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Oral history interview with Val Laigo, 1989
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Val M. Laigo on July 12, 1989. The interview was conducted by Alan Lau and Kazuko Nakane for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

VAL LAIGO: --this worry, suffering, everything else. And it used to come out in my crucifixions. And so I did series of crucifixions because to sort of, I guess they were sort of a means of exorcising--

ALAN LAU: A catharsis.

MR. LAIGO:--your demons. Well, yeah, they were a catharsis, you know. Whenever I'd commit a mortal sin, you know, that I thought was a mortal sin, I couldn't get to confession soon enough. Sometimes I'd even go to the chancery or look for a priest and ask him if he'd give me confession right then and there. And I drove the poor priests crazy. But when I did my mural at Seattle U I had to do a lot of research and doing my research I discovered that I was praying to the god of the Jews. The god of the Jews is very vindictive.

MR. LAU: You have--

MR. LAIGO: Vindictive.

MR. LAU: Vindictive. It's revenge.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: And you had the one panel for God, a real large panel there.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. So my god, as the mural evolved--and I'll show you reproductions of it; I'll show you even the copy of the [inaudible] I made for it--

[Interruption.]

MR. LAU: Well, let's start, let's go backwards. When did you--as a child I guess you painted a lot because Dorothy was saying that you were so good in art in school that she got an inferiority complex because everybody said, "well, why can't you draw like Sonny."

MR. LAIGO: Well, I got an inferiority complex because I was so dumb.

MR. LAU: She got straight A's?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, that's right. We both had what you call mutually paradoxical inferiority complexes.

MR. LAU: But you were a whiz at art, right?

MR. LAIGO: Well, that's--

MR. LAU: At school.

MR. LAIGO: It depends on who was--

MR. LAU: Teaching?

MR. LAIGO:--thinking it, but they did have me do a lot of art and I remember my memories of art were at Maryknoll, for example. See, Maryknoll was taught by the Maryknoll nuns and they did have a strong program in art and I did learn watercolors. There was a Sister Ephram that taught us how to paint with watercolor and how to, you know, to delineate things and so I remember painting the northwest scenes, you know, mountains and trees and things like that at a very young age. And so I--and then I remember also one time when they had me, there was a story of Silas Marner in which they had, the sister wanted to depict a roast lamb or a roast mutton over a fireplace, you know, with the drippings. And I could taste the darn thing. And I was, I mean, I was, you know, I lived what I was painting. I mean, actually I drew it with chalk on the blackboard.

MR. LAU: How old were you then?

MR. LAIGO: I was about, I was in about the sixth grade so whatever age you're supposed to be in the sixth grade. No, yeah, I was about in sixth grade.

MR. LAU: About 11, about 10 or 11?

MR. LAIGO: Ten or eleven. Just before World War II broke out. Because see, in 1941 I was still at Maryknoll.

[Interruption.]

MR. LAIGO: Let's see, where were we?

MR. LAU: You were doing the mutton, Silas Marner.

MR. LAIGO: Okay, so I was doing Silas Marner and this mutton.

MR. LAU: When you were about 11.

MR. LAIGO: And I was about 11 doing this mutton, the drippings falling into the fireplace. And I recall that very vividly. That's one of the vivid memories. But I have an earlier memory of my art work and that was when I had an appendectomy. I had an appendectomy. I had acute--

MR. LAU: Appendicitis?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, acute appendicitis at six years old, just before my father died. Maybe I was five years old or six years old. And I remember that it happened at Providence Hospital. They took me up there and I remember them giving me ether. Oh, that was a horrible experience. Ether goes, it's like--

MR. LAU: It takes a while.

MR. LAIGO: It was just like you see this thing, you know. It was not like the anesthetics we have today. And then they put me under ether and I had my appendectomy. And then in those days appendectomies were large gashes, so I had a large gash halfway across my stomach like a Caesarian operation or something like that. And nowadays they can do it with a small, fairly small cut. Anyway, while I was convalescing my mother brought me a big box full of crayons. They were the same good crayons that they're still making today. What's that yellow, that brand in the yellow box?

MR. LAU: I don't remember.

MR. LAIGO: Well, we'll remember sooner or later. They're the famous brand. Anyway, Crayolas. And they had something like 34 colors or something like that, you know.

MR. LAU: Oh, yeah, the deluxe set.

MR. LAIGO: The deluxe set, you know. And she got me a coloring book. And my sister was very jealous.

MR. LAU: Which one, Dorothy?

MR. LAIGO: Dorothy. She was the only one. It was just Dorothy and me at that time. Jerry was still a baby. And anyway, she wanted to use my crayons and I wouldn't let her. And here I was playing the role of convalescing, you know, invalid and all that sort of stuff to the hilt. And maybe that's why she started to develop a subtle hatred for me as well as art. I'm just kidding. But anyway, and that's why I started. And then my mother started showing me how to use crayons to create, get shading.

MR. LAU: Your mother was an artist, right?

MR. LAIGO: Oh, that's her painting right there. Yeah.

MR. LAU: Yeah, we have to ask about that later.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, and the one above it is my brother. I fished that out of a garbage can. He did that in crayon and so I sprayed it. It was on newsprint. I sprayed it on both sides with fixative. That's my brother Ed. He's the one that has a business in Los Angeles that they do these mirrors and they create art on the mirrors.

MR. LAU: Oh.

MR. LAIGO: And then that's a piece by what's his name, Perry Acker, a watercolor by Perry Acker.

MR. LAU: Oh, yeah.

MR. LAIGO: And then this is something we got from the white, what was it?

MR. LAU: White elephant sale?

MR. LAIGO: No, no, no, no.

MR. LAU: [Inaudible] auction?

MR. LAIGO: No, no. No, no, we got it at Foster White Gallery when Mr. White was the only owner at the time and David Mendoza was running it.

MR. LAU: He was your cousin?

MR. LAIGO: My cousin. He's my--see, his father and my father were first cousins because their mothers were sisters.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: Okay. That's how it goes. In fact, that's how Fred Mendoza gets into the picture, too, who is a lawyer. He's the one that was doing the thing for Michael Stafford.

MR. LAU: Oh, yeah. David was helping and then he got his dad to do the legal.

MR. LAIGO: No, his brother.

MR. LAU: Oh, it's his brother.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. His dad is dead.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. And anyway--

[Interruption.]

MR. LAU: So did you feel that you had a natural talent for painting?

MR. LAIGO: It's not that. I had a, it was a necessity.

MR. LAU: A necessity.

MR. LAIGO: You see, my problem was this. I have a heart condition.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: I was born with a condition called Eisenmenger's Complex, which is a hole between both chambers. As a result, I get nothing but polluted blood every time it pumps. But according to my doctor, I'm the oldest living example that he knows of in the United States.

MR. LAU: Well, you almost died because of it.

MR. LAIGO: Yes, because a bacteria eventually got into my brain and--got into my brain and caused this thing that happened. And so that created an abscess and that's what gave me my stroke. A seizure actually is what it was.

MR. LAU: Right. Well, after you got out of high school--

MR. LAIGO: In high school--let me show you what I did. In high school I was, back in 1941 I was a dishwasher at the New Washington Hotel. I was so short they had to put me on a pedestal. The New Washington Hotel is where the--

MR. LAU: I think I heard this story before. Didn't they do that when they did the Filipino oral history thing on stage?

MR. LAIGO: I don't know. I wasn't there.

MR. LAU: Oh, okay.

MR. LAIGO: Or if I was there I've forgotten. No, I wanted to show you this because, like I said, I did all these sort of things. I did this. They had a school paper too, and I used to knock out an athletic thing that was similar to one that was being syndicated nationally by a professional. And Tom Tooley was my counterpart at Seattle Prep, who died in an unfortunate car accident years later. I got to meet him in college. He was a swell guy. I did things like this, you see.

MR. LAU: Yeah, they used to have those in newspapers.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: The sports figure, and have--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, and then--

MR. LAU: Have the statistics and--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, and that was what I was emulating, you see. And so--

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. LAIGO: When you want to find something--

MR. LAU: You'll find it after we leave.

MR. LAIGO: Well, it's in this book. It's got to be in this book. It hasn't left after all these years. It's got to be here. I mean, you can't have just--

MR. LAU: Maybe it's in your college yearbook.

MR. LAIGO: No, no, it's got to be in my high school yearbook. Here it is. Popularity poll. The most popular--

MR. LAU: Oh, hey, you're there.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Why? The most popular athlete, the most popular non-athlete. I knew all my peers couldn't stand my guts because I was just too much, so I made friends with all the underclassmen. I became friends with all the kids that were freshmen. I became a friend of the masses and they voted me in as the most popular non-athlete.

MR. LAU: I didn't know they had that category.

MR. LAIGO: There was none. I created it. I created it, just like I created the wolverine, the choice of the wolverines for Highline High School. The kids, they wanted to have a logo for Highline. I was teaching there. The first year that they--and so I started campaigning for wolverines because I thought a wolverine is a terrific animal. And that's why they were called the Wolverines. But anyway, so I--

MR. LAU: Well, Sonny Laigo, most popular non-athlete.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, non-athlete.

MR. LAU: Well, tell me--

MR. LAIGO: That means regular person, right?

MR. LAU: Yeah. Civilian.

MR. LAIGO: What I'm trying to say is that you don't have to be an athlete to be somebody. See, because in those days--

MR. LAU: Sports were it.

MR. LAIGO: Sports has always been it, you see. And yet, at this very same time I was the coach at the Immaculate Grade School and my team took the city championship twice.

MR. LAU: You were a coach when you were in high school?

MR. LAIGO: I was a coach in high school.

MR. LAU: Oh, you were?

MR. LAIGO: Of Immaculate Grade School. And a lot of these kids went on to become stars at Seattle Prep and O'Dea.

