

Eugene "Gene" Ray
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interviewed by Susan Resnik
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SUSAN RESNIK (SR): Today is Wednesday, January 29, 2014. This is Susan Resnik.

I'm here at San Diego State University with Professor Eugene Ray, to record his oral history. This interview is part of the San Diego State University Oral History Project, funded by a mini-grant from the John and Jane Adams Fund for the Humanities.

From 1969 to 1996, Eugene Ray founded and headed one of the most unique environmental design programs in the United States. He had been hired by Ilsa and Lloyd Roco [phonetic] to start a radical new approach to architecture, considering the whole environment as a subject for investigation. During this time, he travelled all over the world, giving illuminating lectures on his theories and work. Through his travels, he was able to meet and to bring back major thinkers from his generation as visiting scholars to the SDSU program. They included Sir Peter Cook, Bruce Goff, Reyner Banham, Buckminster Fuller, Ant Farm, Jersey Devil, and many more.

In 1978, four students assisted him in building his most widely published project, his residence, "The Silver Ship" in La Jolla. Over the years Professor Ray has received numerous honors and awards, beginning with the Danforth Award upon graduation from high school. In San Diego, at the university, he was voted Outstanding Professor on two separate occasions. He had been selected to be on the International Architecture and Energy Research Committee of Nonci

[i.e., Nantes?] University in France, and was selected by the Buckminster Fuller Foundation for their final conference.

He maintains a daily blog, where he shares his thoughts, drawings, photos and more, and rather than my continuing to describe him, I'd like Professor Ray to share his fascinating life story with us. Good afternoon, Professor Ray.

[00:02:22]

Eugene Ray (GR): Good afternoon, Dr. Resnik. What an honor it is for me to be here with you today, in my old milieu at San Diego State. I'm looking forward to this discussion. I hope I can do justice to it.

SR: I'm sure you can, and please feel free to call me Susan or Suzi, and may I call you ... what?

GR: Gene is fine.

SR: Gene. Okay. Gene, we know how significant early years are, and the relevance of family and heritage. Let's begin at the beginning: Tell me where you were born, when you were born, and about your parents, siblings, and family history, which you have indicated involves castles, a chateau, plantations, and Merovingian blood. It's all so fascinating, please just start.

GR: Thank you so much. Indeed, I spent five years right after I retired, writing, researching my family's history in Louisiana and France. I learned a lot more than what I knew just from my childhood, but regardless, I was very fortunate in that my mother and grandmother and family generally shared their memories of a very rich Creole French life in Louisiana. My people had been sugar planters, and they built the most unique sugar mill in the New Orleans area, in the latter part of

the eighteenth century. I discovered that years later, and it's very impressive to me because it was obviously a Templar type building, and I discovered the Knights Templar were so important to my family in France. And you may know that the Templars were into geomancy that was so important to Saint Bernard, who was the brains behind the Knights Templar in the Champagne Region of France. So I wrote for five years about that, but as a child, my mother, a very artistic woman, and her mother, had so many memories of the plantation, of France. Our house was filled with antiques. We had a lot of art. My older brother was a professional painter. So I grew up in this wonderful milieu. It was not a very expensive neighborhood—please understand. It was in an industrial neighborhood in North Baton Rouge, not far from the Esso plant. Of course as a child you don't know these things, but I was lucky to be surrounded in this atmosphere of European culture. I learned a lot from just word of mouth.

[00:05:35] I did a lot of reading. My Cavereaux grandmother taught me to read at age four, and she did that in the *History of Louisiana* book, so I got started in culture right away—French culture. I'm sure a lot of people in California are probably somewhat suspicious of my devotion to that, but it's what I grew up with.

SR: Well, I am not suspicious. I am so fascinated because I'm a Francophile. I love that.

GR: Wonderful! How lucky *I* am!

SR: I've been to France many times, and admire so much about French culture.

GR: Well, you know, that's part of the synchronicity that we were chatting about—you know, the fact that you are a Francophile means a lot to me.

[00:06:27]

SR: Well actually, I think I shared with you that our dogs are named Renoir, Degas, and Liberte.

GR: Oh wow!

SR: So there we go!

GR: Well, you know, in New Orleans, Degas visited, spent several months there, and my wife and I had the joy of staying in the house that he lived in. It's now a bed and breakfast. His history is one that means a lot to me, his paintings. Actually, his family from New Orleans has a historical interface with my own family in the Creole section of New Orleans. We don't have the time to go into that, but one can go on the Internet and type in my name and the word "de Gruy"—that's my mother's family D-E-G-R-U-Y, and Degas, which is D-E-G-A-S, I guess you know, and find some of the blogs I wrote about my family's interface with Degas when he was in New Orleans.

SR: I shall do that. Could you tell me your mother and father's names?

GR: Yes. Sure. My mother was Gladys Marie Staigg Ray. Her mother and father are Staigg in New Orleans. She spent some time as a child and young girl in New Orleans and Covington, a health resort across the lake. And she had *tremendous* love for the plantation life and Creole history. Her mother and she were very verbal—in contrast with my de Gruy grandmother who had very bad asthma and didn't speak a lot, she was very quiet. It was only in later years that I discovered

the amazing history of her family. So there I was as a child, learning about the history of the family in France and Louisiana in better times. I guess it was rather poignant, as I look back at it. Our house was rather small. I put a picture of it on my blog two nights ago—it's a very humble little place. Now to me, when I lived there, it looked much better, because my mother filled it with antiques and planted a magnificent garden around it.

[00:08:47]

SR: How lovely.

GR: So I didn't think of it as being in any way a negative place. But as we know, neighborhoods, it's become unfortunately derelict.

SR: Share with us what year you were born.

GR: I was born in 1932, on the twenty-sixth of October, in the height of the Depression, in Bessemer, Alabama, simply because my father managed Auto Lite Stores and travelled from town to town. They were closing them in those days, because of the Depression. But they soon enough came to Baton Rouge, and I grew up right in the shadows of the state capitol there, which is kind of synchronistic in that on the tenth floor, I think it was, the Department of Institutions, is where, at the age of twenty-one, I designed my first buildings for the State of Louisiana—two chapels, which were quite a joy for a twenty-one-year-old young man, as I was, just starting out, to be given that opportunity to design those two chapels for a state hospital. It was some very generous people who gave me that break, so to speak. And as I look back on it, they published my drawing in the local paper, so that was quite a perk for a young guy.

SR: That's exciting!

[00:10:25]

GR: I can think back to my life and the synchronicities of that sort—breaks that you get. As I've said many times in my blog, John Lennon's quote, "Life is what happens when you're making other plans." The fact that Martha Longenecker was standing next to the receptionist at San Diego State when I arrived one day seeking a position of teaching and asked about the architectural department, and she said, "Come with me." And that led to Lloyd and Ilsa Roco, who reviewed my portfolio, and before I knew it, they had given me the opportunity, much to my amazement, to design a whole new curriculum in the art department, which I was honored to do, and environmental design became fairly well known in architectural circles in the state.

SR: Absolutely. Well, thinking back to your childhood again, I think that it would be interesting to talk about who influenced you, and how it all developed. For example, you mentioned something about receiving a book when you were fourteen?

GR: That's right, sixteen. My dear Aunt Elise Ray—a *noble* human, a *wonderful* lady—I guess saw that I had some artistic thrust. I was doing a lot of watercolors and other paintings as a young boy. My brother, of course, was a professional painter at an early age. And so for my birthday, sixteen, she gave me a Frank Lloyd Wright book. I could see that they were very interested that I might follow that vocation, and I did! I was thrilled to death. And I'm proud to tell you that one of the last lectures I gave as a professor was at the Wright institution not far

from where you live in Arizona, at Taliesin West. That was a marvelous experience. I'll never forget that, because I admired Wright so much. Our first trip out west, we visited every Wright and Goff building we could find—my first wife and I—taking photographs. Took us seventeen days to drive from Baton Rouge to here—New Orleans, it was, because I was building then in New Orleans. And that experience at Taliesin, to see it, was very exciting. He was such a great architect—he and Bruce Goff—in my mind had cosmic consciousness, and I'm delighted that I can feel related to their great history.

