RL: As you know, my godfather--no, you don't know it--but he was the late Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, the tapdancer. It had never entered our minds in our immediate family that any of us would have been involved in the theatre. I really wanted to be a nurse as a youngster because I suppose now I liked the uniform, the white hat, the white shoes and everything, you know, coming from a very poor area. So that was my preparation academically in school, but in the summer I would tour with my godfather, and I think now mainly because of the money to buy us our little pleated skirts and our middy blouses and our little ties and shoes. Because in those days if you worked and were the oldest in the family, no matter what you earned, it all went into the family pot, you know. And so it was just a way of life. However, when afterwards I got married, had a child, and then the marriage broke up. And I decided that I would go and get a job as a typist, stenographer, and I did with a maintenance company. And in the meantime, I would go back to school so I could become a nurse. Instead of that, the Federal Theatre was organized and I was requested to come and join the Federal Theatre. So I did, and while there I played in Macbeth one of the witches with Mr. Orson Welles, Mr. Abe Feder, Nat Karson, who turned out to be a lifelong scenic designer, set designer for the Radio City and the Roxy. Then I went downtown in the Village. I was transferred down there and played the crippled child in Maeterlinck's Blue Bird. During that period while I was studying, because we had free classes in everything, I heard that Native Son was going to be done, starring Canada Lee, who I knew very well, lived in my block. I auditioned for that, but I didn't get it, but it began to really light a little thing inside of me.

Then there was an audition to do the Hot Mikado. Now at that time. Uncle Bo

had just come back from Europe, and I went down but didn't tell him that I was going down to audition. When I got there, down the aisle after I auditioned came Uncle Bo and Mt. Mike Todd. And Mike Todd said---I'll never forget, coming down the aisle. He said, "Do you dance?"

And a voice said, "Of course she dances." It was Uncle Bo, and so I was hired. And I went into the chorus, but two nights before the show opened--it sounds like one of those stories that you used to see in the movies--the girl who was playing Pitti-Sing was fired. And I was told that I would have to then go into Peep-Bo and the girl who was playing Peep-Bo would go into Pitti-Sing. And I cried my heart out, and every girl in that chorus wanted to just knock me over. They said, "How ridiculous! You ought to be glad you're little and you weigh 76 pounds. I would do anything to shrink." I didn't realize how important it was until the day after we opened and I saw my name mentioned along with the Three Little Maids, how cute we were, what a great sound we had and what-not. Then it began to dawn on me, "Gee, this is nice, you know, it's really good." So I stayed from that moment on, which was in 1939, we went out to the World's Fair. We opened at the Broadhurst here, went out to the World's Fair, stayed there, went on tour for one year. I came back and Uncle Bo then had to go again out on the road I started really looking for work in the theatre. Now I'm not going to tell you a lie and say it was great, it was wonderful. It was not because in those days unless you could play and look like what most people thought a maid could be as a black woman, you just weren't considered.

I often wonder today if a lot of young people realize how lucky they are because now you run the gamut as far as roles are concerned. In our day, no siree. I have played every maid's role that you can think of. In fact, I learned after a while why I wasn't being hired. I didn't have a Southern accent. So I went

to Betty Kashman, who I'll always thank, who happened to be Jewish. And she taught me how to speak with a Southern accent. She was marvelous. Yes, she did it, she was great. There were a lot of us she had to do that. We had a class and so she charged us something like $1.00 for two hours classes to hold it, to be consistent with the southern accent. Now at home we were taught, "Do not say 'den' and 'dose.'" But you had to speak thoroughly or you were stopped, you know. So after that, after I came back, finally we went into a slump financially in this country. Then the Federal Theatre was formed. Wait a minute, that's right, came out of that. Then what happened, I went out on tour for Luther Adler, Federal Theatre. And that's when I started touring with Mr. Stone, Fred Stone, the late Fred Stone, in "You Can't take It With You," and I played Reba. And that's when I really got a good taste of what it was to be in the legitimate, no music, no dancing, just the story. I went down with a black man from Jamaica by the name of Charles Benjamin. I'll never forget him. He had just came from the West Indies. And when we got to Washington, as we started, the first stop was Virginia Beach, the camp. And that's when the two conductors came through---one was always black and one was white--and said, "You have to go now into the Jim Crow car." And I'll never forget Mt. Benjamin said, "What? What are you saying?"

And he said, "You'll have to get out now."

