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Oral history interview with Wesley C. Wehr, 1983 May 26-September 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Wesley Wehr on May 26, July 29 & September 22, 1983. The interview took place in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Martha Kingsbury for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DATE: MAY 26, 1983
[Tape 1]

[WESLEY WEHR had prepared much of the following material prior to the interview session.]

[Some playful exchange regarding taping procedures before interview officially begins.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wes, why don't we begin by talking about your early years, where you grew up and then when you began to meet painters and other visual artists.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, all right. I was born in Everett, Washington, in 1929. My parents packed up and we moved immediately out of Everett, moved to Seattle. I went to the usual grade schools and high school, Queen Anne High School, and in January of 1947 I started as a freshman at the University of Washington, enrolled in the music department, ostensibly as a music composition major. I had-- let's see, shortly after that, let's see, '47-- the typical liberal arts education, taking some cultural anthropology from Erna Gunther. There was nothing particularly unusual about the education at that point. Around 19, let's see, my music composition teacher was Lockrem Johnson, the composer. I had started studying informally with him, studied piano with him officially, in the music department for credit. Lockrem at that time was certainly one of the most talented and successful of the musicians in this area. He was a very close friend and protege of Berthe Poncy Jacobson. My introduction into the arts of this area was actually quite accidental. Lockrem had been coaching Mark Tobey, the painter, in music composition at that time. Lockrem had been introduced to Tobey through their mutual friend, Berthe Poncy Jacobson. Well, in the summer of 1949, Lockrem went back to Tanglewood to study with Messiaen, the French composer, and that meant that Tobey wouldn't have anyone to give him assignments and keep an eye on him, musically. So Mrs. Jacobson unexpectedly suggested that it might be an interesting idea to have me tutor Mr. Tobey in music composition that summer.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I never knew that! That's great.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, well, which is really silly. Lockrem would be back in the fall and then he could repair any damage which I had meanwhile done to Mr. Tobey musically. So that seemed agreeable to everyone. Mrs. Jacobson decided that she would take me to Tobey's house on Brooklyn Northeast, Northwest?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Northeast.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the U [University--Ed.] District.

WESLEY WEHR: Northwest, how can there be Northeast Street in the Northwest?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This is the Northeast; Northwest is over in Ballard.

WESLEY WEHR: But this is Northwest art. I'm [very, very sneaky]. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you digress?

WESLEY WEHR: Sorry.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Are you saying then that you didn't have training in the visual arts in grade school and high school that mattered to you?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, good heavens, no.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You probably had early training in music?

WESLEY WEHR: No, my training was entirely in music. I didn't have any particular talent for painting, whatsoever. I was just as hack as anybody else.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! So she took you up to Brooklyn?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, she took me to Lockrem's, no to Tobey's place. We went in; Tobey was very nice. He immediately did everything he could to make me feel at ease; he went and brought some coffee to me, of all things, and Mrs. Jacobson started talking with Tobey so that I wouldn't feel that I had to say anything. Immediately, Mrs. Jacobson, to make things easy, just started talking to Tobey as one would talk to an old friend, asking him what he had painted recently, and would he show us his new works.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now, at this point did you know Tobey by reputation, so that it was intimidating, or potentially intimidating?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, it was only... It could have been, but, no, I've never particularly been intimidated by famous people. In high school...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was he someone who seemed famous, then? Or was he just someone you didn't know?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, gosh, yeah. No, he was already legendary.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay. That's what I wondered.

WESLEY WEHR: Morris Graves was very famous. Tobey was famous in a different way, but in the music department my teachers, the musicians, were very aware of Tobey. Tobey, being an amateur musician himself, had many friends among musicians.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: One digression there. Many young painters would like to meet Tobey and they would say, "Well, I'm a young artist," and Tobey would often be a little standoffish, because as he put it, most young artists really wanted to show Tobey their work and then hope that he'd say that they were unrecognized geniuses, and that he'd dash off a recommendation for a Guggenheim, and that'd be the end of it. If Tobey was a little remote to young artists, it was just that he liked them if they were serious and wanted to, you know, be friends with him, but he... So often the reasons young painters came were basically rather avaricious and not very flattering. They liked his reputation and thought, well maybe he'll proclaim them geniuses. And Tobey hated this sort of thing. He thought painting was something that you worked very hard at.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And he was already troubled by this sort of thing when you met him in '49?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, of course, he loathed this idea of instant success. And he was very short with anyone who didn't work hard and realize that painting is lots of work and a very slow thing. He was very critical of Morris Graves at that time for the reason that Morris would go around saying, "Oh, we shall transcend painting," or "You have to resist painting until you can't anymore." Well, this just sent Tobey through the ceiling. Morris was making a mystique out of not working.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: This became very attractive to different young artists because you could go and visit Morris and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And it all sounded so easy, and...

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, it sounded so wonderful!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...exalted...

WESLEY WEHR: You could all be terribly sensitive together and transcend painting.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Morris, by this time, lived up north. Is that right? In '49 he was out there?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, Woodway Park [near Edmonds--Ed.] What I'm doing here for a moment is to explain that when I first started meeting artists, notably Tobey and Graves, I realized instantly that I was confronted by two drastically different types of artists. Morris, brilliant, he had already behind him a sizeable body of work, he had worked like blazes for many years. But Morris had a tremendous charisma, a powerful personality, which was very attractive to young people; they admired his confidence, his magnetism and all of that. But if you went to see-- and Morris would be very flattering with artists-- he'd...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh really?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, gosh, yeah. Very generous; he'd say that's a beautiful painting. So Morris automatically, though he was quite sincere in his enthusiasm, he would attract people because they loved the idea that he'd praise them so much, and so receptive.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they feel, did these people often feel themselves to be his disciples and admirers rather than, say, his students? He didn't actually coach or take students?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, no, no. Morris simply didn't teach; he might occasionally make a comment on a painting, but... That was very interesting because I was simultaneously showing paintings of my own. When I started painting, accidentally, in around Christmas, 1960, well, I had the advantage of being able to show the works informally to Tobey and to Morris Graves. And that was an interesting education.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In what way? It clarified their differences further?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Well, it certainly did. I would take a painting to Tobey, a landscape, he would look at the sky and say, "Now, this area is dead. Nothing happens. Now, look at a Cezanne; when you move across the sky, it changes, there are different tints. It's an active plane. And when you move across the sky in a Cezanne, it's a journey; you go someplace. But in your blue sky, nothing happens, and nature is very active, but you have none of the variation and activity of nature in your sky; you just have a dead blue plane." And Mark would be rather technical; he'd say, "Well, put in some yellow, and vary the color here, and wake up this plane; it's dead." The next day Morris would come in to my room and I'd have the painting, the very same painting on the wall, and he'd walk over and he'd look at it, and say, "Well, it's obviously very lovely, Wes." And there'd be a pause, and I'd think, "Oh, oh, now what's he up to." And he'd look at me and he'd say, "I don't know why, but I keep waiting for a bird to fly across that sky." (chuckles) Well, this is, I thought, "Uh-uh, this is very interesting. Tobey and Graves are making about the same point." Tobey makes it in a sort of academic, teacher way. Morris makes it by inference. Morris is very sly; he makes a comment about a bird, and if you're on your toes you realize it isn't just a whimsical remark, it's a painter's remark. And on another occasion, Morris looked at a seascape I had. The water was rather tranquil. Tobey would have said, "Well, you know, it's too uniform. Do something about it." Morris [is] looking at that painting, saying, "Well, again, it's very lovely, but I don't know I wait to see an Indian in a canoe going across it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that kind of remark was not really a remark about subject matter; it was a remark about the painting needing something.

WESLEY WEHR: Not at all _____, yeah. Morris was commenting on a plastic deficiency of the work, but doing it in a sort of off-hand way.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, then, and in a way that a lot of young people would have missed.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. But that is the interesting thing about Morris; he said his points that could be taken as criticisms very lightly. I'm going to digress again, for a moment. When Susanne Langer, the philosopher, was studying cello, she said that many years ago her teacher said to her, "Susanne, you're simultaneously my best student and my worst student. You're my best student because you only have to be told once; and you're my worst student because you even have to be told at all." And, well, that was a pretty heavy comment. I think in the case of Morris Graves commenting on pictures, he would make the comment just

obscure and oblique enough that, it'd be sort of a word to the wise should be sufficient.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: And Morris'd also have a way of seemingly complimenting you, but if you're hopelessly deluded and vain, you'd say, "Oh, Morris really complimented me." But if you had at all any marbles left, or wits about you, you'd realize that the compliment was rather double-edged.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: So, I told Morris, finally, one time I thought he was a terribly good art teacher, and he looked a little annoyed. He said, "I'm not an art teacher." I said, "Then why have I learned so much from you?" Well, I'd just started, I've jumped over a whole stretch here, and sort of around 1961, here, but I'd like to pursue this because there's not apt to be much record of this sort of thing, these comments on painting from Morris.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay. Go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, yeah. I think it's worthwhile to say specifically what kinds of comments I've had from Morris.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, can we set the scene a little bit? If we're talking about 1960 and '61 and you're beginning to paint, now Morris is living where?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, gosh. Where is he?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is he up on the island now, in his own house?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, no, no.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [Has he, have you] changed scenes?

WESLEY WEHR: My! Oh, oh. 'Cause I'm talking presently about a stretch from 1961 into the mid sixties.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where are you seeing Morris? And how often?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, he's in and out of town, he's...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

WESLEY WEHR: He comes to Seattle for a while.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He went to Ireland in the fifties.

WESLEY WEHR: Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now, and by the sixties, he's essentially gone from this area.

WESLEY WEHR: That's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: California...

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, that's right. California and all of that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, well, oh for one thing, he's building his house in California, in Loleta.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And so you would see him when he came to town here?

WESLEY WEHR: That's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or would you go down there and visit, too?

WESLEY WEHR: I went down once to stay with him there, but I would see him when he'd come to Seattle and check in at the University Towers, Meany Hotel.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, and Tobey has left the area?

WESLEY WEHR: Tobey's in and out. He comes here during the summers, and then he goes back to Basel, Switzerland.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

WESLEY WEHR: So, there's one stretch where Tobey is half here and half in Switzerland.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, okay. Now I'm situated.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Go on with what you were saying.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. Just some things I would like to record. One time Morris comes in, and I have on the wall a painting that I just had framed, and he looks at it, and he says, "Oh, this is a very good frame; I never noticed it." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that let you know?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, he said, "A good picture frame is one that you don't notice; it doesn't get in the way of the picture." Okay. Well, this was Morris's specialty; he had his own way of making a seemingly casual remark that sticks. He doesn't make a polemic out of it; he just sort of drops it and then walks away from it. I'm trying to think, one time, I'm showing pictures to Tobey, and again it's technical. He finds one area where the paint is too thick, and he says, "Well, Wes, you've interrupted the tension of the picture plane; I think you should scrape this paint down a little. My eye, when it looks at the painting, this area sticks out too much; it's like a bad note. It's like when I'm trying to play Schuman and I break the legato and the note is abrasive." And so Tobey, since he and I both have a background in music, is constantly making musical analogies, like, "Now this whole picture is very impressionistic. It glows in a certain way, but this one area interrupts it, much as a musician breaks the tone in his performance of..." It's easy for me to follow Tobey's comments, because he was very comfortable in translating into musical terms. Morris is still being very cryptic. He walks in and I have a painting of eastern Washington. He looks at it, and it's his usual highly supportive enthusiasm. "Oh, that's very nice; that's real sagebrush in the foreground!" And I think, "Oh, oh, here we go again. What's he up to?" And then Morris turns and kind of looks at me in that quizzical way like, "Well, I'll try this on him." And he says, "Well, now, you know, Wes, when I look at the picture and I look at this painting in the foreground say sagebrush, I've named it. And whenever I'm able to name something, I'm through with it, and it's over."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So some unnameable and ineffable, the fact was the design _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. Yeah. See, Morris says, "I like better the paintings where you suggest the sagebrush, but in this it looks like sagebrush, all right, too much." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. He was quite specific.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. So, okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Tobey's commentaries frequently lead to further discussion between you and Tobey, and did Morris's usually preclude real discussion? You had to think over what he said, and make what you would of it?

WESLEY WEHR: Umm, I was bouncing between showing paintings to both of them, very interested in this. They were both very supportive. Tobey was never extravagent toward a young painter in encouragement; he just, he might say something like, "That's a very nice painting; I like it," or, "That interests me," or... He simply, if he liked a thing, or you did something that caught his fancy or he could feel an affection for, that was very encouraging. He might say, "Well, I've been thinking about what you've been doing, and I think you have a genuine feel for nature; I think you should go on with it. I think you have a feel for landscape that I find convincing, so don't rest on your laurels; get back to work, now."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were you studying painting seriously, or was it...?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, gosh, I was just painting for my own amusement.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was music still your primary interest, then?

WESLEY WEHR: I was trying to compose, but I had become so self-conscious with music that it was falling apart completely. I couldn't compose anything. I'd been thoroughly trained in music, and then I'd had this rigid three-year training with Theodore Roetke in poetry.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: While you were still enrolled at the university?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, uh huh. See, what happened was in music I got to the point of having so much technique and methodology in my head, that the impulsive and the intuitive just couldn't survive. The training under Roetke had been marvelous, but again I became self-conscious. Well, by the time I started painting, which was just an accident, I thought, well, I've been scorched twice; I don't want to learn how to paint. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you refused to become seriously trained in the way you have been.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I just, I thought, well, I just want to paint without a procedure, without buying a book, or studying formally; I just want to stay faithful to certain experiences in nature and temperament, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you've hung onto that? Because you continue to paint.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. I just, I was so ambivalent about the so-called technical, classical training. I think Arp one time said we spend ten years learning all of this, and the next fifty years trying to forget it; something like that. Go ahead.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I was going to ask at what point you began to make your living doing paleobotany?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I don't get any money from paleobotany at all.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh. Okay. This maybe shouldn't need to be part of the record, but I'm trying to sort out your parallel interests.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, no, no. I think this is very funny. I'm glad you brought it up.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That, too, is a response to nature, of a sort, but very different from your painting.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. I sound a little snide and smart-ass, but people will say, well, you're doing two very unrelated things; you're painting and you're collecting fossils, and backpacking. And I thought, well, what makes you think they're so unrelated. The thing that I find unrelated to painting is being a social creature in the art world; I think that gets very far away from art. I can't, if anyone tries to...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're not alone thinking that, either.

WESLEY WEHR: If anyone tells me that digging into a hillside and finding the most beautiful fossil leaves in the world -- kinds that send Guy Anderson clapping his hands like we should be so inventive -- if anyone tries to tell me that that sort of thing has nothing to do with art, I'm not going to buy it. But I really felt, and I don't want to sound sarcastic and defensive, that when one wants to use painting as a way of becoming a somebody, then I think one gets a little away from art. There's a matter of being a good painter, and there's the matter of being a local burgermaster, or a celebrity, or "a legend in your own time," whatever you want to call it. I find no way of getting around the fact that becoming well-known or talked about is, oh, somewhat theatrical, not entirely accidental. Or, Yeats, "One must choose perfection of the life or of the work." To go back to where we were a few minutes ago, the reason that Tobey didn't have a certain kind of following was that he wasn't very generous in flattering one. He'd say, "That's a nice painting, but stop goofing off," and "You don't know how to draw!"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! He laid it on the line!

WESLEY WEHR: Well, if one was young and insecure, the last thing you wanted to be told is that you were lazy and, if you had any delusions about being a great painter, you better learn how to draw a good line and mix paint. Now I'm going to jump around, but I think the pieces will gradually fit together.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let me ask you a couple more things before you jump away from this. The paintings that you've been talking about showing to Tobey and Morris, in the early sixties. Were those very small, like the things I know of your work, or were...?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh sure.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And second clarification, when did your responsiveness to landscape, which is what you've said was at the heart of your art, also take the form of digging up fossils? When did you become conscious of that other approach?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. Always, all of my life-- beachcombing, my grandparents place on the beach, with my parents going collecting agates. My parents and I were rockhounds. So I had a perfectly normal Northwest life. Living here, one has a high probability of being a rockhound.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. Was it a long time, though, before you spent much time east of the mountains, before you became aware of fossils?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. This is something I, all of this is something we can go into later, because the transition into being what you call a paleobotanist has a lot to do with meeting Joe Goldberg, the painter.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, maybe we should say that...

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, this we have to say because that's a very important friendship...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it's not important for the things you're describing now in the early _____. That's what I wanted to know.

WESLEY WEHR: No. He comes much later. Several things I want to add at this point. One is to go back to Morris. Tobey would be very nice and say, "Well, you have a real feel for landscape. You've gotta work!" Then he'd shortly say, "I think you should study Cezanne." And then he'd come back a few more days later at Manning's coffee shop and say, "I've been thinking about that; I don't think Cezanne's for you after all." And then he'd say, "Your color's a little stingy; maybe you should look at Nolde."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No Nolde! (chuckles)

WESLEY WEHR: "And go a little crazy, wild, with color; don't be so stingy." So Tobey was trying to think of good advice to give me, and then I'd see him a few days later, and he'd say, "Well, I tried to give you some advice, but I'm not so sure that it's right for you." And then he'd say, "You're an odd duck; I just don't know what to do with you." So finally, Mark had me get together a body of work and leave them at the house and he was going to look over a lot of things, and think about it, and then say something the next day. So I lugged up to his house a whold bunch of paintings and drawings and left them overnight in his dining room. I guess I was being, what, inspected. (chuckles) So, the next day I met Mark and we started up the alley behind his studio, and he was very serious, and he said, "Well, I've been looking at your paintings; I rather like them. They're off to a nice start, but I must tell you, if you're thinking of becoming a painter, there are 5,000 painters alone in New York, and 10,000 in Paris. And you've gotta realize what you're up against, if you want to be a painter. Because nothing's guaranteed. There are lots of good painters. The competition is terrible. I'm not saying that originality is necessary, but the fact is we live in a time when, if you're not original, you're lost; originality is very important in our time.

[Tape 2]
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WESLEY WEHR: Tobey decided that I should, if I wanted, go on painting, but he felt it was his sacred duty to explain that I was going into an activity that was not a gravy train, or-- if I chose to be a painter, I was asking for trouble.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was he asserting something about the need for originality? Was he advising you to hunt for your own originality?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, he was saying that to survive as an artist, the nature of our times is such that originality is very important. We didn't live in a society or culture where excellence

was all. You had to have something that was your own, a temperament, a style. And I think Herbert Reed had said about the same thing, that for better or worse in Western painting, art has become somewhat autonomous. You say this is a good Braque, that is a bad Braque, and an artist is judged by the relative merits of his own work, he becomes a closed system.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right. Braques are judged in terms of their Braqueness.

WESLEY WEHR: That's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And Tobeys are judged in terms of their Tobeyness.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. And so Tobey took the Fifth Amendment on whether this was admirable or not. He said it's simply a fact of our society.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It just is.

WESLEY WEHR: So he had to explain very quickly that I stepped into a thing that was fiercely competitive and all of that. Well, I appreciated his concern, but I just said, "Well, Mark, I don't really care about that very much; I happen to enjoy painting and I'm not feeling very competitive anyway. Even if you told me I didn't have any talent whatsoever, I enjoy painting so much I think I'd go on doing it even if you told me to stop." And he just stopped and looked at me and started laughing, and he said, "Well! You would defy me if I told you you had no talent, and went on doing it? Why?" [WESLEY WEHR:] "Because I enjoy doing it, and I don't know what's good for me but I know that I enjoy doing it." So he just let out a snort, and said, "Well, okay." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A snort!

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He hadn't encountered this among all the sycophants who wanted to make their careers.

WESLEY WEHR: Yes. He didn't give me any compliments, but he gave me a wonderful kind of affectionate vote of confidence. No compliments, but if I had a problem he'd look at me and say, "Well, I had the same kind of problem when I was your age, but it didn't kill me, and it's not going to kill you.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's nice.

WESLEY WEHR: I think what makes me very sad talking of Tobey is that he's been turned into an Egyptian pharoah. He's been turned into all kinds of thingamabobs. And the Tobey I remember was very dear; he was a lot of fun. I would stay with him and I had so much fun with him. For people who didn't know him, and there's going to be fewer and fewer of us all the time, Tobey is simply going to be taken over by distance and time, and it's...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you elaborate on what you mean by "He's been made into a pharoah."?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, well, what I mean is Tobey at one time I think wanted to be a preacher. And he was a good actor; he was in plays at Cornish. He wrote and read very eloquent poetry. So in one sense he had sort of the gift of theater, and he could be oracular, he could play the role of being Mark Tobey to the hilt. And was very good at it. But he also had that sort of, "Well, now I don't have to be Mark Tobey," and he could drop the whole thing and then he was simply, you know, a lot of fun. There was no generation gap. Let's see, I think he, yeah, he was 40 years older than I but I didn't feel the distance in terms of Tobey being authoritarian or a father symbol. I only felt it in that he had lived for a long time. And he seemed so wonderfully human to me. He could jump over the 40- year distance with a wonderful kind of, oh, "I was where you are, once, and I know what it's like, so cheer up."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: So, he never spoke from a kind of cold mountain top, you know; he could sort of be where you were as a kid.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And this, is this that you're commenting on now also a contrast with Morris Graves? Like you say Tobey could stop playing the role of Tobey. Did Morris Graves

play a kind of role of being Morris Graves?

WESLEY WEHR: (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which he never stopped playing?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, oh, oh. Well. That's a good question; I can think of a number of ways to answer it. Oh God help me. (chuckles) The burning question there, at that time in the early fifties, through the fifties, for instance, the most tiresome question on University Way was, "Is Morris still painting?" And it was incredible. Tobey, of course, painted all the time, so everyone knew that he was painting. But Morris had had that incredible fame and then once Morris became famous he had all this attention on him. And I don't see how he could paint anything because, like Tobey said, "A watched pot never boils." On every side it was, "Is Mr. Graves painting? What are the paintings like?" If I were Graves I would have hated to paint because of, there was some thing like once having painted he was to go on forever getting better and greater, and it was wicked! It was, I think...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was it oppressive to him? Could you tell?

WESLEY WEHR: Well...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he resent it, or play off certain characteristics against it?

WESLEY WEHR: Hmm, that's a good question. I never asked him, "Are you still painting?" One time we were driving to Eureka. We were going through the redwood forest, and I said, "Morris, I have a confession to make to you, dear." He said, "What's that, Wes?" I said, "I don't give a damn if you ever paint another picture; there are other things about you I like too." And he looked at me and just cracked up and said, "You don't care if I ever paint again?" I said, "No, I'm sorry." (laughs) And he just...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And could you tell if he liked that?

WESLEY WEHR: He liked it enormously.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Good.

WESLEY WEHR: And one time when he was staying here at the Plestcheeff [Gwendolyn--Ed.] mansion on Capitol Hill -- he'd rented that briefly -- and I went up to see him, that would be about, ooh, 1964, I think, somewhere in there. I walked in and I was having coffee with him, and Morris said, "Well, Wes, I have been painting lately, in case you are interested." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: You know I don't want to...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So he could be ironic and self-conscious _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. He says, "Now I don't know if you're interested in my activities as a painter, but I thought I would mention that I have been working. And actually I've been working in the room right next door, where we're sitting..."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So naturally, you were to go see.

WESLEY WEHR: "And I've been thinking that maybe you'd like to see what I've been working on." And I looked at him. Morris said, "But on the other hand, you know, I'm a terrible prima donna. Unless I can be absolutely sure that seeing these new works, you were just going to break down weeping uncontrollably at how beautiful they are, I don't think I could take it. And I've got to tell you they're not that good, so I'm not going to show them to you." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And he didn't?

WESLEY WEHR: And he didn't. So, what Morris was trying to say...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's like the Morris other people have told me about.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So Morris was just saying, "You know, I don't want to show you something unless I know you're going to be swept away by it, and they're not all that good,

so let's go on just having our coffee and talking about other things." I think what happened to Morris-- unfortunately his intense privacy made people more and more interested in him. Morris got into a vicious circle having so many people interested in him because he was allegedly such a private person.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And this became a spiral that fed on itself?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, it was very destructive. Consequently, if he painted anything, it would be like, you know, the second coming. God knows what people wanted.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: If he was to show up with a new show, the expectations would be insane.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think this was destructive not only to his relationships with the community, but destructive to his own state of mind in his work?

WESLEY WEHR: That's a good question. I would have to think about that; I'm not sure, but it's a very good question. I think where Tobey was more fortunate was he lived on University Way so he was taken for granted. There was no brownie points in seeking him out on a mountaintop because there was Tobey in the Market [Pike Place--Ed.], at a concert. He was so accessible that his privacy was the fact that you didn't seek him out because he was so available. But on Sunday afternoons, everyone drove out to Woodway Park to see Morris, thinking he might be lonely, and it was absolutely ridiculous. You'd find Betty Willis, Stanley Kunitz, Carolyn Kizer, Guy Anderson. Everybody was out to visit Morris in his vast solitude.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: It was about at that point, seeing Phil McCracken and other artists that I thought if you want privacy, live in the city.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There's a lot to that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, be absolutely available. Then nobody'll bother you. If you want to be horribly distracted, move to a beautiful place, and everybody will come out and try to invade your solitude.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And yet his original choice, Morris's original choice to live outside the city was made because he did prefer solitude. Is that right?

WESLEY WEHR: Probably. But on the other hand he would show up at my room in the early fifties, just saying, "I can't stand it at Woodway Park. The silence is driving me crazy. I drove into town and put on a jacket, and I'll take you out for some pastry."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Some ambivalence on his part.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What about the Morris Graves people would tell me about who was a prankster, a social...

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, God help us. (laughs) Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was that a true side of his character?

WESLEY WEHR: Yes, absolutely.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did it persist?

WESLEY WEHR: When Ray Kass started to do the Morris Graves book, some four years ago, he came here and Morris had given him a list of people to look up. And so I met Ray Kass at the Boiserie [Burke Museum Cafe]. We had coffee and we started working together on going around town looking at Graves' works. So I saw a great deal of Ray Kass when he was here that summer staying at Marshall Hatch's house and interviewing people. We went to see Guy Anderson and all that. So Ray Kass had great cooperation from Morris; he had known him for many years and had many conversations as a friend. I've just gotten the Ray Kass catalogue on the Graves show, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I've seen it; I saw it in New York.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. And I'm very happy about it. A few people have said, "Well, some of the color reproductions aren't good enough." You know, for God's sakes, what do you want? I just have had it with people who want to show that they have critical abilities; they just say, "Well, everything isn't perfect." If you wanted to say, "Well, which one isn't right," then maybe they wouldn't know. But they have to remind you that they have critical judgment by carping and bitching. And in the case of the Graves book, I think it's stupid to find fault with it in any way because in the way that it's good I think it's very heartening. So, what I'm getting at is the selection of the works -- I think it's wonderful that Ray Kass somehow got in that text different sides of Morris.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, that's what we were talking about? Different sides of Morris.