[00:13:21] I was honored back in 1985 to be included in a *huge* publication in Japan of architects that are in the Wright and Goff tradition. I'm very honored that I was included in that. So yes, it was that dear aunt, Elise Ray, who synchronistically—I opened my little office in Covington in 1959 I got an architectural license—I opened my office in this little town that my parents had lived in, they had met there, a resort community thirty miles north of New Orleans, and synchronistically my office was in the very room that that aunt had been a stenographer in the bank, because it was a bank building. Isn't that amazing?

SR: That *is* amazing.

GR: She was very generous and helpful to me at a number of points in my life, helping me buy my first property. She didn't lend me the money, but she stood up for me at the bank. She vouched for me at the bank so I could borrow the money.

SR: That's a wonderful thing about family, when it works.

GR: I had two noble aunts. The other one, Lucy Ray, also my godmother, was very kind to me. All of my family were very supportive. I must say, I was very lucky to have on both sides, mother's and father's, great people.

[00:15:01]

SR: That's marvelous. It makes a difference, I think.

GR: It really does.

SR: Also, tell me about teachers in your childhood who may have influenced you.

GR: Yes, yes, of course. Well, I will go back to my junior high school years. I was in a Catholic school and there was a wonderful sister there by the name of Sister Tollentine [phonetic]. And she was very young. I didn't realize how young she was until later. She had just arrived from St. Louis, and poor thing, it was in the hot days of the summer, September, and school was starting, and there she was perspiring, her first year of teaching. Well, she took an interest in me, the first teacher I ever had who really went out of their way to encourage me and to give me a push, so to speak. I was very interested in history from the earliest days, and she encouraged that. I kept up with her in later years, and she retired in St. Louis and I communicated with her, I sent her packets of my mail art. And I also spoke with her by telephone a week before she died. About eighty-six, I think she was. So I'm very grateful to her for helping me at that age.

At Louisiana State University, a Professor Heck [phonetic] was a brilliant historian, architectural historian, who encouraged me. He and Patrick Staub [phonetic], another professor, got together and they saw that I got hired to teach the same class that I had to leave five years before because my first child was on

his way. I had to leave school and go to work, and I built a few buildings in that five-year period, and they hired me to teach that same class, and it was Professor Heck who was really the lead of that wonderful experience which gave me my first teaching opportunity.

[00:17:28] And later, at Tulane, a similar occasion, a Professor John Lawrence, head of the school of architecture, hired me to teach and allowed me to teach while I was earning my master's degree, which gave me my opportunity to teach here at San Diego State. So I can thank those professors. And there are others: Dr. Ryke [phonetic] at LSU, a great landscape architecture professor over many years, who helped me. I was honored to be—I went back for two lectures at LSU, and they were in the audience. I was able to say a few words for them before they died, and had exhibitions there too. The one at LSU, the second one, I was able to cooperate my metaphysical graphics. I am not only an architect, but an artist. I do metaphysical graphics that draw on the family history. I'm reminded of [Paul] Gauguin's great painting, "Who Are We, Where Are We From, Where Do We Go?" and I've added to that, What did we do, and What did we learn? So my blog at night incorporates this basis of who are we, where are we from, where do we go, what did we do, what did we learn? I'm saying that because my blog is not just about architecture, but about life. I try to synergize the two together. I've always enjoyed reading the life story of people that I admire.

SR: Me too.

GR: Well, I'm not surprised. You don't want to just see what they did, you want to find out what caused them to do that.

SR: Right. And getting back to that, from what I understand, you had some very significant experiences in your young years, that I think while we're still talking about your earlier years, would you share some of that?

[00:19:43]

GR: Delightfully so, Susan. I'm so happy you brought that up. At age fifteen, my dear father helped me build kites. We built *huge* kites. This is right after the Second [World] War, and I remember they went up so high—our big kites were as tall as I was—that at age fifteen we could fly them high enough where the airplanes, the military planes, had to kind of be wary of them. And one day my friends and I were out near our home in North Baton Rouge, and on a very clear, beautiful day, all of a sudden, high in the sky—we were lying on our backs, looking up at our kites—was this craft of the most unusual characteristic. It was not an airplane. We had seen many airplanes. It was not a dirigible. We had seen dirigibles. It was what today is known as a UFO. And it was a type known as mother ships. That is, it was a giant craft that was later photographed by other people, and I've been able to see these photographs, and indeed it's what I saw that day—a rather cigar-shaped cylindrical craft. And believe me, that sighting influenced my life probably more than anything that ever happened to me.

SR: I would imagine so. I just get the chills thinking about the experience.

GR: Oh, it was astounding!

SR: As a young person.

GR: Fifteen years old. There weren't any articles yet in the newspapers about.... This is 1947. Only later did finally the UFO articles start cropping up in the paper. And then I saw photographs that were taken by responsible photographers, that matched what I saw that day. Well, that influenced my whole life, my professional life, in every aspect, to this day. In fact, we're going to go in the middle of February to Arizona to a big UFO conference. I have a lot of people I know in that realm of research. It influenced my design work, it influenced my teaching. I learned so much about it, advanced concepts in architecture. Energy, especially biotronic energy, which is the reason I was invited in Nonci [i.e., Nantes?], France, at the university, to be part of an international committee researching architecture and energy. So I can thank that experience on that cold clear day in Baton Rouge, sighting that ship. And I'm *very* intrigued....

I have a huge library. I'm giving San Diego State my library when I leave this earth. I've already given thousands of books away, but I've got a core library now that my good friend and former student, Dave Fobes [phonetic], and another great student of mine, Jim Burke, got together and assembled some Ikea shelves for me in my garage that will go intact. Mr. Robert Ray, as you well know, the kind gentleman who's head of the archive here, and the library of San Diego State, has nicely agreed to take my library, as well as my archive. So they're going to keep it together, and that means a lot to me. I've seen other libraries donated to major universities and to be dispersed. And I've always thought it would be so good if I could see my books kept together, because there is an interchange of the material—synchronicity, holographic universe kind of thing.

[00:23:57]

SR: I would think so.

GR: Well, I'm very happy to say about the library, that these books of mine have really done so much to make my life a joy. I brought a few books here today, and I'm reminded in the classrooms—and my students can testify to this—I would always have a bag full of books to lay out on the table before class would start, and I could refer to these books during my lecture. I have a few here today. Here is a book that I found synchronistically in Carmel, California, of the history of the counts of Gruyère. I may have mentioned that for five years I researched that family and wrote about it on the Internet. They lived a fascinating life, the de Gruy. They came from a region in France called the Champagne. And it's there in the Orient Forest, right near Trois [phonetic], they had a chateau that my wife and I tracked down. It's destroyed, but it was only twenty kilometers from the Monastery of Saint Bernard, who founded the Knights Templar, and conceived of the idea of sacred architecture, diomency [phonetic]. And my family built a domed sugar mill at New Orleans, which was the only domed sugar mill. And I'm confident that they did that as a reflection of their Templar heritage. Domes are extremely important to the history of the Knights Templar.

[00:25:51] In that same Orient Forest there, there is a chapel my wife and I visited, called the Learee [phonetic] or Loray [phonetic] Chapel, and it's there that the Shroud of Turin was brought. It was first introduced into France from Constantinople to the DuRay [phonetic] Castle in Burgundy. At Rey Sirson [phonetic], on the Saone River, that Castle is still there. In those days, the Middle

Ages, it was the largest castle in Burgundy. But the shroud was kept there for a number of years, and transferred to this little chapel in the Orient Forest.

