



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Ron Ho, 2017 May 9**

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ronald Ho on 2017 May 9. The interview took place at Ronald Ho's home in Seattle, WA, and was conducted by Lloyd Herman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Ronald Ho and Lloyd Herman have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

LLOYD HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman at the home of Ron Ho in Seattle, Washington on May 9, 2017 [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution]. And let me start off, Ron, by asking you to state your full name, and your birthplace and date.

RONALD HO: Yes, my name is Ronald Tau Wo Ho. And I was born in Honolulu on November 1, 1936.

LLOYD HERMAN: Can you tell us a little about your family, Ron? Because you have, I think, a really interesting family history.

RONALD HO: Yes. Well, first of all it was interesting because both of my parents spoke different dialects. So, first of all, I'll tell you about my paternal grandfather because he came from Kowloon [Hong Kong] to Hawaii in 1878 to work in the cane fields. And he was what you call Hakka, [who spoke –RH] a particular dialect. And the group started up in the north and eventually travelled down through the south. And most of them were farmers. And so, in the end, he had decided that he wanted to earn some extra money because times were hard in China.

So, at the age of 20 he left his family and moved to Kohala, which is on the big island of Hawaii. And he worked in the—in the cane field for a number of years. And then, he decided that in the end he wanted to have his own farm. And he moved to Kula, Maui because at that time there was a Chinatown even though it was only two blocks long. And so, he started on this farm, which was leased land, and so what happened was that after a while he became very lonely. So, therefore, he asked his parents in China if they would arrange a marriage for him. And my grandmother was actually born in an adjoining village [in China –RH].

And so, she travelled to Hawaii. She had, you know, never left home at all. So, for the first two years she cried most of the time because she missed her family so much. And then, eventually, they had eight children. And my father was probably the third from the youngest. And he actually quit school in the fourth grade to help my grandfather on his farm. And there were some wonderful stories about my grandfather because in World War I he grew corn and lima beans. And for two years in a row, each year he earned \$10,000, which was a phenomenal amount of money for the time. And, anyway, they paid him off in gold coins. And so, he would put them in jars and—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —would bury them around the farm. And as my uncles grew older, they told him that

this was not a very good idea. So, one moonlit night, they took a horse-drawn cart and filled it with hay and then dug up all of these jars of gold coins.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And then, put them on this horse-drawn cart. And in the morning, they went to the bank, which astounded, of course, the tellers. And eventually my grandfather found out in—it was probably the early '30s—that though he had been leasing the land he could actually buy this land. And, unfortunately, he was not a citizen of the United States, so therefore, he couldn't buy the land. And my oldest uncle at that time was only 16 years old, so he couldn't buy the land either. So, then my grandfather thought, well, maybe they should take the whole family and move back to China. But then what happened was his parents wrote him back and said, "Well, this is still not a very good time." So, therefore, he moved—decided to move to Honolulu where he bought a house for \$8,000 cash.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And it was a rather large house and they moved into it.

LLOYD HERMAN: About what year would this have been?

RONALD HO: It was probably about 19—I would say—32 or something like that. And actually my uncle said that actually it was probably a good decision in the end because, you know, being on the farm, they would be eking out a living; whereas by moving to Honolulu, they had the opportunity to get some more education. And a number of my uncles became businessmen and some worked in the bank. And my—one of my aunties became a schoolteacher. And eventually she started leading trips to southeast Asia—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —which is something like what happened to me, as an example.

LLOYD HERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

RONALD HO: But [my father –RH] met my mother and my mother was a different dialect. She actually came—their family came from the Canton area, so they spoke Cantonese. And, therefore, since they both were different dialects, they never spoke Chinese to each other, only English. And the interesting thing was that, okay, my grandfather on my mother's side; I never met him because he died before I was born. However, my grandmother was really the matriarch of that particular family.

LLOYD HERMAN: Now, was she a picture bride? Do I remember that?

RONALD HO: No, I think she just immigrated.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh. Who was the picture bride, though?

RONALD HO: Oh, the picture bride was really my paternal grandmother.

LLOYD HERMAN: Ah [affirmative].

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Can you say—tell a little bit about how that—

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —worked?

RONALD HO: Well, what happened was that since she lived so far away, he never—my paternal grandfather never met her, so all he got was a photograph of her. And so, you know, she took the long journey from China to Hawaii. And they met and it was really, for her, an incredible experience since she had never left home before. And as I said, she cried for the first two years.

LLOYD HERMAN: And that would have been on a ship, of course, at that time.

RONALD HO: Yes, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: That was probably a pretty long trip, I would imagine—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —And very frightening for a young woman who never left home.

RONALD HO: Absolutely. And as a matter of fact, I eventually did a couple of narrative pieces of necklaces to depict my grandmother. And I had a porcelaintile that featured a Chinese woman. I put it in a frame and then put it on a Chinese dragon boat with a banana tree to depict—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —Hawaii.

LLOYD HERMAN: I'm wondering, you know, how they financed immigration and citizenship since Hawaii was a territory and not a state until the 1950s.

RONALD HO: That's right. Well, you know, I think that my great-grandparents, they probably had to raise the money to be able to send my grandparents—

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —over to Hawaii, which was probably not an easy thing since—

LLOYD HERMAN: No.

RONALD HO: —they probably only had a farm. And—but it was interesting that in the end they never actually—my grandparents never actually became citizens—

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —at all.

LLOYD HERMAN: Because I think about the Chinese Exclusion Act [in about 1882 –RH], which

prevented Chinese workers who came over to work for gold in the U.S.—could not bring their wives.

RONALD HO: That's right. However, with that Chinese Exclusion Act it did allow, if you were a farmer—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: —it did allow you to bring your wife—

LLOYD HERMAN: Interesting, yeah. Oh—

RONALD HO: —or your intended, right? Which was, I thought, quite an interesting thing.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, tell me—talk a little bit about your childhood and your siblings. Describe your —

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —brother and sister and what life at home was like and the kinds of chores that you all might have had.

RONALD HO: [Laughs.] Okay—[laughs.] Okay, my father and mother—we had actually originally three of us siblings who were born, of course, in Hawaii. I have a sister, Nathalie, who was one year older than I am. And then, I had a younger brother, Tim—I'm sorry, Ray, who was three years younger. And one of the interesting things that happened in our family was that when we were in junior high school, my sister and myself, my parents heard about this woman who was going to give birth to a child and she said, "Well, what do you think about having another brother or sister?" [Laughs.] And we were awful, we said, "Oh no, we don't want any foreigners in our family."

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: So, she was going to give your parents her child?

RONALD HO: Yeah, she was going to give this—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, my.

RONALD HO: —child up.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: This woman. And in the end, they went, of course, and adopted my brother—they named him Timothy.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, so he was—he was the adopted child. They did—they did take the baby then.

RONALD HO: That's right. They did. And in all respects, when I look at it, it was a wonderful thing because first of all we had Tim since he was 3 days old from the hospital. And we've always known him as our brother. You know he wasn't some foreigner—[laughs]—at all.

[They laugh.]

RONALD HO: And it actually was a very good thing because when we went away to college they still had my brother Tim at home.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: So, you know, therefore, they loved him and—

LLOYD HERMAN: But Tim was Chinese, too.

RONALD HO: Oh, yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yes.

RONALD HO: Well, actually he was half Chinese.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And I believe the other half was French. But the interesting thing was, okay, his blood mother actually had another child by the same man; except he looked more Caucasian where Tim looked more Chinese, which was better for us really, you know? There weren't that many questions that people would ask about him.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So when you were a child did you have household chores? And—

RONALD HO: [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: —talk a little bit about your school and the friends and the kinds of activities—

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —you liked.

RONALD HO: Well, for instance, particularly—well, I should tell you that during World War II we had actually a home that was right—not too far from Pearl Harbor. And so, what happened was that on December 7th, we were at my auntie's house, which is quite a distance away from Pearl Harbor.

LLOYD HERMAN: 1941.

RONALD HO: Yes, in 1941. And so, we heard all this noise of bombing. And then, we heard these—those—the airplanes diving around. And, of course, we were obviously quite frightened. And I remember that we stayed at my auntie's house for a whole week, except that my father went home during the week because we had goats and we also had dogs. And so, he had to feed them. But we stayed for about a week before we actually went home.

LLOYD HERMAN: Did—besides goats and dogs were there crops that were raised that you had to help harvest or—

RONALD HO: No, we didn't. Except that, you know, my father—having grown up helping my father, my grandfather, on the farm—

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —and since my father quit school in the fourth grade, he actually was an excellent person for growing crops. And, however, about I would say 19—maybe—48, or something like that, he actually bought 10 acres up in a valley. And he—well, my father was also a carpenter. So, first of all, he built our first house in—on Airport Road that was near Pearl Harbor. But right after the war he actually bought this 10 acres. And then, the first thing he did was clear the land because it was all, you know, brush. And then, he built our own house there. And then, at that point, he started, you know, planting all kinds of trees and flowers. Because he said he didn't like to plant anything unless they produce something of value. And at one point, actually I remember he planted flowers that he would grow and sell to the lei sellers.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, sure.

