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Interviews for WESN 35th Anniversary Celebration 2007

[Recording begins abruptly]

Rick Lindquist: --here.

Chris Kawakita: Yeah, we'll see, we'll see. Are you directing it with—are going to lead with questions or do you want me to just—

Lindquist: Well, I mean—

Kawakita: Speak freely?

Lindquist: You're class of what, '98?

Kawakita: I was, yes.

Lindquist: And, let's see, were you a DJ your whole time?

Kawakita: No, I probably had a show for—while I was—originally Jim Garvey, who was also Class of 1998, he had his own show and so the way I was introduced to radio was through him and he had a hip-hop and some r & b. It was—that was his show and I kinda joined him and then from there, during my senior year, I lived in the Harriet House the first year that residence hall was open.

Lindquist: Hey, me too.

Kawakita: Yeah, yeah, and so the suitemates and I decided it'd be a good idea—ultimately it was a failed experiment—but we decided to have a show that did everything you weren't supposed to do…[laughs]. You know, we had inside jokes we were telling, playing terrible music—

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: I think we imagined our audience to be just our suite and it didn't gain much listenership or—and I think we were axed at semester, which is fine, I mean, we totally deserved it. But that's the arc of my WESN radio experience.

Lindquist: Now I can't remember—what was the name of the hip-hop show?

Kawakita: I think it was originally called *Fat Tuesday* and I think it was—you know, wasn't there like a *Fade to Black* music hour or two hours like four to six—

Lindquist: Yep.

Kawakita: Every day?

Lindquist: Yep, yep.
Kawakita: I think we were in the four to six Tuesday slot. And then, from what I remember, I think we eventually got moved to Friday and I think it was maybe like eight to ten. I can't remember. And maybe I'm blending memories here. That could've been our failed—

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: Suite radio, but I remember Jim and I moved times and days. I can't even remember—

Lindquist: Didn't you guys have live DJs all the time?

Kawakita: Yeah and that's the most—I think you had asked what I remember most fondly. It was—we had freestyle hip-hop artists come in all the time and they would—I think some of them were from the community, some were Illinois State students. We never had any Illinois Wesleyan freestylers. And they would come in and towards the end of the show Jim would give them the mic and he would tell them the rules—certainly no cussing—but we had some really tremendous talents come in and I went out to visit Jim in Los Angeles late summer this year and we were reminiscing about some of—some of the guys who came in and we decided to look them up and one of the guys actually went on to represent the United States in the world freestyling championships.

Lindquist: Wow.

Kawakita: Yeah and so we went and YouTubed some of his footage and he's just the same guy. I mean, it was the guy who came in and he was probably the best of the bunch. His name was Presence, or at least that's what he went by, and he's still doing his thing I guess.

Lindquist: That's amazing. You were on the cutting edge there. You probably—

Kawakita: Well, we like to think so. We went to his Myspace page, there's no mention of us or WESN but, yeah, we'd like to think so…[laughs].

Lindquist: Sometimes people don't want to reveal their roots and, you know, Bloomington, Illinois—

Kawakita: Right, right.

Lindquist: And they want to be from somewhere else.

Kawakita: Right, everything was Chicago for him.

Lindquist: Right.

Kawakita: It's been Chicago, Chicago, Chicago.

Lindquist: That happens sometimes.

Kawakita: Yep.

Lindquist: Let's see, in your job now, working for Admissions—

Kawakita: Yes.

Lindquist: Do you get—do you still have students who are interested in like radio as one of the features of Illinois Wesleyan?

Kawakita: You know what, I've—I don't hear it as much, although I know students are interested, and the encouraging thing is students are now coming in having had experience with their own high school radio and so I think that's pretty exciting and they want to continue with that when they get to Illinois Wesleyan. But it is something that I know those of us who had radio shows, those of us who are in Admissions like Tony Bankston, the Dean of Admissions, and I, we always work into our spiel about the extracurricular groups that are available to students—

Lindquist: That's good to hear.

Kawakita: I think—yeah and I think it's because we had such fond memories of our own experiences and I always talk about it as a way to learn about communicating effectively, to have audience awareness, to think quickly on one's feet—these being applicable skills beyond Illinois Wesleyan—

Lindquist: Yeah, no doubt.

Kawakita: No matter the profession. Certainly in something like Admissions, but in all sorts of other areas too.

Lindquist: Very good, very good.

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: Are there any people other than Jim that you remember having radio shows with? Or who were the other suitemates that you had—you had your failed radio experiment with?

Kawakita: Yeah, well…[laughs]…the coconspirators of the show we had included people like Hassan Mahmud, Gaston Cordova, we had Eric Norell, Nate Bobofchak. We gave it our best shot and like I said, it was…[laughs]…it was sort of a—oh gosh, an experiment and like one that went terribly wrong.

[Lindquist laughs]

Lindquist: I would suspect that most concepts like that probably shared a similar fate, but—

Kawakita: Right, right.

Lindquist: But those are also the things that give—college radio is both a blessing and a curse because—

Kawakita: I think you're right.

Lindquist: It's absolutely distinct from everything else—

Kawakita: That's true.

Lindquist: That you could possibly get.

Kawakita: Right.

Lindquist: It's also at times unlistenable—

Kawakita: And I would put our show in that category.

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: And that would be putting it gently.

Lindquist: Well, you know, you remember Phil Huckleberry?

Kawakita: What's that? What about Phil?

Lindquist: You remember Phil and his show *Goat Shpeel*?

