

# Appendix

## Ruth Cope Interview

## Ruth Cope Interview<sup>1</sup>

*Ruth, the first time I think I ever was in that building, I came with Bob Studdiford – I don't know if you remember him –*

Oh! Oh, yes, yes. Yes, yes. He used to come back and forth to work on a skateboard.

*Yes. Skateboard, scrawny, tall. Remember the red beret, and shorts, and –*

No, I don't remember that part. I remember the skateboard.

*But, I came in, and back then – I guess it still is – When you came in you had to sign in to the ledger –*

We do that off and on. We're doing it now.

*Bob gave you a hard time about that, and – and, you know, he didn't want to sign in. I guess he was in and out all the time –*

A lot of people feel like that.

*– And you told him two things about why you had to sign in. Do you*

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<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted by the author at Ruth and Al Cope's home, probably circa 1983. Transcribed from degraded cassette tapes in 2008. Extended ellipses [...] denote passages (usually brief) of unintelligible dialogue. Spellings of some names are phonetic, approximated.

*recall what your stock answer to that was?*

No, because I've got a new one, now.

*What's your new one?*

Well, the Fire Marshall asked us to do it this time.

*I remember you saying that you had to sign in, because if there was a fire, they'd have to put a name on the bones –*

*(Ruth laughs:)* Yes.

*– Or something like that.*

Yes, yes. Yes, that's it. That usually – shakes them up.

*And I remember he signed. And the other thing was that there were procedures that you had to follow, being in the box office.*

*How did you first become involved with this theatre, Salt City? The very first thing you ever heard of, or –*

Well, it goes back a ways. When we were over in Utica, the whole – this part of New York – was alerted to the fact that blacks were not graduating. The minute they were legally, of legal age to get out – what is it, sixteen or something? I won't say when – and, *What to do about it?* And so, where we were living there was a committee of half blacks and half whites, trying to do something about it. And we came back to Syracuse about that time, and there was a committee – there was the same thing over here. Only they had the jump on us – they'd got started about a year before, and they'd tried out a few more things than we had. And so, we figured if I could do it in Utica, I might as well do it over here with them. So, I signed aboard with this committee, and it was called the *Y.O.U.* – Youth Opportunities Unlimited. And what they did was to have a conference on a couple of days, about 48 hours, at the end of school, the day school ended for Spring, we invited students who we

thought might profit by it, and they tried out different formulas, it was various approaches. And we took them out to Cazenovia, because one of the cast — one of the committee members was on the staff there. And they loved it. It was *their college*. They wanted to go particularly to *their college*. And the community, for quite some time, was not sensitized to blacks out there. I know we were very careful — when we went down to the village, a couple of blocks away, we sent somebody with them, a chaperone went with them, they weren't allowed roam around with one another. Anyway, my daughter had gone to a camp when she was in eighth grade, and she still showed the effects of the things, ideas she took up in that camp, and so I was absolutely sold on what that experience could do for a kid, just by itself. And — But the committee, and the people on the committee, thought we ought to do something on a year-around basis. Which wasn't too easy to do, because the kids were collected from, oh, a dozen target schools over in the city, and children that age don't have carfare money . . . . Nevertheless, somebody conceived that they should have a drama group, and they signed Joe aboard.

*Do you remember who conceived of the idea?*

No, I don't know which one, it could've been anybody. And you know how Joe is — He just doesn't know when to *stop!* So this thing struggled along for I don't know how long, not quite dying out and not doing any sort of spectacular, either. Oh —

*Did they do productions, though?*

Wait a minute, I'll come to that: they had one final production, which was terrific, which was *The Raisin in the Sun*. Before that they did what I would call, uh, the large drama — you know, the group of kids dressing up in one another's plays, and that sort of stuff. And Joe has a handful of stories from that to tell, on how that started and the different approaches they had to use. For instance, these kids had trouble *reading*, and Joe conceived of, leaned on the techniques that, uh, 'how now, brown cow' sort of thing. As one of the things he would do, would be to take a script — and there were

always scripts lying around – and he would take a phrase and hand it to this person, and another phrase from the same play, hand it to the next one. And they were supposed to pass it on in a certain style. And you could choose a style. But if I yelled at you, “I want eggs for breakfast!” – the guy was supposed to respond with, “My mother’s coming for lunch!” – you know, in the same style. But Joe didn’t stress it much, he just let them do whatever they wanted, and it was a good icebreaker. And we used to take the *roof* off Plymouth Church – this is where they had the room – every Saturday afternoon, nobody at Plymouth Church was delighted, but we had a great time with these exercises.

And then finally one time, Joe was putting on a demonstration for the Y.W.C.A. of Western New York. Three hundred ladies, in the Y.W.C.A., of course. And I said to him, “Joe, what is this all about?” Joe said, (*Ruth mimics, abrupt:*) “Just never you mind! Just be on time. Don’t ask any questions, just be there.” Well, anything but over-rehearsed. (*Laughs.*) You know John Heard, of course. We stood out in a row, and John Heard – I think he was really tall – present with four or five girls, including an extremely – well, she became a doctor since – a Chinese girl. She wasn’t pretty, but she was neat and intelligent, and she was there. And three or four others, and Joe tried this exercise. He called it ‘improvisation’ – I think that was what he called it – but anyhow. And he was, had the greatest misfortune that day. I don’t know what script we had – it was clearly spelled as unnaturally as possible. But nevertheless, we managed to get a – he was standing all this time, he was standing on the front of the stage in front of these three hundred ladies – but he finally got a phrase for John Heard and everybody else. Well, by the time he got everybody assigned, John had forgotten what he had to say. He couldn’t say it. And he said out loud, in a word that all three hundred ladies could hear, “Joe, I can’t say that. Give me something” – I think he said ‘rhymes’ – “Give me something that rhymes with it.” And Joe got him another phrase. But it was the turning point in the afternoon. All of a sudden, they all realized that we were not a little bunch of whiz-kids, we were not rehearsed to a fare-thee-well. This really was a workshop! And we were approaching it with very ordinary talent.

Now, uh – And I didn't know John well enough to talk about it at the time, but later on, some time later, I actually referred to it. And he had had the same impression of it that I had: that that was the incident that got the audience behind us.

But we had some good things to give them, that day. We had a little comedy that somebody had written, I think probably for the use of General Electric, about modern housewives and their – how they go gaga over household goods stuff. And the girl who played the lead was this little Chinese girl, and she dresses herself up as a slob, and screwed some huge pink hair-curlers into her long black hair, and got her father's bathrobe and slippers on, and came out looking like a slob. Well, they loved it, because they could see how neat she was, when she was in the line-up.

Well, I remember we wound up – Do you remember a person named Betty somebody? Do you remember this – we did it several times – a scene from, I think it's called *In White America* – it's a girl who goes – in Little Rock – who goes down to the school, to integrate the school? She's the first child that tries to go to school in Little Rock. And she describes it, and she describes how tense the family was. And her father said, well, he wasn't worried, but she says 'How was it he was smoking on a cigarette and a cigar – pipe at the same time?' And she goes to the school, and she's as nervous as can be, and the crowd is hostile to her. But she says to herself, 'Well, there are these soldiers up at the school. As soon as I get to where the soldiers are, I'll be all right.' But no, the soldiers and the crowd up there were against her, and they turned her away. Then she said to herself, 'If I can just get back to the bus stop, I'll be all right.' But then she realized, when she thought about it, there was nothing in the bus stop to protect her. There was just a bench there, there was no real, it wouldn't protect her from this – The crowd was spitting on her by this time. But there was a man there who was sympathetic, and he said 'Don't let them see you cry.' And she . . . was reunited with her mother who was a teacher, in her mother's classroom there, and that was the end of the episode. Well, *they* – The first time I saw her do it, she did it as one of our workshops one afternoon, and I didn't know what was coming.

And I said to Joe, "I didn't know she had it in her." Which was, I didn't know *that* girl was inside of her. And he said, oh, he knew. He said, "She drew a big breath before she started," and he said, "When an actor does that, you know they're going to give it everything they've got." Well, she did! And she had you right there on the stones of Little — pavement of Little Rock, being spat on like everybody else. Well, she did her thing, and all of these people were excited — and while she was out doing that, I guess, they came around backstage and said, "Joe, we want to sing *We Shall Overcome* as our last item. Should we hold hands?" And Joe didn't care whether they held hands or not. (*Ruth laughs.*) So they decided they'd better hold hands, so they went out and held hands, and we sang *We Shall Overcome*. It was really a nice program when all was said and done.

Well, Joe was doing that, and they were meeting in the basement of Plymouth Church, and he wanted — He didn't want me to help him with the theatre. Not for one single minute! But he had to have a sort of a lady chaperone, and somebody to watch the door. And I don't know if you've been around Plymouth Church, inside there, but it's worse than where we are now, with people around and everything. And worse than that, they had an alcoholics program there, and every once in awhile, some drunk would wander in to talk with the minister. And my business was to supervise, to see the door, and I just took — it was very casual, there was no pressure involved — I just took names and phone numbers of newcomers. And people would drift in to the program, and drift out, and if they liked it and found something they could relate with, they'd stick; and if they didn't, well, we wouldn't see them again. And that was just the way Joe wanted. And he was never on time, and they would come, and if the right guy was sitting over there, maybe, they would stay, or something like that, they would go and buy themselves a popcorn and soda. Come back, throw the popcorn. But nevertheless — Oh, their hope was, we had done, Joe had done *Blues for Mister Charles*, the year before I got involved. And a lot of white kids from out-of-town schools climbed aboard, hoping they could see themselves behind the spotlight, but they hoped in a few weeks or something. But Joe was terribly involved at that point

getting started with Salt City Playhouse, I guess it was. But anyway, he was off with other things in mind, and we never mounted any big thing then for these kids, like *A Raisin in the Sun*. Which was a huge success, and it marked — I don't know if you were around when it happened or not.