RONALD HO: Right. And then, he also, I remember, he grew a lot of Birds of Paradise, which he also sold to the florists. So he was really good at growing things. And my brother Ray, incidentally, I will say he was the one who actually inherited all of my father's great qualities, as well as my mother's. And so, I was telling Lloyd that the great thing about my father that even though he was not formally educated, he was a very smart man. And that he was a genius and that he could fix anything that broke. And my brother [Ray] inherited those qualities, which is really wonderful. Because when I finally moved to Seattle what happened was that I bought this beautiful house. And the thing about it was that naturally having a house there was always something that was going wrong. And my brother, who lived about an hour south of here, I would call him up and I would say, "Guess what?" And he says—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —"What?" I said oh, I'd tell him that something disastrous happened. And he would literally drive up from Gig Harbor and actually come up and fix this.

LLOYD HERMAN: Is that this house?

RONALD HO: Yes, this house.

LLOYD HERMAN: How long have you had this house?

RONALD HO: Believe it or not since 1963.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: So, I've lived in it for over 50 years. And it's a very historic house because it was designed by Paul Thiry—

LLOYD HERMAN: Wow.

RONALD HO: —who was one of the prominent Seattle architects. And the interesting thing is this particular house was actually the house that he built for himself.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh boy.

RONALD HO: And so, it's a—it's a very beautiful house. And I really have loved living here.

LLOYD HERMAN: Now, getting back to your childhood—

RONALD HO: Oh, yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —did you have chickens or you talked about goats. Did you have to feed the goats or milk the goats—

RONALD HO: [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: —or how—what were—what was—

RONALD HO: No, I don't remember that we did that particularly. But—okay, right after the war—well, when we had to give up our house on Airport Road because the government, at that time, took all those properties over so they could build an international airport in Honolulu. So, therefore, since we didn't have a place to live, we moved to my maternal grandmother's house. And there, we lived in the basement and my grandmother lived upstairs with my uncle who, incidentally, was the only male child of the family of seven. And, of course, as you know the Chinese really believe in having a male child because they're the ones who carry on the family name.

So my uncle, actually, was quite spoiled. [Laughs.] And so, yes, we did chores around my grandmother's house. And—[laughs]—the interesting thing was, of course, my mother's family, they had this—[laughs]—obsession with cleaning. And including my uncle who—one of our jobs was that he had a couple of cars. And one of our jobs was when the gravel got between the treads of the tires—our job was to take a—[laughs]—screwdriver and—[laughs]—remove that—those little pebbles between the treads.

LLOYD HERMAN: But you didn't have to cut the flowers or things that were grown—

RONALD HO: No, we didn't. But, you know, we used to do a lot of things like raking up the leaves in the yard and things of that sort.

LLOYD HERMAN: Who milked the goats?

RONALD HO: My father did. And we actually—our whole family grew up on goat's milk. [Laughs.] And the interesting thing about the Chinese is that they don't believe that you should drink things that are very cold. So my mother would warm this goat's milk up—[laughs]—and that's what we drank when—and grew up on it. I don't think I could stand to do that today, however. [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: What kind of foods did you eat at home? I'm thinking about goat's milk. You probably didn't grow up on oatmeal with goat's milk or—

RONALD HO: —No, that's right. Well, it's interesting because my father was actually the Chinese chef in our house. And he did absolutely wonderful dishes that he had learned from his parents. And, of course, he didn't use any recipes. And so one of the great things was that his famous—one of his famous dishes was his pot roast chicken. And so, since he didn't have a recipe one day when he was visiting me in Seattle I said, "Dad, why don't you make this for me?" And I sat down and actually wrote down the ingredients and the way he put it together and the measurements of the ingredients. And so, I do have that recipe.

LLOYD HERMAN: Do you still make it?

RONALD HO: I have on occasion. But I haven't done it because one thing, of course, since you put this chicken in this pot—[laughs]—it also splashes a lot of oil around—[laughs].



LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: But anyway it's very delicious because you get this caramelized—

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: —skin.

LLOYD HERMAN: What would you have in a typical say, breakfast, lunch, and dinner? Because I assume it would all be Chinese. You talked a little bit earlier about—

RONALD HO: —Yes. Well, interesting enough—I mean we would have eggs and things that—and cornflakes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And that was—and, of course, naturally in Hawaii—[laughs]—we also would have Spam—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —and also Portuguese sausage—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: —with our eggs. And the interesting thing was that my father did the Chinese cooking dishes, but my mother did other things like spaghetti. And as a treat, she would make tapioca pudding for us.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And, of course, we all loved that. And my mother, actually, was quite precise about how she did things. And when we moved to Palolo, where we had this house that my father bought that [was on –RH] 10 acres, we had all of these guava trees on—

LLOYD HERMAN: Now, is that where the airport was built?

RONALD HO: No, no.

LLOYD HERMAN: This was after that.

RONALD HO: This was after. This was up in the valley.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, which valley?

RONALD HO: Palolo.

LLOYD HERMAN: Palolo?

RONALD HO: Right. And so, we had all these guava trees on it, as well as we also had passion fruit vines. And, anyway, my mother would take the guavas, and she would precisely make guava jelly and guava jam. And I remember that her guava jelly was just incredible because she didn't make it so it was too sweet, but it had to be the right amber color. You know, she was really very precise

about doing those kinds of things.

LLOYD HERMAN: You haven't mentioned pineapple. And, of course, we always think today of—

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —pineapples being in Hawaiian pizza or anything with the word Hawaiian.

[They laugh.]

RONALD HO: Right. Well, I remember we did have some dishes with pineapple in it. However, the interesting thing is that my brother, Tim, was the only sibling who did not become a teacher. The rest of us became teachers.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: But Tim actually majored in labor relations at the University of Hawaii. And in the end, he got a job at Dole canned pineapple cannery, and he was the personnel director.

LLOYD HERMAN: Wow. Well, I think since you and I are the same age, about the 1950s in this—

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —similar period—[laughs]—of life then. And I think about activities in school, were you active in sports or drama or singing or—

RONALD HO: [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: —what were your activities?

RONALD HO: No, actually I wasn't ever good at sports. [Laughs.] That's the one thing. But, you know, I was very interested in working on the stage crew. And, anyway, helped build the sets and we did the lighting. And, actually, it was quite a wonderful experience. And I remember at one time I was also on the movie projector crew where we would set up the movie projectors when the teachers would, you know, have to—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, yeah.

RONALD HO: —show films. And I thought that—Well I wanted to tell you, incidentally, about the Hawaii Public School System at that time, which is quite an interesting thing that happened because I don't think this happened in any other part of the United States. But the public school system had the regular elementary, junior high, and high schools. But there was one division that was called the English Standard Speaking Schools. And to get into these you would take an oral test. And, of course, hopefully you didn't speak a lot of Pidgin. Not that that didn't happen on the playground. But they would say, "Well, what is this?" And you would say "That is a toothbrush." [Laughs.]

And so, anyway, we were fortunate to get into this particular part of the public school system where they had a number of elementary schools. And then, they had one junior high and one high school. And Roosevelt High School was an incredible high school. It was like a private school in many ways. We had incredible teachers. And I mean people who came out of there—there were—we had a lot of National Merit Scholars.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And everyone knew that if you went to Roosevelt it was really a prime school to attend.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, it was almost kind of like a prep school or—

RONALD HO: Absolutely.

LLOYD HERMAN: —you know. Well, there must have been a drama department because you were —you said you were building sets with. Did you ever—

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —try acting?

RONALD HO: No, I never—

LLOYD HERMAN: No.

RONALD HO: Well, I—once I did when I took French. And I remember that I was in this play, and I was sitting with my good friend Joey Ing, who we played this part where we were chasing these mosquitoes with a newspaper.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And, of course, speaking French, naturally.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Which I wasn't that good at. In fact, I remember after the two years of French and I went to Pacific Lutheran and took another year of French—[laughs]—my French teacher said to me, "Your French is very English." [Laughs.] Which was not a compliment.

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: That reminds me of—learning to speak French and thinking about the diversity of Hawaii, could you address that and the kind of makeup of both the various Asian and other ethnic groups that you went to school with—

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: —and what that was like in Hawaii at the time.

RONALD HO: Well, it—that's the one thing that I've always appreciated about growing up in Hawaii. In that we got to go to school with Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese. And, of course, we also had, at our particular high school, we had a great number of Caucasians because their fathers were probably in the military.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And we, you know, we really enjoyed each other. I don't think there was any particular prejudices.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: And I think the—[laughs]—the one of the great things about it is that we got to eat all these different kinds of foods, like the Japanese noodles that was called saimen. And we liked malasadas, which were the wonderful Portuguese doughnuts.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh. Some of these you're going to have to spell out when we get the transcripts.

[They laugh.]