MR. LAU: Was that your part-time job?

MR. LAIGO: That was my part-time insanity, because I was working also at the Ranier Club as a pantryman.

MR. LAU: Pantryman?

MR. LAIGO: Making salads and sandwiches.

MR. LAU: Yes, I heard the story. They used your life story in this Filipino oral history.

MR. LAIGO: You've got a good memory.

MR. LAU: Yeah, I remember that.

MR. LAIGO: See, I have a poor memory.

MR. LAU: [Inaudible] did your part.

MR. LAIGO: [Inaudible.]

MR. LAU: He must have given the stuff to Fred, I think. That's what it was.

MR. LAIGO: Well, Fred knows my history backwards, forwards and sideways. See, because I met Fred. Fred was from California.

MR. LAU: Stockton, right?

MR. LAIGO: From Stockton. And anyway, we of course met as freshmen at Seattle University. And he was a Filipino, I was a Filipino. I introduced myself, which is usually the case. I'm a very extroverted individual, as you can tell. And the thing is, so we became friends. And I said, "I'd like you to meet my sister one of these days."

MR. LAU: You're responsible for that?

MR. LAIGO: So I introduced him to my sister Dorothy and that's what happened. And things happened after that.

MR. LAU: Quickly, yeah. So what did you want to do when you got out of high school, did you want to be an artist or what was your direction?

MR. LAIGO: No, I wanted to be a singer.

MR. LAU: You did?

MR. LAIGO: I was actually singing for an orchestra called the Gentlemen of Rhythm. And the head of the orchestra was called, was Ray Sadirius. They were playing things like Glenn Miller plays, you know.

MR. LAU: Oh, okay.

MR. LAIGO: You know. They were playing that sort of stuff, big band stuff.

MR. LAU: *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree*, stuff like that?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. And I used to sing that stuff. In fact, it all started at the Traynon, which is now a liquor store. But one day there was an all-city dance and a bunch of guys took me and put me up on top of the stage and said, "Sonny Laigo can sing." Because it was a chance for, you know, to show off their school.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: Because other guys had gone up there and sung. So they put me, they grabbed me bodily and stuck me up there. And here I was in front of all these people and so I started singing. But I had been singing already at the Filipino Catholic Youth Activities things already.

MR. LAU: Hey, that's a good way to attract girls, right?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. But I was also interested in art. I found out art later on--see, I loved singing but I found

singing a dead end for two reasons. I was too dumb or too lazy to learn how to read music. In fact, my mother gave me a violin when I was about six years old or five years old or three years old, somewhere around there, and I smashed it. And that was the end of my violinist career.

MR. LAU: Well, were you around long enough to know some of the people that were playing about that time, like--

MR. LAIGO: Quincy Jones.

MR. LAU:--Blackwell and Quincy Jones?

MR. LAIGO: Quincy Jones used to play for our dances and the name of the orchestra was Oscar Holden's Orchestra. Oscar Holden, who used to be all-state basketball player for Garfield and later on went to play basketball first string for Seattle University. But Quincy Jones was in that orchestra and he was a tremendous, fabulous trumpeter. Can you image what a good orchestra we had?

MR. LAU: I bet.

MR. LAIGO: With Quincy up there and all the other guys keeping up with him. Oh, boy, it was great.

MR. LAU: So you were singing like, it must be like '49, '50?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. In fact, I sang on the radio. I used to sing on the KOL and I even sang on KING Television, K-I-N-G, with Art Bardeen and his trio. And also, who's the guy that's the Scandinavian? What's his name?

MR. LAU: Oh, it must be Arthur Godfrey.

MR. LAIGO: No, no. The Scandinavian fellow. He and I were on a program together too.

MR. LAU: Before my time.

MR. LAIGO: But Dorothy will remember.

MR. LAU: Were you painting at the same time you were doing this?

MR. LAIGO: No.

MR. LAU: Or you didn't have time?

MR. LAIGO: I didn't even, I didn't even understand painting until I got to college and then I started taking art classes.

MR. LAU: You started painting professionally in '52, was it?

MR. LAIGO: No, in '51.

MR. LAU: In '51.

MR. LAIGO: But I started my art, I started painting seriously sometime around 19--when I was 16 I was still in high school. Among all the other things I was doing, I was started--later on I ran a newspaper called *Oriental*.

MR. LAU: You did everything, didn't you?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Well, and then Fred Cordova came on it with me and he became the editor. And we did a magazine called *Bamboo* and we took an award for the best design. And Mits Katayama was one of the guys--

MR. LAU: Designers?

MR. LAIGO: One of the designers that chose, was on the choosing committee.

MR. LAU: Oh, well, that's good. That's high praise.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. People like that. Rudy Bundis and guys like that. They were in--I've got, you know, the stuff to prove it upstairs. But, I mean, I don't have to prove nothing. I just, if you believe it, you believe it. If you don't believe it--

MR. LAU: So during your singing career you were just, you probably were coming home 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning and--

MR. LAIGO: No, I just sang, you know, until about 12:00 or until the buses--

MR. LAU: Oh, stopped running?

MR. LAIGO: Stopped running, you know. Because it wasn't always, you know. It was just--usually dances in those days were just on Friday or Saturday. That was it. It wasn't like nowadays, you know. And I had no car. I never bought a car until I got my first job as a teacher after I graduated from college.

MR. LAU: Well, in those days I don't think everybody had a car.

MR. LAIGO: My brothers had cars before I did. They were all younger than I. All of them did.

MR. LAU: So what kind of direction did you get in your art when you got into college? What good influences kind of--

MR. LAIGO: Well, the first--

MR. LAU:--channeled you in that direction?

MR. LAIGO: The first things that happened was my feelings against the--it was unconscious. Like the thing that [inaudible] has, a thing called [inaudible] well, when I did that work he was my design teacher, Doug Bennett. He's the one that did the art work of Columbus for the, on the waterfront by the--

MR. LAU: Oh, yeah.

MR. LAIGO: By the, for the Italian community.

MR. LAU: The sculpture.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, in bronze. And he told me in those days, he looked at it and he says, "Hey, Sonny." He says, "this is really powerful. This is really powerful." He says, I don't know, the equivalent of wild in those days, you know. I said, "should I tame it down?" And he says, "no." He says, "you don't tame it down." He says, "it's like a wild horse." He says, "you learn. You'll kill the spirit if you tame it down." He says, "why don't you ride it." And so I started learning to ride a--

MR. LAU: And he was one of your first influences?

MR. LAIGO: He was one of my first influences.

MR. LAU: Good--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, good influences in composition and design. Doug Bennett, and he was with Kal Chin. Kal Chin was a damn good designer and he was, Kal Chin was the guy that was really doing all the stuff for him.

MR. LAU: Oh, mm-hmm.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, Kal Chin was the talent behind the--

MR. LAU: The workhorse.

MR. LAIGO: Or the workhorse behind Doug Bennett.

MR. LAU: The name was Doug Bennett.

MR. LAIGO: The name was Anglo-Saxon. But Doug Bennett was good, too. He was, had been an Air Force pilot and I admired him very much. I liked Doug too, but I haven't seen Doug for--wasn't Doug-Kal Chin. Kal Chin, the artist.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. There's a lot of Chins, you know.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: After a while you get confused. By the way, is Au Chinese, Japanese?

MR. LAU: Au?

MR. LAIGO: Lau.

MR. LAU: Yeah, I'm Chinese.

MR. LAIGO: Chinese.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: Lau, okay. That's it. I wasn't sure.

MR. LAU: You might be Chinese too, you know.

MR. LAIGO: Well, I could be possibly. Because I had a student years ago named Lau but he was from--and that's why I got confused.

MR. LAU: Right.

MR. LAIGO: When we talked one time, because he was from Hawaii.

MR. LAU: Oh, I see.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: I think you asked me once about this boy, right.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. You were having a show at the--

MR. LAU: Francine.

MR. LAIGO: The Francine.

MR. LAU: And you very politely sent your son as an emissary. "I represent Val Laigo and I'd just like to say that he couldn't come." He was a good representative.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, I probably couldn't. I really couldn't. I was probably sick as hell.

MR. LAU: Well, that was very polite of you. I was quite impressed.

MR. LAIGO: Well, anyway, he's doing--he just got himself an agent. Or at least he got an agent yesterday that has accepted to be his agent.

MR. LAU: For writing or--

MR. LAIGO: No, he's an actor.

MR. LAU: Oh.

MR. LAIGO: He got his master's all on scholarship at NYU.

MR. LAU: Oh, great.

MR. LAIGO: He had two choices: NYU or Juilliard. See, UW had rejected him three times so he started scouting around the country and finally wound up getting offers from NYU and Juilliard.

MR. LAU: Well, he got better offers then. I mean, it probably turned out better he went there.

MR. LAIGO: Well, yeah. And the night, the day that he was supposed to give his decision he was pulling out his hair practically. He says, "Dad, what am I going to do?" He says, "Juilliard and NYU both are offering me and they want it by today at 5:00." Five o'clock our time, you see. And I said, "it's up to you." And I said, "what does Juilliard, how far does Juilliard go?" He says, "well, they give you a bachelor's degree. That's the highest they go." He says, "well, I've already got my bachelor's from Seattle U." I says, "how about NYU?" He says, "that's a master's program. It's three years." And it's all by attrition. In other words, you make it the first time, you get a chance for a second shot and so on. He made it for three years.

MR. LAU: Great.

MR. LAIGO: And he made it and then he toured the country with the acting company, which is an extension of the Lincoln Center from New York, the traveling extension of the Lincoln Center. Or is it Kennedy Center? I

keep forgetting; Kennedy, Lincoln.

