JO: What we're trying to do is collect a history of Federal Theatre primarily and American theatre of the thirties in general.

LG: Oh, I see. The American people--well, that's good so that I'm really part of that.

JO: That's right and from our talk over the phone, you were with the Chicago Repertory.

LG: Yes. As a matter of fact, I organized the Chicago Repertory group. I might as well give you a background. I'm actually raised out of an institution, the Cleveland Jewish. Orphan Home, and my reaction to that whole life there was one of observing and learning the whole institutional life, really learning from my peers that all of us liked school and colleges and so on, wondering who has the right to teach you and so on. And there was a constant observance and my ability at imitating started out with imitating the institutional workers at any rate- and it was also to find a place in the sun. And I found that I could best find a place for myself by either crying or laughing or the emotional range and that I had a mercurial ability or control of the visceral area, not knowing it. And it was a kind of sensitive, poetic sense to who I was and what I am and so on. But I must say at the beginning it started out with imitating, and we were quite fortunate at the Orphans' Home, like any organizational institution around the country, to say that the best talent, existing professional talent, weren't sorry for the orphans, the poor orphans, would be the understatement. So we would have coming to the Orphan Home to entertain us the best, the cream. So that I was stimulated by them and one of them was, and I'd like to include that, was Bert Williams, the Jamaican black. And I remember a song that he sang and it goes something like this: "Beans for my breakfast, beans for my dinner, beans for my suppertime. It was baked beans, boiled beans, string beans, stewed beans, all for a rusty dime. I never had ham, chicken or lamb, but it was baked beans, boiled beans, string beans, stewed beans, all for a rusty dime."

Well, that was my situation in the Home. It was an intriguement. Now I got out. The Cleveland Playhouse was right around there, and also the--I give you the background because then you see why I had to do what I've done and continued to do what I am doing, that is, to hold onto a personal integrity and feel somehow the establishment or the institution, shall we say. There's the constant fight against the institution or the establishment or people telling me what I should or shouldn't do. So that it was a constant almost anarchy but not trying to hurt anyone but to express an individual feeling about things and so on. So as I say, it has been that constant fight.

I got out of the Orphan Home not knowing what I would do. I didn't: know whether I wanted to become a social worker or an actor. My last year in the Home--oh, by the way, I must go back because I have, to tell about this country, you see, and my understanding of it. I never really understood the whole black question because I didn't know any blacks at all. In 1917 you know that we went to war with Germany. The reactionary thinking which it seems to me continues, because we were fighting Germany--I don't know whether you know that the learning of German in any institution in the country was cut out. Now I was a kid learning German. I couldn't understand it. So that was the beginning.

Now because the first Jewish benefactors were German; they came over after the revolutions in Europe of 1848. Goldwater is a descendant. A good many of them settled in the South, as you probably know. Strauss, Robert Strauss, is from the South. So that when the enemy was the Germans, the loss of income to the institution was tremendous. We went to school; we had an institutional school, very marvelous, wonderful teachers. But they had to cut down like they're doing now, and so they had to take advantage, of the public school system. So what they wanted to do was to test it out, so from the third grade to high school they sent a number of people to the public schools and I was one of those

chosen, which I say was really wonderful because it is again me learning and constantly learning. I mean, I now know I know nothing and constantly the experimenter and always learning and always trying now to listen very much and participate with the young, for instance. I call it all now "payment deferred," you see, that someday it'll come to ma. Money isn't the thing alone. I have tco survive and it is the medium of exchange and I've got to learn how to use it and so on arc= get it. But that isn't the prime motive for me. It is passion, what I'm interested in. So we go on.

My first remembrances of the blacks were the memories of the Orphan Home kids, off the few that were going to this particular school, Outwait School in Cleveland. During the recess periods, the orphan homes and most of the blacks were against the fence. So that was a deep, deep memory for me, and I didn't know, would question. When I got out of the Home or I was still around, worked at the Home the year after I was so-called "confirmed." Well, I won't go into the whole story of why I didn't get a scholarship. Well, I might as well now that I brought it up.

I had the dubious position, honor, of being president of the Boys' Athletic Club at the Orphan Home, which only meant that I was responsible for the balls and bats and the equipment. But it did give me a place where girls could come and I investigated it, and I was caught investigating. I remember the superintendent with his red moustache, bristling moustache, just askance, you know.

And he told me right then and there that he was going to take away my scholarship. And you know how all of us in our youth are interested in words and so on, you know, the use of words, whether we knew really what they meant or not. I remember saying to him, "I can't understand it. How can you equate the gonads with intelligence? What has one thing got to do with the other? I'm already so embarrassed that I can't begin to tell you, but I think it's unfair, unjust."

So that again it is the dictum, what you have to do, how do you learn. So it's me constantly making mistakes now for the res=t of my life, and I've been making them constantly. And I said to the McCarthy people, "You want me on my knees saying, 'mea culpa, mea culpa.' I've made a¯ lot of mistakes but when am I going to learn and how am I going to learn? I'm a beautiful, good person, and that's it, and you ain't going to corrupt me because I'm not trying to fight." So it has its beginnings, and so it isn't accidental.

I worked with the Cleveland Playhouse after I got out of the Orphan Home--I'm going back. And I knew that I was an actor and I had something to contribute, and I thought I would do that. I would become an actor. As a matter of fact, I worked with Mary Miles Minter in 1926, tint I wondered how I was to earn a living, So I thought I would go to Carnegie Tech, which was the best school at that time, or at least the people at the Playhouse, Carl Bettinreed, Russell Collins, K. Elmer Lowe, McConnow, and so on, were all graduates of Carnegie Tech. And I thought, "Well, I'll go there but I ought to get a job first." So I took a trip to Pittsburgh and I thought the only thing I could do was institutional work, work with children, But I found out even there--in the first place, they thought I was too young, and they- thought I was too emotional, that you couldn't be subjective; you only could be objective. So that's another lesson learned, and I couldn't get work, so that I couldn't continue on in school.