RONALD HO: Right, right. But really Hawaii was really a, I think, an incredible place to grow up in.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, were you aware of economic discrepancies? I would think that the pineapple and sugar industries had been so important in Hawaii's economy, as well as the military. And that probably if you encountered any discrimination it probably would have been—[laughs]—in the people—who came from the military from say the deep South or places—

RONALD HO: That's true. But, however, it was interesting. Like, for instance, we didn't have any—many blacks, for instance at the school that we went to. And what was interesting is that many of the Asians had these mom-and-pop businesses.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And, you know, they had these restaurants, or delis, or flower shops. And, of course, they worked their fingers to the bones. And, of course, they ended up sending—[laughs]—their children off to school and maybe they became doctors and lawyers. So they didn't come back and continue working in those businesses at all. So, many of them eventually closed.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh. Upward mobility.

RONALD HO: Right—[laughs]—exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, it's interesting you didn't play sports, I assume.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: You haven't—you haven't mentioned that. And did you have close friends that you grew up with through the years or did that sort of change over time and—

RONALD HO: Yes. I had a lot of friends that I grew up with. And what was interesting was that, I have to say that, when I was growing up in high school I was really very shy, in many ways. And—but I discovered as I grew up later, that the people that I actually hung around with were really some of the leaders of the school. I mean, some of them were like on the student body, presidents and secretaries and all of that. And many of these people went on to become doctors, lawyers, architects, and so on.

LLOYD HERMAN: Did you belong to clubs or, you know, like, a school choir or debate team or any of those kinds of activities?

RONALD HO: No, I don't remember that I actually was in any of those particularly.

LLOYD HERMAN: And what kind of after school activities were there?

RONALD HO: Well, for instance, interestingly—[laughs]—enough, there were some activities such as church-related activities. And, you know, today there's this division of church and state. Well, at that time—Hawaii was an interesting place because, of course, so many of the things were founded by the missionaries who came. And so, therefore, it has a great—huge religious community of churches of every denomination.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, that—it's really interesting. Missionaries and I think of—well, of Mormons.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: I think there were—did you have Mennonites?

RONALD HO: I don't remember—

LLOYD HERMAN: No?

RONALD HO: —Mennonites but—

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, interesting.

RONALD HO: But the Mormons—

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: —we did.

LLOYD HERMAN: And, of course, there was all the south pacific people; it's the Tahitians, Samoans who brought yet another kind of culture—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —to the islands.

RONALD HO: And for instance, what was also interesting is how the blending of cultures happened, like, there would be a Chinese, say, Christian church. But the church was designed much like the Asian architecture.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]—familiarity.

RONALD HO: Exactly. And, you know, that happened also with the Japanese Christian community.

LLOYD HERMAN: Sure. Interesting. In school, what subjects were you good at and—

RONALD HO: [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Because I'm getting around to—

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —how you developed an interest and an ability in art.

RONALD HO: Right. Okay, well actually I think I was pretty—fairly good at the sciences and in English. The one thing I wasn't very good at—[laughs]—was math, but I survived algebra and

geometry. But, of course, one of the things that happened is that I got interested in art, and so I began taking these art classes.

LLOYD HERMAN: About what age would you have been?

RONALD HO: Okay, well, the first time actually I started doing things was when I was about 12 or 13. And at that point in my life, I wanted to take some music lessons, and my grandmother, we lived in the basement at the time; they had a grand piano upstairs. And I said if I took some music lessons, could I use the piano? And they—[laughs]—said, "No."

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Which was ridiculous because at that time I guess people had living rooms, but they never really used them, you know?

LLOYD HERMAN: Are you saying the piano was for show—[laughs]?

RONALD HO: That's right, exactly. And nobody ever played it that I remember—

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: —which was really kind of ridiculous. So, my mother said, "Well, why don't you take accordion lessons?" So, I started at this music store taking accordion lessons. And what happened was that my music teacher was Korean and this warm, wonderful person. And she didn't have any children at the time, so she treated me like her own child. And she was so wonderful to me. And one of the things that happened was that she was interested in doing crafts. And so she made, like, earrings out of shells and she also did things like copper tooling repousee, which she taught me at the time.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And anyway I began to feel that this was quite wonderful to be able to make something with your hands, and see the results that happen—

LLOYD HERMAN: Unlike your brother who could fix things and do other—

RONALD HO: That's right—[laughs]—

LLOYD HERMAN: —sorts of manual—

RONALD HO: Right. That's true. Except, eventually, my brother, Ray, also became an artist, which was quite remarkable. And I felt I kind of led the way and opened it up.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, you were older than he was so it's—

RONALD HO: That's right. Exactly. Because one of the things that happened was that—when I was probably a junior in high school—was that my parents said to me, "Well, when you graduate from high school, what would you like to do as a career?" And at that time, I was so interested in automobiles, because some of the best designs of automobiles were designed during the 1950s. And so, I said well—I thought well, maybe I'd work in a service station or I'd sell used cars—[laughs]. And they said, "Absolutely not."

[They laugh.]

You're going to college. Well, I never had ever entertained that idea. But, of course, being Chinese, education was very important even though my parents really never had great formal educations, they felt it was important that we should.

And the thing that happened that was that on my mother's side of the family, we were the first ones who actually went to college, and obtained a higher education. And the interesting thing was that a lot of my classmates went to the University of Hawaii, of course. But my parents decided that they would send us away to school on the mainland, which at the time was quite unusual. Though, you know, there were people who sent their kids off. But we ended up going to Pacific Lutheran in Tacoma.

LLOYD HERMAN: How did you choose Pacific Lutheran of all the possibilities—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —on the mainland—

RONALD HO: Well, okay, I had originally thought that I would go to Boston University because I had some friends who were music majors, and they were living in Boston. And they were very good friends. So, I was going to go there. But my sister was a year older, and she was at Pacific Lutheran because our neighbor in Palolo Valley was going there. My sister, actually, had quite a religious upbringing, and she wanted to go to a Christian college. And so, when I was in—as a senior in high school she kept writing me and saying, "Well, you really should come here. It's really a lovely place and the people are wonderful." And so, finally I made the decision that I would.

LLOYD HERMAN: Hmm [affirmative]. Initially, when you started at Pacific Lutheran did you have a major or was that to be chosen as you progressed?

RONALD HO: That's right. Well, you know, originally, I told my parents that I wanted to go into art. And they said, "Oh no, you don't want to do that. You know, look at so and so. They got an art degree and then came back to Hawaii and never could make a living. So, don't you want to become a doctor or a lawyer? Or even a teacher?" And I said, "No, I don't want to do that." So, when I started Pacific Lutheran, I started with the basic classes. But then, I started taking some art classes. And in the process, they had a small Art Department, which was nice because you got to know everybody in the Art Department. But I met my friend Jerry who was a couple of years older than I was. But he was a—just a terrific artist.

LLOYD HERMAN: Jerry, what was his last name?

RONALD HO: Slattum. And he was from California or—no, from Oregon. And so, I said what are you majoring in? And he said, "Well, I'm majoring in Art Education." And I thought, hm, that would be actually quite a good thing because you could then [... -RH] make a real living and you could also make art as well. And that's how I got into actually being a major.

LLOYD HERMAN: And your early art experiences before college, what were they? What did you—what materials, processes did you gravitate to?

RONALD HO: Well originally, believe it or not, I was actually a painter. And I took things like ceramics. Since we didn't have a great—large department. But then, I did sculpture as well and took art history classes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Sculpture in wood, metal, clay?

RONALD HO: Clay; and yeah, I remember we actually did some cast pieces as well. But I gravitated mostly to painting. And when I actually graduated, I ended up getting a job in Hoquiam, Washington which is about, at that time, about four hours driving time south of Seattle.

LLOYD HERMAN: Did you do that every day?

RONALD HO: No, no.

LLOYD HERMAN: No.

RONALD HO: No, I lived in Hoquiam.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And I stayed there for two years. And—but being from an urban environment—I never felt in any way that I was going to stay there, much as it was a beautiful environment. And people in Hoquiam and Aberdeen, which is the other town there, they—most of the kids that I taught, their fathers worked in logging and fishing industries and things of that sort.

LLOYD HERMAN: Because this was on the southwestern coast—

RONALD HO: Coast, that's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —of Washington State.

RONALD HO: Right. But it turned out actually to be a wonderful two years because for one thing, about two blocks away were all these places where they were building and restoring boats. And I could take my students and we'd walk down there and do all this sketching and drawing. So, in many ways it was a wonderful environment for art, to stimulate—

LLOYD HERMAN: So, this happened after you got a bachelor's degree at PLU.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: Exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, then after you left Hoquiam—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —what—

RONALD HO: What happened was that—[laughs]—you know, I always knew that I was going to live in a bigger city like Seattle. So, I finally applied and got a job in Bellevue, Washington which is one of the premier public school districts, which is east of Seattle.

LLOYD HERMAN: This would have been about what year?

RONALD HO: 1960.



LLOYD HERMAN: So, Bellevue was really in its infancy then. It's a huge city now, I think the second in Washington State. But then—

RONALD HO: That's right. But it was really wonderful because we had terrific kids, because most of them came from families who were working at Boeing. And—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: —I know one of my good friends that I made with, her husband actually was the test pilot who flew the first 747. I mean those are the kind of kids we had. It was just wonderful.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, that was the era in which Boeing was the single important—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —employer in the whole area.

