't think I could do another mile or two. I was really working hard at Clorox, and very long hours. When I was at home in San Francisco and had to commute from Hillsborough to Oakland, an hour each way or more, that didn't help, either. That was a hard time. I was thinking about retirement, but of course that isn't what I had in mind at all to do.

A month later I had a call from Bob Shetterly, and he suggested lunch. I was very moved that he would call and suggest lunch. I should have done the same thing myself. I thought, why hadn't I done that? He was always the first one with a gentlemanly move. We sat down, and we went for some time through a very lovely lunch, talking about one thing or another, nothing very profound or significant. Somewhere just getting close to dessert time, I remember he grabbed his napkin and was holding it like this in his lap. He looked at me and said, "Well, I suppose we ought to get your company back to you." Really? That hadn't occurred to me. He proposed a way that that could happen. Very typically Shetterly in his graciousness. Fair to both sides. I was very quick to say, absolutely. Thank you. Love to do it. Will do it.

So, after this brief rest, I went back to work in constructing a way to reacquire the Texas company, which happened pretty easily and fairly quickly. The plan was to stay in San Francisco, not to move back to McAllen, and to run this company in a careful and quiet way from here and go to Texas when I needed to. Actually bought a modest Philadelphia-style row house in McAllen where we could have a place to stay when I or the family was there. I assumed I would go down maybe once a month or so and look after things.

08-00:31:05

Cándida Smith: I noted that you changed the name of the corporation when you reacquire it, to the Wornick Company.

08-00:31:20

Wornick: It did become the Wornick Company. I couldn't have told you when, but that's probably right.

08-00:31:24

Cándida Smith: Were you thinking of expanding beyond the plant in Texas, or was your initial thought, go back to where I was in 1972?

08-00:31:39

Wornick:

I remember clearly the two things I had in mind were—and they were somewhat contradictory—one was that we should hire a firm to help us find other food companies to get us into other areas of the food industry, because this freeze-dry thing was not a growth category, and I knew that. I did not want to depend on that for the next number of decades. Secondly, no matter what opportunities appeared, I was not going to put myself back on that kind of a Clorox treadmill anytime soon. At this point, having sold the company to Clorox and got it back and now owning a company that could make a little money, I felt confident enough that life was going to be all right. We'd make our way. Don't fire up all the burners yet. Just take it nice and slow. That's what we did. We began looking at other acquisitions, and we ran the company. We set up a new little headquarters office on the Airport Boulevard in Burlingame, very nice little offices very close by. The plan was to run the company from here and grow it as best we could. I would look after major customers and look after things.

08-00:33:25

Cándida Smith:

What did Anita think of this transition? This would have been the third major transition in half a decade, I guess, more or less.

08-00:33:36

Wornick:

Well, you might put that question to her. I don't know that we ever talked about it in that way. I have heard her say to people that, back in the United Fruit Company days, she just got used to thinking that that was the way it was for everybody. You get a promotion every six months and you get a new title and more money. She didn't think anything very remarkable about it. All the other stuff, which was symptomatic of my own, I don't know, restlessness or energy or serendipity or opportunities that come by, I don't know what that's all about. It's hard to know how the forces move you through a life pattern that you look at this stage of my life to try to make sense of. I don't know how she would explain it. On balance, they have all been positive experiences for her. The Clorox experience was very wonderful for her. She loved meeting the wives of the other board directors. It was just a whole new experience for her in a world that hadn't been available to us. McAllen, Texas, was probably her most favorite time. Hard to believe. It was, in fact. So all of this has been, I think she would say, good for her. Put that aside and ask her.

08-00:35:07

Cándida Smith:

Your oldest son was getting ready to go to college about this time. Maybe your middle son was as well.

08-00:35:23

Wornick:

Yes.

08-00:35:25

Cándida Smith:

Did you have enough time to be a hands-on dad?

08-00:35:30

Wornick:

I think so, but of course every father would probably say that. Again, the children probably would give you a more honest answer. We had three sons. It would be hard for a father not to understand boys. I felt very close to all three boys. It was a different generation. I'm watching fathers now, two generations later, and they are there with a Kleenex. It's an attentiveness beyond anything that would have occurred to me or my generation. But I think I gave them a lot of time. We certainly spent a lot of time talking and visiting. We paid a lot of respect to dinners at the table. Both Anita and I believed that the family needed to sit down at dinner together at night, and we always did. At this stage, the conversation was beginning to make it clear to my children that they ought to go and find out who they are and not count on plugging into the Wornick family business, because it changed often enough and was unreliable enough. I don't want you to end up with some disappointment or some surprise. Think about what you'd like to do with your life and go do it. If, at some subsequent time, we find ourselves in Fat City and you'd like to come circling back around again, that's always possible, but for now, go get educated and make your way in the world on your terms. Every one of the boys got that lecture, and pretty much they followed that instruction and did it, which became a difficulty when I could have used some sons in the business at a subsequent time. Life is what happens while you're making other plans. I think your question is guardedly asking, with all the time I was spending on business, was I spending enough time with the children? I think so. Possibly less so during the Clorox years. Those were just so frenetic that I probably was negligent in that timeframe.

08-00:38:00

Cándida Smith:

The other thing I wanted to ask you about today was, the seventies was a particularly tough economic climate for all sorts of reasons. Businesses were having a hard time. Unemployment was high. Energy prices skyrocketed. Inflation. Interest rates went up to 21 percent. From the way you talk about the period, I don't hear any echoes of your having to deal with a very difficult economic period, and maybe you didn't.

08-00:38:47

Wornick:

That's true. Even as you tell me about it, I think that you're absolutely right. It did not show up on my radar screen. The reason for that probably is that—I probably owe this credit to my father, who I don't think ever had a checking account. If he wanted something, he bought it with cash. It's hard even to explain to people today. There was an attitude in that generation that borrowing was a dangerous thing, especially if you'd lived, as he had, through the Depression. When Anita and I first married, we had a number of conversations about this, because her father was a serious borrower. He was in the drug wholesale business and probably needed bank capital to keep his business going. The idea of using other people's money appealed to him, and he did a lot of it, apparently. I never knew the details of his business, but that ultimately, I think, was his undoing. Seemed to be. If I bought a car, I bought it for cash. When I bought a house, I put down at least 50 percent, maybe

more, or I wouldn't buy it. Mortgages were always fixed-rate mortgages. The idea of betting on being able to sleep at night was never an option, even when we were about to take—we'll get to it next week—probably the biggest financial risk of my lifetime. I slid a partner in to take the risk, and then quickly bought him out.

I wanted to play the game. I wanted to be out there doing all I could do. But the extent to which I was willing to do an honest-to-goodness gamble and watch my house go away because interest rates have gone to 20 percent and I can't pay the mortgage—that was never going to happen to me. That's very old-fashioned. One of my sons, who is in the real estate business, thinks I'm still in need of some education. He may well be right, but that's how I think about things. I've always been very financially cautious. It's a very good question, but it never impacted me. The food business doesn't go up and down with the economy. It changes in its complexion, where the money goes, in terms of the quality of the restaurants and the kinds of foods it buys and sells. The kinds of things we were doing wouldn't have been impacted by the economy. Military, ingredient business.

08-00:41:59

Cándida Smith: You mentioned earlier that, in Sharon, Massachusetts, you were on the Republican Committee for the town. Did you continue to have time for involvement in politics after you left Massachusetts? Is that part of the story as well? Were you still participating in Republican Party politics?

08-00:42:26

Wornick: Probably less so and in a different way. When I was there, it was very hands-on. I actually ran the campaign for a state senator. We were very heavily involved in legislation. But it was also the time of Nixon, and not a very good time to be a Republican. Even for a Republican, it was a little creepy. Agnew didn't help. Subsequently, I became active by getting alongside of candidates that appealed to me. I got in a Republican senatorial inner circle, which is just a signal of how much support you give them. We would go to Washington meetings.

08-00:43:32

Cándida Smith: So you were giving money to candidates, primarily at the state level?

08-00:43:37

Wornick: National.

08-00:43:40

Cándida Smith: You were supporting presidential candidates?

08-00:43:41

Wornick: Presidential and occasionally senatorial.

08-00:43:47

Cándida Smith: Nixon was a big-government Republican, not a small-government Republican. There's been a long history of pro-big government in the Republican Party, as opposed to, say, the Goldwater wing.

08-00:44:11

Wornick: Precisely. When you think Wornick, think Goldwater or Reagan. In between, it was just wait and see. I'm still of the point of view that our government is way too big, and lots of things need to be shoved back to the state level or even lower. Education first among them. I just can't believe what we've done to the public schools. It's just deplorable. Beyond explanation. I don't begin to understand how we could have spent that much money and ended up with the schools closing, but there we are. Anyway, yes, I am a small-government Republican.

08-00:45:01

Cándida Smith: There was obviously a tussle within the Republican Party over these issues. Your ideas would get expressed vis-à-vis who you would contribute towards, so Reagan in '76 instead of Gerald Ford?

08-00:45:22

Wornick: Yes, but these are compromises we all make when you have a two-party system. Both parties have activists at the extremes that are very embarrassing for us, whichever party you're in. There are forever policies that are going to divide everybody. I won't even start listing them today, but you can start with abortion. You could probably break up a dinner party, even among Republicans or Democrats. Everybody is very divisive about it. Although I continue to think that, in a pleasant environment where people are really trying to learn from one another, the gap is not as big as anybody thinks it is. I think we're all thinking the same way, but when you get over there, and you get over there, and we just glower at each other as if we are in total disagreement, that's not helpful. You've got to actually ask, what do you mean by what you say? But I don't see that happening very much. We happen, while we're doing this interview, to be in the darkest time I can recall in my eighty years of watching our government at work. If we don't find a way to get our budget balanced and our debt dealt with very soon, the lights are going to go out.

[End Audio File 8]

Interview #5 August 23, 2011

Begin Audio File 9 wornick_ron_08-23-11.mp3

09-00:00:59

Cándida Smith: When we left off last time you had left Clorox. You had reacquired your firm and renamed it.

09-00:01:12

Wornick: Well, it hadn't been renamed yet. But yes, that's right. Yes.

09-00:01:15

Cándida Smith: As I recall, it was very striking that you were bringing or trying to bring a new attitude towards how you engaged in business. That you see you were perhaps going to be a little less—

09-00:01:35

Wornick: Frenetic.

09-00:01:37

Cándida Smith: Frenetic. Yes, exactly.

09-00:01:41

Wornick: I remember the word and the reason I remember the word. We are in 1977. Anita and I and our children were living in Hillsborough, California. I was no longer with Clorox, and they helped me reacquire that company, which is a factory in San Carlos, Texas, a little village in the Rio Grande Valley. My intention was to lead a relatively quiet life out of Hillsborough, amusing myself as best I could with some modest business interests and at the same time trying to fan the flames around our little Texas company. Maybe we could turn it into something worthwhile.

09-00:02:50

Cándida Smith: Was its primary product still shrimp? Freeze-dried shrimp?

09-00:02:53

Wornick: Its primary products were multitudinous, and I will come to that in one minute. Our children were at this time just about out of the nest. The eldest son was twenty-one or twenty-two, and he was off at University of Pacific studying geology. He was to ultimately go on from there to Bechtel and other successful ventures. His younger brother Michael was at the University of Denver studying business, finance, and real estate. That went very well for him, and he went off into that exact field to become a real estate guru and financier, which worked very well for him. The youngest son Jonathan was mid-high school, maybe freshman or sophomore approximately, and he was doing pretty well. He went from there to Boston University.

The California experience was totally unlike the Texas experience. In Texas, everything but a band greeted us at the airport. It was a relatively small but sophisticated little community. A lot of wonderful people in McAllen made us very, very welcome. We made great friends there. We have them to this day,

and so we were just overwhelmed with wonderful people the minute we got there.

When we moved into Hillsborough, I had to immediately show up at the Clorox Company. I left Anita to make our new home. She makes the life, and I make the living, as we've been saying all these years. Neighbors in Hillsborough don't see you move in or out. No different than anywhere else. Now that we've lived there thirty-five years, I can tell you they're wonderful people when we came to know them, but it takes a while. They don't run over and ring the doorbell with a cake, and you don't get invited into their clubs and inner circles. It took a fair amount of time for us to make our way into that community. Did I tell you the story of how we met the first people in Hillsborough?

09-00:06:01

Cándida Smith: You talked about getting involved with the Jewish community, finding a temple.

09-00:06:07

Wornick:

Going to the temple was the seedling that got us going, but it was not a bonfire. It was just a little start. Anita was settling in and becoming, I would say, active in the community. The family was doing very well. I was enjoying our relatively quiet life in Hillsborough. In order to make the Texas part of this work, I acquired a modest row house in McAllen, Texas, across from the McAllen country club. I was able to go to McAllen once a month and have a little bit of a reasonable life there if I had to spend four or five days there. I could entertain and do business in the apartment. Things were moving along nicely and quietly, and I was rather pleased.

My health was coming back, and I was not feeling as backed up and put upon as maybe I had been in some of the previous adventures. But if you are a restless free-enterprise guy, you are reading the *Wall Street Journal* and you're scratching around a little bit. There's a certain amount of restlessness. Anyway, one day, I was in the factory in Texas, and there was a phone call from a Captain Stuart Platt.

To position that phone call, which actually changed the history of food for the military and changed my life remarkably, we need to position Stuart Platt and this little funny place in San Carlos, Texas, just a little bit. Stuart Platt had a finance background. He had been a CPA, and he had made his way up the line in the Navy. He was then working directly for Admiral Rickover, who had a reputation as being a procurement genius. He could make things happen and get things done. I think one of his biggest accomplishments might have been the nuclear sub program. As I understand it, he selected Stuart Platt, brought him into the office, and told him that he and a number of people in the defense department had been working for five or ten years with a U.S. Army laboratory in Natick, Massachusetts, which they lovingly called

NARADCOM, Natick Research and Development Command. NARADCOM had maybe a hundred very young food technologists who were told that the World War II rations fundamentally had not done the job very well. Guys who would stay on them for long periods of time lost weight, they had health problems. It really was not very well designed. It had lots of other shortcomings, as well. Some of the packaging was very rigid. If you fell on it, it could break a rib if you had it in the pockets of your jacket. Nobody had good things to say about it. It was a favorite category of humor to just talk about the C and the K rations of World War II.

So in typical military style, that group of people in Natick had designed a chart that said the new rations had to be in soft packages that you could fall on. They had to be much more like regular food that a nineteen- or twenty-year-old would eat if he went into a restaurant somewhere and ordered it, because that's your market. It needed to last five years without refrigeration. It needed to be self-heating.

Anyway, Stuart Platt was an accountant, not a food scientist. A bright guy. The deal he made with Admiral Rickover was that— Rickover must have said to him, as Stuart then told me some time later, that if he could get this thing industrialized, get factories built and product coming out the front door, this new product was going to be called MREs, “meals ready to eat.” If he could bring this off, he would get his flag, which is to say he would become a one-star admiral. Navy captains probably think that's important. Believe me, for Stuart Platt, nobody ever got his attention better than that assignment.

And so the phone rings in my office. But before that, you've got to see what Stuart Platt did before he called me. First of all, he went on the “Today” show and told the country about this revolutionary new meal product, which was possible because of a new food science preservation technique called high-temperature, short-time food preservation. It was going to be in flexible packages. It was going to be self-heating. It lasts forever. You could drop it out of a helicopter. You couldn't get into it unless you knew how. If you were a crocodile, forget about it. If you were a PFC, you'd have no trouble opening it and heating it. And it was better than a Christmas dinner. Senator Towers in Texas heard this broadcast, and he was immediately taken by that. He might have been on the armed services committee. He became a big fan of the program. He began talking it up. Anyway, this spread as Stuart Platt made more and more appearances on television. It was a newsy thing, and even the popular press was starting to put pieces in the paper.

I had written off to the Defense Department to get a copy, if one existed, of what a procurement specification would look like, just to see what these guys were up to. If you kept going down the index, you would find that one of the dessert items they were planning to include was freeze-dried strawberries. My little company in San Carlos, Texas, was the world's one and only supreme supplier of freeze-dried strawberries. We were already doing it for the

military. They knew that product. We were doing some other small products for the military, as well. I'll come back to that. I assumed that sooner or later this MRE project would cut across my bow some way or other because somebody was going to buy strawberries from me. The next thing Stuart Platt did was announce he was going to introduce this MRE program to the food industry. He was going to "attract the major food companies to get onboard and develop the technology to replace canning and freezing."

His first program was on the East Coast, either in Boston or New York. The second one was in Chicago, and I went to the one in Chicago out of curiosity. It was a big deal in the food business, and I knew I would have an ingredient in there somewhere. I needed to see it better. Well, there wasn't a major food company that wasn't represented there, and it was a very large crowd. But remarkably, the tone that you picked up if you walked the corridors and met many of the people—I knew enough people there that I could do a little interviewing—It was very clear that the thought in the audience before, during, and after his presentation was, "This is ridiculous. Nobody knows how to do this. There is no equipment." The Natick labs are populated, may history forgive me for this, by mostly lower-level, less-experienced food scientists than maybe they should have and you couldn't turn somewhere in the U.S. and buy those products in some factory somewhere because they were all different processes and different equipment than fundamentally you could just turn on and operate. On top of which, most of the major food companies in the U.S. had already been through the experience of selling to the Defense Department and 95 percent of the larger companies will only sell the government anything they want if it's a labeled product that they routinely sell. They ask me to make jelly to their specification I'm not interested because it's just not worth the trouble. I don't mean to damn either side, but it was not a good connection. They just didn't understand each other.

I didn't believe that Platt was going to collect as many interested parties as he was looking for. The West Coast program followed, and as far as I could find out from interviewing people, it ended about the same way. And that was the last of it. I didn't think anything more about it.

In the meantime, in San Carlos, my little factory was growing its own little business. We were doing sauces and soups for a Japanese food company, a very good experience for us because they were bringing Japanese quality-control systems into the plant which we enjoyed learning about. It was a very good company to deal with. Plus my eldest son and I had a life experience on our trips to Japan, four in a row. As a businessman, it was a very different country. I had been there as an art collector and as a tourist, but when I went there as "Chairman Ron Wornick-san," it was another experience, very interesting and very enlightening.

09-00:18:57

Cándida Smith: What was the name of the company you were working with?

09-00:19:00
Wornick:

I knew you would ask me and I will find it for you. They found us because almost everything we did was dry. We were doing instant food for the astronauts. I was making freeze-dried ingredients for all the noodle companies. There were I think twelve or more noodle companies in California. Ramen and Instant Noodle, things that are I think still ubiquitous today in college dorms and everywhere else. Inside of there you'll find little peas and chunks of egg. Those all came out of that little factory in Texas at that time. Mushrooms and so on.

Yes, we continued to make freeze-dried shrimp for Kraft. It was a fairly successful product. We introduced a line of instant salad mixes which looked very promising in that a restaurant could buy a no. 10 can, dry, not refrigerated, peel it open, add a quart of water, put it in the refrigerator for, thirty minutes, and then into a bowl with mayonnaise and you've got forty two-ounce servings. The niche for that turned out to be drug chains with lunch counters. People who didn't have big kitchens couldn't afford to have somebody standing there chopping and dicing and cooking and doing all these things. We could offer tuna salad, egg salad, crab salad. I've forgotten how many salads we had. Lovely variety, portion control, and you were just going from our instant product. There were a number of little roots coming up out of the ground for us. We didn't think we were going to be threatening General Foods or General Mills anytime soon, but the sales were gradually growing and there were enough good things going on. We got freeze-dried fruit into some cereal boxes, and there was always another little door opening.

And then, before Stuart Platt's call, the government began a new program they called "tray pack." The army feeds A rations, B rations, and C rations. A rations would be on a post, in a mess hall. B rations is field feeding. They set up a tent, and you go down a line with a tray. It's like a mess hall but they've got to invent because they're not sitting next to a butcher and a grocer and so on. C rations, at least at that time, were still considered to be field rations. You were eating by yourself out of something you'd just taken out of your pack. You sit down and eat all alone. A and B, you were actually sitting around and sharing in some way.

So in the B ration program they were introducing a thing called "tray pack." Tray packs were fairly large trays in which food would be prepared and sterilized. In the tray, so that the tray was permanently sealed and re-sterilized with food in it and then shipped. The military could take this tray of prepared food without refrigeration into the field, rip it open, and put it right on the steam table. You'd come by and take your turkey tetrazzini. The idea that you could do that sterilizing in increasingly smaller packages led to the idea that maybe we could do that in a very small, single-serve-portion, flexible container, which led to the retort pouch, as it was called in the MRE program.

So we were selling product to the military and I was living in Hillsborough, going back and forth to Texas. Stuart Platt was getting himself fitted for an admiral's outfit, and he woke up one morning, I guess, and said, "Something's wrong in this movie. I don't have any prime contractors." A prime contractor has to sign up and say, "I'll do it. I will deliver the ration." Now, to deliver the ration means you got to put in a bag which they've described as this size, this material, this seal, this strength, with 99.99999 perfection so that the bags can't disappoint anybody. Inside of this bag will be probably something approaching 200 items that start with little things like a half a book of matches, maybe some Chiclets, toilet paper, and it works its way all the way up through beverages, entrees, dessert, bread, and all the things that you might have in the specifications. All of those thousands of requirements have to be met. The specifications have to be met for each one of these things. If you put a toothpick in there, the book will tell you what kind of wood, how long, how sharp. They have to all go someplace where you assemble it into the finished package, which means an accessory kit gets made and an entrée with say the heating element gets made. Then another package comes together for beverage and dessert. Then another, and then all these packages go somewhere else to come together in another larger bag. That bag, together with something else, goes into a bigger bag. Enough of these bags for a company of men have to be put into humongously *tough* cases. They're called VCR. You cannot penetrate it with a machete. It *looks* like cardboard, but don't hurt yourself. The reason I remember it is you can hardly find a machine that can bend it over and slam it through a filling machine. The machine breaks before the box does. So that's the end product.

A prime contractor's objective is to produce and then get all this together. It's practically beyond comprehension because you've got to find people to make things they've never made before on equipment that doesn't exist, following specifications that are underdeveloped because they haven't really been used over enough time to have been developed. The only companies who are going to bother are companies as entrepreneurial as my own. You're not going to get Sara Lee to open the boardroom doors and offer to make a couple thousand special cakes for you. This just had a lot of problems, and we all knew it. So I'm sitting in Texas thinking let somebody else—

09-00:28:05

Cándida Smith: You knew that the military did not yet know?

09-00:28:10

Wornick: Well, Stuart Platt, who was not a foolish person, I don't think he fully comprehended the difficulty of doing what he wanted to do. In some cases, that can be a good thing. Probably it was in this case because if we'd swapped jobs I probably would not have taken the assignment, I'd say. I don't know that he could have done what I was about to do. Anyway, we both would have failed. So we both had a role appropriate to the story. Stuart Platt, I don't really know even to this day, but he combed his Rolodex, and he looked up

people already doing business with the government and he came on Right Away Foods. It was selling tray packs and no. 10 cans of freeze-dried shrimp for officers clubs. And a few other specialty things. The president is an MIT food science graduate. He checked where I'd been and what I'd been doing, my career at Clorox. He really knew all about me by the time he picked up the phone. And essentially in the phone call, he said, "I think we need to talk. I think we can help each other in a major way here. Would you give me a couple of hours?" "Absolutely. Be glad to see you." I didn't know where he was heading, but sure.

The gap of "our ways" revealed itself early in how we came together, however, because he got on a navy jet and flew to a naval base somewhere inland, mid U.S., and remote. I had to make my way there on commercial planes, driving and walking and by mule. I made my way to him. We finally sat down and had our visit. I discovered all the significant things during the conversation, two or three things very important to him. He had a very serious girlfriend in San Francisco. I was living in San Francisco. And an opportunity to take his little plane in and out of San Francisco on a regular basis, he liked that idea. And his butt was seriously on the line with his boss. He was going to have somebody get the thing started. It might take longer than they hoped and it might fail but somebody had to step up to the line and swing at the ball. And he was willing to do almost anything to get us over that line. He was essentially saying, "Do this for the Defense Department, the United States government. It would be a huge contribution to the military. We think you can." He didn't know, but he was assuring me the stuff that: "We think you're going to be able to do this. We'll be there for you."

There are layers of rules and regulations in the government and the military. If you end up in an argument with some inspector from the USDA, Stuart Platt, would be out of town or on vacation. He would be of no help. But I did know I had friends in high places with Stuart Platt and that wasn't a bad place to start with.

I left that day thinking, "Holy cow! I don't know. What do we have to lose? Let's just look at it."

09-00:32:31

Cándida Smith: He was soliciting you to be the prime contractor?

09-00:32:33

Wornick: To be the prime contractor.

09-00:32:35

Cándida Smith: And no competition?

09-00:32:37

Wornick: There were to be three awards. They had \$100 million, this is 1977, to spend. They were going to divide it into approximately thirds, and they wanted two

serious commercial companies, of which I don't think I qualified, and one minority company. That's my language, but that's in fact what the plan was.

So, back to Texas. I gathered up my brainpower from my little company, and we sat around at the table and we talked and talked and talked and talked and talked. The major decision we made was that if we did it right we had nothing to lose. That proved to be right. To do that, several things had to happen. I had to take the contract in the name of a brand new separate company to isolate it from everything I owned, everything we were then doing in the existing company, and build a wall around this new MRE venture. Step one.

Step two, find a venture capitalist, who in exchange for this rare opportunity to get a piece of this start-up company, we would allow him to place his investment first in line for the risk capital. So the first \$3 million of losses would go to this new partner.

The third thing, we had to absolutely satisfy ourselves that we could find food companies around the U.S. willing to make some of these sub ingredients. Baking, dessert items, little bread items, entrée items in this new retort pouch, some of these really weird things the government was asking for because we were going to take responsibility only for assembly. We were going to become a General Motors plant. That was our only job. We'd be best at procurement, we'd buy it on tight specs, we'd check it on the way in, we'd check it on the way out, we'd put it all together, and we'd ship it to the government. That was the strategy.

I don't want to make too much of this. It was not that historic. But you have to understand that I don't think we had an annual sales year that might have reached \$10 million. We were probably in the \$5, \$7, \$8 million dollar range in those days. The first award for us was \$32.8 million. In a \$7 million company, that's an interesting new chunk of business.

09-00:36:04

Cándida Smith: I presume you had to invest most of that into whatever it was that you needed to do to deliver.

09-00:36:13

Wornick: No we did not. We now come to talking about facilities, land, building, equipment, capital, personnel.

Land, I've spoken to you about Glen Roney. He was my very biggest supporter and just a supreme Texas banker in McAllen, Texas. "Glen, I'm probably going to need you to finance a piece of land here in McAllen and then I've got to build a plant on that." Glen to Ron, "I'll take care of that for you." Glen made a few phone calls, lined up a few citizens in McAllen, a couple of his board members. Glen and his wife Rita Kay took me for a drive around town and showed me the various lots that they'd like to propose. We

picked one out, and that became the site of the first MRE facility in the U.S. In McAllen, Texas, on South Second Street.

Immediately after that, I engaged a company in Houston that was in the business of operations research. This is a very interesting subtext to our breaking into the MRE business. Their job was to figure out if I was going to have sixty days of raw materials, or thirty days, or ninety days of each of the ingredients stored in my plant, how many cubic feet is that going to take? How many aisles how high? How many people will I need to pick this up, put it on top of this and slide it into that bag and then fold it up in a sealer and close it? How long does that take, and is that on a belt or on a table and you just throw it on? We had to think this all through. Operations research is the science of envisioning all of this. The Houston company very quickly came to a strategy that said we needed a rectangular plant. Trucks would come in on one long side on the front, where the front entrance would be. On the back side, rail cars would come up and take the finished product away. Raw materials would come in and get distributed, and there were arrows, lines, and aisles. Mostly the assumption was anyplace that we could we would do it by hand. We were not going to commit to any equipment until we really knew what we were doing. So it was going to take hundreds of people, but we knew we could get there if we could just wrestle with that.

So anyway, the plant turned out to be a five-acre, 220,000 square foot building that Glen Roney and his friends built. We called it a swimming pool in a desert because it was built to government specifications. It had to have all kinds of special things, including an extra four or five inches of rebar and concrete on the floor and whatever else the military required. I was running around the country lining up suppliers and mostly working on personnel problems, trying to assemble the management crew who could get to McAllen and begin to hire their own people. One time Anita and I drove down there to see what was going on in the plant, and they had put in a ramp where you could drive forklifts into the factory because the factory floor was at dock height so trucks could load and unload. You couldn't normally drive in there, but there was a ramp to do that. So in my rental car I drove around through this mud, up the ramp, and into the building. It was completely empty. But it looked like it went over the horizon. It was so startling to us we took pictures. And it was like, "Oh, my God! What are we doing? How will we ever fill these offices and all of these stations and places and rooms?"

09-00:41:17

Cándida Smith: It sounds on a scale beyond the \$33.8 million that you got. The cost of land, construction, planning.

09-00:41:38

Wornick: Not really, because the cost was not in the product. That's why there are \$300 toilet seats and \$500 hammers. To supply the Defense Department, or any part of the military, I presume, to such an elaborate system of specifications and

requirements that—I don't know that I would want to put numbers on this but a very, very significant price reduction could be achieved if you would just go away and let me rent a warehouse and follow my own recipes. I could probably make it better and faster, and I know I could make it way less expensive. But there's a mentality in the Defense Department that says, "Well, your chicken's going to have way more fat than we want. Wait a minute."

I've said this in I don't know how many meetings with all kinds of guys with all the curlicues on their uniforms. "The very best thing I can do to keep you as a customer is to give you what you want and follow your needs. I'm not here to cheat you. I don't want to say that. It seems self-serving, but everybody who works for me knows you do not short-change our customers. And we don't. It's a stupid thing to do." But in order to prevent that from ever happening, a wall of requirements is set up to prevent it, including USDA, FDA, DoD, USDI, countless audit agencies, financial auditors. Sometimes there are more inspection people than employees just roaming and combing. We had to have offices for them in the facilities, and it was not helpful. It was a major burden and a distraction.

09-00:43:44

Cándida Smith: You were in the process of creating the plant that would allow you to deliver the product.

09-00:43:53

Wornick: Manually produce. In the meantime, they awarded a second contract to a company in Chicago called Freedom Foods, an African American company. And a third contract to a company in South Carolina called Southern Packing Company, SOPACO, a tobacco wholesaler/jobber. They had a lot of warehouses, and they thought they could use their warehouses and their freight and traffic to do the same assembling that I was thinking about.

09-00:44:34

Cándida Smith: Are those companies about the same size as yours?

09-00:44:37

Wornick: Oh, no. SOPACO was considerably bigger than us. It was a major company. Freedom Foods was not anything actually. They never delivered any product. It just didn't work. I think they probably meant well. I don't know what happened there, but it didn't happen.

09-00:45:25

Cándida Smith: I'd like to get a better sense of the relationship between the three companies. Were you ostensibly in competition with each other, or were you supposed to be complementing each other? What was the rationale for having three separate awards from the Army's point of view?

09-00:45:45

Wornick: Stuart Platt, now back in his element of finance and contracts, very wisely chose to have at least three companies in the picture because it not only leads

to competition, which it should in terms of quality and getting the job done, but he started us all in a process that I had not ever used before, which is called the “letter contract”. Down the line some three or four years later, when the industry was beginning to mature a little bit, they did real honest to goodness, and from that time to today, competitive bidding. The system that he was setting up provided that the people who were doing the pioneering couldn’t say for an absolute certainty if they ran a thousand pounds of beef down the line how many pounds of three-eighth-inch diced beef would actually make it through into the package. You could say, “Well, it should be 94 percent. I’m using industry rules. If you want the actual figures, I’m not going to know them until I’ve run this for three months. Then we’ll get a smoothing curve and we know how it works through the machine, clean up and losses on the floor.” A letter contract provides that you get paid for every one of your costs: insurance, raw material, labor, whatever, rent for this factory that Glen Roney built. Then you get a profit margin which is decreed by the military.