I then thought since I now was a supervisor at the Orphan Home, I might have access to my case history. So I decided to try to find out who I was or where I came from, whether I was a bastard or not. And I found a particular name in the records in Ames, Iowa. I knew that my mother was the insane asylum in Newburg, right outside of Cleveland. By the way, there was the--part of my real growth and development was due to one of the supervisors or the Home who became an,

assistant superintendent, who was raised in the Home. And get to tell you about him. His name was Jack Girick. We used to call you know, Girick, G-i-r-i-c-k we didn't know. So we'd call him "Lake Erie”, -“Jake Erie”, and so on and so forth. He as we found out, was one of the most 'brilliant children around. He was given a scholarship to Hebrew Union School… at Cincinnati and since Freud and Karl Marx was on the ascendant in that period, he got involved with both. And he decided never to continue on with being a rabbi, so he got a job at the Orphan Home, and he was the first one to introduce me to Bertrand Russell, listen to music and so on, and encourage me to be myself. At any rate, he was responsible for insisting, with the superintendent who had deprived me of my scholarship, that what they ought to do was keep me there as a supervisor and give me responsibility. So the year before I was one of the boys, the next year I was a supervisor trying to learn. Very good; it was very important for me, and that's when I started to work with the Cleveland Playhouse and so on. I then decided that what I ought to do maybe is become a social worker rather than an actor. And I decided to find my father because I thought that I could make that demand, that he owed me a living, you see. And I had dreams of my father being a very wealthy man.

I must go back and say that I do remember my second year in the Home when I was about six, five or six, 1914, that one of the family--I never knew how--came to visit me and that I then found out that they wanted to take me back to Russia and Poland. It was my grandfather. But they needed the permission of either my mother or father. Well, my mother was in an insane asylum and so on, so I never returned, fortunately, because I feel I'm a wonderful American kid. So I dreamed, as I. say, that my family must have money, you know, and so on. So I tracked it down and I got a marvelous letter in Spencerian handwriting. You know what Spencerian is? The flowery writing with the curlicues. We learned it in

the Home. I should have really noticed the signature that it was a little different handwriting because, maybe 10 years ago I found out my father never wrote that letter. It was written by his sister-in-law, you see, because he really couldn't write that well. But at any rate, we had a rendezvous in Chicago to meet--that would be the meeting place. And by the way, it was 1926 and 1927 and I hitchhiked with two boys to go to Chicago, and we caught a ride out of Fort Wayne, Indiana. And I had learned, I took auto mechanics at the Home, and I had learned how to drive a car. So there I was in 1926, you know--I was 19 years old or 18--driving a car. And this particular guy, it was the middle of the night that we saw him in Fort Wayne, Indiana, he asked us if any one of us could drive. And I said, I could drive, and we knew the way. It was Route 20. But he seemed to be taking us any other route. Finally out of, I think it was Hammond, Indiana, I said to him, "Gee, you're having us take these different roads and so on." So he lifted up the front seat and there were hundreds of bottles. He was a bootlegger. I tell this because it is part of it again, the learning, because Time constantly--so at any rate, that's part of the, ability is the actor because it's the associations that you remember and how you dig into your craft.

At any rate, I found out that my father was poorer than I was and that--some other time I'll really tell the story. It's a bittersweet story of his asking my forgiveness and so on and my realizing that I had no right to interrupt his life, that one thing had thing to do with the other and that it's then--my name wasn't always Gilbert. It was Gitlitz, but the reigning hero of the day, or my hero, was John Gilbert of the movies. And I decided and I told the judge that I wanted to get lost, become a nonentity, and I changed my name to Louis Gilbert. It was still the L.G. But ever since then I find that my fight is not to be a nonentity. But at any rate, that's part of the fight that I think the--you don't

mind If I keep going?

JO: No.

LG: And about the contemporaneous situation because I think I'm younger than ever, and listening to the young people these days because I say there are no answers; there are only questions. And it's interesting that you guys are going; into the WPA or the theatre of that period, beginning to ask questions---what was it?--and that you come to a guy like myself because we're really part of it in continuation. And that is the need to develop or find a way of developing your own potential, how do you do it, you know... So that these constant struggles was really that.

At any rate, I came to Chicago. I decided to live with my father, come back and live with him. I left the Orphan Home, and I thought I'd go to the University of Chicago. Well, that was 1929, another depressed period, 1917 the Orphan Home and now 1929, only 12 years later--yes, 12 years later--another depressed period to where I couldn't even get in. So I then decided I would work with an uncle of mine, and my evocation would be the theatre. And I went to the Jewish Peoples' Institute on the West Side and participated there. The interesting thing is that that was a learning process, too, because it was another institution although the neighborhood was a thriving, marvelous area. . . And out of that institution, the Jewish Peoples' Institute, came Leo Rosten, whose name was Leo Rosenberg at that time. He was a high school teacher teaching Jewish people English and so on. That's where he got to write The Education of Hymie Kaplan and so on, so I remember that. That's part of my--and Joseph Buloff, who's now a very famous actor. He had left the Polish theatre that came, the Vilna Group that came to America, and it was that period also. A little later on Stanislavsky came with the Russian theatre and any number of the Stanislavsky