MR. LAU: Well, they're both equally impressive.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. So and then he couldn't get a renewal on his contract so he spent a year working as a waiter at the Russian Tea Room.

MR. LAU: In town?

MR. LAIGO: No, there in New York City.

MR. LAU: Oh, okay.

MR. LAIGO: And then they wanted him back but he decided to wanted to come back here for a while and then scout things out here and [inaudible].

MR. LAU: Well, people have got to go to L.A., I guess.

MR. LAIGO: Well, he says--

MR. LAU: I don't know how much acting jobs there are in Seattle.

MR. LAIGO: Well, I guess--

MR. LAU: Well, theater, yeah, if he's going to be in plays.

MR. LAIGO: He's willing to go into anything, see, because he wants to learn all he can. Just like he said, like he was reading about Sir Laurence Olivier yesterday who said that he used to look down his nose, he was snobbish about filmmaking until he learned from one of the producers or film directors that film also is an art form and that you can perfect it so that you can become great in that too. And so he says, "and so I humbly subjected myself to learning the craft of filmmaking, which was totally different." And Rene has had the experience of projecting himself on stage. Now he's looking forward to the other possibilities. And his agent likes him because, she'll take him because he has a chance to not only--he has the ability to project himself in terms of the stage but at the same time he can possibly work himself into film, you see. But with guys that have just worked with film, it's very hard for them to go the other way.

MR. LAU: Yeah, I think stage is a good foundation.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, it is.

MR. LAU: Well, what did you do, did you continue painting at the university?

MR. LAIGO: Well, yeah. So I just went through the regular courses at Seattle U, but as I was going through those courses I started wanting to become professional. I joined Artist Equity in 1951 or thereabouts, and you know some of the people that were in Artist Equity at the time were Paul Horiuchi, James Washington, Dick Kirsten, a whole host of others. And I joined Artist Equity at that time, way back in the '50s. And my first work appeared, my Madonna which I'm going to show you--

MR. LAU: The Seattle Art Museum, right?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, at the Seattle Art Museum. And I have a painting that fell on the floor in the other room that was hanging up on the wall.

MR. LAU: But it jumped.

MR. LAIGO: About two months ago it fell down. It had been up there for about eight years and fell down. It's the same size as my other painting that I did for Boeing, which is six feet by eight feet.

MR. LAU: Well, what other--tell us about some of the other artists you started meeting.

MR. LAIGO: Well, I started--

MR. LAU: After you graduated from Seattle U. Did you start--

MR. LAIGO: I met lots of artists. Frank Okada and John Matsudaira, of course. And John's been a good friend for many years. In fact, we went to the same grade school together. In fact, John was on Maryknoll's city basketball championship team when they won way back in 1930, God knows when, in those days when I was still at Maryknoll. So, and then I got to meet, oh, I got to meet lots of artists through the years. I mean, so many

artists. The artists that I've met are just like the students I've met.

MR. LAU: It seems like in the '50s and '60s artists in Seattle knew each other.

MR. LAIGO: Oh, we knew each other.

MR. LAU: And got together a lot.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, we did. I knew Walter Froelich and I knew, I know Rudy Bundis and I know--I used to belong to a Puget Sound group of northwest painters but I had to quit for two reasons. First of all, their meetings were always on a Tuesday, I think. Secondly, they always have, your dues are always a painting. Well, I couldn't keep up with that painting a year. But also, whenever they had a meeting, which was only once a month, the meeting was preceded by happy hour and by the time you got around to the meeting everybody was about wiped out, you know.

MR. LAU: Oh, lots of drinks and food, yes.

MR. LAIGO: Happy hour.

MR. LAU: A big feast, yes.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LAU: Well, you had--

MR. LAIGO: It was all men.

MR. LAU: You had your first show at the furniture store, didn't you?

MR. LAIGO: I had, I guess so, somewhere.

MR. LAU: Well, we've got it here in the files.

MR. LAIGO: Probably so. At the People's.

MR. LAU: People's Furniture Store. How did that come about?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, I was surprised. Well, I approached the people and I asked them, "I have some paintings I'd like to, if you'd like to have me show my stuff I'd like to show there." But eventually I eventually wound up showing my first major show after I had become a professional was with Fay Chong. I wanted to--I knew Fay very well, you know, and so I felt confidence in him and he was such a nice man. And so I told Fay, I said, "Fay, would you be humble enough to show, to be willing to show, have a two-man show with me at the Hathaway House?" He says, "Sure, Val."

MR. LAU: Oh, yeah, we have the flier for that somewhere.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: A copy of it.

MR. LAIGO: Oh, good.

MS. NAKANE: It's in Fay's file.

MR. LAU: It's in Fay's file. Sorry.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. And Fay was wonderful.

MR. LAU: And that was after the People's Furniture show?

MR. LAIGO: I think so. Because I used to have shows, I used to go--

MR. LAU: It seemed like you were showing actively--

MR. LAIGO: All the time.

MR. LAU:--from like '52 to about '69, and then there was a blank space.

MR. LAIGO: Well, yeah.

MR. LAU: You were submitting to all the annual and to the Puyallup and all those things.

MR. LAIGO: And then I got tired of the whole show. Well, first--

MR. LAU: Then the gallery scene came on strong in Seattle.

MR. LAIGO: The gallery scene came on strong. Zoe Dusanne became my agent and then she died.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: And when she died--this is a side story. I don't know if I should tell you. It's all lies, everything you say here is lies. My [inaudible].

MR. LAU: Art is like food.

MR. LAIGO: Boy, oh, boy, young artist's work makes viewers think. Oh, well, I like them to think. I hope they still think. I still like, for example, my next show coming up. I'm going to have some of my paintings wrapped in plastic, hanging wrapped in plastic.

MR. LAU: Well, I think people will think about that for sure.

MS. NAKANE: Wrapped [inaudible]?

MR. LAIGO: No, plastic. Just the plastic that the framer uses to protect them. You'll see it. I'll show you. I've got one, I've completed one in the back room and I'm working on another one right now. See, I'm working several shots. I'm working on my first piece of computer art. I never had done a piece of computer art in my life.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: But I was, you know, I called up this friend of mine and I said, well, I was talking to this fellow and he says, "why don't you call up Bill Ritchie."

MR. LAU: Yeah, right. He's known for that.

MR. LAIGO: And Bill Ritchie is, Bill Ritchie, I had not remembered Bill Ritchie. I says, "do I know you, Bill?" And he says, "yeah." He says, "you and I juried together on several shows." I says, "is that right?" You know, and he says, "yeah." And I said, "well, I've been told to ask you for some advice." And he said, "Well, I'll try to help you." And he said--so I started telling him what I had planned in my show. He said, "Val," he says, "you know, if you're going to have a show you should have something different also." I said, "like what?" He says, "computer art." I said, "computer art? The only computer I ever dealt with was my, the one that I add my grocery bills with, you know." And he says, "well." I says, "how do you go about it?" He says, "I don't know. You should start calling around." So I started calling here, there and everywhere.

MR. LAU: I think he's being modest. He does know.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. But he's too busy.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: He's got his own project that is going, see.

MR. LAU: Right. He's quite a specialist in computer.

MR. LAIGO: And so therefore I got a hold of Seattle U and then finally I got a hold of this Dr. Eichmann, David Eichmann, and told him about the situation. And he said, "have you ever heard of MacPaint?" I says, "now I have." And he said, "why don't you come down here and we'll talk about it."

MR. LAU: Apple computers.

MR. LAIGO: Yes. And then I said, "well, how do you begin?" He says, "well, let me look in this catalog." And he looked in the catalog and he says, "next Tuesday there's going to be a two-hour seminar." Not a seminar but just an explanation on how to use an Apple computer. And he says, "you can use MacPaint disk if you want." And it was for faculty and staff. And since they haven't fired me at Seattle U I'm still, technically I'm still faculty.

So I said, so I went down there and he said it's up on the sixth floor. And so I went up to the sixth floor and he says, "speak to this Ms. Grimes." So I got in the elevator and there was this lady looking out the window at the

Cascade Mountains and I said, "excuse me, do you know where I can find a Ms. Grimes?" She says, "I'm Ms. Grimes." I said, "I'd like to know if I could sign up for this course, for this lecture or whatever it is for Apple computers." And she said, "Sure." She signed me up right just then. And then that next Tuesday within an hour I learned how to use a mouse and all that sort of stuff. I lost a whole bunch of them, a lot of pictures, but at the same time I learned.

MR. LAU: Sure.

MR. LAIGO: And so I produced, I have now produced my first work of art, computer art, which is at a printer. But he has to still take one more shot of a plate. But the guy went on vacation and he won't be back until Friday, like I said.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: So there's nothing. So that's on hold. But that piece is called--what is it called? It's called not *Metamorphosis*. *Evolution*. I [inaudible] called *Evolution*. It's called--anyway, it's called something.

MR. LAU: Yeah, it probably is.

MR. LAIGO: And so it's--I took it from--I had a lot of fun. And then I got really excited so I finally called the head of the art, of the computer software, computer sciences department, who is Dr. Everett Mills, and I asked him out to lunch and I started talking to him. I told him that I was interested in computer art and maybe we could talk about computer art one of these days. If and when I get my first piece completed I'd like to show it to him. He says, "oh, good, that would be fine." I'm still waiting for that first piece. It's been about three weeks now, three or four weeks.

MR. LAU: Well, let me take you back in the space capsule.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Yeah, you better. You've got to control this. I'm a -

MR. LAU: Yeah, okay. How is the chronology working? You had your first show at the People's Furniture and what was the response? Do you remember at all?

MR. LAIGO: No.

MR. LAU: And how about the show at the Hathaway House with Fay?

MR. LAIGO: Oh, the Hathaway House was fairly successful. I mean, by my standards. I sold quite a few paintings. Don't ask me how many, because I have no records.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: But I sold, I mean, I sold a few paintings. I sold quite a few of my paintings.

