Raymond Wheeler interview

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Ray Wheeler

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 1)

EJ: [Tape begins in mid-sentence. The interviewer identifies himself at the end of the tape.] 1996, and we are interviewing Emeritus Professor Ray Wheeler from the Music department to give us some background about himself. Ray, would you start off with telling us your pre-Central activities like being born, and things like that?

RW: February 12, 1930 – Lincoln’s birthday. That’s a good start, I always thought. Born in [Kearney] Nebraska. When I was five or six years old we moved to Wyoming. I lived in Grable, La Grange, Douglas, and Laramie, and I think we moved to Laramie when I was in the seventh grade. That was right – real close to the – WWII was just getting going there. My dad was a music teacher, and I moved to Laramie. I went through the seventh grade through the twelfth grade, went immediately to the University of Wyoming there in Laramie, and after four years there I was Bachelor of Music degree, went back east to the University of Rochester at the Eastman School of Music. I was there long enough to get a Master of Music degree, and immediately went into the US Army. And interviews there – I still remember the interviewer fellow would ask me, “Do you know anything about driving trucks?” And I said, “No, I’m a musician.”

“Ever cooked?”

“No, I’m a musician.”

“Ever typed?”

“No, I’m a musician.”

And after about seven or eight of those he said, “I think I’m getting the message. I think you must be a musician.”

“Yeah, I’m glad you figured that out.”

This was at Fort Riley, Kansas, and they sent – there was a band school there – they sent me over to meet the band director who was a former Sousa trumpet player, as a matter of fact. Anyway, I played for him, and he was glad to see me, and then he immediately put me in the Army Band there at Fort Riley. I was there six months, and the [inaudible] called me in one day and said, “We’ve got an opening for Seventh Army Symphony in Europe. Do you want to go? You got the job if you want it.” Well I had just moved my wife from Laramie down to an apartment off the base – just bought a [inaudible] – I don’t remember what year it was – a Studebaker automobile, and I was set up for it, and I didn’t really want to move. So I turned down a chance to go to Seventh Army Symphony, which was kind of one of those places in your life where who knows what would happen if you’d gone the other way.

Anyway, so a little later a chance came to move to Indianapolis in the Army. I took that because it was a mouthpiece maker there for clarinets who was very well known, and I thought that if I went there and could go out to his place, he could fix me up a mouthpiece and I’d be set for life. Anyway, so we – I and my wife were in Indianapolis for a year and a half, and I got to play for Army Band there most of the time after the Warrant Officer figured out what I was able to do.

Got out of the Army, and immediately moved to Tacoma, Washington and taught nine years at UPS. I was band director, woodwind teacher, music ed person, student teacher observer, etc. And after nine years I
decided that things weren’t active enough in the Band department to be interesting much longer, and I was 34 years old. I figured I was old enough where I could compete for another kind of job. At the same time Dr. Hertz left [inaudible] had a job over here for woodwind person – not a band person, but I thought about it a while and said, “Hey, that’s a good school.” It had a very good reputation in the middle Sixties, and I said, “I’m going to go over and talk to them.”

Came over and talked for a couple of hours with Dr. Hertz one day, and I still remember a couple things that happened that probably got me the job. Hertz was extremely well-known in the Northwest. Terribly active, etc. And my dad, clear back in Laramie, Wyoming knew of Dr. Hertz. And when dad told me that – I told him that I was looking at a job over here, he said, “Now, I want you to remember what a reputation Hertz has. You cross him up, and you won’t be there very long. You better learn that he’s the boss.” [Inaudible – could be “all right.”] I was sitting there talking to Hertz, and I said, “You know, it’s kind of interesting what you just said. My dad knows who the heck you are, and you know what he told me? He says that if you work for Hertz you’ve got to understand who’s the boss or you won’t be around very long.” And I said, “That suits me fine.” I think that’s one of the reasons he hired me.

Anyway, so I came over here and my job was just woodwind teacher, and Bert Chrisianson and I taught all the other things, and nowadays of course we’ve finally got around to doing it the right way and we have a teacher for each of the woodwinds. But Bert and I, we did very well. Kept us very busy, of course. I’d show up at 8:00, 8:30 in the morning and I wouldn’t go home before 4:30 most afternoons, and I’m busy with students all day long – either giving private lessons or having the three or four classes I’ve had each quarter. Anyway, that’s kind of a background.

EJ: That’s very interesting. You say mid-Sixties. Do you remember the particular year?

RW: I came the fall of 1964, and that was just when the new building had just – we’d just got into it. They moved into it spring of the previous year, and the first full year was the year I showed up.

EJ: And were you hired as – what rank?

RW: Assistant.

EJ: Assistant. For historical purposes – see what’s happening to the dollar – do you remember your salary?

RW: Yeah. Six thousand dollars.

EJ: Six thousand dollars.

RW: And it stayed at six thousand for a long time. Would you believe about ten years? Oh, I moved up a hundred or two, but essentially didn’t change at all, and that – if we ever talk about gripes with the school – I, Bob [inaudible – seems to be four syllables – Penario??], Jensen, and Mallard all tell the same story. We came over here and for ten years we got almost nothing in the way of raises, promotions – every one of us were here at least ten years before we got to be Associate. Nowadays some of the new people come in and they’re Associate after about two or three years, they get tenure way ahead of the appropriate time, etc. Anyway, that’s just one of the little things that some of us are not too happy about.