people decided to stay, didn't want to go back. So that's all part of a whole--my dream of course was to go to the Rhinehart Theatre, the German theatre. And I thought I would learn German and go there and really--but I had to find a way of making a living. And by the time I thought I might be able to go. 1933 had come by, and 1934 and there was Hitler ensconced there, so that dream was shot. Our constant lives, it seems to me, are full of those dreams and hopes and so on. I worked at the Jewish Peoples' Institute, but the Depression, and it seemed to me the economy and the whole sense of--so I was rapidly becoming more than somewhat interested in Marxism, in how do you---the manufacturing of goods, the overabundance and how do you distribute them and so on seemed to be a paradox to me. But I must say that during the period also I realized I wasn't a political animal, that I was much more an artist, so that I couldn't really be long, I tried to but again it's the anarchy that I talk about against any institution. So that I only participated in various aspects, but I was interested in the theatre. And around that particular time there was the formation of the John Reed Clubs, so I decided that I would become a member of the John Reed Club, the theatre branch of the John Reed Club, and that's what I did. The interesting thing is that again I was fighting dictum, so we decided to break away and not particularly do--to do socially conscious plays but not told what socially conscious plays we should do. We would decide what we wanted to do. At any rate, we did do Maxwell Anderson's. He wrote a play about Mooney, you know, Tom Mooney, and we decided to do that and we formed a group. It was first called--oh, on the horizon came the New York Group Theatre, that is Strasberg Clurman, Cheryl Crawford's group of Odets Land so on and so forth.

We decided we would form a group there in Chicago rather than a strictly workers' theatre, you see. I wanted to say that I did start with a workers' theatre,

that idea, you know, of saying something about our… our way of life, you know. We would do agitational propaganda stuff but we wanted to do much more than that. So we coopted. You know that in 1934 the first year that Roosevelt came in, he set up what he called the (15 second pause) project and working with them college graduates, lawyers and so on, And one of them was a fellow by the name of Louis Terkel, who subsequently became Studs Terkel. And I think I had an approach, so I managed to get some of them to work with our theatre group as an avocation. So we set up. It was first called the Chicago Group Theatre. We then got a letter from Cheryl Crawford asking us to change our name in all fairness, you know, that there might be a confusion. There was the New York Group Theatre and they felt that they did want to travel and go across the country. And we felt it was more than fair, so we changed it. You want a give and take or you want me to continue?

JO: Keep going.

LG: Really?

JO: No, this is, fine.

LG: All right. So at any rate, we then changed our name to the Chicago Repertory Theatre. We enlisted what I feel a particular, one of the most talented men that I've ever really known in the theatre, Charles de Sheim. He too changed his name from Swaddish to de Sheim, but that was because of his leanings towards theatricalism, you know. He was really one of the most knowledgeable men that I've really ever known and he became our director, really artistic director, really more, you know, We started to study Stanislavsky by ourselves and tried to really begin to understand what he meant and through Charlie. At any

rate, we would do- plays and one of the plays that we did do of course, as I said, was Tom Mooney, a play on Tom Mooney. And then we did all the subsequent plays that the Group Theatre did like Bury the Dead. Now we were together for 10 years from 1933 to 1943. 1943 of course was the war, the beginning of the war and the loss of our people. In the meantime, we became part of, at times, at various times, part of the Northwestern University curriculum. That is, they wanted social theatre and wanted the students, and so they were very wise and so on and they--by the way, Yale Wexler, not Yale but his brother, Haskell, remembers the Chicago Repertory Group coming to--he was going to high school at that time. At any rate, we would go around the city.

Then as I said, Roosevelt set up the Statistical Project. It was for the final setting up of where the needs for the various projects that he finally set up, you know, finding out about painters, about--so that our group was decimated a little bit by the Federal Theatre. Now as you know, I was working with my uncle, so I wasn't: entitled to work on the Federal Works Program, but my best friends were there, you know. But I was in a particular business that was a very hazardous business, that is I bought up--it was a junk business really. I bought up old x-ray film, photography film and so on, and precipitated the emulsion, you see, through a particular process. And it became transparent film used for menus and any transparency, you know, with the manufacture of a transparent box for women's powder puffs and so on. But we would have occasional fires because it was highly inflammable, and the last one, as I said, wiped us out and it was the day Hitler attacked Poland, September 3, 1939, because I had been arguing with my partner--my uncle had died since then and I took over and got another partner. You see, I was practically supporting the group, you know, I mean, the needs and we were holding it together that way, although we did become quite successful and ran around town entertaining trade unions and participated

in the struggles, the various struggles of--I can compound the stories of our activity and fights with the dictum of various people. But we still managed to belong, to belong to that community and we became very well known. And I kept avoiding going to New York, although both Studs and I made attempts at various times to go to New York. I mustn't let you think that I wasn't attracted by the gravy train or the possible gravy train. So as I say, we were wiped out, the business I was in was wiped out, and I tried to get into the Federal Project. But the only job they would give me is with the constructing of roads and so on, you see, where they felt they needed a guy who knew something about figures. Arid so I was used again to monitor the spending of gasoline. I mean, I found, you know, we would buy gasoline. I was a gasoline attendant, you see, for the Works Progress. The wonderful thing was again my stories about the blacks as I worked with them, and it was really quite an education and I'm full of stories of that period. But I wanted to get onto the Project.

Also at that time this fellow, Charles de Sheim, got onto the Project. He was one of the best theatre men around and they were aware of that and they coopted. But it seems a fellow by the name of Paul Green wrote a play called Hymn to the Rising Sun. Do you know that play? Yes, which was a protest play. It seems that two blacks, members of a chain gang in Georgia or somewhere, committed some minor infraction of a rule or something. They were put into the sweat box, what they call a “sweat box." And these poor chaps got cold at night. You probably know in Virginia it's cold at night. And they wrapped their legs with burlap and the burlap gangrened and they had to cut their legs off. Green was horrified and he wrote this play, Hymn to the Rising Sun. And to the credit of both Charlie de Sheim--Elmer Rice also left out of protest when they refused to allow Rice to do the play in New York. I mean, it was probably the

culmination of any number of censored of what should be done. Charles de Sheim decided to quit in Chicago, and we decided to do the play ourselves, so we did that play and took it around and I played the chain gang captain and tried very hard to be as mean as possible.