WESLEY WEHR: Yes, exactly. And so I started through the text and I thought, "Boy, good for him; he's touched on these different sides of Morris." And I haven't counted how many sides Morris has, but I...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In what capacity had Ray Kass known Morris?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, he knew him years ago in California, and Ray is a painter. Ray got the idea through the friendship of guest curating a Graves show, and it just started. It was interesting working with him; I would go around, and we would visit Melvin Rader and different people, and Jack Alger. "Rising Moon" of Morris's is a wonderful one. And I noticed with Ray that he has a fine eye, a sense of quality, of good painting, and I thought, "Boy, this Ray Kass is going to put together a show that isn't categories or anything; it's going to be very sensitively done, and I think Morris Graves is damn lucky to be in good hands." So I think it's been a very propitious, felicitous -- Latin words -- it's a good combination, Ray Kass and Morris Graves, because I--

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And those aspects of Graves as character that we were referring to are well played off against each other?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh. There are certain stories about Morris's antics that are told over and over.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Many of them are from before the time that you met him.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Are there some from your experience also?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, good Lord, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: There are certain tried and true ones -- the John Cage concert, and then the Woodway Park one, and the Japanese reception. And they're all good.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What's the Japanese reception one?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, that's the Japanese national treasure show at the Seattle Art Museum, where Richard Gilkey dresses as a chauffeur and Jan Thompson gets a beaded dress and Morris has on sneakers and they get this limousine, rented car, in behind all of the officials in the great procession to the museum. Oh, it was incredible! And then the PI [Seattle newspaper--Ed.] came out with a cartoon showing Morris standing among all these very important people wearing sneakers. I called Ray Kass when I got the catalogue, and he started talking about these different things of Morris's, and something came up about, well, when did happenings start?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In relation to things like this?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, if one's into who did what first, one could start looking into--

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You'd have to investigate all the Surrealists and all the Dadas.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh God, yes. So, for people who are concerned not with who did what best,

but who did it first, the question of... Morris, obviously, is one of the great pioneers in shaking up the status quo.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And he didn't cease to be prankish when fame came to him and he moved outside the city?

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, all right, all right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Partly what I'm asking is whether that was only characteristic of him in early years.

WESLEY WEHR: Right, okay. This, I think, is important. Shortly after I-- Oh. I'm going to jump very quickly. I did start teaching Mark Tobey, teaching music composition, summer of 1949, and that began the friendship with him. Around Christmas of 1949, Mark (chuckles) had a Christmas party at his house, an open house, and so I went to it, and there was Morris Graves. He was wearing a suit. He didn't look like an artist; he looked terribly striking.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Tall and distinguished, like a businessman?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh gosh, yeah. I assumed he... Yeah. He looked like he might be a visiting professor from Oxford or something.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see!

WESLEY WEHR: And so Tobey introduced me to Morris and we sat around a while, and then I went back in the kitchen and sat with Tobey and Pehr [Hallsten--WESLEY WEHR] drinking coffee, and Morris came in and said, "Well, I have to leave now, but..." He shook hands and said, "I'll look forward to seeing you again sometime." And he was very nice, very polite. But, oh God, where were we?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'd been asking whether he continued to be prankish?

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, yeah. This I want to bring out because I don't know who is recording what any more. Morris, shortly after that, after I met him... Oh, okay. He invited me out to Woodway Park to visit him. I took the bus out [to Edmonds--WESLEY WEHR], I walked out to his place, and he invited me out shortly after we met for lunch. And the movie, "Sunset Boulevard" with Gloria Swanson, had just come out at that time. And it, well, it was called the greatest comeback of all time. And it still is. Well, Morris, I think, was putting me on; he told Guy Anderson once that he's 51percent put-on, something like that. (chuckles) With Morris it would drive you batty, because he could say something deadpan and you didn't know whether it was a confession or a put-on.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see, yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: And you had to sort of get used to this. So Morris started walking in the woods, and it immediately came up, Gloria Swanson and "Sunset Boulevard." Well, in a way, I can kind of identify with that. I thought, "What?" Morris said, "Well, let me explain. A long time ago," -- Well, Morris could dramatize in such a way that "a long time ago" could have been six months earlier --

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: He's Irish. He said, "You know, I used to do all of these things. I was impulsive; I would do this, I would do that, and it was fun, it was acting up, and it was just being natural, but then all of a sudden people started writing about me and I made the mistake of reading this stuff. I read all of these descriptions of Morris Graves acting like Morris Graves, and all of these wild things I do. Then all of a sudden I go back to do them, and I tripped all over myself because I sounded like somebody doing an imitation of an article about Morris Graves, and it was all messed up. It had been just things I did naturally.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The directness of it was not there.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. And he said, "This is terrible; I'm suddenly... How do I be myself anymore and be Morris Graves who's got all this attention? And people expect me to do crazy things; it's part of their idea of what Morris Graves is like." And he said, "I'm telling you; it's a nightmare."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And he meant this.

WESLEY WEHR: He meant it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So he'd been made, he'd been forced to become self-conscious in a way that made it impossible to remain that way.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. See, in a way it's very clear why Morris had such very close friends as Jan Thompson, Ward Corley, Richard Gilkey, and still does-- and Phil McCracken. Because these are the people around whom he can be himself.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: People know him [simply] real.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So there's a sense in which he had to pull back inside a set of barriers.

WESLEY WEHR: I think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Leave the rest of the world outside. And Tobey never had to do that?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, Tobey had a following too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But he didn't need to have barriers.

WESLEY WEHR: Not Tobey. When you first met him he could be very formal and a little standoffish, and perhaps a little suspicious, like, well, with young painters. But if you said, "Well, I'm a music major," he said, "Oh, that's wonderful; I like music too! Come over and play the piano for me; maybe we'll do some duets."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [Very loose.]

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. If you wanted to meet Tobey, you just said you were a musician and before you knew it you were having dinner and playing four-hand piano with him. But if you said you were a painter, he could be a little suspicious, like were you a serious painter or just somebody buttering him up. So he was standoffish with painters and that was _____.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you feel Morris had to withdraw even more. Restrict himself to what you were calling a circle of close friends.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, Morris... I'm trying to think. Good questions. I certainly don't want to make cut and dried comments where I'm not quite sure. I'd have to kind of think about it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure, drop it. We can drop it.

WESLEY WEHR: When I, I get a little, when I'm talking and what I'm saying suddenly seems a little too tidy and doesn't have some contradictions in the background, I think, "Oh oh." 'Cause I think I'm getting closer to the truth when I can think of contradictions to it, certainly in Morris's case. But again, it was very interesting watching Graves be a legend.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can I raise the question with you-- as long as we're talking about the fifties and now Morris was a legend-- of how other people felt about him being a legend: his friends and the other painters as well as he himself if you are willing to address that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I am. Morris being very striking, very tall. If one reads the letters in Ray Kass's book, the letters to Marian Willard, one realizes instantly that Morris has a tremendous sense of words, presence. Many times I was with him, he'd walk into a room and nothing was happening. And he'd simply say, you know, "This won't do." And he just simply turned the place upside down.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It would happen?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah! (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: From his presence?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh God, anyone...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This is part of the charisma that you mentioned.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yeah, and it's part of the mischief and the restlessness. Jimmy McLean, a painter, one time about 1964 or so, when Jay Steensma and others-- Jay Steensma the painter-- we were all seeing Morris at the same time, and Jim McLean said (What was it?), "Create the drama and then step into it." Morris loved that remark; it sounds like something Morris would have said. And [he said, I thought], "That's very good." He said, "That's what I try to do when things got a little dull; I create a drama, and then I try to jump in and participate." Pehr Halsten was the same way. He said, "It's so stuffy around here, somebody has to play the fool and the clown. And if nobody else is going to do it, I'll do it." I was very taken with Pehr and he knew that people thought, for instance, that he was kind of a buffoon, but there was great wisdom behind it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When did he come to Seattle?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, oh gosh. He met Tobey in 1940, and he came in the late thirties. Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: I sort of jumped to Pehr there, but all I'm getting at is that's certainly one thing Pehr and Graves had in common-- when people would freak out, they [even] mentioned them in the same breath-- was this ability to come into a room and see that they had the imminent prospect of being bored and saying, "Well, if nobody else is going to do it, I'm going to do it." Okay. Oh! Can I tell a story?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Of course!

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. This is going to be a little-- okay, why not? Shortly before Mark Tobey died, the Hatches (Marshall and Helen Hatch), were in Basel, visiting Tobey, and they asked Tobey to autograph one of the Beyeler catalogues for them. And as I understand it, Tobey started to...

[Tape 3, marked tape 2, side1]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: We were talking about Tobey in Basel.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. I don't know if this story is worth recording, but I enjoy remembering it. The Hatches had asked Tobey to autograph this catalogue. Tobey, who in his last years, as I understand because of a bad reaction to some anaesthetic and an operation-- The story that I was told by Mark Ritter was that Tobey, with some surgery, had a bad reaction to the anaesthetic which gave him some serious medical problems toward the end of his life. So he'd have bad days and he'd have good days. But the day that he was autographing the catalogue for the Hatches, he managed to write Mark all right, and he started to write Tobey and he just paused like he wasn't quite sure how to spell that last name. And then he finished it. So I heard about this from the Hatches, and I mentioned it to Morris Graves. And he said, "Oh, that's wonderful; that's the final nirvana to forget how to spell your own name. Oh, I envy Mark so much!" Well, Morris wasn't being unsympathetic to Tobey, but he was saying in one way, "Boy, I wish I could forget how to spell Morris Graves." So, you see how we're coming again?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I do.

WESLEY WEHR: So, LaMar Harrington, right here at the Henry Gallery, where we are now, told me that Morris was coming up to the Henry Gallery the next day -- that would be about, ooh, 1972, perhaps, somewhere in there -- to look at some Morris Graves works that the Vellutinis [Mr. and Mrs. Ray--Ed.] had donated to the collection here. And I'd not seen Morris for some while, and LaMar said, "Well, he's coming tomorrow; I thought I should tip you off, if you want to see him again." So I told Glenn Brumett, the painter, a very close friend, that Morris would be here, and I wanted Glenn to meet Morris-- the occasions were becoming increasingly rare. So we came here that next day and LaMar said, "Well, he hasn't arrived yet, but he's due any time now." Well, Morris had always had this ability to throw me off guard by just coming into a room and saying something before you could get your bearings, and you were a shambles. And I thought, "I've not seen him for a long time, and, by God, this time Morris isn't going to open with some line and while I'm still trying to recover, he'll be off somewhere else. This time I'm going to get the jump on him."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And...?

WESLEY WEHR: "Just once, I'm gonna throw him for a loop." So Glenn and I were going up the stairs, right down here. I was still trying to think, "Well, how do I just once make sure that Morris doesn't rattle me," and just as I reached the top of the stairs, in came Morris with Phil McCracken. And Morris and I just crashed into each other physically. And I don't know. I opened my mouth, and Morris says, "It's you!" And I said in very cool stentorian tones, "Redeclare your love to me; that is all I require of you today, and then you are dismissed."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: And it's sort of a parody of Morris being tongue-in-cheek. And he looked at me and he grinned and said, "Well!" And in a booming voice that rang down the Henry Gallery corridor, said, "I love Wesley Wehr!" I said, "Thank you! You are dismissed now." (laugh) And Morris was just smirking. Phil McCracken was thinking, "Oh God, now where are we?" And then Morris turned to me, he said, "Well! We mustn't forget LaMar Harrington. Take my arm; we will go down the stairs together to see her." This is Morris. Okay. He'd already, you know, this is our reunion, and he's already turned it into a theater. We started down the stairs, the gallery aides had come flying from all the areas to see if they should call the campus cops, and Glenn's grinning -- Glenn Brumett. So Morris and I started down the stairs, and Morris in this great voice says, "Announcing Wesley Wehr and Morris G-, G-, G-, G-, G-, G-," And then he says, "What is my last name, Wes?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is this after the earlier incident?

WESLEY WEHR: Yes!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: And what he's doing, in going G-, G-, G-, is saying, "Oh my gosh, I'm almost having to vomit on the stairs and can't remember my own last name, almost..." And then he goes, "Graves!" and looks at me and says, "Damn! I just remembered it again." Okay. So, well, that's a long story but if I tell these things, I think woven into them are examples of uncalculated comments on the pros and cons of success or being somebody. It was very interesting that Graves became very famous, Tobey was relatively obscure. And then Tobey grumbling, "Oh, I'll have to be dead before they do a book on me," and all that stuff. And then finally when Tobey becomes very famous after all that long time, he has this weird relationship to being famous which is just a panic. Tobey finally becomes a big celebrity, and the Louvre show and all of that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. A time like the sixties.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, exactly. And so Mark will come to town, we go downtown, first we have lunch, "Oh, let's go to the Frederick & Nelson Tea Room [large department store--Ed.]. So what does Mark do? He charges right through the center of Frederick's Tea Room where obviously people are going to look up, and he's grumbling, "Oh, for God's sakes, I can't even come here without people looking at me!" And I think, "Oh, for pity's sakes. If they don't look at you, you bitch; and if they do even look up thinking maybe you're the waiter, you're grumbling about it (chuckles)." You know, I say, "Oh, this has just gotten out of hand. You've got the typical love-hate thing about being noticed; it's like Greta Garbo or whatever it is and it's really silly." Then the next breath later, Tobey'd say, "Oh, my phone hasn't rung for days." And then a week later he's grumbling because he's had five requests for autographs. And then finally he's saying, "Well, I've decided I was much happier on University Way." And all that stuff.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can't tell until you've tried both sides which you prefer.

WESLEY WEHR: Since I first met Morris Graves, who had peaked on being a celebrity, and was trying to find his way back to being himself, and Tobey, who was, had this love hate thing about being famous... I'd studied with Roethke, of course-- and rockhounding with Susanne Langer [he pronounces it Susan--Ed.], the philosopher. So I had plenty of opportunity to have as friends and pals, people who were in beginning, the middle and the end of fame. So it was very interesting to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: See how they took it.

WESLEY WEHR: To see the relative values of it. Montaigne has an essay on fame, and it opens, "Since we shall never have it, let us proceed to speak disparagingly of it." (laughs) But I've noticed when it comes to fame, the people who don't have it say it's nothing, and the ones who do have it tend to be very sarcastic about it. For what that's worth. But it saved me a lot of bother growing up around these people. I was forever talking about Roethke and friends who happened to be quite well known, and then one time Ralph Aeschliman, the young painter, accused me of being a name dropper.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm.

WESLEY WEHR: Which I am. But it always hurts our feelings to have somebody else tell the truth about us, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It didn't lead you to change your policy [that way].

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, God, no. So Susanne Langer showed up -- See, I'm name dropping, again -- and she was in my room and my feelings were hurt. And I'm proud of...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right then, you mean?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, sure. So I'm proud of my friendships and I... Do you see how I've managed to weave Mrs. Langer in now?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When, or how many times, was Susanne Langer here? I thought she came only one summer. Did she have friends and return to the area?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh. I'm told you do your homework!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No!

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, now! She came in 1953 to teach...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't mean summer; I mean year.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I think it was two quarters in 1953, I think.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: And then she came back in 1966 to visit. She was in California and then flew up to see Guy Anderson. And Elizabeth Bishop, the poet, was here, so I arranged for Bishop and Langer to have lunch together. I've written that all out for-- that's all recorded.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, okay. The visit in '66 was to see people, not in an official capacity?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, she just flew up, since she was in California, to see Eva Heinitz, the cellist, and Guy, and just spend a few days here visiting and then take off again. So Mrs. Langer and Guy came to my room, and then Guy left, and I don't know why, but I said, "Well, Susanne, I've just been accused of being a name dropper, and it kind of hurt my feelings." She smiled and said, "Well, Wes, these different people you know, they're not interesting because they're famous; they're famous because they're interesting. And you happen to like interesting people." I thought, "God! That's a nice answer."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And you hope it's the true answer.

WESLEY WEHR: And then just before she died, Berthe Poncy Jacobson, the pianist-- I was having lunch at her house-- looked up and she looked kind of puzzled, and she said, "I've known you a long time. You met Pierre Bernac, the great French singer, and you took him some songs, and you met Ernst Bloch, the Swiss composer, who was my teacher, and you knew Tobey." What she was saying was that I had had some acquaintanceship with different Europeans and what not, who had been part of her past, and she said, "I suddenly realized that you've known a lot of very interesting people. Now, how did that happen?" And I just said something like, "Oh, well, opportunities arose." Jacobson looked at me and said, "Ah hah! Opportunities arose and you didn't flee from them." She said, "But you weren't aggressive about it, and that makes the difference." Then she had decided it was okay. Well, I don't know why I wandered into this aspect of having interesting friends, but...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You wandered there from the discussion of fame and its effect among

those people.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Okay. The fact is, to say one thing about myself, a lot of my friends were, like Tobey, older, but I honestly don't think I had a rebellious streak of thinking I had to rebell against my older friends, or I don't think I had that sense of old age and youth and rebell against the establishment. That would have made no sense to me because the older people I was around weren't intimidating authority figures to me; they were simply, kind of, older friends who... I didn't feel intimidated by them because they bent over backwards not to be intimidating. So if for a long time there wasn't any Wes to speak of-- I just seemed to be somebody who knew an awful lot of people and really enjoyed being around them. If somebody said, "Well, who are you or what are you?" I'd say, "Gosh, I never thought about that!" (chuckles) That idea of finding myself, I never was all that interested in it. It seemed like a peculiar thing; why would one want to find yourself, then you'd be stuck with being yourself. I enjoyed being a little lost. But this idea of young people wanting to find themselves...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It is a widespread idea. If it didn't bother you, you're to some extent unusual.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I thought you never can get away from being yourself, like Elizabeth Bishop said, "We're ourselves all the time; it's just...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, that's the alternative.

WESLEY WEHR: Don't worry about telling the truth; we blurt out the truth all the time. It's that we don't like the way it comes out. So I think the atmosphere... Sometimes I used to tell people that it's not that the artists in the past had more character or virtues; I think there were fewer temptations. (chuckles) That's a little glib, but if the artist got on in a nice communal way, it was simply that we were all broke. And circumstances threw us together.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're talking about the fifties?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I think so. I don't want to be too cut and dried about this, but maybe the World's Fair in '62 or whenever it was, that seems to be a turning point. Suddenly Seattle gets ideas of not being a little town anymore, but being a great something or other. The nice thing about the time before that was there weren't so many people interested in art.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let me ask you several questions about this since you've brought it up. One thing that happened at the World's Fair, if I remember correctly, was that there was one exhibition devoted to art from this region; there was another exhibition devoted to art from around the world. Did that lead people to think differently about being an artist here? Did it lead to any kind of defensiveness or pride, conversely, or change of perspective?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. Yi! I think something happened during the time of the World's Fair, and I'm not sure what it was. There's a lot that I could go into.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, there are a lot of things that I want to think about whether I even want to talk about them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Want to hold this question and come back to it?

WESLEY WEHR: I think so, because then I'm going to have to talk about the rise of art committees in this town; I'm going to have to talk about how the collectors become a collective force in this town; I'm going to have to get into a lot of things that are going to show how biased I am.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And those things you think happened from '62 on?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, and I really wanted...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let me ask you another question related to, indirectly to the Fair. Do you think-- well, you just remarked that before the Fair fewer people were interested in art in Seattle.

WESLEY WEHR: That's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that the artists themselves, as a result, formed a more easy- going, but also cohesive group, before the Fair?

WESLEY WEHR: Ah, it's very tempting for me to just say absolutely, yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really? So that there was no town-gown thing before the Fair... There were no ins and outs...

WESLEY WEHR: Pehr would say, "Tobey, Mark, where are all the young artists that used to drop by in the evening?" Tobey'd say, "Oh, they're all out busy digging their private goldmines." And you know...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Would say this when? In the fifties?

WESLEY WEHR: Umm, in the early sixties.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the early sixties, I see.

WESLEY WEHR: Sure. Okay. What I mean is suddenly the government steps in, we have one percent for art; we have all these infernal grants.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, most of that didn't happen 'til the seventies, really.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yeah, okay. But I came out of a time...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The urging toward it began in the sixties, the national endowments were set up in the sixties. But there was no real local money in the form of one-percent programs until the seventies.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I came out of the tradition of Helmi Juvonen, of Tobey, of Morris-- of live by your wits. I don't want to say the scroungers, but I come out of a very interesting bunch of what is it? But the sudden availability of more and more funding -- I'm not all that keen about it. I can make a big speech about private patrons. Oh, okay, something has come up lately. When I got back from a field trip, the first thing I heard from five quarters was Sue Ann Kendall's article about support for the artists here.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A recent article, yes.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh God, I haven't read it, but I got phone calls-- "What do you think of it?" and I still haven't read it. But, and I talked with Regina Hackett about it yesterday, and Marshall Hatch last night, and I've just got to put my foot on this damn nonsense. Why not? (chuckles). Anyhow.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Put your foot down on which side? That there needn't be institutional support?

WESLEY WEHR: No, I told Regina lately I wanted nothing to do with this nonsense that this area is not supportive of the arts; I think that's ludicrous.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I see.

WESLEY WEHR: And I think anything said like that is just unsupportable; I think it's ridiculous. With Dr. Fuller's support of the artists, with the Henry Gallery in its Washington year, with all the shows... Well, I happen not to like Charles Cowles, but I would have to say that he certainly introduced a lot of artists in this area. I happen to have some very serious criticisms of Matthew Kangas, but I don't think he's worth talking about in some ways. But on the other hand, though I happen to dislike him strongly on certain polemical grounds, I think the way he's working very hard to introduce a lot of artists and draw attention to them is thoroughly commendable. I happen to dislike his being a category factory; that's another matter. But the fact is that I don't want to dislike people so much on certain grounds that I'm oblivious to the good things they do. But to very quickly say, Fuller... Oh, and we have many, many little museums here. I think artists have a tremendous support here. This nonsense; it just sends me through the ceiling. My God, what do the artists want for...?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In reference to the distinction we were making before '62 and after '62

a minute ago, is part of what you're saying now that there's almost too much support now?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, not too much, but it's certainly...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or of the wrong kind?

WESLEY WEHR: What bothers me very much is when the support disappears for things that are very expensive, like theater, symphony. This is a very serious matter, when the symphony is threatened or major dance groups and all of that. But I don't like it when I, from any quarter, get the idea that any artist thinks the world automatically owes him a living for being creative. Then I think it's getting stupid.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think with the increase in funding, in the sixties and seventies, that happened to some degree.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Compared to earlier.

WESLEY WEHR: There comes a point at which very often one will hear a howl if the public is not supportive. It comes from some gallery or from some painter. And I think, "Oh buster, I got news for you. What you're whining about isn't worth buying. I mean if people aren't buying your works, maybe it's not that the public is inappreciative but that what you do really isn't very good." So all I'm trying to say is sometimes the ones who complain the most bitterly about being unappreciated aren't really doing anything that's worth appreciating.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sometimes.

WESLEY WEHR: Sometimes. Okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think the opposite can be the case also?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, okay. This is something I talked to Marshall Hatch about yesterday. I think the times are very difficult; there's no doubt that we're not in an economic boom for the arts. It's not fashionable to buy and people are worried about money. But so the broad support for the arts, and for artists and paintings, is obviously in trouble. But on the other hand, I'm kind of reminded of something Tobey said, "No matter how bad the times are, if you're doing something which has quality, there's usually a patron somewhere that'll keep it going."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did Tobey generally maintain that for the time you knew him?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Okay, yeah. And I think it's all very well to carp that the times are bad in a broad sense, but art patronage, which generally, as Zoe Dusanne put together a collection by skipping lunch in New York, there're usually people that have such a serious love for the arts that if they find works that they believe in, they'll somehow get them, they'll somehow keep artists going. And they're the real continuity. It doesn't basically interest me, the ups and downs of economic trends, how many paintings sell a day; my real interest is in the continuity in an area and that continuity is in the quiet patrons and collectors who don't serve on every board, and don't have a high profile. They're the unacknowledged contributors to our culture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you think Seattle is a sound and healthy environment in that respect?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. And that's where I really would have to be a little sharp. There, I know for a fact there are in this area many people whose names are generally unfamiliar, except to artists, who quietly deprive themselves of trips and vacations to buy paintings because they believe in the artists. They do it quietly, discreetly, and they keep the whole thing going. So I simply think it's utterly unfair to publish an article which adds fuel to a kind of bleak picture when at the very same time I happen to know of all kinds of wonderful people who bend over backwards to buy paintings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And was this also the case when you first became involved in the visual arts?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, that's what I want to get at. I don't know...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the fifties, was it the case?

WESLEY WEHR: Sure, of course. That's what kept Tobey going, and it's what's keeping many of our best artists going now, quiet patronage by people who really believe in what they get. I think the more shallow aspects of being an art collector are going through a shake-up. And just as well; I'd just as soon see-- I don't love money so much that I want it that badly, but that's an aside. It just bothers me very much how we ever got into box office and statistics that they measure the culture (and I underline that word) of an area is based on how many people buy how many paintings. I think that's a very shallow definition.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think the prominence of that kind of definition has increased with the introduction of significant numbers of galleries to Seattle? In the fifties, there was almost no gallery scene. The last ten years there has come to be one.

WESLEY WEHR: I think the Frankenstein monster has been the idea of art as investment.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, okay.

WESLEY WEHR: And I think the people who perpetrated it deserve to have the thing come back and bite them, the way it is.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And those people are, what, gallery people?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay, well, good question. Very often if I bought a Tobey painting from Seligman or from Mark, Mark would be very worried; he'd say, "Well, I like that Tobey painting, too, but Wes if you get broke, you'll have trouble reselling it. So I don't think you should get that one, because you might need the money and you won't be able to get it back."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now who would say this?

WESLEY WEHR: Tobey! If I bought one of his works.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you're tracing this attitude right back to the heart of the creation!

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So Mark, if I bought things -- and, you know, I was buying Tobeys all the time, and, you know, that was fun; I liked having original works -- but then Tobey would say, "Well, this one I feel good about you getting it; I like the painting and if you get in trouble, you can always get back what you pay for it." So Mark wasn't concerned about art as investment; he thought that was nonsense, but he was concerned that if I got into trouble at least I could sell the painting and get out of trouble.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But doesn't the one attitude shade into the other? To be concerned with whether you can get back what you paid is just elbow to elbow with being concerned with whether you can get a little more.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, good point. Is it?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's being aware of the dollar implications.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, okay. Let's put it this way. When you have an area which has more and more painters, all painting, and aside from what the promoters say, the degrees of difference in the talents aren't all that different. There'll be a handful of superb painters, and then, well, yeah, then I put in a plug for Joe Goldberg and [Francis--WESLEY WEHR] Celentano and all that, sure. But if the talents and the accomplishments aren't really all that different, the ones that survive are going to have to have other things going for them.

[Tape 4]
[There's a bit of empty space at the beginning of this tape.]

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, we were just going to sort of warm up today and I'm just rolling. Shall we just...?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure, just continue!

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Because I am doing the very thing I didn't want to do, and I'm pontificating.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's why we have all these tapes.

WESLEY WEHR: Right, okay. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Not to worry.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Well, how do artists, if their talents and accomplishments aren't notably better or worse than everybody else around, how do they survive? Through becoming personalities, so that you don't buy a painting by that somebody, you buy a religious trophy of this saintly personality. You're not buying a picture; you're buying a souvenir of...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Of the name?

WESLEY WEHR: Of the name or personality.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or the brand?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. You might as well collect religious reliquaries, something like that. So, or you buy something to save face or a little better than Tupperware, I hope. You buy, well, oh God, ambivalence, status symbol, all that bore...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, I do understand what you mean.