EJ: Those were dry years.

RW: Yeah, the legislature just ignored us terribly.

EJ: And you were with us how many years?
RW:  Sixty-four to December of – thirty years and a quarter. I retired at the end of December, 1994, which was at the start of my 31st year.

EJ:  And what rank were you?

RW:  Ten years, at least – I’ve forgotten exactly – as Assistant, and I think one of the reasons I got promoted to Associate was that the University of Wyoming where I’d originally gone – there were still teachers there that I knew, and they opened up a position similar to what I’m qualified to do, and I was – and they asked if I’d be interested, and I was kind of – you know, kind of good for the ego to have somebody ask if you might be interested. So I go back and talk to them, and they made a few phone calls to Dr. Hertz and said [inaudible] “Tell us about this guy. We think we might be interested.” And Hertz said, “No, you don’t want him. I won’t let him go.” I got promoted a year later, and I think that was the reason for that. And Dr. Haruda was our Chairman when I finally got [inaudible – sounds like “to be full.”] And that was a [inaudible – could be “matter of ten years”], too. Terribly slow promotions.

EJ:  And would you mind telling us what your salary was when you completed your Assistant [inaudible] indication of what kind of change occurred. You started at $6,000.

RW:  Uh – I said no. It must have been in the lower 40’s.

EJ:  So finally got to [inaudible].

RW:  Yeah, I think I must have ended up a little past the middle of the scale for a full professor. But several just thought things were terribly slow.

EJ:  I remember some of your colleagues that you mentioned said they took a loss to come here. Took a long time to make it up.

RW:  Yeah. Central hasn’t done well with the legislature. They consider us – that’s not my problem.

EJ:  What problems do you recall other than salary that occurred? Not necessarily only in your department, but campus-wide, that occurred during this particular period.

RW:  I went through these sample questions that you might be going to ask and tried to remind myself, because it’s pretty easy to forget everything the minute you get out of the game.

EJ:  Certainly.

RW:  Problems? Uh, constant arguing about what merit is and how it should be awarded. They’ll never solve that. To me, it was simply a matter of respecting whoever made the decision, and – uh, yeah – merit, and salary schedule was a terribly – I thought that was awful. I didn’t have any problem at all with Faculty Code. A lot of the people get very interested in that, but my sort of – definitely my own opinion is that we certainly [inaudible – might have been “didn’t] need a faculty code. The faculty understand why they’re hired. I was hired to teach Music. I wasn’t hired to complain about how the President was doing his job, etc. And I understood that, and I accepted it. Like I said earlier, when Hertz said – or somebody – my dad told me that Hertz liked to be the boss, that was no problem for me. I appreciated a boss who was a good leader if I respected that person, and I certainly did with Al [?] Hertz. Same goes for President Garrity. I didn’t worry – some people were no fan of his, but I was 100% for him. [Interviewer tries to say something. His remarks aren’t audible]

We can talk about him, too.

EJ:  He was a clarinetist, too, wasn’t he?
RW: That’s the [inaudible], and there’s a real possibility that – he was from western Colorado and I was
from Laramie, Wyoming. We both went to Denver and took lessons with the same big-named hot
shot. And there’s a very good possibility that I was sitting in the hall waiting for my lesson and he’d been
taking, and come out and we’d crossed paths back when I would have been a sophomore, I think –
freshman in high school. At any rate, the minute he showed up here I made a point of going over and
talking to him, and kind of reviewed some of this. He knew a lot of people I – in Colorado that I knew. So
we were good friends, and I enjoyed his wife very much. I still correspond Christmas cards each year
down in San Francisco, I guess it is. Now, what was your question?

EJ: I just took you off the track there. I would like to get back to – do you remember what the merit
system was under which you were judged?

RW: Very simply, and I think this has to be fact – when I showed up there, merit was a matter of helping
a person’s salary, and it was low. It had nothing to do with merit – you know, I mean – merit means you’re
doing a tremendous job. It was very clear, and it was even said out loud at some meetings, that so and so is
the lowest man on the totem pole but you’ve got to help him out. He gets merit the next year.

EJ: This was at the departmental level?

RW: It was kind of the way we managed it, and Dr. Hertz was a big part of that one. There was another
occasion – I won’t mention his name, but he was one of the older faculty. He took a trip to Europe, and the
next year he came back and he got merit. And we wondered, how could he get merit? He wasn’t here last
year! [Inaudible] – we didn’t think much of the way merit was awarded, etc. I like the idea of merit. I
think there are teachers who do exceptional work and ought to be rewarded or recognized, at least. But I
don’t really feel that it works 100% that way. There’s too many other things – it’s a lot of politics
occasionally.

EJ: Did – did it ever change, near the end of your tenure?

RW: No, I still thought it was politics – pretty much that way – who was buddy with the Chairman, or
Personnel Committee, etc. Uh, yeah – sometimes a person got merit and I thought, yeah, that’s appropriate,
but there were many times I thought, that’s just to equalize salary, or because he’s a buddy with so and so,
and the politics. I didn’t appreciate that.

EJ: Well that’s a very common problem. Why don’t we flip the coin over and see if you can remember
any kind of humorous events that happened in the department or out around the campus.

RW: Philadelphia String Quartet was here a bunch of years ago and started playing a recital in Hertz Hall
when the lights went out. We ended that concert with about five people holding candles on the stage. That
was a little bit that way. Peculiar? I don’t [inaudible].