Now meanwhile, we had to earn a living, I got onto the Writers' Project, fortunately, and I didn't pretend to be a writer. And I had suggested to them that what I could do would take what plays this particular theatre department would write and do them at institutions. Since I'm out of an institution, I could work at least in the theatre end of it. So that's what I would do, and I worked at Chicago Commons. I used to come back telling fascinating, wonderful, wonderful stories about the fight to try to do the plays there. And I'll only tell you one of them.

You know that we committed some tremendous excesses during that particular period, again going back to 1917. The Italian and German families again suffered, the aliens, you see, the so-called aliens, they had to report. Chicago Commons was in the Italian area and one of the boys--by the way, they used to say to me, "Mr. Gilbert?" and I'd say, "Yes." They'd say, "Balls," you see. You never could get, you know, anywhere and since I was raised in an institution and so on, I had a sense, So the next time they said, "Mr. Gilbert?" I said, "Balls." They said, "Put 'em on your noose and snap 'em," you *see.* That was the next thing. Well, at any rate, to say that I didn't get along with them again was because I really encouraged them to bee themselves and to write. And I would try stimulating them through the games of Stanislavsky, you know, about testing their imagination because that's really what it's all about, your imagination. Three things: a tie, chairs and books, and write a story about it, you know. Well, they were marvelous. They would create their own stories. At any rate, one of the boys hung himself because his father was an alien.

And how do you get at these kids to get them to know they belong. So you see, I never really could be isolated from them. I was constantly always listening to the rumblings of the earth because it was me. By the way, I've get to go back and tell you another marvelous story of Cleveland.

I used to go downtown to the market, you know. I'm always fascinated markets. When I went to France I went to LaSalle's, the marketplace, because that's where you see the wives and the working class people. They're buying stuff and trying to save a buck here and there. And I went down and it reminds me of Paul Green. I saw this man, great, big, husky man, with stumps, playing a guitar. But again, first I told you Bert, the beans.

JO: Williams?

LG: Yes. And I. saw this man strumming a guitar with stumps, singing (sings) ever and over. And I used to make weekly visits, just stand there and listen to him. One day the great big arms enveloped me and pulled me towards him and he hugged me. And he said, "I love you, boy, I love you." I stood looking at him and crying, "I love you, too." "Don't you ever forget it, boy. Don't you ever forget it. You and me lookin' in each other's eyes." Well, I never forgot it. It's that. So that my constant distress about any kind of movement, any kind of radical movement, is "What are you going to do about the black question? What are you going to do about them?" And I remember coming back to the Home saying, "I don't know whether I'm a Jewish black or a black Jew." It is there and Langston's poem, "The Cross--" by the way, he went to school in Cleveland; when I was a senior, Langston came back to the school and I was in the Drama Department. Latham ran the Drama Department. Her husband ran the Drama Department in Western Reserve University later. By the way, I was a token Jew accepted at Western Reserve and decided to leave because this was the first time I sensed anti-Semitism and I was corroborated later during the Second World War. They found a nest of

Nazis there. But again, it is me learning, you know. At any rate, Langston came and he had just written his first book, The Weary Blues by Langston Hughes. And Edwin Arlington Robinson, who wrote Boomalay, Boomalay, Boomalay, you know, was being given an award, and there was Langston working as a waiter in the same hotel where Edwin Arlington Robinson was. And Robinson said, "You should give this award to the waiter there, Langston Hughes." At any rate, I was the darling of my home room teacher and I guess four years earlier Langston was. So she introduced me to Langston Hughes in 1926 and I have been in touch with him ever since. One of the despairing moments of my life is that I never saved the letters and the poems I used to get from Langston from all over the world. But at any rare, you don't have to keep them, the memory of them is just---and I tell about finally introducing my children to Langston. But at any rate, I go back.

So you see, it has really been that all the time and finally the war really dissolved the repertory group. By the way, I'd been married and I married my first stepmother's niece, so it wasn't a blood--but you know. At any rate, again the difficulty with the whole system and so on, marvelous, very talented gal, beautiful, wonderful gal, very talented, but lost in again the difficulties of talent being wasted here and not wanting to have children. I didn't know that, you know; I wanted them, not knowing I wanted them. At any rate, it ended with her one day saying to me, "The trouble is I don't know how we're going to divide everything."

And I looked, I said, "You can't really mean that. Oh, God, it's all yours, all yours. I go out with just myself." And so I went to New York and decided--I've got to tell this; now that I'm confessing everything I might as well just include it all. I came to New York in 1943, 1944, and I didn't want to fight in the war because I was against war and fascism and I was afraid to. But I thought that my value would be as a theatre person, but I did volunteer and I was turned

down. I had a particular physical problem, an inherited problem. At any rate, they turned me down, so I decided I'd come to New York. I left my job; I was working in civilian defense and I thought I could make a, contribution, at least to that, even though I didn't believe in war. Then I came here and I decided I go into USO. I took my yellow fever shots and I went through everything and I was called to the front office one day. And they said to me, "Was your name always Lou Gilbert?"

I said, "Evidently you haven't seen the original sheet that I filled out.

I filled out that my name was Lou Gilbert, and in parentheses I put 'Louis Gitlitz.'"

They said, "Oh, we hadn't noticed that. But at any rate, we can't take you.

You're what we call a 'premature anti—fascist." 1945. Another lesson learned. I decided then I had to participate, so we formed Stage for Action, which became one of the most important civilian theatre groups in the country. Arthur Miller, as a matter of fact, wrote a play that they may win, which was about the need for nurseries. You remember the kids came back; most of the women went to work in defense plants, so they had to have nurseries for the kids. But when the boys came back, the war was over, they were cutting out the nurseries. But what the vets were saying was, "We need a time to adjust and so on. The nurseries are still important. The women still have to work because we don't know how yet."