WESLEY WEHR: Sure, all that boring stuff. Okay, somehow it is -- I don't think they realize they're better or worse than anybody -- yet the idea that to survive and be noticed, they've got to be talked about, they've got to be, yeah, something of a local celebrity. Dealers, or painters selling their own work, can give a sense that their works and they are going someplace, and the collector in buying one of their works is having the opportunity to buy a painting by an artist whose work is -- God knows where it's going to go. It'll become part of the fictions and legends of its time plus a billion dollars and all of that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's that you're objecting to?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. What I'm getting at is somehow, through Madison Avenue or whatever it is-- New York machine, and the other places, God knows, Paris is the great place for making reputations and careers. This whole thing got started as spiraling, quick skyrocketings of values-- it was like oil, what they call it, oil wells. Art can be identified with the excitement of vast fortunes. So of course the dealers cashed in and the painters cashed in-- it was all very lucrative-- and it got to the point of don't even bother whether you like the work or not. Buy in fast.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that before, say '62, there was little or none of that mentality here?

WESLEY WEHR: Not much.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that there has come to be that?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I think one thing that happened was when Tobey had the show at the Biennale and then at the Louvre. Suddenly it's-- after the Biennale I know Seligman came back and I go into the gallery and the prices had all multiplied by ten.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ah hah. And nothing like that had really happened in Seattle before?

WESLEY WEHR: No! We have a hometown painter who gets the grand prize of the Biennale. Seligman comes back; I saw this...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And it's reflected directly in the financial structure?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Times ten! I'd been buying them. After I bought a drawing for $35 Mark sent me a letter for being a patron!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And suddenly it was all out of reach? Another ballgame?

WESLEY WEHR: Joanna Eckstein, bless her heart, comes in. Seligman has everything times ten. She says, "Otto, now look. Between you and me those were so-so Tobeys last week, and

now that he's got the Biennale, they aren't any better." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Did he take the tags down?

WESLEY WEHR: No. He said, "Oh my God, get her out of here; she'll spoil everything." So Joanna told the truth, Joanna Eckstein, and she rocked the boat because, you know, suddenly we have a hometown painter who makes it big, and suddenly, we have an international superstar.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that single fact, or that Morris Graves' earlier thing changed the whole game for other people?

WESLEY WEHR: That's exactly the point I'm leading to. I think one thing that happened was Tobey literally opened the door by this enormous world fame. Good old Tobey who you could see on the corner overnight became one of the big international, big bananas, as Guy [Anderson--Ed.] would say. So all of a sudden the big question is who's the next Mark Tobey?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Who's next.

WESLEY WEHR: Which company to buy into next.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it changed everyone's hopes and everyone's expectations, everyone's criteria. Not everyone, but it changed some people's expectations, hopes, buying criteria.

WESLEY WEHR: I think it made a difference because in no way am I going to... I've got to say again that there has been a very serious group of people here buying art because they loved it. And I'm not talking about them. Not at all. But I am talking about the bunch that came rushing in to buy the Tobeys at the new times-ten price. That weren't interested in them before. And they were pathetic. The ones that I would take into Seligman, saying it's a beautiful Tobey; it's only $125. They'd say, "Well, oh, I don't know." They were the very ones that came rushing in to buy the Tobeys at the new prices, because then the question was, do you own a Mark Tobey? And there was a lot of racing around to save face and sort of get your Tobey up on the wall, and pretend that you've believed in his work for a long time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: This is only part of the group here. So I think what happened, money entered the picture, an overnight Cinderella kind of success-- it was pretty heady stuff-- and then the businessmen, God bless them, got interested in the arts more. It never occurred to them that-- they were so into stocks and stuff like that-- it never occurred to them that art, especially local artists, might be a possible source of big profit. So you suddenly have a lot of people saying, who should we buy next? Who do you collect? Who's the next Mark Tobey? And suddenly everyone's asking everyone, "Who are you buying? [Who, where, what] are you collecting?" And there's a certain aura of, you know, tips on the stock market. Well, this is very good for business; everybody's out, even the ones who don't know what they like or what to believe in, are out sort of like betting on all the horses, buying everything so the good painters, the bad painters, everybody's having a field day because Tobey, and perhaps to some extent Morris, had opened the door on the possibility that local artists can be extremely lucrative.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, when this happened in the early sixties, here in Seattle, it certainly paralleled developments and changing attitudes around the country at large.

WESLEY WEHR: That's right. Okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then do you think something peculiar in any way has happened in Seattle, because in Seattle those who achieved fame and opened the door, as you just said, then left.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And we have this peculiar excitement about people who aren't here anymore.

WESLEY WEHR: I know. It's weird!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's a stange void.

WESLEY WEHR: It's a very strange situation. Tobey is dead. Morris lives in California. Callahan is off on the beach. Guy Anderson, I can be accused of being biased, but I think Guy Anderson is just at the height of his powers. What amuses me terribly is that Guy is at an age where most painters are sick and tired of painting, but he gets such a buzz often, I think this is terribly funny.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He's tremendously vigorous.

WESLEY WEHR: I know. I think Guy and-- Now Guy isn't going to be too fond of this, but to hell with it. I happen to think that Guy Anderson and Helmi Juvonen are two of the best things in the area.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What won't he like? Your saying that? Or your linking them?

WESLEY WEHR: My linking them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: And that's just too bad. (chuckles) I'm sorry. But one simply can't think, guess how the chips are going to fall; what I think is terribly funny is that Helmi is 80. She's still, she has no script for painting, and she just, oh, goes on being horribly creative. Guy just, God, he doesn't stop! And so what we have, you know-- I think this is just marvelous--two painters who just go on.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But they're not present in the minds of people who are wondering who will be the next Mark Tobey.

WESLEY WEHR: Not particularly. No.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is that what you're saying? I mean they have their eyes on younger generations, less known people.

WESLEY WEHR: And that's kind of interesting; I think the thing backfired terribly and I really think this is funny. A lot of these painters who bought for investment, the point came when they thought, "Well, I don't like the work. I only bought it for investment. And I sure don't like it around my house." Then they took it back on consignment or to resell it. Well, having bought some rather dumb stuff, they decided to cash in on it, and since it was dumb stuff...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It didn't work.

WESLEY WEHR: It didn't work. (chuckles) So, when they decide really to cash in on their imaginary stocks and bonds, they find that something's kind of wrong, if they bought dull work for proper reasons. And then it creeps into the suspicions of some of the collectors that maybe they've been had.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think that has happened only recently, this entertaining of suspicions?

WESLEY WEHR: I think it's going on now, and I'm glad it's started. I shouldn't put it quite that way, but nothing delights me more than to see shallow, materialistic reasons for collecting art go through a big shakeup. If I say I'm not all that gung-ho about the popularity of the arts, things that are popular, I tend to be a little... Well, just because it's popular doesn't mean it's necessarily bad. But the thing I like right now is I think, maybe it's just wishful thinking, that something may be happening in this area which is going to make it very hard on painters to survive.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which is what?

WESLEY WEHR: And I don't think it's going to kill them. I think we're going through, you know, the recession and all of that. Okay. I think this is marvelous in one point. And I don't want to sound heartless and unsympathetic, but I think if this area is going to produce some underivative, genuine-felt, true work that's really interesting and genuine, it'll come partly out of a transition into sort of why do you paint? Do you paint to become a superstar or somebody important? Do you simply love to paint, and you're going to paint because you want to? And in that sense, I welcome an economic bad time here, because I...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, I'm thinking that a degree of hardship is a kind of test of integrity that will leave the field to those who remain, leave the best.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, it's also a test of why one does anything. Is it out of deep enthusiasm or out of personal ambition? And I think in that sense, I'm delighted to see the arts become not too fashionable and the collectors confined to the more serious patrons. In that sense, trying to take the long view of it, the long, lean hungry look of Cassius, I think the Northwest masters have become sort of like Burgermasters... Oh my God, the amount of junk that has been sold in this area, Tobeys that should never have left the studio, with incredible prices. I will go ahead and just take a slam at Kenneth Callahan. It's the only tactless thing I've said so far, that I do feel in the case of Callahan, though we have a nice acquaintanceship, that he has allowed just abominable stuff to be sold with his signature. Well, oh, why not say it, yeah. It's just, I think an artist gets to the point of being a local success, and my God, the junk they let out. And this is the very time to, when you become famous, you've just got to put your foot down and say I don't care how acceptable I am, I'm not going to let that junk out of here.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Given this area now has enough historical development behind it to have several generations of painters, don't you think it possible that an economic hard times, like you were just speaking of, militates against younger innovators and in favor of...

WESLEY WEHR: Conservative?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...the older slightly mythologized people like Callahan that you were just speaking of?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay, yeah, right. Yeah, I think from some...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...continues the production of all sorts of stuff, from a recognized studio?

WESLEY WEHR: Ooh. It's a terribly good point. I think Regina [Hackett--WESLEY WEHR] may have made the point lately, surveying the galleries, that the established artists survive, and the young good ones are having a hell of a time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So if you think of hard times in the twenties or thirties when there essentially was no older generation, hard times would weed out the good young from the bad young. But now it may weed out the established from the younger, in a way that operates differently from before.

WESLEY WEHR: I can't get around your point; I think it's absolutely the way the cookie crumbles.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's not so hot, in my opinion.

WESLEY WEHR: I know! It stinks. Again, to dodge that situation, I have to go through my set speech of enjoy luxury, but don't count on it. You know, to live by your wits. Private patrons, again. I just have this thing about it's better to have one or two serious collectors behind you than the vagaries of being fashionable and unfashionable. You turn into a screaming neurotic if you're dependent upon being in and out of fashion.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You need private patrons who are not tied to the established fashion of an older generation and feel themselves free of that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Also you need private patrons who could not give a damn about being local social climbers. They are either so lofty that they don't have to become anybody, or they couldn't be bothered. It's the ones in between that are the creeps. I mean, I knew once a baroness from Germany, and she could get on with other baronesses or with the maid, but she said, "It's the people in between I can't stand." And she's got her point. So the marvelous painters are the ones who don't want to become socially something via their activities in the arts because to be a social somebody is a pretty symbiotic thing. It depends on what everybody else thinks of you. And all I'm saying is that when you set out to be social, you may, you become very clever, but you don't become very wise. And socially ambitious people do become terribly clever. And especially when they're artists that want to be socially ambitious, too. They become...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. I don't know that hard times alone are enough to eliminate those motives at all.

WESLEY WEHR: But when artists become socially ambitious they become clever, calculating. I'm not saying it feeds back into the work, but they become locked into a thing they've had a taste of it, they don't want to let go of it. They're sort of hooked. My God, I've certainly _____ the old [boy, way].

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wesley was going to tell me a story now, and he says that they'll all say it didn't happen, but I said, "Wes, go ahead and tell me the story anyway, because this is our coffee break."

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, right. Is it on?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Uh huh. It's on.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. There are stories that I tell painter friends or friends occasionally after I've known them for a while. They're the stories about friendships with different painters here. Some years ago a student came to me and said she was doing a paper on Mark Tobey and Zen Buddhism and she wanted to ask some questions. And I kind of looked at her and I thought, oh, oh-oh, she looks like she doesn't like the present very much; she looks a little repressed. And I have a suspicion that this poor dear has fled into history because it's behind her and it's negotiable. And I thought, oh my God and here she is asking me about Tobey and Zen Buddhism, and I don't like it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She doesn't know what she's getting into.

WESLEY WEHR: So, what I said was, "My dear, when Tobey painted these paintings that you're curious about, I can say this much, he was alive when he painted them." Which was kind of a little nasty. Okay. Then I said, "If your relationship to the past is looking for tidyness, forget it. If you want to go into the past into Mark Tobey or Morris Graves or whatever, I have one suggestion. Do you know any painters now? She said, "Well, no, I don't." And I said, "Well, if you want to understand Tobey in the past, I'd suggest you start going out and dating some painters, get drunk with them, you might even think of living with them. Whether you get married or not, that's up to you. But I can assure you that if you want to understand Tobey and Morris and everybody else, I don't want to contribute any more to the bullshit of their being stuffy and as tidy as you historians sometimes want to make them. I would suggest, bang around with a lot of painters, find out how materialistic they can be one minute, or genuine the next, and find out how filled with contradictions they are, and then maybe you're ready to start backwards. But if you're looking for a consistent Tobey or a consistent Graves, there isn't one. The thing that can only be said about them is that they were-- like they said about Victor Hugo, he was like everybody else, but nobody was like him. And this is the thing about Tobey. When he was ambitious, he could be the most calculating, contrived, polishing his career, imaginable. He was brilliant. When he was fed up with ambition, he was the pure, intrinsic joy-of-doing-it artist as you couldn't believe it. But being around Tobey, you had to simply give up the idea that there was one Mark Tobey. But the thing is, each of the Tobeys that you saw in this prismatic way was absolutely brilliant. It kind of made you feel that you weren't much of anything; you were just sort of a pastel, homogenized nothing. But here was Tobey and he was just a whole Shakespearean cast of being petty and bitchy and cranky and absolutely boring, and then the next minute being absolutely moving and eloquent and human and vulnerable, and you just had to sit back and say my God, is that Tobey's greatness that is he is so many things all at once.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did this young woman marry a painter?

WESLEY WEHR: No. I was, I had a terrible feeling that she might have been one of your students, and I had a, I thought afterwards, oh my God, she's studying with Martha and she's going to go back and say, "Who is that jerk at the Henry Gallery? He told me if I want to write about Tobey I should go out and have an affair with a painter."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She must not have been my student.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, thank God! (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I never had a student who took that tack, that I know of.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. I'm afraid I meant to call you in those days and say, well...the art history majors are coming by to ask me questions. I'm telling them terribly raunchy stories. Okay. Let's see. A few stories about Morris. Okay. Anyhow, here we go.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You want me to turn it off?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, for just a second.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now, what were you just saying?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I just...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you first came here.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. Before I met Morris Graves, I had heard many stories about what a legend he was, how handsome he was, and how many people had been in love with him--past and present. He certainly was one of the most colorful people on University Way; there are all kinds of
stories about him, legends of-- you didn't know what was true and what was simply invented. But the fact was that he simply was the subject of enormous myth and all that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But with some grounding in fact.

WESLEY WEHR: And the same thing was true of Roethke; he was somebody who was alleged to have had many affairs and all kinds of names of different students were, you know, sort of did he have an affair with her? Was it true about Roethke's affair with so and so? So the two people on University Way who were in a sort of legendary classification, shall we say having a past and having a present, certainly Roethke and Morris Graves. And when I... I knew Morris Graves' paintings a little bit from books, and then I met him. Ward Corley and I had exchanged rooms at the Kennedy Gallery (chuckles), God. [Kennedy Building--WESLEY WEHR]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Delusions of grandeur. (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, next to the post office. We just traded rooms. People came looking for Ward and found me and vice versa. I got to know a great many people accidently by trading rooms. So there was a knock on my door, 103 Kennedy Building, and I have a bed, a wash basin, a bare lightbulb, and an upright piano. I open the door and it's Morris Graves, who I'd met at Tobey's house. Morris looked startled and says, "Oh, it's you! Where's Ward?" And I said, "Oh well, we've traded rooms." He said, "Well, it's nice to see you again." And I said, "Well, won't you come in?" Morris walks in, and the bare lightbulb, which is blinding, but he is too much of a gentleman to say, For God's sakes put a lampshade on it." So he sits on the bed and he sees the piano, and he says, "Oh that's very nice. Would you play something for me?" And I thought, "Oh, good God." So he sprawls out on the bed and says, "Well, I'm tired, just, I'll relax. Play for me." So I improvised something in Eb Major, God knows, and tinkle away, and after about half an hour, Morris says, "Oh, that was lovely. Thank you very much. I must leave now." I thought, "Oh, good heavens! That was Morris Graves." He walks in, takes a nap on my bed, asks me to play the piano, says it was lovely, and disappears.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's when he's rested.

WESLEY WEHR: This is how he got a reputation for being so bird-like. But then different friends start telling me of Morris' alleged liaisons and how many people have loved him and all of that. So he invites me out to Woodway Park, and we go out for a walk after lunch, and Morris says, "Do you have a beloved? Are you in love with anyone?" And I say, "Oh, yes, I am." He says, "Oh really. So there's somebody you love?" I said, "Well, yes." "Are the two of you happy together?" I said, "Well, yes, very happy." And he says, "Oh, I see. Would you care to talk..."

[Tape 5, marked tape 3, side 1]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So he said would you care to talk about it?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, without naming names, another painter said, "Wes, if you don't tell these stories, nobody else will. Everyone is so protective about Morris that..."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Quite right. So go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: "...you'll be the only one to be so tasteless as to tell these stories." I thought, gee, thanks. Anyhow. So he says, "Well, are you happy together?" "Why, yes, I am." He says, "Oh well, that's very nice." And then he says, "Now let's go back and have some more lunch." Huh! So Morris is very nice to me; we become very good friends. I see a great deal of him. He's a marvelous friend to me many years, and around 1964 or so, I'm sitting in a house where I live-- we had a mutual friend, Bob Mony, a pianist-- Morris would come by to visit me, and I'll come to visit Bob Mony, and I go into the room and Morris is sitting there, and I'm sitting with Bob and Morris talking. Morris says, "Wes, I have a question to ask you. And it goes back a long time, and I've gotta ask you, because I can't take it any more." And I said, "Well, what's that Morris?" He said, "Well, when we first met, and you came out, I asked you if you had a beloved, and you said yes, but you wouldn't say any more. And I was very curious who it was. I asked Guy, and he didn't know. And I asked so and so, and I asked all around if anybody knew who your lover was. And nobody seemed to know, because they never saw you with anyone and we couldn't figure out who was your secret beloved. And this has been very frustrating. So for God's sakes tell me who was it." I said, "Oh, well, as a matter of fact, I was absolutely alone. I had no beloved." He said, "For God's sakes, why did you lie to me and say you had?" And I said, "Well, Morris, I'm very vain and I'm very insecure, and just before I met you I had heard all these stories about all these people who were hopelessly in love with you, and I had the impression that, a lot of times, that in a very [complicated], if something went wrong and all of that and you and I are still friends. We've had a wonderful friendship, and I'm afraid I just invented an imaginary great love on the spot." And Morris said, "Oh, you didn't!" I said, "Yeah, I lied." Why is it I'm telling this story?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: So Morris just let out a snort, and he said, "Oh for pity's sakes, I should have known even at that age, you tricked me!" And he just started laughing and he was so nonplussed that, you know, my first meeting and how he could have asked me a serious question and I invent an imaginary happy affair, and then explain that it was my vanity to put a wall between us. [WESLEY WEHR added later: I didn't want to become just one more person in Morris' past.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's perfectly credible.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. (laughs) It's sort of...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) What did he do about it?

WESLEY WEHR: He started laughing, and he said, "Oh good Heavens!" So years later Joe Goldberg and I were driving to the Mojave Desert-- we were on a trip-- and we went through Eureka, California, one night-- I think around, oh, 1968 or so, someplace in there-- and I called Morris from Eureka, and he said, "Well, why don't you come out to the house? But be sure you're here at exactly eight o'clock. Be punctual. And I thought, oh God, here we go again. Morris being imperious. So we went out, and I took the alarm clock and told, "Well, Morris means it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) Did you wait outside the gate until the alarm clock rang?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, exactly. We had to find our way through all the gates and everything to find the house in the woods at Loleta, and I thought, well, all right Mr. Graves; you said eight o'clock, and it'll be eight o'clock. So we synchronized our watches, sat in the woods chain-smoking, and we thought, by God, we can play this game too. So Morris knew that by telling us to be there at eight o'clock, he was presenting difficulties. And I was thinking, well, the way to get on with him is... Okay, so anyhow, so promptly at eight o'clock I went [knocks three times] on the door, and Morris opened the door a little surprised that we were there exactly at eight because that wasn't all that easy. And he said, "Well, do come in; how nice to see you." And he said, "I do have to apologize that I can't let you stay any later than ten, but so if I shoo you out at ten, you know, don't be disappointed, but I'm awfully glad to see you. Do come in, and can I get you some whiskey? And I thought, oh my God, I haven't seen him for a long time, but here we go again. So we sit on the floor by the fire and Morris is

talking to Joe-- Morris had met him briefly before that-- and then Morris says, "Wes, I don't understand you. You used to write me such sweet letters that are like little love notes, you know, that you like me, and you don't write me letters anymore. How come?" And then he said, "Well, come to think of it, I haven't answered your letters," and he said, "You know, Wes, if you really loved me, you'd write me, and you wouldn't expect answers." Oh, God. So he said, "I still have the last letter you wrote me. Let me go to find it." So he rummages around and he comes back with this little letter and reads it to me, and he says, "You know, how come you have forgotten me?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Giving you a hard time!

WESLEY WEHR: And I think, oh for pity's sakes, you know, Morris, let's stop this, and can't we just be friends, and stop all this nonsense because, with Tobey, he was just a very straightforward creature, but with Morris I got sort of tired of all the little games and things like that. Because with Morris, he's very real and very wonderful, but he's got this compulsive side there from Dada; it just wears me out. To the point of, one has this sort of love/hate thing toward Morris until you just don't care anymore. I'm not speaking for his other friends, but I simply found the friendship with Tobey fine, but with Morris I got tired of the ups and downs of all this nonsense. But anyway. Morris says, to Joe Goldberg he says, "How do you feel about death?" And Joe says, "Well, Mr. Graves, not having died yet, I really don't know, but when I do, you'll be the first to know. (laughs) And I thought, Morris, oh.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ of you too?

WESLEY WEHR: So Morris is, you know, asking big questions and all of that. So he says, "Well, Joseph, I've known Wes for a very long time now; we've had a very good friendship for a long time. He is the kindest, most loving, gentle creature in the world." And he starts praising me about what a nice guy I am, and I think, oh good God, now what? He's setting me up for another of these double-edged things. And I just grit my teeth and think, here we go again. And then Morris says, "However, I can tell you, Mr. Goldberg. Should Wes ever decide to be cruel, God help us all." (chuckles) Okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You were used to it; you knew what was coming.

WESLEY WEHR: I'm used to it. So these stories are rather trivial, but I guess that if I'm making a point... Speaking for myself, I found that in the case of Morris, one can be terribly grateful to him for friendship and on the other hand experience a sheer exasperation like, for God's sakes, stop this nonsense. But I have to be careful what I say about Morris because it can be a mixture of tremendous warmth toward him plus sheer exasperation. And never toward Tobey did I feel that way. It's just Morris is a very ambivalent subject for me, so if I talk about him I go in circles. Oh good, yeah. [Seems to be relieved that MARTHA KINGSBURY is suggesting the tape be turned off--Ed.]

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: One thread I'd like to pick up about Mark Tobey, and going back to this old ambivalent thing about fame and success. Let's see. I've gone blank for a second. Okay. You know I thought of two things at once, and they canceled each other out. One thing about Tobey, for instance, when one was with him, he could be continually complaining, just, on some days you'd think he was describing to you the end of Western civilization. He'd been to New York, and all the painters are getting worse and worse and you were witnessing the death of feeling and that [soul] in contemporary painting. Tobey would just tirade day after day until you thought, my God, I've heard it, I've heard it. If you're going to complain, find something new to complain about. So if anyone thinks for a moment that, oh he wished he'd known Mark Tobey and what a great thing it would have been to have known Tobey, I can say that on some days and some times it was wonderful to know him; he was marvelous. And other days, you thought, my God, you looked at your watch and tried to think up an excuse to get away from him. Because when Tobey was in a good mood, he was wonderful, but when he was on one of these other kicks, he was the most insufferable complainer in the world. Until you thought he's just-- his needle is stuck. So it was a favorite thing of Tobey to explain patiently to you how practically all the painters of our time were just getting, you know, it was a very bad time. And I couldn't understand in many ways how, why Tobey wasted so much time yapping about the things that he thought were no good. And then he would of course be talking about being neglected, how all the other painters, Pollock and the others, were having spectacular reputations and here was poor Mark, no book published and

all that stuff. So finally, when he started having all this international success, some of us thought, well, now he's finally having it, and so we won't hear about any more complaining. But, oh no! He would somehow brush aside the Louvre show, and the Biennale, and that was all very good, and he'd be back to bitching again. And you thought, well, what is going on? What's he complaining about? Well, he'd suddenly remember that when he was young he applied for a Guggenheim. Then suddenly there he was telling you that the man who took him out for lunch said, "Well, I'm sorry, Mark, can't give you the Guggenheim. We had better material this year." And Tobey had set the clock back decades and he was going back to some early rejection and tirading, and this went on and on, and I couldn't understand why, even when Tobey became terribly famous and successful and had all the things that most people would think were the end of the road, he found so much to complain about. So finally, I asked Berthe Poncy Jacobson, "Well, why is Tobey such a complaint factory?" And she laughed and she said, "You've got to understand one thing about Mark: He's an artist. Artists are like oysters; they don't produce pearls unless they're irritated!" Tobey has an instinct. He realizes that acceptance and fame and all of that, that's the end of your tensions and you fall asleep. So when Mark gets all of these things that he says he wanted, well, that's all very well, but what do you do? You've got them and then there go your tensions. So Mark has to ransack his past or the environment to find something to be upset about because that's how he sustains his tensions. So don't pay any attention to what he's complaining about; that isn't what's going on. Mark is simply guarding his slights, and it's that sense of..."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Guarding his slights. Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: "...because they're what keep him irritated and on his toes." And that was a very interesting remark from Mrs. Jacobson because I thought maybe she's getting down to something a little biological and a little fundamental about artists that, if they're complaining a lot, how valid are the complaints? Do artists have an instinct for the importance of tension and frustration? So...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or at least some artists, who are doing some kind of art.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Do they, is their fear not of rejection, though they scream that they hate rejection, is their real fear, in even a subconscious way, that, God help them, they may be accepted and then what happens? There goes their sacred hunger. There goes their desire, their drive, and that's what... Yeah?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that's true of Tobey? That even in his successful years and even in his late years he always maintained that irritability?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oyster-like irritability.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I think so, and even though it sounds a little tidy, I think there's something to it-- Tobey had a razor-sharp relationship to things. He was very tough on himself, very severe with his own work. What's happened is dreadful-- there are many paintings that he did which were casual, trivial. Many people came through the studio, and they'd see something. Mark was very generous; he'd say, "Oh you like that? You can have it." Just a souvenir, a thing given casually to a friend.

Later on when the works became very valuable, then of course, often out of necessity, the people owning them would put them up for sale. And the galleries, of course, knew there was a market for an original Tobey. Well, what's happened in this area, which is very serious-- an enormous number of really dreadful trivia, if not junk, circulates endlessly with enormous pricetags. Tobey himself would be the first one to deplore that it should have been thrown away, but it's gone on, there's no way, the works are simply worth too much because of Tobey's having done them. No one is going to destroy them. So what we have going on now is a rather nightmarish thing that the very bad works by Tobey and by other artists are endlessly circulated.

The legends about Tobey and these different painters are very intriguing, but a young artist or somebody new to the scene that doesn't know the range of their work-- when they'd painted some good things and how much junk and stuff they ground out-- suddenly goes around and is aware of these local, huge reputations and is confronted by a vast amount of just inexcusably bad stuff. It's enough to make any young artist cynical about the basis of

success because he sees these enormously big reputations, such as Mark's and Morris', and then matches them against this God-awful mess of...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Of the stuff that's around in _____.

WESLEY WEHR: ...of trivia. Yeah. And this is dreadful, what's going on, because the young artist coming on the scene being confronted by this schism between reputation and bad works circulating is going to have every reason for believing that reputation is...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is all hype.