No.

It was a milestone for Joe and Syracuse, just as it was in New York City. It was the first time blacks had seen their problems, aired from their point of view, on the stage. And where they weren't just playing the part of a maid or a butler somewhere, you know, they were doing their own thing. Well, back to the audience, and standing around in the lounge, waiting to go and — well, Ralph Cooper, I know, particularly — he was a white man with a black spouse — he was thrilled at what he was going to see that night! And we — I don't know what we charged, but our aim was to make money for some scholarships, which we did — we cleared over a thousand dollars. Which we probably converted into scholarships, when there wasn't any money left. But anyhow — and there were a lot of people who would come and see a thing like that, because it was in a good cause. Dr. Washington, and you name it. And that established Joe as a teenage director, and as a black director.

*So, a white guy as a black director . . .*

Yeah. And there was nobody to fill that spot for several years, until after Salt City Playhouse got underway, and then we always had what I called a vehicle for black talent, as you know. And, um — then, we had some interesting castings. We had a black duchess in, uh, *The Man Who* —

*Who Came to Dinner?*

No. No, we never actually played that. I've got another story about that, though. No, something about 'cheese in the moon.' With a . . . . Well, anyhow, we had a black duchess in that one. We had a black member of the aristocracy in *Brothers and* — *Fathers and Sons*. And I



wasn't in the audience when it happened, but my daughter was — they were down to the period of, uh, Lincoln, with the big belle skirts, and somebody had given them a wedding dress, and they had dyed it blue, I think. And this a nice young black girl who was playing the part of this young Russian —

*Countess.*

No, she didn't — the whole point of the play — she didn't actually have a title herself, but she was related. She was related. And Joan said that the audience started gasping when they saw her at first. But then, she was so winsome. And she played the part so well. She was so, you know, she went over with the audience before the night was up. Oh, and you know, Hans Klint, of course, played *Pippin*, and also he was a — some other parts. And so we've always had the blacks around. Then, finally, all this broke through. Roy Delemos got to directing. Bill Rowland got to directing. I'm not sure, one or two others, I'm not sure. And they've been doing their thing. Oh, Bobby Hamilton got into it. And they have, now, the *Paul Robeson Company*. And they've been putting on, from what I hear, very successful musicals and shows and one thing or another.

*Ruth, let's backtrack for a minute. There's an apocryphal story that back in those early Y.O.U. days, when Joe was just working as a teenage director, when he first began, that he would pass out scripts for the kids to read, and that he would have them stand up and just do readings, and he found out that they couldn't read very well at all. And he had to deal with that, also. You ever heard that story?*

I heard something along that line. I think the woman who helped him in those days — Well, even John Heard. John Heard was a strapping big kid who was playing football, in the ninth grade probably, when we encountered him. And John will tell you, as fast as anybody, that he finds reading really difficult. And yet he played the lead for us more than once. He played the lead in *Great White Hope* and *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*. . . . Oh, yes — and he sang . . . nice big voice. And he was singing in the chorus of our first *Fiddler*. And I was watching this with my black friend, and she

studied the matter: "I suppose he's one of these new Jews?" Oh, dear. Well, anyhow, what was her name? Some woman was helping Joe, before I got into it. And they had such trouble with these kids reading. And that's when they started improvising. And then, whether it was because of our experience with the Y.W.C.A. ladies or not, I don't know - finally Joe got around to using just numbers. One! Two. And he'd give each person a number. And then he would give them things to do. Act like it was the hometown ballgame was just won. And then there was one that you had to stand in the middle, and everybody was supposed to get that they were going to be hostile. And I guess they tore his shirt, and they were pushing him around, and demonstrating that, falling. And then there was another one where we had to line up, two sides, and finally, well, they were all fighting, one at a time, it was just touched over, to the strong side, and who was finally the one person up. But do you know, somebody wanted to do - We were always being - not always - but I mean, we were, have to and still are - looked at from people in the TV classes that need free actors? Well this, there was a gang who needed personnel for some assignment or other they had. So we did 29 minutes of emotions, as I recall, which was always numbers. Just numbers. And they built a total stage, so that you could look down into the formations . . . . It was just numbers. And Joe used numbers, then, from then on, quite a bit. Because reading was such an effort. And John Heard would be the first to admit to that. I don't know how he ever learned his parts, but he did.

*How did they get from doing Raisin in the Sun, which I guess was in the old Regent Theatre -*

. . . . The University.

*How did they get from there to the Peat Street theatre? How did that work out?*

Oh, well, *Raisin in the Sun* was done with part of the Y.O.U. - It had nothing, legally - Joe thinks it. In Joe's *mind*, everything he's ever done with youth is part of his theatre life and - the fact that it

goes back to his first play, if you hadn't met him . . . 'Oh, I've been doing theatre for so many years.' Well, the truth of it was, that was *not* Salt City Playhouse, it was this Y.O.U. thing. But Joe *thinks* of it as being all bound up together. And sure enough, the personnel in one, kind of resurfaces in the next one. And, um – Oh, you asked me about Peat Street. Oh, they did this thing, *The Raisin in the Sun*, in the Experimental. Which in those days was part of what they called the Regent . . . .

*We're talking 1960-what? Sixty-eight?*

Sixty-eight? Oh, gosh. It was the year my daughter graduated from high school, because I saw so many high school plays, I could just croak. Her high school play, and our high school play – all this high school stuff. Anyway – Oh! The reason *The Raisin in the Sun* was a success was, Joe had the necessary ingredients. He had Eleanor Russell. Now, she was only about sixteen, but she could project her voice and her emotions clear to the back of the auditorium. And she was stout. But she looked the part of Grandmother, without any effort. And the other kids weren't as spectacular as she was, but they supported her. And the theme of *The Raisin in the Sun* – this family was with a variety of problems, and their mother agonizes over them, and that's what this play is – the dramatic intentions . . . . And it nearly ruined her. Because all of the sudden, here was this teen-aged black actress, and everybody wanted her. They wanted her to do a South African play at the Jewish Community Center, she was put on a marriage committee, and one thing and another, and she almost didn't graduate. She got into this – she was in the spotlight and she had so much, so many other opportunities.

*So, how long was it after that Regent Theatre performance that they did move into Peat Street? When did the incorporation thing happen?*

Well, we moved into Peat Street in sixty-nine. And this was – must have been a year or two that they did *Raisin in the Sun*. My daughter must have been about eighteen at the time. It would have been about sixty-eight, I believe.

*And how does that work out, where they decided to form a company? I understand Joe was still working at G.E. at the time.*

Oh, yes.

*What really crystallized that?*

Well, I wasn't in that end of it. I've always said, why, I was happy to be out of it. I wasn't involved in all the stress and strain of starting another theatre. You know, there always are half a dozen theatres. Right now, they seem to be in a particularly vigorous phase. There've always been some around. And here Joe was this — and his gang — were setting up another one. And they got everything set up, and they put on a play that Joe found over in England — maybe you saw it — *The Restoration of Arnold Neuin*.

*No, I don't know it.*

Well, Joe saw it in England. It's about a slightly wacky English schoolteacher who collects all sorts of stuff, and his wife can't stand it, because her nice livingroom with the chintz curtains doesn't mate with the sort of stuff he brings in. Finally the last straw occurs as the curtain opens — here is a suit of armor, right in the middle of the livingroom. She can't stand it! It's got to go. And, well, various things happen — but the suit of armor I guess goes — but then it turns out he has a sort of an affair with his mother-in-law, and a few other things. And the first time — we did it twice, once down there, and then to Peat Street — and I had two different impressions of it. At Peat Street, I kind of felt sorry for the guy. And when we did it up at — I mean at the first time. And when we did it up at Peat Street, a little bit wackier, and the stuff we had on the stage was wackier. But anyhow, you were asking about —

*Getting into Peat Street.*

Getting into Peat Street. Well, I went in on the coattails of Salt City Playhouse. Because — Oh! They did this thing, *The Restoration of*

*Arnold Neuwin, and Call me Madame.*

*When you move into Peat Street, they charter the theatre, and it's incorporated – that part of it you weren't involved with. When did you first come back into it?*

Oh, in the Salt City Playhouse part?

*Um-hmm. How did it happen that you got on the Board of Directors?*

Well, as soon the president found he had a debt on his hands, he was for getting out as fast as possible! And they were – I was – I don't know why they asked me to come in. Because I'd been working with Joe as his –

*Door –*

Door woman. And so I was called aboard – I don't know what they had – a couple of folks they had, probably. And oh, yeah, another thing. One of the things they say – I've heard this said repeatedly – *"The purpose of the board is to raise money."* But my personal income at that point was eighteen dollars a year! So I didn't feel that I had much money to offer. So my argument was, to myself – and I didn't see myself as in any way as a leader – I can't give them anything in the way of money; I can give them *time*. My golly, I've done that. I really have.

Yes.

So, I was invited aboard, when they sort of re-vamped themselves in the fall. And one of the best things that happened was they got Dr. David Nash as president. Now, he knew rather little about theatre – his wife was a singer – but he was an intelligent man, he was ready to learn, and he wasn't at all afraid by three thousand dollars worth of debt – he has a ninety thousand dollar house himself, I guess – and a clear thinking fellow, and he was just what we needed at that point. And he stuck with us until, I think, until we moved out of Peat Street. We moved into Peat Street, and then

out. Joe was simply – some friend of his, I don't know who, was connected with this, absolutely a –

*Warehouse.*

Warehouse on Peat Street. And he was letting Joe collect all the flotsam and jetsam that comes after a play in his warehouse. And every time we took over some stuff, Joe and Pat would go around with a flashlight in this great big room and say "Gee, there's a theatre in here. A theatre here." And so they finally – then, I think, they had a lot of things that happened – then they found there was support for it, until they decided to go ahead. I think their bill – ur, rent for it was something like four hundred dollars a month, I guess, something like that.