At any rate, Arthur wrote a play and it was done at the Henry Hudson and I played a distressed man in the audience and stopped the show cold. At any rate, I ran the Stage for Action group here. So you see that I was always committed, I was always a committed man to what I believed in, that is in the theatre and the use or the meaning; of what the theatre meant to me. It was a continuation of what Shaw was saying and, you know. And also we did insist on quality, so there would be a constant fight there, too, going back to the 1922 period when

I was objecting to just doing agitational propaganda because I felt that the form that you didn't want a workers' play if it wasn't any gcod, you know. Who the hell needs it? So it was that constant.

At any rate, that was the beginning of the participating and then the fight t: also try to work in the professional theatre. Really that's it. I bring you up to date. Now you don't want the rest of the period but that's the period.

So that there was a constant corrolary. I mean, we were going right along with tie Federal Theatre. Those plays they were turning down we would do, that they felt was political but very important plays. We did One-Third of a Nation, the repertory group did it rather than the Federal Theatre at that time. I remember What's his name wrote Spirochete.

JO: Arnold Sundgaard.

LG: Arnold, and he was coming around, you know, and Walter Huston was there. As a matter of fact, when I did Juliet, Huston was there doing the Bible Story and he had a beard and I was trying to get to see him. I didn't know whether he'd remember me or not. I was telling everybody--I had a beard and Huston had a beard—and I was telling everybody that I was an older John Houston, a little smaller, you know. When we were going to finally meet, I said, "My God, I'm older than he. He's younger than I." So at any rate, you had to get to see him through his secretary and it finally took place.

He said, "Oh, I remember you" and he just enveloped me. He said, "Yes, I remember you during that period. Oh, those sparkling black eyes. I'll never forget it, the sparkling black eyes, fiery." Yes, it was a marvelous period of me not knowing. I've got to tell this one story.

My representative now is Barna Ostertuck, a great woman in the theatre. As a matter of fact, she represents the Norman Bel Geddes estate. She represents

Margaret Webster's estate. She was **a** marvelous gal. She was an actress. I remember her at the Goodman Theatre. I was thrown cut of the Goodman Theatre. We tried to do, you know, the Mooney play. Oh, I didn't tell that story. Oh, well, that's part of the background. I'll go back and you can edit it.

We decided to do the Mooney play, so I was raising money and I had been thrown out, by the way, of the. . .

. . . Goodman because again an institution and I was radical, it's true. Was that Charles Freeman's doing?

LG: No, Charles Freeman was the Jewish People's Institute. No, no, this is when Morris Mason and what's his name, the marvelous Jewish--he always said **it** was "Moscow Art." His daughter, oh, why do I forget his name? Oh, it's so much a part of my life. At any rate, he was there. I'll come back and remember his name, but I've got to tell this story.

Because I had **a** job, you know, and I had a car and I was driving around, I would try to see whether they were doing the set, you know, checking up on everything, even though I was in the play. I played Fremont Older, by the way, played the publisher. I came one day and a gal that I knew said, "Lou, we know where you're getting your money."

So I said, "What do you mean you know where we're getting . . ."
"Moscow Gold."

I said, "Oh, my God. My dear, I want you to know it's late in coming and I don't know whether we'll ever get it because we don't know how we're going to pay you." So they decided to stop us. We had to issue an injunction to prevent the Junior League from stopping us doing this particular play at the Goodman Theatre. So that's part of the background, so you see that it isn't accidental. (40 second pause) Well end it up with one story because it's really a wonderful story, I think.

In 1967 or so--my frame of reference was if I could get a number': of jobs to qualify me for unemployment insurance in New York State. The qualification is 20 weeks of work during a particular term and so on, so that was my frame: of reference. So Arthur Cantor, who had done The Tenth Man, said they were going to do Tenth Man at City Center. So I said to Arthur, "How many weeks is that?"

He said, "Well, it's four weeks of rehearsal and eight weeks of playing." I said, "Twelve weeks? That's marvelous."

So then Studs had written a play and they were going to do it at the University of Michigan. I said, "Studs, how many weeks would it be?"

He said, "Well, it's four weeks of rehearsal and a week of playing."
I said, "Five weeks, marvelous, 17 weeks I've got lined up." You see, this is about July or August. So then I got a call from Eddie Sherin, who then was Zelda Fischandler's assistant at the Arena Theatre in Washington saying, "Lou, listen, we're interested in you doing a new play of ours."

So I said, "Well, Eddie, when does it go in?" So he mentioned November. I said, "Oh, gee, it conflicts, Eddie. You know, I want to get unemployment insurance, you see, and I'm sorry. I really can't do it." In the first place, it was off—Broadway, you know, and money also.

So he said to me, "Well, listen, do me a favor and would you read the script? I think you'll like it."

I said, "Well, you want me to tell you about it?" He said, "Well, I'd like to know what you feel."

So I go up to the thing that has now become the distributing--what is it, CRC or something? What do they call it, they do the work for all the community theatres all over the country. So I go up there and I pick up this tome. You know, the first two weeks of playing were five hours. They got out at one o'clock in the morning.

JO: What was the play?

LG: The Great White Hope. It was Great White Hope, you see. So I called up Barna, this representative of mine who I told you I ¯know, who is a great woman. I've

I had got to include stories about her because she is really, really--again. I had a number of influences in my life, that is Jack Girick, who I said was my adopted father out in Cleveland, and then Barna Ostertuck, who is my representative now, who I don't have a contract. She's may agent but I 'nave no contract with her now for almost 15 years. It's just the= handshake and the love of each other, and I pay her 10 percent of everything. And when I get a commercial I'm paying 20 percent because I pay the commercial agent 10 percent and Barna 10 percent. But I told her that she shouldn't be. distu=rbed because I'm calling her "Dr. Ostertuck" now. It pays for the couch, you see, the sessions on the couch, so she should not be distressed, She refuses to get: me commercials because she doesn't believe in them, you see, but I'm saying I've got to survive and "I'd like to help you buy ice cream cones. At any rate, I called her¯ up, getting back to Great White Hope. I said, "Dear, would you call Miss Dalrymple of City Center and tell her that I have to beg out of doing Tenth Man. And I'll call Studs and tell him that I can't do the play."