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, so you were progressing there. What, then, caused you to go back to University of Washington for a master's degree?

RONALD HO: Well [... –RH], first of all, at that time, after you got your bachelor's you also had to get a fifth year of schooling. That was required [by the state of Washington –RH]. And so I started—since I'd lived in—not very far from the University of Washington, that's where I decided to go to—

LLOYD HERMAN: When you came back.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: Right. And I had in '63, I had already bought this house, you see. And so I ended up taking a lot of painting classes. And the interesting thing was—[coughs]—excuse me—at that time, it was when this—they were teaching us abstract impressionism. So, it kind of changed my whole style of approach—

LLOYD HERMAN: Who were some of your—

RONALD HO: —to painting.

LLOYD HERMAN: —teachers at the UW?

RONALD HO: Well, actually I had some wonderful teachers like Alden Mason and Fred Anderson. And I also took—oh God, I'm—what's his name now? Anyway, but we had some really wonderful teachers there. But my great experience happened when they started this Masters of Art Education Program at the University. And so, I decided I would take those classes. And so, then even though I was taking all these other painting and printmaking classes, it so happened that the last summer quarter that I was finishing up, Ramona Solberg, who was this instructor at Central

Washington College in Ellensburg, which is east of the mountains from Seattle, came to teach jewelry. And I said—I had met her before. But I said to her—"gosh, I'd like to take a jewelry class but I've never had any jewelry—[laughs]—lessons."

LLOYD HERMAN: You mean education—

RONALD HO: Education, right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —[Laughs]—in jewelry.

RONALD HO: Right. No, right.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Lessons. So she said, "Well, most of my students—[laughs]—never had." So, I signed up for this class and—[laughs]—actually, I have to say, the interesting thing was the first—that first class, I wasn't very good because I ended up melting and burning up some of my projects—[laughs]. And everybody looked, and my friends in the class said, "Oh, poor Ron." And Ramona said to me, "Well, you're a good designer—[laughs]—but actually you're a nervous solderer.

[They laugh.]

RONALD HO: And actually, Ramona was a person who literally changed my life. Because at that point I didn't know I was going to be a jewelry artist, because I wasn't very good at it.

LLOYD HERMAN: But you were planning to teach and so this—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —was almost like supplementary education.

RONALD HO: That's right. And I actually had my junior high school students who—I actually had them making some jewelry. And—oh, one of the interesting things that happened—that one of my high school students was Lynne Hull.

LLOYD HERMAN: Lynne Hull.

RONALD HO: Who the first time she ever touched metal was with me in junior high school.

LLOYD HERMAN: Wow.

RONALD HO: And in the end what happened was that she went on and got a degree in metals and is now the head of the Jewelry Department at north—

[Cross talk.]

LLOYD HERMAN: North Seattle—

RONALD HO: Seattle Community College.

LLOYD HERMAN: —Community College, yeah.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Interesting. Any other famous students?

RONALD HO: Oh, yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Wow.

RONALD HO: Well, actually one of my most famous students, and she was in my jewelry class, and her name is Luly Yang. And she is the premier couturier in Seattle. She has this multi-million dollar business and people like Michelle Obama have bought her clothes.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And she has now, even besides her Seattle business, she has opened an additional business in Hong Kong.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And it's great because Luly has never forgotten me. And I have visited her at her store, and she's even taken me down to where the workshop is where they make the clothes. So it's been pretty rewarding to find out that some of your students have continued into art—

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: —you know.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, it's interesting I assume you got better at soldering.

[They laugh.]

RONALD HO: Yes. Well, what happened was that, in the end, they asked Ramona, after that summer quarter, if she would transfer to the University of Washington and become a full-time professor. So, she decided to do that. So, meanwhile we became quite good friends. And she ended up also teaching evening courses for Bellevue Community College. And so, I decided, okay, I would continue and take a couple more classes, which I did. And I got much better at what I was doing.

And towards the second class that I was taking at Bellevue Community College, what happened was that Ramona was an interesting person in that she never actually liked pearls and diamonds and that kind of thing. Because she travelled around the world and loved that she ended up picking up a lot of indigenous artifacts, which she incorporated into her jewelry. And I, at that point, had never thought about the fact that you could actually use found objects.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, were you working with gold and gemstones and doing what you would think today might be fairly conventional precious jewelry?

RONALD HO: I was at first. I mean, you know, I made rings and set—

LLOYD HERMAN: Set stones?

RONALD HO: —cabochons and things of that sort. And I remember—[laughs]—one of the things I did, was I made [myself –RH] a ring and I melted down my college and my high school gold class rings, because I thought well, you know what? In the end the gold was worth much more than the—[laughs]—sentiment. [Laughs.]

But it was at that point when Ramona started showing me the fact that you could use other kinds of things to make jewelry. That she gave me a domino, an old bone domino. And so, I then created this necklace which became the first piece that actually set me on my way as to the direction that I began to work with found objects.

LLOYD HERMAN: Hm [affirmative]. Then you switched to silver exclusively, I believe, didn't you?

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: From gold and—

RONALD HO: Exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: —yeah.

RONALD HO: And actually—[laughs]—I should have probably done more gold because as one friend said to me, "You know, it takes the same amount of effort to make something out of gold as it does out of silver." And at that time gold was only \$32 an ounce—[laughs]?

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah. Yeah, remarkable. Did you—before you were given that domino from—by Ramona, did you sell or show your jewelry, or what was your earliest exposure to your work as a jeweler?

RONALD HO: Right. No, actually I didn't. I wasn't really very commercial about it. I made things for my family and also too, for some friends. And, actually, I never thought about having really a jewelry career.

LLOYD HERMAN: Because that was sort of a sideline to teaching I assume.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: Exactly. But then, you know, at that time in the 1960s, there were not that many galleries in Seattle. I mean—so the shows that happened oftentimes were, like, at the University of Washington. They had the Northwest Craft Exhibition that you could enter in; and also the Seattle Art Museum would have these exhibitions. And so, I actually entered one of my paintings and actually got into one of the exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum. But what happened was we had a great—at the Seattle's World Fair—

LLOYD HERMAN: 1962.

RONALD HO: In 1962, they took one of the buildings and made it into the Northwest Craft Center.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: Which was—became a very important part of exposing crafts to the Seattle area.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: Because you could go and buy incredible pieces of art, ceramics, and sculpture, and for not much money. And I bought a Rudy Autio pot.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: I bought a Harold Balazs sculpture. I—

LLOYD HERMAN: A who?

RONALD HO: Harold Balazs who—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, Harold Balazs. Yeah.

RONALD HO: Right. And I also bought a Bob Sperry. You know, you could buy all these incredible—

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: —people at that time.

LLOYD HERMAN: And for not very much money—

RONALD HO: For not much money.

LLOYD HERMAN: —by today's standards—[laughs].

RONALD HO: Right. So, anyway, what happened was that I became good friends of the director, Ruth Nomura. And so, anyway, then she asked me if I wouldn't be in a show at—this is about a couple of years after I started making jewelry.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, this would have been still, what? Late '60s or mid-'60s?

RONALD HO: Yeah, it would have been late '60s.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And so, anyway I ended up being at the show with Kay Sekimachi as one of the people. So that was where I first began to sell my work. And then, eventually, I entered the Northwest Craft Show at the Henry Gallery. And it so happened that Lloyd—[laughs]—was one of the jurors—

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: This was in—[laughs]—1974 when I met you—[laughs].

RONALD HO: Right. Exactly. And in the end what happened was that I got one of the top awards. And that award enabled me to have a one man show at the Henry Gallery.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh. Wow.

RONALD HO: And—

LLOYD HERMAN: Well Ron, how many—was that your first solo show then at the Henry?

RONALD HO: Yes, that's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: The Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: And how many pieces did you have in that show? Do you remember?

RONALD HO: I probably had—

[END OF TRACK]

RONALD HO: About, oh, I would say 15 to 20 pieces or something like that.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, that's a lot. I remember that when you were teaching, it was very difficult to get many—[laughs]—pieces made.

RONALD HO: That's right. And, you know, when I was teaching, actually that was a great time of creativity for me, because even though I was teaching, I would sometimes be working in my studio till 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. in the morning, and then go to bed and get up and go to school.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, was this body of work you made for the Henry Art Gallery show found object pieces?

RONALD HO: Yes, that's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: And like, more dominoes, or what sort of things did you incorporate?

RONALD HO: Well, interesting—I mean, I did things, like, I took an old toy car, and combined it with the logo from my Cougar XR7, which when I got rear-ended, I took that. So, anyway—but I was using kind of normal objects that most people wouldn't think of to make jewelry.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: But then, you know, Ramona and I were constant friends, and we actually began even traveling together to foreign countries. But she eventually said to me, "You know, Ron, I think you should sort of examine your Chinese heritage, because really, you drink too much Coca-Cola."