EJ: It was kind of funny about how you had to set the clock.

RW: Oh, oh, oh – okay. If you think so.

EJ: Well I think it is.

RW: A constant source of disappointment, I guess, would be the fact that the grounds people are – or
whoever’s in charge of that – would take forever to change the clocks around from Daylight Saving back,
or to. Anyway, I finally got tired of that stuff, and I watched them do it one day. And I said to myself, “I
can do that.” So the next time it comes around I got the step ladder and the [sounds like “scooter”] took the
face off, reached behind, twisted the gears, and I – the rest of the department found out – I ended up
changing about 15 clocks in the Music building *instantly*, rather than wait three months for the grounds person to come over and change them.

EJ: You should have got a merit for that.

RW: Yeah, sure. At least a salary. Oh, another thing – you were talking about problems. To me it was a mistake when they threw out that automatic growth raise, or whatever it was called every year.

EJ: Yes. Increments.

RW: That helped me a lot, because they weren’t handing out very – I think I got one merit in thirty years, and I’m sure that I was – worth at least *two*. But anyway, that growth meant that you could plan on $100 or $200 every year, and I thought that’s appropriate. Your experience is such that it – you deserve that. They don’t have that anymore, do they? Or they didn’t several years ago when I was still here.

EJ: My recall was that disappeared.

RW: Yeah. I think so. Anyway, I thought that was bad.

EJ: Do you remember when it happened?

RW: It’s been four, five, six, seven, eight years ago, I think.

EJ: I think so. You mentioned Dr. Garrity as an administrator that you enjoyed, and that happy coincidence of your common background. Do you remember some things about him you particularly liked as an administrator?

RW: I got a story.

EJ: All right.

RW: I – by the way, I liked Dr. Garrity a great deal, and we had a Dean Williams – do you remember him?

EJ: Oh yes.

RW: He was tremendously helpful to the Music department – partly because he liked music, and his son Jerry was a good drummer in our department, so we got a lot of help when we needed it from Dr. Williams, or Dean Williams. Anyway, Garrity was in around at the same time and he was very helpful. There was one instance where I had reason to go over and talk to the President – I don’t know what it was right now, but we were talking about something else and he says, “By the way, I understand you people are asking for four new French horns. And they asked Dean Harrington – or Vice President Harrington to approve it. Well Dr. Harrington doesn’t understand or know a lot about French horns, so he came to me – President Garrity. He [Harrington] says, ‘The Music department wants four French horns, and they cost a fair bit of money - $1000 or so a piece. How long do they last? I mean, if we get them, can we expect to last a long time?’” And Garrity, that smart Aleck, he says, “Oh, about four years.” And hell, they’ll last 15 or 20 years if they’re taken care of. But he told me that story and just giggled like heck how he’d put one on Harrington.

I don’t even know what your question was, but I enjoyed President Garrity a great deal. I thought he was a smooth person. He was so socially very adept. I think his wife is a tremendous person. I was never in a position to understand or knew all the facts about how he managed budget and all those things, and lately –
or afterwards – several years after he’s gone I start hearing, “Well he didn’t do this. He didn’t do that.” I frankly don’t care. I think he was a tremendous prize – a tremendous presence for the college when he was here. I was terribly disappointed and sad when he got sick in Japan and came home and died so soon after. That just made me hurt bad.

EJ: Well you’ve mentioned Dr. Garrity, Williams, and Harrington. Are there any other administrators that stand out to you?

RW: Dave Brown was one. I liked Dave Brown. I thought he was a very honest person. He was not devious in any way. Helpful – I thought a well-rounded person – the right kind of person for that kind of a job. I don’t remember any others right now.

EJ: All right, thank you. You called up a significant number.

RW: I don’t even know who’s the Chairman now. But I know they’re going to – a big mess trying to decide how to reorganized, and I kind of got tuned out of that because I got to retire about when it was happening.

EJ: Well you said you were much more interested in your particular job than in the department.

RW: Yeah. I’m a [inaudible] get in real arguments with a lot of people about that. I think it was just the way I was brought up. I always respected my elders, and I respected the position they had, and I was not what some people call a trouble maker. I liked my job. I thought I was extremely good at that, and that’s what I want to do. I did not want to be the President of the college, or the Dean, or the Chairman, or something like that, and I figured those guys had problems, they were hired to do it, and I wanted them to do it. I didn’t want them to ask me, which is one of my big gripes about Personnel Committees. I was a real sore head in the Music department. I tried my darndest to get Personnel Committee thrown out, and it went nowhere, of course, but that was just my attitude about it. I appreciated people doing what they’re hired to do and other people doing what they’re hired to do.

EJ: Well I think that gives us a pretty good view of your – on relationship between faculty and administrators. Do you have any recall about problems between students and the faculty and/or administration?

RW: One year we had approximately 200 majors, and there’s always one kid that just doesn’t quite get with it somehow or other, and he can find fault with a faculty or two, or three, or four. But if – in the Music department, why, the faculty knows the students real well. It’s not just one teacher knows this student and everybody else, no. I know everybody in the department, or most everybody, and you’d work with them, and so you’d get a good feel for what those people are able to do. If one person started complaining about something all you had to do is say, “I’m having a problem with so and so.” “Oh yeah, I know that kid.” And before long we did – and we probably tried to help the kid, of course – but what I’m saying is that in the Music department the camaraderie [stumbles over the word] – anyway – faculty and students and such, we get along real well, and right now off the top of my head I don’t think of any time when we had a war going on of some kind.