WESLEY WEHR: ...is all hype. And in that way, I think the whole thing is very unfortunate; it just lends more weight to the cynicism that reputation is hype, that the actual merits of the work itself is not a serious matter. So what's happening now, in these perennial reviews of what they call "let's look at the evidence" of the Northwest School, is really a terrible thing for me to have to watch. The lack of what Robert Sarkis calls "con-nos-ser-ship" [WESLEY WEHR is deliberately misprouncing "connoisseurship".] (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What a friend of mine calls "con-noise-er-ship". (chuckles)

WESLEY WEHR: Con-noise-er-ship. Well, we're seeing a great deal of it now. A lot of people who want to serve the cause of Northwest art duly bring out genuine works by genuine Northwest artists, and think that's where their responsibility stops. But I'm afraid what's being done is the most inadvertent hatchet job on the past imaginable. The works that should...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: By ignoring distinctions of quality?

WESLEY WEHR: By ignoring distinctions of quality. They think that to bring out inferior works, not knowing that they're inferior, but they trust them-- the work should have been destroyed; they should not be brought out. If you're going to revive a thing, it should be revived well or not at all.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I want to go back in relation to that question of quality and in relation to the story you were telling about Tobey and maintaining tension. Do you think that the way Tobey conceived his art was particularly related to maintaining a certain kind of tension that entered into the creation of works?

WESLEY WEHR: Ah, that's good, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That that was a more important characteristic in other words for him and his art than it might have been for other people.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. One thing I noticed about Tobey and it's quite true of Helmi, for instance, too. They didn't have a formal platform of what their painting was all about. They might have some general kind of kinky, kooky ideas of, oh, I want to combine the East and the West or the North and the South, but it was a kind of open-end. They didn't have polemics and didactics as such; they had sort of loose ideas. They were often more intuitive, a little unprogrammed. A painter today, if he's the victim of his own press promotion, is going to suddenly realize that in order to go on being himself he's got to be like a certain breakfast cereal that's the same old product with maybe
vitaminC added-- carefully calculated degrees of "progress," and if any...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The continuity?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, the continuity.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A recognizable continuity.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, and it's really a kind of packaging; it's the Quaker Oats that your grandmother grew up on, but it's got alfalfa added.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think Tobey was not in that mind?

WESLEY WEHR: No. He was too smart for that. If you look at his work, it's filled in some ways with all kinds of contradictions. I go into the studio, and on a given month he had painted some very ethereal, abstract, rarified things. Over in the corner were some life studies done

from the model. There might be some satirical things, which are really quite funny, little drawings, quite irreverent. There might even be a still life. And if you went into Tobey's studio, you thought, my God, this man is stylistically schizophrenic. But what the works all had in common was that whatever painting he was engaged on at the moment had his entire attention; it became a thing which he went into as well as he could.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you go to his studio and find sometimes this diversity of work, did you then or do you now have the sense that distinctions of quality might reside in the different kinds of work, so that when he did one kind of work, it was good Tobey, or was any type of work apt to result in a good sometimes. I know that's good work.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I like that. Yeah. Tobey was interesting; he called himself old-fashioned in that he would be the first one to say that anyone who says that figure painting or still life or landscape had had their day is a God-damned jackass. He was impatient with anything to say that only good painting can be done in a certain ism. He thought that was absolutely stupid.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And was he right with regard to his own work?

WESLEY WEHR: I think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That some of the still lifes were good; some of the caricatures were good.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, there are good paintings and there are bad paintings. And when he had the big retrospective at the Seattle Art Museum, the thing that was surprising was that going through it one noticed an enormous range of kinds of painting. But then you thought at the end of the show, well, somehow there's something that holds it all together, and what is it? I think it was quality of Tobey's sensibility; it wasn't just a still life here or different categories, it was something that the level of Tobey's aesthetic energy and tension and all of that somehow gave it-- continuity to this enormous variety of work. In other ways, I think one reason he remains one of the more interesting painters for me is that he didn't short change himself by saying, "Well, now that I'm Mark Tobey, I can't paint the figure any more or I'm not supposed to do this or I'm not supposed that. Which I think is a problem with young painters today; they're...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'm thinking. I know some for whom it's a problem.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, we could really go into that one. But where I think Tobey was well off, he might, in collaboration with the dealers, show works that fell within being Tobeys, because the dealers didn't want to confuse things too much.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He kept right on working at whatever he felt like.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay, but there was the Tobey that was exhibited, and they went on looking more like Tobeys, but if you went into the studio, that was another... Even some of the drawings are quite erotic and wonderfully licentious; they'd be very lusty, busty nude women and all kinds of things; you'd say that can't be a Tobey. And there'd be an owl with a wedding veil, and eighteen pandas in a row, and there's tremendous fantasy. And you walked into Tobey's studio and looked around and said, good God, this man paints by boredom, restlessness, whimsy; like, oh I'm bored with doing that, I'll do something else today. So Tobey was always saying very dogmatically, "Now you shouldn't repeat yourself; you must press on, press on, [create a _____, or some French expression?]" So one day I walked in and he was doing something in the white writing idiom, and I said, "Mark, you've been telling me now an artist shouldn't repeat himself, well, isn't that white writing? Aren't you kind of repeating yourself?" And he went, "Humff, now you know your music, boy, I'm not repeating myself; I'm just recapitulating."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: [Mark Tobey speaking here--WESLEY WEHR] "In a piece of music you go back and touch on the whole thing, and I'm not for a moment going back and repeating myself. I'm just like a pianist that likes to pick up an old piece of music and play it through again and see if he can still do it. And don't you try to tell me I'm repeating myself." So all I'm saying is Tobey could be very dogmatic, but when you pointed out to him that he wasn't the best example of his own dogmas, he usually found a way...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Back at you?

WESLEY WEHR: He didn't take it very well. He usually explained to you that you weren't quite aware of the difference.

(Tape 6, marked tape 4, side 1)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: We had felt last time that one of the things we wanted to talk about was why Mark Tobey eventually left this area, the Seattle area, during the period when Wes Wehr was friends with him. And so why don't we begin by talking about that.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, all right. There's one bit of nonsense that I would like to put an end to; namely, it's a standard story that Tobey left Seattle in a huff because his mural in the state library in Olympia had not been received nicely. So this still surfaces in the paper that Tobey was, quote, "so upset about the lack of response and the criticism of his mural that he packed up and moved out of spite to Switzerland." Well, this is just nonsense, but it makes a pretty story. Another story is that he moved to Switzerland for tax reasons, etc. I don't know how these stories got into the literature but they get stuck in there by a guess or something like that and then before one knows it, they've just become tiresome dogma. In the case of Tobey's moving to Basel, the furor about the Olympia state mural was a cliche '. Any artist doing a public work, takes it for granted that there's going to be some uproar; it's just part of the package deal of such a situation. So Tobey was realistic enough to take this in stride, but the whole thing has been overchoreographed into being quite foolish.

What really happened in the case of Mark, was that he would travel; he loved London, he loved Paris. He was always very taken with, oh, the nineteenth century; he was very Victorian in one sense. He wore... Well, how do I put this? I don't want to say he was like Henry James, but with Tobey you could go into something like the Waldorf-Astoria in New York-- and he loved fine places-- go in and have lunch. And he loved that kind of opulence of the post-nineteenth-century, post-Victorian grandeur. Then the next night I could see him in New York, and we'd take off for the Bowery or Times Square, and go into a cheap movie in a dumpy place. The nice thing about Tobey was he had this great attraction to fine restaurants, grand old hotels, but he didn't have the kind of ego that said, well this is the only place I can go to. He could just as much take off for the Public Market or some really dangerous part of town. But the thing that had a great hold on him was he loved flowers, he loved shops, and he loved anything that was a little old-fashioned. And as Seattle started to stop being just a kind of nice coastal town and decided to get with it, I think Tobey got a little tired of the way University Way was getting jammed. His life on University Way just simply wasn't as pleasant as it had been. Seattle was becoming a bit noisy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. Big post-war growth made Seattle, after the war, I suppose, a great deal different.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Well, I'm inclined to think it was the Seattle World's Fair that was a turning point. Up until then we'd just been kind of an outpost. But about at the time of the World's Fair, there was a tendency to think of Seattle in a different way, like, hey, let's come into the 20th century. At that point, Seattle began to either think of itself or fancy itself as trying to become more cosmopolitan. My own feeling was that it was nice to live in Seattle because it had certain things going for it. If I wanted other things, then you go back to New York. But I felt, and I think Tobey did too, that Seattle was losing some of its virtues and its charm and headed quickly to being kind of a pathetic parody of New York. This bothered him, that the American cities were all trying to become stereotyped. He used to always say, "Well, Wes, you should go here, you should go there, go to London, go to New York."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: For the diversity rather than _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, so then finally, one of the last times I saw him, I said, "Well, where should I go now, Mark?" He said, "Wes, at this point I just don't think it makes any difference. The cities are becoming so uniform that why should I tell you to go to any one of them?" And so he didn't dislike Seattle but he talked about coming back, and we'd go to Manning's [a coffee shop--Ed.] or he'd say, "Tell me about the gossip in Seattle; God knows that's more interesting than the painting." And Tobey retained an affection for the area but the... When I left here in '76 and went to Basel, the first thing I did was to leave the hotel that night and walk over to Tobey's house on St. Alban's [Vorstadt--WESLEY WEHR] and I started walking down to the market place. I found Beyeler's Gallery, I walked along the Rhine, and I suddenly

thought, well, gosh, what Tobey has done is-- Tobey's a walker; he doesn't drive a car-- he's transported, he hasn't, he's actually moved from University Way to Basel, and the distance from his house to the market is about the same. The distance from his house to Beyeler's is about the same as it was from, walking from his house to the Seligman or the Campus and Seders Gallery.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So he moved in order not to have to change his life?

WESLEY WEHR: Exactly. And that hit me that he had moved to a place where he could walk down and buy flowers, buy fresh fruits and vegetables, just as he would at the Seattle Public Market, and suddenly there wasn't any great mystery to me about his moving to Basel; it was simply a nice settled place to live. Tobey was not particularly gregarious; he tended to have-- I think when he was younger he was sort of a know-everybody, knew the scene-- but in his later years he became more and more secluded, up until Pehr's death in 1966. And later, then, well, then Mark Ritter, his secretary, living with him. Tobey tended to have a highly, not tight circle, but he tended to be standoffish meeting people. He turned down invitations. He generally liked a fairly, you could say regulated life. Pehr just went stark raving mad in Basel; he was dying of boredom. But Tobey...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When Tobey moved to Basel, he was already associated with the Beyeler Gallery?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was that a factor in choosing Basel rather than some other place?

WESLEY WEHR: I think as Mark Ritter told me the story, Tobey was passing through Basel, and this wonderful house, 69 St. Alban's Vorstadt in Basel, an incredible street-- Holbein, Paul Klee, Einstein, Burkhardt, had lived on that street. And John Calvin had actually lived in the house where Tobey used to live. So Tobey, as I understand the story-- there was a great Paul Klee show, it may have been in that house; I have sort of the impression that Beyeler had the Klee show, maybe in that house. Tobey was seeing the Klee show, and Beyeler said, "Well, Mr.Tobey, if you like this house, I could make arrangements for you to live here." And I believe, my memory's a little wobbly, that the arrangement, and I hope I don't have this wrong... Oh, okay. Otto Seligman was in a state of shock, here at the Seligman Gallery. I came in and I said, "What's wrong?" And, I believe he said, "Well, Beyeler has told Mark that he can live in that wonderful house on St. Alban's, and he doesn't have to pay rent. He'll take it in trade for paintings."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Seligman couldn't match that.

WESLEY WEHR: Seligman said, "Oh, my God. I think I've lost Tobey. Tobey hates to part with money sometimes, but paintings aren't money [to him--WESLEY WEHR]!"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

WESLEY WEHR: And what had happened was the house belonged, and probably still does, to Mr.LaRoche, of Hoffman LaRoche Pharmaceuticals, an incredibly rich man. And I believe, as I was told by Ritter-- I hope this is right; if Beyeler ever reads this he'll probably say it might turn out accurate enough he'd second it-- Beyeler told Tobey that he could arrange for Tobey to live in the house through Mr. LaRoche.

It's a marvelous house. I was there in '76 and in '78, almost every day for some weeks, seeing Mark Ritter. Tobey was standing with Mark Ritter, or with Pehr, how does this go? Ah. Mark Ritter tells me that Tobey is standing in the doorway of this house--and it's unclear to me whether he said this to Pehr or to Ritter-- wondering, you know, "should I move into this house? It's a nice street. I like it here." And then Ritter said, "Tobey looked across this very narrow street, facing the door, and this beautiful little girl with long golden hair waved at him," and Tobey said, "That does it! That's an omen; that's a good sign! I'm going to live here; that settles it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ that kind of thing.

WESLEY WEHR: And Ritter said, "That's all that Mark needed. He loved the house, he loved the staidness of Basel, and he couldn't quite decide, and then suddenly the little girl waving at him, he said, 'That does it! I'm going to live here.'"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I can't remember whether you mentioned there were more things you wanted to say about the Olympia mural per se. Was there something else?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, well, I was down to see it in Olympia just a few weeks ago and it tends to be experimental; it's a little like an Arp or something. I can see why the legislators, or whoever, went, "Now what is it?" Tobey, since he didn't paint murals regularly, tended when he was given a large commission to experiment, generally to do something that was totally unlike his own style-- for instance, the Journey of the Opera Star at the Opera House here, commissioned by Haubergs.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: At the Opera House.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, the first version was done in Basel-- I've been in the room where Tobey did it, at the back of the St. Alban's house-- well that simply wouldn't have projected at the Opera House here; it was too subtle. And Mrs. [Adelyn--WESLEY WEHR] Breeskin somehow managed to get it for the Tobey show here from the Kunstmuseum in Basel. But it would not have worked as a mural, so the Basel Museum got it instead. And Tobey tended in doing those things to, well, he... "Journey of the Opera Star" came under criticism, and I wrote to Mark, "Well, as far as I'm concerned it's more than a mural." And he wrote back, "You're absolutely right, and this is what people don't understand; this is more than a mural!" (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That limited _____ of the mural. Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, boy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: While we're on this later epoch in their association, do you want to, what was it, you wanted to talk about, particularly Tobey and Guy Anderson in relation to their reticence and the absence of a kind of social-climbing mentality?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. This I noticed immediately when I met Tobey, summer of 1949. His friendship with Feininger was extremely important. He would have dinner at least once a week with Berthe Poncy Jacobson; his friendship with her was of signal importance.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Who was the first person you mentioned?

WESLEY WEHR: Feininger, the painter. Lyonel Feininger in New York.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, when he was in New York, then. Okay. I didn't understand when you [put the two]...

WESLEY WEHR: Tobey and Feininger had correspondence. I think the Seattle Art Museum has the letters now from Feininger to Tobey...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, I just wasn't sure whether you meant someone in Seattle or... Go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, and by the way if anyone's interested, at Harvard, in the Feininger papers, I think you'll find Tobey's letters to Feininger.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay. We'll come back to that kind of thing. You wanted _____. You were talking about how much certain friends meant to him, and I had asked you about Tobey and Anderson and their...

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. Yeah. One thing people are always interested in which famous people knew which famous people. For instance, I believe that Leopardi, the great Italian poet, and Byron were in the same city and never even met each other.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It does happen!

WESLEY WEHR: Right, okay. Dick Selig, the poet, once called me the artistic pimp of the Northwest, by which he meant I was always running around trying to introduce interesting people to each other, and then being [vaguely] disappointed because they didn't seem to get along very well.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: So, I arranged for Mark Tobey to have lunch with Susanne Langer, the great philosopher, in 1953, and that was the one time that Tobey met Mrs. Langer, while she was teaching here. We went to campus for lunch, and Tobey opened with a marvelous rolling oracular, typical Tobey speech, and it was really gorgeous! Well, he sat back very pleased with his opening performance-- it was almost biblical. Well, what he hadn't reckoned on was that Mrs. Langer is brilliant. She had listened carefully to every single word he had said. Tobey was used to moving people, and just laying them in the aisles like Jehovah, but he wasn't used to having people listen to what he was saying. So when Mark got through with this opening speech, Susanne said, "Well, that's very interesting, Mr. Tobey. Now, when you pointed out that..." Well Mrs. Langer proceeded to let Tobey know that she had memorized every step of what he had just said, and listened to every word. Tobey looked at me a little horror-stricken, like, oh my God, what have I just said?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He couldn't remember?

WESLEY WEHR: She was listening and I'm not so sure what I said. He looked a little intimidated by her, and she was very impressed by him. I think he was a little cowed by her. So we had a nice lunch and then we left and I walked up 15th with Tobey and he said, "What does she eat? High protein?" (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they become friends at all?

WESLEY WEHR: No, that was their one and only meeting, but she became very good friends with Guy Anderson. I still call Mrs. Langer once a week; I write her a letter every morning. She's 87 now. But she and Guy Anderson had a very important friendship. She thinks very highly of him; he adores her. So they had many interesting talks together. One thing, people are always interested in the connection between Mark Tobey and Theodore Roethke, well...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was there any?

WESLEY WEHR: No. That's the thing. Tobey knew Roethke's poetry; he knew Open House, the first book. There's a poem by Roethke called "Dolor": "I have known the inexorable sadness." Tobey thought that was a beautiful poem, and he liked Roethke's poetry, admired it. But Tobey, there were some things he would not tolerate, and it was something you had to understand about Tobey instantly-- anyone who was rowdy, drunk, profane, Tobey would have nothing to do him. And Roethke was famous for his drunken kind of-- he and Dylan Thomas, you know, Roethke was an extremely sensitive, brilliant man, who liked to drink and roughhouse, and all of that. And what had happened is Mark told me, "Well, I ran into Mr. Roethke one evening on University Way; he was drunk, he was trying to be very nice to me, but he was, you know, a bit coarse, and I just don't want to be, I admire his poetry, but I will not be around that kind of behavior. I just don't like being around people that are drunk, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were there any of the visual artists who felt any affinity with Roethke as a person?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Roethke and Morris Graves had a very good friendship, and I think they got on very well.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. I didn't know that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, they had a good friendship as far as I know. But Roethke was bothered. He admired Tobey's work very much. I ran into him one day on campus, right outside the Henry Gallery as a matter of fact, and Roethke said, "Well, I've written a letter to Tobey inviting him to dinner with me and Beatrice, and I've told him, 'Mr. Tobey, it can be anyplace, everything on your terms.' I've made it very clear to him how badly I would like him to come to dinner, and I've told him, 'everything his way.' And Wes, you know what I'm like, so for me to say 'everything on your terms' Mr. Tobey."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And it lead to nothing?

WESLEY WEHR: So he said, "Mr. Tobey should have the letter by now, and when you see him can you please tell how much it would mean to me."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How painful.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. "I want to see him; I'm sorry if he thinks I'm rowdy, or whatever."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Vulgar.

WESLEY WEHR: "Maybe I've bungled everything, but would you please put in a good word for me? Tell him I can be decent man." So I went to see Mark a few days later, and he said, "Well, I've had a letter from your friend, Roethke, inviting me to dinner, but I just don't want to go. I'll try to get out of it tactfully." So when I was going through the Suzzallo [University of Washington Library] archive once, I forget where, I found a very nice letter from Roethke to Beatrice Roethke, no...from Tobey to Beatrice.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, from Tobey?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Saying, more or less, "Dear Mrs. Roethke, thank you for your kind invitation. I'm unable to make it for dinner because that's the evening I have dinner with Mrs. Jacobson. But thank you for your invitation." So this is one thing that interests me about art history. Anyone going on the documents will find this sweet letter from...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, right. (chuckles)

WESLEY WEHR: ...Mark to Beatrice saying, "Oh, I can't make it,"...

[Someone comes into room and interrupts-- break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Graves and Roethke admire each other's work?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh yes. Gosh yeah. Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they see each other regularly?

WESLEY WEHR: Graves, oh yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did Roethke have an appreciation for Graves' prankishness and sense of humor, and... I don't picture Roethke that way, but I don't know much about him.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, it was very interesting. Le 'onie Adams, the poet, when she came here to teach, she said, "My God, all you people do is talk about Tobey, Graves, and Roethke. Don't you have anybody else to talk about?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were there other poets...?

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To continue with this a minute more, were there other writers like Carolyn Kizer who knew both painters and Roethke and who formed the basis of group association?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. With all due, I want to say about the list of people who were selected to be interviewed for this series, that whoever did the selection, I think it was a remarkably good list.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was a committee job. (chuckles) Naturally.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. And I'm not saying that because I was invited; I'm saying that because I looked over it and found some real imagination in the selection. There are a couple of people that absolutely should have been on the list, and I think Carolyn Kizer was...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was one?

WESLEY WEHR: ...just, I just kind of went, oh my gosh, I mean Carolyn of all people, should have been included. And then there are others like John Uitti and what not, but then you get into... But certainly Carolyn. Carolyn one time she was publishing poetry, and I was painting, and she said, "Well, Wes, you really had the same situation; there was Mark, there was Morris, there was Ted, and my God, there was poor Wes, poor Carolyn, surrounded by these giants!" She said, "Well, I guess we came to the same conclusion. We had to go and sit in our own sandboxes." (chuckles) "Because," she said, "my gosh, to have Graves and Tobey and Roethke around you, who would dare to do anything?" Well, it's quite true. There was

that time in the fifties on University Way when it was absolutely heady. There'd be a knock on my door; it was Morris, he was bored, let's go out for pastry. I'd get home, there'd be note from Tobey, would you like to go to a movie?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think, though-- you brought up a very interesting point-- do you think that the kind of adulation of these people led to intimidation of younger people? To less energy on the part of the younger generation than there might otherwise have been?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yes, it is interesting. Tobey got very upset when people painted a la Tobey. And they'd bring these dumb little, fake, pseudo, insipid, calligraphic, Sumi, punk, pseudo-white writing, little turds to Tobey, and he'd just tear them to shreds, say, "Well, go home and paint what you know and paint what you love." And Tobey'd say, "I came to all of this through a long evolution of painting figures, and burlesque dancers, and still lifes, and, you know, what makes you think? You've got to start through your own natural process; don't bring me this junk." So Tobey, even though he was considered an abstract painter, got very upset with young painters who hadn't evolved through their deepest enthusiasms and sources. He just tore them to shreds. He said, "This is just silly decoration."

I think partly, it may be a bit of a digression, but since the Northwest School is being reexamined, and resurrected, I do have to say that this is a very uncomfortable time for me. Ken Levine's film on Northwest visionaries, I happen to like a lot. A lot of truth leaked into it by just... There are a lot of in-jokes and a lot of inflected words in it, and it's almost like something by James Joyce. You almost perhaps have to have been part of the crowd to catch the double-edged things that go on in that film. But if one's watching that film you can absolutely crack up because of the ambivalences and the kind of things that somehow come through that movie. I went to the...

[Tape 7, marked tape 4, side 2]

WESLEY WEHR: Come to think of it, the irony is I've... Well, there was a showing of it first at the Seven Gables, and I went to that with some painter friends and just practically cracked up...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Talking about innuendoes and ambiguities not evident to a general audience?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh God, yes. Yeah, because I thought one thing that came through was the deep respect that the artists had for Mark Tobey; the respect came through for Tobey's integrity as an artist, his seriousness. But some of the other things, for instance when it got to Morris, some of the lines had kind of a double-edged love-hate thing about them, where... And I kind of thought, oh, this is wonderful because in the case of Morris what one ends up with, a kind of very complicated love-hate thing. And that came through in the movie. The truth came through despite ourselves. I think the... Bill Cummings says some very funny things, like they asked him what we were thinking about in those days. [He answered: --Ed.] "Well, we were kind of thinking where our next meal and our next lay or girlfriend was coming from." Well, that's typical of Bill Cummings; he's pretty good.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure.

WESLEY WEHR: But I really thought that the funniest moment of high comedy in the movie, unintentionally, was Kenneth Callahan, who held forth. Kenneth Callahan, I've always had a nice acquaintanceship with; he's been very pleasant and whatnot. But what struck me as a little hard to take, if not comical, was that when Kenneth was talking about the good old days, he would say Mark, he would say Morris, with a sort of, oh, one big happy family. Well, it's my impression that those artists were probably pretty close years ago. I don't know the details of the fallings-out and why certain frictions arose, but I thought really that Callahan in the film was making everything sound just peachy and I really thought, "Oh no. Kenneth, for God's sakes, this isn't fair." Things here have been riddled with great feuds and passions and everything else, and to hear Kenneth tell it, oh God, you know, just nature and art and brotherhood, and I...

Well, when Sue Ann Kendall was going out to interview Kenneth, I met Sue Ann for coffee and she said, "Well, I'm going to interview Kenneth Callahan, and if you were going to do that, what would your first question be?" And I said, "Well, now that you ask, my question would be, "Kenneth, do you really believe the crap that you tell Deloris Tarzan?" Well, maybe he does, but the thing that puts me to sleep is this nature, all these artists pretending that

each one is nature's intimate confidante, some local delphic oracle. Well, okay, the artists here do love nature, but they don't have any exclusive on it. Tobey was concerned about good paintings...

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: This may be a bias of mine or a misinterpretation, but I'll stand by it. The Northwest mystics have been often depicted as solitary figures. Well, that's not true; they knew or know everybody, highly gregarious, very much in touch with art movements. This idea of the artists in this area living in vast seclusion is just a crock of shit. But although Tobey, Graves and Anderson, and what not, have very serious interests in Oriental art and philosophy and all of that, I think certain affectations... For instance Tobey at one point wanted to be maybe a preacher, and then he was an actor, a very good one, at Cornish. Morris is Irish; he happens to have, like John Cage and Merce Cunningham, a tremendous sense of theater. So I think one thing that held back Guy Anderson's fame or recognition is that Guy simply is not as gifted a theatrical personage as Tobey and Graves-- and Roethke! These three people knew how to get talked about and be the subject of attention.

And sometimes I think it backfired and became a bloody nuisance. But I think what happened was, certainly in the case of Graves and Tobey, they attracted enormous followings. Anyone who's got any vitality and flare whatsoever is going to find himself with a coterie, or people mooning over him. So what happened, there became a confusion between, well, I'll say the theatrical force of the artist himself, in having a myth woven around him and helping it along very effectively. So what happened, if you got a Tobey painting or a Graves painting, for many people they couldn't tell a good one from a bad one; they were just getting a holy relic. It was "the master painted this." Tobey, very generous, he would give the, "Oh, you like that? You can have it." And Tobey was forever giving people presents, and then as his fame came on, this damned stuff of course had some monetary value and appeared on the market.

Tobey, Northwest shows, Graves shows, what's "The road to..."? Oh, yes. "The road to banality is paved with good intentions." All of these people who have wanted to resurrect the Northwest School, well unfortunately the Northwest School consists of some extraordinarily powerful paintings and an appalling amount of potboilers and stuff that should have been burned. But unfortunately, in this resurrecting of the Northwest School for critical reexamination, an awful lot of miserable works by those artists have also been pulled out of mothballs. I think on the curatorial level an exceptionally fine job has been done by Ray Kass on the Graves show. That is one of the best things to happen in recent years. I think Kass has written a text on Morris which is a break-through. He's curated the show in a way that I think really is fair to Morris. But what bothered me, in that being in the artists' studios in the years, especially in Tobey's studio, constantly, I had some idea of what Mark was painting, what was going to New York, what was disappearing into European museums, and what was staying here. Unfortunately, marvelous works were constantly going to Europe. Tobey would say, "Well, I've gotta save my best works for Europe now." So unfortunately in the collections in this area, some of Tobey's greatest periods are only haphazardly represented.