09-00:47:50

Cándida Smith: So was this a cost-plus contract?

09-00:47:53

Wornick:

It was like a cost-plus contract. The loophole that the government puts in there is that they have complete authority to hold you to the definition of what allowable costs are, which is probably as a concept not a bad idea. They investigate and audit what you claim for costs all the time. That’s people sitting there looking and checking at every step of the way. The good news was that allowed us to do it on a risk-free basis because we were going to do the best job we could. They were going to have our records, and if I got some return at the end of the day for having done it, we were both okay. We all knew that subsequently the costs would improve, but this was the first time out of the box. Everybody doing whatever they were doing in this factory they were doing for the first time. That was not going to happen in a way that was really attractive necessarily. So there were three companies.

In retrospect, because we started in the way that we did, we did not make huge commitments to huge investments. We started very cautiously. As we brought equipment on the floor, it was specially created and designed to fill the needs that we could begin to see, so you could take this operation and turn it into a spinning wheel. Everything just one at a time started working. We got a piece of equipment to palletize the cases and then stretch and wrap the cases and then shove them all the way down a belt to the real car. In small steps the lines got mechanized.

And what was happening is we were getting into the sixth, eighth, tenth month of our production, and we were surveilling other activities in the competing plants. It seemed to us that SOPACO was struggling a little bit but not

horribly. Our sense was that we were running ahead of them, and Freedom Foods was just not getting off the runway.

To get to the next milestone, I would say it came about twelve or thirteen months after we actually moved our people into the factory. These people did not know one another, which made it very interesting. Not a single soul knew another soul. The general manager was an attorney with tremendous government contracts experience. He was very good to work with the government. He could read through these specs and requirements and deal with the regulations in a way that was patient, respectful, and knowledgeable. And, some personal shortcomings aside, he was pretty good with people. I thought he would make a very good general manager, and, in fact, he did become a very good general manager. A woman who had run the factory in San Carlos for me became my chief financial officer. Manager of assembly was a guy we stole from auto, I think General Motors, but a guy really who had assembly experience. He was a whiz bang at it. We just were in awe of his skills at envisioning how you can get all these little things to move around and come together and end up a car that drives itself away, even if it's an MRE on a pallet load that you can drop out of a helicopter. So he was a huge contributor to us. We had a freight/traffic guy who was a wonderful man. All of these people became a team of pioneers in a brand new building, brand new contract, and their job was to fill out the people underneath them from the local valley.

On the day the factory was to open we scheduled a big celebration because when the contract was awarded to us there was an award ceremony in the bank tower in McAllen, with congressmen and senators and mayors. VIPS from all over the valley came to this party, and I don't know how many uniformed people came. It was a wonderful celebration. When the factory opened, we thought we ought to repeat that, and we planned forward and scheduled it. We had all the wives lined up to do tours, and it was going to be a beautiful day. Hurricane Allen came through Texas two or three days before that and not only blew away the party, it would have blown away the factory except that McNally, our assembly guy that I was telling you about, had understood that you opened the doors of the factory, instead of leaving everything closed which would have left a draft over the roof, an updraft. He played this thing like an organ. He stayed in the building through this dreadful hurricane. Anita and I were in a bathtub in our apartment just holding onto the plumbing, hoping we'd live. It was pretty scary, 120-mile-an-hour winds. It was awful. The building survived intact thanks to our VP assembly.

To get quality people in the plant, we had the support of, for example, Kika de la Garza, our local congressman. In the defense-contracting business, when a contract of any size is awarded, the rules are that the Pentagon has to tell the congressman before anybody else knows because he has the right to make the announcement to the local newspapers. So Kika de la Garza was always the bearer of good news anytime there was a contract award. This did not hurt his

career any because in those days people who were hiring five, six, seven hundred people for relatively well-paying hand labor was a very good addition to the Rio Grande Valley, especially in McAllen. So he and the bank and lots of other people really were very useful in helping us configure a lot of good people. So we had a pretty good team of people.

So we were now at a point where we were making shipments. We were, by at least four months, the first contractor to deliver finished rations, a rail car worth of rations. They were passing inspections from the military; they were passing all the inspections in the factory. We were pretty damn proud of ourselves because we started with no plant, no personnel, no anything. We were making our way into new technologies, and it looked like this could be a long play if we could build it.

I was thinking we could find it interesting to visit about, the next time we visit, the way in which the military did the procurement because our “letter contracts” became so fraught with problems that I was almost put in jail just over disputes with the military. I’d be very happy to tell that story.

The potential for growth required a lot of internal investing, but our cash flow was not too bad. I was already of a mind to buy out the venture-capital investor, who was a wonderful man from Seattle. I’d like to put his name in history. George Hiddleston from Seattle, who was in the business of feeding oil rigs. He liked what we were doing, and so I bought out his position before we got too far into the building of the business. Then we found a lot of interesting opportunities inside the military contracts which became uniquely our own. And there’s been, gosh, decades, because we’re still doing it, of improving on, making and getting better at the business of keeping the military supplied with MREs.

09-00:58:26

Cándida Smith: Is the improvement due to your—

09-00:58:36

Wornick:

Do not put my name on it, no. It was an outgrowth of the interaction between government and industry. Over time the troops report, the procurement agencies report, the people who run factories report, the assembly companies report. There’s been a lot of vertical integration. We now have our own factories that make a lot of the materials we would be buying from other people. The whole thing matured in a way nobody could have really foreseen at the starting line, but it has become a very reliable source of what the military needs. It is flexible about keeping up with the military needs as they change over the years. At this time, I have no connection with the business but I have a lot of wonderful memories and I’ll get to the getting out at another time.

We're talking about where all the money came from to do this business. We had to approach it in small pieces. You can't think about it in terms of tens of millions. It'll make you nuts. But you can collateralize a lot of very routine banking so that when a 100,000 pounds of packaging material comes into the factory and I need to pay DuPont for it, you can take that payable to the bank and transfer a title to that packaging material to the bank. The bank will give you a certain percent of that payable. Maybe it's 50, 60, or 70 percent of that amount as a loan. It's working capital loan. So you get that on various kinds of raw materials. The percentage you can borrow goes up as you get closer and closer to, let's say, a receivable. If you get a freight car of packaged finished goods that the military has accepted, that's 100 percent collateral. The bank's happy to have that. When it becomes a real receivable, when that loop has been closed, then you get maybe 90 percent of that number. So you have a working capital line going at the bank that is a pretty large number because there's always a lot of materials coming and going, receivables and payables and payroll and bills coming and money coming from the government. In the main, the government pays its bills in a reliable way. They have a lot of ways to not pay you and we'll come to talk about that because that's frightening.

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Interview #6 September 28, 2011

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10-00:00:34

Cándida Smith: Why don't we begin with some of the thoughts that you've been having since our last encounter? We're going to be talking about your business, the Wornick Company, through the eighties.

10-00:00:55

Wornick: We left off at a time when, I think I had explained, we had miraculously raised the money, raised the building, raised the employees. We got hundreds of people in this large building, and our task was to simply begin to make MREs. Over the next twelve months or so, of course almost everything that we thought we would be doing turned out we wouldn't be doing. We had intended, for example, to bring all of the raw materials into this large assembly plant by trucks on one wall, and on the opposite side of the building, to remove finished products by railcar. As it happened, the rail service in that part of South Texas was not quite as fleet-footed as we needed it to be, and so we had to abandon one-half of the plant in terms of the way production flow was going to go. We went from straight across the plant to an almost circular arrangement in which things were going in and coming back out on the same side of the plant. That's just an amusing little tale, but in fact, you are responsible for getting everything screwed to the ground, lights in the ceiling to light workstations, and assign people and get them fed lunch. It was a very strange time.

10-00:02:36

Cándida Smith: I assume that your customer, the DoD, had some patience, but probably very limited patience, for delays and delivery.

10-00:02:47

Wornick: No, that never, curiously, became a problem. First of all, they had no idea what to expect. Nobody had ever seen an MRE plant. They were relatively loose about our getting this first contract finished. They were more interested in its being accomplished than in it being accomplished in ferociously quick time. Plus, we were able to begin shipments fairly quickly, so they knew that, although we might not get all \$34 million worth out the door in a few months, we would get this whole thing finished within about a year of starting. Also, for a year or two, wherever we had 250 people standing, putting this inside of that and folding it over and passing it to somebody else, that became, as quickly as we could do it, a machine. Packaging material came off in a roll, and another machine got the piece on there, and it became a little pouch, and then it went down a line, and another machine counted it.

Very gradually, in small steps. I can tell you, I had two or three principles at the start of this thing. One was, no matter what, we had to be able to produce it, so don't undertake anything that doesn't seem completely accomplishable. Don't design some machine that we're going to wait here for, and when it

comes in, it doesn't work. We'll use hands as long as we have to, until we have duplicated that process on the side with equipment. We did succeed in getting the first rations delivered. We did it by primarily leaning on that first principle, which said, we're just going to grunt it out, by hand, one piece at a time. Although that seemed really, really impossible, because it was a lot of pieces. If I tried to count this up for you in my head now, I'd have trouble counting the number of zeroes in the number, because you had sixty or eighty individual items in each individual meal, and a dozen in a case, and a certain number of cases on a pallet. When that pallet went out the door, it had a lot of stuff in there. Every package had to be exactly right, nothing missing, nothing misplaced.

It took us some time to go from a very primitive manual system to a much more sophisticated and mechanized system. Although it's amusing to think about the route that we took from the point of view of 2011. When we were doing things then, it would have been with U.S. and Italian food-processing equipment, packaging equipment. Today, it would be 100 percent robotics. But that was unknown as a technique. Even barcode processing, which would have really simplified our lives, so when a truckload of goods came in—that came much later in the business—we could scan the barcode in and track its path through the plant and always know whether it had been approved, whether it's not been approved by our QC on the way in, whether it's been used, where to find it. It's wonderful. No, we were working out of composition notebooks, at desks, with a very hand mentality about getting the stuff out the door. That was really one of our principles, and I think, in retrospect, that was a sound thing to do.

The second one is that we made an oath to absolutely, religiously following every single military specification that was in the books. This has to do with how you keep your books, how you prepare the products, how you package and ship. The number of people on our staff whose singular job was to just understand what was going to be required of us, and make sure that we followed those rules, was large, and it became a major part of our expense. In working for the government, you don't get to win their respect on the golf course. You don't even know who "they" are. It's an amorphous, large place somewhere off, where lots of folks have sub-responsibilities. The only way to really win respect from the Defense Department is to do exactly what's expected of you.

Working in South Texas, this would not be exactly a Proctor and Gamble environment. These were not people who had grown up with that kind of a business ethic. Or any ethic, for that matter. It took a lot of time and attention to get everybody in that plant to understand that if the specification called for every seam on every bag being absolutely flawless, and any seam that had a little crack where the bag closure was, which might lead to a leak, has to be found and removed from the line. Zero tolerance was the whole mentality. Doing that in South Texas was a massive undertaking. I don't mean to

denigrate anybody, South Texans in particular, but it wasn't the world that they had any experience in. Nor, for that matter, did we, because government standards are just way, way higher than any other standard that most of us would ever think reasonable. Which, by the way, is why you pay \$25 for a screwdriver, or \$300 for a toilet seat. That isn't what they want to buy. They have in mind a very specific item that has to meet certain standards that are very elaborate and very expensive to meet. In that early time, we were trying to follow all the rules, and, at the same time, get the product out the door, and, at the same time, bring up the standards of manufacturing to where we would be less beholden upon that many hundreds of people who have to do things by hand. Not that we had any problem with labor or the cost of labor, but the opportunity for error is multiplied countless times. Tuning up a good, reliable packaging machine is a lot safer than keeping 200 people trained in what's expected of them.

That was the mood that we were operating in at that time. Curiously, when the first contract ended—and this is an interesting story to tell, and a good segue to my last remark—there was a movement in Congress to deal with defense contractors who were charging these outrageous prices for military products, as in toilet seats and whatever other silly examples were being used at that time. Legislation was passed that—I'm going to use some lay language here—in essence, it said that if you had a dispute with the audit agencies of the government, three contracts in a row, that you would be subject to investigation. You would be audited beyond the usual audit standards. It didn't occur to us there that that would have anything to do with us, because we were feeling ourselves very squeaky-clean. However, we had a contract that was called a "letter contract." They still exist today. It's the exact opposite of a firm fixed-price contract. The first two or three or four years, all of our contracts were letter contracts. That meant that there was another stack of some thousands of pages that provided how you would determine your costs. The government would have already agreed in this letter agreement that you would be entitled to certain costs, and certain overhead, and certain percent profit and what have you, at the end of the contract. Well, that seemed perfectly fair to me. We had an army of bookkeepers and accountants, and all of our invoices were in the office, and paper records could be found. Should be a piece of cake.

Well, of course, it wasn't. At the conclusion of a \$32.8 million dollar contract, we're now maybe eight or ten months into contract number two, we discovered that we were not going to get paid \$32.8 million, because they had \$4 or \$5 million of the 32.8 needing more evaluation or explanation or what have you. Not only was that a little frightening, because we were not really set up for that kind of surprise in terms of cash flow, but in fact, if we were not going to be able to reclaim our costs and our expected margins and overheads and profit, business was going to go in a bucket pretty quickly. Anyway, we brought a group of people to work on that. By the time we were already in the third contract, which is, let's say, 1984, we were still negotiating a settlement

on the first contract. So we had now three contracts outstanding, in terms of negotiation.

10-00:13:52

Cándida Smith: You must have gotten some money during—

10-00:13:54

Wornick:

Yes, you get progress payments as you go through. Oh, yes. We were not totally shut down. It was a little frightening, but it was all right. We were still very confident that it was just the nature of the business we were in, and at some point it was all going to clear up. Two things began to happen, almost simultaneously. One was the amount they were withholding on contract number one went from some number of millions down to some number of hundreds of thousands down to some tens of thousands, because they simply hadn't the experience with a business that was simply starting up from scratch. We didn't have forty years of records. This was the first contract. When I had bid it, I said that for every hundred pounds of beef we buy, ninety-six pounds are likely to get through to the front door, because four pounds out of every hundred are going to disappear. They just do. It goes into production machinery, it goes on the floor, it goes in short weights, it goes in cooking. That's our best guess, because we had done experiments on that. But when it's all over and the contract is finished, if it isn't ninety-four, it's ninety-three point six, or ninety-four point two or something, well, that was the deal we made. You pay me for costs, and those are the costs. Maybe they aren't quite as efficient as you'd like it to be, but you come in here and build a factory and equipment and turn it on and try to do it flawlessly from the first crack. You can't do that.

So they came to me and proposed a settlement, and I said, I'm not interested. I want to get paid for what we are entitled to under the terms of the agreement. So we did not resolve contract one. We had come from millions of dollars or differences down to something like \$18,000. I remember it was a teen. I can't swear to the exact number. It would have been very easy to take the eighteen and move on, but I did not want it in the record that we had even an \$18,000 difference, because there should be no difference, unless there's an error, in which case we'll make it go away or something like that. But there was no error. The disputes were carrying on. We were now on the third contract. People started disappearing off the factory floor, mysteriously. It took about ten days, or almost two weeks, before I discovered that the Department of Defense had come into McAllen and set up a grand jury to try me and my senior officers for fraud against the government. This was not a civil case that could be settled with money. This was a criminal case. In other words, only two things could happen. You go about your business, or you go to jail. Yes. Your expression is only half as horrified as mine was. You cannot get any more government businesses if you are found guilty of fraud. Everything was at stake. The business and family, reputation, jobs of all these people.

Furthermore, the grand jury system was such that I was not entitled to know who they called, what issues they investigated. I could not have an attorney there to represent me. This is the way grand juries work. Their task is to go through and assemble a lot of information at the end of the line, decide whether they want to do an indictment. I hired a Washington firm called Crowal and Mooring. I'm not good with names, but I remember that one. For a not modest fee, they put a team of attorneys on exploring all the things we had done, and the government's position, and one thing or another. For a period of about a year—I would say it was less than a year, but close to a year—I went to bed every night knowing that I was well represented. I was confident of my employees' integrity and confident of what we had done, but not confident that the government, which seems to make the rules and then arbitrate and determine on their own what they think is right. Anyway, at the end of that time, the grand jury was dismissed, and I didn't even get a postcard that said, "Sorry! We just didn't have all the facts. We're really regretful that we wasted so many millions of dollars of legal fees, and whatever we've done to your intestinal system." They just closed up and left town.

10-00:19:28

Cándida Smith: Do you think that—

10-00:19:29

Wornick: Who all they were?

10-00:19:31

Cándida Smith: I was going to ask you who "they" were, but—

10-00:19:34

Wornick: The Department of Defense and some branch of the Justice Department.

10-00:19:43

Cándida Smith: Would this be the kind of thing that Lockheed and General Motors have to deal with all the time?

10-00:19:49

Wornick: They'll have their own horror stories to tell, of which I have too many to take you through. The thing is, most agencies of government are just very, very rigid. There's nobody that will apply a little common sense, and walk in and just look at the picture from a broader point of view. They'll get stuck on, well, insurance is supposed to run at 7 percent. It does, nationally. You're at 8 percent. We don't think we should pay 7 percent. I will sit there and say, "Well, here's the three bids I got. These are the bills I paid. That was my insurance cost. I don't much care what the historical record is. I'm not historical. I'm here. Hello. This is what we agreed to." Yeah, we did prevail. I don't want to sound smug about it, because it was scary and it was humiliating. It came back to the principle that I opened this discussion with, which was that—not because we ever expected a grand jury, but we did know that making a product more delicious, or being more polite, or doing the kinds

of things that might service a customer if you are in a commercial retail world, it doesn't matter. What matters here is that you have met every single rule and requirement that the government puts on you.

10-00:21:29

Cándida Smith: The "they," it's the Department of Defense. Are you dealing with military personnel, or accountants who were civilians, who were working for the DoD? Are they career employees for the DoD or are they on loan from the Justice Department or the Budget Office?

10-00:21:51

Wornick: The answer is, all of those. Are you speaking now just about day to day, or talking about this fraud case?

10-00:21:57

Cándida Smith: Well, both, actually. Who were the "they" that you, as a businessperson, had to deal with? If you're dealing with another business, you have an idea of who the principal partners are.

10-00:22:10

Wornick: At some point, there was a real human being. You could fly out there and sit down opposite him, and you had a real talk about what you could do to help get past the bottleneck, whatever it was. No. In this case, the process began, as you say, DoD, in the Pentagon. They delegated it to an agency called, at that time, DPSC, which stands for Defense Personnel Support Center. That place was given the assignment to buy food and clothing. If you make your way down to food, food gets divided into fresh and frozen and field rations and fruit and what have you. The corridors of those buildings, you can't see the far end. It's like the arch of the earth. There are so many doors and so many people, they just disappear over the horizon. We did get a contract officer. He had the title and the responsibility for overseeing the contract. Usually, pretty good guys. My experience with them over decades was that they were selected for that job because they were probably a cut above.

But let's just say, for example, a truckload of frozen codfish blocks arrives in my plant driveway in Texas. One of the specifications says that, before I put it in my deep freezer, the temperature has to be 0 degrees Fahrenheit or less. To determine that, USDA has an inspector who specializes just in meat and fish kinds of products. He comes down from somewhere or other not too far away. There's a lot of them roaming around plants. They pull out a case, at random, of fish. They're three-inch thick slabs of fish. He drills a hole in there, puts his thermometer in there, and takes the measurement. Puts it back in. Maybe takes two or three more cases at random out of the truck, and he adds up five or six numbers, and he comes up to—I'm going to make this up now—4 degrees Fahrenheit. It's supposed to be 0 degrees or less. Now, my point of view is, it's 110 degrees outside. You're in South Texas. You can hardly stand out there without having a medical problem. How much temperature increase goes on during his drilling and cutting and measuring? I don't really know,

but some. Furthermore, those fish blocks freeze at around 30 or 31 degrees, and 29, 28, 27, 26, it's still frozen solid. If you're getting readings of 3 or 4 degrees Fahrenheit, you can't saw into it. You'd need a power drill to get through that thing. So how have we endangered? Well, it doesn't meet the spec. The USDA inspector says, close it up. It's rejected.

Now I have to call the contractor's office. Well, he doesn't know anything about drilling holes in fish, so he has to go and find somebody out in that jungle that he works with who will make a decision on this. No one has any incentive to deal with it. Your job is to stay out of trouble and get paid. You're sitting at a desk somewhere in that labyrinth, and somebody has said to you, the temperature is four degrees over the spec. Would you accept it? No. The spec is 0. It has to be 0. Why are you calling me? We never won any one of those arguments, ever, of that kind.

10-00:26:33

Cándida Smith: I can imagine the fear of somebody in Congress or a newspaper getting hold of information, putting it out of context. Four degrees, you're endangering troops all across the world.

10-00:26:46

Wornick: We do a very ethical thing, of course. We send it to Brownsville and take the temperature to minus 10, because it's been in a truck coming cross country and it probably did get close to 0. We bring it back and we retest it. It's exactly the same fish. It gets accepted, and it goes into the plant. But in the meantime, I don't have the fish to run on the line, probably, unless it gets down there, frozen and back, and approved and so on, in time. There's always this tension in the business of a nameless army of well-intended people who are so rigid that you just absolutely don't count on bending any rules.

If the spec says you have to take the chicken for the chicken salad, put it on a number ten sieve and shake it for two minutes, and not more than 3 percent will fall through, you better be sure it's 2 percent. Because if it's 3.5 percent, that whole rail car of chicken is going back. That's the world we lived in. They probably pay, in round numbers—I'm going on record with this—three times what you would have to pay for the same product, simply because of the cost it takes to get a subcontractor to deliver chicken to us under that kind of a standard, and for us to take the risk and then assure the finished product's compliance.

10-00:28:21

Cándida Smith: Is there a process for adjusting the specs so you could say 5 degrees Fahrenheit would be acceptable?

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Wornick: Yes, there is. There are two processes. They move glacially slow, not surprisingly. One was called value engineering something or other. We actually made a pretty good living on that, because if you put in an idea that

saved the government money in this world of field rations, even if the money was saved around the entire industry, you'd get a half of the savings. A very enlightened point of view. Some of the more brilliant moves we made—our very first one I remember, I still smile at it. We said, since we no longer pack cigarettes in the rations, and since the rations are self-heating, why do we put in a book of matches? We don't need matches. So there go the matches. We get a sizeable reward for that. As to the specifications, the improvements that you could make had nothing to do with deliciousness. If you found a way to make the product lip-smacking good, there was hardly anybody interested in that. But if you could find a way to make it safer, more reliable, and maybe lower the cost without any compromise in quality, those were things that they were receptive to. We had an industry/government agency that met on a regular basis, where we could discuss these things from the point of view of industry-wide interests. It's an interesting business to have been in at that time as we were just getting started. That grand jury exercise was a reminder to me that we were playing with some pretty big, tough guys and that we were going to have to maintain a meticulous, fastidious attention to detail, as we already had proved good for us, because we never did have any major cash settlements back to the government. I think they ended up respecting the quality of our bookkeeping. Okay, I'm sitting here talking about me. They're not sitting right next to me, but that's the way I remember it, and I think that's fair.

The business in those first two years surprised me in several ways, but the only one worth reporting, in terms of it being something I didn't count on, was that if you did all of this work right and you got it delivered without rejections and things that were costly, it was a pretty damn profitable business. Knowing that this was likely to be even more so as we increased our efficiencies and got a little better at what we were doing, and at that time, we were winning the biggest awards in the industry every year, and so it seemed like we could get the biggest, most well-run facilities. That compounds so that if you get the biggest, best, you get to be more competitive. You get to be more competitive, you get to perpetuate that. I did two things at the same time. One is I bought out my venture capital risk partner. You may recall earlier on I mentioned George Hittleston. I was fearful that we could very well lose lots of money, which would put me back on a magazine route. I had given him a chance to capitalize on a risk investment, which he did. I bought him out. Then we purchased the land and buildings from our banker in order to take that cost down from rentals to owning.

The next thing we did was put ourselves on the market. We looked around for an investment banker or M&A guys. People who could either find us a company we could buy or sell us to a company that might enjoy this inroad into the Defense Department and a growth area. That proved to be very non-productive. In hindsight, I can sense why. We had only been in business maybe four or five years at that time, and most people didn't understand that this would likely be a forever kind of business. The question often would be,

well, what if you don't get a contract next year? We would say, well, that is possible, but *what* is the possibility of our being at peace next year and not having any problems anywhere in the world? Go back to Jefferson if you'd like, we have never been without an army, and we probably never will be. I've been proven, regrettably, very right about that. Even when there is no active military campaign anywhere, the government still needs a supply that they keep around until we're ready to go, should there be a crisis somewhere. Which would be a very good segue into 1991, Desert Storm and Schwarzkopf and that whole thing.

We never were able to either sell the business or find a business that we could buy that would help diversify us enough so we wouldn't be completely beholden to the government. Normally, we need that for our own security, but we would have been a better customer for the government, because they don't like to know that they have to give you a contract or you go away. Because if you go away, you're not there should they need you. They are stuck. They've created you and they've got to feed you, so to speak. It doesn't work for either side. We made a serious effort at diversifying our own businesses, which we did some of, and at the same time, being less beholden on the government for income.

10-00:36:03

Cándida Smith: What percentage of your business was the government?

10-00:36:06

Wornick: It was probably never less than—a round number—70 percent.

10-00:36:12

Cándida Smith: Besides the Department of Defense, you also had a contract with NASA, didn't you?

10-00:36:16

Wornick: A very small, tiny little thing, yeah. Over the years, we also did co-projects with the Japanese. We made a whole line of curried products for them.

10-00:36:31

Cándida Smith: For the Japanese commercial market?

10-00:36:34

Wornick: It was a chain of fast-food stores that liked our equipment and plant. They were fascinated, in the first case, because the Japanese were reverential of the astronauts, and we were feeding the astronauts. That led to our doing some business with them on some other things. We did a lot of business with diet-food companies, because they were, early on, discovering that if they could succeed in getting people on their diet regimen, they would ultimately lose weight, and then they would lose a customer. That wasn't much of a business. You needed to have a product line that would continue to serve your customers through their lifetime, rather than they reward you with, "Go away, I don't need you anymore," after they have lost ten pounds. They came to us

and asked us to create a line of shelf-stable kinds of products that they could ship to customers, that are calorie-controlled. We did Nutrisystem and a half dozen other diet food companies. The first of which was Cambridge Diet. I don't know if anybody would remember that. It came, actually, out of London. It was a firestorm across the country. We produced for them as well as others.

I'm going up to Desert Storm. General Schwarzkopf had already said in the newspaper—this will tell you something about our customer—he'd already said in the newspaper that he would not start the first round of action—this was Kuwait, '91—maybe '90—until he had food, ammunition, supplies, et cetera, et cetera, for sixty days, for all of his ground forces. A very significant number. It might have been a couple hundred thousand.

10-00:38:53

Cándida Smith: I thought it was actually close to 600,000, not quite.

10-00:38:58

Wornick: It was a huge number. You multiply 600,000, Richard, by three meals a day, times sixty days, and where was this food going to come from? It was not in inventory. I didn't have it in my plant. We were just poking along at our regular rate. One late afternoon—and it's curious it was late afternoon, because it was early evening in Washington—I was playing tennis in San Carlos, California, and a hysterical assistant secretary of the tennis club came running across the court diagonally. "Mr. Wornick! Mr. Wornick! I have the Defense Department on the phone. It's a matter of national urgency!" It was very good for my reputation. I went over and took the call.

Well, it had obviously taken something like three or four months for Schwarzkopf's message, which was already in the newspaper, to make its way up the line, across the street, over to here, over to there, get funded, get approved, go through some committee, go over to DPSC, DPSC to write out the contracts, figure out who makes this stuff. Boom, the phone call. I had been walking around for months, thinking, "What in the hell are they talking about? What are they doing?" Now I was on the phone, and they wanted to know would I be willing to take a contract for ten million gazillion units, but I had to get them there in segments of a gazillion each, in two weeks, for the following something or other. I just stood in this office of the tennis court building and said, "I will do everything I can, but no, I cannot accept that contract. I cannot erect another plant. I cannot find another 600 employees and train them. It will be a bloody fiasco. If I produce anything, and you pay the costs, you're going to be astonished at what it will cost, if you care. If I have to do it at a fixed price, I'm going to get clobbered. It's not doable. You cannot do that. Now, what can I do? I can lengthen my shifts. I can add a shift. I can do everything we know how to do inside the confines of a machine that's made to make MREs, and that's all I'm willing to do. I hope that's enough." He didn't hang up, but that was not the answer he wanted. We were

given an open-ended contract to do what we could. It was maybe the best business decision I might ever have made. One of the three suppliers, the smallest one—there were three companies, and I'm embarrassed to tell you the third one will not come back into my head, but we can easily find it.

10-00:42:10

Cándida Smith: Are these the same three that started out—

10-00:42:12

Wornick: Yes. The second largest is SOPACO. They're in Mullins, North Carolina, maybe South Carolina. Tobacco jobbers. They also said they would do the best they could, but this other thing couldn't happen. The third company, which was generally getting the smallest award every year, they took the bait and said, "Well, this is our moment. We can do this." So they took the contract for some huge amount of stuff. They found a fairly clean, empty building in Blue Ash, Ohio, and they spent close to \$30 million very fast and put in incredibly automatic equipment for producing MREs. A generation ahead of anything anybody could ever have imagined, including the making of some of the sub-components.

When the Desert Storm war concluded in about three days, the government exercised a "termination for convenience," they called it. The government has quite a number of conveniences. The contract simply said, it may become important for us to not do everything we said that we were going to do. We have the right not to do it. All of us were given a notification that the supplies that had been ordered were way more than they needed and we were each to go back to some reduced level.

Well, this third company had never actually got their plant up and running, so they hadn't produced anything anyway. It never occurred to me that that might be an interesting plant to look at, because they were a competitor. But a year later, they went on the auction block. The auction called for them selling off the individual pieces of equipment. We gave them an opportunity to get some bids on the individual pieces of equipment, and then we offered them a lump-sum purchase of the whole thing. Land, buildings, and all of the equipment. We bought it. Starting almost immediately, maybe a year after the war was over, we moved all of our food-making operations into that plant in Blue Ash (Cincinnati), which is where the whole company is now headquartered.

10-00:45:17

Cándida Smith: Did you close down your South Texas plant then?

10-00:45:21

Wornick: No, not at that time, because that was an assembly plant, and the Cincinnati plant had way more to do with the actual producing of the sub-components. We became very vertically integrated. One after the other, we looked at each of the sub-products that we were buying—that could be cake in a pouch, a

little cheese packet, meals in ready-to-eat plastic pouches—and we started making them ourselves. Some we did in Texas. We rented a plant in Evansville, Indiana, where we made lots of the rations, and another one in Mission, Texas. We were just spreading out. It was becoming a growing business. As we vertically integrated, it was better in terms of our own control over our own destiny. Profits could be enhanced this way as well. Getting the Cincinnati plant allowed us the opportunity to concentrate all the food production in one plant (Ohio), and all of the assembly business in another plant (Texas).