EJ: Probably just important in that department as any – you’ve got to have cooperation in choir, band, orchestra, etc.

RW: Yeah, I just don’t recall any time when – oh, we – we had a lot of griping. The students wanted a student lounge. We didn’t have one set up in the building, and so we kind of had to ignore them a little bit. Eventually Dr. Schultz showed up, and he turned the faculty conference room, as we called it, over to students and it’s a mess now. The furniture – you walk in there chairs are upside down, broken, tables scratched, and it’s just a mess. Um, anyway, if I were still there that would be one of my gripes right now –
come on, let’s straighten the students up. But it was probably – in the Music department our situation itself – we got along well with the students, and that’s one reason we’re fairly successful. Those kids like what we do. They go out, and they send students back for us. Recruiting is quite easy. Well, we work at it, but on the other hand we’ve got an awful lot of help with our students bringing students back.

EJ: Well I think you’ve given us your perception of a lot of the relationships on campus. Do you remember any situation between so-called town and gown, or University/town?

RW: Only lately.

EJ: Only lately. Pole rules, firing athletic coaches, Taco Bell or tacos?

RW: I don’t really – there probably were some, but I don’t recall any right now. Somebody else can review that and remind you of something. I don’t remember anything.

EJ: Were the students being upset about Viet Nam war, and so on? Pretty well over?

RW: That goes back quite a ways, doesn’t it? Sixties and Seventies. We had a big department. In fact, that’s when we grew a lot. Penario was – the faculty was eight or nine people for many years, and Penario was hired, I was hired two years later, and two years after that they started hiring two or three a year, and we suddenly jumped up to almost 20. But that was right in the Viet Nam situation. We a lot of students with long hair, and so-called hippies. It didn’t really change what we did, though. We didn’t get too excited about what they wore or anything – we just kind of [inaudible, sounds like “operated going on.”] I just remembered something else I’d like to put on that page.

EJ: Please.

RW: Again it’s this attitude about boss and doing what you’re hired to do. When I came over here, I didn’t know President Brooks – he was the President – I didn’t know who he was. That’s not my problem. I want to know what goes on in the Music. Purely by chance there was a faculty lunch – the faculty had their big meeting, and we had lunch, and then another meeting – I sat down at Brooks’s table on that little [inaudible]. I didn’t know who the hell he was. Pardon the expression “hell.”

EJ: That’s all right.

RW: I’m retired now, I can get away with that.

EJ: Right.

RW: You know, I sat down with him, and I didn’t know what he was, but after a while, “Hey, what the heck. I’ll bet he is.” And I made some stupid statement like “You’re kind of young, aren’t you?” Because he only could be about two years older than I was. It was light hearted and no problem – he just kind of giggled a little. But later on that same afternoon he spoke to the faculty, and I remember him welcoming all the new faculty, and he said, “We appreciate your input a great deal, but we hope that you will understand that it’s worthwhile to understand which way the wind blows before you get too noisy.” And I thought, now that’s a smart statement, and that suited me fine. But I had kind of wished that statement could be made louder every year my last six, seven, eight years, because we had – new faculty came in, and I thought that their new ideas weren’t as new as they thought they were, and it was kind of a waste of time to hear them go through stuff that we already worked out several years earlier, and it kind of bothered me because I thought, now if you guys would sit back and listen a bit, you’d realize that you’re not really contributing anything right now. And – figure out which way the wind’s blowing before you get too noisy. Anyway, that’s another – [inaudible].
EJ:  Glad you captured it.

RW:  I don’t know if [inaudible] they wanted to know that. I enjoyed him a lot. I just saw him down at the – that seafood place south of town here a couple days ago. We were just shooting the breeze. I always liked Jim. I never called him Jim, by the way. In fact I never called Dr. Hertz – I don’t even know what his first name – Wayne!

EJ:  Wayne.

RW:  I never called him Wayne. He was always Dr. Hertz, it was always Dr. Jay, it was Dean Williams, etc. I never went first name. Maybe it’s just because they were older than I was, I don’t know, but it’s still – just kind of the way I was.

EJ:  Maybe you’re kind of a traditional faculty member.

RW:  Well I don’t know if that’s good or bad.

EJ:  Sometimes it’s pretty good.

RW:  But that’s the way I grew up, and I’m not apologizing for it at all.

EJ:  You mentioned you’re really departmentally oriented. Did you happen to be on any campus-wide committees, to speak of?

RW:  I got the usual first-year appointment onto the Bookstore committee. I pursued that right away, and I think I was on that a couple of years. I’ve forgotten other ones – I was on the Senate for a couple of years. I found that very interesting, too. I was on that two or three years – I’ve forgotten which – and I think that was about all.

EJ:  Shows your department appreciated you by having you represent them.

RW:  Well, I hope so.

EJ:  The campus seemed to have – at least people think so – there was a kind of publish or perish kind of thing in terms of promotion. Do you think that was partly the factor in staying in rank?

RW:  It didn’t help me a lot, and I published more over there than anyone. I’ve got 12 published articles. We haven’t talked about this at all, but my real claim to fame is some research I did in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s using x-ray films to study the inside of my mouth when I’m playing horns.