[00:26:39] And I should explain an amazing synchronicity of that in that it was given to a lady by the name of Jean de Virgy [phonetic] and the de Virgy family was important to the De Gruy: the last count of Gruyère's mother was a de Virgy. And I'm mentioning this because the Shroud of Turin ultimately was acquired by the Savoy, S-A-V-O-Y, family. The Dukes or Counts of Savoy acquired it by trading two castles for the shroud. Now they were intermarried with the de Gruy and with several other families in this Orient Forest. So this history I had to research for five years in a number of books, a lot of books, to put this all together. I have two of those books here today: *The Turin Shroud* and *The Templar Revelation* by Lynn Picknett [phonetic] and Clive Prince. Those two researchers have put together a volume of material that is absolutely astounding.

Now most of our listeners would know that the *Da Vinci Code Book* by Dan Brown became an industry. But what some people may not realize is Dan Brown got a lot of that material from an earlier book called *Holy Blood and Holy Grail*. Mr. Lincoln, who wrote that book, was the key figure in bringing this tremendous story of the Templars and the associated organization of the Templars, the Priori de Sion, S-I-O-N, to the world's awareness. Now we don't have the time to go into all of that history, but I can tell you that it is the most *interesting* history I've ever read. And my family in the Orient Forest was part of it, which is amazing to me. It's like I'm trumping up some kind of fiction when I

write about it. I'm sure some of my readers on the Internet may wonder if I've imagined all of this. But believe me, it's all verifiable, documented, and the Picknett and Prince books that I just mentioned are very important in learning about this history. And architecturally I can say that Saint Bernard in Clare-vo [phonetic] Monastery where we went, out of that place came over 200 other monasteries, and they were very important in spreading civilization in Western Europe. You know, even if you're not a religious person, you can appreciate the cultural expansion they provided through their monasteries.

[00:29:55]

SR: Absolutely.

GR: In Switzerland where the counts of Gruyère have their castle, they were part of five crusades. And when they came back from the first crusade, the Count of Gruyère as a gratitude of returning safely, built a monastery called Rougemont Monastery, a few miles from the Gruyère Castle. And it's there that Saint Bernard and his Clare-vo monks actually took that monastery over, and some of the early printing press material came out of that. The Templars and the Rosicrucianists, the.... I'm trying to think. What's the outgrowth of the Templars?

SR: The Masons?

GR: The Masons, who did so much to design the capitol of this country. I'm sure that you are aware of that, and many people are today. It's become rather popular, I think, a study of the Mason's design work. Interestingly, a very key figure in my

family's history, tangentially, is the former president of the United States from the eighteenth century, the great.... Oh, after George Washington.

[00:31:38]

SR: Adams? Madison?

GR: No, even more well-known than that. This is the one problem of aging, is that memory becomes not as strong. It will come to me.

SR: I know it will. We'll get back to it.

GR: At any rate, he did have a lot to do.... He built a domed house at Monticello.

SR: Oh! Jefferson!

GR: Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson, who had quite a history in France, as you well know.

Thomas Jefferson, at the same time my folks built that domed sugar mill, built

Monticello, and both domes were copied after a dome in Paris at La Hall

[phonetic]. And Thomas Jefferson also had a good friend, the famous Lafayette,

whose wife had relatives in New Orleans. So there's an interface. And when

Thomas Jefferson wanted to reward Lafayette for his service in the Revolutionary

War, he gave him land in New Orleans, which Lafayette wanted because that's

where his wife's family had friends and relatives. Interestingly and

synchronistically, the land that Lafayette acquired was part of the de Gruy

family's property in the Garden District of New Orleans. Talk about

synchronicity! And so that's a fascinating part of my family's history down there.

I didn't know all of this when I lived there. It took me years out here on the

Internet and in books to discover all of this. I don't have the time to write a book,

but I will tell you that I've been writing on the Internet now for something like ten years—maybe eight, nine.

SR: Marvelous!

[00:33:35]

GR: And I'm praying that someday scholars might go through that material and put together paper-type books for people to study. You know, because there's material in there that I can't remember myself. I sent you an e-mail just this morning that had some of that historical data in it.

SR: I want to understand more. When you talk about Creole heritage, explain that.

GR: Yes, I'll be happy to. There's some misunderstanding of the word Creole, and that is people with black heritage, but it's not true. Creoles are really descendants of people who were there at the beginning, early colonists, whether they be from France, from Africa, from Spain, or wherever, they were the earliest colonists. And their families that came after are called Creoles. So I'm saying that in that a lot of people outside of Louisiana misunderstand the word, and think that Cajun and Creole are the same, but they're not. The Acadians were originally, as you may well know, from France—historically agriculturally oriented—and finally arrived into Louisiana. I'm sure you know the story of Manon Lescaux [phonetic], which relates to it's an opera and also a famous novel. There is, I think, an admiral or a Captain de Gruy. There is one of the characters in there, a de Gruy, who is based on one of my ancestors there, from a synchronistic standpoint. But at any rate, a lot of the people that I associate with in California really could care less about this. I'm grateful, with your interest in France, Susan,

that I can talk about these things with some comfort. I'm sure my own wife must get tired of hearing me talk about French heritage.

SR: Well, I think there's so much relevancy to heritage and family and shaping things as we get older. I think I appreciate that more.

[00:36:22]

GR: Definitely. Just this morning I had the joy of writing about my mother's influence to me, and I credit her with forming my vision. She had a marvelous vision herself, based on her Creole heritage. And little did I realize how much it would affect me. Because as a young man, when I started out in architecture, I was really gung ho for building the most modern structures I could think of. And my first house in Louisiana, built in 1960, was a *very* clean, modern, kind of rectilinear glazed structure in a beautiful forest. I had considered building a round structure even then, I will tell you, but it's more expensive to do that. And I only had \$13,500 to build this structure. So I drew up the plans in two weeks and built it in two months. That wasn't too easy to do, because I had two country carpenters, and one disappeared along the way. (laughs) But at any rate, that house gave so much pleasure to us. To this day, my son, my oldest child, claims that's the most favorite place he's ever lived. It was in this beautiful Sansouci Forest.

I do believe that genetic memory is part of our being. My family's history in the Orient Forest, the Orient Forest was very important in France near Trois. I know you know France, the Champagne Region. It was quite large in the early days, where the Knights Templar got started. But one of the reasons it became so

important is where they had the trade fairs in the Middle Ages, at Barcereaux [phonetic]. So the forest there I think left an imprint on my psyche. I sought out the Sansouci Forest to build my house in Louisiana. It was somewhat removed—we couldn't see our nearest neighbor in the summertime—which was a joy, to be secluded there amongst this gorgeous nature with the glazed box we lived in, rectilinear glazed pavilion brought the trees and nature into the house. It was a very, very enriching kind of environment. And honestly, that has held with me throughout my life.

[00:39:14] Out here, environmental design, which was a vision, an idea, of Lloyd and Ilsa to incorporate a larger orientation architecture—I had never heard of environmental design when I came out—was a very new kind of theory. But I will say that I had studied landscape architecture at Louisiana State, as well as architecture, so I did have a history of synergizing something beyond just a house, a building. So those forests really had a big impact on my life and my work. And I'm sure they must have had that to my family in France. I will tell you, very interestingly, that the first ancestor of the de Gruy family to come to this country was actually born in the palace at Versailles. Now that's very interesting, because his father was a colonel in Louis XIV's personal guard. And although they had the chateau in the Orient Forest, they would go back and forth to Versailles. So he had this history, and there's a lot to it more than that, which we don't have the time to get into. But I have this book on Rene d'Anjou, and you may know that Rene d'Anjou was a good friend of Joan of Arc, and he protected her when she went on her great trip of destiny to save France from

England. But even more importantly, Rene d'Anjou was a *tremendous* cultural figure in the history of France. He was an artist, he was a poet, he was a military man, but he was also a great scholar. He did so many marvelous things that I consider him one of the greatest figures in my family's history.