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: What did she mean by that—[laughs]? It's too American? [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: It was too American, that's right. And so that was the turning point in my life, because I started looking and thinking about when I was growing up, what my grandparents or my mother or father had said. And, you know, at that time, it really didn't make a lot of sense; and at first, you didn't think much about it. But, like, for instance, when we had birthday parties, they always served noodles, because noodles represent long life. And so, when I started—well, I did a series in the 1990s, of Chinese chairs, and I found it was a great platform in which I could actually use some of those ideas. So, I put a platter of noodles on the chair, and on the back rung of the back of the chair, I soldered a pair of chopsticks that were holding these noodles that went into the platter. And anyway, so it was called "First Birthday."

LLOYD HERMAN: But was that body of work with the chairs the first of your whole series On Becoming Chinese, which I remember as a topic.

RONALD HO: That's right, yeah. I think—I did make some other things earlier, however. One of the pieces I made was for my mother, because she always—they have that donut-shaped jade piece

that's called a *bi*, which actually represents heaven. And she wore it with a gold chain. So, I said to her, when I started making jewelry, "Give me that *bi*," because I knew, you know, it was precious to her, "And let me make a piece of jewelry for you." And so, I did make one, a piece of jewelry. And when she passed away—my sister inherited the piece. But I also made another piece for my sister as well. And so, I had started exploring it probably earlier than 1990, my Chinese heritage. Because—oh, I remember I also made some pieces using mahjong tiles—

LLOYD HERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

RONALD HO:—right. And so, it slowly started creeping in, as part of my vocabulary.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, it's interesting that Ramona had such a profound influence on you, and I think of Laurie Hall.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: I don't think Kiff Slemmons was actually a student of hers, but a very good friend.

RONALD HO: Very good friend.

LLOYD HERMAN: And very influenced by found objects.

RONALD HO: Yes, and I think, you know, at that one time, in the '70s and '80s, Ramona, Laurie Hall, Kiff Slemmons and I were really close, tight friends. And what was incredible about that experience was that we were able to interact with each other when we were making things. And it was a wonderful experience. I remember one time—[laughs]—I was at Jean Jongeward's house, with Ramona, and I was making this piece for her, but I hadn't solved the neck piece. And so, anyway, I had brought what I had started with the pendant portion of it. And so, then I went to the bathroom, and then came back, and Ramona said, "We got it."

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: She says, "We've solved the problem of how the neck piece would come together for this piece."

LLOYD HERMAN: So, in a way, it was a collaborative piece, in terms of concept.

RONALD HO: Exactly. And I have really appreciated those years of being able to interact with all of these wonderful people.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, it's interesting, when we were talking earlier, you said that that first piece with the domino was in that exhibition that I organized for the Renwick Gallery, and that was circulated by the Smithsonian's traveling exhibition service; a show called *Good as Gold: Alternative Materials in American Jewelry*. And that was, I think, maybe the first exploration in a single exhibition, of jewelers who were using other than silver and gold.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: And I was trying to think, the date of that. It must have been about '82 or early '80s, I'll have to look that up. And that piece is now in the Tacoma Art Museum?

RONALD HO: Tacoma Art Museum. I originally—I gave it because I felt it was such an important

piece, because it sent me on my way. I decided to give it to Ramona as a Christmas gift, and I put a note in it. I said, "This is a non-returnable gift."

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.] But she did—she returned it, I guess, because you gave it to the museum, didn't you? Or did she?

RONALD HO: No, she did, she did.

LLOYD HERMAN: She did.

RONALD HO: Ramona was always so generous about giving things, you know. To things like museums, and—

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, generous as a person in many ways, yeah.

RONALD HO: In many ways.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, you also, I think, had traveled with Ramona as well. I know you've talked about being in London with her. Was she teaching there? I don't remember what that was.

RONALD HO: Yes, what happened was in 1970 or '71, for three years in a row, she and Jack Stoops, who taught art education—

LLOYD HERMAN: At the University of Washington.

RONALD HO: At the University of Washington. They did a class in London that was called "Design Resources of London." And so, what happened was that for four days a week, in the morning, we spent the time, and you know, they would go into the history of the architecture, and all of the crafts. And then, in the afternoon, we were free, but we also had a project. And so, Laurie Hall was one of those with me. And so, it was quite incredible, because we had just started contacting some of those very famous jewelry people like Wendy Ramshaw, Caroline Broadhead. And we got to go to their studios. And it was so amazing, because in America, we live in homes that are quite large, so most of us have fairly good-sized studios. But I remember going to, I believe it was Caroline Broadhead's studio, and it was basically a desk in a corner, and that was her whole studio.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, that was really the beginning of what became the art jewelry movement. I think of it as coming out of England with bold sculptural objects—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —that you wouldn't even think were wearable. [Laughs.] And some of them barely were. But they were really interesting, and I think because they were so daring, they really kind of gave Americans and people in Germany and elsewhere the kind of idea, "Oh, yeah, I don't have to work on this tiny little intimate scale that jewelry has always been."

RONALD HO: That's right. And also, I mean, it also was the point where jewelry became much more intellectual in so many ways.

LLOYD HERMAN: True, and the word that then came up is "content."

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Things—they had to be about something.



RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: And that, I think, was—you were in that show I did called *Brilliant Stories*: —

[Cross talk.]

RONALD HO: That's right, that's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: —*American Narrative Jewelry* that was really all about storytelling through jewelry. And that circulated for you, through [the United States] Information Agency, through the Middle East.

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Which was a very interesting—[laughs]—tour to attend. So then, talk more about, then, how teaching and making jewelry coincided, or when you retired from teaching. And, of course, I want to get into travel, and how that's kind of influenced your creative work—

RONALD HO: Sure.

LLOYD HERMAN: —and however you want to approach it.

RONALD HO: Right. Well, what was interesting is that originally when I started teaching in the public schools, was that I taught elementary—not elementary, I'm sorry, junior high—art. And it was wonderful in that they required—the seventh and eighth [grades were –RH] required, that you had to take a half of a year.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, the eighth grades?

RONALD HO: Grades, right, right. And I remember, I was telling you, I had these wonderful students who just were so creative and talented. And so, I remember this one year, I had this terrific class, and they just loved art so much. And so, they said, "Oh, Mr. Ho, can't we have a ninth grade art class?" Which wasn't, you know, at all required. So, I said, "You know what? Okay. Get a list of people who would like to take this class, and I'll approach the administration." So, what I did was, I took this list in, and I said I wanted to have a ninth grade art class. And what happened was, in order to do that, I had to give up one of my planning periods. But I didn't care, because these were such wonderful students.

LLOYD HERMAN: And I'm guessing you get a lot of pleasure and feedback from teaching. Now, you haven't told us where you were teaching, and what your teaching trajectory after Hoquiam was.

RONALD HO: Right, from Hoquiam. Of course, then I got to teach—I applied and got to teach in Bellevue.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, right, yeah.

RONALD HO: And so, what happened—at first, from 1960 to 1969, I taught in the junior high school. But at that point, at Newport High School, in the Bellevue School District, Ron Adams was teaching then. And so they needed to have a jewelry program started there. So, they asked me if I would transfer to the high school.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And that's how I started teaching the high school jewelry program, as well as painting, design, and also photography.

LLOYD HERMAN: Hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And the other thing that also happened, midway through my teaching career at the high school, we lost enrollment. And so, they said to me, "You know what? You're going to have to teach elementary art half-time." And I thought, "I don't want to teach those little kids." They said, "No, you have to." So, I started teaching elementary art. Well, I was teaching then—in the mornings, I would teach the high school, and then—

LLOYD HERMAN: This is at Newport?

RONALD HO: At Newport. And then, in the afternoons, I would start at the elementary school.

LLOYD HERMAN: Boy.

RONALD HO: And what was amazing, that once I started teaching those little kids, I just loved it. I mean, they were so enthusiastic and creative, every day somebody turned out this masterpiece.

LLOYD HERMAN: I remember once you had a trunkful of your student's work that you were so proud of that you showed me. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Right, oh yeah. And you know, the thing is, those little kids were so lovely, because they would come up to me and say, "Oh, Mr. Ho, Mr. Ho, art is my favorite subject." And I always thought, if you could only keep that kind of enthusiasm going the rest of their life, we would have these creative individuals. But you know, by the time they got to high school, they already had what I call braces on their brains, you know what I mean?

LLOYD HERMAN: You got recognition as an art teacher, I believe.

RONALD HO: That's right. And actually—[laughs]—it's so amazing, because I've had so many awards. Well, first of all, I started with being—with the Washington Art Education Association. And so, they gave me this award, which then allowed me to be part of the National Art Education Conference, where they also selected the top elementary art educator, which I also got at that point.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.] For something you were initially reluctant to do. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Yes, exactly, you know. It was—and the interesting thing was, toward, you know, I actually taught, in the end, for 34 years, in the public school system.

LLOYD HERMAN: Wow. When did you retire, then, from teaching?

RONALD HO: 1990.

LLOYD HERMAN: '90. And you were making jewelry and showing it all through that?

RONALD HO: Yes, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: What other kind—what recognition did you get? I know you got that solo show at the Henry Art Gallery.

RONALD HO: Right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Were there other solo shows?