And he said, "Okay. I will get off." And he got off in Washington with his bags and went back to New York, And I then had to play the two roles, and I'll never forget--the kind of mind I have--when we got to Virginia Beach and they said, "What are we going to do? Rosetta, you'll have to blend the two roles."

I said, "Fine, but under one condition. You give it to me in writing that I

get paid two salaries. And I brought my own apron, and I brought my own housedress." And I said, "You're going to have to pay me." That was the only way I could get over the hurt. I said, "You'll pay me" because I had a young boy then in private school, Catholic school. And they thought I was kidding. And I said--because I'm so young, you know. And I said, "No, I'm not. I'm not kidding. I mean it. I will not go on that stage other than to play my own lines." And finally about five minutes before the curtain went up, he ran out front in the box office, had it typed up, brought to me and brought me a single copy. I said, "NO, you bring me two copies. Then I'll sign it." I was a little girl. I'll never forget George Norworth, who was married to Nora Bayes, who was playing Grandpa Vanderhoff. He was sitting across from me, a great, big, rotund man, on the stairs. And he kept looking at me doing like this, winking with approval, and shaking his head. And his wife was, too. And I needed that support. I love him, I really adore him. I got it and I put it in my little suitcase and locked it up and went on. And the entire tour I played the two roles. And I could never forget all those soldiers every time Reba would come out of the kitchen with this piece of watermelon, and she would be waving it, and she'd say, "Goddamn those flies in the kitchen." It was a big laugh, I'd get a standing ovation because the soldiers just loved it, you know. Toured with that, came back,and as I came back, the reports evidently had come back to New York that I was good in the show. Then Frank McCoy, who worked for United Booking, called me, and Mr. Jules Leventhal, what a man! He called me and asked me if Lwould go right back on the road with Janie, and I went out right away with Janie. Then as I came back for a year I was called again to go right back out with Three Is a Family with Ruth Weston and Irma--oh, what is her name now? She was such a great comedienne,

actress, and also Bob Burton. I went right back on, and I did that for about seven years, just in and out on the road, change my clothes in the trunk and go right back out.

LB: How did you prepare yourself? Now you said, it's very interesting that the only roles in the beginning that you had were maids. Did you take lessons, acting lessons? That must have been a--

RL: No, because in real life if you didn't have a job, because there weren't that many black secretaries or in the post office. You know, they just weren't around. So you simply did what you had to do: housework. You were just playing what you did in real life. There was no real problem. I knew when I went in to read for a role, I knew by the script they had given me it was a maid. The only trouble I had was what color was the uniform going to be? Was it going to be a black-and-white number or a blue-and-white number or a gray-and-white number?

LB: It was a transition though from that kind of role to, say, even the Hot Mikado. That required a certain flexibility on your part.

RL: That's right. The first time, other than the revues of Shuffle Along and Brown Buddies and what-not,that they'd ever done a play with costumes of any other culture with blacks in it.

LB: It's obvious that there was a lot of talent there, and whether there were opportunities to really play other roles, the talent was there and ready.

1114: That's right. Yes, and that's what I thought about. I thought by that time I'd be--to really reach my potential, I would have this white uniform, running around with bedpans and thermometers. But that wasn't where it was, you see.

LB: Can we go back a minute to Federal Theatre? You said that there were classes. Acting classes?

RL: Free acting classes. All you had to do--

LB: Right. Tell me a little bit about that.

RL: They were marvelous. You could take fencing, you could take dancing of any kind, African dancing, ballet, soft shoe, tap dancing, modern dancing. All you had to do was have the will and desire to go register and do it. The Government paid for it. So I did everywhere---I even took fencing, you know. I took everything that I could get to that I could do within a day, you know, different days.

LB: These were offered at the Lafayette Theatre itself?

EL: They were offered by the United States Government anywhere you wanted. NO, you didn't have--you weren't relegated to go just to the Lafayette Theatre.

LB: You could go anywhere they were offered?

EL: You could go wherever they offered it in Manhattan or if you wanted to go out to Queens, if you wanted to change. That was what was so--we were on our way then to a national theatre. I don't know what happened along the way. But it was marvelous because it kept a lot--and that's when they had that CCC, was it, Where the camps—

LB: Yes.

EL: For the men, and it was just great, you know. You didn't have all this crime that you have now because we were all so busy doing something, learning a trade, becoming an auto mechanic. There were schools that the Government had underwritten. And poor as everybody was and you did have the people on the corner selling the apples and vendors selling fish and meat and vegetables, however there was a dignity, there was a knowing of getting up this morning to do something and there was a pride in what you were doing. And the bottom line was there was hope.