EJ:  Oh, yes.

RW:  And I found out things that are not what we thought they were, and I published three big articles in big magazines right away, and then one every year, or something like that. So I’ve got 12 published articles. None of those are what I would call a “little” article. They’re all pretty substantive material, and it didn’t help me at all. We didn’t talk about [inaudible] – it was lip service, as far as I’m concerned, but we kept saying that well – having a Doctorate degree or not having it isn’t important, it’s whether you know your business – the music business, your horn, or whatever it is – and we gave lip service to that real hard, but I think it was still operating. But that should have helped me for publish and perish. Nobody else did anything like that over there.
EJ: It was probably those period of years they were focusing very heavily on the Doctorate from someplace high up.

RW: Yeah, maybe. Penario – Composition, you know – he’s a – we call that publication.

EJ: Yes, obviously.

RW: It was obviously research in your area, and then doing something with that research. He’s the only one that comes close to the number of articles or pieces published.

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 2)

RW: [Tape begins mid-sentence] – a few articles, but it’s – the field is so saturated any more, it’s pretty hard to come up with something new. I just lucked out with that thing. Nobody had done that, and it turned out to be terribly important. So I had a good excuse to write, and a good excuse for people to read what I’m writing. But any more it’s pretty hard to come up with something unless you bump into –

EJ: How did you come across that idea?

RW: That’s a long story. When I was in [inaudible – sounds like “Scone”] I gave lessons to a girl [inaudible]. Her father was the head of Radiology in [inaudible] Bridges Hospital in Tacoma, and he was also a clarinet player – very common for medical people to have musical backgrounds, which he did. He was a good clarinet player. Anyway, after the girl’s lesson on oboe he and I would be talking every now and then. I even gave him a few hints. And he one day told me he respects what I do, because I am careful not to talk about things I don’t know about. And I say, what do you mean? He said, “Well I’ve taken lessons with music teachers who say, ‘Now when you do this, by all charts your tongue will do – ’ and something with the anatomy. And a few years after, when I’m out of college and actually working as a medical doctor I think back and went, that guy doesn’t know what he was talking about. He talking about the uvula. He should have been talking about the [inaudible] or something.” In other words, the guy’s talking about things he doesn’t know about, but pretend he knew. Anyway, he says, “You don’t seem to do that.” And I says, “Well, I’m kind of afraid to. If I don’t know what’s going on in there, I don’t – I’m kind of afraid to say that.” Anyway, he respected that, and I said, “It sure would be nice to know that.”

Well, I moved over here and I don’t even remember now what the occasion was that he and I are talking somewhere again – some trip back to Tacoma, I suppose – and he says, “Did you ever think about that stuff we talked about a long time ago, about inside your mouth?” I said, “I think about it all the time, but I don’t have any way of doing it.” He said, “If you ever get interested, let me know because we’ve got the equipment.” “Well good, I’ll check it out.” So sometime later I’d been talking to him and said, “What do you mean?” He says, “Well, what do you have to do? Stand in front of this machine, we’ll turn on a machine – camera film that would record what we’re looking at, and you just play some examples and we can see right in there.” “Oh boy, that sounds good!” I went back a little later and took my clarinet and just stood in front of the machine, and they’re standing out in front – this is a fluoroscope that you use when you want to look at your chest, or something. Anyway, that [inaudible] possession so they could get a picture of this part of my mouth, and I’m playing and they’re [inaudible], “Hey man, look at that! You can sure see that good. Let me try it!” Because two of these guys were also clarinet players, and [inaudible]. Anyway he stood on there and he tongued a little different than I did, and this other doctor – I still remember him saying “Hey, don’t do it that way. That’s not right.” And I’m looking there and you can see the tongue just so clear – you’d see it flop around. And I knew it it’s doing that, but I didn’t know what it was. Anyway, so they fulfilled that occasion. They even let me have the film because they said they were going to do some medical writing and use this for a basis for that.

Anyway, he eventually lost that film, and never wrote the articles either – he got too busy. Anyway, so that was kind of a test to see if it would work. So it was at least a half year later I wrote up some [inaudible] examples not knowing what I’d see at all, and I went back over and I took only clarinet, and we played a
few things – I took these [inaudible] examples, and about half of them were kind of – I didn’t know this, but half of them just sort of duplicated what I’d done in our earlier example, and so out of about a dozen examples, at least half of them had good new – good separate information. Anyway, I came home and looked at that, and the first time I looked at it I had the whole department – faculty – come in and watch [inaudible]. And I hadn’t even seen it yet. I just turned it on and here [inaudible]. And for – I was confused for about three, four minutes because I don’t – everything you’ve read about how clarinet’s played is when you play low notes your tongue’s low in your mouth, you play – etc., and that’s what will affect the wind. Well that’s what [inaudible] was to believe. And I was watching this, and I remember that I had played – written down, you know – and I’m not seeing what I think I’m supposed to see, and so I’m confused. My first reaction is that those – well, when I got the film back I really took – [inaudible] Seattle at a place called City something – a film producing place. I didn’t want to mail that film because it’s too valuable. So I drove over there and said, “You take care of this, because if you lose it you can expect a [inaudible – three syllables] suit. Anyway, they sent it back to me – I’d had them make five copies of each of the film. I’d turned the film on and started watching it, and I can’t believe it – the tongue’s low, it’s supposed to be high. What the heck? And after about halfway through the film I started saying “Well maybe it isn’t what I thought it was, because so far it’s consistent as heck.” The low notes had the tongue high, and the high notes had the tongue low, and that’s the opposite of what it should be. I said, “Well what the heck?” So I told [inaudible], “Hey that was kind of a surprise. That wasn’t what I expected.” And I went home and I wore out one film watching it back and forth – of the five. And after a while I started saying, “Hey, that explains something.” And before long some of the idiosyncrasies of the clarinet – it was just – it all had the same problems, and before long I could explain exactly why some of those problems happened. And I started saying, “Well hey, the world’s got to know about this!” So I – it was only a matter of a month or two later I’ve got an article in the mail to the [sounds like “equipment”] and they took it right now. They didn’t wait on it. Uh, how did I get into this?