MR. LAU: When did you go to Mexico City? Where does that fit in?

MR. LAIGO: Mexico City is a very interesting thing. Mexico--that's my wife, a photograph of my wife, and it's a picture that was taken of her when she was in her office. And they took a snapshot of her and there was one that she wanted them to throw away. Well, anyway, my wife is actually, she started off as a nurse in Mexico and she became the head nurse of the children's ward in Mexico City at Hospital Infantil, which is the children's hospital in Mexico City, which is run by the, supported by the Shriners. And then later on my wife was sent to Europe to study midwifery, to England. So she had to learn her English. And she went to England and she learned midwifery and she got a degree in midwifery and became a midwife. So she now had been a head nurse at a major hospital in Mexico City and then she became a midwife and went back to Mexico again. And then they now were looking for someone to go to study medical records and--

MR. LAU: You met her in Mexico?

MR. LAIGO: No. She had several, she had two options, to go to--[inaudible] were you offered to go to Sao Paulo?

MRS. LAIGO: To Brazil. They didn't specify because I said no.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, she was offered Brazil or Seattle. And so she asked some of the doctors whom she knew very well in the hospital, "what's the best place to go?" And a lot of them said, "Seattle's a good place to go. Go to Seattle." So she came to Seattle and when she was here in Seattle she went, she was studying at Providence Hospital under Sister Peter Oliviant, a French-Canadian nun. And anyway, she was--her picture was seen in the newspaper by a woman named Mrs. Fabico, who is married--she is a Mexican married to a Filipino. And she was

so excited to see this other Mexican, she invited my wife to her home and started inviting her regularly to her home for dinners and things like that. Well, one evening she invited my wife to a--by this time I had already discovered the Mexican muralists independently.

MR. LAU: What year was this?

MR. LAIGO: Back in about 19--see, I was teaching, I started teaching in the Highline school district in 1954.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: And '54 I taught at Puget Sound Junior High School. In 1955 I was sent with a group to become the first class--of the class of everybody in high school. So anyway, where am I going?

MR. LAU: We're trying to find out how you got to Mexico.

MR. LAIGO: Anyway, so therefore--

MR. LAU: You got into the muralists.

MR. LAIGO: So I started, so at that time I was already planning to go to Mexico and so I had already made my, I was already making my plans to go to Mexico.

MR. LAU: To study art?

MR. LAIGO: To study for my master's, you see.

MR. LAU: In Spanish or in English?

MR. LAIGO: No, in English.

MR. LAU: Oh, they have a school there.

MR. LAIGO: I found out that there was a school that was in English. It was called Mexico City College. And they had, their counterpart was in Mexico City where they taught Spanish-speaking people in English to speak English. And so they had, it was kind of a double shot there. And anyway, this woman had invited my wife to a party and so she knew that I had been wanting to go to Mexico, had been planning to go to Mexico to study the muralists in Mexico because I had fallen in love with Diego Rivera and Orozco and Siqueiros and Tamayo. At the time Tamayo was the least on my list.

MR. LAU: Well, he's not as bold as the others.

MR. LAIGO: Well, he wasn't in my mind. See, and Siqueiros was to me the greatest then. As things turned out, I became disenchanted with Siqueiros because his message was too damn strong. Hit you in the face, take it or leave it. If you don't like it, get out of here, you know. Whereas Tamayo is a poet. Siqueiros is a politician, too much of a politician. But I didn't understand that. All I knew is that I loved these four artists who are the greatest artists of Mexico.

MR. LAU: And you just got it from looking at books and such?

MR. LAIGO: I got it from just looking at books and seeing their stuff. So I had determined I was going to go and find a way to get to Mexico, so I started writing. And I wrote to Mexico City College and they told me that they would accept me to go to Mexico City College. In the meantime, at the same time somewhere along the line this woman had invited my wife to this party, and so I went. And she thought that my wife liked this particular other fellow, so--

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

MR. LAIGO: So I started, you know, pursuing her, dating her.

MR. LAU: Right.

MR. LAIGO: You know, and she still was going to school. And we would meet every night and every morning I'd meet her and take her to work at Children's Orthopedic Hospital where she was doing her internship there. And I'd make lunch and we'd have lunch at, believe it or not, 5:00 in the morning. And I'd drive clear out to Highline High School all the way from the arboretum clear over to the Highline in my Chevy, Chevrolet car in those days. But I had energy in those days. And anyway, she had to go back to Mexico because she had made a commitment to her government to come here to study and she had to return to fulfill her contract with the

government. She had to go back and head the medical records at Hospital Infantil, which she did.

MR. LAU: And it coincided with the time you wanted to go?

MR. LAIGO: And so it coincided with the time I had time to go. Or let's put it this way: I made damn sure that I was going to go at the same time that she was going to go. So I went down. I had to wait about, I had to wait two years, however, before--well, from the time I met her until the time we got married was two years that we got married.

MR. LAU: Well, I don't know how you could sum it up in a nutshell but what kind of influence did Mexican muralistic art have on your work when you--

MR. LAIGO: Enormous.

MR. LAU: When you went there and started looking at it in person?

MR. LAIGO: Enormous. Enormous. I've always--

MR. LAU: Did it change your color, your palette, your subject?

MR. LAIGO: Well, see, Mexico City College itself changed my palette because, see, I was trained by Nick Damascus, who is always toward the grays, grays, grays, always graying things down. And I was always, wanted to bring things up. And, you know, unconsciously it was the Filipino in me saying bright, bright, bright. And so--

MR. LAU: Nick Damascus was at Burnley, wasn't he?

MR. LAIGO: He was at Burnley and he was also my teacher at Seattle University. And he taught me at Seattle U and he was my first teacher at Seattle U. And in fact, Doug Bennett and Nick Damascus were both my teachers at the same time. One was in design and one was in painting. And so they were both strong influences. But Nick was a strong influence on my painting and my painting had a tendency toward graying down. And you can see it in John Matsudaira's works, earlier works.

MR. LAU: Yeah, so--

MR. LAIGO: They have, they gray down.

MR. LAU: Your early work had that kind of--

MR. LAIGO: Gray tone.

MR. LAU:--subtle northwest tone.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LAU: The hazy grays.

MR. LAIGO: The hazy grays.

MR. LAU: You didn't get flamboyant until you hit Mexico.

MR. LAIGO: Well, I started to when I came back, I guess. Because I'm going to show you a painting I did in 1958 after I had come back and I was convalescing and I was babysitting my son, who was a little baby, and I would feed him hotdogs and Campbell's soup, you know, vegetable soup. He was a little baby then. Now he can carry me, but in those days I carried him. And anyway, so the colors changed. And then when I went to UW--see, when I went to Mexico City I almost got my master's degree and I almost had it until I started--see, I had only about two more quarters to go.

MR. LAU: And you had your show.

MR. LAIGO: And I had my show. I had gotten married and that summer of 1957 I did a whole one-man show in my living room on Masonite. I did the whole thing. And then that was it. And then I started hemorrhaging. Not yet. Not yet. I didn't start hemorrhaging yet. Then I returned back to school in the fall, in October. And one day I was sitting in my class--and see, Mexico City College is 1,000 feet above Mexico City. Mexico City is 7,500 feet. Mexico City is on the Toluca Mexico Highway, 1,000 feet higher. So I used to go up there every day. But going on my honeymoon I had gone to Acapulco. We had gone to Acapulco and my heart apparently had lost its tension.

MR. LAU: Oh, tension.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, I had lost that vigor that had been building up because I had always kept myself in good shape. And then I wore myself down by knocking out this one-man show and by the time the end of the summer came I was ready for a collapse. And so when I was sitting in class one day I was sitting like this and all of a sudden I started coughing blood. And all, the teacher just about freaked out and called the doctor and the doctor said, "somebody got a car?" So a guy in a car--a guy had a motorcycle, a friend of mine. His name was John Counts. He's the guy that launched the show for me later on. We drove all the way down that mountainside like this until we got down to the Hospital de Linde, where they put me in and I was just bleeding like a stuck pig. Blood was just coming out of my eyeballs and everything else, my nose and everything. They started giving me--it hurts like hell. They gave me vitamin K, vitamin K to stop blood, to coagulate the blood. That's all they knew about it at the time. They were trying to stop the bleeding so they'd give me this vitamin K. As soon as I got that, that vitamin K hit me, my whole body felt like a fire. It was just like being turned on fire. Well, anyway, these bouts went on for about three weeks. And I kept saying, "I'm going to stay. I'm going to stay." Because I had already planned to stay and teach and live in Mexico.

MR. LAU: You had fallen in love with the country?

MR. LAIGO: I had fallen in love with Mexico. I had wanted to remain in Mexico and teach in Mexico, and that was my plan.

MR. LAU: But you had to fly back home?

MR. LAIGO: And then one night--and if you don't believe in visions you don't have to, but I had a vision. One night shortly before we left--I've got even the papers upstairs of the time we left and letters that my father had to write to support that my wife could be supported, that he would support my wife and me if things went wrong, \$10,000. And Ira Hagler even was in the picture at that time. The thing is that I was lying in bed. My grandmother, my daughter, my mother-in-law had stayed up all night long with me, with us, and then she had to go back home because she had a business. So she took the last train home sometime around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and we said goodnight and then she left. And we went to sleep. And I was in bed but she had left the living room light on and our bedroom was dark but you could, the light was coming in. And so I was, I had been asleep for all practical purposes. I had gone to sleep. And then all of a sudden I heard a bell ringing. There's a bell ringing. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Have you ever been to a Catholic church where they ring these bells at Mass?

MR. LAU: No, I haven't.