What's been very confusing for the young artists who come on the scene, confronted by this dinosaur called the Northwest School-- it's just kind of a horrible monster anyway. They go around and they see some trivial little thing that Tobey banged out in five minutes and gave to some friends and it's priced at $15,000. Trivial! It should never have gotten even-- into a frame. Well, enough young artists going around and seeing this stuff could quickly come to the impression that reputation is a farce. People owning this stuff when they find that the junk is worth something, they're not going to throw it away, and if they take it in to a gallery, a dealer is not going to say, "Oh, that's a piece of crap. Take it home; I won't touch it." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Maybe should, but won't.

WESLEY WEHR: Maybe should! But the whole, well, I guess... Who's to blame? The painter? Because...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Because he gave it to a friend?

WESLEY WEHR: Because he gave it to a friend.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Quality control begins at home?

WESLEY WEHR: Right. Yeah! Well, on the other hand, it's fun to give things to friends. It keeps you unconstipated.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And an artist's own need to play and experiment...

WESLEY WEHR: Of course!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...not to do everything in a masterpiece mode.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I guess all I have to say is-- well, Picasso said an artist shouldn't collect his own work. And then John Uitti, the framer, one day said, "Painters shouldn't collect their own work because it's a fundamental law of biology that an organism cannot survive in its own excrement." (laughs) God... Okay for that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ view of art.

WESLEY WEHR: But one time Pehr said, "Oh Mark! You gave away all that work, and if you'd kept it you'd be worth so much money now!" And Mark said, "Oh for God's sakes, Pehr, if I hadn't given it away, people would never have heard of me and I'd still be sitting here with a big house full of paintings."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And they wouldn't be worth a lot of money.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Tobey said, "Well, Pehr, now that you bring it up, look at the people to whom I gave those things." Well, Tobey's gifts weren't all that, I mean some... Yeah, Tobey just said-- and dealers hate this remark-- "It's better to give your work to the right person than sell it to the wrong one." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Leaves out the middle man altogether.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. When I published my nine installments of Tobey conversations, I knew I was going to step on toes; it's surprising I didn't get the whistle blown on me more often, but... Oh, can we break for a minute?

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: In 1973, Elizabeth Bishop, the poet, arranged for me to meet Loren MacIver, the painter, who lives in New York now. For a long time, in books on American painting, Loren MacIver would be mentioned with Mark Tobey and with Morris Graves as perhaps the three American intimate painters, and Loren did know Tobey in Paris, met Morris Graves. Both of them-- Graves and Tobey-- and certainly Guy Anderson, Bill Ivey, esteemed MacIver's painting very highly. So it's always been very interesting to me that, when we say the Northwest School, you know, what in blazes does that mean? Some of our very best painters that live here don't have anything to do with the Northwest, and some really punk painters get brownie points because they fall under the general description of the Northwest School. But there are some paintings by John Franklin Koenig painted in Paris that have more the feeling of the San Juans and Northwest weather. It'd be very interesting to me, for instance, if Mark Rothko had painted his great things on the Oregon coast, his great DeMenil, Texas things. They could easily have been painted in the San Juan Islands, or the Oregon coast, and then one would have said, "Oh, they're a great testament to the Pacific fog reaching to Japan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That would have been said. Yes, exactly.

WESLEY WEHR: So, what we have is a very curious thing. The best so-called Northwest painters haven't necessarily even been here, or certainly painted here. This thing, Northwest, is tiresome because it's, what we're talking about is a certain kind of intimacy or a certain palette, and it's interesting to me that MacIver could have such an affinity with Graves and Tobey in one way, and still be at the opposite end of the country. But the mumbo-jumbo surrounding the Northwest mystics and the Northwest School I'm sure led to a lot of attention, but it's also backfired badly. The painters, in being very interested in Zen Buddhism and Asian philosophy and religion, and then being very interested in nature here and in the Orient... Well, what happened, in a way, was that anyone being introduced to Tobey's work or Graves' work or some of the others, it would be very hard to look at the painting intrinsically, is this a good painting? Because those paintings, obviously done by somebody who has a pipeline to Zen Buddhism and has meditated in a monastery and God

knows what else, and has affinities with great religious traditions, God knows what else. I guess what I'm trying to say facetiously is that it's very hard to look at some of these paintings cold turkey. Is it a good painting? Because the inference would be, if you don't like my work or my painting, well, you're dismissing Zen Buddhism and God knows what else--and nature!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And nature.

WESLEY WEHR: And nature, because I love nature and I've spent so much time in it, you know, that my paintings are nature. Well, I'm not quite saying this...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A little as you were saying earlier, the paintings came to be accepted as relics and testimony...

WESLEY WEHR: I think so, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...to the painter's state of mind rather than being judged as independent works.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. Well, I'm as guilty of that as anyone; when I first met Tobey I bought Tobeys like crazy. And I had them, Tobeys all over the place. Crazy about his work, but I bought, certainly, things by Mark that ten-twenty years later, when I looked at them I thought, "Gee, that's a dumb little thing, but Mark did it." What happened with Tobey's work is that some things I liked better looked better to me all the time. And the others look dumber all the time. At one point, they were all Tobeys, but it took a long time for me to sort them out.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did anyone here or did you yourself ever speculate about the absence of many good historical artworks in museums as a factor in allowing that to happen?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As a factor in sliding and insufficient standards of quality.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It may be that no one thought of that, but here were all these painters who came to the university like Patterson and Isaacs, who should have known better. And Tobey traveled, and Graves traveled, I don't know whether they regarded it as a factor.

WESLEY WEHR: Tobey would say, "Don't waste your life being your hometown's most fashionable painter." It is true that the painters here certainly traveled a lot. And thanks to people like Zoe Dusanne, who had brought to this area an enormous knowledge of art. If I get started on the subject of Zoe Dusanne's importance here, that'd be a whole, long speech by itself.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: We can refer people to the master's thesis on her that covers it in 200 pages.

WESLEY WEHR: I think we'd better do that, but Zoe Dusanne for me is a towering figure here. Another figure here of tremendous importance, lost in the shuffle is Elizabeth Bailey Willis-- Betty Willis, Mary Randlett's mother. Very important in her role in the Tobey show at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, in her introducing Tobey's work into New York. It isn't the time to go into all of that, but I just have to say categorically that, and Guy Anderson, when I talked to him on the phone last night and told him I was doing this tape, he said, "Be sure that you stress Betty Willis' importance here." Because...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you want to break at this point from talking people and events as we have been and talk for a few minutes about those people and those resources that you think are important for art of this area?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. This is something I'd like to put on a record, get it out of the way. And I took a few notes on it. What I've been thinking about quite seriously in the past few days is which of the artists here leave behind them a body of documents and archival materials from which can be reconstructed a pretty complete picture of what they were like? And which artists are going to leave behind a misleading, fragmentary thing from which some scraps can be reconstructed but the artist himself is going to be lost? So what I have

been trying to do is figure out in terms of the students and historians later which artists can be reconstructed pretty reliably. For myself, with Maxine Cushing Gray's Northwest Art, I published starting 1976, nine installments of conversations with Tobey, taken from notes that I made at the time. So many people have said that some day they intend to write their memoirs and then one day they drop dead or they don't want to remember the past.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

WESLEY WEHR: So that to get this stuff out of my own way, I started, thanks to Mrs.Gray, doing something like William Hazlett's Tabletalk [19th-century essay--Ed.], thinking now writing a book is boring. I'd rather publish short memoirs from time to time and do it that way. So it's not an ominous chore.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you've set those down?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So what I've done is publish a tremendous amount on Tobey, mostly direct quotes. I read it, it's from my own notes, and then in doing these installments I would have Mark Ritter go over them. Ritter was very adamant that he supported them and liked them. Guy Anderson and others have too.

Before I publish an installment, I'd send it to certain people who knew Tobey very well and say, "Well, please check it out. Is it accurate?" So partly I wanted authenticity, and partly I just wanted to make sure that once it was in print somebody wouldn't write a letter to the editor saying, "That ain't the way I heard it." So in memoirs that I've published, I've tended to run them through a lot of people in manuscript saying, "Read it now, and forever hold your peace. If there's anything that doesn't jibe, well, tell me, because it's about to go to press." So in the case of Tobey I have some things in private manuscript. I may publish a little more on Tobey later, but by and large in what I've done with Mrs. Gray, it just about represents the bulk of what I'd have to say about Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What you have in manuscript, in addition to that is still with you. It's not in Suzzallo [University of Washington Library--Ed.]?

WESLEY WEHR: No, it's not in Suzzallo. I have some kind of bumpy little stories and stuff like that. Joe Newland, here at the Henry Gallery, has his own private copy of my Tobey notes. And some things that are not to be published; Joe has a copy of them. In the case of Morris Graves, I've written out accounts which I haven't decided what to do with them. (chuckles) I do want to write some memoirs on Morris-- sooner or later. But before I publish those anywhere, I think I would show them to Jan Thompson, maybe Marshall Hatch. I would screen them with Jan because I don't know anyone who knows Morris better than Jan does. Guy Anderson certainly knows him very well. But I wouldn't want to publish something on Morris without having Jan read it because she could tell if it's accurate, if it's fair, or if some secret axe to grind has crept in on my part which I can't see.

I did a memoir on Pehr Hallsten and Helmi Juvonen and Tobey for Northwest Arts, and I think that one pretty well encompasses, gives a fairly good impression of Pehr. I will be doing a long one on Susanne Langer eventually. I'd like to do some memoirs on Guy Anderson later. I told that to Guy last night. He likes the Tobey conversations and seems to trust me with being reasonably delicate. But I want to go through very quickly about Tobey resources. Tobey was such a voluminous letterwriter-- and the Seattle Art Museum has inherited his papers and all that-- that by and large I think a fairly accurate Tobey will be reconstructed. There's enough documentation to pretty well put Tobey together. Fred Hoffman, God help us, I have very little respect for him. I don't want to get very sarcastic, but I have read some of Mr.Hoffman's writings on Tobey and they make me shudder. He psychoanalyzes Tobey in a way that would have sent Tobey through the ceiling. And I've clashed openly with Hoffman on this matter. I think he's on a California hip-trip, or God knows, but Hoffman's version of Tobey is so alien to me that I just kind of tolerate it and try to forget it. Tobey himself is the first... Mark Ritter told me that just before died he said, "Well, tell my friends to cool it on anyone perpetrating the idea that I understood Zen or had enlightenment. That is pompous; that is ridiculous." And Bill Seitz has this also in his wonderful book on Tobey, thank God.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's right, that's right.

WESLEY WEHR: But when a jackass like Hoffman comes along and calls up me and calls up Betty Willis, you know, about Tobey's enlightenment, this is projection, sheer nonsense. Tobey would be the first to just... Well, while we're about it, Fred Hoffman went to see Tobey

in Basel, and, went with his wife, and, you know, he wanted to explain to Mr. Tobey what he was doing. Ritter told me afterwards, "Well," he said, "Mr. Hoffman came with his wife to see Mark. Mark really couldn't understand half the stuff that that Mr. Hoffman was talking about. And after he left..."

[Tape 8, marked tape 5, side 1]

WESLEY WEHR: Mark Ritter said, "Mark told me after that young man had been here, 'Oh, he's certainly awfully serious. I had an awful time following some of the things that he told me about what he thought I had done. I had no idea I'd done some of those things. But I must say his wife is very charming, quite pretty.'" Well, that's from Ritter to me, that Tobey had not been particularly impressed by Mr. Hoffman. So if Mr. Hoffman ever makes a big to-do about his visit to the master, well, that's Ritter's word.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There's the other side of it.

WESLEY WEHR: There's the other side. When I went with Fred Hoffman to see George Tsutakawa [Northwest sculptor--Ed.], that was very interesting. At that point Hoffman was still beating the drum for religious enlightenment and God knows what else. And George Tsutakawa, who has a remarkable grasp of Tobey, immediately pointed out that the aesthetic impact of Japan on Tobey was very important. Tsutakawa told Hoffman, told me, well, "It was Tobey who introduced us American-Japanese to our own traditions; we were losing touch with them. It's Tobey who understood the Japanese aesthetic and woke us up to what a beautiful tradition we'd come out of." Betty Willis would be the first one to say Mark used to say the Japanese have the finest aesthetic tradition imaginable, and Betty would stress this. The diaries that Tobey kept in Ceylon and China and Japan, Kyoto, 1934-- I do have a Xerox copy of them. Eliza Rathbone has a copy. And they're very interesting; they're actually entries from the Kyoto Monastery, in 1934, where Tobey allegedly was meditating and having enlightenment. Well, all one has to do is simply read Mark's daily account of being in Japan while he's supposedly having this religious conversion and it'll confirm what George Tsutakawa said, what Betty Willis says, that Tobey's diary... Oh, there's one funny episode. "The gong has just sounded for meditation. I don't want to go and I can't think of another excuse." (laughs) And, yeah, that's not quite the words, but that's the gist.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. It's an aesthetic not religious experience.

WESLEY WEHR: But he's talking about a fascinating Japanese painter that lives up the road. He's got a wonderful prose sketch about the toad, and Tobey's talking about the sense of scale and all of that, a little like William Blake. So Mark was very emphatic, and Ritter told me, that it is pompous and unfair to Tobey for anyone to claim that Tobey, for a moment, thought he could grasp Zen. And so I really have to be very bitchy and very angry at anyone who, in a well-meaning or pompous jackass way tries to choreograph Tobey as anyone who had religious delusions. And one quick little aside, because Tobey and Mrs. Jacobson were very close friends. One day Mrs. Jacobson said to me, "Well, Wes, I've read some Zen but I'm European, I'm Swiss, and I can't understand it. Of course I can't; it's too far removed from me." But she said, "There is one little thing in it that I read, and that's where the Zen master, the student comes and says, 'Oh Master, what is the meaning of Zen,' and the master says, 'Have you had your breakfast?'-- 'Why yes!'-- 'Have you done your dishes?'-- 'Why no!'-- 'Well then, why don't you go and do your dishes?'" Mrs. Jacobson said, "If that has something to do with Zen, maybe I could understand a little bit of it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: (laughs) Bless her heart. Okay. Well, mind you I'm now quoting one of the greatest people Mark Tobey ever knew, one of his very closest friends. So, take that as a clue... (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Of where his head really was.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. So Tobey, to make his own myth and play the role of Mark Tobey, may have at times put on a certain mumbo-jumbo. But take that theatrical side of Tobey with a grain of salt. Oh, can we break for a moment?

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: I apologize that I'm a little disorganized. There's so much that I want to put

down that I haven't put it in the best of orders. To go back to the matter of Tobey documents, Berthe Poncy Jacobson had an extraordinary correspondence with Tobey. She had many letters from him. And she and I, a few weeks before she died even, talked about the possibility that she could put her Tobey letters with the Suzzallo Library under restriction. And when I mentioned that the letters could be restricted, then she started to think twice that maybe that would be agreeable. But on the other hand, she felt that Americans had very little respect for people's privacy, and she'd just say, "I'm sorry, Wes, it was a private friendship, as your friendship with Mark was a private one, and I..." She simply was very ambivalent about private letters, so when she died of a heart problem, we simply could not find the letters-- and they would have been very important letters. So, a search was made and as far as I understand it, several weeks before she died she did throw out her diaries. It's very possible, in view of what she said to me that she did just decide that her friendship with Tobey was very private. It's very possible that she destroyed the letters.

Another batch of very important correspondence would have been Tobey's letters with Seligman, but I have the impression that when Seligman died-- and it was I who found him in his Wilsonian Hotel room. I went to see why he hadn't showed up and he'd died in his sleep. My impression-- and this could be confirmed or whatever-- is that the letters from Tobey to Seligman, most of them at least, may have been destroyed. I can understand perhaps why that would be; they would have a great deal of business in them and Tobey was always rather paranoid about business. So...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He'd sooner get rid of them.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I think there's a good chance that Tobey asked that his letters to Seligman be destroyed because they involve so many transactions of business that Tobey may have felt that somewhere in the correspondence were things that he didn't want circulated. So as far as I know, all of those letters disappeared. I do have, on a fluke, I have a beautiful letter from the Bahai Congress in Chicago to Pehr, which is in my own possession, given to me...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Concerning Tobey?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh it's a beautiful letter; it's from Tobey to Pehr. Helmi Juvonen gave it to me. And it's just a fluke that it survived.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, it's written from there? From Chicago, I see.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So Guy Anderson gave me, to give to Suzzallo and the American Archives [Archives of American Art--Ed.], some marvelous letters, letters from Tobey to Guy, letters and notes from Morris Graves to Guy. So Guy has been terribly generous, and those things have been donated to the American Archives and Suzzallo.

Because Tobey and Guy Anderson, from the very beginning up until Tobey's death, had a very good friendship that, to the best of my knowledge, there never was any kind of a falling out between Tobey and Guy. It was a stable, long-term friendship. I wish I could say the same about some of our other luminaries, but one of the firm friendships in this whole school has been certainly Tobey and Guy.

I'd like quickly to say that in matters of understanding Tobey's work, as I understand it anyway, and having an eye for good Tobeys, bad Tobeys, genuine ones, but possible forgeries, that I personally consider Francine Seders to be excellent. There happen, apparently, to be a great many Tobey forgeries floating around, but I want to say on this record, certainly, that I consider Francine Seders to have an extraordinarily reliable ability to evaluate a work attributed to Tobey.

I'd like quickly to mention Joanna Eckstein, who I think is one of the most wonderful figures in this whole scene. I've tremendous regard for Joanna, and also Betty Willis... Oh God, I'm going off!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were you mentioning them in relation to the same thing? Judgments and quality of judgments?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, what I'm saying is, with Zoe Dusanne, with Joanna Eckstein, we had some early collectors here who were marvelously independent. Jo Eckstein is a wonderful figure. Very few people think of her as a collector or have the vaguest idea of what a pioneer

she was here.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

WESLEY WEHR: People tend to think that pioneering starts with Virginia Wright in this area, which (chuckles) is a little hard to believe. But sometimes I seem to think people think we grew up in 1963. Well, I hope someday...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: After the Fair [Seattle World's Fair, 1961--Ed.].

WESLEY WEHR: After the Fair. I don't want to get launched onto this one, but we have a tradition of sophistication and cosmopolitanism here that simply, the reason it's not known is that it was participated in by people who were basically quiet and unpushy, and didn't make a lot of noise about everything they did. So, but that's a sore point with me, this attitude that our culture starts quite late. But certainly in Halley Savery at the Henry Gallery, a great pioneer, Joanna Eckstein, Zoe Dusanne, Betty Willis-- extraordinary figures. And any scholar who wants to go in, as Pat Svoboda has done on Zoe Dusanne, marvelous piece of research. I'd like to say about Paul Cummings, formerly with the American Archive and now with the Whitney, that his understanding of Tobey, Tobey the man, Tobey's work... Paul will frequently say things to me about Tobey that I find astonishing. I'm supposed to have known Tobey quite well, but God, if I want to talk to somebody, if I have an idea about interpreting Tobey, I call up Paul.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You go to Paul?

WESLEY WEHR: I go to Paul Cummings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he know Tobey? Or know Tobey's works?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yeah, both. God, he didn't, you know, live in Tobey's guestroom for 50 years and all that stuff, but I think that really Paul Cummings has a grasp of Tobey on the aesthetic level and the personal level which flips me out.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So if I want to come off sounding good on Tobey, I check myself out with Paul Cummings, something like that. Oh, we can break now.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: I think with young artists, certainly in the case of, oh, for instance Tobey when he was in New York-- and this is in any book on him-- he knew Edgar Varese, Mary Garden, good God, Marsden Hartley, he knew everybody. And very often, with young persons, they're out meeting all the interesting people, all the famous people. This is a part of those early years. And certainly in the case of Morris Graves, who still knows extraordinary people. Guy Anderson has known, of course, Susanne Langer, Bernard Leach, he's known many extraordinary people, Edward Root, the collector. But the point is later on I think, by the time I met Tobey, he didn't care to go out too much. He was certainly not a celebrity chaser, he tended to have a close circle, but he certainly wasn't out trying to meet interesting people. He enjoyed being around people that he liked, but he was actually very distant to people who were famous but of no interest to him. In the case, the night that the Opera House [Seattle--Ed.] mural was being unveiled, for instance, Zoe Dusanne and Tobey had not spoken to each other in many years. There'd been that horrible parting of the ways between them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When he changed galleries over that...

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, when he changed galleries. And I think in my friendship with Mark one of the few cases where he did something that bothers me, that was leaving Dusanne. That's one of the few things that in the case of Tobey I kind of think was not very nice. Because I loved Zoe Dusanne and I was good friends with Seligman, but I think certainly in that case Tobey was, I don't want to say cruel, but it's an embarrassing episode. And Zoe was crushed by it; it just happened so suddenly. It was a very unpleasant thing. But at the Opera House, I was sitting with Zoe at the unveiling and there was Mark. And Zoe looked at Tobey and she

looked at me and she said, "Wes, I'm getting old. He's getting old. This can't go on any longer. We can die any time." And this took enormous something for Zoe. She got up and she walked over to Mark-- and I found this awesome.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: And she said, "It's very nice to see you again, Mark." He was startled and he embraced her. So it was over. And he said, "Well, I'd like to see you again." She said, "Well, you must come to dinner." And then she came back and she sat with me, and she was almost crying. And she said, "Oh, it's over! This nightmare is over." It was a gorgeous moment and I think I learned something from that. So Mark Ritter and Tobey and I went to have dinner with Theodosia and Zoe, and I was very glad that everyone had lived long enough to do that. Well that was quite an evening. I started down the [Opera House-- WESLEY WEHR] stairs with Berthe Poncy Jacobson and I thought, my God, Dusanne, Jacobson, Tobey, this is quite an evening. You know, this is the caldron.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Everybody.

WESLEY WEHR: God, you know, this is the moment of truth. Halfway down the stairs, Mrs. Jacobson stands, stops on the stairs and looks at me and says, "There are people who think it's not nice to grow old. Well, let me tell you there are a few nice things about it, Wes. One is that by the time you are my age, you don't need people any more, and then for the first time you're free to love them." Wooo! And then she said, "And another thing about being as old as I am, you come to that point where you don't have to be anything, and you don't have to do anything. I don't have to play the piano. I don't have to be a pianist. And when you don't have to be anything or have to do
anything, then you can do a lot." And then she said, "Well." And she wandered off, and I thought, oh boy, this is quite an evening.

So I was standing there, and of course it was the unveiling of the Tobey mural and there were a lot of brownie points connected with, you know, see if Tobey will come to your house after the unveiling, and you can tell all of your friends, "Well, we had Mark over." You know, lots of brownie points for that. So I watched the different people come up, "Oh Mark, would you like to come to our house? We're going to have a little pastry, and we can take you home afterwards, and come and have some coffee, just a few of us, Tom and Shirley, and Agnes, Mary." It was a little competitive.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, so Mark was going on, "Oh I'm sorry, but you know I'm pretty old and I haven't been feeling well and my stomach-- I really should go home and go to bed." He was being very polite. I think Morris wouldn't have been so polite. You know, "What makes you think I'd come to your house? Who do you think I am?" Morris can be pretty rude. I'm glad I slipped that one in. Anyhow... (chuckles) Morris, I've got to come to grips with you yet. So Tobey passed me, very innocently, nudged me in the ribs and said, "My place. Midnight. Scrabble." Okay. (laughs) So I went back and sat with Dusanne and, sure enough, at midnight I went up to Mark's, the door was unlatched. I walked in. He'd set up the scrabble board, opened our scores, made the first play, and said, "Your play, boy." (chuckles) So anyhow, okay. What I want to tie this into is presently Guy Anderson, who's a little like Mark in this respect. When Guy Anderson has an opening at the Seders Gallery or a retrospective at the Seattle Art Museum, the Henry Gallery, there aren't any great festivities planned for him. The mayor doesn't invite him to go out for a drink. And why not say it, all the right people in town don't throw a big bash for Mr. Anderson because, thank God, Mr. Anderson isn't in with certain circles here. Oh, but I'd better not carry this one too far; I'm going to get nasty.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. I think it's one reason Guy Anderson has grown as an artist; he's never been fashionable in this town.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He's never been fashionable, and he's never had to resist being lionized.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. And I will be a little indiscreet in that one time a few years ago when I was up in La Conner with Guy and we were having dinner, and nice fishermen would come

by and pleasant neighbors, Guy looked at me and he said, "Well, you may be a little surprised at some of the friendships I have up here and might kind of be thinking to yourself, well, how come. But Wes, let me tell you I like these people, I have nice times with them, nice friendships. It's the people in Seattle that invade my center. These people up here, they don't invade the part of me that paints, the part of me that needs to be left alone. It's those people in the art world in Seattle, and I had to get out of Seattle because they go for your center."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he mean other artists also? Did he need to get away from other artists?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, no. I think what he meant was he needed a place where he could have nice friends, but...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Without a scene.

WESLEY WEHR: Without a scene and too much buzz and the right people and all the people and all the king-of-the-mountain politics, all of that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure.

WESLEY WEHR: So, I'm not speaking for Guy, by the way. I'm merely doing a little projection here. But anyhow, if Guy has an opening here or the Seattle Art Museum thing, he does something that's terribly nice. He isn't concerned about, well, are they having a big party for me or, you know, he couldn't care less. What he does is go around to a number of old friends, young artists, who perhaps have been cooking on a toaster oven for three weeks and working in the fish market, and says, "I've arranged the rides. We're all going to Nikko's tonight for dinner. The sky is the limit. It's on me." Or he says, "Oh, I have some tickets for the Opera House. I'm taking us all to Leontyne Price tonight. So Guy would say, "Well, when Tobey was selling paintings, Tobey sent me checks." Guy would, when his paintings were selling, he would send me checks. And it's because Guy has sent me endless hundred-dollar checks that I, I've just named the world's oldest-known cherry tree after him: [Paraprunus--Ed.] Andersonii [Wolfe and Wehr, authors--Ed.]. So that's another story.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In your paleobotany?

WESLEY WEHR: In my paleobotany. And then the next week we name something after Richard Fuller. But what I want to say about Guy is he'd send me this money, and so I'd say, "You're too generous." And he'd say, "Well, this is what Mark did to me and I don't need it. You...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Pass it on to the next.

WESLEY WEHR: So Guy is wonderful. He's used his success, to take the rest of us out, Glenn Brumett, Edward Kamuda, Deryl Walls, for incredible banquets. We just, to Nikko's or... So Guy, when he goes to a preview, will be very gregarious, very chatty; he can stand for several hours in one spot just answering endless questions, seeming terribly friendly and outgoing. But he happens to be an intensely private person. He has very close friends, Deryl Walls, the playwright. If he travels, he travels with a few very close friends, he might go to see Mrs. Breeskin, or Phyllis Massar, but he even dodged seeing Paul Cummings when in New York. He dodged an invitation from Alfred Frankenstein, even though we'd had dinner with Frankenstein. Guy travels, he loves to go to the museums, but always with a few close friends. I'm not doing a very good job of it, but what I'm trying to say is that Guy tends to have a fairly nice life in LaConner. The painting, I don't want to say he lives just for his work; that's misunderstood. But he certainly lives a very nice life and in his friendships it's the people he likes, not the right people. We can break now.

[Tape 9, marked side 1]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wes, you wanted to say things about Mark Tobey, but before that, maybe you'd like to start by addressing the question of the Northwest School in general, which we were just talking about, along with Zoe Dusanne.