Before Desert Storm had completely wrapped up—the war was over, but they had a lot of troops left there for some time—we got a call to bid on a thing called the sundries pack. I never had heard of a sundries pack, but apparently they had never needed one before. They needed us to invent a large box in which we could put in enough supplies for a company which would be one hundred men and women. That would have eyeglasses, razorblades, pencils, aspirin, combs, Kotex, drugstore supplies. Naturally, they needed it pretty quickly. We put out a request for quotes from all the various people that could do these things, added up the numbers, and put a bid in for the assembly business. We won the award. For the first time, I had another little business to start up over on the side here, and we took another building. We put my oldest son over there to manage it, and we went into the sundries business. For the record, the amazing thing that happens when you stumble into these kinds of things is that you just don't know what you're doing until you actually do it. Over time, we were able to make the package more efficient, the cost of everything that we were buying fractions of what the first bids were. Maybe the first eyeglasses were bid by some well-known company. The second bid probably came from some nobody-ever-heard-of eyeglass company that was equal in quality. Over time, that became another very good profit center for us. That's the nature of being in the business of selling supplies to the military. We'd actually looked at going into selling uniforms and other kinds of opportunities. We took a look at helmet liners at one point. Fortunately, we stuck close to our own business, which is food, food assembly, food manufacturing, that kind of thing. We always did well and continued for decades to do so, through today.

[Interruption]

10-00:50:29

Wornick:

I want to return for a moment and reflect on employee relations, because we were a vigorously growing, exciting company, to be sitting in an otherwise unremarkable little Southern town. We brought in lots of people from other big cities with experience to do the major jobs, but if you looked at percents, we were probably 90 percent or more of just good old local people who would have been doing other local jobs. We were really lucky to have them, because they had a great work ethic and were, primarily, very reliable. They did a great job for us. We were able to keep the union out of there, keep the trust of

our employees. I don't know if this is going to sound self-serving, but I grew up in a time when a business was pretty much a reflection of the owner or chief executive officer. Somebody became the icon of the business. The way in which that business was run, or the amount of attention we put on local good causes, and the programs we put in place for our employees, and the way they were promoted and treated with respect and so on, from my point of view, gave us, primarily, a very good environment in which we continued to grow, and they all grew along with us.

But then I had an awakening that reminded me of how isolated and naïve you can become. We had, very early on in the business, put in place—I think we might have called it a profit-sharing program at that time. This was in advance of there being the software programs that are available today. I dumped this project on the bank that was going to be sitting on these funds, and they had the task of keeping proper account of everybody's account. Well, this was on paper. Probably a lot of typing. I don't know what all went on. We were always struggling to keep the records updated and to be able to get reports to employees about what's in their account and what it's worth and so on. Although I didn't sense it, there was a growing unease among the employees that maybe we were up to some mischief. What was really going on with this guy who didn't grow up here in McAllen? "Maybe we're going to end up surprised one day." I never heard it expressed out loud, but you began to hear there was some question about whether the money was real. The way that expressed itself was that we had provided in the profit-sharing plan that employees could borrow money from their own fund if there was some family need of some real significance that it would be absurd to keep it for their retirement when it might save their daughter's life. A hospital bill or something.

Well, our human relations department was overrun with emergency claims. That, together with the problems we were having keeping the records clean and straight and coming out of the bank, it became a distraction and an annoyance. I, finally, one day, being something of an autocrat anyway, said, "Okay, finished. It's over. We're closing it. You're each going to get your check." I can't tell you now how many years it would have been, but maybe it was ten years. Plus, these were times when invested capital actually grew when you put it in an account, instead of sitting at zero. People would have gotten a check that was probably close to equal to a year's salary, because they were getting 3 or 4 percent a year for ten years, and compounding, and was there matching? I can't recall, but they were significant checks. For somebody who was earning a very modest salary, it was a stunning development. Of course, at the higher salaries, it didn't change their lives so much, but it was very well received.

What I discovered in that exercise that I had never understood before was that, on a very basic level, people really would rather have the cash in their hand than any well-intended program you might provide for them. Your avuncular

behavior is not understood or appreciated. It's taken to be patronizing. They'd just as soon you leave them alone and give them their money. If they want to save it, they'll save it. I don't think that's necessarily just some primitive attitude that existed in South Texas. It may well exist in most labor forces. It might even have something to do with the government solving its problems with health care and social security. I don't know. I did walk away from that disappointed and offended, feeling as though I had not really understood employees as well as I had hoped to.

That was one thing I'd left out before that might be useful to somebody. The other one is that I have always worked in and around food companies and food businesses, and I should have known better. Rather than buy a company that would have helped us diversify, I spent a fair amount of money creating and developing new food products, using our process technologies, which we could put into the retail stores and develop our own business. Every single one of those products failed.

10-00:57:55

Cándida Smith: Every single one?

10-00:57:56

Wornick: Every single one. The odds against crowding somebody else off the grocery shelf with a new product is a tough ballgame. You'd be better advised to find an existing, ongoing, succeeding or growing, modest business than ever try to do it on your own. It isn't that apparent because the products that you invent seem to be just really wonderful and perfect for the market niche that you're aiming at.

10-00:58:40

Cándida Smith: Can you give an example or two of some of the products you introduced?

10-00:58:46

Wornick: Sure. One was called Now Italia, which was a line of pasta products that were in a shelf-stable tray, like a white plastic tray, with a seal over the top. Non-refrigerated. Peel back the corner and microwave it. Very affordable, very good-tasting, nutritious. Easy to produce, easy to ship. All of those things. Were we too early or too late or too anything? I don't know. We never generated any real interest or excitement. We did sampling. We did couponing. We practically gave it away. It just never happened.

10-00:59:45

Cándida Smith: That raises the issue of whether you as a company were experienced enough with advertising.

10-00:59:55

Wornick: No marketing. No advertising. Yeah, all those big words. Because I had been in and around the business for decades, I thought we'd create our own, but we

didn't. We gave some of the frosting back, so to speak. It was all for the enterprise. Just trying to find our way.

[End Audio File 10]

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11-00:00:02

Cándida Smith: You mentioned something about perhaps you were too early or too late. The kinds of products that you were producing strike me as probably becoming an important part of U.S. supermarket offerings in the last maybe ten years, fifteen years. Was there resistance from the consumer to freeze-dried products or from retail chains?

11-00:00:48

Wornick: Well, these weren't freeze-dried. These were wet, ready-to-eat products. Everybody makes the mistake of assuming that because our products are non-refrigerated, that they're somehow dehydrated. No. We had, and have, a method of processing food in relatively thin packages, which were, say, maybe an inch or less thick. High temperature, short time sterilization. You can do it in a tray, a plastic tray, with lots of different laminations of different materials together, and end up with a product that does not require refrigeration. It is wet and ready to eat. If people are used to looking for certain products in the frozen case, or in the refrigerated case, or on the canned goods case, or what have you, and you come along with a product whose brand they've never heard of, the whole language and narrative that goes with it is all new and needs to be explained. The process, they don't quite get. They're picking it up off a shelf now, next to other what would be thought of as not fresh foods. It's a very steep hill to climb. Anyway, for probably a hundred reasons, we just never made the penetration.

We did try things with freeze drying as well, by the way. We had what I thought was a spectacular line of salad mixes. Essentially, you take a No. 10 can of this dehydrated salad product, and add a certain amount of water into the can. The can is in the refrigerator for an hour or so. Then you just drop it into a big mixing bowl with mayonnaise. If you followed those two steps, you'd get a fixed number of servings of sandwich filling. If you pay us—I'll make up the numbers—\$5 a can, you're going to get fifty portions, and it's ten cents a portion. That's the way it worked. Versus having to have employees in the house who are going to chop celery and do all these little things, mincing, opening containers, mixing it all up. It's just water and mayonnaise in there. Whenever I demonstrated it to companies, they seemed to love it. More often than not, it would be a salesman doing it, but I did do it myself a couple of times. Once at Long John Silver's, which is a seafood chain, and once at an East Coast drugstore chain, the kind that doesn't exist anymore. When they had lunch counters, this would be the perfect place for a salad-sandwich mix. That business did take off, somewhat, and we were in it for a few years, but it

never went anywhere. It just came up a little bit. Had I known it wasn't going to grow beyond what we were able to do, I wouldn't have started in the first place. It's another lesson that, you need a large R&D lab. And you go in recognizing that you're going to have to come up with twenty or thirty or forty products to find one that might succeed, and you spend an enormous amount of money pushing it into the market, getting it on the shelf with all kinds of advertising and promotion.

11-00:05:05

Cándida Smith: You weren't General Mills or United Fruit Company.

11-00:05:10

Wornick: No, no, not close. We shouldn't have even thought about it, but we did, and we didn't do it very well.

11-00:05:18

Cándida Smith: What was your total payroll? Not the dollars, but the number of people that you employed?

11-00:05:27

Wornick: It alternated, I would say, over the years, depending upon what year and what was going on in the world, but it was never over a thousand. On the high side, it might have been 1,050 or something.

11-00:05:40

Cándida Smith: Of those, how many were executives, managerial, and how many were production? Maybe that's not even the right way of breaking it down.

11-00:05:51

Wornick: People who actually sat at desks and were not doing anything with their hands, so to speak, might have been thirty-five, something like that.

11-00:06:04

Cándida Smith: So you could know them all on a first-name basis?

11-00:06:08

Wornick: Absolutely, and did.

11-00:06:11

Cándida Smith: Then you had 900 to 950 production personnel?

11-00:06:17

Wornick: Yes, but declining as we automated.

11-00:06:19

Cándida Smith: Divided into two plants?

11-00:06:22

Wornick: Yes.

11-00:06:24

Cándida Smith: You mentioned the profit-sharing plan. Were you also offering health insurance to your employees?

11-00:06:33

Wornick: Yes.

11-00:06:34

Cándida Smith: Was that a problem for you as a business from a—

11-00:06:41

Wornick: This is before the world we're in today. In the main, the South-Texas workforce had never enjoyed the benefits of insurance, for the most part. This was a new phenomenon for them. We played with it over the years to tune it up to the kinds of things that benefited them, because there was a proclivity on the part of the employees to use it for the nickel-and-dime purposes that were just too tempting not to do, which was driving up the cost and making it unlikely that we could provide the real protection that they would need in the case of important things, which did occur. We definitely had employees whose families had very serious ailments and very expensive ailments to deal with. So we were always balancing the insurance benefits, and doing it in a non-union environment, there was a need for a good deal of explaining and trust on both sides. It's too many years ago for me to say with reliability, but we contributed significantly to the cost of that, and we always had them contribute something, on the theory that you only respect things that you pay for. They also paid, and they got to decide whether it was just for themselves or for their family. That would impact what their costs would be as well. It's like playing a church organ. There's no absolute, precise way to do these things. You just do the best you can every day. You try to hear what needs are, and try to fill those as affordably as you can.

Our program was very local. It just gave people an opportunity to go into the local hospitals, see local doctors, and get needs cared for. It was all the way from the usual head colds to broken arms and the things that people deal with. We had a few employees with very serious ailments that were terminal, that were horribly expensive. Yes, your premium does adjust for that. We all end up paying, but we had enough people and we were in a big enough program that it averaged out over time.

11-00:11:34

Cándida Smith: I was wondering how you made it affordable for the company, how you structured the program so that you could offer the benefit, but also make sure that it made sense to you from a business point of view. Obviously, it was built into your labor costs to offer health care.

11-00:11:58

Wornick: I may be drifting too far afield and getting over to the political side of things. In that time, there was a lot of freedom to pick an insurance company and to pick benefits. Today, the government says, if you have somebody living at

home under the age of twenty-six and you want to include them in your program, the insurance company has to do that. Okay. I don't have any objection to that. But who just paid for that? If I'm the company, I have to have a right to say, wait a minute, I've got to recalculate the costs. I don't know how many people there are going to be and what the cost of that is going to be. I'm going to have to determine it, and it has to become part of my premium. Otherwise, it's fantasy. You can't just invent coverage and there's no cost for it.

Well, they were different times. In that time, you could construct a policy that was in the best interest of the people you were insuring, and you would try to do it in a way that met their needs, and it was affordable. It wasn't affordable in the sense that it was really cheap, but it seemed manageable. I never felt that it was an awful burden. We managed it. Today, it's a topic everybody talks about. It keeps going up by some massive amount every year. You and I could probably get into a long discussion about who's at fault. I will say that you'd be hard-pressed to find competition anywhere in the medical field among providers, doctors, even patients. If you have a serious ailment and you're covered, you're not even going to know what your costs are. It will go away somewhere. It's very unattractive. We're getting what we deserve today, in my view. It's just very badly managed. I don't think anybody in particular is at fault, except that it's in the hands of the wrong party.

11-00:14:24

Cándida Smith: You moved—well, you didn't move your plant, but you were based in South Texas, and then you expanded into Ohio. That, in some ways, is counterintuitive. It's supposed to generally work the other way around. You're based in someplace like Ohio and decide to move to South Texas to take advantage of all the various things that Texas is said to offer. If anything, if you were in South Texas, you were supposed to think about moving across the border into the maquiladora zone, and take advantage of all the things that Mexico was supposed to be offering, particularly at the time that you were operating. Did you ever consider moving any of your operations into the maquiladora zone, or otherwise into Mexico or another country, where labor costs were significantly lower?

11-00:15:33

Wornick: No, not ever. Not for an instant. It's risk-reward times a thousand. There are some gains to be had if everything works out on the other side of the border, but it feels uncertain to me. I never wanted to be a party to that. You are really beholden to a lot of forces on the other side that you would not be used to. On the U.S. side of the border, despite all of the regulators and regulations and the clumsiness of having to do business here, at least I know what the rules are. I know how to get by working inside of that game, and so I never for a moment thought that we would have the capability of operating a plant somewhere else outside of the U.S., and we never did.

The reason for the different moves that we made were just completely serendipitous. We started in Texas because that's where I bought the business from United Fruit Company, way back in the beginning. It was out in another town, but we got to know people who lived and worked there. We knew the bank there. It became a good place to do business. When we started the MRE business, it was very easy for us to see that we could put it in McAllen, Texas, where we had an airport and we had a certain level of sophistication, banking and other kinds of things. It was an easy move. The move to Evansville, Indiana, was just an addition because we had a chance to pick up a facility there on a rental basis that was very attractive. That plant, we closed as soon as we got on the foreclosed Cincinnati plant. Today, everything is in Cincinnati. It's all on one growing campus.

We're probably next going to be talking about the way I exited the business through an ESOP, but when I did that, I did keep ownership of the assets. I sold the operating company, but the land and buildings, wherever they were, remained personal property. They were rented to the Wornick Company in the intervening years and still are.

11-00:18:10

Cándida Smith: What about your supply chain? How far afield did you go to find the companies or the suppliers that would give you the various things that you need? Not only the food things, but also—for instance, in the sundries business, you could probably get eyeglasses from China or Malaysia at a tenth of the cost that you could get them from a U.S. manufacturer.

11-00:18:44

Wornick: Yes. That's a very large and interesting cost of goods category. All of it is governed by very rigorous "buy America" rules, though. That would have been a rare exception when we bought something not American. Some parts of a product might have been made offshore. No, our supply sources were almost always—whether it would be sundries or the food business—just small to middle-sized companies willing to put up with the peculiarities of this product. There were two bakeries that were very successful, small, local bakeries in Texas. We were able to coax them, one in particular, into putting in a major amount of equipment and make baked goods for the military program. They ended up with one-of-a-kind equipment, one-of-a-kind processing, just very unique baked products that were made only for the military, and supplied primarily just to us. It was all part of a larger human and equipment machine that's necessary to stay in that business, because you're not buying commercial products most of the time on the food side. On the sundries side, you are, of course. That didn't last long.

11-00:20:42

Cándida Smith: Who made the decisions about the menus for the MREs? Were you involved in that, or did you simply get, as part of the contract, you were going to make so many spaghetti and meatball dinners, and so many tuna salads, and so many whatevers?

11-00:21:10

Wornick:

As a broad generalization, the decisions were made by the government agencies. Primarily, NARADCOM, which was the Natick Army Research and Development Command. They had a large group of young food scientists and food technicians. They worked on the recipes and would develop them, test them, and then put them in a procurement. Our job was simply to make what they asked for.

11-00:21:46

Cándida Smith:

So if they said a quarter of a teaspoon of basil, you would put in a quarter of a teaspoon of basil? Not an eighth and not three eighths.

11-00:21:57

Wornick:

There wouldn't have been a quarter of a teaspoon. It would have been measured in fractions of a gram. But yes, that's exactly right. You do precisely what it says on the spec. The annoying part of it—maybe the two parts that have always annoyed me about doing business with them that way—was that, oftentimes, we knew how to make things way more delicious. In fact, on a few occasions, we employed executive chefs to come in and see if they could upgrade the quality of the MRE's. Whether it was the not-invented-here problem or maybe reasons that I never understood, the DoD was more interested in creating products that they could control and we would make. Our job was to follow instructions. It's a mindless—not completely mindless, because it was hard to do, but we're not supposed to be creative. Don't make it better. Make what we've asked for. That's pretty much the history of our business. If we impacted what they do, it was primarily through value engineering, where we tried to show them smarter ways or less complicated ways of getting to the same end product.

11-00:23:21

Cándida Smith:

You did business before you exited the company, I would gather, under four different presidential administrations, and probably a half dozen secretaries of defense, and however many joint chiefs of staffs. Did it matter who was in charge in terms of the process and how the Pentagon functioned in your relationships with them?

11-00:23:51

Wornick:

No, Richard, I think it does not. There is a huge population of government employees who are not ruled by anything or anybody. There's some great, amorphous tide of energy that goes on in the Federal Government. Presidents come and go. I don't know that they look up to notice. I suspect that's all the way up into even State Department and other places. It's what is. They have a certain autonomy at all these levels. They do what they do. Presidents come and go. It doesn't ever seem to matter. I always thought that having friends in government, if you're going to sell to the government, might not hurt. That has been variously very successful and variously unsuccessful. Lloyd Bentsen, who was treasury secretary and senator from Texas, was very difficult for me ever to get his attention. We had a fairly large business in McAllen, where his

family came from. His father had opened a very successful bank there. The Bentsens were a McAllen family.

On, I recall, the very last time I went in to just call on him when I was in Washington, I was sitting, making cordial niceties about the world and McAllen and what have you, and just trying to settle into a groove, get him talking a little bit. I didn't have something I wanted. I just wanted to make sure he knew who we were and what we did. He interrupted me with something like, "What do you want?" Okay. He's a very busy guy. He's not interested in visiting. I probably told him that I wanted to make sure he knew that he had to support the defense business that was feeding people all over the world, whatever. Anyway, I left that meeting not feeling very good about him or me. About a week later, I got a very nice letter from him, signed in ink, that said, "Dear Mr. Wornick, Terribly sorry I wasn't in when you came to visit. I do hope you'll stop in the next time you're here." What did that mean?

On the other hand, I had a congressman in Texas, Kika de la Garza, who would have slit his wrists to help the business. He knew that we were providing a lot of employment, and it was very beneficial for the valley to have that business. The government works in interesting ways, anyway. They are required to give contract award information first to the politicians and last to the owner of the business. So Kika de la Garza would always get the news of an award to us before we would get it. He got to the microphone and got to the press, and told people that he was bringing in some more business into the valley. It would have seemed that we were a very political company, but we were positively not. There was no way to—at my level, anyway. Maybe at Rockwell or Raytheon or something, but not in mine.

11-00:27:59

Cándida Smith: Did you feel like you should give campaign contributions to these various politicians, and maybe also to their opponents, to hedge your bets?

11-00:28:11

Wornick: So the family will know this, I don't believe after the age of forty, I ever wrote a check for a Democrat for national politics. It had nothing to do with business. It had to do what I felt was best for the country. One last little story, about a very, very well-known local California congressman, Tom Lantos.

11-00:28:49

Cándida Smith: From here in the Bay Area?

11-00:28:52

Wornick: Yes, the Peninsula. A tall, gray-haired, very attractive, very articulate man. Toward the end of his career in the House, he ended up chair of the Foreign Relations Committee. Anyway, he, at the very beginning, called one day to say he was going to be running, and would I be willing to meet him? I said I'd be happy to meet him, but we're of different political camps. It's not like we were going to be able to work together. He said, "Fine, I'll come by and see

you anyway.” He did. The most skilled chameleon politician maybe I’ve ever met. Very good at what he did. I don’t mean that as a slander. He could do what he has to do. He became a “Republican” often while in my office, and I became one of his supporters. Over the years, anytime I went to Washington, I would always stop in to say hello to Tom. He would take me to the congressional dining room. Always arm around my shoulder. He introduced me as one of his very first and most important supporters. Tom kept me well-introduced to a lot of people in Washington, and that was a privilege.

11-00:30:20

Cándida Smith: I would imagine, on some issues, particularly Israel, that you two probably had a lot of agreement.

11-00:30:29

Wornick: Completely eye-to-eye on Israel, yes. That was one of the causes that he worked very, very hard for. He had been through some difficult times of his own.

Most of the problems I ever had got solved without my ever having to go to any politician. One time, I did turn to Tom. The awards for the contracts every year were given out so that the lowest bid would get, I think, 40 or 45 percent. The next lowest bid would get 30 percent, or 35 percent, and the rest would go to the highest bid. One year, we had the lowest bid, but they gave us the smallest award. How could that be, we inquired. Well, it was in the government’s best interest. Well, what does that mean? It means that if you take our third-place price, because everybody had to bid on the largest and the smallest—in other words, we were bidding as if we didn’t know which of those three places we were going to get. If you added them all up, it was cheaper for the government to take the second lowest award and give them the first place, even though their price was higher for the larger quantity. But the sum total of the numbers came out lower because our price on the smallest quantity was not as high as everybody else’s, which was very high.

Now, this was not fair, and it wasn’t in the rules. We wouldn’t have bid the way we did had we understood that was going to happen. I made I don’t know how many calls to how many people, and mostly got yawns. I finally went to Tom Lantos. His son-in-law was Dick Swett, then a congressman from New Hampshire. Clinton was trying to get Swett to approve a budget, but Swett was holding out. Tom told me that he was going to see if he could get to the president on the strength of getting Dick Swett’s vote on the budget issue. It’s a world I couldn’t begin to understand, but anyway, as Tom ultimately told the story—let me come back to that. The government reversed its stand, and we got the first-place award. I don’t know whether it was something we said, something Tom said, they figured it out on their own, lawyers. I’ll never know. But I had a phone call from Tom, which I often had, just checking in. “Ron,”—he had this very charming accent—“I’m going to be at SFO on the

way to L.A. Can you meet me for coffee tomorrow morning, maybe seven o'clock?" "Yes, I'll be happy to do that."

So I came into the United Presidents Club. We sat side to side, like this, and he was leaning in here, a hand on my knee over there. Very low whisper. "Remarkable. Wonderful story. Dick Swett changed his vote, and Bill Clinton called me and said, 'Tom, I have to do something nice for you. What do you need? It would be very good if we got this bill passed with your help.' 'Oh, Mr. President, you don't need to do anything for me. It's my privilege to help support your programs.'" This went on two or three times. Tom was still whispering to me. Finally, the president must have called the second or third time, and said, "Surely, Tom, there's something I can do to make your life easier. Tell me what it is." Tom told me that he told Bill Clinton about this unfair change in the way the application of the rules came down on a very major contract, and that his constituent was feeling it needed to be reviewed. The impression was clearly that it could get fixed at the White House. This was what Tom told me, and then he swore me to eternal secrecy. I didn't know why he should, because I hadn't heard anything that was illegal or different than what I know went on every day of the week where he worked.

Anyway, I thanked him, gave him a big hug, and I went back home, thinking about this little story. Late that evening, I got a phone call from a friend in Los Angeles. He said, "You won't guess who was here today." "Oh, who was that?" "It's a very good friend of yours. Tom Lantos." "Oh yes, he was here raising funds for his campaign." Ah-ha! "He told us a remarkable story." Ah-ha! So the story that I was not to repeat was being used, somehow, probably differently constructed, on the campaign trail, with enough information that my friend knew he was talking about me. It's a strange world, government contracts and politicians. I am not here to slander them. I don't know what I would be doing if I were in their world.

11-00:36:50

Cándida Smith: One last question, during the period that you were in business there was what we could call the MBA revolution in business. Where MBAs used to be the rarity in most companies, they became the norm, and certainly in large corporations, absolutely required. What were your feelings about what MBAs could and could not bring to a company like yours? How did you feel about the kind of corporate culture that you wanted to create?

11-00:37:40

Wornick: In fact, that MBA revolution, as you call it, was a pretty significant part of our own thinking. I always felt that the people we hired, the first three requirements were IQ—if you were smart and honest and passionate about what we're going to ask you to do, the rest of it you were going to figure out. It would be handy if you had some experience in law or materials handling or whatever the broad category, but I looked for people who had good degrees from good universities. What I didn't look at, and should have looked at, was

how they would fit into the organization. I was making the decisions unilaterally. We didn't do this by committee. I ended up with a group of incompatible characters, and it was a circus a lot of the time, just trying to keep people from killing one another. We had two guys in the same level of the general organization. One, churchgoing, married with children, a very saintly guy. We had another guy who drank and cheated. He was another package. Smart as hell. This is probably way distant from what you were looking for, but I definitely got a lot of very competent people, and I did not get a lot of good friends out of that period of my life, because there was a lot of tension and pressure in every direction. I hadn't quite understood the need to get people who were going to get along with one another and with me.

11-00:40:02

Cándida Smith: To play the devil's advocate, the compatibility issue used to be a primary priority for American corporations in the interwar period and before. It was a primary—I won't say it was the cause—but one of the things that it directly led to was an active decision to exclude Jews from high positions in most corporations, because, quote unquote, they wouldn't get along with our good Baptists over here, or whatever. You were looking for smarts. How do you do compatibility without creating invidious and unfair kinds of ways of excluding people?

11-00:41:06

Wornick: I don't know if it's doable. I didn't go that way, clearly. In fact, since you brought it up, not by any intent, but I don't believe I had a Jewish employee in the company. You might very well ask why, and I'm not sure I could begin to tell you. There were South Texans. There were one or two applicants who were Jewish. I remember interviewing them. Their wives were horrified. They were going to have to shop in a pith helmet. This was like the jungle. Where's the nearest French restaurant? They probably weren't going to fit in. I hope I'm not being racist. I had a lot of very, very smart, very competent people, all of whom, to this day, I respect for what they'd done for us. But there was not a lot of warmth between the people up and down the organization. We never really turned it into one of those teams the way, it seems to me, the baseball-cap-turned-around generation seems to be able to do it now.

11-00:42:28

Cándida Smith: Some of this is management philosophy. Norton Simon, for example, strongly believed that his lieutenants should hate each other and be competing with each other, and that that was best for the Norton Simon enterprise. Some of that was his personality, no doubt. Some of it was also an idea of how you keep a company vibrant.

11-00:42:59

Wornick: That tension did exist in our company, and we did have competition. It was subliminal, but very real. I don't know. I would like to have done it differently. It might not have played out as well. I don't know. In retrospect, I think I might have probably done better to pay some attention to group buy-in

on who we brought into the organization and to have been a little less autonomous about it. In fact, that's probably applicable to most of the things I've done.

11-00:43:33

Cándida Smith: You've referred to yourself, at least three times and maybe more, as an autocrat. Ultimately, did you make all the decisions? Did everything have to wind up on your desk and you sign off on it? How much were you willing to delegate?

11-00:43:52

Wornick: I did huge amounts of delegating. I always made the distinction between delegating and abrogating. In other words, the head of this division is responsible for making up the plan and then meeting it. But when those critical moments came and we were about to put in a bid on a major contract, or invest in some new venture or something of that sort, yes, I wanted to be a party to that. I needed to understand the thinking and sign off on it.

11-00:44:31

Cándida Smith: Were your decisions ultimately gut-based? Could you override the collective recommendations of your most trusted lieutenants?

11-00:44:45

Wornick: It wouldn't likely be that they would all be on one side anyway, although that could happen. No, I definitely had the authority and the right, without any question, to make changes. It would not be a frequent thing, but it certainly happened over time, when I didn't agree with something. But in the main, I think I was pretty good at delegating. Most of the division managers were as well. When I say division managers, I mean areas of responsibility. It was the fact that you wouldn't have found all thirty of them at a dinner table ever. They all went to different galaxies as soon as they walked out the door. That troubled me, too, because occasionally, maybe once a year or more than that, I would gather dozens of people together for a retreat. We would talk about our business and about things that we liked and things we were going to do. It was a loose agenda, but it was a chance for a little camaraderie. We played some golf. We sat around, talked and drank. We did a couple of them at Meadowood here in St. Helena, and some in San Francisco. They were not families, and this was not people who, outside of the office, would depend on each other. My relationship to them was way more distant than I would have liked it to be. They were not people that I would have been inclined to bring to my dinner table. Not that they were flawed in some serious way. They were perfectly good for what they were being paid to do, but I lived in a different world. My friends were different than we were.

11-00:46:51

Cándida Smith: Clorox, as I understand it, does have a corporate culture of being a family.

11-00:46:57

Wornick:

They do, yes. They only hire, in the main, people who fit in, et cetera. Bob Shetterly, the guy who brought me there, had intended, overtly, to challenge that. He was up for challenging a lot of things anyway. That was a little bit of his personality. I don't mean he did it recklessly. He would reinvestigate anything that got to look a little dusty. He thought we should have three or four people in this company who had never been to Proctor and Gamble and didn't know anything about it, just entrepreneurial, working by a different set of rules. Maybe we could learn from one another.

11-00:48:01

Cándida Smith:

It sounds like you have regrets about possibly not having a more congenial atmosphere, but nonetheless, you did pretty well as a company.

11-00:48:12

Wornick:

Last night I sat in the luxury box at the ballgame with my very good friend, Allan Byer. He's one of the owners there. He owns and runs a significant business called Byer California Women's Clothing. Every one of his employees looks like every other employee, and they are family. They're 90-something percent of the same faith. They all have nicknames for one another. It's a very different environment than I ever had. He likes it and they like it. He did it differently. It works for him. I don't know that there's a right and wrong here. Maybe it takes some of both. Personality, background, talent, IQ.

[End Audio File 11]

Interview #7: November 10, 2011

Begin Audio File 12_wornick_ron_12_mm-dd-11.mp3

12-00:00:00

Cándida Smith: Last time we discussed the Wornick Company, and we were going to get to the situation leading up to your retirement and how you decided to transition out of the company, which sounds like it was a prolonged process to some degree.

12-00:00:46

Wornick: Yes, it was prolonged and serpentine. I marvel sometimes when I read in the *Financial Times* or other current newspapers about the swiftness with which people seem to be able to make acquisitions and mergers and carry out things today. But anyway, that aside, we are back about fifteen, sixteen years ago, the mid-1990s. We had about fifteen-plus years of very sound company profits, very good cash flow. The employees were well cared for, things were relatively stable, and I was restless because while we were not plateaued, we felt vulnerable. We were not big enough to be completely independent. We were not exactly a public company with access to huge amounts of cash.

All the diversification efforts that we had tried, which had to do with food products because that was in the main where our professional talents were, none had worked out. We looked around some and engaged a few professionals to find a company who might be interested in our company or a company with which we might merge. Those conversations all went pretty well, but they never culminated. My sense of it was that people were primarily anxious about the inability to predict the future of a government-contracts company because we didn't have a share of the market that you could actually forecast the way you do for Proctor & Gamble. Even though I made the argument that we would be in that line of work as long as the world was ill at ease, and that that had been going on for six or eight hundred years and would probably go for another six or eight hundred, that didn't do the job in conversations with other companies. A few times we got close.

The very closest we came was with Philip Morris. I have tried to remember his last name. He was president of the foods division. His first name was Hamish and his second name hasn't come to me. He very much liked the business and the position that we'd taken in this industry and thought it would be a very good fit for their food division. They came, they looked at the plants, they met our people, they sat over our books and we worked out the rough outline of a transaction. Although I wasn't running to the bank to celebrate this acquisition, sale, to Philip Morris, I seriously thought it was going to happen. But at the thirteenth hour, so to speak, the Philip Morris board was stunned that their food division would have anything to do with the Defense Department or any branch of the government because the government had been so ruthlessly abusing them because of their cigarette record. The idea that they might have to go hat in hand into some branch of government

and asked to be treated nicely—these are my words, not theirs—but that’s essentially what undid it for us so that the senior strategists in the company and at the board X’d this at the very last minute. So that didn’t happen.