So she said, "Well, what play is it?"

I said, "Well, dear, I have to preface it with this story. If the Lusitania would come in, you see, around 1914 and so on, off that boat has to come Jack Johnson from Havana, Cuba, with his marvelous smile, his gold teeth in the center, that beautiful homburg hat of his and so on and the__ there's got to be a barrage of photographers and reporters and so on, all saying, "Mr. Johnson, is it true and so forth and so on. Behind him has to be his little Jewish fight manager, me, Goldie."

She says, "Oh, dear, that's a beautiful story, beautiful."

I said, "That's right, dear. I either want to go down with it or up with it. So you call and we'll get out. I don't know, but this is what I've got to do and this is what I want to do." And that's the story of Great White Hope, of how I've conducted the life, you know, and the need to belong and the need, rightly

or wrongly. And I tell marvelous stories off-this'll be the last one--of during that particular period, I also did my first commercial. I'd always refused to do commercials because--but after a while, as I said to the kids, "I want to qualify for my Screen Actors' Pension and also get some money to help you guys go to school, You make sense so who am I kidding? There's no optimum. And you and I have got to know that it's a Madison Avenue world, not any other world and how do you survive in it and how do you---as long as you don't hurt the next person." And so I did the Spatini commercial, you *see,* about selling Spatini. By the way, it was a fantastic commercial. It created a whole new style. It was me in a very mercurial, you know--I would look in the camera and say, "My sons don't want me to do this commercial. I say to them, 'You can sit in your big office. It's my business and I'm going to do it.' You see, they wanted me to put my Spatini in jars. Jars! Gets stale and so on. Not me." Well, at any rate, it was me and the mercurial--and everybody became fascinated by it, you see. And they paid me a buy-out, what they called the "buy-out," you know. I took a certain amount a year, $5,000 for the year. I wasn't interested in residuals, you see. This is how it all started. At any rate, I came down to the theatre one day, I used to come early, and there was a big line on the theatre. And a very tall, almost, as I said, a Noel Coward figure, and he talked like this, you know, and he said, "Do you do the Spatini commercial?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Don't you think they're rather playing it too much? Every time I twist the dial, there you are."

So I said to him, "Well, I guess I sold out my birthright. You see, I took a buy-out, so they can play it as often as they can afford it and on whatever station. So, I have no control of it."

So he said, "Are you in this play?"
I said, "Yes."

He says, "Well, is it true what Watt says, that it's too noisy?"

So I said, "Yes. Yes, it's true. You know, the blacks and the young people won't let us get a word in edgewise. We've been directed to be strident." That is the word he used, "strident." "Don't you think it's a little too strident?"

So he said, "It's like in music, the highs and lows. If you're only going to have stridency--"

I said, "Look, please, I've got to go in. You going to see the show?" He said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, look, have a good time— You decide for yourself. Don't let Watts tell you or anybody. You decide for yourself. God bless you. Good night."

So after the show, coming out, there's this figure and he looks down from his height and he looks at me and he says, "You don't have to do commercials."

So I had to defend myself, you know. I said, "Listen, what world are you living in? Don't you realize that we actors have to supplement what we get in the theatre over the years with anything we can get in television and/or movies or radio? Eighty-five percent of the actors are out of work? And after all, what the hell am I saying in that commercial, stuff I tried myself? I'm not saying, 'Let's get these niggers.' or 'Drop bombs on Viet Nam.' I'm saying, 'Try Spatini spaghetti sauce, something I tried myself.'" So then I looked at him and I said, "What the hell do you do for a living? What are you, a critic or what? Teaching school?"

He says, "No, I live in this world. I'm a certified public accountant." That's the story.

Well listen, I've bored you enough. So that's it.

JO: Let me ask a couple of questions about the Federal Theatre, what you knew about it.

My sense is then that the Chicago Repertory was not in competition with Federal Theatre. They covered a different field not competitive with--

LG: At times we did. No, we weren't in competition. As a matter of fact, we en

couraged seeing-we would always announce, you know, "Go to the Federal Theatre." No, we were-always--and too many of our people were now working in the Federal Theatre, you see, Gertrude Gunter, Allen Peters was head of the downstate project and Charles de Sheim, you know. And by the way, Babette Block, Mrs. Oscar Serlin, who was married to Charlie. She then when Charlie died married Oscar Serlin, and she was responsible for my first Broadway play. As a matter of fact, I have a nickname? Giggy, and they called the character "Ziggy." They decided to add a character and to give me a job.

JO: Do you remember the writers on the Chicago Federal Theatre? You mentioned Arnold Sundgaard and David Feltz and George Murray.

LG: Yes, George Murray,

JO: Were those people all involved in Chicago Rep?

LG: They used to come around. No. Especially Arnold. Arnold would come around. Who else? Well, I don't remember any other unless you named them.

JO: Kay Ewing?

LG: Oh, sure, Katharine Ewing, yes. Well, the interesting thing about Kay Ewing, she was part of the Junior League. Well, do you have Babette Block there?

JO: I don't see her,

LG: Who do You have George Kondolf?

JO: *Yes,* George Kondolf *was* director for a while.

LG: Yes.

JO: Before he went to New York.

LG: George and then Allen Peters. Don't you have Allen Peters down there?

JO: Yes.

LG: Yes. Well, Allen was one of our mainstays. Do you have Lucille Covert?

JO: I don't see it. Now primarily what I have here are directors and writers.

LG: Well, who are the directors?