WESLEY WEHR: Uh huh. Well, I should explain that Martha has spent the past hour or so getting me quite tipsy on gallons of black coffee, so I'm not quite totally in possession of myself and I'm not too sure of what I'll be saying today. But anyhow, this tiresome thing

called the Northwest School-- one has to live with that slogan, if one's going to go on living around here. If any...

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: My impression of how the Northwest School as a slogan came about has a great deal to do with Zoe Dusanne. She happened to know a great many influential people and at one point, as I understand it, it was Zoe who talked to the critic who did the very important article on the mystic Northwest painters in Life magazine back in 1953...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: '52 or '3, I'm not sure which.

WESLEY WEHR: '53. Yeah, so probably it's what Zoe said at that time about the interest that Tobey and Graves and Guy had in Oriental philosophy and religion, their interest in Zen and all of that, that had a great deal of influence on how that article is written. I wouldn't think that the artists themselves really had codified themselves so much, but Zoe had a good sense of theater, she knew what would make good press, she was a good salesman, a good champion for the artists. I think in a way that her enthusiasm plus her sense of handing the press something that would make a good feature story, in a way sort of led to this thing that we've been stuck with ever since called the Northwest School. It certainly was glamorous, there was something fresh about the idea of it, and it gave the painters instantly a kind of distinction. They were different-- it led to a sort of kind of notoriety for them, but like any schools, I think it obscured a lot about the actual paintings itself. And I don't think we need to go into that anymore at this point.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, but you're saying in part that not only she played an important role, but you think her formulation of that in her head was perhaps stimulated by the opportunity of the Life magazine article; she hadn't been presenting them that way in her gallery before that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, but she was a very good friend of Winthrop Sargeant, the music critic, and she was very good. She had a marvelous sense of theater, and if anyone has read Pat Svoboda's work on Zoe, I think it's a tremendous thing she did. I worked somewhat with her, but Pat Suboda went back and forth asking each of us different questions and cross-checking her answers to see...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was a big piece of work all right.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I've got tremendous respect for her. But, I would, at this point, probably mention something that I've gone into before, that usually when people are interviewed about artists or about their own lives, anyone who's going to be listening to it or reading it is unfortunately more interested in which famous people knew which famous people, and which ones loved which ones and which ones hated which ones. I'm afraid that the historical record often is not particularly accurate. People are always asking me, "Well, were Theodore Roethke and Tobey friends?" and this and that, but what bothers me very much, looking at the books now written on Tobey or different people, it's the well-known names that are bandied around, but the people who were profoundly important to Tobey, well, it's lucky if they're even mentioned in the books.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And who are you thinking of?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, case in point, I think it's almost disgraceful the way that you're not going to find Zoe Dusanne mentioned in any book on Tobey, except maybe he had some exhibitions with her; but Zoe had an enormous influence and role in Tobey's being introduced into Europe. Zoe had many powerful friends and she literally set out to make Tobey's work known in Europe. She's of course not the only figure on that, but she had a great deal to do with opening the doors in Europe, paving the way. Betty Willis had an enormous, crucial role in Tobey's introduction into New York, and that gets lost in the shuffle. And she had a big role in his ex...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She played a big role in introducing him to Marian Willard.

WESLEY WEHR: Yes. And then she knew Feininger, she was very close to the Feiningers, she...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Tobey know Feininger through her or independently, sort of a

mutual acquaintance?

WESLEY WEHR: That's what I wonder; I never quite got that straightened out with her.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: And then she went to Sidney Janis with Tobey's work. One story that I have heard is that Marian Willard hired Betty to sell Morris Graves's works in the front [gallery room--Ed.] because Morris was suddenly very well known, very successful-- and a very nice idea that Betty, who knew Morris quite well, could be kind of working for Marian Willard and selling Graves' works. But as I understand it, Betty was also at the same time showing people Mark Tobey's work in the back room. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: So she was devoted to both of them, but she really was working very hard to promote Tobey at the same time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And in addition to the loyalty to the artists' work, and the promotion of the artists' work on the part of people like Zoe Dusanne and Betty Willis, can you say anything about how important they were, in terms of Tobey, for personal support or personal rapport, as friends as well as publicizers?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, no.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As mediators to other people? Did they have a role of that sort as well?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, that's a good question. I know that Tobey was very fond of Zoe, great respect for her-- they weren't intimate, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [But] you've always told me that he was very good friends with Betty Willis.

WESLEY WEHR: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They had a very warm relationship.

WESLEY WEHR: And there is the story that he proposed marriage to Betty Willis and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right, I've heard that story, yes, and not from you; I've heard it from people in other places.

WESLEY WEHR: Right, that's a good one too. Oh right. I never heard that story from Mark himself, but I have heard it from other people. The funny thing is, when I first got to Paris, Tobey armed me with letters to about everybody under the sun, and Clare Falkenstein. The upshot was I landed in Paris with introductions that literally said, "This is Wesley Wehr, the composer. He is a good friend of mine. Any courtesy shown to him will be taken as a favor to me." Well, Tobey was very well known in Paris at that point, so armed with that kind of an introduction, people bent over backwards to be nice to me, and I _____ was treated very well. But the funny thing is Clare Falkenstein, through parties, and Martha Jackson, Tapie ' [Michel Tapie ', French art critic--Ed.], Mathieu-- so I had all these interesting, legendary people sitting with me on the floor in Falkenstein's apartment. We were drinking and one of them said, "Well, I'm very curious and I hope I'm not being too inquisitive, but is it true that Mrs. Dusanne and Tobey are lovers?" I found out that the stories that were circulating in Paris were almost [obscured phrase].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Almost more interesting than real life. (laughter)

WESLEY WEHR: I suddenly found out it's the way it always is, that the truth comes out to be rather bland.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Bland and mundane.

WESLEY WEHR: Because at one point the stories used to go around that Susanne Langer, the philosopher, and I were lovers, and I was embarrassed as all get out; I just thought it would embarrass her if she knew that that kind of gossip was going around. Well, I was

seeing a lot of very interesting people at that point, and I had to decide at one point whether I was going to be depressed by the gossip and give into it and have a very dull life or just ignore the gossips and have a very interesting life.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wear it as an ornament? And go on with whatever you wanted to do.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: While you're on the subject of the French friends that Tobey's letters led you to meet, what was the allusion you made to Tobey and Malraux?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. Well, I'm very sorry that Mark Ritter has died; again, he was, I probably would say one of the most wonderful people I've ever known in my life. Ritter is going to show up in the books as Tobey's companion, his secretary, but for anyone who had an opportunity to know him for himself alone, he was an incredible man. And he also had an enormous gift of conjuring up episodes, taking all the parts. When I was with Ritter in '76 in Basel, and then again in '78, Ritter dictated a lot of things to me that I have in diaries that he wanted me to gradually publish in time. I thought it was less than discrete. They're a lot of things that he wanted to say but he knew he wasn't going to get down to writing them or saying them. So they were different things that he wanted me to put in the record, eventually.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which are still in your possession?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh yeah, there's a lot of stuff that I simply have to do piecemeal, bit by bit. One time I saw Mrs. Hauberg and I said, "Well, I'm publishing my memoirs." And she said, "Well, where are you going to publish them?" I said, "In Germany." And she said, "Why in Germany?" I said, "Well, Anne, because it will make it much harder for you and everybody else to sue me for slander." And she said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Well you never know."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Poor Anne Hauberg. (chuckles)

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I was teasing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know, I know.

WESLEY WEHR: But anyhow. To go back to Ritter...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And Malraux.

WESLEY WEHR: ...and Malraux, yes. Malraux indeed. When Tobey had the opening at the-- the [Vienese] would say the Louvre or the Muse 'e des Arts De 'coratifs-- somebody like Koenig would probably be very fussy about the difference.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: John Koenig?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh yes, John Koenig, but Georges Mathieu, the painter, who was an enormous champion of Tobey, and had a great deal to do with sort of introducing Tobey's work into France, Malraux, no, Mathieu, rather, was taking Malraux around the Tobey show at-- I'm just going to say the Louvre-- and pointing out to Malraux, now this man's very important. So Malraux looked at the date on this painting, and looked at this, and this was rubbing Malraux increasingly in the wrong way. Malraux is very French, and not about to concede to any mere Yankee, American, that an American could do anything that had any historical importance [WESLEY WEHR intended "precedence"--Ed.]. That would go against the infernal French ego, to grant brownie points to anything that isn't French.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Would he just [yield] precedence?

WESLEY WEHR: Malraux just didn't like it, [plane overhead obscures phrase]. ...Mathieu to stick his neck out this way. So Malraux was being led from Tobey painting to Tobey painting. Naturally [Mathieu] was doing everything he could to try to get into that noodlehead that Tobey really was something of a pioneer. But Malraux would keep "No, no, Masson, Masson, Masson [Andre ' Masson--WESLEY WEHR]. French. Nobody was mentioning Bill Hayter [printmaker--Ed.]. (laughter)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Uh huh.

WESLEY WEHR: God knows, somebody should get around to Hayter some day; he's the father of everybody, which is another joke. But anyhow, so by the time Malraux and Tobey were introduced, Malraux was not in a very good mood.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes?

WESLEY WEHR: And Tobey, I always liked-- I'm going to do a quick little aside. Where Morris Graves might be off with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, or be introduced to the Rothschilds, well if the Rothschilds or the Duke and Duchess of Windsor come through Seattle and wanted to see Tobey, he'd say to me, "For God's sakes, I don't want to see them. What have they got to say to me, _____? What will I have to say to them?" Well, Tobey was a little Yankee; and he kind of had a way of guarding his individuality. He was, oh, okay, I'm going to digress, but it does come together eventually. The other day it occurred to me that in one sense Tobey and Graves were a little like Goethe and Beethoven. The story goes that one day, Goethe and Beethoven were walking on the streets of Vienna. And the Emperor came by, and Goethe took off his hat and bowed to the Emperor and all of that. And Beethoven got furious and just started beating him saying, "The damn fool; the Emperor should bowing to you. Stop being such an obsequious jerk." Well, I think there's a little bit of this in contrasting Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, since in a way art always seems to be a kind of king of the mountain _____, [phrase] of the aristocrats, the aristocrat or the artist.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: This is an eternal battle, and Tobey would tend to be like Beethoven; he would not bow to every emperor. He would just, well, so if he liked the emperor, well, [phrase],

MARTHA KINGSBURY: All right. Same kind.

WESLEY WEHR: The emperor would have to be an interesting guy; he gets no brownie points for being the king of Timbucktoo. Morris, for reasons unknown to me, has always been, I think a little stage-struck. So Morris, I think, would be more taken with the...well, I see it a little mean in somebody who'd say about Morris that probably the nicest thing we could all do would be forge a document to show that Morris has really descended from nobility, you know, "Morris, we've just found this document; you are in the line of the Huguenots [WESLEY WEHR intended royalty here-- Ed.]," or God knows what, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. [phrase].

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I don't know why I say that, except that I kind of thought that it was a little interesting in terms of social identification. Tobey around aristocrats would be kind of [ever] faithful to his way of [scrapes chair] but not about the _____. But Morris was always off with the, you know, maharajah, God knows where; and there was a little aura of being the jet set about Morris which, to me, seemed a little like Susan Sontag. You know, I kind of think, "Well Morris, I don't
care if you met the maharajah; is he an interesting man?" And in that way I would be closer to Tobey I think.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So what happened when Tobey met Malraux?

WESLEY WEHR: Tobey has a bit [____-chased] after that. Oh God, what [hypocrites] we are. Anyway...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'm not saying anything.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, well, maybe you're not saying anything...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'm just asking what happened.

WESLEY WEHR: What happened. Okay. That was a long digression but it's a long footnote all explaining that Tobey was being introduced to the emperor of France. Malraux was...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Art dictator?

WESLEY WEHR: Malraux probably fancied himself to be the emperor, the Louis. So Ritter was standing there and the two moguls are introduced to each other. And DuBuffet is Malraux's protege at the time. Dubuffet is a very wonderful artist. While he was Malraux's, Malraux was

promoting him -- grandly. So Malraux opens with, "Well, Mr. Tobey, what do you think of DuBuffet?" And Tobey, who didn't speak French well, to handle the situation, said, "Oh, very intelligent man, but alas he's all head," putting his hand to his head, "and no heart-- what a tragedy." Well, Malraux just turned pale, because he took it as a slap at his face, and he spun around and walked away from Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Nobody would dare do that to Malraux, say such a patronizing _____ thing about DuBuffet to Malraux. Tobey turned to Ritter and said, "Now, have I just stuck my foot in my mouth again?" Ritter said, "Mark, you know damn well you have." Okay, well that's enough of that story.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

[Break in tape -- resumes with better quality.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now it's on. And this is where we've been having it [the recorder--Ed.] sit at, so _____ things.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, what I think is I've been letting my voice drop down too much; I've just been swallowing. I can try putting it up higher.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Try sitting back in the chair, though.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And still putting your voice up.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I used to just swallow everything; I probably need to just force it up or something.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let's go ahead and address the situation of Tobey as a young man in Chicago, and who he worked for; that you said you had something to say about.

WESLEY WEHR: Ah hah. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which was what?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh. (laughs) All right. I'm jumping into this one. First of all, in the university [of Washington--Ed.] Suzzallo Library, there's an interview done with John Uitti, the picture framer. It's a very important document; I've only looked at it quickly but... Uitti had worked in Chicago and Tobey had spent part of his early years in Chicago too, so that when Tobey and Uitti first met and would talk, they talked a great deal about Chicago, and I think Uitti knows...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How do you spell that?

WESLEY WEHR: U-I-T-T-I, John Uitti. It's a very important interview because Tobey told Uitti many things about his Chicago days that just simply aren't apt to show up in the literature. And then a couple of years ago, I was having coffee with Uitti and he started telling me these different things, and I took notes over coffee _____ and checked the notes with him. But the main thing at this point is that there is a man Ove-- O-V-E-- Hoffman, who ran a gallery in Chicago when Tobey was quite young and Tobey at that time was doing, oh, commercial work, fashion design, very practical types of things. But apparently, as I understand it from Uitti, it was Ove Hoffman who just finally zeroed in on Tobey and told him to take painting seriously and just stop this kind of too facile way of making a living. My impression is that Hoffman was a very cultivated man, older than Tobey, and probably had a profound influence on Tobey-- probably to the point that he may have been the one who, as much as anyone at that point, pushed Tobey into deciding to take painting seriously, because certainly the case of Tobey's marriage in that area, about, not, well, it's unclear when it was. But I've already published that story about Tobey's wife, as soon they're married, tells him to stop having these highfalutin' ideas of being an artist and go out and get an honest job.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Tobey tell you this?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, yeah. I've had that story from Ritter and from Tobey himself, and I've published that in Northwest Arts. But Tobey had decided at that point the security be damned; he was going to be an artist. And it is quite definite that when he got married he said, "My God, she changed overnight, you know, immediately."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: He just said, "Before we got married, everything was she'd be my helpmate, my soulmate, and my [muse], and everything under the sun, but the minute we were married it was a different ballpark, and I just said, 'my God, I'm going to be married to this for the rest of my life?' and climbed out the window and fled."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Immediately.

WESLEY WEHR: Immediately! So Tobey always, and then of course after that marriage, he did, as I'm told, but not by him, he proposed marriage a second time, and was turned down. And the story that Tobey always told me was that he really needed companionship, he needed somebody to just kind of, for company, for companionship; and then he met Pehr at that point and just decided, "Well, I'm not cut out for marriage, I'm not cut out to be a family man, a provider-- I want to be a painter and I can't do both." So I published this story in the Pehr [Halsten] memoir in Northwest Arts; it's there.

But the upshot was Tobey always said that it was Pehr who settled him down to work and gave him stability so that he could concentrate on his painting. I asked Mark Ritter, I said, "Well, is there anything to that, the way that Tobey always said, 'Well, it was Pehr that finally gave me some stability in my life, someone to come home to, somebody to kind of give me a sense of regularity'?" And Ritter laughed and said, "Well, basically that story's correct but more to the point the way Tobey told it to me, he looked at Pehr and said, "My God, I'm going to have to support this big baby of mine; I'm going to have to get out and paint and sell!"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So he had to get down to work?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Ritter said, "Well, your story is a little all right, but the fact is Tobey spoiled Pehr rotten; he had to get out and earn a living because Pehr didn't know how to support himself, and Tobey suddenly had this big baby that he had to provide for." He said, "Tobey had to learn how to be practical and in that sense Pehr also had a great impact on Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To whom had he proposed marriage, the second time?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh well, I don't have Betty Willis' permission to say that it was to Betty Willis, so I can't say it was to Betty Willis, without her written permission.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you can't say anything. Okay. What about the admiration Tobey had for older artists? Or affection he had for an individual _____?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh all right. Yeah. Zoe Dusanne, who used to be really quite colorful, one time just said to me, "That man's absolutely queer for people who speak foreign languages." Well, we all kind of went, "Oh, Zoe, take it easy." But the upshot is Tobey spent his life trying to learn how to speak French; he had no gift of language. So anyone who could speak foreign languages just totally impressed Tobey; he was just really enamoured, impressed by anybody who had a European background, who had a gift of language. And in one sense I think Zoe probably knew what she was talking about. Tobey would say to me, "Well, I just am not interested in younger people romantically or any way; I like young people if they're serious about art, then I like being around them. But I'm not interested in young people because they're young; I just...somebody has to be mature before I feel much towards them; I can't, I like young people, not in any romantic way."

And then I thought about that and realized that Tobey's really deep friendships, well, Feininger, the painter, was older than Tobey, and Tobey really looked up to Feininger. I think Feininger died in 1956, and it was a terrible loss for Tobey. I saw him outside the Wilsonian Hotel; he had just received the news; he was in tears. Feininger was very important to him, but then I realized that in 1957 Tobey was seeing Takasaki, a wonderful Japanese man, and suddenly Tobey did all the Sumi paintings, the summer of '57. Then Seligman, with this enormous gift of languages, a very cultivated man who'd known Alban Berg and Webern.

Seligman was a man with enormous cultural background, a very fine man in that sense. Pehr spoke God knows how many languages. So then Ritter, marvelous man, just enormously cultivated, intelligent, civilized. Berthe Poncy Jacobson was immensely impressed by Ritter. So this is kind of going around it, but one time Tobey-- oh I forget, God he must have been 70 by then-- he looked at me, he said, "Well, Wes, I guess I've always been in search of a father; I've got this kind of father symbol that, God, you know, when you get to be the age I am, it gets awfully hard to find a daddy."

[Tape 10--marked side 2]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What you've just been talking about really addresses, I think two things at once: the age of people for whom he had this warm affection and admiration, but also the culture. And I'm wondering why, if he was strongly linked in his mind to be drawn to a kind of maturity in individuals but also a kind of cultural maturity that Europe has or the East has, like Chicago and Seattle never had.

WESLEY WEHR: Ah, yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that may have coincided among the people that he found important to him?

WESLEY WEHR: You know, Tobey had this great sense of Europe as kind of point of reference.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. In a way that few people here did, evidently, and yet you cite his acquaintances among people who did have that point of view.

WESLEY WEHR: There is one story that I think I'll go ahead and tell; it's not very nice. But Tobey of course died in Basel in 1976, and I did see him, oh, about a week before he died in the hospital. But in the years just preceding his death, there was a tremendous concern in some circles here that Tobey should come back here. People here-- and I won't name which ones just now-- were obsessed with the idea that Tobey should come back here and die-- the return of the native or God knows what. And no one really was very concerned about what Mark wanted, but I thought, good God, he became a symbol, bring him back, we will take care of him, and die surrounded by the people who love him. So one night I had a dream that Tobey had come in on the plane from Sea-Tac and I picked him up and we were headed out to Mannings to have coffee. Just as we got to University Way in the taxicab and got out of it, we looked up the street and there were 50,000 people saying, "Mark, we love you. Welcome home." Tobey turned to me and said, "Wes, I can't handle it. Get me back on the plane."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, okay. Well, what I didn't like...at one point different people met and they were trying to decide what they felt Tobey should do, and they decided that they would set up a house, or provide him with a house, up on Capitol Hill-- and I don't know, I'm just going to tell this, because I'm fed up with some of the shennanigans-- and I was taken to see this house, which wasn't far from Capitol Hill, and the arrangement was that if Mark would come back here, he could live there, you know, a kind of return of the native and all of that. So there were different committee meetings and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's like treating him as a cultural property.

WESLEY WEHR: That's right. And I also, like Wilt Chamberlain or Jim Zorn or God knows. (chuckles) I felt it was a tremendous local provincial ego trip-- you know, Mark Tobey has been to Paris, he has been to the Louvre-- it was the biggest provincial piece of vanity. Mark Tobey has seen the world but he chose to die here.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. He didn't though. Frustrated them.

WESLEY WEHR: No, he didn't. And I thought, well really, that's carrying vanity a bit too far. So anyhow, at the Henry Gallery, one of the members of the Tobey committee came up to me-- as an old friend of mine who'd been appointed by the committee to sound me out-- and he said, "Wes, the committee has been discussing these matters and decided that if you will allow us to tell Mark that if he comes back to Seattle you'll live with him, that may influence his decision to move back to Seattle, because you've stayed with him for years and we all

know that you and Mark get on very well, and he might be more disposed to moving back to Seattle if you'll agree to live with him." I went, my God, you know, thanks! Then I was informed that, you know, by a woman who I don't care to name, that I really should put aside any concerns I might have about myself, that here was an opportunity for me to serve the great master. I thought, well, for God's sakes, this really is, you know, getting a bit spooky. Because at one point, Pehr had said to Tobey, "Well, how come we never invite Wes over to live with us in Basel?" And Tobey said, "Oh, that one. He's too independent; he'd never put up with us for five minutes, the way we push them around and..." Well, it's quite true; the ones that went over to live with Tobey as secretary and all of that came back nervous wrecks because Tobey could be very generous, but when you work for one's salary, money was time, and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He was evidently very nervous about money. {missing phrase}

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, good God, yeah, he worked you ragged. So the idea of going to Basel to live with Tobey sounded wonderful but the truth is it was a goddamned nightmare; your life wasn't your own. And when I would stay with, I always made a point of living fairly close to Tobey's place because if Pehr had to be out of town, Tobey would call and say, "Well, you know, I can't stand to be alone in the house at night; can you come over?" So I would instantly come over and use the guest room and had wonderful times with Tobey, but he had strict policies that he couldn't go to sleep until everyone was checked in. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Turned into an old mother hen.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, exactly, and when Mark Hopkins was, had gotten back from Basel with Tobey and was... Well, I was going to go out to a movie with Hopkins one evening, and Tobey said, "Well, all right, but make sure you have Mark in by 11:00 because that's when I want to go to sleep and I can't sleep if somebody's coming in later."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This aspect of his character sounds related to the stories you've told about Tobey in relation to nature.

WESLEY WEHR: I know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In contrast to the kind of nature fetishism that you might attibute to other people.

WESLEY WEHR: (chuckles) True, I know. Well, I made the terrible mistake of coming in at 11:30 with Mark Hopkins. The next day Tobey read the riot act to me: "You know, if I allow you to go out, what do you think you're doing?" So anyhow, it was absurd that I could live with Tobey, but I was absolutely horrified that this concern, you know, that it was such a symbol that Mark come back here. I was approached by different people who tried to influence Tobey, even while he was dying, to come back to Seattle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ a kind of Tobey manipulative.

WESLEY WEHR: I don't know what to say about it, but I just, as usual, felt there are a lot of people who know what they want from Tobey and sometimes they're not very concerned about what Tobey wants. They're just-- Tobey as symbol of God knows what to them, and I don't like it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: While we're speaking of Tobey in Basel, you wanted to add something about Pehr, and about Bahai.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, right. I've got some reservations about some of the things I'm going to be telling next. I may look at the transcript and decide to restrict it for a while, or something, but at least I'll record it now. When John and Anne Hauberg and I were sitting in Tobey's room in Basel-- Tobey had died, and the Haubergs and I were sitting with Mark Ritter having coffee and talking-- Mark Ritter suddenly turned to Anne Hauberg and said, "Well, Mrs. Hauberg, Mrs. Hauberg..." (chuckles) Oh those Swiss. [Wehr repronounced Hauberg in Ritter's accent, which he apparently finds amusing.] "...I think I should tell you that Mark was not so keen on the Bahais in his later years." Well that came as kind of a surprise-- it wasn't

to me-- but Ritter felt that at least he should tip Mrs. Hauberg off that all was not well in Denmark. And Ritter had tried to explain to me a little about this, that in Basel Tobey's house became a meeting place for the Bahais, and Tobey'd been very generous. He was devoted to Bahai, there's not question of that, and Bahai is of extreme importance to him. But the thing that was starting to bother Tobey, which frequently happens to religions, is they get a little secular, they get a little commercialized even. Like when Joe Goldberg and I went down to make a pilgrimage to Krishnamurti, I thought I'd find Krishnamurti sitting on a mountaintop, well, he was off lecturing in London, and we were up against the Krishnamurti publishing industry, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: So much for that. We were given a membership in the Krishnamurti industry. Well, Ritter and Tobey went to, I believe, in Basel, a Bahai program, and Ritter said, "Well, Tobey was shocked. They were jazzing up the Bahai songs." [sings in a jazzy manner] "And Tobey said, 'My God, I'm getting out of here. These are sacred songs. To try to be with it, they're trying to jazz this up and I don't like this one bit. This has nothing to do with the seriousness of Bahai and I want nothing to do with it.'"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had a lot to do with the sixties probably.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, that's exactly the point. And Tobey just said, "I'm sorry. This is a very beautiful religion, and this bothers me very much to see this attempt to popularize it or vulgarize it. Call it what you will. It loses its richness, it's wonder. Why do you try to cheapen it this way? I don't want anything to do with it." And Ritter said the ring that Tobey had had that was blessed on his pilgrimage, he lost it one day, toward the end of his life.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: That he took it off [WESLEY WEHR added later: in a restaurant or somewhere] and Ritter said, "It was very strange. It had been kissed by the [Bab?] [Bahai holy man--Ed]. Mark lost it and I thought he would be very upset, but he wasn't as upset as I thought he should be, and I'm puzzled." So the upshot, Ritter was very good at enacting these things.

Pehr and Ritter and Tobey lived in a house at 69 St. Alban's Vorstadt, and as Ritter told me, the Bahais would have their meetings there, the Persian Bahais, the German Bahais, they'd all be meeting in the main room, and Tobey would come down to the kitchen where Mark Ritter was getting the tea and pastries all ready, and say, "Ritter! I can't take it. They're all babbling"-- oh, no, no, not babbling-- "They're all chattering away in Persian and German and I don't know what they're talking about."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: "And, you know, what's this got to? They're having meetings upstairs and I'm supposed to be part of the meetings and I don't know a damn thing that's going on. And what's it got to do with Bahai? It's got an awful lot to do with fundraising and...I'm discouraged." So, the upshot, again from Ritter, he said that at one point there was one of the Bahais who was giving this talk to everyone sitting around. Tobey, they're all sitting there, and this one Bahai, who was particularly stentorian, was saying, "The age of spiritual enlightenment is at hand, and all of you are asleep." Well, Pehr was stretched out on the divan with the Stockholm Gazette over his face.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He was asleep.