*What did it look like, when they – How much was done to convert it into a theatre?*

Peat Street? Well, the roof was never satisfactorily sealed, so it would rain. It would drip in the summer, particularly, and sometimes in the winter with an ice melt. The Fire Department thought it was marvelous, because it had a cement floor, and it had cinderblock walls, and it had a steel roof, and it had a great big door to the north, and the south – loading platforms, they really were. And the Fire Department thought it was an ideal theatre, from their point of view. And it was an oblong – You ever down there?

*No.*

It was a long oblong room. We had the same seats that we have in the Second Theatre now, by the way. And we had seven rows. Long rows. And then we had a very long stage. Sometimes we used all of it, even with extensions . . . . And the roof was fourteen feet high.

*How was it lit – Do you recall?*

Oh, lit. Uh, with neon tubes – I know we always had neon tubes being thrown out of the back door. Uh, well, they had a – Oh, I

know. They built a lightbooth outside – We rented the west end of this building – They built a lightbooth at the far side of this wall, and knocked out a hole off at the top . . . and that's where our spotlights were – and gosh, I don't know what we did for lights on the stage, I don't remember. And Joe used the most youthful of people – Butch Capito and Frankie Shay were both in high school at the time – did a lot of the lighting, did all the kind of building and stuff you used to do, climbing up on ladders and stuff, and so on.

*About how many shows would you say were done at Peat Street?*

Oh, that's funny. When we started in, it was my impression – Now, Pat and Joe's impressions, they're not always quite the same as mine – but it was my impression that we would do a show – like – well, we did . . . we did some things in the summer. We did a Pinter *Birthday Party*, I think – Oh, yeah, I know we did the Pinter *Birthday Party* – and *Camelot*. In the summer. Then we'd take a big breath, and wait until the treasurer found out whether we'd lost or made any money on the show, and then we'd decide what we'd do next. Now, I don't think it was quite that casual, but that was kind of my impression. And we didn't really buckle down to a serious program until we began to get funding from, I guess it was the New York State Council – And then they said to us, in April, "And what are you doing next year?" And all of a sudden we had to come up with a program for the following year. Now, they were gentlemen about it – If you had ran into difficulties, you know, you were allowed to change it and stuff – but we had to show that we were thinking a year ahead. And so we had to start thinking a year ahead.

*At this point, was it still a black theatre?*

Oh, no. Oh, no. It never was a black theatre. It was just that Joe always was interested – And once we – once the Salt City Playhouse – once the Playhouse got started, Joe personally just couldn't give the blacks the time that he had previously. But we always had one show a year which was what I called the vehicle for

black talent. We did *Great White Hope* – What else did we do? . . . . Well, we did *Curley*, *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, we did a black *The Wiz*, I can't think of what else. . . . And then, in addition to those plays that were black vehicles, Joe was always giving black talent a quite fair – a black duchess, a black Secretary of State, and a black Pippin, for example, and so forth. And Joe was very hospitable to black talent. Which makes it a lot of fun to watch, actually.

*How many years were you at Peat Street?*

Oh, '69 through '72.

*And during this time, you were on the Board.*

Yeah.

*Who were the people who were around then? Who were the – Was Terry, uh, Terry What's-his-Name around? Was he one of them?*

Terry Nicholson?

Yeah.

He didn't come on until we got up to where we are now. Oh, I know what happened. Pat went up to Alexandria Bay, to do a thing – a summer theatre, that . . . . Anyway, she went up to do *Can-Can*, in this program that Jerry Ridenborough developed out in Alexandria Bay . . . . I think he did, *Applause* maybe?

*Applause?*

. . . . Oh, it was when Joe hurt his shoulder, and was out. And we were doing *Godspell*. The first *Godspell*. And the – Did you ever see *Godspell*?

*Not Salt City's version of it, no.*

Well, first of all, the music's nice. And it doesn't take any –



costumes are very economical. Just clowns. And there's practically no set. And it was just fresh out of Broadway. And I think they were doing it in the schools, and we had a great audience. And people were coming from Buffalo to see it. And here was Joe — really flat on his back, actually — and Terry wanted to — I don't know how the subject came up — Terry wanted to continue it at the Regent. I don't know what it was, whether it was still the Regent or not — and Joe said he wasn't interested in extending it. And here's Terry, who had directed it . . . and he wanted to continue it, over Christmas, at the Regent. And so, since Joe said he wasn't interested, Terry undertook to put it on at the Regent. The first that the Lotitos knew was when Bobby Hamilton said — Well, Bobby'd been asked to play — "What gives?" And they had a fit! Our play, and he has no business doing this, and oh, they had it out. And it put Terry in the doghouse forever, as far as they were concerned. But they've never done — I guess we did do *Godspell* once after, a long time afterwards, but we certainly didn't do it that year. You can't —

*With that situation —*

Anyway, that was the end of Terry Nicholson. And, of course, in a way it was a little unfortunate that he did go off and did it on his own, just at the time when Joe was completely incapacitated.

*We'll get to that in a few minutes, but I understand that the Temple opened up after it had been vacant for some time, and there was a lot of talk about moving into that location. Which to the layman looks like a good location — up in the University section, with a big enough building for a couple of decent theatres — and I understand that you were the one member of the Board to oppose that move.*

*(Laughs.) Oh, really?*

*Was that true, and why did you oppose that move?*

Well, I don't know if it was true or not, but it could have been. Well, first of all, I predicted that the heating system was shaky —

*Which turned out to be very true –*

Very true. And it would cost a quarter of a – at least twenty five thousand dollars at least to fix it – and of course, that was ten or fifteen years ago – it would be twice that now. And, well, I just didn't really visualize that we had that much clout to move into . . . . And if it hadn't been for Joe, and his bulldog qualities, we wouldn't have succeeded. Because we had awful debts . . . and whenever we had a play on, and we were in the headlines, all the people that we owed money to would call in, in a testy way, wanting to talk to *Joe*. This has nothing to do with that aspect of it, but it was most every play. One of the things that happened was we did *West Side Story*, and Terry Nicholson was there, and Terry said that it had to have a big band and it would go over. So we got Mario DiChavas and a big band – but I don't think we really made enough to pay it off or not. But I think what was really happening was, Joe was stalling for time, waiting I think for the funding from one of the agencies to come through, or something. Anyway, he was stalling. And Mario DiChavas naturally wanted his money. And he would come over and ask for Joe, and Joe was unavailable, and Mario just didn't believe me, and he would start stalking Joe around the building. And they would – it was quite a sight. Well, anyway, eventually, I guess he must have gotten it settled with Mario.

*I heard one story about a debt collector, who didn't know Joe Lotito, getting tired of the run-around and finally barging up to the upper offices, only to find a janitor who was emptying wastebaskets, sweeping up the offices. And this janitor turned out to be an Italian immigrant, who didn't understand much English, but just enough to say that he had no idea where Mr. Lotito was – [Ruth laughs loudly]. Did you ever hear that story?*

No, I never heard that, but it's very plausible. Very plausible.

*The actor at work, there.*

*So you moved into the Temple, there, and I guess they did an awful lot of work. At what point did Joe stop working for [General Electric]?*

Well —

*Was that before the move?*

No, it was after the move. I'm just trying to . . . . We moved in '72, and he was still at G.E. then. Gosh.

*So, it was later?*

Maybe the following year. It wasn't much later.

*And by that time, I imagine that both theatres were established?*

No, no. No, the work on the — Oh, dear. Kathy Gayle wanted us to do nothing but clean house that summer — Let's get ourselves nicely strong. And Joe wanted — I guess he wanted the income — what he wanted was to do something *immediately*. And Jerry Ridenbough said — in those days, Syracuse Stage wasn't doing anything that particular summer — and Joe said, 'You'd be well advised to have a couple of, you know, to run a program this summer,' because Syracuse Stage wasn't doing anything. I'm not even sure they calling it Syracuse Stage at that point. And then we chose *Fiddler on the Roof*, because we wanted a vehicle that if any of the former members of the Temple wanted to come back and see what we were doing, they would feel comfortable to come and see it. And it wasn't my impression that they came by in droves. But they may have sent a few trusted scouts out, finally, to see what was happening — I don't know. Anyway, so Kathy — that was kind of the cause of her breaking with us — she really thought as though we shouldn't have gone ahead with that at that time.

*But Fiddler turned out to be a real success, didn't it?*

Always is. Always does. A little bit like *Superstar*. That happened with usually a play like that, yes. And you wait a few more years,

and you've got a whole fresh lot of students, and fresh faces —

*And everybody else ready to see it again.*

What was the question about? What we did?

*Oh, boy, I don't recall. Just about moving into that theatre —*

Oh! Well, we managed to get the big auditorium going. First of all, they did have plans. I mean, they had an architect to design what they wanted to do . . . . And one day, one morning, I went into the theatre, and I poked my head into the big theatre, and I was *floored* at what I saw! Here on stage were about two hundred great big black wheels, like the kind that you put under an industrial refrigerator, upside down. Screwed into the floor, upside down. It was the funniest — I have a picture of it, somewhere. It was the funniest thing I ever did see. Well, that was the underpinnings of the turntable. And there was a hassle over that, too, because we had a black engineer on our Board at that time, and he said that we had too many of them, that it would be . . . friction, you know what I mean — So many that the friction of starting it would be a problem. He said we had too many, that we needed fewer ones if we wanted to move the turntable readily — we shouldn't have them every eighteen inches like we did. Well, he was shouted down, or voted down or something, he went off in a huff. And we — Oh, and the contractor won that round. The contractor had his two hundred wheels put on. And — We still use it occasionally, but it hasn't — it's used sporadically.