MR. LAIGO: Go sometime. And they ring these bells and they ring them. They're simultaneous. They're small bells and they ring them simultaneously and they ring loud. Well, anyway, these bells started getting louder and louder. They were starting as a single bell and then started growing in crescendo, okay. But as the bells started growing in sound I opened my eyes and I noticed there was a light on the wall. Maybe a pure hallucination, pure vision, pure anything; who knows. I was looking and there was a light and the light started to glow and enlarge and enlarge. And it got larger and larger and larger until the whole darn thing was just vibrating like one huge sun and the bells were just knocking my ears out. And my wife was sleeping by my side. And I said, as a good Catholic I said, "thy will be done, Lord." And as soon as I said that that meant I had submitted my will to God. As soon as I had said "thy will be done" the bells stopped, the lights went out. I turned around to my wife and I said, "Did you hear that? Did you see that? Didn't you see that stuff?" She said, "what?" "Didn't you hear the bells? Didn't you see the light?" She says, "what?" And then at that point I started coughing up blood again.

And my wife looked at me and started to pull her hair, "oh, my God, what are we going to do?" And, you know, and the buses, the trolleys had stopped running. And I saw my wife getting hysterical so I got up and I said, "paper and pencil," you know, like this. And I wrote down, "dress me up." And [inaudible] outside down three flights of stairs and the streets were empty. It was twilight. I mean it was dawn. And then all of the sudden way down the street this milkman was delivering milk. I said, I told my wife and she started running to him and she started begging him to give us a ride to the Hospital de Linde, where I had been taken several times already. So sure enough, he came back, he came around and picked me up and we all flew to the de Linde Hospital and the doctors said, "your husband's got to go or he dies." So I finally decided, I finally realized this is it, I can't stay. My dream is over and so I've got to go and start again.

The irony of the whole thing is this. I was the editor, sports editor for *The Seattle University Spectator* and as such I was editor at the time of the O'Brien twins, and as such we were in a life and death struggle psychologically with the University of Washington for the domination of the fans of the city of Seattle in basketball. So therefore I did not want to go to University of Washington, so I wanted to go to someplace else besides UW so I went to Mexico City.

MR. LAU: Oh, I see.

MR. LAIGO: That was one of the reasons.

MR. LAU: To get your MA there.

MR. LAIGO: To get my MA there. The irony is this. My doctors, my teachers all came and visited me and they all said that they were willing to let me complete my master's because I had had the highest scores they had so far. My score was one of the highest; not the highest up until that point. Merrill Wacto was the head of the department and the head of the school--she was a woman-Doctor, I forget her name now. She's dead now. She said no, she could not allow it. They were going to allow me to finish my master's by correspondence.

MR. LAU: At UW?

MR. LAIGO: No, at Mexico City College.

MR. LAU: Oh, I see.

MR. LAIGO: And she said, "no, we can't establish a precedent." So I had to almost complete my master's at Mexico City College. I was two quarters short of it and I had to leave. So my teachers couldn't do anything about it. So when I got back to Seattle after I had recovered. After about, oh, almost six or eight months I recovered sufficiently.

MR. LAU: Pretty serious.

MR. LAIGO: And I signed up again at UW to get into their graduate program.

MR. LAU: In art?

MR. LAIGO: In art. The same thing, painting. And they accepted me and I had to go through the whole thing. I had to take freshman drawing and design.

MR. LAU: You had to start from scratch.

MR. LAIGO: I had to start from scratch. I had to do everything. I had to take the whole thing that a person going through the graduate program had to go into. And they said, "we'll accept your credits, whichever credits that are acceptable." As it turned out, they never accepted anything.

MR. LAU: So you had to do the whole thing?

MR. LAIGO: So I wound up doing the whole spiel. But in between--I went there for a whole year, all 1969 or something like that. And then in--that's why my painting dropped off about that time. Because then I got, then Tom Kwazume [phonetic] came into the picture. Tom Kwazume and I had gone to grade school together. He was one of the brightest boys in the classroom and--

MS. NAKANE: Sixty-nine? That's quite late.

MR. LAIGO: No, '59. Fifty-nine. Fifty-nine.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: Fifty-nine. That's right. In 1959 I got a phone call. We were still in this little apartment. We had moved into a smaller apartment--so we could start saving money--on 19th and East John. We had lived in a larger apartment and we moved to a smaller apartment which was just a wall, you know, just a wall and a bed that folded out. And so we could save money so we could start mainly saving money for a house.

One day I got a phone call. He says, "Sonny?" I says, "yes." "This is Tommy Kwazume. Remember, Tommy Candall." Because he had changed his name to his grandparents' name. And then the thing is he says, "can I see you? I'd like to visit you." And I says, "yeah." So he came over and he says, "I've been offered the job as the head of a group of people at Boeing," a new group that was called the Boeing Scientific Research Labs, which was going to become the Boeing's think tank. And he was to head the artists, the draftsmen and something else, you know; three groups of people. And he says, "I want you to be my artist because I remember what a good artist you were in grade school." He remembered all the way back to that, all the way back to that piece of mutton that was on the wall.

MR. LAU: And you needed a job then?

MR. LAIGO: I was desperate. I had no job.

MR. LAU: Oh.

MR. LAIGO: I had--my wife was working, the only one working. I wasn't working. I was babysitting.

MR. LAU: You had graduated from UW?

MR. LAIGO: No, no, I hadn't graduated.

MR. LAU: You were still going to school?

MR. LAIGO: I was still going to school. And as soon as he said, "I would like you to do this," I said, I suspended my continuation. I didn't drop out of school, it was just--

MR. LAU: Took longer.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, just took a little longer. Took three more years. So I worked at Boeing for three more years until I couldn't stand it any longer.

MR. LAU: It does kill the spirit inside.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Well, see, there was a little story that goes in between. I hired a guy. I said, "okay, Tom, I'll take the job on one condition: if you allow me to hire as my assistant this particular teacher that taught with me when I was teaching in the Highline School District." His name was Don Fenton. Don Fenton became my assistant.

Well, later on when I couldn't take the pressure anymore because I was, I just didn't, I was bleeding and stuff like that, and then I said, I gave the reins over to Don Fenton. He took the job. And there's a policy at Boeing that if a supervisor wants--if an employee wishes and his supervisor accepts, the employee can get his college work paid for free by Boeing. So I wanted to get my master's, finish up my master's for free. So I went to Don Fenton and I says, "Don, I'd like to finish up my master's. I only have just one more year to go." And his answer was very, very candid. "You don't need a master's degree." I says, "Don, please." And then the other--there were other supervisors similar to him that had allowed their people to go there. There was Osa Nokamura or somebody like that; a great big Japanese guy, you know. And they had let him go, you know, and get his master's degree and stuff. But Don would not budge.

MR. LAU: Even though you got him the job?

MR. LAIGO: That's right. So I--

MR. LAU: You had to quit.

MR. LAIGO: So I, no, I didn't have to quit. I could have stayed. No one said I had to quit. But I told myself and I told my wife, I says, "it's a matter of honor." I says, "if this guy is not going to let me quit then you and I are going to live on tortillas and beans for the next year. I'm going to go back and get my master's. Do you mind?" And my wife says, "I'm with you." And she stuck with me and we went, we tightened up our belt buckles even though we were paying for a house and everything else, and I quit my job. You know, my last day was December 31, 1963 and I left so that I could start the next quarter, 1964, at University of Washington to finish up my master's degree.

MS. NAKANE: Did you have a show around that time?

MR. LAIGO: I had a master's show at University of Washington.

MS. NAKANE: Is that one--how about the [inaudible]?

MR. LAIGO: [Inaudible] in 1963, 1963.

MR. LAU: And then she died?

MR. LAIGO: Then she died.

MR. LAU: She was a good woman. I've heard a lot of people--

MR. LAIGO: She was a good but she never pushed me, see, because I wasn't a big wheel yet. I was just--

MR. LAU: You were just starting.

MR. LAIGO: See, I was one of the little, young--I was younger, see. She had Paul Horiuchi.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: She had, I don't know Sudakawa but she had Kenneth Callahan and all these men are much older. Kenneth was a good friend of mine. Paul Horiuchi was a good friend of mine. And in fact, I bought those things from Paul Horiuchi when he had his little shop. I've got some boxes in the back that I bought from Paul Horiuchi when he had his little shop.

MR. LAU: Antique shop?

MR. LAIGO: Antique shop. And I like them so much, they were so beautiful, just boxes used for shipping. They were so beautiful to me. I used them and I put linseed oil on them and I have them in the back room and I use them to store things in. And you'll see those too.

MR. LAU: How was the show received at Zoe Dusanne? That was a pretty prestigious gallery at that time.

MR. LAIGO: Well, but I was nobody. And Zoe never pushed me and so therefore--and so, and I was, I had not really evolved as an artist.

MR. LAU: You were gone, too, for a few years.

MR. LAIGO: I had been gone, yeah, so who the hell was I, you know. And so some people knew me and but that was it. I mean, there was no, there was not much PR except for people that she--

MR. LAU: This is all you got was this picture.

MR. LAIGO: That's it.

MR. LAU: On the bottom here.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, see. Which one?

MR. LAU: The one on the bottom.

MR. LAIGO: For Zoe?

MR. LAU: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This is reproduced on a number of pages.

MR. LAIGO: That's it. That was all they did for me. That was all the PR I got for that show.

MR. LAU: Nineteen sixty-three.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: June 11.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. That was it. And you know, I hate to say this but I was supposed to have shown the year before. But Paul Horiuchi was supposed to have shown in New York City that same year, had had a, he had had, there was a feeler. You know, his show did not pan out very well because of the snowstorm or something like that, the weather.

MR. LAU: Attendance was poor.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. So therefore Zoe Dusanne said, "well, Val," she said--

MR. LAU: You got bumped.