RONALD HO: Absolutely. I had, at the Wing Luke Museum here.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, yeah.

RONALD HO: I also got the award for the Asian Artist of the Year. And then, what was interesting, while I was still teaching, Pacific Lutheran had their 100th anniversary. And so, what they did was they selected 100 of their top alumni through the years.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.] Wow, for 100 years, that's remarkable. And you were one of them?

RONALD HO: As well as my brother.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, wow. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: But we were the only siblings that were of the hundred.

LLOYD HERMAN: That's remarkable.

RONALD HO: Which was really quite wonderful. And, of course, I've also had lifetime achievement awards from the Seattle Metals Guild, as well as Northwest Designer Craftsmen. But, of course, the one that I'm especially proud of is that I became a Fellow of the American Craft Council.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, oh, yes, yeah.

RONALD HO: And, you know, I guess I would say that I had to be fortunate, because Michael Monroe, who at the time was the director of the Bellevue Art Museum, who actually followed Lloyd from the Smithsonian. And anyway, he happened to be on the board when they were selecting the Fellows, and it was part of—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, the board of the American Craft Council, ah, yeah.

RONALD HO: And so, he said to me—I said, "I have a hunch it was one reason I got this award," and he says, "Yeah, you know, the thing about those people back East is that they don't really think that we have very many—[laughs]—upstanding—

LLOYD HERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —craftsmen in the West."

LLOYD HERMAN: But he was already at the Bellevue Arts Museum at that point, as director.

RONALD HO: That's right, right. [Laughs.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, and then of course you had a wonderful solo show. But was that a retrospective, I don't remember, at the Bellevue Arts Museum?

RONALD HO: Yes, but before that, I also had a retrospective at the Honolulu—well, it's now called the Honolulu Museum of Art.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: But that's when I decided to call this show *Becoming Chinese*.

LLOYD HERMAN: Ah, good, that's where that title came from, yeah.

RONALD HO: Right, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, was there a catalog for that? I know there's—

RONALD HO: No, they didn't do a catalog, which is kind of sad.

LLOYD HERMAN: But the Bellevue Arts Museum did a wonderful book.

RONALD HO: They did a wonderful book. And that book, interestingly enough, won several awards for museum catalogs.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, really? Well, it deserved it, it was very good. Something that I'd like to go back to. We've talked a bit about teaching, and like, many metalsmiths do workshops. Have you done a lot of workshops for kind of adult, you know, accomplished professional metalsmiths?

RONALD HO: That's right, I have. Yes, you know, I've really taught quite a few of them. I've taught here at Pratt, for instance.

LLOYD HERMAN: Pratt Fine Arts Center.

RONALD HO: Right. And then, I also started doing a number of workshops up in Homer, Alaska.

LLOYD HERMAN: Really?

RONALD HO: Yes. And it was a challenge, because, first of all, they didn't have any jewelry materials. So, at that time, I was teaching at the high school, so I would borrow these tools for these weekend workshops I flew up to Homer. You know, I had to carry all this stuff. And at one point, I forget, I think we were going to do some etching, and there was this problem about how to get this etching material up there, you know?

LLOYD HERMAN: On the plane, yeah.

RONALD HO: On the plane. But, somehow, I think we got—we managed to get it somehow sent up there, so I didn't have to carry it.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, I would think they would not look happily on acid. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: No, that's right, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Carried on a plane.

RONALD HO: I mean, in fact, at that time, they were a lot looser than they are today.

[They laugh.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, yes, that's true. Well, obviously, teaching was very satisfying to you.

RONALD HO: Tremendously. I mean, I've always said the great thing about my career is that I always had two careers.

LLOYD HERMAN: Simultaneously.

RONALD HO: Which most people didn't have, you know.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, yeah. You know, I think that so many people go through life with jobs, but they're not really satisfying.

RONALD HO: That's right, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: You've been very fortunate in that regard.

RONALD HO: I was, totally.

LLOYD HERMAN: And thinking about how taste in jewelry has changed—

RONALD HO: Yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: I don't think that you've ever probably been influenced by that, because your jewelry has always been unique in terms of content and the materials you've used.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: The whole body of work *On Becoming Chinese*, I remember you moved away from dominoes, for example, to more specifically Chinese found—

RONALD HO: Objects, yeah.

LLOYD HERMAN: —objects, yeah, like carved jade pieces—

RONALD HO: Kingfisher hair ornaments.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And, yes, and you know, it's interesting. I mean, I look back at what's happened to jewelry today, and it's interesting, because, you know, when we took those first jewelry classes, it was all about design and craftsmanship.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: And today, sometimes I kind of look at some of the jewelry, and I think, you know, the craftsmanship is not all that great. They're trying to say something, but on the other hand, when you look at some of the pieces, some of them are over-scaled. Would you really wear them, you know?

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: These are all the questions that come up in my mind. And also, I just had lunch with Laurie Hall, and we were talking about that idea, you know, of how jewelry has changed so much.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, and you and Laurie have both made pretty bold pieces. It's not like it's a long

way from that simple gold chain. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: [Laughs.] That's right, exactly, yes.

LLOYD HERMAN: Interesting. Just going back to—how many times did you spend those summer programs in London? Was that more than once?

RONALD HO: I did two of the three.

LLOYD HERMAN: Two of them, yeah. And how did that foreign travel experience lead in, or—because I know you've traveled a lot, and you've led trips, but—

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: How did your travel, your love for travel, evolve?

RONALD HO: Well, what was interesting, the first year that I went to London—

LLOYD HERMAN: Which would have been when?

RONALD HO: 1970 or '71.

LLOYD HERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

RONALD HO: I thought, "Well, if I'm going to go there, I might as well do the grand tour of Europe." So, prior to ending up in London, actually Laurie Hall and I traveled together, with one of her friends. And we started in Denmark, and, you know, we did everything from Belgium to Paris, and Venice, Rome, all of that, before we actually—oh, and, of course, naturally, Florence. And you know, I went and saw everything that was possible from, you know, I remember being in Florence, and seeing that famous sculpture of the Leoncoeur [ph].

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, oh yes, yeah.

RONALD HO: Right, right. And I was standing there, and all of a sudden someone said, "Ron." And I turned around, it was one of my friends from Spokane. And so, anyway, that was quite an amazing experience. But the thing that—I enjoyed all of those experiences. But you know what, the first time that I got to travel to Southeast Asia, I went on a workshop that started in Japan, and then ended up in Taiwan.

LLOYD HERMAN: What year would that have been?

RONALD HO: I think it was—I believe it was about 1980. And it was an incredible experience, because—[laughs]—our instructor was the person who helped the Kabuki Theater; when they first came to America, he arranged for them to be in all these venues. And so, when they built the new Kabuki Theater, they actually—he encouraged them to use these moving platforms.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, is this in Kyoto, or Tokyo?

RONALD HO: It's in Tokyo. And I mean, so actually, we got to meet all these living treasures, including when we went up to Osaka, and we went to the Bunraku Theater. That was such an amazing—

LLOYD HERMAN: Which is the puppet theater.

RONALD HO: Right. And because of that, since I was there, you know, of course I wanted to go to, what's his name, the Japanese living treasure, in Machiko? [Hamada –RH]—

LLOYD HERMAN: A jeweler, or—

RONALD HO: No, ceramic.

LLOYD HERMAN: Ceramic, oh. Yeah, well—

RONALD HO: Anyway.

LLOYD HERMAN: I think I know who you mean, yeah, but I can't think of the name, either.

RONALD HO: It'll come to me in a moment. But anyway, I got to go up there, and I bought all these Machiko plates, and everything. And I thought, "Well, of course, how am I going to get this home?" Well, fortunately, I had a friend who was teaching with the military.

And so, what happened was I got these—able to send these home APO. Which didn't cost very much. But one of the extraordinary things that also happened on this trip was, when we went to Taiwan, was, we ended up going to this commune, and—

LLOYD HERMAN: To what?

RONALD HO: A commune.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, commune.

RONALD HO: And so, what happened was that after we looked at where they were drying the rice and all of that, we went into the house. And when we went into the house, there was this extraordinary vision that happened, because first of all, they had, in the kitchen, this giant altar table, with all of these objects on it. And then, sitting next to it, at this time, was a gigantic black-and-white TV.

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.] And you used that? [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: I did. You know, I looked at those images, and I thought, "You know what? Those are the two things they worship the most in this house."

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And I eventually did a Chinese altar table with the objects, but on the object table, besides the objects, I put a part of a TV. And anyway, I called that piece "TV Guide."

LLOYD HERMAN: [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: And—

LLOYD HERMAN: Where is that piece now?

RONALD HO: Well, it's actually at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, good.

RONALD HO: And it was in the collection of Daphne—

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, Daphne Farago, yeah.

RONALD HO: Farago, yes. So, it's been really quite an amazing thing that these things happened. And how you can reinterpret them in pieces of jewelry.

LLOYD HERMAN: You know, while we're talking about pieces you've made, I know that you had a commission for the Wing Luke Museum exterior, and I'm wondering about—talk about that, and any other commissions that you've had.