*Who was doing all the building? The stage, and the lighting grid. The ceiling, where those chains —*

Who built the grid? Just contractors. Jim somebody. Jim — I always get it mixed up with — Trainer, or Turner, or something of the sort. Oh, he was excited. And the grid excited him more than the turntable. He had never done anything quite like that.

*Was he donating his —*

Far from it! And he had to whistle for his money for a long, long time, too. We were really living on the proverbial shoestring, or less, for quite awhile in those days.

*Now, you were managing the box office in those days.*

Well, 'manager' was not my title. In fact, whenever Joe wanted to bring somebody aboard in the box office, he would install them as the new manager. And the new manager would come along . . . [laughter]. But then if you needed them, if they lent themselves to it, like Mary Eagle – next thing you knew, they were doing all their work upstairs, and you were left doing the nitty-gritty downstairs. This happened over and over again. And, uh – When I was there, I mean, it was – I have a kind of a, an unchanging quality.

*It's often said that the box office is 'the lifeblood of the theatre.' How many times have you heard that?*

Never. But I believe it. I've told people – I've pointed out to people in different words – everything we do is at small scale in the box office. If we have a fifty dollar order, it's big. And as for two hundred or more, it's huge. But, it all adds up. Since I've been off the Board, I don't know what the figures are anymore, nor the percentages, but your box office is at least half if not more of your income. In our particular theatre. The rest you get from donations, or foundations . . . .

*So, by 1973 you have regular seasons, you have regular production schedules. How about staff? What's your staff turnover?*

Oh, horrible! Horrendous! I have compared the theatre with my Quaker experiences in Philadelphia many a time, and you'd be amazed at how similar they are. We were a charitable institution – you know, both of us were – so we were dependent on public gifts and whatnot, we used volunteer help whenever we could get it . . . to lead to a high turnover. And – What else do I want to say? Well, there several marked differences. One was that in Philadelphia they

had a core of people that had been used to working together for – several of us for ten years, our boss had been hired a quarter of a century before, and his assistant had been hired in 1917! And there was a stability there that Salt City Playhouse is just now beginning to –

*[Tape ends. New tape, in medias res:]*

And then of course the personnel, the central man, was quite different. We had a very laid back man in Philadelphia who knew Quakers thoroughly. He knew what they needed to know, he knew what he was going to tell them, and he knew how to tell them, and he had them eating out of his hand . . . Joe never had – You know Joe. ‘Laid back’ is not the word for Joe most of the time. Joe’s a very different person. But otherwise, there were remarkable parallels – Why did I bring that one up?

*I don’t know. But between the two organizations – Did you ever feel that it was anomalous for you to be working in the theatre? That is was –*

No. Because I justified it for a long time, because I had an interracial experience that was far superior to any of my friends. Most of my friends – one or two had some experience – but even most of the white people I knew. I was associating with blacks on a positive, upward, intellectual level. Now, of course – well, they’re still around, in a way – but the people that helped Joe in those years, were part of his program, have gone off and they’re doing their own thing. They’re the Paul Robeson group.

*And what group has come in to replace them?*

None, that’s coming to our theatre. They’ve gone off and done their own thing, down at the Landmark or wherever they go. And it upsets Joe a little bit when he thinks about it, but on the other hand, I think he can pat himself on the back. Because he really launched a vigorous, independent black theatre. It got its sense of direction trying out their . . . at our place.

*Now, for awhile the theatre, once it started burgeoning, once it started being a pretty big thing, was funded and run by OCETA people, a lot of it.*

Oh, yes.

*A lot of Joe's staff, people like Mike Davis and Eddie Musengo. How did that come about? I've always seen that as a great expansion – the move into the temple and then, you know, in hiring, getting a staff through this OCETA program –*

Well, we had some of that money – We had some of that money down at Peat Street, too. We used to hire a bus every Saturday morning to pick children up around the neighborhood, and take them home afterwards. And I guess it also hired, also paid John Connorson, and others. We had more than . . . a payroll, staff, there. Joe, quickly, used whatever came, was available. And if OCETA money was available, Joe knew how to use it.

*But there was a staff that came in. I remember while we were still in the old part of the building –*

Mike Toucci?

*Yeah, Mike Toucci, and Desimone, and those OCETA kids, and then the people upstairs [in the administrative office] in that old part of the building. Was that kind of a hey-day, at that time? Was that kind of the high water mark, or no?*

Well, I never looked on it that way, because we were always – even in spite of that, we were always scrounging. And we could never – and of course, it was a little bit like Wooser's Law: 'the more you have, the more you want,' and so forth. It never really quite came up to your desires or expectations. But also, these OCETA people – Some like yourself, now, were a real find. And Kelly was another. And, well, I can't name the others right off the bat, but some people were just – I don't know whether the Kesels, the Kesels may be one, I don't know – They were real finds. In which, we had something to give them, they had a lot to give us,

and it was a real marriage of opportunity. But there were a lot of people that you couldn't say that of them at all. They were just –

*Hoods.*

No, not necessarily, just ineffectual people. And, well, Joe could find things for them – they used to manufacture our tickets. Our tickets were appalling to look at, but just the same, they were tickets. And he would have these high school kids upstairs, printing tickets and cutting tickets, and stuff. It was just – busy, kind of busy. I used to come across stuff that looked like it was made in a kindergarten. But anyway, Joe managed to use it, one way or another. And it wasn't always easy. You probably know that yourself, better than I do. So, I was more aware of the effort it took to use these. Well, in a way, it was a sort of a hey-day. Of course, that came to an end, and I don't know – I've been off the Board, and I don't know what they do to manage now. There must be something, because Joe has a bigger staff than he did then. He used to have one bookkeeper, remember? . . . And now he's got – well, his sister's in there, and I am so glad she's in there. Because she can now see the theatre from the inside. Anyway, Toni's there, in the business office, and Sheila Allen, and their daughter Sue. . . he's got quite a staff up there, and I don't know how he manages it.

*It seems that when it began to expand, it was in the Sixties when there was all kinds of funding available for black programs, and for youth programs, and for all of that –*

Well, I think before the inner city we had this thing that Glenn Brown was in – P.E.A.C.E! P.E.A.C.E., that was it. P.E.A.C.E. Oh, yes. P.E.A.C.E. : “People's Equal Action Community Effort.” And for every dollar they got from us, we had to provide a dollar in volunteer time. Now, they were very proper about it. If you were a schoolteacher, your time was worth maybe six times as much as your student. So if you came in and signed up for ten hours of time, that was worth so much; and if your student came in, and he signed up for ten hours of time, he would be worth a sixth of what you were. And it would all add up. But you know, we made our quota.



And it was mostly due to Edith Faber. She was the one who really put the rules down . . . . And we made our quota, and we were told at that time that we were greatest consumer of volunteer help in the city, in those days . . . . But Edie was great with putting people to work, finding things for them to do, and not fretting too much about the quality of the work done.

*That brings up – It seems like the predominance of people who have been involved – and I may be wrong, this may just be my impression – but I’m thinking of people like Toucci and Desimone – It seems like an unrepresentative sampling of people who are Catholics, in this Jewish temple, with a Quaker box office lady. (Ruth laughs.) That’s quite a mix. Is that a correct impression, do you think?*

In the theatre you don’t think about religion much.

*It seems to break down that way.*

When *Superstar’s* around you get a strong Catholic feeling, because it has an appeal to the Catholic church. And you all of a sudden get all these Catholic names in the box office and other places – It’s the only time I ever really thought about it much. There’s this flood of usually Italian and Polish names that you get at, over *Superstar*. But, I don’t know, I don’t think about it much. People don’t – The theatre’s not a place for a whole lot of religion. *(Laughs.)*

*Who first came up with that tag, “The House that Joe Built”? Who came up with that?*

I never heard of it. But it’s true. People ask, “Who’s the boss here?”, and oh boy, it’s true.

*One of the most crucial things that happened was that accident. What are your recollections about that?*

Joe’s accident?

Yes.

Oh. Well, first he was — One interesting thing about it is that his attitude changed radically. They were going to take some promotion pictures one night, and they were with Henry — What was their name? Henry somebody. Anyway, the car ran into a ditch, and Joe literally smashed his shoulder. And he was in *misery* for a year. It was misery for him. You know, how they tied his arm up like this, and there was some explanation as to why they couldn't immobilize him, I don't know why. But any move was painful. And he finally got into one of these flying braces, sort of thing. And then getting out of that was a pain in itself. His brother — Oh, do you know Dan?

*I've met him, yes.*

He is just darling. He's mellower than Joe. Anyway, Dan came to help out. And he brought his wife, his son, his dog, his cat. And Joe had a wife, a son, and a daughter, and two cats and two dogs. Well, how they all fit in that house, I never could figure out. And . . . he drove Joe around town, and came down and checked on the theatre — we were doing, I guess it was *Godspell* — we were doing something that was very successful at the time. And Dan came down and, you know, checked it out. Then Joe had a brother — a cousin rather — Lorenzo. And Lorenzo was fresh from Italy, and he felt as though he had to help out in this crisis, and he wanted to do something — so he decided to paint the livingroom! How you could get on to paint with two women, three children, three dogs and three cats is beyond me! But he did a nice job anyway, so Lorenzo helped out. And Joe didn't come back for a full year. And when he did come back, we were still aware of it, you know.