In business there’s a time when you need to act. If you’ve had fifteen years of pretty good growth and you can’t find a way to go to the next stage, you simply don’t want to sit over and preside over a plateauing and diminution if you can’t keep the company growing. I couldn’t really see how to do it short of the military. The military by itself would not be an answer, and I never did find a good answer for us. So we looked at all the other options which we had considered, that we had already been through. Diversification and buy or sell with other companies. Most of those were interesting adventures but used a lot of time and talent to go through. Then the possibility of an ESOP came on the table. For anyone who is coming to the subject for the first time, I would tell you that ESOP, coincidentally, was a concept developed by attorneys here in San Francisco.

12-00:06:10

Cándida Smith: And what does ESOP stand for?

12-00:06:13

Wornick: ESOP stands for employee stock option plan, ESOP.

12-00:06:30

Cándida Smith: A plan for selling the company to the employees?

12-00:06:32

Wornick: It’s a very simple to say concept, but in most cases people who have been through this will tell you it’s impossible to get done in under three years. The essence of it is that the owner of a company hires a business valuation company, an independent business valuation company. In this case here in San Francisco we hired a company called HLAZ. Z I think was for Zukan. They had the full respect of IRS, as well as other companies who do that work. They come in, study your books, and give you a very responsible and supportable valuation based on what you have been doing, where you are today, where you might go in the future, based on other ventures in the same field and references that they bring to the table. They put a value on your company that they’re prepared to defend. That’s the first step because that’s the step that will tell the owner—in this case it was just me—what the proceeds would be for me in the circumstance.

12-00:08:03

Cándida Smith: Now, normally, in a free-market situation, Philip Morris or some other company would pay whatever they thought they should pay and that would determine the value and the figure might have very well diverged from whatever an appraiser would say.

12-00:08:20
Wornick:

It would because there are countless ways of doing these things, and in the case of Philip Morris, people like that, it's often done as an exchange of stock or pooling of interest. So you exchange some of your shares into Philip Morris, for example, and you get Philip Morris stock back and there's really no taxable event because you've just changed shares. There's essentially no gain. The value is what a willing buyer and a willing seller set as a market price. If you can come to a number, that's the market price. The IRS will accept that. In the case of an ESOP, totally different. A very academic way to come at it. It's done in a very studied way because it has to be defended, and it will be studied by a number of people who take an interest in this number. It gets to be conservative. So it might well be 20 or 25 percent less than you would get if you were out really negotiating your way in an open free market where there was some competition for the company. There was not.

So anyway, the validation number was close enough that I decided to proceed. Now, the reason the value now became important is that there were forces that would be set up, each of whom would hire lawyers and accountants. They all were entitled to representation at this long and growing table of parties to the ESOP. First was a bank. The bank came in and said—I'm just going to use very rough numbers because it's easy to talk in numbers. Let's just say the company is going to sell for \$100. A bank must be found who will put \$100 into an ESOT, which is a trust. T now stands for trust. Employee stock option trust. The trust was inside of the company. I placed all of my stock into the trust, and it went in trust to the employees. Until the trust has no debt obligation to the bank, the bank puts in the complete purchase price. The bank is interested in the value placed on the company because it needs to know that if it's going to place a loan of \$100 into this trust and it only has the shares of the company as collateral, then those shares better be worth the \$100 that they're putting in. So they're the first one to say that seems a reasonable number. Secondly, there's another group called the employees. Employees get stock awarded to them pro rata with their share of the total compensation. So if, for example, we have a total annual payroll of \$100 and your salary is one dollar a year, you're entitled to 1 percent of the stock. The IRS, lawyers, everybody who's beginning to put their reputation on the line for this house-of-cards need to assure the employees that they will be getting a share worth what their percent of the company is worth. So the employees get accountants and attorneys. I paid for all of these people who were coming to the table.

12-00:12:45

Cándida Smith: Now, you did not have to deal with unions. The employees didn't have what we could call an independent representative.

12-00:12:55

Wornick: Ah, but they did.

12-00:12:56

Cándida Smith: They did?

12-00:12:57
Wornick:

They did. They did, in fact, because they had two representatives at the table. One was because the company in essence became a broadly based held company. It started to behave like a public company. So we had to bring in a trust company. In this case we hired US Trust. Their job was to oversee every single piece of paper, every meeting, every transaction, every step we took to assure the employees in particular that they were not being set up for some abuse. I always found that a little offensive because the employees took no risk, put up no money. They were going to end up at the end of the day with somewhere between ten and forty times their annual salary, and yet it was quite remarkable. In fact, I smile today. I was not so smiley at that time. How very quickly they went from employees to, “Well, wait a minute, aren’t we partners in this situation? I don’t like that or this or that.” Even though everybody was always very respectful, there were no thank you notes and there was no environment of genteel gratitude.

12-00:14:36
Cándida Smith:

Would that attitude you’ve described primarily be coming to you from, say, mid-level management and up?

12-00:14:43
Wornick:

Well, the upper management was, of course, more sophisticated and, as is always the case, I was not sure what they were thinking and where the difference lay between what they were saying and what they were really feeling. Obviously for the top eight or ten people who took away mega millions, they knew they were onto a very good transaction. For them it was more a question of, “Well, this is great but how fast can I get my hands on this money because I don’t want to see this crumble and fall away because something weird happens. We need to get on with this.” Their objective was to go quickly. Plus, naturally, in a group of that kind you’re going to have people with all different kinds of attitudes. Some who were very patient, respectful, and willing to see the thing go in a responsible fashion. Others who saw the money on the table, became totally unglued, and behaved in ways which was beyond what I would have expected from them. It could be very disappointing. One in particular was very painful for me to see his meltdown.

But anyway, it was more about the fact that it was a pretty darn good idea. The bank was interested partly because it had been a major financier, it could continue to be the major financier of the company. So it built on an ongoing lasting relationship. Plus, the tax laws, the tax code provides that if you make a loan to an ESOP to make this happen, the bank got some very significant deduction in interest, the tax on the interest. The interest that they charged us might have been, let’s say, 3½ percent, but they only had to pay tax on some fraction of that 3½ percent. There was an incentive for them from the business point of view. The incentive for the owner was that when I got my payment for all of my stock, if I reinvested it in other U.S., at risk securities, not in government bonds but companies—it’s called QRP, a qualified replacement product, if I put it in shares of General Electric or Johnson & Johnson, then I

would be exchanging shares for shares, and there was no tax due on the payoff to me individually at the time of the transaction. Ultimately there was a tax due on the gap between my basis in cost and the ultimate sale price, which was the gain, the long-term capital gain, but that can be delayed until you died. Then there are all kinds of estate things that kick in having to deal with stepped up basis and other kinds of things.

So the company owner has a way to exit with some dignity and feel pretty good about the fact that he's handing the company over to the people who helped to make the company. The bank is pleased to do it. The employees are exceedingly anxious to do this, although you'd have to interview them to help me understand what went on in their mind. I never quite understood that entirely. It was not as pretty a picture as I'd like to think it was. At the end of the day, we had the bank, the trust company, my attorneys, the employees' attorneys, and I don't know how many others involved. And the valuation company watching over everything.

12-00:19:31

Cándida Smith: And you were paying for it all?

12-00:19:32

Wornick:

I paid for 100 percent of this, and this is all pre-ESOP. Which was fine. Most entrepreneurs will tell you, you have to get used to the idea that there's going to be somewhere around a 5 to maybe even 10 percent soft cost that you are going to have to pay for lawyers and accountants, and dealing with regulators and agencies, and it's part of the cost of doing business. Keeping them all productive and focused. The extent to which attorneys try to make deals happen or overprotect their clients can get to be a balancing act. There are risk/reward things going on all over the place, and it comes down to what does this sentence mean and who's taking the risk and who pays for what if what happens. It gets tedious. But in our case we got there.

We were maximum four, maybe six weeks away from assembling all these documents and looking ahead to the day when there were not less than twenty people around very a very large table. The stacks in front of every person were several feet tall, and everybody wanted a copy, triplicate copies. Everything had to be signed and notarized, and there were people with checklists. It was an almost scary process because you really had to do it right. There were a lot of competent people sitting watching. Even with that going on, things can happen at that very last moment that will hold you over until the next morning because something isn't there or something was misunderstood. You spend a few sweaty nights in bed until you get it over.

Anyway, before we got to that day, I had for years had the very bad habit of not doing as many vacations as I should have. We slipped away as a family on a vacation. I just remember it was a sunny place. I got a phone call from the accountant who was working for the company as an inside employee. He said,

“I am really embarrassed. It’s a thing I would normally catch, but this one got past me. We’ve got a problem.” “Okay, let’s talk. What’s the problem?” Problems when your feet are hanging off the side of a bed in a nice hotel somewhere and the ocean pounding outside the window are always a little tricky, and I’ve been to that movie countless times over the years.

Anyways, it turned out that the ESOP tax benefits had been renewed into the federal tax code countless times and they have decades to go. They were going to be fine, but the California state tax code, which would not require a 10½ percent tax on the transaction, expired in two or three weeks, which meant that I was going to pay 10½ percent on the gross proceeds of this deal. Now, you can add that into the soft costs and say, “Well, okay, 10½ percent. Maybe I just suck it up and do it.” But, wow, that’s a lot of money to just pay for what was supposed to be a tax-deferred transaction.

12-00:24:12

Cándida Smith: But if you postponed three weeks you would escape it?

12-00:24:16

Wornick:

Well, you’re on the question. So what is the state up to? California is the birthplace of this tax concept, the idea of an ESOP. They birthed it here. The reports I get back is that everybody’s on it. Everybody’s trying to find a way to get this done so that it doesn’t expire and if it goes past that amount by a week or two it’s going to get—I think they call it grandfathered. But anyway, they can sweep it back to the date the old one expired and it’ll still be all right. Well, anyway, I didn’t want to take a chance on this with an accountant who lives in Texas and was a very bright guy but not terribly sophisticated. I hired a—I’d guess you’d call him a lobbyist, a firm in Sacramento that knows everybody, can talk to everybody, can find out what’s going on about anything. They came back to me and said, “This senator and that senator are talking to some other senator on this and that committee, and if this one agrees to put another four miles on the bridge going across his whatever and somebody else gets approval of a barber shop—I don’t know. They are doing such transactions as you really and truly don’t want to know.” That was my only experience with Sacramento. Not a terribly pretty picture but even though it looked rather clumsy and slow, it was clear that they fully intended to proceed with protecting the ESOP plan.

So my lobbyist said, “Well, what we need to do is just get through the next few weeks, maybe even few months maybe, start showing up with the important senators and putting a few bucks in their campaign chests and making sure that they know that we are really interested in having this code renewed for the state because we can demonstrate that it’s not just you but lots of California companies that are becoming ESOPs and this is in the public welfare and it’s a good thing to do.”

The point is the ESOP expired before we had our documents ready to sign. No surprise. That looked like it was going to happen. Now we had the question of, do we just sit on our hands and wait for this to happen? So we spent, I would guess, maybe a couple, three months at the very most. It's very awkward to do because we had all of these parties queued up waiting for a sweeping change in the way the company was going to operate. I had assembled a group of experienced men from around the country with expertise in law, in corporate law, in marketing, in government affairs, to become our new board of directors who would be the public figures who were not employees. Clearly they were all acquaintances or friends of mine but their obligation was to the employees and stockholders as it transferred, and they knew that. All of this was in limbo. We had to decide would we proceed. I insisted that I get a chance to talk to one of the senators who was supposed to be in the middle of this free-for-all, and I did. He told me that he was not in a position to absolutely assure me of it, that it was tied up, and lots of people were pushing and pulling for one thing or another. It was not being supported by a large constituency. The number of people who really cared about it was small. There were bigger fish to fry, bigger issues, and he just couldn't give me a very positive answer. Back to the pillow I went. I thought about it, and I said, "You know, this is the old risk/reward question. Let's get on with this." So we did.

We did the ESOP. We did the closing. The board took over the company. U.S. Trust oversaw all of this. In the next about two years, it might have been even three years, the company, because of its earnings and the cash that it already had on its books and the value of its assets on its books, was able to totally discharge the debt to the bank. The 100 percent ownership of the company went 100 percent to the employees.

At around the same time I got a phone call from the senator in Sacramento. He was no longer a senator. "Mr. Wornick, if I could deliver the ESOP legislation to you, what would that be worth to you?"

Some really unattractive language came through my head, and I thought, "I didn't like your behavior in the first case. This one is even less attractive." But I had a strong hunch that he had no clue about the numbers involved. So I said to him, "I have nothing to lose. If it's completely legal, and I'll need your assurance in that direction, I will name the fee and you will get your fee when I get a rebate from the California Franchise Tax Board." We were going to do this on my terms this time because I got no help and no encouragement last time, and I was left out in the storm. He said, "That's okay. Those terms will work for me. I can trust you." "Fine." "Well, what's the fee?" he asked. I told him a number; it was pretty tiny, really tiny. It would have been less than 1 percent of the tax due back to me. He said, "Great." That's the world he lived in. That seemed like money to him. I never heard a word about it. Six, eight, nine months, a fairly long time goes by. Anita will tell you, my wife, this wonderful story. She was going through the mail one day, and she handed me

an envelope. She said, "I don't know what this is. It looks like the California Franchise Tax Board." I opened it up. Inside of this seventeen cent stamped whatever they stick on a state envelope is a check for millions of dollars.

12-00:32:36

Cándida Smith: You didn't even have to apply for the—

12-00:32:38

Wornick: I never did a thing. I hadn't even been aware that the senator had done anything. Either he knew it was going to get done and was just fleecing me, or he had a hand in getting it done. I never read it in the paper. I don't know. This would have been well ahead of Google alert and things like that that I might have had in place.

12-00:33:00

Cándida Smith: So we're talking like '98, '99?

12-00:33:04

Wornick: Before 2000 I think. I bring that up to say I have no complaints about the ESOP. It was a scary bumpy ride, but it worked very well for our family. In the short period of time that followed, the company was very quickly pursued by an equity firm.

12-00:33:46

Cándida Smith: Veritas Capital Fund.

12-00:33:48

Wornick: Veritas, exactly. They paid, round numbers, about three and a half times what I sold the company for. This would be, in rough numbers, about four or five years after the valuation that I took out. So to some extent, the company had continued to grow, and maybe it was worth two or two and a half times. Maybe. Three, three and a half times, no. But they liked the vehicle and what they did was go around and get lots of doctors and dentists and investors to buy into these transactions. They put in very little cash of their own. Then they left the company with a humongous debt to pay because they'd already paid off what my transaction required because they did it out of the resources of the company primarily. Now they had to pay off more than three times that number to an equity company whose only interest was really to get enough money out to repay the investors. So a huge debt was placed on the company. They were not only struggling to pay the debt but they were distracted from running the business. The change in the nature of the way things were run—

12-00:35:32

Cándida Smith: Did new management come in with this deal?

12-00:35:34

Wornick: It was new management, but it was like a fox in a henhouse. There were two or three people who were just really tough guys, and they set the rules. The people inside the company who really knew how to run the company, they quite properly kept their jobs because the equity investors, they knew what

they had to do and they needed the people who ran the company and the people who ran the company were in place. But remember now that they got stock worth, let's just say, one dollar and now they're being paid three and a half dollars by the equity company for their shares.

12-00:36:24

Cándida Smith: Not a stock exchange but actual cash.

12-00:36:26

Wornick: We're talking about cash, cash, cash. Countless people retired and left the company. It was a huge change in a lot of people's lives. It happened way too soon, and the numbers were not right and what have you. But anyway, within a year or two of that, the company filed for bankruptcy. It just couldn't keep its head up. I apologize for not having the years entirely straight.

12-00:36:58

Cándida Smith: The Wornick Company was purchased in 2004 so it would have been—

12-00:37:03

Wornick: Purchased in 2004 by Veritas. Okay. So then that would have been two or three years after that, that the bankruptcy occurred.

12-00:37:13

Cándida Smith: Before the fiscal meltdown of 2008?

12-00:37:18

Wornick: Yes. That's how I recall it.

12-00:37:29

Cándida Smith: At this point your relationship was that you were the landlord?

12-00:37:32

Wornick: Yes. I had the, I'd like to say, good judgment of assuming that the company was fundamentally sound and if they kept sound people in the operations of the business they ought to easily be able to pay a sizable rent and I better than anybody in the world know how much rent they could afford and how much it would cost them to move should they decide not to renew their lease. So I got a very good lease from them, an attractive lease, and they have continued for all the years since the ESOP went in place. I continue to receive rent on the land and buildings and some of the fundamental equipment. But most of the assets that have been added are all company assets since that time.

12-00:38:39

Cándida Smith: Well, you were on the board for three years, the board of trustees. But I presume you got a big cash payout.

12-00:38:47

Wornick: Yes.

12-00:38:49

Cándida Smith: Is that unusual because I thought in many cases people got a timed payout.

12-00:38:56

Wornick: I didn't get my payout until everybody else did.

12-00:38:59

Cándida Smith: Oh, okay.

12-00:39:01

Wornick: In other words, the stock is in the company. I essentially guaranteed to the bank that this debt will be paid off.

12-00:39:13

Cándida Smith: So when the debt was paid off, you got your cash payout?

12-00:39:17

Wornick: I did. Right.

12-00:39:27

Cándida Smith: Three years you waited.

12-00:39:29

Wornick: I was all right. I had no question about it. It would have taken some extraordinary turn of events to sour that thing. The company had good assets, good cash, good cash flow, and a good reputation with the government. It was a very stable business.

12-00:39:50

Cándida Smith: Did you literally remove yourself from the management of the company other than being one of the members of the board of directors?

12-00:40:00

Wornick: Not entirely. It had been some number of decades of my life getting us to where we were. I was nervous about our directors. And one or two who might have made good directors, but were so tainted by the opportunity for money that they just lost their way. They were corrupted by it. So what I wanted to do is see to it that over time we could start with a board that I appointed and over some number of years we would start moving directors in and out. U.S. Trust would watch this, and I'd just walk away when the board was right. My own interest in their surviving, frankly, was a question of respect for the name which remains on the business and the record of the company. And I am a landlord, and I wanted to make certain that they stayed healthy so that it would be good for them and for me. It was a mutual pact we had taken with each other, I thought.

Anyway, that got to be very clumsy, and ultimately the board became a completely employee board and they were easy pickings for equity companies.

12-00:42:03

Cándida Smith: Was this a hostile takeover?

12-00:42:05

Wornick: No. If somebody came to you and said, "I want your house, and I'm willing to pay you three times what it's worth," that doesn't sound hostile to me.

12-00:42:16

Cándida Smith: No.

12-00:42:17

Wornick: Because you're going to get cash. How they get the cash is their problem. So that's what went on.

12-00:42:31

Cándida Smith: But the company is still functioning, and it still has its DoD contracts.

12-00:42:38

Wornick: It came through a bankruptcy reorganization. It has not returned, in my view, to the days of its glory, but it is still producing rations. The military ration business has certainly strengthened over the last five or ten years in terms of quantities starting from, gosh, maybe 15 years, starting with Desert Storm in '91.

12-00:43:04

Cándida Smith: I think you said, when you started out there were maybe three, four companies.

12-00:43:08

Wornick: Three. There were only three.

12-00:43:09

Cándida Smith: Three companies that could actually do this line of work. Now how many are there?

12-00:43:14

Wornick: There are still three, but I think the sharing has changed. We're going to slip into a complicated area here but I will see if I can say it carefully and simply. They make the awards on percents. So the lowest bid for the first 40 percent goes to one company. The next lowest bid for the second tranche, which let's just say is 30 percent or 35 percent goes to whoever put in the best bid for that section, and then the third one, the 25 percent will go to the third company, whoever that is.

12-00:44:03

Cándida Smith: So all three companies are essentially assured—

12-00:44:05

Wornick: Something. So you sit down and you say, "Well, wait a minute. I know that we have a huge overhead and we're going to want to be in first position. So what I think I'll do is double my price and bid it on the third position. I can make more money than you by getting one-third as much product to run." I'm exaggerating the terms here, but you can understand the grid six dimensional when trying to figure out what's in the best interests of the employees, the

company, the government, yourself, and three companies are going to get this business.

12-00:44:54

Cándida Smith: And there's nobody else? There's not a fourth and a fifth or a sixth company that says, "Hey, we can do this with a little investment. Let's put in a bid."

12-00:45:04

Wornick: Too small, very complicated. I don't think there's been a change in a supplier in twenty-five or thirty years. SOPACO, Southern Packing Company, a tobacco company came in with us at the beginning in 1978. The third company, which was always meant to be primarily a bow to the obligations to the minority-procurement obligations of federal contracting, has changed some over the years. It began with companies called Freedom Foods and funny names like that meant to be patriotic. Many of those companies never delivered any packages. Anyway, I don't want to demean anybody or the process. It was very well intended. But now the third part goes to a company whose current name I believe is Black Beauty. It's a pretty darn good company, a serious competitor and a very good provider.

12-00:46:12

Cándida Smith: But it's just these three companies competing with each other?

12-00:46:15

Wornick: Three companies, yes.

12-00:46:16

Cándida Smith: Is this what Sarah Palin means when she's talking about crony capitalism?

12-00:46:21

Wornick: The distinction is that this truly is competitive. You could very well end up in a place you don't want to be. You could put in a lowest price in all three areas and get the third award if it's in the government's best interest to give that to you. It's a very curious, frightening phenomenon. What keeps other people from coming in is the same thing that terrorized us all in the seventies. I can speak to my own role in this. We had no idea how to do this. It was brand new technology. The equipment didn't exist. The specifications were bigger than, by multiples, the Bible. You better be careful that you don't get what you're hoping for because it could be your undoing. It's a frightening thing. I don't think I would encourage other people to do this. You're certainly welcome to do it, and then God bless you.

Now, those companies who have learned how to do it and have specialists in all these different areas of getting the product out the door and meeting the requirements of the relatively large number of agencies who have requirements on the product, they've earned their place in it. It's the same way with I suppose you could say Boeing or Rockwell. You could go in and compete if you wanted, but it's not likely that you can. Even in our very tiny little business, compared to Boeing or Rockwell or Raytheon, you develop a

position with the customer that's not a whole lot different than Proctor & Gamble has with detergent. There's a complex connection there that is hard to dislodge. Not cronyism. No politics whatever that I know of. It's a very clean competitive, difficult industry to be in. If by cronyism you mean that somebody is being benevolent in some way in exchange for some benefit, I don't know what my benefits have been and I don't know who that would have been. None. Zero.

12-00:50:02

Cándida Smith: You retired in 1996. What did you plan on doing with your time?

12-00:50:12

Wornick:

I simply was substituting things that I didn't really enjoy doing anymore with more things that I do like to do. I've always enjoyed building and remodeling and doing things about the house. That's been a lifelong habit, and working with my hands. We sold our house on Cape Cod and bought a property in Saint Helena which we thought might be turned into a retreat for the family. Some would say I set out to make a nice little villa, and I probably made a village. Ten or twelve years we've been there, and we have, I don't know, eight buildings up now, including my studio, a winery, guest houses, and a nursery for the gardens. We put in fruit trees and a vegetable garden. The vineyard has become a very unexpected and surprise retirement adventure. We could just as easily have taken a nice set of rooms at a nice hotel and gone back and forth to Napa when we needed it, but, in fact, this has given me a dozen years of huge happiness because I've been able to create like a personal little tiny state park up there with trails and art and good friends and family and very comfortable accommodations. It has been a great experience for us.

More to the point, if you own and operate a business, everybody will say this to you, I'm sure, whether it's a corner restaurant or a shoe store or it's Oracle or Steve Jobs, it doesn't really have hours. It just goes. It just burns twenty-four hours a day. There's not a moment that you can really not pay attention. In the order of gentility of life, after some number of decades of grinding my way through United Fruit Company and some little private things and Clorox and then back in business for myself and then fifteen, twenty years on this MRE thing, other ventures inside the private company that we—some succeeded a little bit but mostly didn't but it still took a lot of energy. You do get to think, "Gosh, there must be something more to life than just working for money. Why am I doing this?" Clearly our children have been reasonably well provided for. We're not going to be panicked about grocery bills. I'm not making washing machine payments anymore. What do you want to do?

Well, what I really wanted to do was introduce some grace into our life. We began to spend more time with philanthropic causes that interested us. More time in and around music, more time in and around art and collecting. Way more time in gardening, vineyards in Saint Helena and the pastoral life that you might see in one of the Italian brothers' movies where the don is always

out there in the gardens pruning roses or what have you. It has drawn our children and our grandchildren together in a really, really good way.

I don't mean to be especially self-congratulatory about it, but thanks to reasonably good health I've been able to have a very good life since retirement. I maintain a small office with an accountant who keeps track of the countless things you have to keep track of if you're alive and have some responsibilities. I have donated a lot of time and a lot of money and do things that I like to do, to causes that we want to support. I'm noticing here just ten feet to my left is a guitar which I'm now trying to—I'm not sure what I'm trying to do but I'd like to be able to play for you before the end of the series. Those are the kinds of lovely things you can do. Anita and I can sit down and say, do you want to go to some place where we can visit with friends or what have you. And we're able to do that. It's a wonderful privilege, and I know that.

It's mostly about not being locked in to the exhausting never ending unrelenting permanence of obligation. When you have a lot of employees, a lot of things going on, you can't do everything but you have to have enough systems in place that you think you can sleep knowing that there are little things that will pop up to give you a heads up if you need to and that you can spend your time in those places where critical things are going to be happening, decisions being made. I don't want to make too much of it. This was not a billion dollar business. The world has grown so and changed so much since then, but it was hundreds of millions. In the world I grew up in that was important, and with hundreds of employees, many hundreds in many of those years, yeah, it was a serious responsibility.

12-00:57:23

Cándida Smith: You mentioned the accountant. Do you every day spend a little time thinking about where your investments are placed and shifting things around to protect your assets and maintain your income?

12-00:57:40

Wornick: No, I actually do not. I'm not recommending to anybody, but I believe in very carefully well-thought-out, long-range plans and then stop looking at it. You should have in place some stop losses if something falls out of the sky. But otherwise, no, I don't look every day. Now, I do sometimes just because it's fun. For example, just after we traded in company value for this qualified replacement product, we had an obligation due us from the government that hadn't accrued but we didn't know what it would be and we didn't include it in the ESOP closing so it was just transferred to me outside of the deal. It wasn't valued. I put that money into gold. The gold was around \$400 at the time. It's gone up to \$1,900. Is it going to change anything whatever in my life? Positively not. Do I have enough that I'm going to make any history inside of my family or anywhere else? No. But if you are in the game, so to speak, and you've got investments out there and they're doing something

good or bad, if it's a large move you do need to follow it and think about whether that is something you want to do. So we do. Plus there's never-ending philanthropic stuff to keep track of because there are literally hundreds of obligations. And tax preparation, which goes on all the time. And now managing the books for this tiny, little winery takes as much time as it must take to run, I don't know, a car dealership. I can't imagine why it takes the time it does but it does.

I don't spend a lot of time in the office but I love going there. An office is kind of my place. It's my tools. If I have a sharp pencil and a nice desk, things to do, a computer, a telephone, it's very pleasant. I have no problem with that. I do it about, on average, a day a week, maybe a little more. And that's part of staying vital I like to think.

[End Audio File 12]

Interview #8 December 15, 2011

Begin Audio File 13_wornick_ron_13_12-15-11.mp3

13-00:00:31

Cándida Smith: Earlier, you were mentioning that, when you retired, you had the possibility of just enjoying yourself, but there's always the looming danger that you're going to over-commit yourself and wind up super busy again. Maybe you could talk about some of the priorities you set for yourself and retirement. What you definitely wanted to do, what you definitely wanted to avoid, and what you were willing to accept if you had to, to get the things done that you really wanted.

13-00:01:10

Wornick:

To put it into context, Richard, this would have been about 1977, when I was leaving Clorox, after having sold the business to them. Just to try to bring those moments back, if you have gone through that many decades being on an overload with all the things that you do—getting married, having children, having a career, getting a lawnmower—life was very, very full and very abundant. I had jobs that required a huge amount of travel and responsibility. I was either reporting to a very demanding person or responsible for my own operations. It was a bit of a stunner to get up in the morning, and, ask, “Well, who are you and what are you going to do?”

When I think about it, sitting here for this instant, the best way to help me with this is that, in 1977, I was forty-five years old. The idea of a hammock or a country cabin wasn't even on the list. I felt that I was still in play somehow, and I needed to be productive. I still had a family. We had put away enough money that I didn't have to worry about washing machine payments. Life seemed comfortable, but not by any means would I have thought of myself as secure for life. The things that were important to me in those days, on the fun side, I loved boating. I did all the boating I could do. I played a lot of tennis. I had a wonderful group of friends. My wife, as you'll discover during our sessions today, was then, as always, urging me into more commitment to worthy causes. She does that, and she will not allow me to not do that. I give her full credit for keeping me focused and attentive to meeting our obligations to community kinds of things, religious, cultural.

Fundamentally, I am a person who meant to be a scientist, a musician, but found out that what little talents I might have had were more on the business and business-operating side of things. I was probably a better manager than a scientist. Naturally, I started poking around for what guys at age forty-five—today, it would be twenty-five—a forty-five-year-old man in a semi-retired situation would have looked at for deals. What's the next venture going to look like? Without taking you through the countless proposals that had come over the transom, one in particular really fascinated me. In the five years since we came to San Francisco, we made a number of trips up to Napa. Because of my training in food science, I had had a lot of microbiology. In the field of

food science, bacteria can be very good and very bad. If you're trying to preserve and extend the shelf life of a food product, bacteria, yeast, mold, all of those things, are an enemy. If you're trying to make beer or wine, or bake a cake, you need to enlist their help. That always fascinates me.

When we would take our occasional trips up into Wine Country, as we called it, the first thing I noticed is that wine producers separated pretty quickly into two clear categories. There were people running sound economic entities, mostly large. Mondavi would be come to mind as an example, but there were several others. Then there was a small scattering of little vineyards and wineries that were dedicated to making the best wine that could be made on the piece of soil they were sitting on. They were painfully difficult operations to see, because they were just tiny, little places, three or four acres, five or six. Nobody with fifty acres. Nobody had anything that began to look like a cornfield. It seemed to me, coming out of the food business, where you needed conveyer belts, and hundreds of people, the best and most efficient technical, and all the talent that you need to run a business, there was no way to make that model work.

So why, I wondered, couldn't you bring the devotion to making a fine, fine product, whether it's a Ferrari or a bottle of cabernet sauvignon, to a big winery operation? What makes it so difficult? Why doesn't that happen? Nobody really understood that, but they all had the same story. If you went to a small one, you found somebody who knew every wine. He could tell you when it went in the ground and what its strengths and weaknesses were. He had an unrelenting fastidiousness about making the wine right in the vineyard and in the winery. Then the big ones, where they have huge amounts of equipment and personnel and so on. One has, in today's language, a \$25 bottle of wine, and the other is more in the priceless range. But the \$25 guy is making a living, and the guy with the three or four acres, you could say he's making art. It's a struggle. You almost don't get the bills paid. You cannot sell it for what it takes to make. Obviously, we're going to do it in a large vineyard.

Anyway, I was looking for things to do, and I poked around to try to find consultants who might be able to help me find land and who knew something about growing grapes. I ran into a man named William Hill, who happened to have an interesting combination of talents, at least as he explained them to me, in that he knew a great deal about Napa and the wine business, and the growing of grapes and making of wine, and he was a bit of a deal junkie himself. He was working for a consulting firm in the south Peninsula. We started doing trips up there and looking at properties. One property in particular was on Mount Veeder, 508 acres. I won't ever forget that number. Just beyond superlatives, gentle slopes, views of San Francisco, views across the valley into the south end of Napa Valley. A little inaccessible in the sense that it wasn't up and down Route 29 or the Silverado Trail. You would have to go west and up the side of the valley. It wasn't the place where you'd get a lot

of drop-in traffic. It was owned by the widow of a local judge who was very much in need of a sale. She needed the money, and I think she might have had some medical problems. Bill and I walked the property. We very much liked what we saw. She had maybe fifty acres planted. As I recall, it was mostly chardonnay and a small amount of cabernet. The grapes were good, not great, in the judgment of Bill, in my own amateur point of view, and people that we had look at it agreed, but the price was unbelievably small. I think that entire property was purchased for something just north of \$2 million, a reasonable price of a mostly undeveloped property in 1977. That's a lot of years ago.