EJ:  Well I’d like to ask you – did you use that in teaching, then, later?

RW:  That’s my whole life.

EJ:  Mm-hmm.

RW:  That allows me to analyze problems almost instantly, and I’ve got the right answer. A standard statement when I give clinics showing this film and talking about it is that if students did exactly what their teachers told them to do, they would never learn to play the clarinet. It’s that bad.

EJ:  The individual can determine where the tongue is, right?

RW:  Uh, well –

EJ:  Even though –

RW:  [Inaudible] the details – it would take too long to explain, but somehow we’re misled in what we feel. The sense of when it’s – when my tongue’s low in my mouth I imagine it’s high.

EJ:  Oh, I see.

RW:  And we’re misled somehow or other, and so we’re analyzing wrong what we actually do. Which means when we make a suggestion to [inaudible], we aren’t really helping. They get there in spite of us. Anyway, it’s not that way for me.

I should back up a second. If I were able – well, I was able to go back and do it again, only this time I had an alto sax, bassoon and oboe – just a little bit. But I can do the – I can – sometimes – if I were smart and had the right opportunity I would have taken some job at some big school that had got a medical school
also there, and I’d be in charge of the Doctoral program, and every Doctoral student comes through I would give him a topic and give me about 10 or 15 Doctoral students each studying something – we’d have that thing figured out so good that there’d never need to be any more studying. Anyway, that wasn’t possible, and –

And as a matter of fact, a lot of people aren’t very excited about what I’m telling you. The principal clarinet player of the Philadelphia Orchestra – now that’s big-time. He’s got a drill that improves the playing of all of his students. If they do what he told them to do, they would never learn to play the clarinet. It’s that serious. At any rate, I’ve never talked to him, but I still get letters and phone calls once a month – the latest one is a fellow down at Arizona State who is considering doing something and wants me to and wants me to kind of tell him what the routine’s all about. Anyhow, a lot of people weren’t too excited about this. Why? Because I’m saying things are not what you people think, and you don’t attack the biggest clarinet players in the world and say they don’t know what they’re talking about. I usually butter it up for them so they don’t feel that. I mean, if they – they have their [inaudible] in this, so I was saying the same thing until I had the chance. So some people weren’t too thrilled about this. I wrote a letter just a week ago to a clarinet player – retired clarinet teacher in Denton, Texas who’s in charge of writing our big International Clarinet Society magazine. He made a statement I can’t let go by, so I wrote and told him about it. I’ll get an answer any old day back saying “I don’t agree with you, Wheeler. I’m tired of being lectured by you.”

Anyway, some people do like this, though. The clarinet player at the University of Toronto – Toronto Symphony – that teaches there – Leon Rechnoff, New York State, is one of the biggest names there is in New York City, Gibson down in Texas, John Moley at the University of Michigan, Al Beck [?] University of Michigan, David [inaudible] there have shown the film in all Northwest State International Clarinet Society in Danburg, Flagstaff, Arizona, Chicago, Atlantic City, New Jersey, University of Michigan, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and they were out here. So I – it’s been around, but – a lot of people accept it, but some don’t want to give up.

EJ: I’ve got one other question on that one. Did you find the same general principal for other woodwinds?

RW: Yeah, in a way – the tongue being low for high notes and this or that. But each one is kind of a different story. They picture of an oboe is quite similar to that of bassoon, but for some reason or other the movement from a low note to high note on bassoon the tongue is only a little bit, and oboe is quite a bit. Clarinet and saxophone is a big distance. And so each instrument’s kind of got it’s own pattern, but generally speaking low tongue means high note and the opposite, and that seems to be there. I’ve got it figured out, but I can’t prove this – is that some how or another when you stick something inside your mouth it causes the inside of your mouth to [inaudible] itself differently than if you’d played an instrument out in front of your mouth such as brass instruments or flute. And as a matter of fact they’ve done quite a bit of study with brass instruments – used the same technique I have – but I only know two people who’ve done it for the woodwinds, and the one guy didn’t know what he was doing and he just kind of talked about some things and didn’t publish at all, which makes me mad because we need more people saying what I was saying.

EJ: That seems like a significant contribution. There’s a question in here that have you received any awards or honors. Now I think this would even get to your extra-curricular activities. I mean, all your remarks like that.

RW: Oh, uh – do you want me to talk about that?

EJ: A little bit, yes.