*What happened during that year? How did the place stay open?*

Oh, well . . . First of all, *Godspell*. I can't understand. We were doing also — We were doing *The Visit* that month, and I don't know how we could've been — Maybe with *Godspell* following *The Visit* possibly, I don't know. Anyway, one of the things I remember about *The Visit* was we had a girl from the University who was on a

kind of a work study deal, and she was assigned to get the program ready. And when the time came for her to report, you know, they hadn't completed the program, there was nobody to make it – write it for us. And I don't know what happened. I wasn't supposedly – I didn't supposedly have anything to do with it. So I didn't feel it was my business to write it up. But I've often thought that girl had quite an education with us. She got out a little program on a mimeograph machine that we were using then – so we had our own mimeograph. We would get electric stencil, cut out at AB Dick, and we had a picture of – I don't know what . . . and people liked the cover. And then she had to make the layout. Well, she ran into several things. One was, she couldn't get – She wanted some material from the director. That was some guy from New York. Oh, that was the irony of it! We had just fallen heir to a director from New York, who was getting paid for it by one of these foundations. He was to raise the sights of us hinterland people as to what directing could be. And here was Joe, who would be the chief beneficiary, laid up on his back in the hospital. So Joe – I don't know what Joe got out of it. Anyway, this fellow was here, and she couldn't get the material she wanted out of him until about the night before the deadline. Well, she was so frantic getting the stuff together that she managed to misspell a few names, and she left out the names of – somebody or other. And the AB Dick people told her she could make a – they would make a form, so many by so many inches. Well, it didn't. The outer margins just didn't fit. And so especially on the list of characters, nobody's last name printed! Just the first names, there were no last names. They had a fit! They were not about to do a play where their names weren't listed on the program! Oh! So we had to type a little sheet and stick it in, you know. But everybody liked the general layout, they liked the pictures in it . . . But I thought, boy that girl really learned a lot. But, I felt bad, I thought that it was just that I didn't take the bit in my teeth and point out to her what she does and write it into – of course, you can write it into a report. But I wasn't supposed to be supervising her, and if I'd been presumptuous about it – You know how Joe is, he would have bawled me out. But anyway, so much for that. Uhm – Oh, you were asking about that winter. Well, it must have been *Godspell*. Then, I think we had already

gotten *River Niger* or something, I think, had been set up. With Anderson McCullough? From Oswego? Do you ever see him?

*I took a couple of classes from him. Good professor.*

Great big guy – I don't whether he has – whether he had polio or what. He walks around with a cane. Well. He arrived at our place in winter, after the snow had set in, and after a round of ice had formed between the pavement and the street. And I had managed to dig out – Well, we didn't have any staff then. And I said to Joe this year, "I've dug this place out many a time." I've, you know, gone around the building and kept the paths open. And I had kept a little path open – (*laughs*) – big enough for me, to go from the pavement to the street, not so big. Well, McCullough comes along – Can you imagine him going through a path like that?

*No, I can't imagine it.*

Well, first of all, he graciously came with a sack of halite – so I got the message. Uh, somebody wanted him to go out the rear door, where we are now, because the steps there are slightly better. For some reason he didn't like that – He wanted to go out the door we were using then, which had the flight of steps up to the old theatre. Well, I was terrified that he was going to skid down those steps some night, so I used that halite, and mine too, religiously to keep the steps safe. Then I had to peck away at this little Grand Canyon, in effect, to make it wide enough for him to navigate with his crutches. But he went back and forth every night, except, I think, one night maybe.

And then he did – I can't imagine what other show he directed for us. He directed twice. Both times, he did the same thing. He brought a little white boy, on his last night, with him, that had – was on crutches, too. As much as to say to this little fellow: "Look, I have the same handicap you do, but I'm boss here. You can make it too." I thought it was the most marvelous thing."

*Yes, he's quite a man. A good guy. That was – How did you keep the*

*place heated that winter?*

Oh, well, wait a minute. That's a whole 'nother chapter. We got through *River Niger*, and then Derek Coleman . . . did a monologue called *Darrow for the Defense*. That was a one-man show, it took a minimum of setting and stuff, and uh – I don't know what we did after that. Oh, I wonder – Partly I guess to make money, Joe decreed that we would have a, you know, yard sale on the front steps. It wasn't called that, it was called something else. Anyway, that was an awful lot of effort, because all the clutter that was going to be sold had to be hauled down to the Main Theatre, and then we had, I think it was this Samuel Oran Bisboe, that Joe had, this firm. Anyway, an experienced auctioneer. And he had his own staff, he had a, somebody with him. He would just have a runner. But it meant that the stuff had to be hauled onstage, and giving it to the audience, then it was sold, then it was hauled off the stage down to the, you might say loading area, which was the lounge. People would come in and get it. But it was just this awful lot of effort. And, uh – Turn that off for a minute.

*Okay. [Tape recorder is turned off. Resuming:]*

*I think shortly thereafter, just about as soon as Mr. Lotito was back, you launched into that summer season where really a lot was done – Guys and Dolls, and Berlin to Broadway, and Little Mary Sunshine, Fiorello –*

Oh, gosh yes. We had this director – What was his name?

*Johnston. George Johnston.*

George Johnston came, we did three shows together, he cast it all in one fell swoop, and he made one big long cast list of everybody that was going to work that summer, and everything was so organized it went off without a slip. Yep.

*And that was quite a summer. I remember that it was before there was any air conditioning, and it was a hot summer. [Ruth laughs.] But – a lot of money was made that summer, from what I could tell. There seemed to be a*

*lot of people there. It started out with one by Brendan Behan, and Slow Dance on the Killing Ground, and the three Johnston shows. And just previous to that they'd done Willy Loman, Death of a Salesman.*

Oh. That was considered, reviewed rather, as one of Joe's best roles. Personally I don't like the play at all; it's not about the kind of people I associate with. And I don't know what the social significance of it is, it was lost on me. But anyway, it was reviewed that way, and the play — I'll have to think about this, because you know Joe holds over — it doesn't take much for Joe to decide we'll have a holdover. And that was one of the plays, I believe we held over until one night there were only eight in the audience. And the actors never forgot it. I wouldn't say never forgave him, but at least they never forgot it. But yeah, it was a good play. It was a play that was well reviewed and well attended. There was nothing wrong with the play, it was just that . . . .

*[Rick] Hirschhoff was in that one, too.*

In a — oh, gee. I wouldn't know . . . . You know what he's doing now?

*No, what's he doing, Ruth?*

You'll never guess. He's selling insurance in Washington, D.C.

*You remember the thing with the coal? Remember that?*

Coal?

*Yeah, burning coal.*

Oh, we burned other stuff besides coal, on occasion. Do you mean when the heat went out?

*Yeah.*

Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Well, you were talking about heating the place,

when Joe was out. First of all, just paying for it was something. And what's his name? A board member, Colgrove, undertook to keep the oil flowing . . . and we just kept a minimum of heat in the building, you know, we didn't — we just wanted enough to keep the pipes from freezing. And so, we had our own system for figuring that out, of what that temperature would be. So one night, I figured that I had to turn it on at four in the morning, I think it was. My husband had no interest left whatsoever in this project. So, I hired a taxi, and it turned out, optimistically, [*inaudible*] was driving it. Did you ever — he used to, acted with us. And so we went in, and all I had to do was to just go from the door there over to the cellar door, and flip the switch and come back; I didn't have to do anything else. So I came home, and the next morning I went over, and the heat was off again! And I thought, 'How could it be? Could I have possibly come over here in the middle of the night and not turned it on?'

*What happened?*

Well, it turned out that Pat had come over and decided that she ought to turn the heat on at seven in the morning, so she came over at seven in the morning and turned it *off*. Well anyway, we didn't know — Well on one famous occasion we did not guess right. And we had — and the pipes burst. And I went over to the little theatre — and luckily I was wearing rubber boots; I was so glad — I went in the door, and here was a wash of water; and the water had come down through the wall and was bathing the fire alarm system. And Jowonio was in the school in those days, in the building, and they had figured out how to turn the water out in the building, so that it stopped somehow. But they were upset because they couldn't wash their little children's hands or flush their toilets. So they were upset. So, finally we got ahold of the plumber, and some money, and he came over and he was dismayed because he wanted to work with a janitor and blueprints. And I couldn't provide — I wasn't a janitor and I couldn't provide any blueprints. So he finally figured out a pipe that he probably thought was it, and he tapped it, and I guess it was — To this day I'm not sure where it went. I think it probably went up to where those wash stands, wash basins on the third floor,

maybe. Anyway, we got those waters stopped. And as far as I know, it's been stopped ever since. Anyhow, eventually though, we had to call in Don Angel to review, revamp his fire alarm system. And he reported to Pat Lotito that it would take him another trip to fix it, because something or other was needed, was not on his truck. And he said, 'I don't carry it on my truck because it almost never gets out of kilter.' Pat said, 'Just at Salt City Playhouse.' [Laughs.] Anyway, but then somebody – Oh, when Don Wiltshire. Joe hired Don Wiltshire and Alice Napierski, just before they were married, I guess – to run the theatre, and to do everything connected with the tech – they were to do everything. They were to design the sets, build them, keep the things going. And they accepted this assignment with extremely good – great good will. And, but then some of this OCETA money came in just on top of that, and all of a sudden instead of Don and Alice, we had Mike Toucci and . . . .

*Desimone, and all those guys.*

Yeah. And, uhm . . . . Oh, I know. I know. They had to – Then – One of the things that Don had – They went at it with the greatest of enthusiasm. There was no problem too weird that they wouldn't tackle. Get their teeth into it. Then the other furnace – the gas furnace over in the leased end of the building, had a problem. And it had to be re-vamped or re-surfaced or re-lined or something. And Don went into the whole assembly – and lo and behold if he didn't locate the technician that had installed the furnace in the first place. And he got the original guy to advise him of what to do next. So, somewhere along the line, we discovered that in the synagogue – their pipes had burst, too. I felt guilty about all of this – wreckage. Because I thought, well, we weren't very good managers. But then I discovered that they had pipes to fail, also, because they had help in the place, too.

*I don't mean to go into any names, but there's a huge turnover. Every year when it comes time to put out the W-2 forms and send them in, they've gone through a lot of people –*

Oh, you know that.