We acquired the property, and for the very first time in my life, we did it in a limited liability partnership. I was a general partner, and I had maybe ten or twelve limited partners, which were small investors. I let members of the family in. Bill Hill came in. He brought in one or two of his friends or associates. I don't know why I did that. It was the only time in my life I did that. I have never believed in partnerships. It just is a level of complication that I could well do without. It's best avoided.

13-00:12:47

Cándida Smith: Were you intending to be the hands-on manager of this operation?

13-00:12:51

Wornick: No. What we did do, exactly, to answer the question, there was an old barn on the property. We brought in an architect, and my middle son, Michael, as one of the lead hands-on nail bangers, with a professional crew. We set about converting that house into what would be our family retreat. It had two or three bedrooms, lots of deck, in the woods, with lovely views. What I imagined is that I would spend one day a week up there, and I did. Every Wednesday, I drove up there, got up there early, and spent the day with Bill Hill. We planned that, when the property was up and fully running in a couple, three years, we would stay in this beautiful property. Wine writers would come up and visit, maybe stay with us. We would tour around the property and look at grapes and drink wine. This could be quite a wonderful life. I could be a gentleman farmer, in that I knew enough about agriculture and making things that I thought I could make good judgments from above. But I was clearly going to need very experienced, competent people on the ground to actually do the right things every step of the way, which is nothing I could bring to that project.

It was just one of countless adventures over a lifetime. In the short term, maybe inside of the first twelve months, a list of hair-raising farm problems came at us. When you're putting in new vineyards, there's a lot of planning that goes into selecting rootstalks, selecting the direction that the rows go in order to deal with sun, and the way the irrigation water goes up the hill, and the way the rainwater is taken off the hill. This has a lot to do with what kind of grapes you're going to get. One of those big hills was installed at a very great expense when the rainy season came. I had never seen anything like this

before, but we had what is called a slump, which means that all sixty or eighty rows of terraces just came [makes sound effect] down the hill, and ended up in this lovely pile of debris at the bottom of the hill, with all the vines and stakes and what have you. That was not only expensive, but it gave me a fairly loud signal that I may need to look more closely at who's making engineering decisions.

13-00:16:30

Cándida Smith: This was '78, '79?

13-00:16:33

Wornick:

I think we bought the property in '77. The very end of this story, as you may recall, the MRE thing flashed in here very shortly. In short succession, I discovered that—I know this is for public, and I have no reluctance to say this publicly—Bill Hill was a pretty damn good deal junkie, and the rest of this was car salesman stuff. I'm afraid I wasn't smart enough to discern the difference. Not only did we have a slump in the hill, we had a beautiful reservoir to keep our water, which was designed to water the vines during the dry season of the year. It also collapsed and went down the hill, subsequently, later in the season. We had all kinds of problems with the regulators. I just could gradually discern that he wasn't really tending to business the way it needed to be so that we were getting the cooperation of the people who needed to oversee what we were doing from the county. It was very difficult to keep him on budget. I kept making allowances, figuring, well, this was not Proctor and Gamble, IBM, or Clorox. This was a local farm, and we were going to have to do the best we could here. But it wasn't good enough. Then, finally, I discovered that really the only healthy thing on the property that was really prospering was a lovely marijuana plot. I just had to throw up my hands, because I was looking at other things at the same time. My poor son, Michael, had almost completed this beautiful cottage, which we never got to sleep in on the property. The reconverted tack house, actually.

Bill went out looking for a buyer, because he could see the handwriting on the wall. Clearly, I didn't have the time or talent or funds, actually, to pursue this kind of a fiasco. I made a very bad judgment in him. I wish I hadn't. Two things happened at about the same time. Bill found—one of the better things he ever did for us—Hess. From the Bern, Switzerland, family, in the wine and bottled water business.

13-00:19:54

Cándida Smith: So this is the Hess Winery?

13-00:19:55

Wornick:

He appeared and liked the property. He gave us about—I don't remember exactly—maybe a 25 percent increase in what we had in it. Everybody came out with a modest profit, but in retrospect, 508 acres—I can't recall exactly what we had planted that survived the slumps and all the other things, but I think we set out to do 200 acres, so maybe 150 of it survived, and there was

50 there. Anyway, 500 acres, with 200 acres planted, in today's market, would be more like \$70 or \$80 million. Had I the patience to just change managers and keep cool—which I think, by the way, is a life lesson for anyone. Well, I shouldn't be offering advice for which I'm not always qualified, but mostly patience, endurance, stay the course. Don't do anything until you have to do it. Don't just throw up your hands and say, the hell with it, I'm out of here. Which is what I did, because I knew I couldn't work with him. At the very same time, then-Navy Captain Stuart Platt appeared on the scene with his exciting story about MREs. That was way more down my alley. We sold the property in Mount Veeder. I moved on to MREs.

Now, we've got to come forward about twenty years to pick up the wine story. In the intervening years, Anita and I have gradually moved up from Blue Nun and the other kinds of things that we all start out with in the wine drinking, and had developed a palate and interest in wine. The idea of having a place in Napa had always appealed to us, but we had a beautiful summer house on Cape Cod, which had, for something over twenty years, been the site of fabulous family get-togethers. The family had changed a little bit in that children grow up. Grandchildren get occupied with other things. Getting family back on to the Cape was not what it had been in prior years, so we sold the Cape Cod property and thought we ought to find something possibly in Napa. Anita and I went up, and as almost everything we do together, had some divergence of expectation to deal with. We were looking for convergence. She had in mind a nice little, quiet farmhouse, with a white picket fence, a nice porch with a rocking chair. We looked at a lot of those, and I smelled mildew and maintenance problems, and no room for much of anything except low ceilings and old Royal Barry Wills architecture, none of which interested me. We coaxed each other, and we started looking at just property, because on land, you've got a blank canvas. What you're thinking about, you can put it there. We looked at a lot of things, and almost without exception, it was such a difficult thing. I know if you can afford to do it, you shouldn't be complaining about the doing of it. If you find an ideal property, there's an abandoned ruck parking permanently next door, and you're never going to get rid of it. There's always something to deal with.

One day, we came into the Meadowood Country Club for the very first time with a broker agent. He took us up to a property that was hard to recognize as a property, because it was totally undeveloped. You almost had to make your way through the scrubby brush to begin to see where you were. To help us envision the property, he ran back down the hill and got a big, long PVC pipe. He went up to the top of the smallest of the two hills on this parcel and stuck it on some metal thing that was there. We could see the pipe sticking up, and we could locate ourselves as we roamed around this property to that pipe and the sun. We could begin to get some sense of the property. Well, it turned out—I think this is an interesting story—that the four men with Pacific Union Real Estate who founded Meadowood Resort, I think they called it—a country club-type place—they took 180 acres for themselves in the club, and divided

it into four 45-acre parcels, the plan being that each of them would have a home there and take advantage of the food service, the health club, the golf, and all the wonderful things you could do there. Life intruded, and all four of them came into different kinds of circumstances, such that by the time I got there in maybe '96, '97—

13-00:26:29

Cándida Smith: What I have down is that you purchased the property in 1995.

13-00:26:52

Wornick:

The potential on that property spoke to me. The problem was that there was no water, no road, no electricity, very unlikely chance of any septic system because you don't get drainage up there. There were a lot of shelves of solid rock, with maybe a foot of soil or two over the rock. Most worrisome was that the property that was available, the best of the four, in my point of view, because it was the very first one as you head up the little hill, which meant it was close enough to almost walk back into Meadowood, and very close to town—but anyway, that was the property that Bill Harlan, who had been the lead guy at Meadowood, had selected for himself. For reasons known best to him—I think they were mostly economic—he chose to sell that property. It went from Bill to a series of three or four people, not unlike myself, I think, who saw some potential there. They each did various things. One tried to drill a well, came up dry, and left. Another guy had an architect work on some drawings. I got to see all these pieces of paper when we finally got serious about it. They had all abandoned the project and didn't close, or they purchased it and then didn't build on it. The last one was John Pritzker, of the Hyatt Hotel chain. John was, at that time, an acquaintance, subsequently a friend. He had bought it and looked seriously at it, and then decided to sell it.

My concern was, “What do these people know that I don't know? This property is a problem? I don't want to buy somebody else's problem.” I put in quite a lot of serious time trying to figure out what I would do about electricity, and we had a plan for that, and what we could do about water, which was just solvable with stubbornness. There is water. We just had to go down until we got it, and not quit until we did. The sewage system was going to be more of a problem, because we had to put in an engineered system, which meant it was almost an above-ground thing that we built up, and we couldn't do percolation down. Doable with patience and money. Also, I started conversations with a number of architects who could help us envision how we could occupy the land. It was clear that this was going to be a wonderful experience if we could surmount the major obstacles we had. So we bought it, and we went about getting in there.

While the house was being designed, I had a number of landscape people come up and do landscape drawings. They all suffered from the same abundant landscape conceit. I didn't want a landscape person to put his signature on the property. I wanted the property cleaned up. Just show me the

good parts. I don't need your great big stairways. That's not what we're after. We had lots and lots of conversations, some a little heated. Most of those drawings and all of those people came and went. One actually started the job, and then I had to turn him loose. The landscape became, as it probably should, a project of the people who live on the property. We made the decisions, in very small steps, in very small pieces, as the land began to show us what it wanted to be. We didn't always get it right the first time. It was a very long process. I can't tell you, even after ten or twelve years, that it's totally finished, although we feel pretty good about what we've got now.

The very first decision we made was that we wanted to put a vineyard in. This is vineyard country, and we wanted to look like we fit in here, we belong here, and we wanted to be a part of the vineyard world that we were in. We saw it as a lovely family hobby. We could grow grapes, and grandchildren would stomp them, and we'd make wine, and drink it at Thanksgiving. It's lovely to live through the lifecycles of the grapes and just watch them bud in the very early spring and change colors in the fall, not unlike the New England apple groves.

We did. The "we" at this point becomes, first of all, my son Ken, who had been at Davis, had a graduate degree. He had not worked on a winery, but he had some classes and a real interest in the project, and probably a calling as well. He likes to have his hands in the ground and drive a pickup truck. I could see him being very good at it and happy at it. I asked him to take on the job of finding a good vineyardist to install some vines. I don't know how we made the decision, but we just said, how about one acre, and we'll spread them around in places that they are each side of the road when you drive up our driveway, and they're in some easy to get to level little spots. They'll surround the guesthouse, so that people would notice that they're in grape country. In two, three years, we begin to get some grapes, and we could start this wonderful little adventure.

Ken did do that, and he did it very well. He brought in a man named Ray Barbour, who was a vineyard manager and vineyard installer. Unfortunately, I don't know about vineyards. Ken was learning about vineyards, and Barbour probably thought we were what we were, which is, at best, hobbyists. I don't think he really took the time and trouble to do the vineyards in a way that would have made them right for where we ended up some years later. In hindsight, a lot of mistakes were made. Unfortunately, mistakes in a vineyard, you don't fix in a couple of weeks. It's not less than three or four years, and more if you're looking for maturity. Those vineyards are where they were when they went in, other than modifications that can be made without going back to the starting line. We found ourselves, as a result of that landscaping, back with a toe in the winery business. By 1999, we had our first little harvest of grapes. I don't think we made sixty or seventy cases. It was a wonderful adventure, because it was what we'd expected, in that it was done in great big plastic tubs in the garage, and the children danced in the grapes. Pressing was

done in a manual press. We didn't get as much juice out as we'd like, but we did pretty well. On the romantic side, if somebody took pictures of us doing this, you would think this was a lovely little life experience. From the point of view of the winemaker, my poor abused son, we had inadequate equipment. We didn't have cleanliness. We didn't have temperature control. It was not anywhere near the professional machine that we'd need to be able to make first-quality wine.

13-00:37:40

Cándida Smith: Were you planning on selling the wine?

13-00:37:42

Wornick:

No, of course not. This was just, "Ken, have a good time. Teach yourself, and teach us. We'll make some wine and see what happens." That's exactly what we did for a couple, three years. During those two or three years, two things were happening. One is we gradually brought in some fermentation tanks. We gave Ken a better chance of getting things done. A conveyer belt. He was getting better at it. Ken could take this fifty to a hundred case possible production and turn it into sixty test lots. What would happen if you did this? What would happen if you did this? How about if we combined this and this? What if I add a little more and a little less? In retrospect, I shouldn't have put any expectation on it. In fact, the product that came out in '99 was remarkably good. That was 70 percent Ken, 30 percent the gods who make wine. It was a good year, in fact.

Now, we didn't know that, of course, until 2002 or 2003, when we began to taste the wine. The 2000 production was not as good. 2001 was better than '99. But we were getting irregularity between bottles, and people who were tasting at our table—because everybody up there is in the wine business, one way or another, and everybody is or thinks they're knowledgeable. Among the more experienced people who sat at our table, all the way up to lofty names, like Robert and Margrit Mondavi, and Jimmy Barret from Chateau Montelena and Garon and Sherri Statation—a number of people whose opinion I really did respect said almost the exact same thing to us, which was that, you may have really remarkable terroir here, because there's something very noticeably worthy in this glass of wine. It's flawed in minor ways that are probably fixable. You need to take it more seriously, because something good could be happening here. I should have said, thanks, but no thanks, but that just seemed like an opportunity to turn a little family project into something worthwhile. I hadn't remembered all of those people who had the three and four-acre plots down in the Valley, whose wine I much admired, and who were desperate to break even because of how hard it is to make a venture of that kind go. I should have thought more clearly about that. I didn't. I think it was just all about vanity. I had convinced myself that we were going to make one of the world's great wines up here.

We brought in a professional vineyard manager, in fact, probably the most world-acclaimed vineyard manager, a man named David Abreu. He was aghast at what he found in the vineyards. The next professional would have found his work aghast, so you can't overreact to that. He had a view of how you run a vineyard that was not what we were doing. He had his own winemaker. So Ken, graciously, and probably with some hurt, about which I'm very sorry, dropped out. He lived sixty or seventy miles away. He had his own career to think about. He was never going to be able to make a living out of this funny little thing we were doing up there, and he has a wife and fabulous three children. I thought, in retrospect, it might be better for both of us if we turned it over to professionals, let them run it, and Ken could go about his business. Which he did very well, by the way. He started his own vineyard management business. Abreu came in and lasted for about two years, because, on the one hand, he did everything he promised to do. He completely upgraded the vineyards, and he got it done rather quickly. A couple years is quick in the business. He had me just about trash everything I had in the winery, clear it out, and start all over. He was right about almost all of that, in hindsight.

The problem for us was, and this was another interesting thing about small businesses, I think, his role and my role was not going to work, and that took a little time to become apparent. His position was, "I'm going to make you famous and make great wine. Just stay out of my face. Don't ask me any questions." Well, I wasn't used to hearing that from an employee or a contractor, and I had a little trouble swallowing it. It got a little harder to swallow when I would try to call to inquire about something that I saw that I didn't understand or didn't like, and I couldn't get on his cell phone because it was full of messages. If I ran down his secretary, which was not easy, she would tell me she didn't know where he was. She'd run him down, and a couple days later she'd make an appointment. He was going to come up and see me at eleven o'clock on Tuesday. He didn't ask if I would be there. He would generally show up somewhere around three hours late in the afternoon, and drive up with this very jaunty attitude, by which time I'm ready to put a rifle up to the side of his head. I respected his work, but he took all the joy out of it for me. I needed to be allowed the pleasure of being the vintner, which meant share in some policy matters and some overall reporting. You've got to tell me what you're doing. His needs were to spend what he needed to spend, bill me what he needed to bill me, and I just pay the bills and stay out of his way. He was going to get the job done. I suspected he probably could and would, but it didn't feel right. I felt like I was selling out and just buying something. Just because I could write the check wasn't a good enough excuse to do it.

We parted relatively pleasantly, and subsequently I brought in the company I should have started with for vineyard management, John Piña. They've been in the business twenty or thirty years. I don't have big enough adjectives to tell you the respect I have for them. They do the job as well, or better than,

Abreu, but they love to talk to me. If there's something I want done differently or better or not so well—we're going to cut back here or spend a little more here—they're with it. If something goes wrong and a tree falls on something up there and I call down, in seven minutes, they're up there. In fact, a year or two ago, they asked for a letter of recommendation, and I actually sat down and wrote probably the best letter of recommendation I've ever written in my lifetime for them. They're just that good, and I love having them on the property. They're very respectful of the property, and they're making incredible grapes for us.

I then found Aaron Pott, a remarkable, intellectual guy. He speaks multiple languages. He has a degree in viticulture, in Bordeaux, and another in Burgundy. He spent a number of years there working, a lot of first-growth properties. He is extremely, deeply knowledgeable about the science of making wine, and he is just enough of an artist, a raconteur, a creative guy that he has the palate and the creativity to make a first-rate wine. His reputation had already caught on in the valley, but he hadn't really filled his book yet. When I was able to interview him, other than the fact that we both recognized that we are probably a little stubborn and we have to be careful not to get in a little knot over that, he has been a blessing to this project. I love to be with him. I like to see his product. He has moved the quality of the wine up every year. It's been extraordinary. We started out with a landscape exercise, and we stumbled our way into this thing without much of a long-range plan. When the first Abreu product became available for tasting, we were all really astonished that the quality of the wine was very remarkable. We invited in a man named Doug Wilder. He makes his living on the internet as a blogger.

He spent several hours tasting the wine. He poured it and stayed with it as it opened up and began offering different kinds of notes and tastes. He rinsed his mouth, came back, and did it all over again. I had never seen anything quite so thorough. He put out a report on his blog about this new winery. It was amazing to me how important a blog could be. I came from a world where advertising was the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life Magazine*, the newspaper. By the time we were in this little venture, in the early 2000s, people were communicating on the internet, especially special groups looking for particular kinds of information. They knew where to go for it.

His story spread rather quickly, and it must have gone across the desk of Jim Laube, who was the editor of the *Wine Spectator*. It's actually headquartered in New York, but there's a West Coast office, and he runs the West Coast office. Laube came out, and he took some pictures with his own camera and did a tasting. He declared us a "rising star," which was nice. He invited us back to a big la-dee-da event in New York for a group of rising stars. He had six or eight small wineries that he featured on a panel for big wine weekend that they do every year.

Doug's blog, and other people who started doing things on the internet, got the word out that we were making pretty remarkable wine. Our very first score, which was the *Wine Spectator* score, was a 94. That's almost unbelievable. A new winery doesn't get in the 90's at all, normally, that quickly. It takes a certain amount of time to build the respect and a following, and to learn how to make the wine. More to the point, even though we had only a very small production in '05, maybe a couple hundred cases, it sold out on the internet in four hours.

13-00:54:07

Cándida Smith: At what price?

13-00:54:08

Wornick: \$175 a bottle. I picked that number, quite frankly, because, in a pencil calculation, it looked like, if we could get to 400 cases or more, we could break even at \$175, and pay all the bills. We were at 200 cases, so this math wasn't going to work for a while. I still sell at \$175 today, and we're not at 400 cases yet.

13-00:54:46

Cándida Smith: So you're not breaking even?

13-00:54:47

Wornick: No, we're not.

13-00:54:48

Cándida Smith: Is this a tax write-off, then?

13-00:54:53

Wornick: There's a separate tax report for the Seven Stones Winery, and we have had losses. They're not huge, but we lose money every year. When there's a profit, you offset the profit with the accumulated losses. It's not a way to make money. This is not a tax dodge. As the very bad joke is often told, to make a small fortune in the wine business, you need to start with a large one, because it's not an easily accomplished thing. What's most amusing to me is that I had put myself right back in the spot of these other little boutique wineries that I had snickered at and said, why do they do that? Of course, now I have taught myself why you do it. You get caught up in the possibility of making a great, great wine, if you can afford to have people go in there and deal with every little mode, every little vine, cut back on the amount of fruit, pay close attention to what's going on under the ground, and measure the moisture-pressures in the leaves. It's like taking care of a patient in a hospital. When you're all through, if you get it 100 percent right in the winery, which Aaron Pott does, I guess, at 100 percent level year after year, you get the best that nature can provide out of that piece of soil, and that's a very rewarding thing. I flinch when I think about it as a business, because it really isn't a business. But I do have to sell it, or it would be an embarrassingly expensive hobby.

13-00:56:50

Cándida Smith: It sounds terribly expensive, actually, what you've described.

13-00:56:55

Wornick: In some ways. I have a lot of capital hanging out there that I've invested in the land and the vines, the building and the equipment, the salaries. Now we have had, the last couple, three years, a marketing and sales guy, because we're preparing to move 400 and something cases, which is still, in the wine business, more or less what falls off a truck for everybody else.

13-00:57:29

Cándida Smith: Is Anita involved in doing this?

13-00:57:31

Wornick: She is, in the way that she's involved with everything in our life. For Anita, it's always about friends and people, and that's, regrettably, a short suit for me. I enjoy myself when I go along, but I don't ever lead. We have used that as an excuse to meet people in the industry. Because we like to support all the good quality-of-life causes up and down the valley. We are supporters of Music in the Vineyards and the Festival del Sol, the wine auction. The programs all benefit some good cause. The wine auction, for example, raises almost \$10 million a year for mostly the Mexican-Latin American community, health services and education. It's all quality-of-life things. The part of it that Anita draws us to, which I happily corroborate with, is the fun part. There are dinners and dinner parties and fundraisings and socializing with a lot of good people doing good things for the community. It's enriched our lives up there. We have lots and lots of friends, and a life up there that's quite wonderful. While it was not intended as a friend-gathering device when the grapes went in for landscape, it's turned into a wonderful adventure for us. I think if my life can go long enough, we are going to see Seven Stones with another two or three points on their scores. We've gotten up to a 95, 96 level. If I can get 97, 98, 99 in my lifetime, that will feel pretty good.

A few nights ago, we were entertaining a group in connection with hosting—Anita and I are Bostonians, as you may recall, and we were hosting two nights of concerts at Symphony Hall for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Hosting means sponsoring. This is the centennial for the San Francisco symphony, and they're inviting in orchestras. We wrote a check to make it easier for the symphony to do this. We were having a dinner party for some select guests in connection with the concert. I arranged to pour our wine in the Wattis Room at Symphony Hall that had been in their inventory. They have it on the wine list there because I eat there often, and they do it as a courtesy. I was thinking it was the 2007. It turned out to be the 2006. Our 2006 might be the most spectacular glass of wine I have ever had in my lifetime. It knocked my socks off. I'm still walking around, shaking my head.

[End Audio File 13]

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14-00:00:07

Wornick:

The conversation actually stopped at the table. One of our guests, who was the most wine knowledgeable at the table, actually said, “Wait a minute. What is this?” I hadn’t made much of a fuss about it. It was just being poured, like you’d be sitting at dinner and wine is poured. The conversation stopped, and I hadn’t even tasted it. I took a sip, and as big a smile as I maybe have had on my face ever. I don’t know what it is, but that bottle had been sitting in the wine cellar at Symphony Hall for a couple, three years, aging. Maybe we got it at its absolute peak moment. I don’t know. This is the mystery of this unusual business. Every day, there’s something new you learn. If you taste it when it’s been in a bottle for a year, some people call it infanticide. You’re just taking the life of this little baby before it’s had a chance to develop. It’s too bad it takes such a long time, especially if you’re eighty years old. That ’06, coming way past the ’05 and ’07, is telling us something. I don’t know exactly what it is. I’ve been in conversation with the winemaker, and we’re going to go down and do some more tastings to see what’s going on. It may be that we’re just going to have to not release our wines until they’re ready. We may be doing it too soon, because they are big and they need a little time to develop. More to the point, I’m going to try to get the ’06 scored again by somebody who is good at it.

That’s the wine story, just another one of those little happy things that came over the horizon for us. We are going to see it through its conclusion. If the very best happens, and the wine maintains its quality or gets even better, which I expect it will, it is possible that that little winery up there could develop enough fame and following to be able to support the property, so that when we make estate plans about what to do with it, if the winery could pay the taxes and the cost of the caretakers and maintenance and what have you. It could take the burden off of whatever we do with the property if we give it to an agency or art group, or whether we keep it in the family. I haven’t figured that out. Knowing that the winery might just actually keep the lights on, that would be a lovely thing if that could be made to happen.

After a couple of years of being rather intentionally ignored, I think, by Robert Parker, who is the grand guru of all wine tasting, he finally agreed to come up and do a tasting, which he did in our dining room. He was there for a few hours, tasting our wine and some other wines made by our wine maker, Aaron Pott, on other properties. I was a little nonplussed by his arrival and the hush of the whole thing, because I had expected a—if you’ve come out of the corporate world, usually the number one guy takes a lot of space in the room and has presence. Robert Parker comes in, in shorts and a third-hand T-shirt. Completely open and available and easy to talk to and meet. Not a signal of pretense of any kind whatever. But I had been told, do not engage him in wine conversation, because he’s had it. He’s been abused by it by so many people. He just doesn’t want to hear it. You can talk to him about anything, but do not

tell him about how you make wine and how wonderful the property—just make small talk, which I did. He was very polite. He seemed more interested in looking out the windows and looking around than the wine, but as soon as he'd had enough of that, he went in, sat down in the dining room, and for a couple hours or more, sat with Aaron Pott, our winemaker, and went through all the wines.

Late in the afternoon, when he left, he was not going to be retained. I'd asked would he like to linger for a little light dinner or anything that might please him. He said no, he really needed to get going. I remember that his entire mouth was purple, his teeth were purple. I don't know how many hundreds of tastings he might have done over the course of that day. He may very well have sat in a hot shower for the next three hours. I don't know what he does, but he needed to get away. We had a little cordial chat at the door as he left, but when he left, he said, "I know you'd like me to tell you some more about your wine. It's probably best that I not do that." He didn't make it sound ominous, but he said, "We're not going to do that, but you need not worry. You're making world-class wine here." Those were his words. "World-class wine." They still ring in the ear now.

I closed the door on him, and just stood behind the door for a second and said, "I think I just heard that." He later gave us a rave, rave review, but, the first paragraph is all about what he called Shangri-La. He had actually taken in a lot of the property, the art, and the site, and probably the vineyards, although I dared not point out the beauty of the vineyards to him, but he must have seen it. Unfortunately, however, that was his last year. He has retired from tasting. We have a new taster, who has already tasted this year. He came up and tasted our '08 and '09. Actually, a week or two from now, we'll be reading what his reports will be. We got very, very good press from Robert Parker. That's about as good a measurement as you can have that you're on the right track, if he comes and if he gives you a good review.

14-00:09:12

Cándida Smith: I had asked you about your philanthropy earlier, and you said, "I really need to talk about Judaism first."

14-00:09:24

Wornick: That's true for me, Richard, because I don't know that I thought at all about philanthropy until I thought about Judaism. Judaism is such an enormous subject. I'm not even sure I know how to draw us into this conversation in a way we could manage. As I was thinking a little bit about how to talk about this today, it might be helpful to think about it in this way. For some very significant period of time, literally thousands of years, Judaism was, without question, a religion. It meant respect, fearing God, praying to God, listening to the messages that we'd been given from God and his followers. Reading the first five books and all the wisdom that the rabbis, over the ages, had gleaned from the words, and doing the best you could at meeting all of those

requirements. There are 640 *mitzvot*, they're called, things you are expected to do in your life. It was very strict and very rigid, and it was of one kind. You were or you weren't. There were no degrees. That's at least how I understand it. Lots and lots of people who were not practitioners—they were Jewish, and by nature of the way the world was constructed, they lived in Jewish quarters with Jews—and only those who were Jewish-educated and devoutly Jewish really prayed and followed Judaism, but they all did it substantially in the same way, for that number of thousands of years. Then a smaller number of hundreds of years, when the Jews are now in the Diaspora and growing, especially in eastern Europe, some changes began to set in. You got the Hasidim and the ultra-orthodox, and people start getting a little more interested in experimenting with more enlightened approaches to Judaism. But unfortunately, there were so many things going on in that time period that not a whole lot changed until, I would say, around the early twentieth century, when the mass immigrations were coming to the U.S. and other places. Suddenly, there was a huge splintering into six or eight varieties of reform, conservative, and orthodox, and ultra-orthodox, and very ultra-orthodox. Lots and lots of choices. It was, in some ways, disabling and disorienting, because Jews were not equipped to deal with those kinds of questions. They had always been pretty straightforward.

It's not a bad segue to where my father and I began to come to this question. Remember, he is born 1898, '99, somewhere in there, and he came to this country as a late teenager after the First World War ended but before the Russian Revolution, more or less. His education in Kobrin, which I think we talked a little about, was completely in a *heder*, a Jewish school. There was no public school education. He never had language or math or any of those things. It was not available to the Jewish village he was in. The government didn't provide it, and the Jews didn't provide it. They provided what they thought was an important education, which was Judaism. In the early years of Jewish education, what you were taught to do was to pray. My father learned to pray in the Jewish prayer book, and he could do it at the speed of sound. He would come to temple, I would always be on his left. I don't know whether that was intentional, but he was always here, and I was here. We would be standing with the prayer books. [makes sound effect] I don't know how you can read that fast, but he read it, and he could speak—not speak—he could say the words. You could point to the word, and he would say it. He could clearly read Hebrew and pray. There was a trance-like thing that happened, and I could see that among the other congregants. He belonged to a—we would have called it *shul*, which was a slightly more religious place to go than a synagogue. Synagogue was already American. It was really just an improved house that a small group of zealots went to. It was called the Young Israel Shul.

14-00:15:50

Cándida Smith: He could read the Hebrew. Did he know enough Hebrew to know what it meant?

14-00:15:55
Wornick:

He did not. He did not. Whether that came later in the education or not, I don't know, but he hadn't been there in that *heder* for long enough to have learned to use it as a language. His knowledge of Jewish history was very limited. Yet, I grew up worshipful of my father's love and respect for Judaism. There was no question about the fact that he was as proud and conscientious a Jewish man as you could be within the limits of what he was able to do and whatever background he'd come from. There was a conflict in the house in that my mother, for reasons that are too psychological for me to begin to undo—her father had been a very, very strict European, very educated Jewish man. I think he had been very difficult in terms of his attitude to women. Women were not expected to sit at the table with him. He was president of the *shul*, the temple, the synagogue. When he said *zol zain shtil*, let it be quiet, you could hear the dust settle. He was a very stern, tough guy. The women tiptoed, and he went through three wives. Maybe for that reason, I'm not sure, my mother had no use for religion. Well, for Judaism. She brought into the house an us and them attitude. There were the Jews and the *goyim*. *Goyim* is a Yiddish word. I think it must translate to just gentile, or Christian. I'm not sure which. In immigrant homes, when they spoke of *goyim*, it was a derogatory word. It's like, we're clean, and then there's everybody else. The *goyim*. As a young American growing up, and you walk out the door, that's not the world you see. It's very hard to reconcile that unattractive Jewish kind of racism and self-congratulation.

The point is, it was a very conflicted environment in which to figure out what was my responsibility about Judaism, if anything? Mostly, in the early years, it was more about "if anything." There was not a lot of connecting going on for me. I could clearly see I was Jewish, I was in a Jewish home. Out of respect for my father's wishes, my mother actually kept a kosher kitchen and kept kosher food on the table for quite a while. I think that stopped somewhere during the Second World War, out of convenience or cost, or maybe they just had become Americanized. I hadn't really thought about anything very deeply or figured it out very much, but it was not easy to settle into anything that I could make any sense out of, because while I think I was very happy to be Jewish—it seemed like a good thing—and I liked that part of my home life, and I certainly respected my father for his—very few things gave him more pleasure than working, but Judaism was one. When he was in the temple, in the *shul*, you knew he was connecting in a way that was helpful for him. It may have as much to do as meditation and other kinds of things, just distancing yourself from the day and chanting. I don't know. It's a very elusive subject for people who would have been spending many, many, many hours chanting in a synagogue, and still do to this day. I think those who continue to do that probably are educated enough to really know what they're doing, and are not doing it out of rote.