[00:41:23] And Leonardo da Vinci also figures in my family's history, I'm happy to say, in that the last Count of Gruyère, Michael de Gruyère, grew up with the king of France, Françoise the First. For eight years they lived at the Clos de Luz [phonetic] in the Loire Valley. They learned to read, write, learned all of their early schooling there together at the French court, and became really blood brothers. Now, they were cousins, but Leonardo da Vinci was saved in the last four years of his life from total destitution and illness by Françoise the First. And although I can't prove this, there is good evidence that Michael du Gruyère was the agent between Françoise the First and Leonardo in that the castle at Gruyère is not far from where Leonard da Vinci was living at the time in Milan. And I think that Michael du Gruyère, going down to Milan as he had to quite a lot, probably was aware of, and introduced Leonardo da Vinci to Françoise the First. And they brought him to France.

I'll tell you one amazing thing about Leonardo da Vinci that not a lot of people are aware of, and I can vouch for this as an architect and a professor, is that Leonardo was a great painter, as you well know, and a great inventor, marvelous inventor. But he was also a great designer of fortresses. And right toward the end of his life, he designed the most astounding fortress that I ever knew of designed at the time. It was hundreds of years ahead of its time, because

it had compound curved walls. I featured this the other night in my blog. There is a very nice drawing that he made of this fortress. It's perfectly round. And I will tell you that that's one of the big links in all of my later work in California, is circles.

[00:43:46]

SR: I love round things.

GR: Well, I just discovered this week that Noah's ark was round. I didn't know that.

SR: Really?!

GR: There's a professor at LSU that's taken an interest in this. He sent me an e-mail saying he'd like to write a book on Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, with the circle being a factor. I told him, I sent back a message saying, "That's a great idea." But interestingly, it's galvanized *my* research. When I retired, I had not thought of this so strongly, but so much of my work in California, architecturally, has been based on circles. Of course if you look at the history of architecture from the very earliest days, there is a program called "Ancient Aliens" on the History Channel, and they show a lot of circular structures from the very earliest days. Apparently the earliest cities were generally round. There's a holistic quality about that, but also it relates to what I call cosmic consciousness. There are many reasons to design circular buildings, and I'm grateful that intuitively I got into that here at San Diego State.

SR: That's marvelous. Interesting. By the way, last year, there was a marvelous exhibit in the Phoenix Art Museum of Leonardo da Vinci. It was beautifully done.

GR: I bet. Did they have models?

SR: They did. It was extensive. I went with a young teenage friend who had never seen anything by Leonardo da Vinci, and she really was fascinated. They did a great job.

[00:45:56]

GR: Well, I'm delighted to hear that. And I will tell you that one of my great experiences was to visit his home in the little town of Vinci, and to see in the basement the early models. My current wife, Marianne, and I, did visit the Clos Luz in France where he lived with Michael du Gruyère, and in the basement there they have a lot of these wonderful models. The man was absolutely astounding. And although I admire Degas, who was part of my family's history, and Eau du Lon Raydon [phonetic]—I brought this—I was very happy to hear Rob Ray say that he was a great fan of Eau du Lon Raydon, who was a friend of the Cavereauxes, my grandmother's family, who was really very surrealistic in his work, which I love, because I think super-realism is one of the greatest contributions the French have made in the history of art. Now Leonardo da Vinci, I'm sure everybody will acknowledge, was, quote, "ahead of his time."

SR: Oh yes!

GR: In my life, I've received that. I consider it an accolade so much. It isn't easy always to be ahead of your time, though. I remember designing structures for people that it was just too advanced for their ability to see themselves in such a radical environment. Bruce Goff, the great American architect who I admire so much, had a brilliant way to handle that problem. The story is that a Mr. Smith—

he was, say, designing a house for Mr. Smith—and Mr. Smith asked Bruce Goff, “Now, Mr. Goff, what style is my house going to be?” And he said, “Why, Mr. Smith, your house is going to be in the Smith style.” (laughter) And the truth of the matter is, every house Bruce Goff designed was different, and he tried to draw into the design, as much as he could, of the people’s personality and background so it would be unique to them. But as you well know, so many people are just tied in with historical architecture that they’re familiar with, and [it’s] very hard to shift [them] into a new vision.

[00:48:41] Well, I wasn’t quite as talented as Bruce Goff, I don’t think, in handling the situation that way, but I did build some rather advanced houses. This one is in Louisiana. It was published in the *New Orleans Times Picayune* “Rotogravure” section, and it’s unusual in that it has a tropical living room with plants. It’s a greenhouse, and the side rooms open up with sliding panels to the main room. The lady of the house is an artist, and this is their living room. The idea that the patio and the living room would become one in the same, with the plants playing a major role, and the sunscreens can be moved across up at the top....

SR: I think that’s fantastic.

GR: Thank you. Professor Heck at LSU thought this was my best Louisiana house, so I’m happy I was able to bring that today. I’ve built larger houses, I’ve built simpler houses, but that one maybe is rather unique, and I’m grateful I had the opportunity. Of course I designed it for an artist, and that helped.

SR: And they appreciated it.

GR: They did appreciate it.

SR: You know, as you're talking about that, what's wonderful is that you built it for them, and you could do it from the beginning. Where I live in Del Mar, we are in a home that was built by an Italian architect, but I have wanted what we call the great room or the family room, I've referred to it as saying I want to make it a greenhouse. We have a skylight. But the "bones" of the house is the term I hear people say—that's trendy, to say the bones of the house.... It's already there, and it wasn't thought about as lending itself to something like that, but recently when I went to visit the home of Walter Monk and I saw all the green plants on walls, I thought, "I want to do that."

[00:50:56]

GR: Plants are so important. A lot of people don't realize.... I used to use a book in my teaching called *The Secret Life of Plants*. I don't know if you've seen that.

SR: I've heard of it.

GR: It's a marvelous book. And what you find out when you read this book is that plants are sensitive enough to actually grasp your emotions. Sentient is the word. They've actually been able to trigger garage doors, communicating with plants. Plants hooked up to a lie detector will react to your thinking, if you say you're thinking you're going to boil a leaf of the plant or something. So it's a really fascinating aspect of creatures that we think of being very lowly—plants. And they do a lot for us in a synergetic, symbiotic way—not only the oxygen they provide, but that they do relate to us in an emotional way too. So I can respond to what you're saying.

SR: Well, I think being in California, what's so wonderful is that there is that opportunity with the light and the green. It's very different than living in a high-rise apartment in New York, which is where I lived for a good part of my life. And I think that it's so wonderful to bring that to people.

[00:52:23]

GR: Well, this idea of living in the Sansouci Forest and my ancestors in the Orient Forest. Incidentally, Orient meant Jerusalem, because they went to Jerusalem on the crusades. But you mentioned Del Mar where you live. I had the joy of meeting John Lloyd Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright's son, in Del Mar at his house, because Bruce Goff and he were friends. And when Bruce Goff lectured for us here at San Diego State, we went together to visit John Lloyd Wright. We also went up to Los Angeles, and I met the other son, the great architect Lloyd Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. And I always consider that among the greatest honors I ever had, was to meet the two sons of Frank Lloyd Wright. I, unfortunately, never met him. He died the year I got an architectural license. I can't [unclear 00:53:27] the synchronicity there, but as we know from my earlier remarks, I admire.... And he loved nature. I mean, organic architecture is the term that he followed. I have a number of friends who studied with Wright, worked with Wright, or R. Bruce Goff, and all of them know this tradition of organic architecture.

Now I call *my* architecture, radiant architecture. I take it a bit further in my knowledge of biotronic energy, coming from the shape of volumes. I studied that and employed that in my own work. Just last night, I had the pleasure of

discovering that the Russians have built a pyramid—there's some modern pyramids built in Russia, 150 feet high, by professors, scientists, who are exploring the benefit and virtue of pyramidal volume. A pyramid is in a cone, or related. As I used to tell my students, if you want to build a volume that's good for humans, consider a spherical volume or a conical volume, a pyramid. On this program that I saw this material on ancient aliens, there was a Dr. Patrick Flanagan [phonetic]. And back in the seventies I got to know him through his book *Pyramid Power*. So that's been a good part of my teaching over the years. And when I was teaching, that was kind of far out material for a professor in architecture to consider the energy in a volume. I know no one else in my teaching history that was doing that. I used to have to carry a suitcase full of books with me when I lectured in Europe. Perhaps my greatest honor in lecturing was in London, twice, at the Architecture Association, a school considered the best in Europe, and there I offered them my research in biotronic energy. Fortunately, the Russians have pursued this, and I'm really looking forward to finding out more of their results. I would say that in the future, if there's one thing that my tradition in teaching is going to leave, is for architect's to consider the volume as a very important aspect of the building design.