RW: Well I don’t know. I grew up in Wyoming, so – even nowadays Wyoming, if you’re a shooter you aren’t politically incorrect, but when I was in high school as a senior a bunch of my friends were in the
National Guard and they could go out and shoot on a Monday night – they could just shoot on the indoor range all night long if they wanted. I thought that was fun, and dad and I’d antelope – I hunted antelope and got a few, and deer, and birds. But hunting season’s only in the fall, and that’s not very much shooting. These kids were shooting all day long. So I joined the National Guard, just so I could use that shooting range. And it was a tank battalion – I’ll run that through real quick. It was a tank battalion. We went down to Camp Carson and Fort – in Colorado Springs every summer for a couple of weeks, and I was – I learned how to shoot a cannon on a – on a big Serpent [Sherman?] tank. That was fun! Those things are accurate, boy.

Anyway, the second year down there well we had a retreat or a parade review, I guess they called it, and everyone walked by the General standing out in front, and here’s a band leading the bunch. And I said, “I didn’t know we had a band down here.” So I saw a couple – “I know that guy from Wyoming.” We were there from Cheyenne, which was just over the hill from Laramie. So went – after the parade I went around and talked to the guys and said, “I didn’t know you guys had a band. How about that?” Anyway they told their Warrant Officer about the next – or back home. I go to a meeting on a Monday night or whatever it was, and the Captain of the unit called me in one day and says, “You aren’t a member of this group anymore. You’re in the band.”

“What? How come? Can you do that?”

“Yeah, we did it.”

So I – for my last two years of the National Guard I went over to [inaudible] once a week to play in the National Guard band.

Anyway, I started shooting when I was a senior in high school, and the targets were more fun than hunting because you got to do it all day long. And in no time at all the rifle I had was – was [inaudible], and wasn’t suitable for targets at all, so I bought a sort of middle range rifle and did fairly well with it, but never as good as the – you’re supposed to. One day one of the older club members let me use his rifle, and I instantly shot great. About three days later I had my own rifle like his. Anyway I started going to tournaments and uh – the very first match I went to I won one of the matches, and didn’t even enter the other because I didn’t have a – think I had a chance. But in the first – on the south – high school – freshman in college, sophomore in college I was on the University rifle team. First couple of years – at the end of the second year, which would be my sophomore year, actually, in college, I started winning some tournaments around Denver, and I just kept at it over the years. I’ve won tournaments in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington – all the Northwest states except Utah and Nevada and Arizona. I’ve never been down there, or California. I’ve gone to 135 tournaments, and I think it’s a great sport.

I’ll be watching the Olympics next month very carefully because I know two of the fellows on the team – on the rifle teams. I’ll be watching that very closely, and watching to see what kind of publicity they get. I assume they’ll get zero because shooting is an awful thing anymore – politically incorrect and everything. But the people who make those statements don’t know what they’re talking about. I consider very devious. They’re liars, they’re afraid of things that are not true, and it’s just politics of the worst kind. Anyway, I consider it a very admirable sport that’s been around forever. Shooting is one of the oldest sports in the Olympics. Everybody has – there are more people entering in the Olympics in the shooting games than any other sport. Did you know that?

EJ: No, I didn’t.

RW: You’ll never know that because the people will never tell you that. Anyway it’s a – I got hooked up into that, and I enjoyed it a great deal.
EJ: Getting back to Central, you’ve had some children who went to Central and graduated, have you not?

RW: Three daughters.

EJ: Three daughters.

RW: The oldest one only went one year. She got married, and her husband went [inaudible] so that was the end of college for her. But just for the last several years she’s – the husband took off, and so she’s a single mom, and we sent her down to Yakima. She’s a licensed practical nurse. Probably will be a RN nurse soon. So she only went one year here. The second daughter went five years, got her teaching credentials – she’s down in California now teaching in Rhodes School – a pre-school situation after teaching in the public school four or five years in California – education California. And so she was able to start her own school. She’s making out – she’s paying the bills. And the youngest daughter – by the way, all three of them are flute players, because I didn’t want to make reeds for them. Anyway, the youngest daughter went here four years and – Spanish major. Went to Kennewick and taught Spanish over there about four years. Also was a tennis coach and volleyball coach, and assistant basketball coach – she doesn’t know basketball at all. She ended up being a good tennis player. And she married a Hugh Walker whose father used to be the City Manager here in Ellensburg, and Hugh was kind of copying his father – didn’t go to college after school. Went down and worked for Petersen as a machinery – south end of town – and eventually went to the Junior College over at Kennewick. They’ve lived with us for two years while he finished his degree here in City Government, and after that – meanwhile, his – the youngest daughter is teaching Spanish at Kennewick – he went down to Denton, Texas and – excuse me – the Master’s Program in City Government is what it was called, and he finished there two or three years ago, and he’s got a job as Assistant City Manager in Bryan, Texas, which is the same town, or right next to College Station where Texas A & M is. At any rate, so – oh, she – meanwhile she went back and got her RN degree, so she’s a nurse. I’m real proud of her, what she does. She does – she’s the open-heart and intensive care nurse, and all that kind of fancy type of medical mercy. That’s what the three daughters are doing.

EJ: What was their impression of Central? Any one, or all.

RW: Um, too naïve to think bad about it, or good about it. They just went here. It suited them fine. It’s relatively cheap living here, you know, and the – the middle daughter got her education degree – she started as a music major and I talked her out of that. She wanted to be a flute player in an orchestra, and I said there’s no job there. Better do something where you make a living eventually. No, they don’t have any bad feelings about it. And Hugh – he – he’d had classes with Bob Jacobs – you know Jacobs on the other side [inaudible]?