My mother and father, without much discussion at all, determined that I was going to have a bar mitzvah. A rabbi was selected, named Irving Levine. Up

in the attic of his little tenement house on Almont Street in Malden, every afternoon after school, four, five days a week, from age maybe nine or ten, until thirteen, four or five ruffians would gather back there with spitballs and whatever we could do to make noise and be inconveniencing everybody while the rabbi would take us, one at a time, and give us a little instruction. He would sit opposite us, at a table. He could either, by heart, know the words, or he could read upside-down, and he would just move us along. We would learn to say the letters, and then to say the words. I had three or four years of preparation to be able to actually run a service at the *shul* in Hebrew, and read from the Torah. From the scrolls, actually, which is very hard to do, because it doesn't have the vowels. A scary thing to have to do in a very orthodox *shul*, as my father went to.

14-00:22:55

Cándida Smith: Did you learn Hebrew as a language?

14-00:22:58

Wornick: No. To this day, you can hand me the book and I can read it. I have no idea what it says.

14-00:23:13

Cándida Smith: When you go to Israel and you see the signs—

14-00:23:15

Wornick: We're going to get to that. There's an epiphany coming. That's a good word. Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of young men, and subsequently women, went through this process. So mindless, so wasteful. None of us had good feelings about it. It felt hypocritical and dishonest. In one sense, we were very close to something godly and reverential and precious. I remember walking into the V&A in London and seeing all the books, starting with Gutenberg and the earliest printing press. There was a Jewish printed text that was from maybe 1300 or 1400, early, very early, certainly before 1600. I could read it. It had not changed in the slightest.

Reading Hebrew, there's still magic in it, but it's an isolating thing, too, because you're not really in the product. It's like reading on the carton and not opening the box.

Rabbi Irving Levine, it's interesting to note, I knew him as a sour, stale, uninviting human being in those years, but he gave me a book for my bar mitzvah, which of course I put away and didn't even look at. I must have been a very stupid and unattractive thirteen-year-old. Later in life, I came on the book and discovered it was a book of poems. Of course he was sour. He had to sit there every day, for \$2 a week per kid, or whatever it was, and teach them the same letters and the same words. He was probably a wonderful, interesting, intellectual man. I couldn't have communicated with him. I wouldn't have had the skills. He never made an attempt. I have that precious

book, and he wrote a lovely inscription in there, which I had to grow up to be able to fully appreciate.

I'm making my way through memories of trying to find my way into Judaism. What we might do, since you put it in my head, you said, "What about Israel?" I could say that, in the next period of time, growing from teens into maybe by the time we got married, I lived in a community where it was Norman Rockwell. On the one hand, yes, I belonged to an organization called Habonim, which was a place to make crafts, as far as I knew, but in fact it was a Socialist Israeli organization trying to attract young people to good causes, and having you make *aliyah*. I didn't understand much about any of the real purposes going on there. I became active in an organization called AZA, a Zionist youth organization. That was all about girls. If there was a lot going on about Zionism, it probably escaped my notice. I belonged to a high school Jewish fraternity called Alpha Mu, probably because there were separate fraternities and sororities in that high school. It was a great social environment. Yet, I don't know. I think all of us, we just had every kind of friend. I had as many Italian and Irish and Polish and black friends. The black community in Malden were churchgoing, hardworking. I knew, obviously—I don't want to pretend otherwise—that there were cultural differences, but we wouldn't have crossed a street worrying about our safety.

It was a different world. It was very peaceful. In fact, as I was thinking about sharing some of these memories with you, I had a memory of what happened at night when the streetlights came on, because we lived on a street with a lot of big, beautiful trees, and the street lights on these leaves made it so inviting to go outside, if your mother would allow you to do it, and play in the street before bedtime. The streets were parks. It was an idyllic place. Everybody loved everybody, as far as I knew. We did separate in our dating and our clubs, but not in the debating society, not in the theater group, not in all the sports or music and all the other things we did in school and after school. I rarely went into a gentile home, and when I did, it smelled differently, it felt differently. I occasionally spied a cross on the wall. It was like a foreign country for me. We grew up in an insular Jewish way. I needed a lot of intellectual exploration, which I was absolutely not prepared for at that time.

14-00:30:22

Cándida Smith: Some of this you talked about before, but you've added, actually, some new and interesting details. It sounded like your involvement with Judaism was, for many years, in a holding pattern.

14-00:30:43

Wornick: At best.

14-00:30:45

Cándida Smith: And at a certain point, you had to start thinking about making Judaism relevant to you as a modern, contemporary person, living in a wider world, a world that wasn't Jewish in particular.

14-00:31:04

Wornick:

Your word choice catches my attention, because you say, at some point, you *had* to. The fact is, I became aware that I needed to look at the question. How come I'm studying seven years of Latin, and I'm exploring the whole world of enlightenment? I was in high school, which was a fabulous high school. Then college and graduate school. There was an education going on, but I had gone nicely and conveniently around anything having to do with an honest-to-goodness Jewish education. I didn't say, "I'm not going to do that," but it wasn't relevant. My behavior was very perfunctory. We got married in 1955. Anita, so important in my life, almost from the beginning, insisted that we join a temple, get involved in Jewish life, make connections and participate. I, of course, was far more interested in career. My Jewish connections were perfunctory. We wrote modest checks, and we did what we had to do.

14-00:32:41

Cándida Smith:

You were members of a temple? Was it an orthodox or—

14-00:32:44

Wornick:

Oh, no, no, no. It was modern conservative. The reform scared me. They had an organ. They didn't wear the *tallit*. It was too far from the world that I knew, and I just couldn't quite bridge that. The conservative temples where we did belong had far more rigorous requirements than we were comfortable with, so there was a little bit of a strain there, but I liked the service better. It was a little closer to the one that I could remember and knew.

14-00:33:19

Cándida Smith:

Did you maintain a kosher kitchen?

14-00:33:21

Wornick:

No, we did not. We never did. We were intellectual Jews, and Americans primarily. It was so easy and wonderful to be an American. How could you resist? I don't mean that there's a contradiction between being Jewish and being American, because it's a very private and personal thing, and it isn't like Islam, where it's a governance system. I didn't mean to slander Islam necessarily. Judaism can be practiced well inside of meeting all of the requirements of the U.S. judiciary without any question. No conflicts.

14-00:34:17

Cándida Smith:

I presume there are some religious organizations that are more rigorous in their demands.

14-00:34:28

Wornick:

There are, but the demands are still not going to put you in the crosshairs with anything that the FBI wouldn't approve of. In other words, the requirements among the most orthodox have to do with how you eat, and when and how you pray, and what rules you try to measure up to, the 640 *mitzvot* that we were talking about before. There was never any contradiction there, but given the choices of meeting those rigid requirements and living this wonderful American life, we were Americans trying to pay modest respect to our

heritage. I think that's the way you might put it. Anita was far more rigorous about that than I was.

14-00:35:19

Cándida Smith: And your children? Your sons were bar mitzvah'ed?

14-00:35:21

Wornick: They were. They came at a time when the world was beginning to say, wait a minute, the way we're educating our young people is clearly not working, and many are becoming hostile as a result of this bar mitzvah training. But they hadn't figured out how to do it very well yet, so I think if you ask my three sons about their bar mitzvah-training experience, they would tell you they would rather have had their fingernails pulled out. You come up one more generation, and we finally got there. Today, it's a totally different, new world.

I want to get, to make this more interesting for both of us—in 1975—it was a twenty-year jump from—we got married in '55. This was twenty years later. A doctor friend called me one night and said that they were putting together a group of sixty men, a men's mission to Israel. The Jewish Community Federation was going to pay for everything. All I had to do is get myself to the airport and get on a plane. Airfare, whatever is going to happen over there, get you back here, all taken care of. All I had to do is tell him, yes, I was going to come. Well, I didn't know. How long was the trip? Oh, ten days. I didn't think I could get away for that long. I turned it down, and I turned it down, and then somebody else called, and somebody else called. It's hard for me to imagine, but I really didn't want to go. The reason I didn't want to go, I think if these things could be known, is I think I was a little worried about what might happen, because I had seen people come back from Israel, and they were crazy. They became annoying. They drove you nuts. Anyway, it was a great group of guys going. I don't know why, but I ended up saying okay. I got on the plane.

14-00:38:03

Cándida Smith: By yourself? No Anita?

14-00:38:07

Wornick: No Anita. Just sixty guys, about two-thirds of whom I knew, some better than others.

14-00:38:15

Cándida Smith: Through business? Through the Jewish Community Federation?

14-00:38:17

Wornick: Just the community, the Federation and just friends. Jews do find each other. We mostly do know all about one another. It wasn't hard to know everybody on this trip pretty quickly. The trip took off in the typical Israeli way. We're on EL AL. I have never seen such incredibly rude air attendants. In those days, the Israelis were not yet accommodated to service. The Israeli attitude was they didn't provide service. It was just an unheard of thing. The moment

that stuck out for me was that we were all running out of things to do on the plane, and I heard somebody say, “When you next go down, would you bring me back some playing cards?” The guy said yeah, the flight attendant. When he got back, I told him, “The next time you come back, I could use one here.” He said, “You saw I was going down there to get cards. Why didn’t you tell me that you wanted cards? Now I have to go all the way back.” He was talking to me like he was my mother. This was my first glimpse into who are these people. They were nothing like anybody I had ever met before. Completely likeable, but no pretense at niceness. Just get on with things, doing them the smartest, most efficient way. I don’t even know how to describe it. A different group of people. It was my first meeting of Israelis, on the plane and the crew.

I was still with my friends, playing cards, reading, diddling. It was a terribly long trip. At one point, everybody was weary and exasperated. Finally, the pilot came on the intercom and said, “We’re going to be dipping the left wing. You might get a glimpse of Eretz Yisrael.” In a few minutes, the plane dipped. I looked out the window, and there it was. All 350 people on the plane, with no help, started singing “Avenu shalom aleinu.” I have sung this song as a part of one or another Jewish moment, but it’s about the spontaneity of the homeland and the people who are about to set foot on there, most of us for the very first time. For the first time in a lot of years, and at that very moment, and as I’m about to do this very moment, I lost it on the plane. Why, you might ask? I’ve been a lot of places in the world. What is the difference? From that tears and lump-in-the-throat moment, until we landed and walked across the tarmac and saw nothing but Hebrew language everywhere, Jews only everywhere, I was shaken, really, really, really shaken. I’d heard stories about people who dropped to their feet, to the ground, and kissed the ground. I didn’t do that, but I wouldn’t have been embarrassed to do it, and I don’t know why. I can’t explain it to you. It’s in the genes. It’s a force way more powerful than I can even begin to describe, much less understand.

I was there for ten days. It was the most profound ten days ever of my lifetime, of anything I’ve ever done or any place I’ve ever been. They got us out of bed early in the morning. We were getting lectures at breakfast. We were speeded all over the country. When I tell you over the country, I think you probably know as well or better than I, it’s a tiny, tiny little place. I think, in width, it’s only 40 or 50 miles. You could walk across it in two days from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. North and south, it’s probably 150 or 170 miles or something.

Jerusalem is beyond explaining. It is clearly one of the oldest surviving communities of its kind. I am in awe of the history that’s still there, and I could put my hands on it. I could walk the Stations of the Cross. I could go to the places that everybody’s religion have there, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Western Wall. It’s very intense. People in the streets and sidewalks are of all kinds and descriptions. But once you get out of Jerusalem,

it's even more awe-inspiring in that it is beautiful parks, unbelievable museums, concert halls, hospitals, universities, shopping districts. And tanks and guns left along the roadside from the three or four wars that had already gone on from '48 to '75. It had hardly been more than a few years when they hadn't been attacked or fighting some battle or other. It was clearly a country in transition, but with such a respect and joy for life. Happy, arrogant, beautiful people. It seemed to me that two-thirds of the country was involved in archeology. They were digging and exploring everywhere, and cleaning up everywhere. The abuse of that area under previous management was not pretty to see. It was everything from donkey shit to graffiti. The Israelis don't get credit for it, but they have cleaned up a lot of everybody's history there.

I think I started by saying it was an epiphany. I began thinking about the perpetuity of our people, and the connection, and my place in the chain, and the little, thin connection my father gave to me and that I'm handing to my children. What did I think about all of this? Was I even slightly measuring up to what I should be thinking about and doing and participating in? Israel is a fabulous place to confront these questions because although it is not about Talmud, if the fundamental question that we're trying to deal with here is, why is Judaism even relevant? Why should I have bothered with it? Why shouldn't I have started earlier in my life to learn about it?

Whatever we did in Israel, it seemed to me, I was beginning to notice that. We stopped in a Jewish home for the elderly. The extent to which they were treated with unbelievable respect in that home, but expected to take care of themselves—I'd never seen anything quite like this. Everybody in the Jewish home had a job to do. It might be only to get up in the morning and make sure the clock was in the right position, or to turn on the coffeemaker. Everybody had a job, and the first guy I met, his job was to mooch cigarettes from everybody who was coming into the Jewish home. I ended up giving him a pack, and I discovered that was his assignment. He stood out there all day, and while you came into visit—you can, if I were learned enough to do this for you, the way that Jews look at aging and the responsibility to your elders and how you deal with that is different than everybody else's point of view. I don't want to overstate this, but much of the ideas that came out of those early writings of the Jewish rabbis. I don't believe they came down to us from some tablet somewhere. I'm not qualified to judge that, but it has never worked for me. I'm about 5 percent God-fearing and 95 percent I'm on the side of rational, show me.

14-00:53:18

Cándida Smith: Are you talking about the five books?

14-00:53:20

Wornick:

The five books. Whatever they were, I can't add to that body of information, but what they say became the basis of civilized life in the world, in the free world. One wife and one god, and do unto others. Leave a little fruit in the

vineyard for the pickers. All these kinds of simple concepts of the dignity of life and how we live with one another. The Israelis have taken it to a high art, even though they are less religious than the Jews in America. But they have the same genetic pool, if I may say this, which I'm actually proud, but maybe I don't have the right to say, as I do. Something goes on in somebody who has nothing but Jewish genes, and you've had them for some number of thousands of years. Maybe there's a lot of things we can't do, but the one thing that we seem all to do is, at some point in our life, to understand our responsibility and what Jews speak of as *tikkun olam*, which is the ultimate improvement of the world, when it's just loveliness everywhere. Israel speaks for that. If you spend a little time in Israel, you begin to respect it. You can go there now and take a close look at thousands and thousands of years of real, preserved, beautiful places to see.

I came back from there with my head torn open. The pivotal moment came one night when we were still in Israel. We had been out doing a thousand things all day long, and we had had probably a heavy dinner. We were shoved into another room after dinner for one last lecture before we get released for the day. Some very tall, pale guy, with khakis and a rifle over his shoulder came in, and he put his rifle down and began to talk to us. The room was stuffy. I don't think he was talking more than three or four minutes when there weren't more than three or four guys who weren't either asleep or about to be. He spoke softly, and he didn't have a very commanding presence. He was just a very gentle guy. His name was and is Yitz Greenberg. He became my rabbi from that night on.

14-00:57:10

Cándida Smith: Literally your rabbi? He was a rabbi?

14-00:57:13

Wornick:

He was a rabbi—is a rabbi—but he's a thinking and writing rabbi, not a pulpit rabbi. That night's lecture was on the subject of will Jews be able to deal with the responsibilities that go with being armed and policing? In other words, Jews never carried guns. Jews didn't own guns. To this day, I abhor guns still, and I think, without exception, Jews do. Hunting, no. It was unthought of. Now Israel has a police force. They have an army. What are the ethical considerations of that? Is there some way to be a Jew and have an army? It doesn't say in the Torah. What do you do about an army if you have your own army? Yitz takes subjects like that and writes about them in the most powerful, most useful, and enlightening way. He was there on sabbatical, and he had signed up as night patrol something or other, so he was in uniform. He wasn't in the military. He was an American. He's a scholar's scholar. I could have spent the rest of my life just carrying his luggage. I thought I had never met anybody that smart.

14-00:59:07

Cándida Smith: So he wasn't Israeli. He was an American Jew?

14-00:59:09
Wornick:

American Jew. Shortly after that, he started an organization called CLAL, Center for Learning and Leadership. His observation was, as they all are with him, very profound. He said Jewish organizations in our whole recorded history were rabbinically structured. The first level of rabbis and the next and so on, and depending upon the complexity of the question, it would get to the Rebbe. If necessary, they would convene a Sanhedrin, which would be a judicial body. Now Jews gather in a room, who's sitting in there? A food technologist, a lawyer, a real estate developer. Whoever can write the checks to make the place go, they're on the board. He said, "It's little wonder we're having trouble making decisions that are in the best interest of the quality of life and relevance of Judaism in our community. Our leaders are not enlightened, Judaically enlightened." He set about working on that with his organization, CLAL. That's his life's work. He's written a lot of fabulous books. He, for some time, gave me a reading list to work from.

On that 1975 trip to Israel, I became a Jew. What follows from that will lead us through how I then behaved in my new life as a Jew, which became, in small steps, hopefully a little more informed and purposeful. Then, ultimately, we'll go to philanthropy. Curiously, credit will go back to my mother and father. Despite the uncertainty of what was going on in that home and the conflicting signals, there were a few things which I could have told you when I was ten years old. One was I noticed that our house had a certain sanctity. There was no foul language used there. It was spotlessly clean. There was a reverence about food and clothing and one another, and a clear concern about are you doing absolutely everything you can to improve yourself in terms of learning and learning to work. I think it was Maimonides's concept that you haven't finished everything when you've done that, because when you've taken good care of yourself, you now need to begin to take care of others.

[End Audio File 14]

Interview #9 January 31, 2012

15-00:00:36

Cándida Smith: What we were going to talk about today was picking up on something you mentioned much earlier in the interview, which was your moving away from Judaism at a certain point when you were younger, and then returning to it and thinking more deeply about how to make Jewish faith and the traditions in which you were raised, more relevant for modern life. Relevant for your own life, and I guess relevant for modern life in general. I suspect some of this is triggered by your trip to Israel, but maybe there were already inclinations or leanings in that direction before you went to Israel.

15-00:01:40

Wornick: These are huge imponderables. I don't know how many libraries could be filled with books that ask the question, how does it happen that, time after time after time, the Jews are taken down to a bare whisper of survival, and then come back together again? The new community, or the culture or the religion, it seems all part of a continuum. While we've been doing this tape, I happened to read a book called *The Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*. It's a book, maybe now two years old, that talks about the quality of life in Madrid in the ten, fifteen years before the Inquisition, for the Jews. They were having an absolute golden age, living very, very well, writing, publishing, thinking. The book opens on a group of Jews strolling in the park, and they have beautiful clothes, they have beautiful wives, their lovely carriages. Enjoying the best that life had to offer at that time in Madrid, because they had made themselves very, very useful to several of the major activities that the government was involved in. They became prominent in government and in all the other professions. The Church fundamentally determined—which, in this case, was government—that we were sharing some large percent of the country's wealth with a very small percent of the country's population. That was a waste of the well-being for the rest of their populace, so we just need to get rid of these Jews, and then we can all have all the benefits.

So life became horrible for the Jews. I'll race ahead to the last chapter, by which time the Jews were either converted, dead, or gone from the country in one way or another, or in hiding. Guess what happened? They reconstructed themselves, and life continued in a new way. They already determined that the government's major source of income was piracy on the high seas, which was a government-operated business. In fact, I had never understood that. I always thought pirates were what you see in the movies, just bad guys who go out there and steal from everybody else, but in fact the stealing was being done in the name of governments. This wasn't an invention, necessarily, of just Spain. Anyway, the Jews very quickly set about to have enough people for a prayer minion wherever they've relocated, and to find ways to survive. They actually went into the pirate business and made themselves knowledgeable enough about where the ships were coming and going. If you wanted to be in this business, you were going to need one of them as a pirate broker. It was very likely that you were shipping gold to a place that was already shipping gold to

where you are, so we can help you. You don't even have to ship it. I'll just send a piece of paper over there, and you can keep that gold in exchange for the gold that would be coming and going, just like a bank exchange of a note. They were doing this all over the Caribbean. I've countless times run into the Jewish trail in the Caribbean when we were there vacationing, but never really understood how early they'd settled there, and how these little seedlings of life reemerged just as they had always been. The Jews, those that survived, landed on their feet.

For me, it's a portal to the question, because each of us as Jews walks through that gate in a different way. In my own case, as I think I've already shared in the telling of this interview, for at least a major part of my life, it was a very uninformed, shallow experience. I would have been quite willing to take up a fight in the street if you said anything unkind about my heritage, but I wasn't too sure what it was, what it was about, or why I was so connected to it.

The unanswered question is, what, in fact, are we connected to, and why do we care so much, and how come those of us who care really do care? At the place I'm at today—it's going to be hard to get into a few paragraphs, but let me just say that from my own pride, or maybe even some self-congratulation—not on my own behalf, but on behalf of our people—I'm very taken with the early ideas, that are now six or seven thousand years old, that you would find in the first five books, that have to do with the principle of a good life. The *mitzvot* as they're called. There's a particular book, a very old, ancient book that deals with the 600 and some-odd *mitzvot*. These are the things that you need to understand what they are, and you're well advised to make a good effort to do what you can to keep them as a part of your life code. They're as simple as respect for family, respect for parents. Leave a little fruit in the vineyard when you harvest. One god. One wife. Self-improvement, education. I'm way oversimplifying. I don't know how many other races and cultures around the world would—probably Greeks, and maybe others—lay claim to having civilized the world. I really do think, personally—and if this isn't true, it would be a great disappointment to me to discover I'd been thinking inaccurately all these years—but I think that the Jews really did not only create that code, and that code became the fundamental footings for other religions that subsequently made New Testaments and other kinds of religions that were thousands of years later, that at least use parts of the Old Testament. All the way up to, I don't know, the Magna Carta, the Constitution, wherever you're going to look, you're going to find some of those principles that make for a quality ethical, civilized world. For that reason, the Jews—that was their code. It is more religion than a culture, but because the religion has a calling about it, you have to call yourself Jewish, other than having been born to a Jewish mother, I think we became what we talk about, which can happen if you do it enough thousands of years.

In my own personal case, to try to make this a little more intimate, and I don't think it's very unusual. A lot of us walk around with a tiny little pilot light going in our head. There's just a little tiny lamp in there. It just barely flickers. Then, one day, you have an epiphany, or maybe several epiphanies over a lifetime. It's very easy to ignite that little pilot light. Then you think, oh my goodness. I am, in fact, so fortunate to be part of a continuum. I start seeing my father and my father's father, and how many people—the Inquisition, if you will—how many people made it possible for me to sit here today in this place and tell you. I understand it's complete happenstance, but yet I'm here, and I'm a Jew, so what does that mean? Does that mean anything? I need to know what it means. Without ever having made a formal working exercise, I'd like to think that I've probably lived my life in a Jewish way, which is what we're rounding up these interviews with here today. I appreciate the chance to think back a little bit about this.

I'll go to Maimonides. I don't want to pretend to be a scholar here, but the principles are that you improve yourself first, and then you begin to take obligations for family or friends until you can expand the breadth of your impact. It's hard to find a city or even a village in the remotest places of the world where, if there is any sign of a Jewish community, even if it's three people, they're doing the same thing that we're talking about here, somehow or other. Not every last Jew, but in the main, we've lived and worked in cities all over the world. It just seems like the Jews show up. They make sure that the poor are cared for, and that the unemployed are looked after, and that the quality of life in the community gets some attention, whatever its needs might be. I don't feel comfortable dwelling on this as if it were something that needs to be applauded and, somehow or other, please thank me, or us. It's more that I don't understand it entirely. It's a part of what came to me as a gene pool. It's very obvious to me that my children have it, having the same experiences. "Dad, it's boring! I hate it. I'm not going to Hebrew school anymore." They go through this whole process of finding their way into what role, if any, they'll play in that part of their lives. Because fundamentally, their life is not just a Jewish life. They live a robust American life, and they should. But when they come to the privacy of their home and suddenly, on a Friday night, their wife lights the candles and says a little prayer and reminds everybody that it's the Sabbath, it may not even be a religious experience, but it's a coming together, connecting. Everybody's way of connecting is different.

The rabbi I most respect, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, who I think we've talked about previously, I asked him one time, when he was sitting at a breakfast table and we were trying to find things that we could feed him—he's a modern Orthodox, so we've got to have paper plates and untouched oranges, essentially, to make the breakfast kosher and to make him comfortable. It was a task. Not for us. We were delighted to do it. But how does he get through his life, traveling, running around the world, and making his way? He said it's how he connects. It's not that he would defame, in any way, offend, or insult his own body by eating non-kosher, *treif* as it would be called. But more that

he feels as close as he can get to his people by trying to get as close as he can to the full expectations of the faith. By doing that, he becomes a real insider. These are my words now, not his. He'd be much more erudite. But you can understand that. Each, in our way, we do what we do. We're not probably doing nearly enough.

For the last probably thirty or forty years, when we moved to San Francisco and could afford both the time and the money to participate in community things, I went where I was invited, but I found myself on the boards of the Jewish Home for the Aged, Jewish Vocational Guidance Services, the Bureau of Jewish Education, both local and national, the National Joint Distribution Committee, the Contemporary Jewish Museum, the Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL-NY), and the Jewish Studies Department at Stanford. I was on the board, vice president, and treasurer of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation. A whole litany. When we speak of philanthropy, it's not sitting at home and writing a check for things that you like.

15-00:17:16

Cándida Smith: You were telling me about when you arrived in San Francisco. You had some money. You had the time that you could begin to participate in community life and contribute. You had the wherewithal to do more than just make sure that you had food on the table.

15-00:17:35

Wornick: That expresses itself first in a participatory way. If we're on the general subject of philanthropy, if you're willing to be a volunteer for the symphony or the ballet or any of these social service agencies, long before you get passionate enough to write significant checks, you're very likely putting your time in and getting up close to what they do. I view that as the same thing. I keep saying "but" because there's so many sides to these questions. It should not appear, because it wouldn't be true, that Jewish life was the only category that we supported, although I probably respond more easily and more quickly to a serious need in the Jewish community. Both Anita and I, from the very beginning of time, our time as a couple, have spent a fair amount of time on lots of very worthy secular causes. Just by way of example, one of the first things when I got to San Francisco, I don't even remember how now, but the then-conductor of the Ballet Orchestra, Jean-Louis LeRoux, had started a chamber orchestra. They asked would I help develop the board and work on this. I could imagine how many people would love this kind of music in San Francisco, and how much fun it would be. I'd be meeting musicians, and it would be a great enhancement of my life and the community life. So I went hard to work on that. It was just another item on a fairly long list of things I've done that didn't work.

It's very clear to me that there are people who respond to those kinds of things with their time and energy, and talent if they have any, and money if they have any, and others who expect somebody else will get it done. I do think it's

fair to say on behalf of our community that, disproportionately, you will find that the Jewish people will be there for whatever needs to be done, and do it with enthusiasm. If you hope to learn about anybody that comes from a Jewish background, and you're going to do it inside of the covers of one short little interview process, it would be a mistake to not notice that a lot of what goes on is a Jewish story. It's in the newspaper every day. At this very moment, we're all looking at, admiring, and slightly covering our eyes at the huge philanthropy of Sheldon Adelson, and his support of Newt Gingrich, I think \$17 million from his gambling casinos. I don't know anything about him, but I know him, so to speak, because he's funded so many fabulous causes in the Jewish world that if he happens to also have made \$25 billion opening the Venetian in Las Vegas, that doesn't make him a suspect guy. I can see that, for most of his life, he's been working very, very hard to provide for himself, then his family, and then for things he's passionate about. He's very passionate. Out-of-control passionate about seeing to it that Israel survives in a very hostile environment in which, if Iran gets its way, they could be gone. He has supported anything that looks like it might be a friend of Israel, and guess who shows up to nudge Newt Gingrich along, because Newt is the single most knowledgeable, most experienced, and most dedicated, worthy supporter Israel has in either party, in my opinion, today. Here comes Sheldon out of nowhere to make this happen. I see that as a part of our people's story. It's wonderful.

The opposite of that is that, when Anita and I traveled in Eastern Europe and we went through Poland and Vienna, a lot of places where Jews had lived a very robust, intellectual, high-quality life, the physical remains were still there to be seen everywhere. You could find synagogues that were many hundreds of years old, old homes and printing presses. But the six million that were gone was a painful experience, to walk through a Jewish neighborhood in which there are no Jews. The absence of Judaism in Eastern Europe, I think, has been a huge price for them to pay, because, it's not knowable, but the quality of life that might have been, the way world might have been had those people had subsequent generations—that six million would be ten today—and what would be going on in Europe, I don't know. But the world would be different. I'm certain of that.

15-00:24:29

Cándida Smith: Your own personal philanthropy takes place through the Wornick Family Foundation, which was formed when?

15-00:25:50

Wornick: In fact, if you were to look at this from the point of view of just the book-keeping, the Wornick Family Foundation was set up in the years when we were doing very well in the Wornick Company, and it made a convenient way to professionalize it a little bit. We invited our children to participate in the decision making. It was a learning experience. I promise you, Anita and I did not come from a background where we had any experience with giving away

money from our own foundation. It was a thing we needed to do, wanted to do, and I think we did pretty well. That exercise didn't last terribly long, because the requirements of IRS and other kinds of things necessitated that we do most of the giving in other ways, and we in fact have been doing that. The actual family foundation was only moderately successful. The children, quite properly, said, "This is uncomfortable. We really do not like to be responsible for giving away money we didn't earn. Why are you making us do this? It's creepy. You want to give it? Give it. You don't need our permission." Our children are stand-up guys, three boys. The daughters-in-law are exactly the same. So the foundation is mostly history, but the philanthropy was there.

15-00:26:39

Cándida Smith: I wanted to understand more about how you and Anita negotiated doing the philanthropy. You've been very clear, before, that the business side of things was your side and you didn't share much with Anita in terms of what was going on or the decisions you had to make. It was your responsibility, and she was taking care of the house and family. But when you come together to do the philanthropy, this is a joint operation, right?

15-00:27:18

Wornick: Absolutely joint. There are very few things that ever become as clear as looking back over fifty-six years of marriage. I think the two rules that Anita and I would now say were always in place weren't written down and declared. We observed them, and only now we understand that we were observing them. One was that, as to the relationship, no matter how difficult it got, if it got difficult, and it did, as anyone's relationship does on any given day, anything was okay, including murder, but divorce was not an option. If it gets to that, here's the butcher knife. Divorce was never on the table for either of us. We just understood that. That got us through a lot of bumpy things.

The second principle was there were no rules about who did what. In other words, we each did what we could do. If you could do something, you did it. I'll do what I know how to do; you do what you know how to do. In the early years, it took a fair amount of figuring that out. I was very happily making formula, because I was a chemist, and helping with the baby-feeding and diapers. Anita was extremely skilled at building a quality of life for us, in terms of connecting us with interesting people and nudging us collectively, her first, into organizations or institutions, places where we should be, and meeting other kinds of people. That's how the marriage got fed. We each did what we did. If there was a job to do, we did it. It's clear now, looking back, the business side was not her calling. So I went that way. I never really set out to lock her out, but it became my island. On the other hand, she has islands that are absolutely her own. Most notably, the way in which we've built our acquaintanceships and family and the quality of life that we live.