MR. LAIGO: She got, yeah, she said, "you'll have to take it next year, okay." And so I got bumped and that kind of pushed my spirits down, too. Paul Horiuchi took the show in my place, that year in my place. And incidentally, I have one of his works in the other room that I bought from him. And he very kindly bought one of mine from my show.

MR. LAU: What was your work like in that Dusanne show? Did it have the palette of Mexico at that time?

MR. LAIGO: It had a little bit of everything. That was probably half my problem. See, my first agent was--my first work actually appeared in New York City and people like Paul Horiuchi were coming to me and asking me, "how did you show in New York City?" Because a fellow by the name of Lee Nordness came to me one day and said, "I'd like to show your stuff." He had seen my stuff at the Hathaway House. And Lee Nordness had the little studio in New York City and so I started showing in New York.

And it was, and he was the one that called me up one day very excited and he said, "Val," he says, "these

people from RCA Victor want to reproduce one of your works. Is it okay with you?" I said, "what does that mean?" He says, "well, it means that they want to, they're starting a new series of albums in which they're going to show modern art on the cover with contemporary composers in the album." Okay, so I said, "oh, that's fine." I says, "but what about my painting?" He says, "oh, they're just, they'll pay you reproduction rights but you keep the painting."

I still have the painting. So the painting is in the other room. But the thing is, I got two copies of the album. One was stolen and the other one was lost. And the one that was lost was lost by Clarence Hoffard, who was the vice-president of Ranier Bank. Yeah.

MR. LAU: How did he get your copy?

MR. LAIGO: Well, I wanted to go down there and solicit to--when they were still looking for a design.

MR. LAU: Oh, it was part of your portfolio?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, part of my portfolio. They were looking for something to do on the underside of the building for the Ranier Tower, okay. So I took down my portfolio, including my--

MR. LAU: The album.

MR. LAIGO:--RCA Victor record album. He in turn gave it over to the--so he says--

MR. LAU: The director.

MR. LAIGO: No, he gave it to the interior decorator.

MR. LAU: And he lost it.

MR. LAIGO: The interior decorator lost it. And then I said, "what about the interior decorator?" He says, "oh, he had a nervous breakdown." So I was conveniently again put out of the way. See, I've had a series of--I have been triumphantly put aside by many people [laughter].

MR. LAU: Yeah, well, I just--yeah, it just seems like there was a time when--

MR. LAIGO: But I don't give a damn.

MR. LAU:--your art, you weren't showing or something, from about the '66, '69 on.

MR. LAIGO: I got tired. I got tired. I got tired of showing. Well, see, I was showing at the Panaca.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: And then I had a show in the Panaca Gallery when Margaret Reed was the director at the time at the Panaca. And then she had--and I have a thing to show you if you want to see it later on. And then she finally left the Panaca after many years and then she opened up a gallery in Santa Barbara and brought down a stable of northwest artists. Well, that didn't pan out so she reopened another gallery in Los Angeles. In the meantime she kept our paintings.

I found out that Fred Run, who was a painter, is a painter and also a businessman, was one of the artists. And we were talking the other day because he's the one that's handling the insurance for this painting that the Sisters of Providence are loaning. And he said, I said, he said, "were you in that show at Santa Barbara?" I said, "yeah." And he said, "so was I." I said, "did you, did Margaret ever, did she give you back all your paintings?" He said, "no, she didn't." "She didn't," I says. I said, "what the heck."

So therefore--this was about two weeks ago. I said, "well, I found a list of all the guys, of all the people that were in that show. I'm going to send you a copy, a Xerox copy of all the participants of the show." But she was smart. She never put the date and she never kind of signed a contract with any of us. We all trusted her.

MR. LAU: So it's gone?

MR. LAIGO: So it's gone. Not only that, she kept one of my best paintings. Not one, she has about, oh, God, eight or nine of my best paintings.

MR. LAU: So part of your phase of your career dropped out of sight?

MR. LAIGO: Dropped out, and it's probably in Palm Springs right now. I've called her up several times and told her, "Margaret, why don't you just send the paintings to me and I'll pay the expenses for the, you know, the cost

for the thing." And she just laughs and she said, "oh, don't worry about it, Val, everything's okay." And she just kind of passes, she kind of slides it off.

MR. LAU: You had a show at the Frye Art Museum in '69.

MR. LAIGO: Yes.

MR. LAU: With the other faculty at Seattle U.

MR. LAIGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LAU: And you got a review here, pretty critical review.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, and--

MR. LAU: How did you react to that?

MR. LAIGO: Well, the critical--

MR. LAU: Is that Voorhees?

MR. LAIGO: It was Voorhees and he made a comment on the painting that I'm giving to Dolores Tobanga and he said that the only painting that was any good was the one called *Amish Barn at Newman* but then Val Laigo had given--I gave it eight titles. He said, "he gave it so many titles that he can't be too serious so maybe the painting is not so good." The implication was that.

MR. LAU: Was that--

MR. LAIGO: I was damn serious.

MR. LAU: Did that really hurt you?

MR. LAIGO: It hurt me at the time until I realized later on that John Voorhees is an idiot anyway. Or to put it another way, John Voorhees was not capable of knowing or understanding the reasons for my having to title it eight different ways. I was doing it for contemporary reasons. I was doing it for reasons that were very obvious. I call it *White Stripe*. I call it *Three Panels*. I call it a number of things. *Amish Barn at Newman*, who first inspired me to do it. I call it by the blue felt that surrounds it, blue rectangle, and so on and so forth. It's all on back.

MR. LAU: He didn't get it.

MR. LAIGO: He didn't get it.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: He's too dumb.

MR. LAU: He said, and I quote--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. LAU: "Laigo's eclecticism and wild colors didn't necessarily add up to great painting. Despite the energy, color and various styles the results are rather leaden."

MR. LAIGO: Well, see, the thing is this. What's wrong with eclecticism? You tell me what artists are not eclectic, were not eclectic. Wasn't Picasso eclectic? Wasn't every artist, didn't every artist borrow from every other artist? Except the very first artists, the ones that painted on the caves of Lascaux and Altamira. But from that point on it was, "hey, can I borrow some of your paintings for my work by putting some of your stuff in my pieces?"

MR. LAU: He says, "a muralist at heart, Laigo needs space to spread out. Everything is trying to get off the canvas."

MR. LAIGO: Well, that's his opinion. See, his opinion means that it just, he has nothing else to say.

MR. LAU: I also wonder if your work is underappreciated in northwest because of your palette and the fact that you were using bright colors.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Let me show you some of the bright colors.

MR. LAU: And the fact that northwest they love the, you know, muted grays and blues. I wonder if--

MR. LAIGO: Well, you know, a woman told me, "you'd be great in Los Angeles."

MR. LAU: Do you think that maybe you're in the wrong place?

MR. LAIGO: Well, no.

MR. LAU: For what you were doing or--

MR. LAIGO: Let's put it this way. I am exactly where I have to be if you believe in zen. I am where I'm supposed to be. Joseph Campbell says this. In Hinduism you hear this. I'm in exactly the right spot and everything that's happening is the right thing that's happening. And as far as I'm concerned, that's fine. I have no regrets anymore. I had regrets. I used to be bitter because I had a heart condition until I realized that my heart condition is the very thing that--you asked you originally why did you get started into art? Because I could not do the physical things the other kids could do so I had to find other ways of expression and my mode of expression was through my art.

MR. LAU: Do you think you were bitter at one time because of the lack of recognition for your art in Seattle?

MR. LAIGO: I was--I never felt I was, there was a lack of recognition. I was kind of--

MR. LAU: Misunderstood?

MR. LAIGO: I would say that. I would say that I was not--I wasn't even misunderstood. See, if I were to be bitter it's like the, again like the zen master or the zen, or the black, what do they call these guys that go and kill somebody all dressed in black?

MR. LAU: Ninja?

MR. LAIGO: Ninja, who was going to go and kill this guy, you know, approached this guy and the guy turned around at him and he spit in his face. And as soon as the guy spit in his face he turned around and walked away. And they asked why? He said, "because I got angry, I lost control." Why should I care? I have to be detached from that if that's how they feel. They can't help it. They are what they are. A more compassionate person--from my point of view, of course--would see it more compassionately. Barry Ferrell, who used to be the music and art editor for Time magazine who died a few years ago, to whom I gave a painting, he was overwhelmed with what I gave him. Everything I did he said, "it's so beautiful." But other people, not good enough. See, to them they're looking for something else. They're looking for something that reflects what is in their head or in their heart.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: But all I can do is give them what I am.

MR. LAU: Yeah, I just got the feeling that kind of territory you were exploring--narrative, bright colors- perhaps maybe was underappreciated in this region because of, you know, the northwest school, quote unquote.

MR. LAIGO: Sure.

MR. LAU: You know, what you were doing maybe went by a lot of people.

MR. LAIGO: I get a strong feeling that Kenneth Callahan borrowed some of my--his stuff was borrowed from me because shortly after I do this thing for RCA Victor I started seeing that sort of combination in his paintings.

MR. LAU: Right. He was dealing with a lot of religious motifs, crucifixes and also--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, but he was a good friend of mine.

MR. LAU: Brighter palette, too.

MR. LAIGO: But I'll show you the painting. You'll see the painting. You've seen my mural, haven't you?

MR. LAU: Yeah, I have. You loaned me some slides once.

MR. LAIGO: Oh, yeah, that's right. That's right. God dang.

MR. LAU: And I'm showing it.

MR. LAIGO: We met down at Wajimaya [phonetic].

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. My memory is so short.

MR. LAU: I'd like to get back to Mexico, though. What did you carry with you from Mexico from the artists, from the art you saw there?