I used to tell my students there are no boxes in nature. For several reasons, a box is not the best selection for volume for humans. Spheres, cones, pyramids, biomorphic structures, now, which are fluid sculptural-type structures, are *extremely* good. And I designed a number of those. And I think years in the

future the great thing about biomorphic structures, which are biologically formed, sculptural.... Thank you for bringing those pictures today.

[00:57:06]

SR: This one, right?

GR: Yes, very much so, and among my earliest and favorite ... is that there is a fluidity here.

SR: I noticed that.

GR: And for humans, that is an excellent environment to be in, with plants and a fluid volume. Now, our cities tend to be kind of square-ish and boxy and linear, so it's not easy. When I designed my house in La Jolla, "The Silver Ship," I did consider building a structure. I put it on the Internet just the other night. And it was incorporating a pyramid and a dome. But the reason that I couldn't build that structure is zoning regulations and neighborly prejudice. At one point.... You know, my house in La Jolla, "The Silver Ship," is a very unusual structure. And I remember going down to the building committee here in San Diego to get the building permit, and they were saying, "Well, that's such an unusual design. I don't know if we should let you do this." All this kind of.... So I went out and I took a photograph of every house on my side of the street, on Nautilus Street. No two of them were alike. And I went back to the City and I spread these photographs and said, "Look, there's not two houses alike!" That was the last I heard of *that* problem!

SR: That's good! I know that, gosh, in Del Mar—well, that's a whole different thing. That has to do with the view, too, the way that they watch everything that everybody builds.

[00:58:45]

GR: Sure, they have to protect the view. And I understand that. We didn't have a direct view to the ocean on our first two levels, but on the third level we did. But regardless, we had a tremendous panorama in the canyon. Nautilus Street is built in a canyon, so one could sit at our dining table or in our living room and get this very expansive wide view. And I guess one of the best things with that house was I built in some sun control screens in canvas that could be raised and lowered, so you could have a full view, you could have a partial view, or you could have a very intimate and inward circumstance where the canvas closed the view.

SR: That's wonderful.

GR: My best design, I believe, in California, was something I called the universal spheroid, which is a spherical structure impacted into a hillside that opens up like the eyelid of a human and has a fabric double skin. There is a fabric called Armstrong Teflon, which is very strong. It will last for twenty years. It comes in opaque or transparent material, and with two of those one could have everything. You could have either totally enclosed surface of the spheroid, or totally open, by having it raise or lower like the eyelid of a human. And then inside of this volume, the concept is to fill it with plants, to bring the garden into the home, and have several levels.

Affordable architecture meant a lot to my program at San Diego State. I wanted to see my students have the ability to design structures that people could build themselves, assemble with their own hands. And to that end I had them design kit-of-parts projects. And I'm proud to tell you that our students won awards based on that idea. We competed against all the big universities in California: UCLA, USC, UC-Berkeley, San Luis Obispo Architectural School. And we won first place at San Luis Obispo, and I will tell you the story is that all of these schools were invited to participate in this competition, and build a small structure they could sleep in during the night, and be judged the next morning. Well, the people at San Luis Obispo brought in concrete blocks, huge cranes to haul these blocks. My students went up with a biomorphic tensile structure, very light, but very strong, that could be assembled in a very short amount of time. A storm came up in the night, and the concrete block structure failed. Our students' structure was resilient. It would give with the wind, but it held its position. It was tied down. So in this rainy stormy night, our students won the next morning, first place.

SR: Oh, how exciting!

GR: It was. We won several other competitions too. But that was one of the proudest moments I ever had as a professor.

SR: Well, you know, clearly you've described a family and friends that nurtured you, and it sounds like you have nurtured students. Tell me more about San Diego State, with the students.

GR: Sure. I'm proud to tell you that one day a young Japanese student came to my classroom. He could hardly speak English. He had just arrived. He had no letter of introduction. He had an engineering background in Japan. And I always encouraged these students, so I took him in and I was able to get him accepted. He went on and got his master's degree with me. (chuckles) He's now head of the department!¹

[01:03:21]

SR: How wonderful.

GR: I can't help but get emotional about that.

SR: Oh, that's wonderful.

GR: There are others. One of his employees—he heads a very successful architectural firm here in San Diego today—and one of his associates—actually, she's now a partner—came to me in a similar fashion from Japan. Her father had been a professor there, so she had more of a background than he did, but they both are doing very well.² And then Dave Fobes—who I've spoken about, who got me started in doing my architectural blog, for a year he did the technical work for me, just as a generous gesture—is now a professor in the department, and a very highly respected teacher, and a great artist. He's *extremely* famous in San Diego for his artistry. And there are others like that. So I'm happy to tell you that a number of the people who get my blog—and I hear from them all the time—are former students. There is a network, I see them quite a lot here and there in various ways, and they help me a lot. Dave Fobes and another great former

¹ Kotaro Nakamura.

² Chikado Terada.

student assistant of mine, Jim Burke, got together and put the shelving for my library in my garage, as a gesture of kindness. And then another one, Ralph Bowman [phonetic], my student assistant, became a—he was always interested in California history. His grandmother had been part of the Flying A Studios in Santa Barbara, earlier in La Mesa here in San Diego. Well today he is an extremely successful dealer in Hollywood memorabilia. He sells a lot on the Internet. I hear from him all the time. We have a little tangent of my Facebook I call Posse Flora [phonetic], where these students will write in something for Facebook. There's another professor, Mario Lara [phonetic], who was my student back in the seventies, and there are several others. That's a real wonderful aspect of being a professor, is you get to see these people go on and do good things.

[01:06:13]

SR: Absolutely. That's right. At the time before you were at San Diego State, let's go back to your first teaching. You started out.... Talk a little bit more about your education path.

GR: Yes. Okay. I had a very strange educational career, I will tell you this, in that I taught at two universities without any degree. And it happened in this way: I started at Tulane in the summer of 1952. I went to the architectural school there for a year at Tulane. I had a scholarship, I was very lucky. I loved it. I loved Tulane, but I was extremely sick with asthma. I had a childhood history of asthma, being rushed to the hospital, oxygen tents, adrenalin shots and all of that. I was lucky I survived my childhood. But at any rate, New Orleans is very damp. I grew up in Baton Rouge. It was so damp in New Orleans in the winter that I just

couldn't go back to school at Tulane. So I went to work. And that's when I designed those two chapels in the hospital for the State of Louisiana, at the age of twenty or twenty-one. I worked for several architects during that period, and then finally I went back to Louisiana State to finish my architectural education.

[01:08:01] And then I was married and my first child came along, so I had to drop out again—second dropout. Went to work. I passed the exam for my state license in architecture, and then I opened my office. In that period I built several buildings that earned the exhibition at Oregon State University. That's in 1964. And it's at that point that LSU invited me back to teach the same class that I had to leave in '59, five years earlier. So here I had my first teaching opportunity without a degree, at LSU in the architectural school. I had several students who won awards that year. The head of the architectural school wanted to keep me, but he said.... See, I substituted for a professor who had a heart attack. He said, "If you had any kind of a degree, we would keep you here, but we can't, since you don't have a degree." So I went on and I went to work, I built buildings. Then Tulane.... I had the opportunity here. I came to California. I loved California. I had an uncle that lived in Los Angeles—southern swimming champion at age seventeen. He did the first Tarzan film work.

SR: What was his name?