WESLEY WEHR: And when the Bahai said, "And you are all asleep," Pehr went [makes loud snoring sound]. And at that point Mark Ritter came up the stairs with coffee and tea, and Pehr opened one eye and said, "Oh, coffee and pastry; well now, now I'm awake." And jumped up and said, "Now here's something I understand." Okay we can quit that one.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) Okay.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was Anne Hauberg-- you mentioned Anne's concern with hearing that Bahai was not as important to Mark as it had been earlier-- was Anne a Bahai herself?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. I left that out; I take too much for granted. I know that Anne, certainly at that time, had a very serious interest in Bahai, and she may still have, for all I know. And unless my memory is completely failing, I have the impression that the idea of having a Tobey museum up at Pilchuck, at the tree farm, did have a connection with the Bahai prophesy that-- it's a great, ancient, gorey prophesy that America shall have to go through this great bloodbath and emerge as the spiritual leader of world-- well, Anne being aware of that prophecy that America would fall upon a time of great violence and the Bahais would leave the cities-- it's for her to confirm or deny this, or not deny it, correct it with something else-- I think that the idea of the Tobey museum being at Pilchuck was in line with it being kind of Bahai-oriented too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A kind of refuge?

WESLEY WEHR: And then, yeah, well...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Refuge from the cities?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, the Bahai shall leave the cities and all that, so I think that that had some part in the idea.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And what was Mark's attitude toward that?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I think Mark just threw a big monkey wrench into everything. The Haubergs had worked terribly hard on this. Their devotion to Tobey was extraordinary! And I think, well, if I started to say how highly I think of John Hauberg I would get gushy. I have deep respect for that man, [phrase].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: And Tobey at one point I think said something terribly ungrateful. He said, "Well, John, what good will a Tobey museum do me when I'm dead? Why don't you buy more paintings from me now?" Oh, good God.

There's another story that I think's kind of funny, again second or third hand; I forget who told me this one. I think it was in New York, or maybe Marian Willard and her husband, Dan Johnson, were up here on a visit. They were talking about the idea of the Tobey museum up at Pilchuck. And Dan Johnson, as I'm told it, cut in and said, "Good heavens! A Tobey shrine at Sedro-Woolley (Mount Vernon). I don't see the point of it; we all know that the only thing that'll satisfy Tobey is a shrine on the corridor of Lexington and 57th. (laughter) Oh God, that man understands Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

WESLEY WEHR: But anyhow, my impression is that Tobey finally got very stern about this, that he didn't want his paintings confused with his deep affinity with Bahai; he did not want to be thought of as a Bahai painter.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, he would certainly have painted works that were very much related to Bahai, influenced Bahai, but in no way did he want this to go too far. He wanted the two to be kept separate; that's the point sort of. And he was not an official Bahai painter or hanging on, that kind of a thing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned a minute ago, when the recorder wasn't on, Tobey saying "I am a Bahai, and I am a painter, but I am not a Bahai painter." Were you paraphrasing Tobey himself when you said that?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, he didn't say it directly to me, and that's the trouble; I'm trying to think...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What you meant was that that was the attitude?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, that's the attitude that was conveyed to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay. I understand.

WESLEY WEHR: That he simply didn't pass the [plate,point] once. Well, I know that he used to get very sharp with Morris, and I do have a conversation in my published notes between Morris Graves and Mark Tobey. Tobey told it to me twice, and Jan Thompson gave me a version of it. It's an interesting thing where, in the studio they're talking about painting and Tobey says to Morris, "Well, I think sometimes your paintings are too literary; you get an idea and the idea remains too literary; you don't realize it plastically enough." Well, and then Tobey'd say, "See you have this pretty background, and then you put this bird that has kind of a message or a literary aspect on the background, and you do it very nicely but somehow I don't think that you are enough into the plastic, abstract aspects of the problem." Well, I don't know about that one. I think at that point-- I have to check my notes-- I think Morris picked up something kind of like a background, a wash from the floor, and said, "Well, do you mean that this would be enough for you?" And Mark says, "Well, yes." And then I think it ends with Morris saying, "Well, Mark, you're a very great painter and I respect your opinions." Something like that. (chuckles) But I have to really...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [two words] house.

WESLEY WEHR: ...tell anyone that when it comes to Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, when it comes to Mark Tobey holding forth on Morris and being scathingly critical of Morris, I really have to tell anyone, "Take it with a grain of salt; it's not that simple." So there are times that Tobey was just unreasonably critical of Morris' painting, to the point of making one wonder this just smacks of a vendetta. Why is he so unfair to Morris?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Speaking of him critically, not necessarily in Morris' presence, you mean?

WESLEY WEHR: There were times when Tobey...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Speaking of Morris, or speaking to Morris?

WESLEY WEHR: I think that was always a very...Tobey...I don't know. There are some things I don't care to say at this point-- it's not the time to get every [dog tooth?]. But I think Tobey was very unfair on the subject of Morris. I think his attacks on Morris' accomplishments as a painter were a bad reflection on Tobey. And I think the show that's being done by the Whitney, Ray Kass and the Phillips Collection now, will make this increasingly obvious, that where Tobey, in a way, like [felt that] Morris' obligation to him was an extraordinary one, and an unacknowledged one. I think when one actually looks at it, there are certainly works by Morris that employ Tobey's white writing-- that's obvious-- but I think Morris could have been a transcendent artist without that aspect of his work [Tobey's]. I don't think it counts for very much in Morris' accomplishment.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: And the more I look at this, the less defensible it is to say that Morris used something of Tobey's...I don't think that it can really-- I think you have two extraordinary powerful personalities, I think you have two very proud people and... (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But I agree with you when you look at the bulk of each of their work, they're so significantly and fundamentally different that one feels either would have achieved what he wanted without any reliance on the other.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. It's just that when I was in the music department, a tiresome thing was pitting Ravel against Debussy, like one had to be better. And I think it's...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That that has happened.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, so it used to be a parlor game here to play off Tobey against Graves, and I think it's a waste of time. It just goes no place.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I think it's easy to think of them as apples and oranges, and to say that...[where] comparison can't be pushed as far as [phrase] like.

WESLEY WEHR: I think it's been a very provincial little hobby to get hung up on these questions. What I liked about being in Switzerland is that they never heard of the goddamned Northwest School.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: I thought, oh this is heaven!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There are many parts of the world like that. (chuckles)

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You wanted to mention an incident from late in Tobey's life having to do with Bissier's funeral?

WESLEY WEHR: Um hmm, yeah, that's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In Basel?

WESLEY WEHR: Uh, no, outside of Basel at one of the small villages. Well, the thing is I'm always trying to find opportunities to talk about Pehr because anything connected with Pehr I like talking about it; it's just a very pleasant memory, so I'm trying to smuggle this story into the tape-- I can't really justify it, except that it's very typical. Tobey and Julius Bissier, the painter, had been very friendly. They admired each other's work; they were both handled by Beyeler, the great dealer in Basel. Well, Bissier died, and the day came that Tobey and Beyeler were going to drive from Basel to the village where the funeral was to be, and join the family. So Tobey came in to the living room of their house; Pehr was stretched out on the sofa, and Mark went up to Pehr and said, "But Pehr, Beyeler and I are going to the funeral now. Aren't you coming with us? And Bissier was always very nice to you-- he liked you, he liked your paintings, he was very fond of you, and it's his funeral today. Well, aren't you coming with us? It'd be very nice, very thoughtful if you did." Pehr looked up and said, "Oh Mark, I'm so comfortable here; I was reading the paper and do I have to go? Funerals are so gloomy. Do I have to go?" And

Tobey said, "Well, of course you don't have to go, but it'd be nice if you did." And Pehr said, "Oh Mark, I know, but I don't feel like it." Mark said, "Well, all right, I'm not going to force you to go; I'm a little disappointed in you." Then Mark started to leave the room and Pehr looked up and said, "Oh Mark." And Tobey said, "Yes, Pehr, what is it?" "Well, I've been thinking, you're driving to Ascona; is that where the funeral is?"-- "Well, yes, of course."-- "Oh, there's that wonderful little restaurant that we always stop at on the way to Ascona. Are you and Mr. Beyeler going to be stopping there for lunch?"-- "Well, as a matter of fact, we thought we'd probably should stop; it's a long drive, and well, as a matter of fact we were going to stop there and have lunch." Pehr said, "Oh, well in that case, I will come. I'll be with you in just a minute." Pehr jumped up and shaved and pulled himself together, got on his suit and said, "Okay, well I didn't realize you were going to stop there for lunch; of course I'll come along." So they drove, they stopped, they had lunch, they got to Ascona, or whichever town it was, and everyone was ready for Bissier's funeral and there was Madame Bissier. Everyone was commiserating with her and it was a terribly sad time, so Pehr goes rushing up to her, embraces her, and says, "Oh we had a wonderful time driving here. We stopped and had the most wonderful lunch. Are you all right?" Everyone was absolutely shocked! Tobey was horrified. And Mrs. Bissier said, "Oh Pehr, I like your attitude. Life goes on as usual. I wish we could all be that way." Click.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Good of her.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now it's on, Wes. You were going to say something of Morris Graves before my next question.

WESLEY WEHR: All right. I've got awful reservations about some of the things I've been saying today, like...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'm going to interrupt because now...

[Tape 11--marked side 3]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Go ahead.

WESLEY WEHR: I'm not, well, there are a few little episodes about Morris Graves that I

wonder if I should put on the record. They may not say much about Morris; they may say more about me, that I have an uncharitable memory. But they also do say a little about Morris and so take them for what they're worth. Okay. One thing that I did remember, for instance, Morris could be very generous, flamboyantly generous, suddenly shower one with attentions and gifts, but I learned very quickly after I met Morris that one always had to leave it to Morris to be impulsively generous. Because it was living dangerously to ask Morris for a favor. I could go to Mark and say, "Oh, Mark, would you...?" and he'd say, "Of course, of course." But there's something about Morris that made one hesitate to ask him for anything.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [Asks a question while Wehr is talking.]

WESLEY WEHR: You always had to leave it up to Morris to decide when he would be generous. And when I take these little potshots about royalty, and dukes and dutchesses, I think what I'm trying to say is that Morris had a kind of streak that I associated with this--that we will decide this matter. So, to give a rather uncharitable little episode, Gary Lundell, the painter, he and I used to see Morris occasionally, and Morris liked him quite a bit and all of that. So Gary and I visited Morris in the hospital when Morris was having a checkup, and Morris sort of liked him considerably. So Leo Kenney was having a little party, and I was in the living room and standing with Morris alone, and Morris said, "Well, how's Gary these days?" And I said, "Oh, he's just fine. He asked about you. And he said, "Well, do give him my best regards; I like him very much." And I just kind of said, well... I started to reach for a piece of paper, and said, "Oh Morris, it would mean a lot to him. Could you just scrawl a few words of greeting to Gary. It'd be nice if I could take him a little quick scrawl note from you." Morris just looked at me and his eyes turned dark and he just said in the coolest tones, "I should think a verbal greeting should be sufficient." I thought, oh Christ, Morris, why do you have to act that way? He made me feel awful, like I had... Well, I didn't like it, and I don't like that side of him. So, I had a very good friend at that time, Jon [Henri] Damski, in the classics department, and I saw Damski for coffee late that night and I told him about the episode. I said, "You know, really, Morris made me feel completely out of line that I should dare to suggest to him that he might scrawl a quick little note to Gary. He looked so indignant." And Damski said, "Well, maybe that's the difference between Morris Graves and Picasso. And it's maybe why Morris doesn't paint so much and why Picasso just is so fecund. Because Morris Graves wears himself out being indignant. If you had said that to Picasso, "Oh Pablo, could you scrawl a note to Gary?" he'd say, "Why of course!" And he would have embellished it and he would have put nymphs and satyrs and by the time he'd gotten through he would have said, "And here's a painting for him." Picasso would have sprung upon the occasion as an excuse, a springboard to be creative. Morris pounced upon it as way to be superior.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was indignation a commonly manifested attitude? What were the range of things that he was indignant about?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I don't know. I really...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did it go beyond personal matters?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, Morris and I were very good friends...I'd say very close friends. But if I'm going to say things that are critical of him I really would have to move quickly to say how deeply fond I am of him, and grateful to him. But I'm inclined sometimes to be critical of him or tempted to tell certain stories which, not because I feel that they're all that important, but I have a feeling that when a man is dehumanized as much as Morris has been, one wants to sort of set the scales a little straighter and say well...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. Make him real again.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, so Morris is an extraordinary man, and it was very interesting for me to simultaneously be seeing Tobey and Graves, both of them. One old friend of Morris' said with a bit of wickedness, and perhaps a bit of perceptiveness, that in some ways Morris is a spoiled brat; there's just, he's used to having his own way. And then he discovered Zen Buddhism as a very convenient way of being rude to people, and then having those people thank him for being a Zen master who shocks you. So this is kind of interesting that Morris in a way likes to have temper tantrums.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's consistent with other stories that are told about him. What is your sense of what Zen or other religious and philosophical systems really meant to him in his art or his personal life. From what you've said about Tobey and Bahai...

WESLEY WEHR: (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...bears on this for Tobey.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh right, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now how do you sense that situation for Morris Graves? To that extent that I know anything about Zen and related matters myself, I find them a very paradoxical mix of the egocentric and the self-effacing, at least as they appear from a Western point of view.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Morris Graves find them fascinating for elements of paradox in them?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, good, good answer.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is it? I don't know.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh! I don't know if it's true but it sounds, it feels true-- paradox, that would be very consistent with Morris.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It would?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. He has a kind of sense of irony and paradox, and he's also Irish.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. (laughter) For what that's worth.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, what's that worth. Then Elizabeth Bishop comes here and says, "Oh, you people. I think you're all quite Wordsworthian, but you don't realize it." That was an interesting remark. Yeah. If I'm going to...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wordsworthian without recognizing that you're _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, you people are all babbling about your Haiku poems which are more English than you realize.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

[Someone interrupts saying "Oh sorry." Tape is stopped.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, while we've been talking about a number of subjects that had to do with the later years of Tobey's life and his life in Basel, I'd like to ask you if there's anything you want to say about the aftermath of Tobey's death-- about the wills, the works that did or didn't come to Seattle, the process of deaccessioning, the role of various people or institutions such as the Seattle Art Museum?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh. All right. Yi! Ho-o-o. Yeah, I suppose I should.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Put down whatever you want and if you decide to make some of it restricted then we'll do that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, there are parts of it which I simply am not going to even write down in my own diaries, because I... Oh, what's the old saying that he is without sin cast the first stone or all of that?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't mean that you should record who said what and who's responsible for what, but if there are materials lost which you'd like to enter into the record in case they turn up later, or matters of quality and judgments that were made that you'd like to put down your opinion about.

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, okay. On the matter of the two wills, there are couple of things I could do. One is simply say, "Well, if anyone's interested in them or curious about them, just go and take a look at the two of them and draw your own conclusions." I don't have to say anything about the two wills. One has only to get Xerox copies of them and read them for oneself and decide for yourself. I could do that and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Decide for yourself what?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, I don't know. They're two extraordinary documents and I think, you know, I could simply say, "Well, go and look them up and decide for yourself." But more to the point-- it's an embarrassing story, and in a way it doesn't reflect very well on Tobey, I'm sorry to say. There are only a few times in my knowing Tobey where I have to kind of wince and look the other way and say he was an extraordinarily dependable man. I knew him terribly well for a long time, he even used to say he himself almost considered me to be a son in a way, and for anyone to know Mark as long as I did, I'm surprised that there are only a few occasions where I have to say I don't think he behaved very well. The first one, I think is the way that he, without telling her, helped Otto Seligman set up the gallery.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Without telling Zoe?

WESLEY WEHR: Without telling Zoe. He never justified it to me; I didn't even bring it up with him. I just found the whole thing terribly unfair to Zoe. And it's a very dark, for me, embarrassing time in the friendship with Tobey. I felt he was terribly unfair to her, and I won't say underhanded, but it's one of the bad episodes in my memory, thank God. You know, in no way can I apologize for him then, I think.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No.

WESLEY WEHR: I think it's unfortunate.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And is there another incident that _____ later _____?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah there is. And another one which would explain just one of dozens of reasons why I think so highly of John Hauberg, and that's the matter of Tobey's two wills. Well, as I understand it, Tobey had an oral agreement that he would accept so much money for life per month and leave his estate to the Seattle Art Museum; and, you know, there'd be the Tobey museum and Pilchuck and all of that. So the arrangement in the first will was that everything was left to the museum-- there would be a Tobey museum and memorabilia and all of that. Well, it got very messed up. The problems of having a Tobey museum became, I think, more and more complicated. Tobey himself became less interested in the idea; the Haubergs had worked on it very hard and Tobey just seemed to lose interest in it. That was not very nice. So just before I left for Switzerland in April of '76, I found out that there was a second will in Basel.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: At this point, Tobey was sick?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, he was in the hospital; he had been there...well, it came as a shock that the first will made the Seattle Art Museum Tobey's-- everything went to the museum, and it was the, I believe, oral agreement that John Hauberg, who was an enormously public-minded man, marvelous man, would... Tobey was always afraid that he couldn't paint and he'd die in the poorhouse and he was just batty, but he had this thing: "Oh, I won't paint, and I'll die poor, and..." It was insane.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: So Tobey was also a helluva shrewd businessman and would play all ends against the middle sometimes. I kind of think he played on that insecurity so he ends up with this guaranteed income, so that'll make him feel more secure. Okay. So as I understood now, then suddenly there's a second will, written a few months after the first one. Nobody knows what's in it. There's panic. So what has Tobey done? What's the second will? What's going on? Notarized in Basel. So I flew to Basel, had lunch with Mark Ritter, and he said, "Well, there's a second will, and God knows what they're saying in Seattle, but I better tell you what it's all about." And I said, "Well, what's happened?" He said, "Well, Tobey changed his mind. He suddenly realized that the first will left no provision for different old friends, or different charities, and he suddenly realized that in the first will there was no guaranteed protection that certain people would be taken care of. He was concerned that there'd be no way that I would have any moderate inheritance, or Mark Turbyphill [Chicago poet--Ed.] and Mrs. Elmendorf-- just simply, everything goes to the museum. And Tobey suddenly thought, 'Oh my God, what have I done?'" And then Tobey also thought, "Well, times change; that first will isn't flexible enough. Maybe I'd better do a second will." So Tobey started dictating a second will: "I want the following people remembered: Mark Turbyphill if he's still alive," and this one and that one, and then as Ritter told me, Tobey said, "Oh Ritter, it's too complicated

and things change, people die. You know who I'd like; you know my obligations. I'll leave everything to you because you're going to outlive me and you'll know what to do. You'll know the obligations, you'll know who I want remembered and taken care of. I'll leave everything to you when I die and then you take care of it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is that what he put in the second will?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, the second will, notarized in Basel with all kinds of enormous official stamps-- it looks like the Magna Carta-- makes Mark Ritter sole heir.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

WESLEY WEHR: Well, you could see how, I think it even showed up in the paper. Mark Tobey makes secretary heir. Terrible, you know, and you can imagine how confused people here were when the word got around that there's a second will, and Ritter is the sole heir-- it looked terrible!

I thought, oh my God, and here I was between Basel and Seattle, thinking good God, we've got some terrible problems and misunderstanding going on. So Ritter said, "But of course, you know, Mark just dumped the whole thing on me, anything I inherit, immediately I have to, you know, see that all these different people-- money will come to me but of course I relay what I receive to these different ones that Tobey told me have to be taken care of. And of course I will honor the Hauberg agreements; I'll see of course that... He said, "The estate never passes through my hands. I'm not the heir at all." So Ritter was one of the most honorable people I've ever known in my life, and when I was sorting out the Tobey possessions in '78 and the museum had sent me over, he could readily, every time I found a Tobey, have said, "Oh that's something Mark gave me." And he didn't. He had every opportunity to take works from all over the place and just say, "Oh these are mine, and Mark gave me this, Mark gave me that." He didn't.

Every time I'd find something in a book or file cabinet, he'd say, "Oh that's a good one. Send that to the museum." Then he said, "Well, now, the museum's going to have tax problems. They'll need to sell some things for money, so..." Ritter was terribly kind. And then, he was saying, "Well, now this portrait Mark did of me, and Mark did give me this table," and then finally even Mrs. Hauberg just said, "Well, really you're being very generous, you know. What are you keeping for yourself?" And he said, "Well now, Mrs. Hauberg, you have to realize I don't need very much. I'm a good cook; I can prepare some meat and some potatoes which are tasty; good cooks don't need very much, and I'm a good cook." Well, that was a loaded remark. (laughs) I lost the thread here, but the upshot is Tobey just made an absolute shambles out of the thing and we had to sit back and see the estate, well, the two nieces, the museum, Ritter who represented actually a whole complex of unofficial heirs. And the thing was an absolute mess!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: By the time it got all sorted out, and you had been to Basel and helped decide what would be shipped back here, were there groups of material or groups of work that you feel slipped through the cracks as it were?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, yeah, it's...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And aren't where they should be?

WESLEY WEHR: It's a dreadful arrangement because according to the will, the first one, the museum was to inherit the collection of works by other artists owned by Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, that could change every five minutes. Tobey would have a marvelous collection and he'd give part of it away, he'd sell things, and there was, the idea of the Mark Tobey collection was...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where did the works by other artists go?

WESLEY WEHR: That's a good question, because when I got to Basel, I just about freaked out. I expected the house to be filled with some superb paintings by all these people.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There wasn't.

WESLEY WEHR: There wasn't at all. There were...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's what I've heard from other sources also...

WESLEY WEHR: And Ritter...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .but I don't understand where they went.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I know, and I've been asked about that repeatedly and Ritter said that what happened, and I've heard it from other quarters too, Tobey in the last years was very involved in the graphics. He wasn't doing all that much painting. The dealers were in and out of his place constantly buying. And Ritter said it was absolutely awful; they'd arrive with piles of money, cash, and Tobey got so cash was something he trusted, and he [Ritter-Ed.] said he'd be downstairs in the kitchen and he'd hear somebody upstairs say, "Oh Mark, thank you." And he'd think, "Oh. Mark has just filled somebody's pocket with another pile of thousand-franc notes."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: He said Tobey loved to act like Santa Claus, he was giving away money by the cartload, he was selling paintings for a fraction of their worth, he was literally-- there'd be a very valuable painting, and he'd say, "Oh you can have it for a hundred dollars."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're speaking not only of his own paintings but of the things he'd collected by other artists.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. He said he saw things just...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So the Seattle Art Museum never saw them, those works. They never _____.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I'm sorry to say that what finally showed up here, many of the best things the things that somehow remained in the Seattle studio, and there were some very good things there. There were an awful lot of graphics and a vast number of Pehr Hallsten paintings in Basel and the papers, the manuscripts, were good. But...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: From Basel?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is this recording?

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: Well, there are a lot of very snide remarks said and printed about what was sent from Basel to the Seattle Art Museum, but at the time that I was sent there by the museum as consultant to ship things here, there still was talk about Tobey memorabilia, and all of that. So I was in no position to-- it was my job to see that all of these things were shipped here, sheet music, and all of that, because at that time there was a historical context for all of this. But I didn't realize at the time I was in Basel that there was about to be a drastic shift of accent about the importance of the Tobey bequest; if I'd known which way the accent was going I would have done things very differently. So I assumed that the museum realized Tobey's importance in a more cultural heritage way. It was a very bitter pill to swallow when I got back here and realized what had happened. Well, for one thing, I was working with Ritter in '78 at the house, we were working every day, all the shipments, and all of this, and then I was supposed to, when the shipment arrived at the museum here, I had the key to the locked metal case. It was assumed that the museum would call me instantly and I would be immediately brought in to explain why these different things arrived. This I find just an embarrassing, terrible thing, but I have to say it-- it was horrible. By the time I was finally called by Bruce Guenther to, you know, come and identify pictures and all of that, well, it was a little late to call me, and I endured...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A lot of it was already gone?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, what do you say? There was no point in my howling, because what's the point after the disaster's already over.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What had happened?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I'm sorry but I think it's just depressing to put it mildly. The museum was talking all this nonsense about, you know, all this junk they got from Basel, and they were interested in good Tobey works. So suddenly all these Tobeys appear on the open market, at a time when the market isn't very good anyway, and the logic was that the museum, of course, had all this financial obligation on the estate, legal fees. Well, all right. But the amount that the museum owns, owned, is $80,000-- or whatever it was, I don't know-- is nothing these days. And as far as I'm concerned, it became-- I'll give it an uncharitable interpretation, and say it was a very convenient excuse. It would have been the easiest thing for a couple of people to wipe out that obligation, and I don't mean John Hauberg, because his generosity to the estate was just incredible. But I told several of them already that it was ludi... Like Paul Cummings said, "The Tate didn't get to be the Tate by selling off the Turners..."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm.

WESLEY WEHR: . . .and so what happens, well, dealers don't like me for talking the way I talk; dealers like to sell pictures, and the kind of things I'm about to be talking about now are the kind of things that make me not loved by the dealers because they'd love to have Mark Tobey estate paintings and Pehr's and all that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, sure.

WESLEY WEHR: You know, it's good for business.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But is part of what you're saying that the museum unloaded a lot of stuff right away without even accesssioning it?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, yes, yeah, okay. And I went to see the Tobeys that were singled out as, you know, the cream of the bequest, and God help us, I mean, a couple of big things that look important, but they only look important. Then I went to see the things being sold at Foster [Foster/White gallery--Ed.]. Well, they're from periods of Tobey that are not fashionable. And they're beautiful paintings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

WESLEY WEHR: I'm getting a little nastier than I intended to be today, but I think somebody'd better say this once and for all. But I better move quickly because I'm going to have to say some very positive things about Arnold Jolles and Marshall Hatch and different ones, quickly-- how much I like them and respect them. So I'm getting into all kinds of trouble about saying, in one way, that it was a disaster which...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think they let go too much, and they let go, would you say, areas that are unfashionable now but had real interest as history and as context and possibly real aesthetic value also?

WESLEY WEHR: I don't know. I hate the idea of placing the blame; it's one of the most stupid things we've ever tried to do.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You don't have to place the blame, you can just assess what you think the damage was. That's what I'm interested in.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, it's just because I think, well, I think we've got extraordinary people here [glitch in tape] and I've looked and I, no that's beside the point.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: If you don't want to name them, you don't have to.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. (laughs) Sure.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You still, as I say, can do a great deal else.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah.

[Tape 12--marked side 4]

[Considerable space left at beginning of tape]

WESLEY WEHR: Well, for instance, when I was in Tobey's studio, I had to think in many, many directions; it wasn't just the paintings that were strong Tobeys. That was only part of the bequest. And it would have been very simplistic to say, well, everything else is blah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There were things that might relate to his writings, to his music, to his palette and his ways of working.

WESLEY WEHR: Yes, I had no idea that the museum had such a simplistic approach to art. I was a little shaken by it. They certainly showed an incredible deficiency in matters of historical context, archival... If I'd known that the museum-- or I don't want to say the museum, but whoever was frivolous in some of these matters-- had such narrow perspectives I would have, I don't know what I would have done. But here's the point. In the stuff that I shipped from Basel, in a big trunk which turned out to be Tobey's Dartington Hall trunk. I put in tubes of paint. I started putting in the art supplies. Well, my reason for doing this was there's a little matter of conservation, forgery. I thought, now, with a painter of that stature, it's common to want to know and record what materials for matters of restoration, scholarship. Any idiot, study [phrase obscured]...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Authentication, also.

WESLEY WEHR: Authentication! This is bedrock. So when I got back here. Point one, I said, where are the art supplies? I was told, "Oh, they were sent to Cornish for the art students." Too late on that one.
MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ah hah.