EJ: Mm-hmm.

RW: He liked Bob as a teacher. He said that was good. I don’t recall anyone else he talked about, but he – he got me started on computers, by the way. He had the little desktop that he did things with, and I’d watch him do that and say, “Hey that’s – how’d you do that?” So I eventually got me a computer so I could word process.

EJ: I’ve got one question which may be a puzzler. What have we failed to ask you that you’d like to record?

RW: Well I would love to scramble something terrible, which I’m pretty good at. Well you haven’t really asked me if this is a good school or not – but – you sort of did. I stayed here thirty years, and with my reputation, and my knowledge, and reputation etc. that I got around the country I could have moved, and I didn’t move. I didn’t move because our Music department, I thought, was really one of the best in the Northwest. At one time the University of Oregon, I thought, was competitive. University of Washington isn’t even in the ballgame. They don’t understand what’s going on. And the other schools – we’ve just –
equal or better in many respects. And I used to tell the kids, “We don’t do everything. Over at the University of Washington they’ve got a department of Ethno-Musicology. We don’t do that. And somebody else has this, somebody else has that – we don’t do that. But everything we do, we’re tops. And we cover enough of the field that when you leave here you’re going to be well-prepared to do that.” And obviously we’ve got a lot – we’ve got more teachers out in the state than any of the other schools. We aren’t just a teacher training school. The Music department – we’ve got a lot of that. We’ve also, obviously, got a very good jazz program and a lot of students come here for that reason only. It takes a lot to convince those kids that there’s more to the world than jazz, but – it’s a very well thought of school now in the Northwest, and that’s why I’m still here. Plus Ellensburg – oh, that’s another fine story.

I moved over here in a U-Haul truck and dropped everything off at the little house we were able to find, and a week or two later I came over with my wife, and we were driving in from the south end of town, and let me tell you, the south end of town looks good now. When we rolled in I don’t even think there were sidewalk curbs out there, and the wind was blowing like mad, dusty and everything. We’re driving into town and I said to my wife, “I’ll bet you we aren’t here more than two years, because this looks like the last place I want to live.” Well heck – thirty years later and we’re still here. But they fixed up something here, and the next year they fixed something up, and it’s a pretty darned nice little town now.

And I think about other places – a lot people move after they retire. Where would I go? Well I went to University of Oregon for Doctoral work. I got 90 hours credit down there towards a DMA and then ran out of money – had to come back here. Never got to finish it. Anyway, Eugene was a good town when we lived there. It hardly ever rained, which was very unusual down there. And I thought, “Well that’s not too bad a town. Maybe we’ll move down there.” Portland, that’s a big town. I could do things down there. Nah, I don’t want to live in that big town. Seattle, Tacoma, forget it. I got tired of the rain over there, and I can’t find any town that I like any better than Ellensburg. Now that’s kind of bad, I suppose, but I still think it’s a darned nice little town.

EJ: Well you’re getting more and more agreeing with you, I think, all the time.

RW: Yeah, they’ve all moving here from Seattle now, which has really raised heck with my property taxes. Golly.

EJ: What other thoughts might you have?

RW: Oh, I’ve bored you long enough. It’s a good school. I sometimes think that it’ll survive no matter who’s running it. I haven’t been happy with stuff I read in the paper the last year. These telephone poles – I saw arrogance that I didn’t like on the part of the administration here. I think I’m safe in saying that. I resent quite badly the fact that they built a science building right where it should not be built. If they’d asked me where to go, I could think of lots of places that it would fit nicely. And don’t tell me that the plumbing is such that it can only be built where it is, or the electricity, or whatever. They’ve ruined the best parking places on campus for all kinds of things besides music, and what’s that going to do to parking around there? It’s already impossible. You’ve got to park five blocks down the street to even walk Canal. Before long you probably won’t even able – the downtown people will be driving because students park down there. That was a big mistake, and I think whoever was in charge of planning that didn’t get very good advice before they started it. Once it gets started around this place it’s pretty hard to stop it, I think. Anyway that’s kind of a sore point.

I didn’t care about those poles, but the first time I saw one I couldn’t believe it. I thought “What the heck is that?” And then it was no time at all before the whole town was raising heck. That, and the parking, and the building the science building – I think that’s going to cause people to be mad about the college for years.

EJ: Could I ask Ham Howard, our cameraman, if he has a question?
HH: No, I think he’s covered pretty well. Rambled it pretty well.

RW: Now you make sure you edit it and throw three fourths of that out!

HH: No, we won’t.

EJ: We [inaudible], and we’ve been interviewing Ray Wheeler, emeritus Professor of Music here. Your interviewer has been Eldon Jacobson, and I’ve mentioned Ham Howard, our cameraman.

RW: I’d add one more thing.

EJ: Okay.

RW: I still play in the Yakima Symphony. I started playing that one year before I retired because I thought that might be the only chance I’d get to keep playing my horn, and it’s a good orchestra because all the winds are from the Central faculty. So it’s a good, [inaudible] situation there. I’m also playing jazz tenor sax in a 14 piece band in Yakima called Sophisticated Swing. They play everything from 1940s up to nowadays, and that’s fun. So I still get to do some playing. Other than that, I’m retired.

EJ: Well I’m very glad you added that.

[End of tape]