MR. LAIGO: One of the things I carried from them is the spontaneity, the energy, the--

MR. LAU: Scale.

MR. LAIGO: The scale. The willingness to say it as they saw it. Here we try to be cute.

MR. LAU: Yeah, pull your punches.

MR. LAIGO: Pull your punches. I don't pull my punches. I just say what I think, what I feel. And I think that that--I'm grateful for that. To me the Mexicans are honest. Orozco. I've got Orozco. I've got Tamayo. When I saw their works I started getting on fire myself. I was, I started to become a man on fire because I saw here were men on fire that were painting like they were on fire and they weren't ashamed of it. And yet I can control it.

And yet I did a series of paintings called *Lost Generation* back in New York. It was all just lost. And one guy here in Seattle--oh, I can't remember his name but I will remember eventually--he and his wife bought one of my first paintings. They liked it very much and it was one of the paintings that eventually, one of the types of paintings that eventually showed in New York.

MR. LAU: A friend of mine saw an old portrait of yours at an auction and he wishes he would have bought it.

MR. LAIGO: Is that right? A portrait of mine?

MR. LAU: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] At some auction.

MR. LAIGO: I didn't know that.

MR. LAU: He goes around to auction houses because auctioneers don't know anything about art. So a lot of that stuff, early northwest stuff sometimes goes for a song and a dance.

[Interruption.]

MS. NAKANE: Whose painting is this one?

MR. LAIGO: I forget.

MR. LAU: It sure looks like [inaudible] or--

MR. LAIGO: No, he gave it to me. Ken Harms. He did this one and that one. And I still owe him money for it but I can't find him.

MR. LAU: Oh, he's disappeared?

MR. LAIGO: Well, he has not disappeared but I can't find him in the phone book. I saw an article on him and see, he was a bachelor for the longest time and then all of the sudden he took on a family. And he had built this fireplace out of river rocks and things like that and my wife and I used to visit him. Ken Harms is his name. In fact, he's got a small sketch in the back that he did. As soon as I see him if I have the money still I'll pay him.

MR. LAU: Oh, Val, can you tell me about some of the other Asian- American artists in the northwest that worked at the same time you did?

MR. LAIGO: There's--

MR. LAU: Especially the more obscure ones.

MR. LAIGO: Well, the ones that I--

MR. LAU: Besides like Matsudaira and Horiuchi, Tsutkawa.

MR. LAIGO: Well, you know, Mr. Chin.

MR. LAU: Andrew?

MR. LAIGO: Andrew.

MR. LAU: Any other Filipino-American artists?

MR. LAIGO: There's a Filipino-American artist but I'm trying to remember his name. Fred will know.

MR. LAU: Any of those ring a bell?

MR. LAIGO: No, I don't know any of these people. But I know there's a fellow by the name--across the mountains in Yakima or something like that, who is a tremendously fine artist. He's a young guy, coming along, very great. Fred Cordova will remember his name.

MR. LAU: Okay, well, I should make a note. Because in most of the things we've read you're the only one.

MR. LAIGO: Ben Dar. His name is Ben Dar.

MR. LAU: Okay, because you're the only--

MR. LAIGO: Ben, B-e-n. Ben Dar.

MR. LAU: D-a-r?

MR. LAIGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LAU: Okay.

MR. LAIGO: But then he went on to teach someplace and apparently, from what I heard, he gave up painting.

MR. LAU: Oh, okay.

MR. LAIGO: I'm so sad.

MR. LAU: Was he isolated out there?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. And he used to send stuff over here to this side of the mountain and his stuff was great.

MR. LAU: What kind of work was it, what style?

MR. LAIGO: Well, contemporary. Very contemporary.

MR. LAU: Abstract work?

MR. LAIGO: Abstract work.

MR. LAU: Oils?

MR. LAIGO: I guess it was oils, yeah. Oils or acrylics. I don't know. You know, after a while you get confused as to whether it was acrylics or oils. It's like the old thing that happened with the Frye Art Museum. There was a time when they used to say the West Coast show has got to be in oils, you know, and then all these shows are going to be in oils. Then one year they changed. They said this year acrylics will be accepted. It was--you know, they're a stronghold of conservatism anyway, ever since Mr. Greenhouse died and Mrs. Greenhouse took over.

MR. LAU: Yeah, that's pretty--

MR. LAIGO: And it hasn't gone back into the--it has gone into a, behind a wall.

MR. LAU: I don't really think it will change when she passes on because she probably set it up for afterwards.

MR. LAIGO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, they have good work. Don't get me wrong. They bring in good American art but there's no, you're not going to find anything say, anything, any new dynamisms there.

MR. LAU: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LAIGO: You'll find good art, no question about it.

MR. LAU: What artists did you interact with when you were in Seattle painting and which artists had influenced you and your work, or was it mainly Mexico?

MR. LAIGO: Well, here there was quite a lot. Dick Kirsten influenced me. Nick Damascus for sure influenced me.

MR. LAU: He's still around, isn't he?

MR. LAIGO: Oh, yes, he is.

MS. NAKANE: So maybe I can ask that you correspond with them, you still have contact with them.

MR. LAU: I have contact with him. He's still here in town. I don't correspond with anybody because I don't write.

MR. LAU: That's the trouble we found when we--see, the Smithsonian wants us to document artists through photos, sketches, diaries, letters.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, because I--

MR. LAU: And we found that most of these guys, they didn't write. They play tennis together, go out on picnics together, go out and sketch together.

MR. LAIGO: But they didn't write.

MR. LAU: So there's no documentation of that period.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, because our means of communication seems to be through the visual arts rather than through the literary arts.

MR. LAU: It seems like that, yeah.

MS. NAKANE: Also, you used to say so often that you don't really need to express yourself through writing, isn't it? Through the letters--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. Yeah, I just love to sing. You ought to--you can't do it here but one of these days if you call up my house if we're not home. Call up sometime when we're not home and stay on the phone and you can hear somebody singing.

MR. LAU: On the message thing?

MR. LAIGO: The message thing. Have you heard it already?

MR. LAIGO: No, no.

MR. LAIGO: On the message thing.

MR. LAU: That's you?

MS. NAKANE: That's you?

MR. LAIGO: A lot of people say, "hey, Sonny, I didn't know. You have a good voice." It's my son. He's got a tremendous voice. But I used to sing songs like that.

MS. NAKANE: [Inaudible.] I hear him singing.

MR. LAIGO: I'm [inaudible] well, it's part of our, we were always--my mother used to sing all the time.

MS. NAKANE: Tell us about your mother.

MR. LAU: Yeah, tell us about your mother.

MR. LAIGO: Oh, my mother.

MR. LAU: Did her art work affect you?

MR. LAIGO: All the time.

MR. LAU: Instrumental in getting you started, right?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. There's a very interesting story about my mother and my art. See, my mother had helped to at least influence me toward art. In fact, like I said, I started studying, taking classes when I was about 16. I was paying classes, for classes at, to take classes at this place across the street from what is now--

MR. LAU: Harrison Community College?

MR. LAIGO:--the Seattle Community College. It was at the IOOSF building.

MR. LAU: Burnley, isn't it?

MR. LAIGO: Next door to Burnley. Now that's the other side of her. Anyway, where was I? And so this man, and so I started, I enlisted in his class around 16 or 17 years old and he started teaching me how to paint in the academic sense.

MR. LAU: Is this Derbershire?

MR. LAIGO: Beyond Derbershire. He was one of my very first teachers.

MR. LAU: Was Frank in the same class?

MR. LAIGO: No.

MR. LAU: Or a different time period?

MR. LAIGO: Probably a different time period.

MR. LAU: Okay, he also--that's his first class.

MR. LAIGO: Yes, and I learned a lot from Mr. Derbershire. He was a sweet guy. And he taught me you do it this way, you know, like this. And I know he had, you know, he had, his influence had been the French impressionists and people like that. And so I was influenced by that and my paintings were looking like that when I was younger. And then when I got to college I even, I didn't know much about art and when I took a class from Damascus he started showing us works of Picasso. And I made this comment--this is a very famous comment. I says, "that guy can't paint." I says, "look at how lousy his art is. He can't even draw the human figure correctly." That was my comment I made in college as a college student about, you know, 19 years old.

MS. NAKANE: He [inaudible] what he said?

MR. LAIGO: He just laughed.

MR. LAU: How do we get back to your mother in this story?

MR. LAIGO: Well, my mother, in the meantime she was encouraging me to do these things and she thought it was just great that I was taking art classes and she was very happy. She was also very busy raising, you know, there's eight siblings. I have eight siblings. So--

MS. NAKANE: Are you the oldest?

MR. LAIGO: I'm the eldest of nine of us. And so my mother and father were, they had their hands full, to say the least.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: So her time to do anything was limited. All she could do was give encouragement. And anyway, but my mother always encouraged me. In fact, I had an Uncle Joe, showed me how to draw tanks and things like that and so I learned a little bit from him. I had an Uncle James that showed me how to draw a little bit, and Uncle James had done some paintings also.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

MR. LAIGO: Obviously that died very quickly. Even though I was even given a chance to coach the freshman team at O'Dea High School for a quarter because I had been the champion coach of the grade schools while I was at the high school. But then I went to college and I took music. I signed up for music as my major. But the more I got into music the more I discovered that it takes brains to read music, you know. I told you about the episode of my smashing my first violin.

MR. LAU: Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: And it was also my last. And I never did have the patience to learn a piano.

MR. LAU: And you didn't have the patience to learn to read music either?

MR. LAIGO: And my parents didn't have the money.

MR. LAU: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: See, because my father died when--he was murdered when I was six years old.

MR. LAU: So your mother was really--

MR. LAIGO: So my mother was--

MR. LAU:--running ragged?