Kawakita: Oh yes.

Lindquist: Yeah, probably—

Kawakita: It's hard to forget that. It's still—

Lindquist: I would say probably for the first three or four years it was 70-80% unlistenable.

[Kawakita laughs]

Lindquist: And I'm hoping he's going to send me some tapes. I need to have some tapes of this for homecoming if we get a few alums back from the nineties. I don't want to scare the alums from the seventies off though, so I'm torn because they're—
Kawakita: Well—

Lindquist: Pretty unlistenable.

Kawakita: Yeah…[laughs]…I think it's amazing you said you have all the tapes of—or he has all the—right? He's kept tapes of all this shows.

Lindquist: He does have tapes but he hasn't given me any yet.

Kawakita: Yeah, well there may be a reason for that.

Lindquist: There might be.

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: I do have one recording from 1972.

Kawakita: Wow.

Lindquist: Which is a recording of Spencer Sauter and Bob Bray—

Kawakita: Oh wow.

Lindquist: Do their sort of—what was that called—underground. They didn't really have alternative as a term then.

Kawakita: But it was called underground huh?

Lindquist: Underground rock. Their show was called *Ultramontane*.

Kawakita: Oh wow.

Lindquist: And yeah I've got a couple CDs worth of their program and it's amazing to hear. I've also got a recording of Tony Bankston's program.

Kawakita: Which I've heard is not as amazing.

Lindquist: Um it's got its own character.

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: You know, and actually the more you listen to it, the more you realize things aren't that different these days except for we don't use cassette tapes anymore.

Kawakita: Sure.

Lindquist: But I listened to his show and if I didn't know it was a recording, I would've thought I could just pick up the phone and call in and request The Smiths or R.E.M. or something because it's—

Kawakita: Oh yeah, yeah.

Lindquist: Yeah because it just sounds just like DJs do today, just different music.

Kawakita: Sure, sure.

Lindquist: So that's pretty fun.

Kawakita: Good.

Lindquist: Alright well hey, thanks for your time and—

Kawakita: Sure.

Lindquist: I know I've been bugging you about this but I just really wanted to get some people from some different eras—

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: Get a few thoughts and little memories recorded here because I suspect that a lot of our alums aren't going to get back for my ten in the morning on Friday back-to-class thing because it's ten in the morning.

Kawakita: Right.

Lindquist: So I want to just have some things, maybe pieced together on a DVD or something so they can—I can mail them out or give them out to people.

Kawakita: That would be cool and I'd love to see that and yeah.

Lindquist: Yeah, if you're going to be back, if you're going to—well, you're here, but if you're going to be around, feel free to stop in, come down on Saturday and see if some of your friends are around.

Kawakita: Yeah, that sounds—actually I think Jim is talking about coming back, so—

Lindquist: Oh cool.

Kawakita: We would definitely want to check out a session.

Lindquist: I've—I asked Jason Carlson—I saw him at a concert in the spring—

Kawakita: Oh yeah.

Lindquist: I asked him if he was going to come back and I think he was thinking about it so that might be fun. I think Mike Davis is going to come back.

Kawakita: Oh yeah.

Lindquist: I don't know if he's another one of those people you—

Kawakita: Actually I have a good Mike Davis story—and I'm in a bad area for cell phones here so if I lose you, I'll call you right back.

Lindquist: Okay.

Kawakita: Jim and I were doing our show and Jim was quite diligent about editing our own music, you know, those that weren't on the eight-tracks, and usually caught all the cuss words and I think one time either he hadn't listened to the song before or just he was distracted. I mean we—as you know—[laughs] occasionally let some slip. And Mike came in and you could just see—I mean he was quite steamed and—but knowing—he did present the facts to us in a professional way—

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: And we felt terrible and we felt terrible for letting him down. We felt terrible for letting the station down, but I—Jim definitely took the job seriously. It's from him that I give most of my radio experience—I give him all the credit because he also embodied the—whereas I think sometimes DJs get on like "Oh, it's just for college. We don't have a huge audience. I can do and say what I want to do—whatever I want to say," and then let anything play and—

Lindquist: I think some of the hip-hop programming that we were doing in the nineties was really popular all around town.

Kawakita: The show that we had—and it was the one, that slot before the six slot—we had people call in from all over the place, so that was really encouraging. Yeah but we felt terrible.

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: From then on out we were totally focused and—but that was sometimes challenging when you had—

Lindquist: Mike didn't bring the hammer down and threaten to fire you guys, or did you get one more chance?

Kawakita: I think we got the "one more chance" speech.

[Lindquist laughs]

Kawakita: Yeah, he didn't pull out the "I'm going to fire you guys" at that time, but I think he said—

Lindquist: I had heard—a couple people had said that they used to call up DJs and pretend to be the FCC calling.

Kawakita: Oh is that right? [laughs]

Lindquist: Yeah. I don't know if that was Mike or if that was like a Rob Bennett or somebody that had—

Kawakita: That's—

Lindquist: Just put on their—

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: FCC voice and said, "This is so-and-so from the FCC. I'd like you to know you're in violation," and then scare them straight.

Kawakita: Yeah, that might work.

Lindquist: I'm not sure that anybody would by it though. I'm not—I'm just not sure.

Kawakita: Right, that can't be substantiated.

Lindquist: Yeah.

Kawakita: Yeah.

Lindquist: If they get a suit, come down there with some papers, then maybe.

Kawakita: Yeah...[laughs]…that would be good.