*And a lot of people leave the place very embittered . . . .*

I have to guess at some of that, nowadays, because we had this fall come over — I never can tell whether it's Joe's technique that's rough on them, and they can't take it, or — Of course, he would say that he'd had people that weren't in agreement in the first place. I mean, he'd label a lot of people that way, I'm sure. And we're really insulated down where we are now. We're out of that heat up there. So it's tough for me to make a judgment on individual situations — I can just kind of guess at things, the overall picture. And also, I don't know what he pays people. I don't know whether he pays them anywheres near enough in the first place, let alone what they'd like to have in the second. And Norma used to apparently be asked to forfeit her pay, or postpone it in a crisis. And I know John [Seavers] has. There was one summer when the money just wasn't coming in for some reason, and I don't know how John survived; probably his friends would help him out, or something. But there were whole — Me, I'm a volunteer, so I really wasn't in that problem. But there have been spells when things were very uncertain, and a lot of people just can't stand that uncertainty. They want to go to some place that at least *looks* solid.

*Has it started looking more solid as the years have gone by, or is it still shaky?*

Oh, I have days when I feel like we're all collapsing like a house of cards, but I suppose that in certain stripes — just the fact that we've existed this long is one of them. I don't know what the details are, at all. I did know — I did see the figures on *Superstar*, and it's taking in 80% more than I thought it was going to. I thought it was going to be \$30,000, at the most . . . . Of course, Joe would be the last one to publish how much he was taking in.

*When we were talking earlier you said something about various anecdotes — Would you like to indulge in a few of those?*

You know, most of them are not terribly serious. Life is full of them,

as a matter of fact.

*The Rabbi. The Ghost of the Rabbi . . .*

Well, that never has gone with me. The children make a big thing out of the Rabbi's ghost. And whenever anything goes wildly wrong, it's 'Oh well, that's the Rabbi.' And it makes a good story. [Pause.] One of the things that – well this isn't funny at all, it just that I've often thought about it – One night, Joe and I closed up, and checked the building out, and went home. And in those days we had a door to the box office – remember? . . . It was half glass and half solid? Next morning, a little girl – now, she was the only child of a slightly nervous mother – called in to say that she needed her coat. Left it in the box office. Obviously, she and her escort had been in the building somewhere, and when they came to go home, she couldn't get her coat, so she had to go home without it. And I remember having the nerve to face her mother on that subject. Anyway, that's the kind of thing that sort of pops up and surprises you. Oh dear.

*Being in a former temple, and all the stars of David all over the place –*

A lot of people don't notice it.

*After while you don't. And then the inscriptions: 'Enter ye the Portals of Righteousness' and those things – do you ever reflect on those, and what –*

Once in awhile, when I'm driving past, I do. In terms of 'righteousness', I never really (*laughs*).

*One of the things I think is interesting is that you don't see institutions like this beginning anymore.*

You don't see them what?

*Beginning anymore.*

Oh, you mean the theatre.

*Yeah. I recall once you said that there's no other place really like it. And Mr. Lotito seems to be one of the great actor-managers. You know, he's of that tradition.*

And he's just now learning to let other people be part of it. I said to him once, 'Joe' – this was, I thought, was a weakness – he'd get so involved in anything you care to mention, but he couldn't get the next thing done. I said, 'Joe, I've seen you get involved in everything except costumes,' and he growled, and he said, 'And I'll do that, too.' But I *don't* think he really is interested in costumes. I don't think it – And in fact, you know the Russian story, *The Bear*? Story of this widow, and she's mourning away for her husband, and wearing a – it's set in the 1850's, she's wearing this huge hoop skirts covered with black curvy lace – and the man from the next estate comes in, trampling with his jackboots, mad about something, and challenges her to a duel, and she accepted! And she can hardly handle the *pistol*, her hand shakes so. And they go off to the end of the garden to shoot each other, and of course they come back in love. It's a nice little leisurely one-act thing. And I had seen this at Syracuse Stage and I was describing it to Joe, and especially the costumes. And Joe said, 'That's wrong – the costumes should not be so striking that you would recall it. Of course, in this case I think that *he* was wrong, because the whole point of the thing was that she had dramatized her widowhood. So I think that the black costume was perfect for that particular thing. But anyway, he said, 'You shouldn't notice the costumes; you should notice the actors.' So I don't think that costumes really are his thing. I mean –

*He does like to run everything, though. He's said many times that 'The theatre's not a democracy.' Have you heard that?*

No, I haven't, but it certainly isn't. And in some respects, it's justified. Unless – It's like a giraffe, it's like something made by a committee. You can't really put on anything in the theatre by a committee – it loses focus. It has to be a concept – It has to be a single concept in the play.

*Another phrase is 'Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.' That I've heard a hundred times.*

Joe? From Joe?

*Sure. Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.'*

*(Ruth laughs.)* No, I've never heard that either. When and how did he apply it?

*Oh, I don't know. When something screws up in some way.*

Oh, dear. Do you remember when they were doing — Were you around when they were doing *Butterflies are Free*?

*No, I wasn't.*

He had some of these OCETA type kids around. And they were real thrilled because — They were eighth graders, some of them. For one day they had to make out a very simple little superficial character report — are they clean, are they neat, are they tidy, are they on time — that sort of stuff. And it could be that they were hoping about making a good record, because then when they wanted a job later on, they'd have a good record here. Oh, no! Nothing she did at Salt City Playhouse was going to affect her work, the work she did! She just didn't see it as having anything with her career. And they were — And our own supervision, of course, was erratic here — supposedly under the care of, of all people, Kathy Murphy, I think, upstairs. And to some extent it was based on basically the personal personality, that she had an impact on. And they regarded *me* as a most unnecessary also-ran — well, at least it appeared, at times. I had hoped — disappointment they had — didn't feel they could take me seriously. Well, anyhow, they were always more interested in what was happening out there in the big theatre than they were in what was happening back in the box office, where the work was. So, one day there was a girl — and I wasn't there at the time, but they were rehearsing, er, they had the

set pretty well set up for *Butterflies are Free*. I think, somehow or other, they were, they were helping out. And the *cane* – oh, of course the boy had the cane. And this girl got out there, and I don't know what happened, but it wound up she had, I think – it must have been the cane, hit her in the forehead – and they actually called an ambulance, and she wound up wearing a big spectacular bandage, which she fairly loved. And the cane was impounded as evidence! And they had to go down to the police department to get it back order to continue, to complete with the rehearsals. Well, that kind of thing, you know, goes on.

Yes.

You get, in the theatre – You get a lot of people who don't know what they want to do, and they try out in the theatre – A little bit like this widow, who was told to come get her mind off – she didn't get her mind off her widowhood. As Pat said once, 'They learn what they want to do, and then they learn what they don't want to do.' They – A lot of people have a hunch they could be actors. Sometimes they're dead right. Do you remember Bill Lawrence?

Yes.

Do you realize that he was a stoker on the *Queen Mary*? He saw some play, somewhere or another, and said, 'Oh, gee, I could do better than that.' And with that he did! Not a bit of drama school or anything. And he was the postman in our own *Golden Pond*, and, you know, in lots of plays – kindly, quizzical character parts. (Pause.) Well, what do you want to do? I'm off the track again. Oh – the kind of people you get in the theatre. Yeah, a lot of people sort of have a hunch. And there are some *plain nuts*. And it's a nuisance, because they get very much offended if you don't use them, and yet they're just too wacky for words. So you get a smattering of them. And you get women that are – and just like, boys too – who are kind of at loose ends, either between school or something or another. Then they get married, and they're still more or less in the same place; then they have a baby. Then they're tied

down – Bill Bolle [?] was one of these – The next thing you know, maybe the baby grows up and goes off to school; maybe they have some time again. Kathy Gayle was one of these people – she had some time when her children were in school, but her afternoons were free. Carol Schmuckler, too. And they would come over in the mornings, and then they'd have to go home when their children were at home. Carol would give us one show a year . . . . So, you kind of catch 'em. One of the things that's always been in short supply are older people. And sometimes people would call, and they're looking for, for –

*Commercials, and that kind of thing.*

Commercial actors, and there's hardly any; we had one, and he died. And – So we're getting a bit short on the people coming in, and, uh – But then on the other hand, Barbara Gibbons wrote a very nice letter to the paper once, saying what a theatre, this work, meant to a – serious actors like herself. She couldn't go to New York. She couldn't break up her marriage, leave her children, and go to New York – so, she had a chance on *our* stage. Of course, we can't keep the actors busy all the time, because we don't have the parts. But, at least she was with us a reasonable amount of time, and she'd be welcome with the other groups . . . .

*So there's been that advantage: that writers, certainly, playwrights can get their stuff done, and actors can act, and kids without much work experience can get work experience, and designers. He's certainly done that. I think we're in an era now where there's less volunteerism than there was –*

Well, we certainly don't – Our address goes out. We certainly don't beat the bushes for volunteers, like – I don't think we do; I don't see it happening – like we used to.

*But it has given a lot of people opportunities . . . . Do you think, going at it as an overview, that it's been a good thing?*

For Syracuse? Oh, but how could it help but be? You put on plays

that people like to see — and Joe has put on a variety; we certainly haven't got into any ruts. That I can see. We've had musicals and comedies, and far our things. *Man for All Seasons*, *The Prisoner*. Oh! *Equus*! Did you see *Equus*?

*Yeah. Richard Waldorf designed the set and lights, but I ran lightboards for it.*

You did?

*Had to keep the lights low on that one.*

Oh, I don't know. You know, that was done so beautifully that, in retrospect — Not too long before we did a play that Ron Reed had written about prison life, life in a crowded prison cell. Do you remember that?