JO: Charles de Sheim, as you mentioned, Kay Ewing, Katherine Dunham.

LG: Oh, sure, Katherine taught--well, Katherine taught dance to the Repertory Group. We had her as one of our teachers. Yes.

JO: Harry Minturn?

LG: Harry, very well. Well, the Minturn Players were out of Cleveland. Harry Minturn was, in 1926, when I became a member, I told you, Mary Miles Minturn. So Harry Minturn was, yes,

JO: Kurt Graff and Grace Graff?

LG: Kurt and Grace Graff were dancers, yes.

JO: Clive Rickenbaugh?

LG: Oh, Clive, I just wrote his widow a note, yes.

JO: Did he just die?

LG: He died a number of years ago. I hadn't known about it and I. had just heard and

I just wrote his widow, and I got a marvelous letter back. Yes. I, as I say, have been too much of a part of the life there for them to forget me because I've got well known.

To tell you another story, I did during the war when they turned me down and, you know, I set up the Stage for Action. I also during the summer would work at

Camp Unity. Camp Unity was considered a left-wing camp, and as I said, in 1946

Elmer Rice wrote The Dream Girl. Ad they were going to send out the national company, and there was tree part of the Italian waiter. So they called and I already was having difficulty with what I called again the "dictum," the commissars, you see. And when I got this call, I took that job. So when during the McCarthy period when the paper--it seems I protested the beating up of some actors when they did John Wesley's They Shall Not Die at a Greek church. What was this reactionary paper? They called it, oh, what--at any

rate, they called me, CBS called me one year and wanted, as they said, "I help hire me." And I hadn't realized that, they kept postponing the meeting and I hadn't realized that they were postponing it because they wanted an FBI guy there listening and so on. Counterattack. And Counterattack also had a dossier and they were asking me questions and I was answering the questions. And they mentioned about this. They said that Lou Gilbert protested the beating up of actors, signed a Communist petition against the beating up of actors. Then in parentheses they said (Counterattack is against hooliganism but the fact is that Gilbert signed a Communist petition). I said, "Well, if the YMCA had a petition, I would have signed that or if Counterattack had a petition at that particular time, I would have signed it. The most important thing is I'm against censorship no matter where, and I've been constantly protesting it, especially a play about the blacks and about the Scottsboro boys in which I am part of that struggle." I said, "And you know at the beginning I've said to you my concern is really about the black people in this country, and it has been responsible for my way of life, constant, constant, constant. I am a committed man."

So at any rate, Camp Unity, the woman that ran Camp Unity is now about 80 years old and I'd left, you see, I'd left Camp Unity not on the best terms.

What's the terminology?

JO: Dissident?

LG: Not **a** dissident but in disagreement, you know. So here **It is**, you know, just last year they're calling me and they're going to give the money to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the Spanish vets. So they want to know whether I'll do something. I said, "Yes, I'll do Langston Hughes' poem, Song of Spain."

They say, "Oh, that would be wonderful."

So I said, "Fine." So I then pulled out the Song of Spain that I have the book here. And I looked at it and I called Barna, the doctor, to get on the couch, you see.

She said, "What's the trouble?"

I said, "Oh dear, am I a bullshitter! What a bullshitter I am! How I ornated that poem when it first came out. What I did with it! I'm trying to remember what I did. All I really had to do was say Langston's words, not anything else," And she kept trying to interrupt and I kept hearing her say, "Lou, Lou, Lou," and I went on, you know, beating myself and so on.

She finally got the word in edgewise and she said, "Lou, what you always must remember, it was always done with passion."

I said, "Thank you very much, doctor. I feel much better." But that's really what it is, you know. Maybe you can help me, you know that I'm going to Gila, New Mexico?

JO: No.

LG: Oh, you don't? I thought I told you. My wife and I are moving to Gila, New Mexico. She has an arthritic problem and the weather is supposed to be much better, less humidity and so on, and so I am thinking of--I'm not retiring.

I want to really start to work, but I'm thinking of, I want to go to school, so I want to kind of do Hymn to the Rising Sun. And I thought I would like to

attract colleges and try to get--and I thought, "Well, I'll have to write a proposal." And then just recently when the Guggenheim's came out, I thought, "My God? I ought to write to Guggenheim, you know. They've never supported an actor; maybe they will. Why can't I start a precedent, you see, an especially committed man?" So I began to think in the terms of how do you attract them and I came up with a proposal or a question: Is it possible for a creative or an interpretive, creative artist in this society to attain a unity of his family, his social, his political, and his craft life and still hold onto a personal integrity, Now I'm saying that it is 07 it was for me. I don't feel those are the answers. They are only my answers, but in the process of raising the question, I might elicit questions and with the students show them possible pitfalls of where and what I did, for instance, in the McCarthy period. "What did you do during the. McCarthy period? How did you survive; What did you do?" You see what I mean? Or during the Federal Theatre days or during the war. And, you know, what did you constantly do? So that there was constantly a sense of me participating, constantly participating. For instance, you know, the English author,

JO: Huxley?

LG: No? chicken soup and barley. He's one of the--Arnold Wesker. He tried to set up a trade union theatre, you know, in England a number of years ago and I sent him $10.00. I just read about it in Variety or somewhere. I sent him $10.00. "I'd like to put my money where my mouth is. Good luck to you." I understand American dollars go a long way. You know that I won the Derwint Award in 1948? I did it with a piece called "Hope Is a Thing With Feathers." Gee, I should have mentioned--no, you only wanted it during the Federal Theatre days. But at any rate, Harrity was really, he was really something, He was a ghost writer

for Roosevelt, really interesting, marvelous, Irish. Are you Irish?

JO: Yes.

LG: Yes? Well, he had--you know; by the way, Arnold Wesker is---have you talked to Arnold?

JO: No. I haven't.

LG: Are you planning to?