GR: George Staigg, S-T-A-I-G-G, my mother's brother. And his grandchildren are good friends, cousins of ours, in Los Angeles today. But at any rate, we came out here, I wanted to build a career in California. But I had no degree. I had my license, and I worked on the aircraft hangar for PSA for nine months. And that's

when San Diego State reviewed my portfolio and they said, “If you get a degree, we will give you a good position here.” That’s when I went to Tulane, I got my master’s degree. I taught in the architectural school again, twice, teaching without a degree. But I did get my master’s degree at that point. So my educational career is rather strange. But it goes back to my youth, too, because I had to drop out of elementary school twice because of asthma.

[01:10:41]

SR: That’s very interesting, because besides my having asthma, I was in the public health field for many years. I’ve worked with so many people who spend time being sick when they were children, and who developed the most extraordinary minds and work as children who had that time being sick. I’m thinking of a particular person who I interviewed from the hemophilia community, which is a big part of the work that I was involved in, and today he’s a judge, et cetera. But he’s like a walking encyclopedia. He just read every book. He was home, sick.

GR: That’s the way I was. As I told you, my grandmother taught me to read at age four. Because I was so sick, I was home a great deal, and I got into the culture. And the books, I learned so much as a child. It’s interesting, that negative aspect of life, all of that illness did turn out to be virtuous in learning a lot.

SR: That theme—you know, you speak about different themes, just what you’ve said—cuts across many, many interviews that I’ve done of people who had childhood illnesses. It’s relevant.

GR: Yes. Yes. I’m lucky to be alive, in a way. I’m now eighty-one years old, so somehow....

SR: How's the asthma?

[01:12:21]

GR: It doesn't bother me much in California. I'm happy to tell you I can't remember the last time I had asthma. If I go to Louisiana, it's touch and go. I don't go in the winter. We go in October, usually around my birthday. My wife loves New Orleans. She's a California girl, Los Angeles, but she's very much devoted to the history and the culture down there and so on.

SR: What is her name?

GR: Marianne Conway. She married a gentleman by the name of Laub, L-A-U-B, who was a brilliant scientist. He was a physicist, and amazingly, when they got married, they got married the same year my first wife and I got married, which is 1955. We both went to the same places in Mexico for our honeymoons. They went in November, we went in June. But her first husband was a genius. Being a physicist, they were assigned to China Lake in the desert of California in 1955. Ostensibly he was working on the early rocketry. She got to meet Wernher von Braun at the time in the desert. But what I've learned about this since is that—Bill was his name, her husband—was also deeply involved in UFO activity. The government was doing a lot of UFO research. It was at that time that President Eisenhower, as legend has it, was taken to Edwards Air Force Base next door to China Lake, and had the interface with extraterrestrials, and made some kind of an agreement with them. Now this was all very secret stuff, so it's only gradually come out. But in the UFO literature, you can read about this. It's amazing. But Bill Laub, her husband, was an absolute genius. He went on and built one of the

first computers in the United States. And interestingly, Marianne has told this story a number of times—fascinating story. He would go out and buy used electronic parts at army surplus places, and in the garage he assembled this early primitive kind of a computer. And he brought it in one day and sat it on top of the refrigerator, plugged it in, and it lit up and the children were just astounded. She had four children by Bill Laub. And to make a long story short, he sold this early computer to Hewlett Packard, who he worked for, for \$800. I'm confident that was one of the greatest buys Hewlett Packard ever made.

[01:15:30]

SR: I would think so!

GR: So I think that is synchronistic in itself because Marianne is a rather conservative individual, and she watches the "Ancient Aliens" programs with me, and we'll go to the UFO conferences, although she won't attend the lectures. And she has a tangential interest in UFOs, but it's something that kind of is out of her cultural orientation. She's a marvelous person, with a tremendous history in California. She grew up in Westwood Village, which is a beautiful part of Los Angeles. And she, as a child, knew so many of the movie personalities there, but they were just neighbors to her. You know, she didn't think of it as being anything so special. But I had a great love—romantic, perhaps—for the motion picture industry through my uncle and my mother. My mother was very interested in Hollywood and the lure and romance of that. So that was part of the attraction of coming to California. You know, I do have a deep feeling for California as being a very special place.

SR: I think so too. This is your story, not mine. I'll just tell you fast that from the time I was a small child in New York, I used to look at magazines featuring architecture. I looked at houses and beaches and I said, "It's so beautiful!" It appealed to me. And the first time that I ever came here, I said, "Somehow I am going to do that." And did, in 1994, to Del Mar.

[01:17:25]

GR: Oh, wonderful! Well, that's a great place, Del Mar. Interestingly, I remember being in my studio in Sansouci Forest and thinking, "I want to come to California and develop a life." And I looked at a map of California, and I saw this area between San Diego and Los Angeles, and I thought, "That's the perfect area." We live in La Jolla, but we spend a lot of time up around Del Mar. Marianne's children live near there, so I think you're fortunate to have these two great locations to be. California's a very special place.

SR: It is. It is.

GR: In so many fields, wonderful things have been done. That's why I'm proud that I was able to contribute to the evolution of architecture in this country, and California was the perfect place to do it.

SR: I'd like you to think again about your early years. You talked a lot about your mother and father. Tell me [did you have] any siblings, and tell me about them.

GR: I had a brilliant brother. I'm telling you, that man, Randolph J. Ray, Jr., was the most astounding person I've ever known. And I know that one is prejudiced, but I will tell you, if there was a party of very learned people, he would be in the center of all the discussion. He was a very talented artist, painter, all of his life.

But he also learned to read the tarot cards, and he helped a lot of people with their life, overcoming various psychological problems. I remember after he died, we used to get letters for *years* from people all over the world. He was a tremendous writer. I still have a lot of his writings. But at any rate, as a young boy—he was eight years older than I am, he had tremendous influence on me. I really looked up to him. He was very kind to me. He lived in California so many of those early years, so we were distant. But when we got married, my first wife and I, I commissioned my brother to paint some paintings for me, some wonderful paintings. And I would incorporate his paintings in my architecture. My early buildings, I tried to introduce one of his works. And in the house we built in the Sansouci Forest, we had a marvelous mural that he did. But intellectually, he was so far ahead of most people in every field of art and science, that it was *very* impressive.

To this day, I've met a lot of great people. I always like to tell the story of meeting Jonas Salk at the home of Ilsa and Lloyd Roco, and asking him if he ever used intuition in his work, and he told me yes, "some of us do." But of all of the people on this earth that I've met, brilliant people, my brother really stands out as a remarkable individual. People loved him, too. He was very popular, even though he was very intellectual. He was funny, he was talented, he could entertain. As a child he could dance, he could sing. So he was just an all-around brilliant individual. Now, he died at age thirty-nine, which was very sad. But he worked into a short life a lot of mileage. He lived in California. He lived in Laguna Beach, which my wife and I go to a lot. We love Laguna Beach. He has

a child in Baton Rouge who is a magician, and I don't think *that's* incidental. Joel is his name, and he's on television quite a lot. Dr. Magic, he's known as, in Louisiana on television. So I think *that's* very meaningful.

[01:21:59]

SR: Yeah.

GR: My younger brother is eight years younger than I am, and he isn't as artistic, but he is very much interested in UFOs. He's the most noble human I know of my siblings in my family. He has been so kind to—Joel he adopted when my brother died. He took care of him, raised him. He has had a lot of difficulties in his life that he's overcome. He's a very kind person. I think that his generosity and kindness are a reflection of our Ray family—my aunts who were so kind and generous to me. So those are my siblings. We never had a sister, but we had those wonderful aunts and grandmother.

My own children, my son, Derek is his name, born in '59, the year Frank Lloyd Wright died, is a very benevolent human. He has a master's degree from UCLA. He works with children who have learning deficiencies. He teaches in the school system here in San Diego. He also is a very talented travel writer. He publishes his writings and photographs in the local paper called *The Reader*.