*No, I didn't see that.*

Well, two guys are supposed to have slept on a cot in the middle of this crowded cell. Han Klint — Hans couldn't bring himself to appear stark naked before an audience. That was just too much for Hans. So he wore a tiny little leopard skin bikini! But, you know, the *Equus* thing was done so naturally, that in retrospect that bikini seemed overdressed on Hans, when you thought back about it. If they could come in as naturally as they did, he could have too. Although, I don't know; the audience might have been startled out of their wits.

*True. So it has been a good thing, you think. All around? For everybody? For everybody involved?*

*Yeah.*

Well, if people don't get something out of participating in a show, they don't have to go back the next time. And some people come back a lot. Now, I was thinking, Dan'l Plumridge was in the other night, debating whether to tray out for this next thing we're doing,

because he had a date during the run of the show. And he's a – well, a lot of people – well, *Superstar* particularly. It's practically a *club* now. People who have done it, over and over again. Yet, it does bring in fresh talent; I mean, there are always fresh names around. Of course, Mary Magdalenes, and – what's his name – Kelly; Frank Kelly. Went off to New York and we had to get another Peter. And so on. There are changes, but a lot of people – It's just that they don't have to rehearse it because they all know the big finish. And – of course there are a lot of other show groups in town now that are – I don't know if you see the Syracuse newspapers much. Chris Lightcap's company –

*Oh, yeah.*

And something called – I don't know who's running the Contemporary Theatre.

*Feldman. David Feldman . . . .*

Well, yeah, just – obviously it gives people something to do. If they have a talent, it gives them a chance to exercise it. I don't know – I'm thinking of work backstage. You can't just turn a bunch of people loose on the stage and have good results. You're best off with a –

*Crew.*

Designer, crew. I've read the things that will happen if you have unqualified people working on the electric part. By the way, we have had –

*[End of tape. New tape, in medias res:]*

. . . . And Joe told him to come down and dictate it to me. And he came down, and he stood in the door of the box office, and dictated to me a statement. Probably about a page of shorthand, without a hitch. Just as well or better as some college professors could have



done. In other words, his problem was not in speech or incomprehension, it was in literally reading. And — Did you know [name.]? Nurse in a hospital?

*Don't know her.*

Well, she said she had a criminal problem, and she conquered it by just plain effort, I guess. And one time — Oh, we had an awful year. John Seavers was out. He retired — He resigned. Gave Joe too much notice, and he resigned.

*[Laughs.] Too much. I used to do that.*

You did?

*Yeah.*

What did Joe do?

*I don't know.*

Made you feel better.

*The minute you think you're indispensable, you're not, you know?*

Oh, Joe would be the first to — Joe would, I don't think, lift a finger to prove somebody was not indispensable. *[Pause.]* Well, anyway, in John's absence, we had a rather motley crew. And I don't think Joe really realized what we were going through. The box office has become a kind of a complicated affair. It started with a composition notebook down at Peat Street. We just wrote *names*. Not even phone numbers. And finally one day we had two Mrs. Klein's, each with a big party and we needed every seat we could get that night. I had a suspicion it was a double registration, but I couldn't *prove* it. You ever looked 'Klein' up in the phonebook? *[Laughter.]* Anyway, from that day to this we've always *required* phone numbers. And Joe then finally made us a form, which we use a lot, and it has different purposes. It comes in triplicate, and one part goes this way and one

part goes that, and so on. And – Oh, anyway, we had all these different people – It was much more complicated. You can't tell anybody how to work it in just a few *minutes*. It takes awhile. But, as I've said before, everything we did we thought we had a reason for. We began with a blue notebook, with just names; now we were – one thing or another added up, every little step of the way, when we made it more complicated, we felt the need – and so when John came aboard – John you know, had been down to Syracuse Stage – best we brought along, I thought – I still do, because he after all had been trained –

*Actor's school.*

And theatre manager, too. I said to him: now, if we can think of any way to simplify this, you know, now's the time to do it. We're really getting too over-complicated. Lo and behold, John never took out a step. But he added one! Which wasn't bad, either. He had everybody initial the work that they do, so it isn't – iffy – we find out who did it . . . . But, uh, where are we?

*Well, we've been going for about a hundred, minutes, Ruth.*

Yes, we have. Hit the nitty-gritty pretty well.

*Yeah, I think we did, and maybe at some future time we can fill in more.*

I'll try to think of those things that – funny things that I . . . .

*Now, I'm not going to use this, you know, for years. I'm going to hold onto it, and start making, you know, a library, just talking to different people. And so –*

Well, that's another thing, yeah – Go ahead.

*Yeah, Ruth. So there's no reason to, you know, be distressed at all; because I'm not going to even mention to anybody that I'm compiling this –*

Of course, I kept thinking, there are several aspects – I was under

the understanding that, uh . . . . Anyway. Then there's the question of whether you really want to have a picture of how a regional theatre develops. Hopefully, and hopefully comes to a good end, perhaps; though one wonders. But in times when — Well, you know when Pat was out — Pat had her — kind of a breakdown? It was *appalling*. Her hands turned — one of her hands turned *purple*. She had these great black circles under her eyes — not black and blue — black and gray — It looked like she had been hit with baseballs. And some doctor said to Joe, well, maybe it was stress. Oh! Well, it was decided that Pat being in the theatre was 99% of the stress. She was running the school at the time. And so Joe decided that she should quit the school. That *killed* her. The school was her heart at the time. And she thought — oh, she just died a thousand deaths that year — one way or another. And then they tried to find out what was the *cause* of it. And nor haven't they found out yet. And she's very much against doctors, because she disagrees with them. They're a bunch of . . . . And, well, whatever happened — Joe put on her musical . . . . And the thing was — You know, she had a very — in some respects, a very — there were some very uncertain aspects of her girlhood, you know. She did not know *who her father was*, until a year or so ago. Nobody would tell her. Her mother wouldn't tell her, her aunts wouldn't tell her, her grandmother wouldn't tell her — Nobody would tell her who her father was. And finally — And her mother, the whole subject was so threatening to her mother, that she would go and get sick in the bathroom — this is when, since I'd known her — whenever the subject came up. If the subject came up. So she couldn't talk to her mother. But she finally told me once, after one of those visits with her, that she'd found out who her father was. But — So it was this deep uncertainty in her own girlhood. And then *Joe* came along, and Joe was to be the answer to everything. He was her rock; her protector; her unchanging husband. And then they had to go all — Pat did — what's her name — just annihilated her. And I said to her then, and I don't whether she got my further point, but I think that I was right: her marriage was really more to her, than mine was to me. Meaning, she had her sense of worth and security, was more tied up in her relationship with Joe than mine was with my husband. Consequently, when that shattered, there she was just

falling apart. I've seen her cry in the car, in tears on the way home. With Joe — They were having a little family bickering over who put the gas in the car last, you know. And Pat, next thing you know — Pat was in tears in the front seat. And — But since then, Joe put on her play again — I mean, her musical — and she has done the music for some shows, and it revived her, you know, it got her on her feet again. She — When she slammed her hand, her fingers in the car door and a few things like that, so apparently as a pianist — she can't, doesn't see herself as doing prime piano work. And she seems to be — she seems to have gotten to her feet.

*Well . . . . I don't know what angle to really approach the whole thing from, or whether that kind of thing would be in it. I suppose if you were trying to do that complete a picture, that's what it would be, but you wouldn't be able to publish it for twenty of thirty years.*

No, but just wait. Just wait.

*It is a very rich story. But I don't intend to do anything with it [right now]. You know, I'm going get in there and collect interviews —*

But, yeah, I was thinking when we were — it wasn't so — what I was thinking was, if you can get more pictures of people's reactions to Joe, and on Pat —

*Yeah, a lot of people —*

It would build up a profile of them —

*And it would be interesting to also tell about those people, you know, too. It also tells about me and learning it. You know, it would tell a huge story to get all that. You're right.*

I haven't been able to measure Joe, to see Joe, in comparison with other directors. I have a fond suspicion that there's a big similarity between them. For example, Rose — what's her name? Berzon, is it?

*Uh — hmm.*

Down at Syracuse Stage? *[Pause.]* No, not Syracuse Stage – The Landmark. – Pulled a stunt on Denise Kessel this winter, which sounds just like the kind of thing Joe did – or is capable of doing. She fired her. And the excuse was that – Oh, she apparently had quite a jump; she and her husband came into some money, and she then paid the actors – and they were expensive, had to be paid, on the spot. Then she really had a – there wouldn't be any anybody in a box office job in our place – she fired a number of people. And the excuse was, she couldn't get along with people, so they were against her, or something. And Denise didn't believe it, because those people had offered her jobs. So she felt quite sure that that wasn't the whole story. And I guess she wrote to them, and I guess she got a, you know, a letter of recommendation from them, or something of the sort. But then, strangely enough – Oh yes! Strangely enough, the Landmark was undergoing a period of being rebuilding inside. Taking all the seats out being some of it. And they couldn't have used a box office girl if they'd had one! You know, I hate to say this, but . . . you will come to feel that the time that Mike Toucci came in and Don Wiltshire – kind of a sweet guy; Alice certainly wasn't – You had the same feeling. All of a sudden, here was a couple that Joe took on, in good faith all the way around, and all of a sudden he got this free help, which included a black project – and he took one look at Alice, and he wasn't having a pecking order with a ten foot pole, and so Alice was forced out. And I said to myself, 'How can Don keep going with Alice as bitter as she is?' – because she was – and sure enough, in not too long after Alice, he was out, too. And you can't escape the feeling that if Joe hadn't had that deliberate for his money, I don't know now what. But Don would not have been pushed out like that. And that he – that Joe just simply had a chance to save some money, and tough luck. And he did it. So whether Rose Berenthal was doing the same thing with Denise Kessel, or not.