JO: Yes.

LG: Well, ask him if he's finished--just tell him you saw Lou Gilbert. And he said he thought that Arnold was doing a book on the fact that the most talented playwrights were Irish, going back. You know, when you begin to think of it, it's true. When I said, "your countrymen," my wife is Scotch-Irish, you see, so it's marvelous. You know, during the....

… I told you the story of what I told the committee, that they were saying, what about my children during that period. I said to them, "What about my children? They don't enter my heartbeat. My wife doesn't enter my heartbeat, Certainly the American Legion doesn't enter my heartbeat or McCarthy, only me." I said, "But when my kids grow up, I'm going to tell them all about it and they're going to say to me, 'You cocker, you pisher. you had $15,000 in your hand and you threw it away!" I said, "That's right. You have to do what you have to do, I have to do what I have to do, and that's it."

Well, these kids are marvelous. As I said to them, "You are the best, for me it was the best period of my life." My first wife, you know, didn't want children and here this--and so it was a remarkable growing-up period. And what I was saying -- this is the addendum to it all, but the continuation of what I'm really talking about and which I want to tell kids. I want to tell college

students that, for instance, I think **I** am **a** talented man. But the only way I could possibly show it or make use of it was through the theatre or movies and TV. But if that's close to me, then, you know, I have to---so I thought maybe I should become a speech pathologist. Now since I was a dropout when the scholarship was taken away from me, I never took phonetics. So I decided to go to New York University to take phonetics, and that's what I did. So one of my peers there--by the way, a young playwright, marvelous talent. He's now working for Alex Cohn, who got **a** degree in speech therapy. He was doing some therapy work at Bellevue Hospital on relearned speech in kids, you know, hearing. He said to me did I want to see **a** lobotomy case of relearned speech, a man about 55. I said, "Jesus, marvelous. I'd like to observe that to see what they do." So as I tell the story, he came late. I was there on time. So the session was already started, and **I** remember that he sidled against the wall and then I came against the wall. And the patient then, he knew my friend but he didn't know me, and when he saw me he went, "Ahhhh, ooh." And here was a man and I remember the technician taking his jaw and saying, "The flowers are blue. Forget him." You see, "the flowers are blue." Ba, ba, ba, our first sounds, blue. Ma, ma, ma, ba, ba. I said, "Oh, I've got to get out of here." So I came home and I said to my wife, "I'm crazy. I'm crazy! I'll never be a pathologist. I'll be a patient."
Again it's the story of Carnegie Tech of this guy saying, you know. I said, "But I'm still making the same mistakes. . . . "
But, I said, "You knew. You wanted to shut me up, the thinking." There's **a** beautiful German song, "Freiheit," Free Thinking. It's beautiful. My words are wonderful. How else do you grow? How else do you ever--and it's like at Equity at the off-Broadway strike meeting. I got up. Most of the young people were

against the strike, and I said, "My God!" I said, "I'm probably, all the predecessors at the mike are against the strike, I'm probably as young as any one of you here. But think of my 45 years of experience. It is money. It shouldn't twist you around, but it is the medium of exchange. It gives you real dignity and you're probably looking at one of the original whores with the pure heart. I've been had by all of them and I loved it, loved it. I loved being fucked,

but I now think we should be well paid for it. I make a motion we go on strike." Well, that's what it was, you see. Again I say I really only talk from a hot position, and then I make the most sense, and I'm not afraid to say it and to

do it and to say, "No." It is that value that the Studio really has, the Actors' Studio, if you really, really use it for what it was originally set up for. It's now a cartel swallowing up everything and everybody because everybody thinks all you've got to be is touched, you know, and you carry it in your pocket. I've got a gold brick from the studio, you see, and this is going to make me--no, no, you can't.

Three months ago I got a call from Universal to come up and read, you know, and a part. And they're saying to me, "Henry Winkler. You know who Henry Winkler is?"

I said, "No."

He says, "You know, he's the Fonz, the guy they call the Fonz."

I said, "Well, gee, I don't watch television. I only watch ballgames and so on. I'll have to see him."

So the young director says, "We want you." So just the other day I get a call, Barna, my doctor, says, "Dear, for some reason the wardrobe lady--she's working for Universal--says she wants to meet you and so on."

And I said, I told her, "I don't even have a contract with them" and so on.

So she said, "I then called them up, the casting people, and they said, 'Oh, we're sorry.'" But at any rate, he only has to mumble or jumble something. He plays a crotchety--by the way, I looked up the word "crotchety..." But at any rate, I've got to read this to you. I'm not a crotchety man. You know, always happy and smiling. So I look up the word "crotchety”. "Given to emotions, a crotchety old miser, of the nature of a crotchet." What's a crotchet? "A hook-like device or part, a small hook-like process, a curved surgical instrument." So I came in like this. Well, he fell in love with me. I said, "The woman told me it was a crotchety character, see?" At any rate, he wanted me. So he said, "I want him." Odd casting, I know.

So they called the other day, so Barna says, "I said to them, 'Well, he just did something for Universal.'" I was on a Kojak. "And he got $7500 for the day." It's true; it was three or four different scenes. "But he makes up his mind." A little more than minimum, say $300 or something for the day. Maybe it's twice that. Maybe it's $175 for the day, and they were offering.

So I said to her, "No, tell them I'll only mumble. The floor is $500. Tell them it'll be a $500 mumble."

So she said to me, "Are you ready to lose it?"

I said, "Dear, you know it, it's still payment deferred. I’ll do the

payment-deferred jobs because that's done with passion. But when I just have to crochet it a little, than I ought to be well paid for it, you see."

She said, "Oh, I love you, I love you."

I said, "That's it, dear, Goodbye. Thanks very much." Well, that's it.

It’s hard, it's really hard. But I've got to tell--you see, these are the stories I've got to tell, and each guy has to make his. . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]