SR: Oh, I've read *The Reader*, sure.

GR: *The Reader* is very popular in San Diego. And one can find his writings and photographs by typing in "Derek Ray, slash, Reader" on the Internet. And one can find his marvelous reports. He has travelled all over the world. I'm very impressed with the piece he wrote on Taliesin West, but I must say that his report

on the Taj Mahal is very impressive. He's visited some really great sites around the world, writing. And he takes the photographs of them. But this past summer, he spent two months in Italy, staying in the small villages, and staying with the family and the grass roots. And he wrote some beautiful pieces based on that. So I'm very proud.

[01:24:39] Now I will tell you that his mother, my first wife, Marian, was a brilliant writer in her own way. She got a degree in literature from San Diego State. And she got that degree by going to school at night, to her credit, raising three children, going to school at night. She won a Phi Beta Kappa key. So I think that Derek's writing ability is something inherited from his mother. She was a great scholar, and his writing is very scholarly, far more than mine, far more correct than mine. I could never write the way that he writes with his reportorial text and his photographs. I was so amazed. I never thought that he would be a visual person as much as a literary person. But he's combined his photographs with his writings. And one of the most poignant memories I have of his writing is that he went back to our house in the Sansouci Forest. I can't go back there. Who was it, Thomas Wolfe said "you can't go [home] again"? There's been a lot of changes there, and I just wouldn't want to experience that. He went back though, and to his credit, Derek struck up a friendship with the lady who owns the house today. Apparently she's very notable, I think, in medical circles. I don't remember exactly the details. But he became very friendly with her, and corresponds with her. Of course his approach to helping children with

learning difficulties involves a good bit of medical comprehension. So he's very widely talented, bridging the sciences and the arts.

[01:26:51]

SR: That's wonderful.

GR: I have two daughters. The oldest daughter is married, lives here in San Diego. She has no children of her own. She and her husband adopted a young Chicano child, a teenager—a very difficult task. They're raising this boy, he's now sixteen. She just is totally devoted to him, to helping him achieve a good life—she and her husband. And my youngest daughter is in Little Rock where she does sales on the Internet. She's very computer savvy. She has a little daughter, a beautiful child. I put her picture on the Internet two nights ago on my blog. Ashley is her name, a gorgeous child. So that's my children, and I'm grateful they're all alive and seemingly doing well.

SR: Very nice. Let's talk more about your years at San Diego State, because you came here, as I understand, in 1969.

GR: That's right.

SR: And the context that you were within in the United States at that time, of course, is reflected by the university. I'd like you to talk about what you found when you came here.

GR: Well I will say, as you well know, that Lloyd and Ilsa Roco, I couldn't have asked for two better people to review my portfolio in 1967, when I was here working on the PSA hangar at Lindbergh Field. And I brought my portfolio out here, Lloyd and Ilsa invited me to their house and reviewed it. I'm happy to say they liked

what they saw, and indeed it led to me being hired. *But*, in 1967 I had no degree. The department wanted to hire me, but they said that I would need to get a degree. So I went back to Tulane, to Professor Lawrence, head of the architectural school, who hired me to teach there and gave me the opportunity to get my master's at the same time. I was delighted. Then I came back to teach at San Diego State, which is rather astounding, that they held my position for two years—this is unheard of—while I went off to get my master's degree. So I came back. Now, I don't know, maybe some of my colleagues thought that I was given too much opportunity. I don't know if you can say there was a little jealousy there, that I was brought in to be given the opportunity to actually design the entire curriculum, which I did, for this new environmental design program.

[01:30:11] And the local architects honored me with a dinner in La Jolla at the La Valencia Hotel up on the roof, a very expensive dining room. Some powerful architects. They wanted me to modify or copy my curriculum and program after San Luis Obispo, which is a kind of nuts-and-bolts architectural school. I had a different vision. I wanted to encourage leadership amongst our students. I wanted to turn out designers, even visionaries, where art was important. So instead of turning out just draftsmen to populate the back rooms of plan factories, I was trying to encourage leadership and vision.

And I brought in Archigram, Peter Cook and colleagues from London, to lecture. Now at that time, Archigram was a very radical group. I'm very pleased to tell you, Susan, that just recently Archigram was honored by the Queen of England, they were all knighted.

[01:31:35]

SR: How lovely!

GR: But at the time they lectured for me, they were some very radical young men. They had, although, some profound ideas, and that's why I invited them. They were not your regular architectural types that the local architects were trying to get me to encourage and promote here in our program. And then I brought Bruce Goff in, also a very radical designer. Frank Lloyd Wright was dead, so I couldn't bring him in, but I did bring in a lot of really exciting, advanced thinkers.

Now behind the scenes, I didn't know this was going on. It got so heated in the local architectural offices that I wasn't turning out draftsmen, that as I have learned, they went over my head and around me to administration to try to pressure me to follow their desires. I won't mention names, but to make a long story short, one day.... I was encouraging architecture that was affordable. And I'll tell you an interesting story. Two deans called me in. It reached this climax. Two deans called me into their office. "Professor Ray, we got a report that you are teaching...." I think they actually used the word communism.

SR: Oh my goodness!

GR: I was very lucky. That week, *Time* magazine had published an issue about affordable housing in the United States. Less than one percent of the people—at that time, it was less than two percent—when I left, it was less than one percent—can afford to build a house in this country. So I had this *Time* magazine with me. I said, "Look," to these two deans, "what kind of a country is this, that the average person can't afford to build their own house?! That's what we're trying to do.

I'm not a communist. I had three great-grandfathers who were multi-millionaires. I don't know anything about communists. I'm just trying to teach ways to build more affordable housing." Well, that was the last I ever heard of that problem.

[01:34:17]

SR: Well you handled it well!

GR: I'm very lucky! Now I do know that some of this did kind of spread into the faculty too, and when it came time for me to be promoted, believe me, I had to work at it—but I did! And I was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, and then I came up for full professor. I mean, I had already gone through tenure and all that. There were some shenanigans going.... Even though I was voted first in my department for promotion, I received a notification that I wasn't going to be promoted. And I wrote a letter of complaint. And fortunately, some people came to my support. And also, that's about the time I was honored in Europe.

SR: Ah-ha!

GR: And they couldn't argue with that.

SR: Yeah.

GR: Because that was rare, for anybody on this faculty—certainly the art department—there had been no one honored in Europe with lectures, exhibitions, and publications. So it wasn't easy (chuckles) but I made it.

SR: You did! That's an understatement. And you nurtured so many students along the way.

GR: Yeah, I should point out that I also had some friends I should mention.

[01:35:43]

SR: That would be good.

GR: I don't want to forget friends. And I have here a little book—I don't think I've mentioned this.

SR: No, you have not.

GR: When I graduated from junior high school, I had a dear friend, Ronald Eaton was his name, he died recently. He and I spent a lot of time talking about cultural issues. He eventually went to New York and became a very talented actor. But we were sports fans, we did a lot of basketball, and a lot of chatting. We had a lot of empathy. We used to listen to the New York Yankees play on Armed Forces Radio at noon every day. Well, to make a long story short, I used to send Ron mail off, that I made based on my life and my work. This is my first wife, Marian, and we're in Italy at a castle there. I put together this collage. And I would send these back to Ron, and I didn't realize he was saving all of this. And ultimately.... Here is a mailgram that turned into a poem I sent to him. I would try to send him things that he might be interested in, in my life in California. Well, we had a fiftieth anniversary meeting of all of these former students of mine in that class, and I went back to Baton Rouge. The Class of 1948. This is in 1998, in November. And to my astonishment, each member of that class got this book in my honor. Now believe me, there were a lot of honorable people in that class, and I was very embarrassed about this, but one couldn't ask for a more devoted friend than Ronald Eaton. I'm very lucky.

SR: That's marvelous. And you mentioned that there are other friends you want to talk about as well.