RONALD HO: Yes, okay. Well, I have done a couple public art projects. And actually, the first one I did was right here, about four blocks from my house. At Bailey-Boushay.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, right.

RONALD HO: Which at the time was an AIDS hospice.

LLOYD HERMAN: It's broadened now, I think, yeah.

RONALD HO: Now, to include cancer. But anyway, what happened was, they had these niches, that were outside of each of the rooms. And they wanted [to have –RH] a piece of artwork that was kind of interactive, in a certain way, so that the people inhabiting the rooms could actually do things with it. So, at that time, prior to me being commissioned to do a piece along with a lot of other artists, I had taken a workshop with Helen Shirk.

LLOYD HERMAN: The jeweler from San Diego, San Diego State.

RONALD HO: That's right, who was just this incredible person and teacher as well. And so, one of the things we did was to learn how to raise a bowl from a complete flat circle of copper. So, what happened was, I started working on this piece, and it's interesting because I always thought my studio was large, but I would say the piece was probably about 18 inches by, oh, I would say 30 inches tall, maybe.

LLOYD HERMAN: Not tiny.

RONALD HO: No, it was—no, but it had to fit in that niche, whatever it was. And what happened was, I actually fabricated the whole thing out of copper. And so, I did this platform, and then above it I took that dome piece that I had made in Helen's workshop. And what I did was on the top of it, I took a letter stamp, and I put all of those names that started with the famous people who had died from AIDS. And eventually it went—I just used their first names. And then, eventually went to people that I had known who had died from AIDS.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: So, then with this little kind of pillar of support was a little shelf, so they could put things on it.

LLOYD HERMAN: Like a shrine, yeah.

RONALD HO: Exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: What about the Wing Luke commission?



RONALD HO: The Wing Luke, right. It was interesting, in the Wing Luke Commission, was that I have a good friend, Stuart Wong, who's quite a wonderful artist in multimedia, he does everything from ceramics to sculptures. But anyway, he wanted to apply to the Wing Luke Museum to—they had this idea of having this piece of artwork on the front part of their museum, in the old—

LLOYD HERMAN: The old building, yeah.

RONALD HO: The old museum on 7th Avenue. And so, what happened was, he came to me and he said, "Why don't you come with me and we'll apply together?" And I thought, "Well, do I want to do this?" But I said, "Okay, we'll do it." But it was a very interesting experience, because first of all, doing a public commission is a very collaborative work.

[Cross talk.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, not only collaborative with Stuart in this case, but with the property owners and the committee with various review processes, I believe.

RONALD HO: No, but with the committee, absolutely. And the thing that happened was, Stuart ended up working on these wavelike sculptures that were on the exterior of the building, and I had this—decided to do these enamel panels that went on the side wall to the entry as you went into the museum. And it was interesting because as you started to work, a lot of ideas came into play, such as when I designed the piece, I wanted it to read from right to left the way the Asians read things.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And it worked out pretty well, because as you entered, you started from the right anyway, to the left. And it was interesting, because at first, we started out trying to maybe use figurative things to work up the ideas. And what it was that we tried to show what happened when the Asians came to the Seattle area, and how they changed the International District.

LLOYD HERMAN: Which I think probably was originally Chinese. It was probably more a traditional Chinatown, but each wave of immigrants, whether Thai or Vietnamese or Cambodian all added to that.

RONALD HO: That's right, but interestingly enough, can you believe this, some of the earliest people who came to the Seattle area were some Hawaiians.

LLOYD HERMAN: Huh.

RONALD HO: And so, as I began to work on these drawings, what happened was that I started, instead of using figures, I started using objects.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: So, for instance, I started with drawing that famous Lei Niho Palaoa, that necklace that the Hawaiians—

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —wore with the whalebone pendant, with the human hair.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And so, from that I started doing all of these things, and fortunately by that time I had traveled all through the Southeast Asia. And you know, someone—I went to a workshop once about doing public art projects. And they said, "Always do a public art project that you can relate to."

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah.

RONALD HO: And I thought, "This is absolutely perfect for me." Because I started using all this imagery that I had seen on my travels in Southeast Asia. Like those food carts, which I incorporated into it. Musical instruments, the water puppets from Vietnam.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And you know, eventually it came to the point where, as it transformed from those images from Southeast Asia, it went into what happened when they came to Seattle. So, the Higo Variety Store was one of the images that's in the International District—

LLOYD HERMAN: Is that one of the original businesses?

RONALD HO: That's right. In fact, when they went to the internment camp, the watchmaker actually boarded up the place and looked over it while they were gone. And anyway, what happened was, I drew an image of the Higo Variety Store. And in the window was a mannequin with a modern dress, but outside was standing a Japanese geisha-like figure. So, it was this transformation from the old to the new.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, it's interesting, because the Wing Luke Museum really is the museum of Asia-Pacific cultures, I believe—

RONALD HO: That's right, really a history museum.

LLOYD HERMAN: —so, what you were doing was absolutely right, you know. And it's interesting, because after—the years after, not only a few years, after you and Stuart had made that piece, they moved into a renovated other historic old building in the International District, and that piece is incorporated in that.

RONALD HO: That's right.

LLOYD HERMAN: I've been there, but I don't remember where it is.

RONALD HO: Well, yes, it's in the community room, where they have, you know, meetings or lunches.

LLOYD HERMAN: That seems appropriate, too.

RONALD HO: And what was interesting was that, at first, we said to them, "Well, what are you going to with the art when you move?" And they hadn't even considered that. Because, you know, if you leave those pieces in buildings, they usually throw them away.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, and there again, the artists own the copyright to the works of art, which legally prevents any new owner from destroying it, unless—

RONALD HO: Yeah.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, it's a very complicated thing.

RONALD HO: But then, we started working again with the museum, and also with the architect, Jim Olson. And the thing that happened was that they finally decided to put it in the space in that community room. And they were just going to paint it white, but you know, Stuart is a wonderful colorist, incidentally, he has a great eye for color.

LLOYD HERMAN: Really?

RONALD HO: Which he had done originally on the building of the old museum. And so, he actually chose this color of—this taupe gray color, and the pieces actually looked much better in the new museum than they did in the old.

LLOYD HERMAN: Were there any other commissions, besides those two?

RONALD HO: No, actually. You know, after I got through with that project, it was—the Wing Luke Museum took a whole year out of my life. And in a way, you didn't make that much money.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, it's interesting, Seattle is known for its public art program, but that wasn't part of a percent for construction costs, it was really private. Because there's also—because the government of all levels has set such a standard for Percent for Art programs, even commercial buildings now incorporate art often.

LLOYD HERMAN: That's right. Yeah.

RONALD HO: And you know, after I got through—[laughs]—that project, Stuart wanted to do some other one. And I said, "You know what? I think I really would rather go back to my studio."

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And that's what I actually did.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, because you don't have the pressure of time constraints, [unless you're getting a piece for a show –RH]. And I know often you worked—[laughs]—to the very last minute getting it done.

RONALD HO: Well, that's true. And the other thing is, you know sometimes, as I said, since you're working with a committee, you know, your ideas have to change so much.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah. You don't have total control, for sure.

RONALD HO: No, but on the other hand, though, some important things come out that you haven't thought about. For instance, when I was drawing those drawings for the enamel murals, the committee looked at the drawings and they said, "You know what? You have solved the problem with the immigrants, but what are you doing, going to do, about the people who actually are American Chinese or Japanese or whatever?" And we knocked our heads to think, "What are we going to do?" And you know what we did? It was incredible, but we took this idea of a kite, and I drew the kind of stars and stripes like a flag on the kite. And then, around it, I did all of these fireworks.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, great, yeah.

RONALD HO: So, you know, in many ways, working with a committee is quite—

LLOYD HERMAN: —It can be stimulating. I mean, it's not just a bunch of bureaucrats, it's often people who really are creative, too, yeah.—

RONALD HO: That's right, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: I'm going to have to pause here for a minute.

RONALD HO: Sure.

[Audio break.]

LLOYD HERMAN: Resuming, a recording with Ron Ho. Ron, I think there's a little bit more about family background that we could cover before moving into talking about your passion for travel, particularly in Asian countries. So, tell a little bit more about the kind of—the genealogical—[laughs] —aspects of—

RONALD HO: Yes, well, it's very fascinating, because I knew that one of my father's brothers had researched our family Ho heritage. And it actually—it turns out this genealogy went back 25 generations to China. And within it, it talks about how we actually got the Ho name. And what had happened was, that there was a little boy who was playing along this river, and suddenly these Secret Service agents came along, and he knew if he said the wrong things, they might take him away and maybe put him in an orphanage. So, they asked him, "What is your name?"

LLOYD HERMAN: And this is 25 generations back?

RONALD HO: Right. And he looked at the river, and the name for river is Ho, and he said, "My name is Ho." And with that, it became the generations of Hos.

LLOYD HERMAN: What had been the name? Or did that ever reveal?