*Who would be people to talk with, in all stages and times?*

In the theatre? Well, Barbara Gibbons, for one. Of course, she's been around awful long time. If you just talked about moving into a

theatre, moving to Peat Street, Kathy Gayle did our publicity when we were down there, and *I think* – she never would admit it – but I think she was the person who was behind Pat and my being named women of the year, based on what we were doing down at Peat Street. And that always strikes me funny, too. Because if *I* was a woman of the year, for what I was doing then, I should be *four* women of the year now! *[Laughter.]* Anyway – Oh: Carol Schmuckler. Carol still does publicity for us, you know; I think she does their TV shorts. And, oh yeah, Carol definitely. She might have ideas, too. Let me think of others who have been around a lot . . .

*Rick Murphy?*

Who?

*Rick Murphy?*

Oh, now be careful with *him*. He and Joe had a falling out, but what it was all about, I don't know for sure. You can interview him anyway. Get his angle. Might be good to do. Uh, how about Alan? I don't know. Alan is so emotional.

*I don't think that would be necessary.*

You could get a picture out of him. Uh, Rick Hirschhoff if he's in town, but he lives in Washington. *[Pause.]* I was thinking of Doug Carver. Doug might've hung around if Joe had been able to pay him anything. But his wife got pregnant and Joe wasn't able to pay him any more, so Doug left; I think he went to hanging garage doors with his father again. *[Pause.]* Dan Stevens – now, I don't know how he left things with him. I've often wondered if anyone actually gets to pop in and out. It does make it interesting, because the public doesn't know who they were . . . . We have a cast list, alphabetized now; maybe if you're in the box office sometime we can kind of go through it and see what names show up.

*Well, that's good. Those are basically the same people I was going to cover.*

*Do you have any final thoughts?*

Well, of course I was interviewed by Marion Lawton, who is now a surgeon. And, you know, I was thinking, well, I think I wanted to see whether Joe would make it. [*Coughs.*] And I still kind of have that goal. In a way, he *has*. He has kept the thing going under tremendous pressure. Pat said that one time there were two or three days when he was laying in bed and staring at the ceiling – gave her the heebie-jeebies. And I – Every once in awhile, I have a mental picture of that, because I can just imagine that some of his *nastiness* – real nastiness – I’m quite sure, comes at times when he was under pressure, and he’s essentially a very private person. And he *could not* bring himself to unload it to anybody. Probably to Pat – One time she stepped in the building, which was when we were in the old part of our building – she heard this, like a caterwauling going on upstairs. ‘Is that my husband?’ We said yes, it was. And, I don’t know, Joe was carrying on about something. And she evidently – something she didn’t know at home. She didn’t see it at home. But yet, he was letting loose there. And I had been put on the spot in the most un – inappropriate *times* by him. One time he was opening up a show, and there a temporary and I – I think he came to the office – anyway, he harangued us. I don’t know just now what the haranguing was all about. It was generally – the general tenor was apt to be, ‘Well, you’re all against me, and you don’t do what I say’ . . . . And it seems to me on this occasion, Arlene Welles was there. Because I was so glad there was a third party to *see* it happen. And, anyway – Oh, he was upstairs, because he came downstairs – [*laughing:*] Muriel sat on a chair and *just shook!* It had that effect on her. Well, if I was dependent on a paycheck, and he acted that way to me, I would be *devastated*. She didn’t know which end was up. Furthermore, I think he’s delighted in firing you and hiring somebody else for the same or less amount of money – He couldn’t fire me. I mean, he had nothing to gain cutting *me* loose – all he had to do was lose a volunteer. But if I was on his payroll, that would be different. And he used to say, ‘Well, you know you’re no good . . . .’ – and I didn’t argue with him; I’d just say yes . . . . Anyway, I got the feeling then, and still do, that probably these awful episodes come out at a time when he’s under

pressure. Now, he *is* very private. He tells me he's a simple man — I say, 'Joe, you're not simple; you're very complex.' But — You know my story about the band-aid. Some youngster came in when we were in the other part of the building, and opened up the old ark there and got a band-aid out, and didn't close the door. And somebody came along and said, 'What's the door to the ark opened for?' and I said, "Well, some child got a band-aid.' And Joe heard me say it, and he *jumped* on me. 'They don't *need* to know. They don't *need* to know' — why that door is open.' Now, believe me, if getting a band-aid is a state secret, imagine what the size of your income, the size of your house — Oh, you're not supposed to tell people the layout. Because he doesn't really want the competition to know what we're doing; he doesn't care to have the — he doesn't want to print the layout of the house like they do in the phonebook for the . . . .

*Civic Center.*

Civic Center's layout . . . . Anyway. Oh, I know: one reason he's so darn private about that is, if you have more than five hundred, you've got to pay royalties. And lo and — Every once in awhile he seems to be trying to get *away* with something. I don't know. I'm not on the Board; I really don't know. And if I was on the Board, I might not know anyhow. The real reason for getting off the Board was, Al was worried. Pat always said to everybody, 'We're incorporated; this means individuals are not liable. Corporations are, but not individuals.' But apparently if somebody really wants to whack you, hammer and tong, they can go after individuals whether they're incorporated or not. And we were not about to pay fifty or sixty thousand dollars, in those days — I don't know what it is now — We were not about to try to find fifty thousand dollars to give to anything. And the Ganders came on the Board, as soon as Ray retired — They had the same reaction I did, and they left. And the Board still doesn't have its quota under the — what is it?

*The bylaws, or whatever it is . . . .*

We only have fourteen or fifteen . . . . Anyway, Joe has been



*extremely* resourceful. But some of his resources are downright on the foxy side. Like playing hide-and-seek with Mario DiChavas in the theatre; which he got away with, sometimes. And sometimes — Now, for instance, you get so tired — this is another difference with Joe and the people in Philadelphia: You cannot call Joe up on the intercom, and ask him a question, as a rule, and get a *simple, quick answer*. You just *don't*. He hems and he haws, and he finally gets around to whatever you asked, and you don't get much. There were people in Philadelphia who were delight to work with, one woman in particular. You'd call her up, she'd always answer her own phone — her secretary didn't answer; she answered — I'd tell her what I needed, she'd give me the answer [*claps hands*], and that was that. Joe has no concept of doing business in that fashion. And *yet*, every once in awhile, we realize that he had his reasons to think the way he was. Here's one good example: somebody gave him a script to read. And then they'd call up every now and then, you know, if Joe was ready with the script yet. Well, Joe would have them call, and he wouldn't want to talk with this person — he is busy with it now, or something, would get back later — It turned out that Joe lost the script, and he wasn't about to admit it! See, and something like that will crop up, where Joe had a reason — Oh, another time, somebody wants to know whether they've been cast. Well, he's considering 'A' and 'B'. And he doesn't want 'A' to know that 'B's in the running too, and it kind of probably would have an adverse effect on him to say, well, 'I'll cast you if 'B' doesn't do it.' Now, you just can't say to somebody, 'I'll cast you if 'B' doesn't do it.' You want them to think that they were the one and only logical choice for that part. So Joe would avoid talking to that person until he found out whether 'B' was available or not. And, he had his *reasons*, but he doesn't like to stop and explain those reasons to anybody, least of all the persons involved. So, sometimes his positions, when you learn about them in the end, they're a touch more, uh, reasonable than —

*What they seem at the time.*

Than what they seem at the time . . . but he just seems to be unable to make up his mind on *anything*. And then it drives Pat crazy, too.

One of his habits . . . . If somebody's driving him home – Pat, or Arlene Welles, or anybody – he could keep them waiting *forever*. They'd call him, so scared stiff. Or maybe he starts he starts down from his office, and maybe he doesn't. And if he gets down, then he sees somebody at the bottom of the stairs he has to talk to; and then he gets as far as the cellar door, and maybe he returns for something in the shop – and it will be upwards of half an hour before he finally gets to where you're going, and then meanwhile she's having fits. And you can't tell me that if he really *wanted* to, he couldn't have been at the door at the time he *said* he would. And John Seavers has the same problem – John would love to get home after a show and collapse; and Joe doesn't let him in until he's got – well, first, with what he has to do – but he's got – doesn't really have anybody to visit him there.<sup>2</sup> That's, to me, a probable – that probably shouldn't happen when people like the show and they're impressed with him . . . .

*Well, anything else, Ruth?*

Not for now. I'm sure I –

*We'll do this again, probably during the summer –*

Maybe I – I should try to write some things down, so I'll remember them.

*Sure. I won't be back until around summer, but that's when we could do this again. Okay? All right. And then time will pass, and we'll see how things go.*

But it might not be a bad idea – I mean, if you get a chance – You don't know whether you'll be in Syracuse or not.

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<sup>2</sup> One of longtime box office manager John Seavers' duties was to report the receipts from ticket sales and concessions to Lotito at the end of the night, after the theatre had closed. Ruth seems to be saying that Lotito, closeted in his upstairs office, would forestall admitting Seavers to deliver the report. Seavers was a versatile and talented actor, and would often have played a leading role in the night's performance; Ruth also seems to be noting that, because he was stuck in the box office, Seavers was unable to mix with the rest of the cast and receive the plaudits of audience members in the lounge after the show.

*I don't know. In the summer? Yeah, I should be here in the summer, I would think. You know, I would think so.*

Doug Carver might be a —

*Good person to talk to?*

Because he didn't leave — he didn't leave — wasn't banned. He's been in and out quite a bit, and he's a good actor, too.

*Yeah, he is a good actor. Okay.*

Poor Pat herself would be somebody. If you had the right questions to ask.

*Ah well, Ruth, it's been very enjoyable. I've enjoyed talking with you.*

Well, something will come of this. As you say, it may not be for a few decades, but, uh —

*It was a good thing to do, and I'm glad we had the opportunity to do it, and — you know what I mean? — get it begun, anyway. Anything else, Ruth, before I shut the thing off?*

*[Offering a plate of cheese:]* Would you like — ? Oh, no — I don't want to say — nothing into that.

*Okay. Thank you, Ruth.*