WESLEY WEHR: See this is not very good; it's not very good at all.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What else was gone?

WESLEY WEHR: And why in blazes was I not called in instantly at this time to explain? To explain why I sent these damn things.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you weren't asked...

WESLEY WEHR: I was not asked until it was too damn late.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .what was there, why you put it in, what the principles of your selection had been.

WESLEY WEHR: And then I rolled up his art papers. The point, you know, it should be recorded what kinds of paper he used. The sheet music, he had studied with Berthe Poncy Jacobson, it would have her fingerings. She had studied with Bloch. To the musical community, Mark Tobey's music library, with Berthe Poncy Jacobson's annotations, to musicians in this area, would be a very important heritage. So I called again, "Where's the music?" "Well maybe it's at Cornish." So I called Cornish. "Well, we haven't seen it." And I thought, God, I don't even want to pursue this one.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You don't know where it went?

WESLEY WEHR: I don't know where it went, but I didn't even want to...I was getting depressed.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's the kind of material that you think could have gone to an archives, like Suzzallo, to the music library at the university [of Washington--Ed.].

WESLEY WEHR: Of course. But I made some inquiries. Nobody seemed to know where it was. Maybe there's been a misunderstanding; it's in some box somewhere. The next thing I heard, Tobey's furniture was being auctioned off at unpublicized auctions. Well, that's okay, because it was clear there wasn't going to be a Tobey memorabilia center after all. And then, a particularly wild one was that Tobey's library was never inventoried, to the best of my knowledge. It was sold uninventoried to the highest bidder.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As a block?

WESLEY WEHR: As a block.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In Seattle here?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, yeah. So there were big articles, you know, that the Tobey library is presently for sale. Well, God help us! I raced down to see it, and a friend and I started with a tape recorder to make a list of what was in that thing; at least there should be an inventory.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: But when I got there, there were all these inscribed first editions, and already up for sale. And Dr. Fritzsche, the Tobey collector, and collector of Northwest painting, raced down there; he picked up, for not very much money, a book with an original Georges Mathieu drawing for Tobey _____, limited edition, with a personal inscription from the author. He picked up another book, a Vieira da Silva edition, and it turned out the cover was the original da Silva watercolor.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really.

WESLEY WEHR: Okay. And I picked up a book inscribed by Joseph Campbell to Tobey, a book which I bought quickly and then gave to Suzzallo Library. But this is ridiculous! The museum saying "Well, we have to raise money." It's that, had any of us looked at the books, had they bothered to give us a chance to even look through the books, we could have said, "Hey, look, that one's worth a lot of money, this one's worth a lot of money. If you people are so interested in raising money, you're...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sell 50 books and forget the _____.

WESLEY WEHR: You're throwing the stuff to the winds; you're sloppy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was there any discussion among people connected with the museum at that point of the possibility anywhere down the line of ever having, you know, a Tobey memorial room in some future building?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I don't know what's happened to all of that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Because all this material would have contributed to an installation, environment.

WESLEY WEHR: I just find this whole thing a disaster. I mean, and on a level that goes very deep and tells me something about certain values in this area. But I don't want to think about it.

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: I've been talking with Martha and I've been using some rather strong language. (chuckles) I'm rather glad that I didn't use the words because I get very angry and rather nasty. But to go back to the Tobey bequest, which I do feel is another local low point. For instance, the museum's attitude that it wants high-quality paintings, well, that sounds fine, but on the other hand, to say we want to keep only the best works, well, who in blazes knows what the best works are sometimes? I've seen a lot of museums collect second-rate examples of an artists most fashionable phase, which they usually do, and bypass a masterpiece that's in a phase of that artists work that happens not to be in at the moment. So, in the case of Tobey, in the works that were sold, there were some beautiful, fine paintings that, well, I don't think the museum can say that they are duplicates necessarily, but that's a matter of personal taste. I did feel, in the case of the Tobey bequest, that what I would like to have seen, and I'm sick and tired of those things that are committed in the name of money necessity, I think that's the biggest copout I've yet to hear. I have seen aesthetic crimes committed in this area in the name of money, which make one want to throw up.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ that deaccessioning?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, yeah. What Betty Bowen called "the trashing of the treasures." And (laughs), she died of natural causes, by the way.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before this, before this mess. She didn't live to...

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. But anyhow, what the museum could have done-- and maybe I'm being unrealistic again-- if the Tobey bequest had been considered a Washington State

heritage-- and maybe I'm being a little Japanese about this, I never did claim to have an affinity with the Orient.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

WESLEY WEHR: Which I'm beginning to doubt. The Tobey works, if they'd become property of the state, if our museum felt that some of these paintings which I and some of my painter friends think are very good, weren't up to their lofty standards. Well, those very same works could have been the pride and joy of a great many of our smaller museums round the state. We have libraries, we have schools, we have museums that any of these works would have been marvelous for those museums to have. If somebody could have come forth and wiped out that paltry financial obligation and simply said, "These works should not be scattered to the winds. This is a very important historical bequest. If the works are not up to the standards of the museum or the museum doesn't have any space, well then let the works go to the smaller places."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As semipermanent loans, you mean?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, as loans and God knows what else. But spread the culture around the state. But I get very fed up with this kind urban hangup that, if it's not good enough for the museum it's not good enough for anybody else. And I just, if I were redoing the thing, I would have put the halt to letting all these works go flying in all directions.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have any idea how many were let out on the market?

WESLEY WEHR: Oh, I don't know, but in any case, it's all over, the estate as far as I'm concerned is, you know, the museum will end up with some good things, some not. But as far as I'm concerned on the broad basis of the Tobey bequest, you know, very broad sense of our heritage, the thing's just a disgrace, and that tells me more than I care to know about Tobey's importance in this area. They named a cocktail lounge after him and he might as well be Jim Zorn or Wilt Chamberlain; I don't think it makes any difference anymore, but...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. So, it's so at odds with the adulation and the cult of the artist, in certain quarters during his lifetime.

WESLEY WEHR: I don't know; there's a contradiction involved here which I just can't comprehend.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. Contradiction that has to do perhaps with adulation of the living person as a star, but a lack of sophistication about the cultural value of the things left afterwards.

WESLEY WEHR: I know. It's weird. The 1975 deaccessioning episode, sometimes I just want to forget the whole bloody thing because it's really embarrassing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure.

WESLEY WEHR: But I think a few things I should bring up about it. The first knowledge I had of it was when I opened the paper one morning-- the Seattle P.I. [Post Intelligencer--Ed.]-- and read Richard Campbell's announcement that the museum was deaccessioning what they called minor, duplicate Tobeys. Well that sounded reasonable enough, but I thought, "Well, I hope whoever has made the decision knows what they're doing." So then I quickly found out what was on the list of those "minor duplicates." And then immediately of course, articles appeared rapidly in the paper, and Joseph Monsen, that world-famous expert on Mark Tobey-- we all realize that Professor Monsen is probably the world's foremost expert on Tobey-- informed us...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Your tone of irony may not come through when this is typed.

WESLEY WEHR: (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He informed us what? (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: I'm sorry. I don't admire Dr. Monsen. (laughter)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know. But someone who knows nothing, you know, could read a remark like that as a perfectly straightforward remark. Anyway, what does he say?

WESLEY WEHR: I really had to sit there and say, oh, well this is very nice. Professor Monsen, as head of the collections committee, is assuring us plebians in the community that the situation is well in hand, that there're some minor duplicate Tobeys which aren't worthy of the museum standards-- so trust them, because they're connoisseurs and all that. So I said, well I think I better find out which ones. Oh God help us. I'm not going to get into what I think is major Tobey and what they don't think. Because then they can just say well it's a matter of taste and we'd get kind of nasty. So all one has to do is simply get their hands on a list of the Tobeys that had been sent back East, which had dutifully been relegated, mysteriously, to the classification of minor duplicates, and then look them up in the books in the museum's past records at exhibitions, and it's obvious to anybody that something is very wrong here. Because what we had instantly, Agate World, a beautiful one, reproduced many times, suddenly is a minor duplicate. Minor duplicate of what? Serpentine, which was [purchased by--Ed.] the Fuller Silver Anniversary Fund, suddenly is a minor duplicate. Written Across the Plains II, a gift of Tobey and Seligman to the museum-- well I was very disappointed that Tobey and Seligman would give the museum a "minor duplicate." That seemed kind of strange.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: [phrase obscured]

WESLEY WEHR: Well, as I went through the list I got out the Tobeys '80 book and eliminated the Tobeys that were scheduled to be trashed to see what it did to the Tobey collection. And it was a little horrifying but, oh my. So I was mad. I went to sleep that night and about 2:00 in the morning I woke up, grabbed a piece of paper and I scrawled what amounts to an act of war proclamation, which said that if a single one of those Tobeys left the museum, I and my co-signers would boycott the museum. We would discourage the donors from ever having anything more to do with the museum, and we wouldn't tolerate this sort of thing-- Tobeys that were among the most beautiful ones owned by the museum suddenly being treated that way. It was disrespect for Tobey, for Fuller, and it was intolerable.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What did you do with it?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I called up Morris Graves, I read it to him on the phone, and he said, "Add me to the signers." Now I can only say what happened at the time. And the following painters gave me permission to add their names to it: Morris Graves, Bill Ivey, Richard Gilkey, Guy Anderson, myself-- who else? Oh I'm forgetting, I forget, I think there's one missing. And then a lot of others wanted to. So Richard Campbell came out to the district, and I delivered it to him. I called up Willis Woods; I said, "I'm very sorry but I've written this statement that I'm about to release to the paper. I apologize, but this is wrong, what's going on. It must be stopped." And I think Willis Woods just, I don't think he really quite, you know, he was new to the area; he was relying upon other people for these decisions.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah?

WESLEY WEHR: So Campbell, well, it was a shambles. Campbell wrote a series of articles, Deloris Tarzan _____ had articles and the museum was really caught in some fast crossfire. They kept saying, "Well, you know, we haven't done anything yet; we were going to get the permission of the donors." Well, for God's sakes, they hadn't even called Eunice Clise, the donor or Agate World. It was already back East. She was furious. Other donors were threatening to withdraw bequests. Mrs. Jacobson was, she couldn't believe it, and she was leaving Gothic to the museum. When I saw Virginia Wright in the bookstore, and I apologized profusely to her, my presuming to deal with realities of museums-- told her I lived in a very unrealistic world. But she thanked me for having such a nice attitude, and I... (laughs) Do you think the inflection will across on the tape? (laughs) No, I don't think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It may, it may.

WESLEY WEHR: It may, it may. But there was not a single Tobey expert on that committee, again. If you look at the list very carefully, the works that were chosen for deaccessiioning were generally highly saleable ones. Then I proceeded to have enough... Well, Charlie Cowles was furious with me; he just told one friend, or as it was told to me, that I was on his shitlist, and I just suddenly was not invited anymore to group shows. Different painters kept going to bat for me on invitationals, but I pointedly was left out of all kinds of exhibitions. And even some of the critics started pointing out in the paper, "Why is Wes Wehr left out of different exhibitions at the museum?" One could say I was being punished, but that sounds, that's an inter... I didn't give a damn. And still do it. But anyhow, the museum explanation

was they had so many Tobeys, more than they knew what to do with. Well, if a museum wants to get a lot of donations, you've got to be awfully careful about what you do with what you've already got. What I did say to Mrs. Wright was I thought that it was a diplomatic blunder of the first order, which I thought was a very tactful diplomatic way...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Diplomatic. Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: ...of expressing my feelings on the matter. To make the matter even more ludicrous, the works were being used as an exchange to buy one of many versions of Edward Hick's The Peaceable Kingdom. I forget the price; I think it was priced at $250,000, some incredible price. And the museum kept saying, "Well, this would be a nice painting to have, and we've got so many Tobeys." Well, God help us, they were paying top dollar for... I had a wonderful letter from Sherman Lee at that point, which ended, "My general sentiments may be known, but the specific language is for your ears only." I had letters from all over the country on this thing. And I had phone calls from museums on this thing, and Dick Willis, "We haven't done anything wrong," etcetera. [It's kind of funny in a way.?]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And how did it come out?

WESLEY WEHR: Well, for one thing, well, if our museum felt it was so qualified to decide what Tobey minor duplicates were, well that was very odd because I had a letter from Marian Willard which said, "I've just, through Betty Willis, received news of what's happened. There are some fine Tobeys on that list, ones which I would not like to see leave the museum." So I am not saying that I'm a Tobey expert, but if Marian Willard isn't qualified, good God who is? So I'm really trying to say... Okay.

Another point I want to make, because I'm just going to pounce on this one with leather boots.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

WESLEY WEHR: Just a few years ago when there were some exhibitions at the center, which Tobeys were used for posters? Very soon after this thing, the deal was called off, the minor duplicates, everything was _____. What Tobey appeared on a poster by the Seattle Art Museum? Written Across the Plains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's a major work.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Okay, and I thought, well, Mr. Cowles, or whoever is... My God. I wrote to Arnold Jolles about this. I said, you know, "All I'm saying is the museum itself doesn't seem to know what a good Tobey is. One day it's a minor duplicate; the next day it's a featured poster! I can't follow this anymore."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's being a featured poster relates more to your earlier observation that it's saleable, works that are saleable and have appeal.

WESLEY WEHR: Right, exactly.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or overlap. But they're not necessarily the _____ _____.

WESLEY WEHR: I'm really being unforgiving on this, but I don't care. When the show came from Osaka to the Seattle Center, I went to the Tobey section and I went around with Arnold, who was in a _____. I said, "Look, I don't want to kick a dead horse once more, but I can't resist. By the way, Arnold, this one, that one, that one, and that one...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You almost lost.

WESLEY WEHR: Those were the ones that just somehow, weren't good enough. Gee, it's hard to understand it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: _____ with you?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, no, he's a wonderful man.

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: I should note that I was willing-- I was willing, that certainly sounds

patronizing, I was willing. Yeah, sometimes I think I'm a reincarnation of Mark Tobey; I think I have some ego problems, but...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: But Ritter did tell me that he entrusted, in that he had authority in the estate-- Ritter said that he had assumed that the museum would have me working closely with the Tobey estate. It was Ritter's assumption that I would work very closely with the bequest. And that includes my role in it in Basel. So, if I'm angry and very sarcastic, I sometimes feel that things could have been done much better.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You feel in a way that you were given a certain degree of responsibility at one end and then taken and somehow not being responsible at the other end.

WESLEY WEHR: I was given responsibilities, given responsibilities by Ritter, by friendship to Tobey, and not given the opportunity here...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ...to carry them out.

WESLEY WEHR: ...to carry them out. And this I take badly. But the museum has to go on, and we all make mistakes. This is what I was talking to Arnold Jolles about. We can't go back and dig up things that are best forgotten.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No, but it sounds like what it does for you individually is leave you feeling not only angry but grieved.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, it's influenced a lot of things I've done lately. Tobey, for one thing, should have burned a lot of junk that was in the studio. Artists are forever dying, leaving a lot of taxable junk, and the heirs are stuck with it, the bequests are stuck with it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. (laughs)

WESLEY WEHR: I tend, because of the Tobey mess, to work with different artists now.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Some burn more?

WESLEY WEHR: To burn more, to sign deeds of gift, to transfer works while they're alive.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ah hah, yes. I knew you did lots of that.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, so this is what I do now. I use the Tobey disaster as an example to artists. This is what could happen to your junk; when you die all of your junk will go on the open market.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I understand. Yes.

WESLEY WEHR: If you want these things at Don Foster's, and if you don't want all this junk for sale at the Foster gallery and other places, let's burn it tonight. And then they start to see the point.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

[Tape 13 - marked side 5]

WESLEY WEHR: On the deaccessioning, since I've left a rather extensive file on it, in my own restricted papers at the university, where I wanted the letters and relative documents to be preserved, I left those things in the archive for later. I just wasn't going to say anything about the episode, but I think the reason I wanted to discuss it today was that, oh, a year or so ago somebody brought to my attention that Mr. Wright had given an address-- I think in Texas-- at a museum director's meeting. Somebody just showed me a copy of it, deliberately, innocently, and said, "Oh, I think you better read this, Wes."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: And I read it and I should have a copy here, but as I remember it Mr. Wright brought it up himself as an example of-- oh, I think sort of implying-- blind loyalty,

provincialism, an episode where some minor things were being gotten rid of and there was an emotional backlash from, you know, Tobey fanatics. And I've sometimes heard second hand that there are people in this area still saying that, and it's just... I would be willing to forget the episode, but when people like Mr. Wright or some of the others here bring it up themselves and don't know any better or should be ashamed of themselves-- I don't know which-- give it as an example of local, sentimental lack of, as Robert Sarkis would say, "con-nos '-er-ship," then I get a little angry because that's obscuring the matter, and then it's time to say, well, I won't put up with this any more.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And to keep your side on the record.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So then I have to say well look, I'm biased and if this issue keeps being dredged up-- if anyone's interested in it-- go and get a list of paintings, look at them, and decide for yourself what a minor duplicate is. End of sermon.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

[Break in tape]

WESLEY WEHR: I've been looking over my notes, different things I jotted down that I wanted to mention. Just a few little random things. For instance, Tobey-- certainly his paintings derive very deeply from nature; looking at them one would think that Tobey probably slept under the stars all night and backpacked over half the world. One would assume that any artist with that deep feeling for nature spent most of his life living in it. Well, the contradiction in Mark's case is he seemed to freak out the minute he got within three blocks of the city limits.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Going out from the city center.

WESLEY WEHR: Going out from the city limits. So, when I was a kid I used to have strange delusions like it'd be wonderful to go-- God forbid-- on camping trips with these older painters. And I'd say something like, "Gee, Mark, can we go to the Olympic Peninsula?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes.

WESLEY WEHR: And he'd look at me and say, "Well, do you know a good motel?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) Had he been there at all?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So I was disappointed because as a twerp I kind of thought, well, gee, these people I look up to don't like to do some of these things and I wish they did. So I... But anyhow. I've heard several stories about Tobey on the occasions that he did leave town.

In the case of Guy Anderson-- and Guy has told me this story-- Guy invited Tobey up to LaConner and Tobey got up there in the hotel, the Nordic Hotel, which had been a baudy house at one point, wasn't exactly the most sedate place in town. But Tobey got up there and realized that there was no lock on the door, and he was absolutely freaked out. He said, "Guy. I can't spend the night in this hotel. It's dangerous!"-- [Anderson]: "Well, you can push some furniture against the door. I don't think they're going to murder you." Well Tobey said, "No. I can't do this. I'll have to go someplace else." So Guy had to get out the car-- and it was a very bad night; it was all fog-- and he had to drive Tobey all the way to Coupeville because there was a hotel there.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: All the way to Coupeville? On Whidbey Island?

WESLEY WEHR: On Whidbey Island. The nearest hotel at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well they had to go up around the north end and down, yeah.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So that Tobey could have a hotel room with a lock on the door and sleep safely. Like he couldn't be...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) That's a city person!

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So Guy describes having to lean out the car window while they're freezing in the fog trying to get the car to Coupeville, so that Tobey can have a safe hotel room.

The other story, related to it, is that when Morris Graves lived at The Rock-- and I can't remember where I heard this story-- Morris saved up his gas ration coupons. Gas was scarce and food was scarce, but Morris invited Tobey up to The Rock, and really made elaborate preparations to make it nice. Came down, picked up Tobey, took him up, they sat down, Tobey was going to have a nice visit. Suddenly Tobey says, "What's that noise in the woods? I know it's a bear. I can't... No. No. This isn't safe here. You're just going to have to drive me back to Seattle." And that was the end of that visit. Morris just had to pack up Tobey, drive him back.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's a Morris story, not a Mark story, right?

WESLEY WEHR: No, no. No, I...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Note of origin.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, I don't know what these stories tell, but I...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I think there's something to that in Tobey's attitude though.

WESLEY WEHR: Right. I haven't really done many interviews; I did one when I was in high school and that was only because my girlfriend was with the newspaper and...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Practiced on you?

WESLEY WEHR: (laughter) Yeah. So she did a big article, a story about how I interviewed bubble dancers and things like that. So from high school up until about 1980, fortunately, or unfortunately, I had no familiarity with video tape or interviews-- no practice. But I did envy people who could just sort of open their mouths and utter literature.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Whoever they are.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, like Borges and the different ones. But I did have a show at the Victoria Art Museum 1980-81, and the P.R. man sent out a news release explaining that though I painted, and was having a painting show, I liked to collect fossils and discover new species and things like that. So by the time the news release went out to the media, the television programs and magazines thought I might make interesting copy. Well, here was a painter who did all kinds...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Does something we can understand.

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah, does all kinds of wild things, goes off and discovers 45million-year-old fossils and names them after his friends, and gets things named after him like generals pin medals on each other. They thought well, this guy's got a good gimick; he'll be good copy. So the museum explained to me, before I knew what hit me, that I was on schedule to be...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To be interviewed?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. Two videotape talk shows and one magazine article. All within three days. I thought, good God, I can't do this. I don't know what to talk about. So, well, I got on the boat and they'd already set me up to do this, and I thought, well I'm going to do it anyway. But I'd been listening to a lot of other artist interviews and thinking, well, I'm vain enough that I don't want to sound like the rest of them, and what do most of them have in common? Well, most of our artists of a certain generation here, when they're being interviewed, always sound like nature's most intimate confidants. New York artists frequently sound like the interview is an occasion for explaining why the recognition is overdue, and they deserve much more. Most interviews with artists, I don't think are worth listening to. I just don't care for them. So when I had this opportunity to be interviewed I thought well I'm going to talk about not what I'm supposed to be interested but what I like to do. And I spent all of the time just talking about fossils and my friends and the way I lived and what I liked. And I thought, well, artists are getting a bad enough reputation for being pompous jackasses with great pipelines to the infinite and so I just don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to talk about "my career," because I don't think it's worth talking about.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or "my insights" or...

WESLEY WEHR: Or "my insights." Because most of the time painters invent their intentions

afterwards. I don't think they really know what they're doing, but if the thing works out well, then they invent the intention. And if it doesn't, they sweep it under the rug.

So I'm just going to end with one little thing related to Susanne Langer, the philosopher, which goes back to about 1967. The summer of 1967 I was in Port Townsend, staying in [Victor--Ed.] Steinbrueck's house and having a wonderful summer; I was reading Meister Eckhardt's sermons and beachcombing and writing Susanne Langer letters all the time--having a wonderful time. So I called her up in Connecticut and she said, "Well, Wes, I've been getting your letters and you've been floating up the beaches, and you've been floating down the beaches, and it's your hippie summer; it's beautiful, but I've been worrying that one day you're going to float up that beach and never come back again. If you don't mind, I think I've got to step in at this point and make a suggestion to you." I said, "Well, what's wrong?" She said, "Well, you're young now; you have lots of energy, lots of stamina, and your elbows are sharp, and what I'd recommend to you is to get out and have a lot of painting shows and plow into it and get your credentials and do all this thing while your bravura sense is high, and your energies and your confidence are high. You better do it now. Have lots of exhibitions and wonderful ones."

Because she said, "I've got to tell you, though you may not know this, that a time is going to come when those energies aren't what they used to be and your confidence isn't what it used to be and the world is bigger and your elbows aren't so sharp and, or you just don't care any more. Or you're interested in other things and you just can't be bothered with shows and all of that. But I'd suggest you get out and do it now, because the time's going to come if you haven't done this, it'll be too late to do it, and you'll regret that you haven't." So, I took that advice very seriously and started having lots of exhibitions for a long, long time. And I think Mrs. Langer's probably right because I'm glad I did it. I was with a young painter a few nights ago, and I was being very sarcastic about young painters who hustle and all of that, and Mike Dougan, who is a very good guy, looked at me and said, "Well, Wes, you can afford to talk that way now, because you've done your hustling and..."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .used your sharp elbows?

WESLEY WEHR: . . .you've used your sharp elbows. And you're at that point where you can sit back and cover up the traces and pretend that you weren't like the rest of us. So come off it." Well, he's quite right.

And then, lastly, again Susanne Langer. I was scheduled to have a show at the Shepherd Gallery in New York in 1973 and I was getting ready for it and I called Mrs. Langer and I said, "Well I think I'm going to call the gallery and ask them if I can postpone the show for about a month because I'd like to go out of town and do some camping and then get back and sort of wind up the show." Well there was a long silence on the phone, and Susanne just tore me to shreds. She said, "Wes, I think you should stop pampering that delicate little psyche of yours and snap out of it. You are damn lucky to be offered a show in New York. New York is where every misunderstood battered prima donna ego in the world goes, and I've got to tell you something right off. They have no time for undependable people. You have your show, you be cooperative, you be on time, and be uncomplicated."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Uncomplicated. [phrase]

WESLEY WEHR: So I thought, she said, "If you want to survive, don't be a prima donna, don't be a genius, paint as well as you can, have your shows, and just cut out the prima donna...

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Be a professional?

WESLEY WEHR: Yeah. So I don't know why end at this point, but I think that's enough.

[Break in tape]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before we quit, it seems to me that you had one more set of reflections you wanted to make on essentially what it is you've been doing, which is recording many incidents and many anecdotes. But what it does to those, to set them down in either writing or tape. This is something you've been thinking about.

WESLEY WEHR: Well, a quick little buildup to it. One time there was a pianist John Ringgold, wonderful musician. I'd been composing some music, and Jack went through it and he was very hard on it; he red-penciled it and he-- "not good enough, bad, bad." He just tore it

apart, and I was kind of depressed and Jack looked and me and said, "Look. I have to remind you of one thing, Wes. You are writing a piece of music and supposedly this piece of music will be performed. And if it's performed, you're hoping that people are going to come and listen to it. Well, you have to realize that if you're presuming that those people are going to listen to your music, that you've done the best you can, that it's worth their time to listen to it, it's very arrogant of you to want anyone to listen to what you say or what you compose if you've not made a genuine effort to be honest or interesting in whatever you say." And I think that's what bothers me about this taping. I think I've rambled a great deal, I think if I were to look through this taping, there's a great deal that I'd say, well, why did I bother to say that; I could have said something else. But I've noticed in one thing, to conclude the interview, what I've published on Tobey, on Elizabeth Bishop, different memoirs, when I go back and read them now, once I've published it, I read it, and somehow I'm not connected with it anymore. It's almost like it's something I'm reading. I have had the feeling that writing a thing, publishing it, recording it, is almost a way of letting go of it, that until it's on paper or transcribed someplace you keep it alive like an oral tradition in yourself, but once you've committed it to paper, to any kind of archival process, it's a kind of way of exorcising a ghost, saying a kind of farewell to your past. It's a way of kind of letting go of things so you can perhaps be a little more in the present. And you also realize that in telling these stories that you're now publishing or recording once and for all what in the past you've told each time a little differently, embellished them, told them to suit the occasion, to suit the personality of the person to whom you're telling them. So each time in trying to convey the quality of something that was very important to you or part of your life, you've had to resort to a little rhetoric, a little theatricality, to try to give a little of the sense of what it was like. Because as Roethke told us, for a thing to be like life, you have to make it bigger than life. So, I've realized now that in finishing these tapes, I've attributed quotations and remarks to people and in a way it means that I can't go on saying these things because anyone who is going to take the bother-- God knows-- to check the tape would say, "But one day your verbatim is this, the next day it's that, and you either have a bad memory or you're a liar." So I'm both; I try to stick to the facts, but some things here are... I think everything I've said here is pretty close to the truth as I remember it, but I think I've hammed it up in some cases and (chuckles) that's all right. I think it's over. All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

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