There are things we absolutely do share, and philanthropy would be one of those. We make all of those decisions in a very collective way, and with never

any difficulty. There have been waves of change over the last forty or fifty years. We started out with a category that we might have called quality of life. If we were living in a town or connected to something that might make it a better place to live, in terms of the schools or some other benefits in the area, including politics, we participated. She, by far, was first. She was urging me, and ultimately I did it very willingly, but the credit for her recognizing our need to do it goes to her, without question. Then, subsequently, there's a middle period in which we got very, very involved, as you've already heard, after the Israel experience, with Jewish causes, as I started having my own little pilot light lit, as we say. That middle period included the same kinds of things you already know about in terms of art and music. Any place we had a factory, we participated very heavily in the local community.

15-00:31:49

Cándida Smith: The local Jewish community?

15-00:31:50

Wornick: No, the community, absolutely the community.

15-00:31:54

Cándida Smith: The three places that I know of where you were most focused, aside from Boston, were South Texas, Cincinnati, and the Bay Area. Were there differences in what you chose to support in those three different parts of the country?

15-00:32:11

Wornick: Oh, sure. They have different needs, different opportunities. It's always very different.

15-00:32:18

Cándida Smith: Such as?

15-00:32:20

Wornick: Then, of course, it depends upon whether or not we are actually living there. Texas was not really a permanent home for us, but we supported the Boys Club and the local museum. Local politicians in South Texas. Now, I'm very, very caught up in medical research, for selfish reasons and not so selfish reasons, because we're all in the same boat if you've got some well-known, nameable disease.

15-00:32:05

Cándida Smith: We were talking about the kinds of support you gave in South Texas, and then Cincinnati versus the Bay Area. I guess the Bay Area is where you were most—

15-00:33:17

Wornick: Yes, we're deeply involved here. I don't know that this needs to be listed, but let me just touch on two or three so they don't sound like empty gestures. I went on the board of California College of the Arts. It used to be California College of Arts and Crafts, CCAC. It's now CCA. I fell in love with the whole

experience of watching young people training for a career in the arts. The only place I had any expertise is in the wood category. We commissioned a scholarship fund, and every year one or two students are selected out of a juried show and awarded scholarships on the basis of the quality of their work. That program has been in place for, I think, thirteen years now. On the tenth year, we had a catalog of the stories and histories of the recipients of the scholarship so that we could look back and see how many lives and careers had been impacted by the fund. It's been very, very rewarding. We also set up a lecture series over there. We have helped to fund the move to the new campus in San Francisco. We're heavily involved in CCA. I absolutely love it. There's nothing more renewing than being in a place with young people and students.

We had a very, very heavy hand in the creation of the Contemporary Jewish Museum here in San Francisco, which is a Daniel Libeskind building sitting just behind the Four Seasons here. I think maybe four or five years we've been open there. Admissions are up. We're doing some very, very interesting things. This is a museum that has no collections. It doesn't have any permanent exhibitions. Its task is to deal with the same subject we've been skirting around, which is the relevance of Judaism to the current time period, viewed through the eyes of makers of art who speak with their art. I don't know that we have made history there yet, but we're getting closer to doing some more profound things than we've done so far.

Another cause that I'm involved in, some years ago, our grandchildren were in a day school that was in danger of losing its lease. It had financial problems. There's now a great big campus down in Foster City.

15-00:36:30

Cándida Smith: This is a Jewish day school?

15-00:36:32

Wornick: Yes, it is.

15-00:36:34

Cándida Smith: An after-school program?

15-00:36:36

Wornick: No, no, it's an honest-to-goodness K-through-8 school with something short of 300 students. I don't even dare start into it, because I'll lose control. It is the most beautiful thing ever. I spent a few hours there, just a week or two ago, and I came home just stammering with amazement and joy. I don't know quite how they're doing it, but they have found the most qualified, passionate, beautiful faculty, teachers, that just adore the children, and the children adore their teachers. The programming is very intense. These children are all going to be going to great schools. You can just look in their faces and know it. When we arrived, we dropped into different classes. We wandered into a kindergarten class, and we were kibitzing. The kids asked questions. I was

asked to sit down and read the kids a story. I was pretty soon in a chair like this, and they put a little children's book in my hand, and the kids lined up on the floor around me. I think there might have been fifteen or sixteen kids. Small classes. I was reading and pointing to pictures, and suddenly I noticed that there are fifteen pairs of eyes on me. This isn't a story about me; it's about them. They are so well behaved, so focused, so thirsty to hear what's happening. It's an absolute model of how a good school should run and how they get kids engaged. It's not a simple thing. I don't know how they do it. It's almost magic. I can't imagine a better place to put a young person. They treasure these little children. They make them all feel very special. Not in an arrogant, unpleasant way. They teach them to stand on their feet and behave like adults. Any class you go into, if they don't know who you are, the class has an appointed student who comes up and offers his or her little hand and says, "Hi, I'm Joanne. This is third-grade English. This is our teacher." Can you imagine? I was terrified to raise my hand when I was in the third grade, much less do something like that. A beautiful school. That's the Wornick Jewish Day School. I'm continuing to be as helpful as I can down there.

15-00:39:31

Cándida Smith: So they renamed the school after you and Anita?

15-00:39:34

Wornick:

They did. The day school was so small that it didn't have the critical mass to get noticed in the community, the larger community, or even the Jewish community. There wasn't any chance that they were going to be able to raise enough money to solve their lease problem. Forget about a building. At that time, I was serving as campaign chair for the Jewish Community Center in Belmont. We had a fundraiser, and the biggest gift we got was \$25,000. Well, that was absurd. We were never going to get there. I needed \$250,000 or more times 100. It was clear that we had two institutions with the same problem. They didn't have traction. They weren't visible. They were below the critical mass. I suggested that we should just come together, find a place, call it a Jewish campus of some kind, attract other Jewish institutions, and make it a place for Jewish life. Maybe we could then get some attention or respect from major donors and people who could see it as a higher calling for the community. That idea caught on. We got the boards together; we got a plan together. We went out, and I helped raise quite a lot of money. I absolutely was not alone. A lot of people helped. A lot of people gave huge amounts of money. The biggest single gift for this was from a man named Laurie Locay.

Very early on, when we were still looking for "venture capital," Allan Beyer, who is a very good friend, and I, had a little lunch. He said, "I'll do whatever you do." I said, "Well, I would do whatever you do." So we each put in a million bucks. His million went to the community center; my million went to the day school. Those millions grew, ultimately, and other people joined us, and the campus got built, and the day school and the community center got built. It's up and running. I got a phone call from the chairman of the board of

the school. We had lunch. Some of the people who were active on the school board came. I was fairly certain I was going to be asked to meet some financial need that they had that we hadn't yet covered. They presented me with a letter that said that they—the letter exists, and it's in the school, and posted in a nice framed way. The letter essentially says that they wanted to say thank you, and that they would like to put my name on the school. That actually stunned me, because it was the last thing I expected. Also, they wanted it to be Ronald C. Wornick, like you might put down the name of some Ulysses S. Grant or something. The whole thing seemed out-of-key to me. Schools should be named for somebody who is long deceased. I had grandchildren in the school, for whom I thought it would be embarrassing. The whole thing was strange. Anyway, I took the letter. I discussed it with Anita and with our children and the grandchildren, and it was decided that, in time, it would be the right thing to do. So we agreed to put our name on the school. I used that as an excuse to make a lot of funny little speeches about how we were going to depend on each other's reputation, because if I mess up, you're in trouble, but if you mess up, I'm in trouble. Anyway, that's how my name got on the school. It's a beautiful, beautiful place. It's one of the most beautiful examples of how sweet and pure and wonderful life can be if your focus is on educating young children. It's just really quite exquisite. Yes, I'm completely smitten and probably not entirely rational on the subject, but it's all right.

15-00:44:49

Cándida Smith: You and Anita, two people who give a reasonably large amount of money—maybe not as large as some other—

15-00:44:57

Wornick: Oh, absolutely not.

15-00:45:00

Cándida Smith: But a reasonably large amount of money. You must get contacted by development officers of various organizations all the time, I would assume.

15-00:45:11

Wornick: Well, you do, but it's okay. It's always an opportunity, in fact, to learn about special needs. In some ways, it's also unpredictable. I remember—just one quick example. I had a heart attack when I was on Cape Cod, and they weren't equipped to deal with me. They did what they could on the Cape, and then I was taken into a hospital in Boston. In the morning, the first morning in Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, I notice I had a really nice, large, single room, and a lot of people were coming in to say, "Is everything all right? Do you need anything? Has so-and-so been in? I'm going to have my so-and-so come in and see you." What was going on here? Anyway, it turned out that—this was 1994, but by that time, hospitals were already getting pretty damn good at finding out who was coming through the door. If you are a person who has already given away some funds in recorded, public kinds of places, they know it. That may not be anything people working at the post office might like to

read about, because it doesn't seem entirely right or fair. How does it work? But it does work, because it provides a lot of income to the hospitals. When they develop, they find people who can help, and they develop them. Develop meaning get them in the tent, so to speak.

That's a very good segue to what's happening in our lives right now. Development directors do find us, and they do come after us, and so what? I learn about things that really should be helped and should be cared for, and we're very happy to do it. Today, we've moved from quality of life and Judaism to medical in a major way, but it's just not mindless check writing. The first of the diseases was heart problems. We got involved with the Cardiology Council at UCSF, and it's been very good for them and for us. Then comes glaucoma, and I've spent some time with my glaucoma doctor, and I discover that the glaucoma research is in the Dark Ages. There's not a whole lot they can do about it today. You do a little bit to reduce interocular pressure, but fundamentally, they're a hundred years from knowing the answers, it seems like. Dr. Stamper, who's my glaucoma guy, very generously, but as a part of development, invited me to a session or so with other professionals who report on their work. I got interested; I did a little more reading. Today, we're supporting a spectacular young MD, Ph.D. Dr. Oh at UCSF, who is doing some research on glaucoma. It's a little bit of a cowboy attitude about research. It's a long shot, but a good thing to be doing. It's a stem-cell project. Very satisfying for us to know she's doing that work. She's very competent, very worthy. Benefits, should it lead to something, would be very good for hundreds of thousands of people. Otherwise, the funding from National Institute of Health or from the universities is much more traditional. So private funding into these medical spots is adding a lot to the way in which medical research is proceeding.

One more example in that area, and we can go to your next category. Another of the diseases I deal with is a thing called multiple myeloma, which is a blood and bone cancer disease. There are lots and lots of places where you can support cancer across a broad horizon, but in Connecticut, there's an amazing lady named Kathy Giusti, who was diagnosed with cancer something short of fifteen years ago, when she was a young mother. She has the same multiple myeloma disease that I have. Not absolutely identical, but both of a kind. She had a background in management, but not in medicine. An MBA. She did some of the same kind of looking around that I had done, except that I just said ah-ha after I decided that I didn't like the way research money was being spent and thought I'd spend a little of my own. She did better than that. She started a foundation. She changed the rules by which the money was going to be spent for multiple myeloma research. You'll support from her after she has convened the Food and Drug Administration, pharmaceutical companies, the leading researchers in multiple myeloma. They will give you a grant to do your research if you can get a first-phase trial inside of a finite and short period of time. In other words, do not bring us twelve-year basic research programs. We've got people dying, and we need a solution that's going to be

real and now. She has now given mega-millions away through the foundation, raised mega-millions, and is supporting spectacular research. The drug I'm on comes from her research foundation [MMRF, Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation], Velcade. I don't think they're more than some number of clicks of the clock away from really knocking this one down. They are so close to being inside the understanding of what's going on between the genome and the chemistry that we're applying against it. It's all thanks to her "Hurry up, focus, get it done now, this is what we need." She's working outside of, but in cooperation with, the scholars in the field. Mostly these are more of the kind of thing that I think of as entrepreneurs and maybe cowboys. They're getting us there.

This is my current example of where we are involved today. There's a lot more. The point is, over a lifetime, different things call to you. I'm coming on a few months from eighty years of age. My passion is now probably about staying alive and keeping other people alive.

15-00:53:44

Cándida Smith: I presume one of the reasons we're having this conversation is somebody from the Bancroft got in touch with you, with the obvious interest of getting you interested in what they're doing, and hoping that you would be so taken that you might give some money. Did that develop because you have an interest in libraries, or through the Judah Magnes Museum, a relationship?

15-00:54:15

Wornick:

No, it developed because of the word "library." Anita is a voracious reader. She can read a book on the way back to the apartment from the bookstore. She just goes through books at a—choo, choo, choo, choo. I still read like MIT kids read, almost saying the words. I love to read as much as she does, but she is the reader in our family. For as long as we have been married—well, I think I would go back to public schools for her and for me—we both are reverential about books. I don't know how many libraries we've touched over the countless years that we've been together, but "library" is a word that is very, very high on our list of things that we respect. The Bancroft is a very respected library, and I didn't really know exactly why. I couldn't have told you why, but I had heard it described in reverential terms about the work that they do. I was very willing to hear what they were up to and what they might have to propose. If, in working together, we could help support your ends, and at the same time make me feel good about what we were doing, that would be perfect. From the personal point of view—I have no trouble putting this in print—I'd like to think it isn't about vanity, but just about the fact that a lifetime, anybody's lifetime, deserves a certain amount of reflection before it goes into ether. I thought, gee, this might be a pretty good way, without making a big to-do about it, to just get a few things down in some permanent way, if anybody ever wants to check anything. It's not going to be a very thorough record, but at least there's enough there to form a little tree from which some leaves might fall. I've been very happy to do this. It's caused me

to go back and reflect on a lot of things that I probably wouldn't have otherwise gotten to do. If, in any way, I'm helping at the Bancroft, that's a big plus. That's nice.

The Magnes, of course, is a very complicated story. We did not feel good about seeing them fail to join with the Contemporary Jewish Museum here, because the connecting of those two boards and their different purposes would have been huge—the Judah Magnes is a collecting, and a research, a scholarship museum. Our museum, on purpose, to stay fresh and current, does not have a collection. We could have had one museum. It would have been a wonderful merger, and I am terribly sorry that that failed. It didn't need to happen. But we are both in good hands, and I hope it will be good for the Bancroft and for the Judah Magnes. Our museum will survive here in San Francisco its own different opportunities.

15-00:57:49

Cándida Smith: Perhaps you have a clearer focus now.

15-00:57:52

Wornick: For sure. But it has not changed.

15-00:57:55

Cándida Smith: I wanted to ask you about your philanthropy in Israel, your giving to Israel.

15-00:58:06

Wornick: Well Israel is a huge topic. If you look at the history of our people, almost every time we were taken to within a breath of disappearing, it's because we really had no control of our own destiny. We never had a police force. We never had an army. We never had any control of the countries we lived in. Our job was to look like we are one of everybody else, and our culture, our religion, is just a personal thing. We were never hyphenated people. We're just Americans or Hungarians or Costa Ricans or whatever it might be. In Eastern Europe, we were defenseless. Sitting here now, I could get a lump in my throat thinking about six million people who couldn't do anything. Nothing. They had no voice in the government. They had trouble borrowing a pistol to defend their own front door.

Israel is extremely critical, its survival, to me and to millions of other Jews. In part because it's a democracy and a beautiful experience, and not least because of what they have already given to the world in terms of enlightenment and medicine and technology. Israel is a lot more than just a place already, and it's only sixty years. All of that comes down for us, in this country, to one organization, which is called AIPAC, which is not a PAC, incidentally. AIPAC's job is to make certain, as best they can, that anybody who is in the House or the Senate gets educated about that part of the world. They're taking them over there. They're giving every opportunity to learn so that they have a firsthand understanding of our people, what the neighboring countries are, what they're doing, what we're doing. We want to know that we

are in play. We're not just a crate of oranges that can be shipped up and slaughtered or just sent away. I don't view this as philanthropy. It's more of an investment in survival.

[End Audio File 15]

Begin Audio File 16 wornick_ron_16_01-31-12

16-00:00:20

Wornick:

I'll say another word or two about AIPAC. It also introduces a category of institutions in the Jewish world that are succeeding at helping to make Judaism relevant as a culture in contemporary life. It all comes in different ways. In the case of AIPAC, of course, it's wonderful to see our process at work, because new, young congressmen, sometimes even before they've been all the way through the primary and into office, if they look like somebody that's going to be in office, they're already coming up for attention. Somebody in the local community will appear and get them to dinner, and conversations get started. We are doing a very good job of making certain that people who make foreign policy decisions for the U.S. do it from a knowledge base that is correct and factual. At least it seems to me, it's been very evenhanded. The reason they're so successful at it is, and I think everybody in Congress knows, that they can go to AIPAC and find out what the facts are. I don't suggest for a moment that we don't have a point of view. We do. But to practice, they really need to be able to recite clearly what the issues are on both sides. They've been doing that very well. So we're all very proud of AIPAC. Over the years, we have upped our financial commitment. It's not a deductible thing. It's just a gift to AIPAC. They are in our estate plan. I would say, if I were going to have to list the several causes that will matter to me, that I know they're going to survive our demise, AIPAC would be at the very top of that list.

16-00:02:52

Cándida Smith: Do you give a handsome amount every year to AIPAC?

16-00:02:55

Wornick: It's a growing amount. Still growing, yes.

16-00:02:58

Cándida Smith: Do you participate personally in programs?

16-00:03:02

Wornick: To this extent, I've given them our youngest son. I don't say that lightly, but I would say AIPAC is his life. He's very, very competent and very knowledgeable. This is Jonathan and Christina. He's been very well prepared for this time in his life, and he's doing a very good job for them. I don't know where it will take him over the next ten years.

16-00:03:35

Cándida Smith: Is he working for AIPAC?

16-00:03:36
Wornick:

No, he's a volunteer, but he's all over everything. If you get out of whack here and say something in print anywhere in the Bay Area, you're going to hear from Jonathan, because he just has a very low tolerance for misinformation or just flat-out stupidity or prejudice or what have you, on the subject of Israel.

There are so many good causes. One that you probably know about that's even more interesting, from the point-of-view or its adventures, is the Joint Distribution Committee. Does that mean anything to you? JDC? JDC is the world Jewish underground, so to speak. If there's a Jewish community stuck in Bosnia and they're in danger, the JDC will show up in civilian clothes and they will buy buses, buy a radio station, dig a tunnel—I don't know, whatever's needed. It gets done, and people are taken care of. I was briefly on that board in New York and found it very exciting. They do extraordinary things. By the way, they date back to Louis D. Brandeis, which would be 1930s.

16-00:05:54
Cándida Smith:

He was very active in a whole range of civil rights and human rights and philanthropical issues before he went on to the Supreme Court.

16-00:06:06
Wornick:

As an obviously interested person in the history of the world, the Joint Distribution Committee may be a very interesting story to you, one that doesn't get told very well, but it's a big, independent organization. It looks after people all over the world. There are so many good things going on that our people just get done somehow. I don't know quite how. But anyway, I'm on the theme of getting things done. For about thirty or forty years, I can't tell you how many hundreds of meetings I've sit in where we say, gosh, we've got intermarriage, we've got children who don't want to be bar mitzvah. We're falling apart. There may not be a Jewish community in another generation or two. What should we be doing? A plethora of things have happened over forty or fifty years, from Jewish camps to film festivals, things that are making Judaism relevant again for the Jewish community so that they can begin to connect to it in a way that is not superficial or artificial or not at all—in this area, by far the biggest successes are these.

There's a program called the Wexner Institute. Wexner has gifted a lot of money to a lot of good causes. They had the idea of, in major Jewish communities, picking out young bright people and putting them through a two-year educational process. They become Wexner Fellows, and they, I guess, get certified at the end of this period of time. Jonathan, our youngest son, was selected for that process, and he more or less gave two years of his life to this process. It is a lot of work. It's harder than any graduate school you will ever have gone to, because it isn't in a room somewhere. You are just coming and going to meet people, do things, and reading, reading, reading, reading. He now is so put together and so educated and so articulate and reliable in the things that he says, I'm very, very proud of what he's done with

the Wexner program. Wexner is working in this community in a very real way. I think they do, maybe twenty every other year. Those people are becoming the leadership. They will deal with the next level of problems, and they'll be here to provide an ongoing base of wisdom, which is a very important thing because we have shifted from Jewish decisions being made for the community by the wisest rabbi, to Jewish decisions being made for the community by whoever writes the biggest check. That's not necessarily anybody who ought to be making decisions. Having leadership back in the hands of people who have as much preparation as the Wexner Fellows get is a very, very good thing, and it's going to enrich this community. It probably won't be visible for another ten years, but it will be a change in how well we do things here.

Another program that has become hugely successful, funded in the main by Charles Bronfman, of the Bronfman family, is called Birthright. This program takes—I believe they're first-year college age, or maybe last year of high school age, but in that range, on a trip to Israel, all expenses paid. They get to choose whether they're interested in—I don't know the categories anymore, but there's an outdoor trip that has to do with maybe more archaeology and lay of the land. There are more cerebral trips that are more historically based. There are different kinds of trips, and the kids sign up for one or the other. That has been enormously successful, because they come back from Israel with hands-on understanding of how Jews live a Jewish life in a Jewish place. They have friends in Israel with whom they can maintain a lifetime connection. They care about both our culture and our tiny little country. Birthright is another program that needs to be supported and recognized, and it's one of our successes.

All of the things that Jews were doing in the previous forty or fifty years, that had to do with care of the elderly, care of the infirm, the self-help kinds of things, all the way out to a burial society, while they continue to be important, as they were in the founding of Jewish hospitals when doctors couldn't practice in non-Jewish hospitals—Mount Zion and the rest of the stories in this city—those things are now history. We're trying to do more vital things that have to do with keeping this Jewish culture flickering for a small number, but for those of us who care, it's important to see what works and what isn't working. Jewish day schools go on the list of things that is working. It doesn't turn our children into zealots, but it turns them into young people who are very comfortable in their skin, and they know who they are and can be knowledgeable if confronted. That's also very successful.

16-00:13:48

Cándida Smith: Do you invest in Israel? Are you involved with business life in Israel at any level?

16-00:13:58
Wornick:

I have not. That's been my own shortcoming. Very early on, we were Israel bond buyers. Israel was desperately in need of money. We bought bonds, and if we get the money back, fine. Israel is a pretty darn sound economy today. Israel bonds are still sold, and they're probably a very good investment, but it's been some years since I've actually bought an Israel bond. There are, however, infinite numbers of start-ups in Israel, and great investments, speculative kinds of investments, that could be, and are, made. A very successful stock market. I have not done any of those. I think I've always separated philanthropy and business as two different kinds of thought processes. It would probably not be a good idea to cross the path.

The Israeli government, about thirty-five years ago now, contacted me and asked could I help them develop their field rations. I thought, "Goodness gracious, this will be about the proudest thing I will ever have done in my lifetime! I can't wait to get over there and make this happen."

So we did go, and we sat down. The Israelis are no bullshit, get to the facts, rolled-up sleeves. The generals and the privates are all in the same room, in the same uniform. It's a world that most of us don't understand. I approached this group with a philanthropy point of view. I'll give you anything but my company, but just tell me what you want. In hindsight, I think I would have probably been way better off to deal with this as a businessman. We never got there. We never could make it work. I was working with a very famous Israeli named General Benjamin Ghibli. I don't think he knew what to make of me. Or I made a bad sales call. They have an unusual problem. Their soldiers have been able to come home for lunch. They don't go to far-off places. Rations for them is a different kind of problem. My technologies would have worked. At any rate, I'm not an investor in the country of Israel, not because I have any reason not to, but I just haven't.

[End Audio File 16]

Interview #10 March 5, 2012

Begin Audio File 17 wornick_ron_and_alice_17_03-05-12.mp3

17-00:00:07

Cándida Smith: I want to start by asking you to define “conceptual craft.” It’s not an everyday term.

17-00:00:20

Anita Wornick: It’s a made-up term.

17-00:00:22

Cándida Smith: What do you mean when you use that term to define the focus of your collection?

17-00:00:28

Anita Wornick: Well, because it’s very important to Ron to have an explanation, I think he should talk about how he defines conceptual craft. I agree with him, but he’s much more eloquent about it. Because he struggled for so many years to try to get a label for the kind of work that we collect. He doesn’t want to just call it craft, because that connotes little gift shops with doo-dads and tchotchkes. This work is a lot more important than that.

17-00:01:13

Ron Wornick: Let me try to say it in a couple of sentences. Then, to make it real, I’d like to walk you through some particular pieces and show you the evolution. In the short version, all of the materials that you will see in the walkthrough of the house, which are mostly three-dimensional, material-oriented art constructions of wood or ceramic or glass or metal or fiber, or what have you, grew out of a tradition of the materials. There were people working in wood, and people working in glass, and people in ceramics, and so on. Those were craft cultures. They helped each other with tools, with teaching one another, and then centuries later and thirty years or so after the Second World War, evolved a group of galleries that surrounded the work of artists oriented around particular materials. You had glass galleries, and ceramic galleries, and ceramic collectors. You have people who identify themselves as ceramic collectors. We began, in fact, as wood collectors. Which is another long story as to why, but that’s how we started.

Thanks to Anita’s lifetime interest in art history and art classes and art education, her thirst was much broader and far more enlightened than my own. She urged us over the edges of the wood arena, and we began traveling with other collectors and looking at other materials. We started gathering the best of other works from other materials. But the point is, to come to your question, during that time—which is not exactly finite, but if one were to say the last twenty years, maybe the late 1980s to today—something not entirely definable happened in almost all of these materials. The level of craftsmanship became so consummate, so elevated, that some small number of people began no longer to make just amazingly accomplished craftsmanship, but they began

to say something. They began to try to tell something in a cerebral way. Trying to explain what all of those artists across all of those materials have in common has been our challenge, because it's not a named field. It's not exactly "contemporary craft," and yet they definitely came out of contemporary craft. It's kind of "studio craft," but it's a lot more than studio craft. Is it "contemporary art"? Well, contemporary art curators might quarrel with that, because they're very rigid in what they view as contemporary art. Is it "contemporary design"? It's all about words. But I can tell you, if you give us ten minutes or twenty minutes walking around this apartment, that there is a body of work that constitutes a significant, new movement at the highest levels of material-based, studio art, contemporary work, which is worthy of museums. Our collection has been welcomed into the best of museums, and it will reside in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. We don't have a word for that category of work. We think it gets to be more understandable when you apply the word "concept," because the work has to be talking about something. It has to have some message. It has to say something to you.

17-00:05:34

Anita Wornick: Could I interrupt?

17-00:05:37

Ron Wornick: Please.

17-00:05:43

Anita Wornick: It's much more important to Ron to attribute intellectual ideas to this work. It's not that important to me. I really consider it a continuum of decorative arts. So that when you look at a piece of glass, like this piece here, it can go all the way back—

17-00:06:05

Cándida Smith: Which piece?

17-00:06:06

Anita Wornick: This piece in the corner.

17-00:06:07

Cándida Smith: It's by?

17-00:06:09

Anita Wornick: Oh, gosh. I can't remember. I'd have to look in the catalog. But anyway, that piece can relate all the way back to some ancient glass found in what is now Israel. Even Peter Voukos's piece, and he was a groundbreaker in contemporary ceramics. But you look at an old piece of shard pottery, and there is definitely a continuum. So I don't struggle much with the intellectual part of it. Museums are really looking at it this way. They're putting a piece of contemporary glass next to an old piece of glass, or they're taking a very contemporary piece of furniture and putting it next to something from the eighteenth century. I think there's validity to both points of view. We come at it from a different angle.

17-00:07:17

Cándida Smith: In the interviews I've done with Ron, he's related multiple times that you always insisted in your family life that the two of you had to be involved in whatever the cultural activities in your community were where you were living.

17-00:07:39

Anita Wornick: We definitely have. There's no doubt about it. As we got older, we had more time and the resources, but we definitely always shared—it started with music, and it gradually evolved in this whole collecting thing.

17-00:08:01

Cándida Smith: Before there was a collection, it had to have been just pieces that were bought as they caught your eye.

17-00:08:06

Anita Wornick: I don't think there's anything that we bought early on that we have on display that I can think of. There might be something. Well, first of all, your tastes evolve. They really do. I remember the first painting we bought. I don't even know where it is. We bought it at an auction in Vermont, in 1963, something like that. If I could find it, I might even hang it, actually, because it would be a memorabilia. I think everybody, when they start out, they make mistakes, and they learn. Nowadays, some people who are big collectors have art advisors who keep them from making mistakes. In this field, there really aren't art advisors.

17-00:09:17

Cándida Smith: Besides paintings, were you collecting craftwork before?

17-00:09:22

Anita Wornick: Not, not really. We didn't even consider ourselves collectors until, one day, a bus pulled up from a museum, and we realized, oh, well, I guess we're collectors. We didn't start out that way, and I don't think anybody starts out that way. I've heard many people stand in front of their artwork, their collections, and say the same exact thing that we do: "Oh, we didn't mean to be collectors. It just happened organically. All of a sudden, we had a collection." I did have one collection—I still have it, actually—of little Greek antiquities, which haven't been on display for a long time, but Ron is going to make me some display thing.

17-00:10:12

Cándida Smith: Craft-collecting, did that precede or follow Ron's turn to woodworking?

17-00:10:28

Anita Wornick: I don't know whether he even mentioned this, but his father was a carpenter. He always loved wood, whereas I would walk by a jewelry store and my tongue would be hanging out. He feels that way about lumberyards.

17-00:10:42

Ron Wornick: Or the wooden pedestal holding up the ring.

17-00:10:45

Anita Wornick: He made a little studio, a little workshop, actually, in our garage, and started fooling around making things. Then he had a much bigger studio in a private space down by the waterfront in Burlingame. He always responded to wood. I think he must have told you the story that we were in Mendocino with friends, major collectors, and we saw a beautiful wood piece. It was an outrageous sum of \$1,200. We thought, that's ridiculous. We went back to the hotel, and then, over night, he had a change of heart. We went back and bought the piece, which was our first piece.

17-00:11:35

Cándida Smith: What piece was that?

17-00:11:38

Ron Wornick: David Groth.

17-00:11:39

Anita Wornick: Yes, it is David Groth. I can't remember the name of the piece.

17-00:11:42

Ron Wornick: *Coxcomb Oyster*.

17-00:11:44

Anita Wornick: This guy had been struggling. When we had our first exhibition at the Oakland Museum, that piece was in it, and it really made a career for him. Which was very satisfying to see a good artist succeed. That started the wood collection.

17-00:12:19

Ron Wornick: I never really started an art career as such, but I always had my hands in tools.

17-00:12:24

Anita Wornick: I remember you made me a brush holder or something like that out of a wire hanger.

17-00:12:30

Ron Wornick: Well, there you go. See. I rest my case.

17-00:12:54

Cándida Smith: You were saying that even when you were young marrieds, you were doing, I guess, house-craft stuff.

17-00:13:12

Ron Wornick: It was obvious in our circle of friends that most of the husbands really couldn't plug in a lamp, so to speak. Somehow or other, if anything needed fixing, I knew how to fix it—or wanted to. Or at least I was going to learn how, and I just waded in. What is that about? I have no idea. Clearly, my father was a consummate carpenter, and great with tools. He knew how to collect them and keep them sharp. He treasured his tools. If you were to damage one of his tools, it would be like a wound to his body.

17-00:13:58

Anita Wornick: That was his lifeline.

17-00:14:00

Ron Wornick: It was his career.

17-00:14:01

Anita Wornick: He depended on that.

17-00:14:05

Ron Wornick: I feel like some of that came in my bloodstream. That's all.

17-00:14:08

Anita Wornick: Probably.

17-00:14:11

Ron Wornick: My father's father and father's father were all of that same training. So I explain it to myself as it was a tidal wave that washed up on my life. It's a gift which I've thoroughly enjoyed. It definitely enriched our lives in a way that I've enjoyed, because that little wood habit got us into respecting the work of master craftsman. Then we began collecting the best of those people, and the wood took us to other materials. Other materials took us to finally acknowledging that we became collectors. That's how it happened.