RONALD HO: Well, I'm not sure exactly [...But my family is really very fascinating –RH]. Because the one thing is that my maternal grandmother, who I said was originally from the Canton area, she had bound feet because you know at that time, that was the custom, even though you didn't have to be of royalty, or—

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: —but it became the custom, which finally they outlawed, naturally. But when she came to Hawaii, she had these bound feet, and I remember during my childhood, when we lived in her house. But she spent the time every day unwrapping these pieces of cloth, because you know, her toes had been bound when she was a child, and when she was walking, she actually was walking on her toes.

LLOYD HERMAN: She could walk?

RONALD HO: She could walk, but you know, she shuffled along, but that was the symbol of beauty at the time, you know. Which is weird. But anyway, since I had done one necklace for my paternal grandmother, of being a picture bride, I decided I would do one for my maternal grandmother. So,

what I did was, I went to the Wing Luke Museum, I did drawings of bound foot shoes. And then I made a bound foot shoe out of copper and silver, and then I made a gigantic wheel, a cart wheel, so I called this piece "The Bound Journey."

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where is it?

RONALD HO: Well, you know something? [Laughs.] It was sold at Mobilia Gallery [in Cambridge, Massachusetts]. And, unfortunately, they never gave me the name of who bought it. So, it's out there somewhere. And in the meantime, they lost their computer imagery, and so I don't know where the piece is.

[Cross talk.]

LLOYD HERMAN: You know, I was trying to remember the names of the two sisters who owned it. I think it's Libby and Joanne, Joanne Cooper.

RONALD HO: That's right, that's right. They're wonderful people, and always nice to me.

LLOYD HERMAN: And the gallery's still in business, because I've found the website.

RONALD HO: That's right, exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: Well, is there anything else regarding genealogy, and the whole family history?

RONALD HO: Well, I guess that was really about it. But, you know, the one thing is that we've always had such an appreciation, you know, of our family coming from China. And the fact is that we were so lucky—[laughs]—the fact that my grandfather settled in Hawaii, of all the places, right? We could have been in Timbuktu or some other place, but here we were in Hawaii, the paradise of the Pacific.

LLOYD HERMAN: And I wonder how he happened to choose it.

RONALD HO: Yeah. Well, they might have been offering, you know.

LLOYD HERMAN: Could be, yeah.

RONALD HO: Jobs for the cane fields. And another interesting thing that happened, we went back a number of years ago. And, you know, we had these whole family reunions.

And so, what happened was, one of them was in Maui, where we went actually back to the site where my grandfather had his farm. And in the end, do you know who owns that site now? It's Oprah Winfrey.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oprah Winfrey? [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Right. And I thought sometime, it would be interesting to send her this genealogy.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, absolutely.

RONALD HO: Because she's really interested in that kind of thing.

LLOYD HERMAN: I think that you must, yeah, absolutely, yeah.

RONALD HO: Right, right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Or the completed video—[laughs]—when it's done.

RONALD HO: Right, exactly, right.

LLOYD HERMAN: Now, Ron, have you traveled much in China, since it reopened after—

RONALD HO: Yes, I have. And I've been everywhere. I mean, I've been to Beijing, Shanghai. I've also been completely in the west side of China, to—oh, what's the place where they have the great market? [... Kashgar –RH] But also, I was in another place, I think it was called Hotan. But what was interesting is in the west part a lot of the people there are Muslims.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And what was interesting in Hotan was that's where a lot of the jades are carved.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh.

RONALD HO: And I bought several pieces that are quite incredible.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, that tradition continues.

RONALD HO: That's right, exactly. And the other place that I've spent a number of times going to is Guizhou, which is in the southwest part of China. And this is where—it's next to Yunnan province, this is where all of these minority tribes, like the Miaos, live. And, you know, I had the fortunate opportunity to meet Phila McDaniel, who was a specialist in doing these tours. And she actually ended up—she also was a schoolteacher, but she had a degree in Asian history.

And so, what happened was that she started these tours with a company called East-West Tours, and they specialize in going to these remarkable places, because the average person would never get to see what we saw, because she had arranged—when we'd go to these villages in China, they'd be all dressed in their finery, their costumes, which are just amazing. And we got to go to some of these villages where they had these great rituals and festivals. It was, you know, totally an amazing thing.

LLOYD HERMAN: How many trips did you go on that she led, then, before you started leading them yourself?

RONALD HO: Oh, I probably went with her at least maybe three or four times.

And, you know, one of the places we also went to besides the minority tribes is I went with her to Bhutan. Except that wasn't the first time I'd been to Bhutan. The first time I actually—I took three weeks off from my job in Bellevue, because Ramona was leading this trip to Bhutan. And that was actually a great time to go, because so much has changed, you know, in places like Bhutan, because when I first went there, it was just these one-story [shops –RH], you know, where the whole shop opened up to the street, and you could see the people working on jewelry and whatever they were making. Now, the last time—I've been to Bhutan three times.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And the last time I went, I mean, they have high-rises now, you know. And I always

feel how fortunate I've been that I've been able to travel to so many of these incredible places, before they got inundated and ruined.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, well, that's true. And yet probably there are people who felt it was ruined—[laughs]—before that.

RONALD HO: Exactly.

LLOYD HERMAN: You know, every wave of progress creates something that we wish hadn't happened, to some extent. Except it's all about the economy of the country, and what that has dictated for survival or progress.

RONALD HO: Absolutely.

LLOYD HERMAN: So, when did you start leading trips on your own?

RONALD HO: Actually, it was probably right after I retired, in 1990. And well, first of all, to go back, I have to tell you, that in 1978 and '79, I had applied from the Bellevue school district to get a year's sabbatical leave.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And my proposition was that I wanted to travel around the world, particularly Southeast Asia, to visit and study the crafts. And what happened was, I started—well, at first I started by visiting my family in Hawaii. And then, I went on to Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka. And then, at that point, I met Ramona, who had been to India so many times. So, we traveled, for probably I would say a couple [of] months.

LLOYD HERMAN: Just the two of you?

RONALD HO: Just the two of us. And, of course, traveling with Ramona is such an extraordinary experience, because—I mean, she loved India, she loved all the crafts. She was such an amazing person. [I always tell this story about Ramona, because this shows what kind of a heart she had – RH.]

I remember this one time, we had come from the airport to our hotel in this taxi. And, you know, taxi drivers are very famous for overcharging you, especially if you're a foreigner. So, I said, "Ramona, I know he's overcharging you, and so I'm going to get off and I'm going to the office and I'm going to ask them how much it costs to get to the airport from this hotel." So, I got off, and I went in, and asked them. And I came out, the taxi driver was gone, because Ramona had paid him what she thought he had asked, because she said, "They're very poor, they need the money." That shows what kind of person Ramona really was. [Laughs.] But I mean, the thing is, after India, I went up into Nepal—

LLOYD HERMAN: So, that trip with Ramona was in India?

RONALD HO: Yes, she only did the India part, because—it took me three years to get my sabbatical. And meanwhile, she was waiting, so she took a third each time, and so this was her last third. And one of the things—you know, because Ramona loved ethnic jewelry, and all the ethnic folk-art things. I only wanted to travel where I thought the crafts were really wonderful. And so, while I was there, I bought everything from rugs to jewelry and sculptures. You know, everything, like, see that stack of brass rice measuring bowls? I mean, I bought that on my sabbatical. And it was a great

time, because you could buy things that—they weren't that expensive at the time.

LLOYD HERMAN: And we were able to get more back on planes. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: Exactly. But you know, I was able to send them all back, and when I got back, it was like Christmas, seeing all these things. But I had this really interesting experience, because from India, I was going to Afghanistan, because you could go then.

LLOYD HERMAN: Oh, oh.

RONALD HO: And I had met this English couple, and we started traveling together.

LLOYD HERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RONALD HO: And so, as we were leaving India, what had happened was, in the meantime, I'd bought all this silver jewelry—[laughs]—of course. [And then I read in the paper that the government was not going to ... allow people to export silver –RH]. And here I had all this silver jewelry.

So, anyway, we got up to at the airport, where they were checking our luggage and everything. And I was with this other couple I had met from England, and he was a doctor. And so, the guy who was checking the luggage said, "Oh, and what do you do?" to him. And he said that he was a doctor. So, the fellow said, "Oh, a fine profession." So, then he came to me, and I thought, oh gosh, you know, I've got all this silver jewelry in my suitcase, now what? So, he said, "And what do you do?" And I said, "I'm a schoolteacher." And he said to me, "A very honorable profession." And he put this big X on my suitcase, and off I went.

LLOYD HERMAN: You didn't have to open it. [Laughs.]

RONALD HO: No, I didn't. You know, those were such great times. And, of course, going to Afghanistan at that time was—well, you know, Ramona, about a couple years before, had gone to Afghanistan with Jack Lenor Larson, and Sam Maloof. And so, I knew that if Ramona loved Afghanistan, I had to go to Afghanistan. Which I did, and it was really an incredible experience.

LLOYD HERMAN: How long were most of these trips?

RONALD HO: Oh, well, you mean, like, well, my sabbatical was a year.

LLOYD HERMAN: Yeah, but I mean typically.

RONALD HO: Oh.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]