MR. LAIGO: See, my mother was, my mother had four children. There were four Laigo children. And then she was pregnant with my brother Ben when in 1936 when my father was shot in the Smith Tower. And I was only six years old. I remember the event because one of my uncles came to the door and he picked up the bottle of milk that was in the front door and he said, "hello, Sonny." He says, "is your mama home?" I says, "yes. Mom." And, you know, I called my mother and he told her, he says, "[inaudible] is dead." And he said [inaudible] he had been shot a few times.

What had happened is that my father had been a fairly successful businessman. In fact, he was making a lot of money. He was a contractor and a Filipino contractor in Alaska and then at the same time he had a gold mine in Oregon. And there was, he had a partner in this gold mine in Oregon. And this partner, his name was Coreal [phonetic], wanted some more shares in this gold mine but his lawyers were advising against my father giving him more shares.

So this man had intended to go down and kill the two lawyers or at least scare them into giving him, letting him have his way. Well, anyway, as it turned out my father went down there the same morning that Coreal was down there and Coreal was in the act of--he had killed one of the lawyers already and the other lawyer was, had escaped by crawling out the back door. And my father had gone up to him and yelled out, "stop." When he did that, my dad got it.

MR. LAU: Oh.

MR. LAIGO: He had not intended to kill my dad.

MR. LAU: But he thought it was the other lawyer or he was just--

MR. LAIGO: No, he was just nuts by that time and he killed my dad. He eventually went to jail for life and he died in jail. But as things went in those days Filipinos didn't have much of a shake, you know. So as it turned out, we lost everything.

MR. LAU: Was this a Filipino partner or a white guy?

MR. LAIGO: He was a white guy, Coreal. He was a white fellow. And the lawyers were white. And Mr. Esterman was the other, the lawyer that escaped. Years later--many, many years later he eventually, his wife eventually died. They had raised a family and everything else. And he eventually went to St. Martin's College and he attended the, entered the seminary there at St. Martin's and eventually became a priest, and he invited my mother to his ordination.

MR. LAU: Oh, how nice.

MR. LAIGO: Isn't that something? So these beautiful little circles that happen.

MR. LAU: Yeah. They keep coming back.

MR. LAIGO: Keep coming back.

MR. LAU: Complete the circle.

MR. LAIGO: Well, just talking about circles, just the other day I had broken up with my agent in New York City I told you about, the one that had called me up and said that RCA Victor wants to reproduce your work on a record album.

MR. LAU: Oh, okay.

MR. LAIGO: And then later on we had a, you know, disagreement because I didn't understand mathematics. And he says, "well, Val, that's it for now." And so we parted ways. And Lee Nordness went on to become a very successful gallery owner in New York City and I went on to get married and raise a family. Well, anyway, just last week my son on the 6th of July--my younger son, Adrian, had his birthday. And on the family's birthdays it's a tradition of ours to have just a closed party and the person who's having the party chooses the place where we're going to have the party and what we're going to eat. And so he chose this place called, it's called Saleh al Lago.

MR. LAU: Oh, it's supposed to be a very expensive Italian restaurant in Green Lake, yeah.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU: It's supposed to be one of the best.

MR. LAIGO: Yes, it is. And it's very nice and we all enjoyed ourselves, although it was too salty for me. But I had my usual double shot of tequila in spite of my--I always, whenever I celebrate there's a shot of tequila. They gave me a double shot.

And anyway, to make a long story short, my son had gone, he had not had time to buy a gift for my son, my other son, his brother. So he had gone down to the fairgrounds and he's on the fairgrounds and he dropped into the pottery shop down there. And Ruth Mora was there toward the end, you know, and she was playing cards with this old man. So he kept looking around and he finally chose a couple of pieces and they start turning out the lights. And he said, "Miss, ma'am, I'd like to buy a couple of things." And she says, "okay." And so he showed her, one was a bull and one was a paperweight for our daughter-in-law because her birthday is on the 9th.

MR. LAU: Oh, you've got a lot of Cancers.

MR. LAIGO: Yeah, so we had--

MR. LAU: Yeah, I had a birthday yesterday.

MR. LAIGO: Did you? Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Al, happy birthday to you. Did I say that right?

MR. LAU: That's pretty good.

MR. LAIGO: Okay, and anyway--very spontaneous. And the thing is that so as they were--so my son proceeded to, was thinking of paying in cash but for some reason he said, "I might as well just pay it in, use my credit card." So he gave Ruth Mora his credit card and she looked at it and she said, "oh," she says, "you're related to Val Laigo?" She goes, "do you know Val Laigo?" He says, "yes, that's my father." She says, "oh, he's your father." And she says, "I know Val."

And then she says, and then since they were the only two people--three people there, she says, "I'd like you to meet this man, this gentleman here." And she didn't know the connection or she probably did know the connection. I don't know. But she says, "I'd like you to meet this man and this man's name is Lee Nordness." And Lee, he says, Rene says, "Mr. Lee Nordness? Mr. Nordness, I've heard your name all my life ever since I was a little child." He said, "I've been hearing things about you ever since I was a child from my father." He goes, "you have?" And he kept calling him sir, sir, sir until Lee finally put his hands on his shoulder and says, "stop calling me Lee," he says. I mean, "stop calling me Mr. Nordness. Call me Lee." You know, but that was a good sign. And anyway, Rene said, "hey, I've got to invite these people to my dad's show." So he says, "I'd like to invite you to my father's show. Can I get your addresses?" So he got both their addresses, which I have.

MR. LAU: So he may come?

MR. LAIGO: He may come, he may not. But talking about circles, you know. Like they say, what comes around goes around, comes around. Or something to that effect.

MS. NAKANE: When did your mother start painting?

MR. LAU: And how did she find time?

MR. LAIGO: Well, the thing is after we all grew up and had moved away--you know, she loves to sew but she loves to garden. But then we bought her some paints and we--so she started painting. And she did these, a whole bunch of these paintings. And this Professor Wilson from the University of--

MR. LAU: Bought them all.

MR. LAIGO: Bought a whole bunch of them. And that really, you know, raised my mother's spirits. In fact, we were all fighting to get at least one from my mother. I was angry because one of Fred Cordova's cousins got a painting that I thought was far superior to the one that I got. But now that I look on it, that doesn't really matter really because this is a nice painting too. This is called *The Road to Balio*.

MR. LAU: It's a lot of painting where she remembers her village and--

MR. LAIGO: Yes. She remembered her youth. She was painting people swimming across rivers and doing all kinds of strange things, you know. She painted her house several different views, beautiful views of her house and things like that. So anyway, my mother is a very fine painter and she even--and then David Mendoza saw her stuff and she's his aunt, you see. He says, "Auntie," he says, "these are beautiful." He says, "we'd like to show them with a group of other artists we're going to show, women artists." And she was referred to as one of the naive artists of the group.

MR. LAU: Foster White.

MR. LAIGO: Of that Foster White Gallery. So she showed at the Foster White Gallery and--

MS. NAKANE: That was when?

MR. LAIGO: I don't know, a few years ago. But anyway, you know, I used to make the Northwest Annual on a regular basis.

MR. LAU: Yes. Yeah.

MR. LAIGO: Well, all of a sudden when they moved to the Seattle Center I couldn't get in. I could never make the show. For some reason I never could penetrate the jurors.

MR. LAU: And they change every year?

MR. LAIGO: They would change every year and whatever I would send in would be rejected. So I said--and then but my mother's work was accepted twice at the Northwest Annual. And so I said, "you got one on me, Ma, finally."

Now, which brings us to the story in the back room of that painting. That painting was one that I did when I was 23 years old and at that time the atomic, the concept, what is it? The atomic war was of foremost preoccupation in my mind, as it was in the minds of many people. And so I did this painting, it was a two-part painting. It started off as just an experiment on a piece of Masonite on which I just put a whole bunch of junk, okay, and played around.

And it just sat there for about two or three weeks and then one night around 4:00, 3:00 in the morning I got a brilliant idea and I ran downstairs, went to the kitchen, on my mother's kitchen table, and I painted these two rocket ships. And I cut out--I went to the encyclopedia and I cut out, I drew the continents of the Earth and I cut them out on paper and then I drew the continents and then I drew a silhouette of the moon and then I stippled them in into the painting, on top of the painting. Then I drew these rocket ships and then I took a grayer and I put, and made it look like, you know, there's the jets coming down. One rocket is coming up, one is coming down. One is rising up toward the moon. The other one is streaming down towards the Earth. And the title of the painting is *Dilemma of the Atom*. That's what appeared on the cover of RCA Victor.

MR. LAU: So that's the one that showed at the Seattle Art Museum?

MR. LAIGO: Yeah. No. No, the one that showed at the Seattle Art Museum was--that was shown in New York, the little studio. The one at the Seattle Art Museum was done three years earlier at the--and I'll show you that. It's in the same room.

MR. LAU: That must have been quite exciting for a young artist to show at--

MR. LAIGO: Yeah.

MR. LAU:--the Seattle Art Museum so early.

MR. LAIGO: Well, see, that was my problem. I was so young and I was so successful so early that it went to my head. Because people like James Washington and Paul Horiuchi were asking, "How did you show back there?" I started giving them names and things like that. And in the meantime I started slipping behind, but I didn't care because I was falling in love. And I was teaching and my life was so full. I was publishing a newspaper called *Oriental*, which later became--and then later on we did a magazine called *Bamboo*, which took an art award for its cover design and stuff like that. Fred's got all those records, by the way. He's got a whole bunch of records.

Fred is a lodestone when it comes to records.

MR. LAU: He's the Encyclopedia Britannica of the Filipino-Americans.

MR. LAIGO: That's right. And so I would go to Fred for all that sort of stuff. And so let me take you around.

MR. LAU: Okay.

MS. NAKANE: Yeah, that would be nice.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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