17-00:14:51

Cándida Smith: In the eighties, you began making wood bowls or wood pieces with lathes.

17-00:15:00

Ron Wornick: I would say in the seventies, because by the seventies, I had a studio, a serious studio, and a lathe, and some pretty good equipment.

17-00:15:10

Anita Wornick: He made some furniture, too.

17-00:15:13

Ron Wornick: I always made furniture. That's true.

17-00:15:20

Cándida Smith: How many pieces do you have in your collection?

17-00:15:23

Anita Wornick: I really have no idea. I believe that we're giving 250 pieces, eventually, to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. We've deaccessioned quite a few pieces to the Oakland Museum and other museums, and we still have a storeroom. What's the difference, actually, the numbers?

17-00:15:49

Ron Wornick: I often view that question as, what did you pay for your house, or how many square feet are in the apartment? It's not how collections are generally judged. It's in the many hundreds. The collection going to the Boston museum is 247 pieces. We have given several hundred pieces to other museums already,

really in an attempt to make a little order out of it, because we didn't want to leave it as a tremendous burden to the children to have to figure out who gets what and what goes where. Especially out of respect to the artists, because it needs to be skillfully distributed to the right places. Somebody might fail to recognize what it is, and it goes in somebody's garage or attic. That wouldn't be right. We're pre-planning.

17-00:16:43

Cándida Smith: Have you commissioned pieces?

17-00:16:44

Ron Wornick: We have.

17-00:16:46

Anita Wornick: Some are successful, and some aren't. It's fraught with problems. We've commissioned something that we really didn't like when it was finished, and then we've had some very successful ones. More often than not, it's been successful, but there's one in particular I can think of that we hid, because we just didn't like it. It happens.

17-00:17:23

Cándida Smith: But I presume most of your commissions have been—

17-00:17:27

Anita Wornick: Have worked.

17-00:17:28

Cándida Smith: And you've commissioned some site-specific pieces for your home in Napa?

17-00:17:32

Anita Wornick: One. One major, major piece. It's a huge granite piece that sits out on our meadow in St. Helena, and it's sunk into thousands of pounds of concrete. It's called *Seven Stones* because there are seven pieces of granite. That was a commission. A fortunate ending. A happy ending, I should say.

17-00:18:05

Rubens: The artist is?

17-00:18:06

Anita Wornick: Richard Deutsch.

17-00:18:10

Cándida Smith: As collectors, do you typically come to know the artist personally?

17-00:18:15

Anita Wornick: Quite a few, but they're all over the country. So it's not always possible. More often than not, we buy a piece and we don't even meet the artist, but we do know a lot of them.

17-00:18:31

Cándida Smith: So you do studio visits?

17-00:18:33

Anita Wornick: We have done studio visits, and we meet them at art fairs.

17-00:18:42

Cándida Smith: Do you primarily buy through galleries?

17-00:18:45

Anita Wornick: We try to.

17-00:18:47

Cándida Smith: What are the galleries that you feel closest to?

17-00:18:55

Anita Wornick: They've come and gone. Habitat Gallery in Michigan, del Mano in L.A., Heller Gallery, Marx-Saunders, Leslie Ferrin, Ruth Braunstein. Oh my goodness. Most of the work that we collected is in St. Helena. I'm just looking around here. Those are some of the ones.

17-00:19:37

Cándida Smith: I presume you go to galleries quite frequently.

17-00:19:42

Anita Wornick: We did. Actually, just Saturday, we decided to do some gallery hopping, and we actually bought a piece. Not an object. A photograph, with an object that comes with it. I'm really excited about it. I thought the work was so interesting, and I guess you did, too, because we bought it. We bought things from Rena Bransten and Cheryl Haines, to mention a few. Berggruen. Dorothy Weiss.

17-00:20:22

Ron Wornick: It's a significant part of our social life when that starts to happen. Visiting galleries is like visiting friends. The gallery people know you. The art shown is usually something familiar to you. Very often, you run into other collectors in the gallery, or at least collectors often go together to openings of exhibitions and so on. Just as people gather friends with common interests and do other kinds of things, book clubs or what have you, this is one of those parts of our lives where we—if we go to Chicago or New York or L.A., wherever, we're going to spend at least one or two of those nights with other collectors. We do a what's-new.

17-00:21:15

Anita Wornick: We've made wonderful friends through this, all over the country. Likeminded people have a shared interest, and then you find out you have other interests in common.

17-00:21:37

Cándida Smith: I gather from what you've said that you have an intuitive response to pieces. You have a sense and you thought about what it is that you particularly like, what makes you feel, oh yeah, this is something I would work with.

17-00:21:51

Anita Wornick: Two-dimensional work, we seem to have gravitated to figurative. That has changed recently. We have bought a couple of things that are not figurative. As to other work, I don't think there's a theme. Do you?

17-00:22:17

Ron Wornick: I'm not sure I'm on the same question. Would you ask that again, Richard?

17-00:22:21

Cándida Smith: Have you thought about what it is that grabs you about a work? When you see a piece, is there—

17-00:22:30

Anita Wornick: Oh, I know what you're saying. Ron will—I know he'll agree with me, because we will—

17-00:22:35

Ron Wornick: Go ahead.

17-00:22:39

Anita Wornick: I, me, it's a gut reaction. I look at it, and I like it. Ron has to study it. He's much more intellectual about it. Often, he can point out flaws to me that I wouldn't have seen, and he's much more interested in how things are made. I really don't care. I'm not interested in process. With me, it's visceral: I like it, I don't like it.

17-00:23:07

Ron Wornick: Anita's judgment is always ahead of mine about what's good and what isn't good. If we disagree, you'd be better off to put your money on her bet than on mine.

17-00:23:29

Anita Wornick: Oh, Ron, you're being modest. I wouldn't say that exactly.

17-00:23:31

Ron Wornick: No, but I would. We've probably missed a lot of very good work that, had I been a little more courageous, we might not have missed. But we do do it differently, and I don't know that that's a bad thing. When she walks up to a piece and says, "Oh my god, I love it," I'm thinking, "Wow, Jesus! Here we go again!" Because I don't know what it is. I don't know what it's about. I don't know what the last ten pieces were like. I don't know what this guy's body of work is. Who knows him? I haven't even figured out what the price is yet. But it doesn't matter. Whether it says \$100,000 or \$2,000, she loves it.

17-00:24:12

Anita Wornick: That's a slight exaggeration.

17-00:24:14

Ron Wornick: You just love it, and that's okay, because all the rest is detail.

17-00:24:17

Anita Wornick: That doesn't mean that I know we're going to buy it even if it's \$100,000 or \$200,000. I could still say I like it.

17-00:24:23

Ron Wornick: The point is that we each bring something different to the process. It takes me a little while to buy into the quality of the work, the reputation of the artist, and the likelihood that the piece is really worth coming into the collection. But the instinct, the part of it that says it's special, that it's unique and that it is probably museum quality, and that we'll love it as much ten years from now as today—in fact, if you choose well, the pleasure grows. It doesn't diminish. That's the same for both of us, but I think she gets there faster than I do.

17-00:25:04

Cándida Smith: You used the word "courage" in collecting. What do you mean by that?

17-00:25:09

Ron Wornick: It's easy to embarrass yourself. You were talking a little earlier about commissions. It's too long a subject to take you through today, but there have been times that have been so humiliating that I cringe to think about it. You sit with an artist and go through maquettes and little schematic sketches and siting, and what have you, and you just believe you are exactly seeing the same wonderful emerging piece of art. Then the piece starts emerging, and my god, it is embarrassing. I don't want it anywhere near the property, much less in our house. How do you tell the maker? How do you deal with that? It's very, very uncomfortable. On the other hand, more often than not, the first time we see it, as in the case of *Seven Stones*, we exploded out of our car, and we were jumping up and down with joy. It's like, "Oh my god, look at that piece! It's awesome!" And the piece we hung in the living room, on the ceiling. There have been a number of commissions that have been—

17-00:26:15

Anita Wornick: I forgot about that one.

17-00:26:16

Ron Wornick: Fabulous. I will close this with one last little memory. To answer the question I think you're seeking, which is how do you discern when it's something that needs to come into the collection. Twenty years ago, people were asking me to write little articles about that for the various magazines that we were reading among ourselves. I was very happy to do it, because I knew exactly what the list was. Except as soon as I saw it published, I cringed, because I had put three things in there that didn't belong in there and left four out. Then I realized, this is not doable. It is not knowable. It's a conceit to suggest that you can create a list that will help you instantly discern the wheat from the chaff. It is very, very elusive. But I do feel it's different for Anita and I. She's doing it from an art history instinct, which is sound, and I get there through the evolution of people's work. If you can follow somebody's evolution and see them move from craftsman simplicity to a very complex, evolved body of work, I have a better comfort level with accepting the achievement, than if I

see it as one piece in one place, and I have no idea who the maker is or anything else about it. Yet both observations are valid.

17-00:28:04

Anita Wornick: A lot of people collect what's called vertically. In other words, they find an artist, and they buy a piece. Then the artist does something else that's a little different, and they'll buy that piece. That's called vertical collecting. We don't collect that way. There's no right or wrong. Some people want to follow an artist, and they've done it very successfully. There's all different ways of collecting. Everybody's eye is different. I really do it not even from— Ron said art history, which I've studied. I've been in an art class forever. It's going to galleries, museums, studios. There used to be a class at UC Extension. The professor died. We named our group after him, and we continue. I've been looking at a lot of stuff for many, many years, but I don't have an eye. I really do not have an eye the way some people do. I can miss things easily, and I've seen it so many times in a gallery, when I've been with my group, and I've walked by and somebody will say, "Look at that, and look at that, and did you see?" I'll say, "I didn't even see that." As I said, I've missed a lot of things, unfortunately. There are some really good things that we missed because either they were out of our range, or Ron wasn't interested at the time. Like some of the Bay Area figurative artists, Bischoff and David Park, and a number of others that I really wanted to buy. Ron was in a different place in his career. It just wasn't his thing. Fortunately, all this work, we're doing together.

17-00:30:29

Cándida Smith: The way in which you work together—one of you sees a piece and says, "I like this." What's the process?

17-00:30:39

Anita Wornick: We've always—I would say 99 percent of the time—agreed. I don't think we've ever bought a piece that one of us didn't like. Or if I like something really, really, Ron would say, "Well, okay, if you like it that much." These two pieces, these ceramic pieces by Sergei Isupov—I fell in love with his work from the get-go, and Ron just couldn't see it. He really couldn't see it. I don't even know if you still see it. But finally, he agreed, and we bought that piece, and then this piece.

17-00:31:20

Cándida Smith: Let's talk about it. Isupov is his name?

17-00:31:23

Anita Wornick: Sergei Isupov.

17-00:31:24

Cándida Smith: Let's talk about those two pieces. What is it that you saw in them and what do you see now?

17-00:31:29

Anita Wornick: First of all, I loved the subject matter. I thought it was so interesting. I wanted to get into a little more cutting-edge. Not so much just organic work. The imagery, I thought, was wonderful, and the color. There are stories, which I knew, but I don't remember. That's something Ron would remember, the stories about what these two pieces are all about. I think you'd agree you didn't like his work. You may still not really like it.

17-00:32:13

Ron Wornick: Keep going.

17-00:32:18

Anita Wornick: That's it.

17-00:32:21

Cándida Smith: You can see that these are storytelling pieces, though it isn't necessarily clear what the story is.

17-00:32:28

Anita Wornick: I knew what the stories were, but since I'm seventy-five, my memory is really failing, and I can't remember. Honestly. Can you?

17-00:32:42

Ron Wornick: Just a little bit. To my eye, he has tremendous painterly talents. He clearly is a very skilled painter, and he's obviously an accomplished ceramicist. If you were to glance over your shoulder, probably, of all the pieces in this room, the masterpiece is the Peter Voulkos just behind Lisa. I'll take just a minute to tell you that that Voulkos piece is called *Isis*. Peter Voulkos died within a year or two of making that piece, and we never really got to get an interview and get to the bottom of why it was *Isis* and what it was all about. I seriously doubt he would have had much to say about it. It wasn't his nature to dwell on that part of his work. But anyway, the *Isis* story is that it's a piece of Greek mythology about a woman who was so unhappy with her husband that she chops him into countless pieces, but then is so regretful about it that she has children with each of the pieces. She makes children, somehow or other, in mythology, with each of these pieces and she has offspring. Now you go back and you revisit this piece, and stand there and put your hands on it and look around at it. You recognize that when Peter Voulkos began making his work, almost everybody in that field was working on a wheel, making various kinds of bowls and vases and teacups and teapots, and painting on them, and different kinds of glazes and what have you. He had the courage to begin to tear it apart, construct, deconstruct, whatever word you choose. Then he wood-fired them in order to add interest to colors and the textures instead of gas-firing. That piece has a subtle, complex, nuanced look to me. What is the story? I think about *Isis*. I think about the children. I think about that piece. I never quite get enough of that. I would argue that if you were trying to make a definition of what a masterpiece is about, it has the qualities of advancing the field of new ideas, of storytelling, of using ceramic in the most masterful way. It's way beyond having anything to do with kilns and crafts and turning wheels.

17-00:35:48

Anita Wornick: It's a great piece.

17-00:35:50

Ron Wornick: It's a great piece. Now we turn back around and we look at Sergei Isupov. I was uncertain. I must say. I'm still dragging my foot out of the car just a little bit. The field has not rushed to acknowledge him as a master, and he's continued to make very cutting-edge, provocative kinds of work. My hunch is that Anita's instinct will probably prove to be right. I'm not on that page yet.

17-00:36:23

Anita Wornick: I'm not so sure myself.

17-00:36:26

Ron Wornick: To come back to your original question, most of the time, we get there together. We certainly got there together on the Voulkos piece. No question.

17-00:36:34

Anita Wornick: There was no question. We walked in.

17-00:36:36

Ron Wornick: But if one of us says, "I really want that piece," we've been holding hands fifty-six years. You don't say no. So we do it. You can assume most of this collection has been mutually consented to.

17-00:37:00

Anita Wornick: There might be a wood piece. I always bow to him on that.

17-00:37:05

Cándida Smith: With the Voulkos *Isis*, you look at it. The story isn't necessarily—

17-00:37:12

Anita Wornick: Important.

17-00:37:13

Cándida Smith: The first response to it is as an object, as an abstract piece. Then the story gets added on to it. The Isupov piece, the story is—even if you don't remember what it is, you know it's important.

17-00:37:33

Anita Wornick: The thing is, by the time we bought this piece, Peter Voulkos already was acknowledged as the master. When we went to his memorial service, I can't tell you how many ceramic artists showed up and paid homage to him. He broke ground. He really did. When we walked into Ruth Braunstein's studio, it was his last show. If there was any question, it was probably the cost.

17-00:38:08

Ron Wornick: Don't go there.

17-00:38:010

Anita Wornick: It was more than we had ever spent.

17-00:38:14

Ron Wornick: It was a big number.

17-00:38:15

Anita Wornick: Yeah. *Isis* really made a huge difference, as far as I'm concerned, in our collection. Definitely. We have also collected studio furniture. Furniture made by artists. For instance, this table next to you, Richard, it's really a piece of sculpture, and it was done by a wood artist who has done all kinds of different kinds of things, objects in wood, and furniture, which is why we call it—not us, but it's acknowledged—studio furniture. This table—Judy McKie has done a lot of work in bronze. Benches. She is an artist. She is trained as an artist. I honestly forget how she evolved into doing furniture, but this is one of her pieces. I always wanted a Judy McKie table. It's an interesting story about how I got it—we got it. A friend of ours knew the man who owned the foundry over in the East Bay. He wanted to buy a house and he needed money for a down payment. He had this table, which was his, but he was willing to sell it, because he needed to raise money. I don't know, she might have made seven of these, or five. We were lucky that somebody knew that we wanted it, knew the guy, whose name I can't remember. I think he closed down the foundry. It's over in the East Bay someplace.

17-00:40:18

Ron Wornick: I'd like to add that piece you were referring to is Peter Pierabaum, so we don't leave him off the film since you've mentioned his piece.

17-00:40:26

Anita Wornick: Right, since I said Judy McKie.

17-00:40:32

Ron Wornick: He was a visiting professor at CCA. A very skilled, popular guy.

17-00:40:39

Cándida Smith: Are there other pieces you'd like to talk about?

17-00:40:42

Anita Wornick: This piece behind Lisa, the one that looks like a sarcophagus. When we bought this apartment and the decorators were conceptualizing what this room would look like, we knew we needed a piece for that wall, because you walk in the front door and you can see all the way down. We were in Portland, at a gallery, and a friend whom we were with saw this in the back room. Lots of treasures are in the back rooms of galleries for some reason. They didn't sell. Mostly that's the reason. Anyway, he said, "Come look at this." When Ron and I saw it, we knew immediately.

17-00:41:11

Cándida Smith: Who is the artist?

17-00:41:34

Anita Wornick: Jun Kaneko. He is going to be doing the sets for *The Magic Flute* next year, the 2012-13 San Francisco Opera season. A very well-known, highly-regarded

ceramic artist. He does gigantic heads. On Park Avenue, there's that big grass strip running down the middle, and—

17-00:42:07

Ron Wornick: Park Avenue, New York.

17-00:42:10

Anita Wornick: They had an exhibition, installation of his heads. Unfortunately, we missed it. We weren't in New York when that was up. He's very talented, and we've looked at his work. I don't think we have anything else by him, but that piece, I think it's iconic because it just fits there. We knew it would. It took three guys, driving down from Portland. We had to have the floor tested for the weight.

17-00:42:47

Ron Wornick: A lot of work to get it in here and not tip it over.

17-00:42:52

Anita Wornick: Some people look at it and they think it's a sarcophagus. They don't know what they're looking at. Which always upsets me.

17-00:42:58

Cándida Smith: What do you want them to see?

17-00:43:00

Anita Wornick: I want them to see that it's a work of art. Period. The end. There are people who will walk into our houses and not see a thing. They don't see it.

17-00:43:26

Rubens: How about the vessel just directly behind you?

17-00:43:28

Anita Wornick: This? Oh, Ron, you should talk. The Bill Hunter piece.

17-00:43:39

Ron Wornick: I'd be happy to. We could do thirty minutes on whether that piece, Jun Kaneko, belongs in the collection. I think he is a talented guy, and he has a lot of very good ideas, but mostly his career is based on the fact that he found an enormous kiln. Most ceramicists have to work on a kiln that you reach into, more or less. He's got a kiln you can drive into. So size is not a factor. He's figured out how to make pieces that big, and bigger, much bigger, considerably bigger. The Park Avenue piece is probably four or five times that size. He's got a lot of attention for them, and they are important. Do they meet the measure that we're dealing with in this collection?

17-00:44:45

Cándida Smith: You sound dubious.

17-00:44:46

Ron Wornick: I'm uncertain. I wouldn't want to have to decide, yet it's probably twenty years before anybody will begin to have an instinct. But I would be betting against it, I think.

17-00:44:57

Anita Wornick: I think it's historical, the same way that you walk into a museum and you see Egyptian artifacts. It's what people were doing in 3000 B.C. This is what people are doing in 2000 A.D.

17-00:45:19

Ron Wornick: It's a very contemporary reference to a sarcophagus, which is perfectly okay.

17-00:45:24

Anita Wornick: It is.

17-00:45:25

Ron Wornick: In that way, it is interesting.

17-00:45:27

Anita Wornick: His heads are really original.

17-00:45:30

Ron Wornick: They are. I grant you that.

17-00:45:32

Anita Wornick: No one has ever done anything like that.

17-00:45:34

Ron Wornick: A very quick wood thing, I put a couple pieces out here to just go steps one, two, three. This is a piece by a man named Bob Stocksdale. Bob Stocksdale was probably the first well-known, highly-regarded wood turner. He'd been a conscientious objector during the war. He ended up in the forestry service during the Second World War, and he found a lathe there and began turning wood. No art education, no art experience, no art background, but everybody who saw his pieces acknowledged that he found ways to get this profile that is exactly perfect. If you were to turn a vessel, you'll quickly see how the thickness, the size of the shoulder, the shape of the foot, how it comes to the ground, it's either right or wrong. If it's wrong, it looks amateurish.

17-00:46:46

Anita Wornick: Did he always object to being called an artist?

17-00:46:48

Ron Wornick: He did. He never wanted to talk about art. All of his work was done in his basement in Berkeley, under a light bulb with a string. His work went up from the hundreds to the thousands to the tens of thousands, because he was acknowledged to be important. But in the fifties, sixties, and into the seventies, bowls, bowls, bowls turning. This is what it was all about. Hundreds, possibly thousands, now tens of thousands of people have a lathe in

their garage, and they make bowls. In the case of Stocksdale, his bowls have historic significance, and they really are beautiful.

Anyway, all of these pieces are spinning. But see what happens, ten or fifteen years later, we now have a piece being made by Bud Latven. He also has pretty good skill at shape, but look what he's done here. He's now stack laminated. This piece of wood was a flat board. This thin piece was another one. This is another one. There are two or three in here. Then this piece in here is spalted, which means it was slightly decayed by fungus, which is very good. These are natural holes that occurred from the decay in the wood, which is an interesting feature. He started to include that as an art addition, if you will. You don't need the pristine perfection anymore. These little things are interesting. But look what happens over here. He takes this void in the wood right through four levels of wood with his own hand. You could say this might have been natural from what was existing in the wood, but when it goes up here and cuts through here and here and here, and into here, you know he's done that with his own hand. That's not decay, because this board decayed separately from these little boards. He's painted it on the inside. He's pushing the boundaries. He's making you stop and look at this thing and think about it, look inside of it.

17-00:49:31

Anita Wornick: Who did you say made that?

17-00:49:32

Ron Wornick: Bud Latven.

17-00:49:33

Anita Wornick: Oh, I would never have thought that.

17-00:49:37

Ron Wornick: From here to here is maybe ten or fifteen years. You were asking about this piece. That's William Hunter. His studio was, in years when he was doing this, just outside of Yosemite. The piece on the far right, Lisa, if you could pan your camera over there, on the same shelf, was where he began. What made him come to attention—because there are hundreds of people working in the field professionally—what brought him to everybody's attention was that he was doing that with a hand-sanding device on a wheel. He marked it off with a pencil, and then he would stand there for endless hours, making that all happen. If you go up to it and look closely at it, even though it has a repeating pattern, it has a handmade quality, which is very wonderful. If you were to pick it up, you'd say, oh, this is really gorgeous, and I'd like to have that. It would take too long to do it right now, but from that piece, in the next five or so years, he began to make exactly that piece, but he went all the way through the opening so that it began to open up into spaces between those ribs. One of those pieces went to the museum show. It's in the catalog I'm going to leave with you. Then he let go of that shape and he moved up to this shape, where he actually invites the wood to move. This has actually been made, and

then it continues to actually change shape a little bit, because the wood has enough torque in it that it's actually assuming its own lifestyle. We were talking about, when I look at a piece, I like to know where it is in a progression of work. In his case, even though I settled on him early, we continue to collect him, because his work was evolving. It was growing, and it was getting better. He's something of a poet, and a very, very thoughtful guy. It's very evocative in a way that talks to me. I put him high, in maybe the top ten or twelve makers in wood.

Moving on to the next level, in the subsequent years. Here in the bottom now, we have two pieces side-by-side that were done by Todd Hoyer. Todd Hoyer is one of the most creative of all the wood guys, and this one and this piece are his, the two little pieces on the bottom. This is another Todd Hoyer piece, from the back of our first catalog. If you can see the difference between this story, highly polished on the back, that piece, and that piece, which is very tightly wound with wire.

Still Todd Hoyer. Then look at this piece with the great big burned "X" in it. Without my trying to put words or thoughts in your mind, I hope you would agree that he's conveying an emotion. He's telling you something. I don't want to put words in his mouth, but if he was sitting here, he would help me. You know that this was a time when there were some problems in his life, and he was actually in a separation. His head comes out in his work. The reason I'm taking the time to walk you through this is I believe that we've come a very long way. The field is matured, maturing. Incidentally, I completely agree with Anita that it is a continuum. I don't know where it's going to go. How could I possibly? Is it a continuum from thousands of years? Yes, of course, everything is. I do think that there's been a twenty-to-thirty year vertical blip in this curve, a significant creativeness blip in this curve, that is worth noting, and that's what we're talking about. the adventure going on in wood, in the very short version.

17-00:55:09

Cándida Smith: Anita, when you look at these pieces, what do you see?

17-00:55:14

Anita Wornick: I look at them, and I love them. I like the shape. They're beautiful objects. I understand the evolution because I've heard Ron speak about it so many times. I know what he's talking about.

17-00:55:37

Cándida Smith: It's the individual pieces that move you.

17-00:55:40

Anita Wornick: Definitely. As opposed to the evolution, which really speaks to him. Not that he doesn't like beautiful objects. He certainly does.

17-00:56:22

Ron Wornick: Just sitting here, I'm thinking of two pieces that come quickly to mind. Just down the hall, you will have passed a piece by David Nash, a tall piece against the wall that was a chainsaw work. You can very quickly feel that you're in the woods in a windstorm and the rain. I've forgotten what it's called, if it has a name that says that, but that's what it's about.

17-00:56:50

Anita Wornick: It might be in here.

17-00:56:57

Ron Wornick: Working in wood has become way more sculptural. The fact that so many people started on a lathe was just an accident of power tools, I think. The availability of this wonderful tool that you could plug in the wall and take a chunk of wood and reduce it down to something interesting in a matter of hours was very appealing to a lot of people. Today, it's still a huge hobby, like watercolors and oil painting. Most art forms are broadly based, and only a few people emerge at the very peak as a gifted maker.

17-00:57:37

Anita Wornick: It's really too bad that we couldn't do this in St. Helena, too, because as I'm looking through our catalog, there are so many pieces, and they're so interesting. We could talk and talk and talk about them. I forgot what a terrific collection we have.

17-00:58:20

Rubens: You're reading from the catalog?

17-00:58:22

Anita Wornick: I'm looking just at the photographs of the exhibition that was at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

17-00:58:31

Rubens: *Shy Boy*.

17-00:58:32

Ron Wornick: Oh, *Shy Boy*.

17-00:58:34

Anita Wornick: *Shy Boy*, *She Devil*, and *Isis*.

17-00:58:36

Ron Wornick: That speaks to Richard's question about being about something. *Shy Boy* really is about his own confession. It's a drawing and a sculpture, a glass sculpture, that speaks of his own—

17-00:58:49

Anita Wornick: Personality.

17-00:58:54

Ron Wornick: He needs a little help. He's shy and he knows it. He's actually buried a bottle of wine in his chest in the sculpture.

17-00:59:04

Anita Wornick: He calls the David Nash piece *Downpour*.

17-00:59:09

Cándida Smith: You said you don't have art advisors.

17-00:59:12

Anita Wornick: No.

17-00:59:13

Cándida Smith: But you must have curators and art historians that you are friends with and you talk to?

17-00:59:22

Anita Wornick: We've endowed a curator of contemporary decorative arts at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It's a field that museums were really not paying much attention to, but they are now. Some major museums, like the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. I'm sure there are a couple of others.

17-00:59:47

Ron Wornick: Emily Zilber is the Wornick Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts, MFA Boston. Her task is to explain what we're trying to explain to you to the rest of the world. She'll be doing it long after we're gone. She's a very young, very competent lady. That's what we're hoping for.

17-01:00:12

Anita Wornick: I'm really impressed with this collection. After a while, when you walk around your own homes, it's almost like wallpaper. You see it, but it's when people come and you start talking about it, you say, wow! Then you remember where you were when you bought it.

[End Audio File 17]

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18-00:00:00

Cándida Smith: We can't cover the whole collection, but what I'd like to get is how the pieces feel to you and what they mean to you. It would be very boring to go piece by piece and say—

18-00:00:32

Anita Wornick: I couldn't do it, really.

18-00:00:37

Ron Wornick: I'm not going to propose that, but I will tell you that the most interesting, maybe successful, thing we've done is—I don't remember the years. Probably twenty years ago. This first wood show traveled to a little town in Texas,

where I had a factory. The local TV station sent out a young woman to do a little interview. Before the opening, I was just roaming around. She took me in and asked, would I walk through and talk about it? She picked pieces that interested her, and I stood at each piece and told her some little story about how we found the artist or the piece, or why we acquired the piece. That video got played practically to erasure. When the show went to New York, they set up a room and played that video over and over and over. People sat and watched it multiple times. Because for most people, it's the same thing as going through a museum without a docent or a curator and then doing it with somebody who knows what they're looking at. You see in a way you would never have seen it before. We have this experience all the time, especially at MFA. They have spectacular exhibitions. I walk through, and I see some old guy sitting in a chair with a beard. I think, that's a nice picture. Then the docent shows me that I've been missing everything in the picture. Take a look at his shoelaces or whatever. This tells you this, and that, and that, and so on.

To get people interested in this field, which is to say to get more people working in it, making in it, studying in it, teaching in it, opening galleries in it, buying the work and displaying it, collecting, mounting museum shows, all of that, what we need to do is nourish the appetite of the market somehow. The only way you can do that is to— It's like selling cars in a way. You need to stand in front of a piece. One particular piece is coming to mind, and I'll wrap up with this. Anita and I were in a gallery on the East Coast where we bought the fiber piece, the Korean lady.

18-00:03:32

Anita Wornick: We were at SOFA in Chicago. Snyderman.

18-00:03:39

Ron Wornick: It was Snyderman. The Rick Snyderman Gallery, and there was a long fiber piece that was clearly a lady. We both liked it a lot. The woman who'd made it was a few feet away. This captivatingly sweet lady, who just was that kind of Asian woman who does not require much air or space and speaks in a very soft voice, keeps her eyes just kind of not straight at you. She had a very, very vulnerable way of presenting herself. The question was, tell us about this piece. What is it about? It's about a ten or twelve-foot-long woman with very, very long legs and very, very long arms hanging straight down, and a head that's tilted back, looking up into the sky. The artist recited the story of her last year or two as having negotiated with her parents over a considerable period of time to be able to get the right to leave home and come to the U.S. and study art. Her parents did not think that was a good idea. She was a single woman, coming to the U.S. The whole thing was almost a shame, if not maybe an embarrassment for the family. She was very troubled about keeping her parents' trust. In addition to that, she was having to deal with keeping the car running, making rent payments, medical bills.

18-00:05:43

Anita Wornick: She told you all this?

18-00:05:44

Ron Wornick: Yes. And more importantly, finding her voice as a maker. Because she knew she would have to find some direction to go with her work. Even with a piece, once you start it, it takes you on a trail and you can go piece to piece to piece to piece, but you have to get a progression. Now you turn back to the piece, and you see this woman torn by obligations to family, to herself, to find her voice as a maker of art, expressed in this piece. You would not know that if you just looked at it and walked past it. You would say, I've never seen a piece like that, but I don't think I like it, or I do like it, or whatever. But if you could see her or if somebody told you the story better than I've just done, learn what the piece is about, that's a precious piece. It belongs in our collection for that reason. I'm certain of it. It comes back to concept again. It's not just about craftsmanship. It's about the making of a story, telling of something cerebral that is beyond your skill as a maker.

18-00:06:59

Cándida Smith: Anita, for you, did you need to have all that background in order to appreciate that particular piece?

18-00:07:04

Anita Wornick: No. It makes it a little more interesting to know the background. I don't know that Ron needed to know that, necessarily. We would have bought it whether you met her or not. This was a big art fair where the galleries come who show this work, the kind of work that we collect. A number of people wanted that piece. Of course, it had already been sold. That's another thing, by the way, about collecting. If you travel with people who collect what you collect, there's a little competition, which is fun. Who's going to get there first? I've seen people practically step on people to get into the gallery first. There is a little competition. It's like somebody saying, I have three Gerhard Richters, or some hot artist. There's a bit of the chase involved when you go to these big art fairs. Not when you're just going to a gallery by yourselves.

[End of Interview]