[01:37:53]

GR: Yes! there are. There was one very talented student I had. The very first day I taught at LSU, I was brought in, in mid-semester. The professor had a heart attack. The most brilliant student of the class was the first person they brought me to meet. John Messina is his name. John is an architect practicing in Tucson today. He has taught at the University of Arizona there in the architecture school. He received a master's degree, I think at Boston University. A brilliant architect in organic architecture. He's a specialist in adobe structures. He's remodeled a building in the French Quarter of New Orleans. He's devoted to historical structures. And he has been the greatest friend for me. He was in New Orleans the two years I was working on my master's degree, and we would see each other—he and his wife, Tanya, who is from Yugoslavia. They have a very kind of organic view of life. They did a beautiful job of turning a little bungalow in Tucson into their home—very close with plants, cooking, all of that kind of thing.

SR: I love that.

GR: Yeah, you would, living where you do in Arizona. So John was more than just a friend, he was really a kind of empathetic colleague, and a great photographer. He photographed.... I did three color projects. I got into color, light, and energy at Tulane. I developed this concept of radiant architecture there when I was doing my graduate work, and John was very sympathetic with what I was doing—empathetic. He photographed a jazz workshop that I did. No, excuse me, I got

that wrong, someone else photographed the jazz workshop, but that was part of the three projects. He photographed an apartment I built in the French Quarter of New Orleans for the Trailer [phonetic] brothers, two very visionary and artistically-oriented brothers who commissioned me to design two projects for them: one, the Explorers Gift Shop, and then behind the Explorers Gift Shop, this apartment. And John Messina had been a photographer for *Time* magazine, among other things, and he got *American Home* magazine to commission him to photograph my project. And they did a beautiful job. It was published in New York in 1970, in color—the photographs that John took. They actually got me to make a drawing of the project in perspective, they published in that. But it wasn't just the fact that John was photographing my apartment, but he was an excellent person to talk to about what I was trying to do. I mean, there was a philosophy of color, light, and energy, for several tangents.

Living and working in Louisiana, I had a deep sensitivity to the Yucatan, the Maya. And when I taught him at LSU, I put up on the wall a huge drawing of the governor's palace at Uxmal, and I would share with these students my love for Mayan architecture. Later, when I came to California, I took a whole busload of San Diego State students down to the Yucatan. We rented a bus in Tijuana, with two drivers, and camped out en route. So back in New Orleans, I grew to love the Yucatan. I could sense the tie between the culture in the Yucatan, the artistic history there, and Louisiana, in which color played such a big role. I have since found out something that I had conjectured, and that this has been proven, is that the Maya had huge canoes. They transnavigated the Gulf of Mexico. And just

now—and I brought this here—I probably buried it—the archaeological journals are out.... Oh! it's in this group. *American Archeology* and *Ancient American* are two magazines that publish that Poverty Point, a city in Northern Louisiana, right near Rayville, the little town my great-grandfather founded, is the oldest community in North America, and it has Olmec ties from the Yucatan. So there is this cultural interface from the Yucatan into Louisiana. And I sensed this way back. And I will tell you that my earliest ancestors in Louisiana built in a jungle area south of New Orleans called Arateria [phonetic]. And this area is where there were a lot of Indian mounds with fiber buildings, but rather like the stone buildings in the Yucatan.

[01:44:16] So anyway, John Messina, my student, a really fine scholar, was a person that I could talk to about this, that had total empathy with what I was talking about, and actually reacted in his own life in Arizona, where he has interfaced with the Indian culture there, Native American culture, and his buildings respond to that.

So those are two friends of mine who I feel very, very close to, and I'm very lucky that I had friends like that.

SR: And I'm sure it's reciprocal. Let's reconsider your heritage now.

GR: Well, you know, I'm glad you brought that up, Susan, because I consider the African influence in Louisiana to be as strong as anything. For my artistic orientation, I have the fondest memory of designing the workshop, the jazz workshop in the French Quarter of New Orleans, for two young black jazz musicians. I have the greatest memory of the cultural impact on me of their art,

their music, their food. And I have the greatest honor to tell you that my great-grandfather, John Ray, was one of seven state legislators who voted to free the slaves. I have very sad thoughts about my de Gruy family owning slaves. It's nothing that I can control, it's part of their history, but I will say that all of the people that I have known in my family had the highest regard for African Americans. I remember my Grandmother Ray had Irma, who was like part of the family, who worked for my family for many, many years. My mother *adored* the African culture. I remember we had a yard man who could tell you the time by looking at the sun. That was very impressive to me as a boy.

I have spent a great deal of time in Louisiana researching African influence in architecture. One of my greatest memories is going out to Melrose Plantation around 1960 and meeting Françoise Mignon [phonetic] who was the man who came to dinner and stayed forever. He was an artist, landscape designer. He turned Melrose Plantation into a huge work of art. Well, Clementine Hunter, probably the most famous African-American artist to come out of Louisiana, was the cook there, and he taught her to paint. She wove beautiful tapestries, fabrics. He turned the place into a magnificent creation devoted to African-American culture and French-Creole tradition on the Cane River in North Louisiana. Not a lot of people realize that on the grounds of Melrose Plantation is a building called the African House, which architectural historians have certified as being the only African influenced major structure in the United States. It's a beautiful structure, one of my favorite Louisiana buildings. I'm so grateful that I had the ability to discover that milieu of people,

part French-white people, part African-American people. They have their own cultural history and family structure there on the Cane River. A lot of people don't realize that, and that's not too far from Rayville and Poverty Point, that I have recently visited again. I love to go up to the Cane River. I think too many people come to Louisiana, go to New Orleans, go to Bourbon Street, and that's about it. They miss the great cultural heritage that the African Americans are part of, out in the countryside of Louisiana. And that meant a lot to my life down there.

[01:49:10]

SR: That's really fascinating. Tell me more about your blog.

GR: I'm so grateful that you give me that opportunity, because, you know, I guess a lot of people look at my blog in a way as "old stuff." You know, so much of what I show now in my blog, my work, goes back to 1960 and earlier. That's kind of old hat for young people. But on the other hand, I love the discovery I made once not too long ago, and that is, if you go back far enough in history, you're going to find the future. This is architecturally, and it may be in many other fields as well. So I'm delighted that here now I have a new art form I'm working with: sound, text, and visuals. And it synergizes everything into this wonderful opportunity to reflect on who are we, where are we from, where are we going, what did we do, what did we learn? I'm sure a lot of people have never thought too much about it. But once they do, it opens up so much. Well, what is this all about anyway, this living condition on earth? What are we doing here, where are we from, and where are we going? Now a lot of people have ideas about it. You hear of the

tunnel of light near-death experience. There's great hope we're going to go on to another life and so on. But the Internet, the blog that I have at night, has given me a chance to pursue that in a number of ways based on my own experience and what I learn on coast-to-coast radio at night, on ancient aliens, at UFO conferences, and at other places, and university venues where people research these questions, and have various answers. I think we're still learning. I love the idea of the holographic universe, of wormholes, of synchronicity. I do believe that there will be space travel in the future, based on wormholes. There's every sign that we're going to expand in the universe. It's very obvious that we're part of reality that is far larger than we've thought of. You know, someone pointed out that if you look at the night sky and you see the stars and realize that around each one of those there is a tremendous group of planets that have the ability to support life like ours, you realize that we're just a small cog in this huge wheel. So I'm very encouraged that at my point in life that I can be part of these questions—not that I have all the answers, but at least I can discuss it.

SR: Well, it's really an honor to be sharing the production of your oral history with you, and it will be exciting to produce something on the Internet that will also incorporate the visual material that you want to share, as well as what we have discussed. So I thank you so much.

GR: Believe me, I'm so grateful, Susan, for the effort that you've brought to this discussion. You've made it possible for me to talk about things I'd never think about talking about. And more than that, it's very exciting to think of the future of our existence, reality, and our existence on this great planet. I have every

belief that in the few years left that I may have, there's going to be some more exciting discoveries that will open up even greater opportunities than we're aware of today.

SR: Thank you again.

GR: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]