LB: I'm interested in what you said about the fact that you thought a national

theatre was really on the way.

EL: We really did. We really did, we really thought it was on the way.

LB: What killed it? What do you think killed the Federal Theatre?

EL: Having not been very politically minded at the time, I tell you the truth, I really don't know. I don't know what happened. None of us know. I don't think any of us ever will know. Maybe there are people around, but I know Hallie Flanagan and any number of--I can't remember the names of the men and women involved. But I do remember her because She was fantastic.

LB: Was she?

EL: She was terrific! Absolutely terrific!

LB: Did you have the chance to see her at all?

EL: She and Mrs. Roosevelt. I have pictures taken of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt because then they did Marching with Johnny on a commercial basis. They were trying to reach out, you see, for this. And I was on the road. I was lucky, I was given the song to sing about Crispus Attucks, the first black man to be killed.

LB: Yes, in Boston.

EL: And so she came to see it, and she took pictures with all of us. And I was lucky enough to be right close to her because I'd sung the song. I saw Mrs. Flanagan a couple of times at symposiums where she came to talk to cheer us up and tell us what they were going to do. They were going to better conditions and etcetera. And she came to Harlem. She was a woman that was always on the way because she checked out, she really checked out. I often wondered if that's not the reason we've had to fight for our independence because when women get ready to do something, they're like housekeepers. They go right into the corners, and maybe these men don't want us to do that. They don't want us to

uncover their affairs. I think that, but we're going to have to deal with it. And we're going to have a better government.

LB: I hope so.

RL: Because all the women, the mothers, the housekeepers, they'll be there with those keys to unlock all those little quiet doors.

LB: Let's go back to Macbeth. That was the first one that you did at the Lafayette?

RL: That's right. Edna Thomas played Lady Macbeth, and her sleepwalking scene was rated as above that of Miss Cornell, which was hard to believe because Miss Cornell was just not to be believed. But they did rate it, they compared it and that was it.

LB: Did you know her before or you knew her--

RL: Miss Thomas?

LB: Yes.

RL: I knew Miss Thomas before because I knew her through the Negro Actors' Guild of America where I was one of the chartered members and the youngest member on the Board of Directors at the time. Yes, with the late Noble Sissle, the late Lee Whipper and the late Mr. Elmer Carter, Harry Bragg, Attorney. It was a very prestigious board, but I didn't know it. However, they saw something in me, and I was put on the Board and later made chairman of the--(Interruption)

LB: . . much talk of .Federal Theatre.

RL: Well, we were sick and tired and I'll tell you, it was Fredi Washington, Edna Thomas, Noble Sissle, my godfather, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, with the help of a marvelous man by the name of Mr. Allan Correlli, who was then head of Actors' Fund. And they always had to go to Actors' Fund to bury the dead without insurances, to give them shoes and food. And so this was a corps of people who organized the Negro Actors' Guild and then went out to seek people

that they thought would be able to live up to Board of Director's members and contribute and guide it. So I was with them something like 10 years on that board, young as I was and later was made head of the welfare department and ran that for three years and the balls. I'm wondering how in the name of God did I do it.

LB: The same way you're doing specialized work now.

EL: But I did it while pursuing a career and raising a child. So that's why they say people who have a lot to do always get a lot done. But anyway, it was just to do that so that we would then not have to beg and look and scramble and bury our dead with dignity. That was really the bottom line. And so it was organized and through the Actors' Fund headed by Allan Correlli, it was organized. And I learned a lot, a tremendous lot by working there as a volunteer whenever I had the time. And it's still in existence, still doing its job. They raise their funds through boat rides and balls. In fact, this Sunday they're having their memorial services for all of our actors who died within the last year. We do it every year. They still do it. It's a marvelous organization, none other to top it, none. Like they have the Jewish Actors' Guild, the Greek Actors' Guild, the Irish Actors' Guild, well, it's the Negro Actors' Guild. And I guess if it were to be formed today, they'd call it the Black Actors' Guild. In those days you were permitted to say Negro Actors' Guild. So it still is.

LB: But that is where you met Miss Thomas.

EL: That's where I met her and she saw a potential in me that I didn't, along with all of the others that I met. Eubie I had known because Eubie lived right around the corner from where I lived in a brownstone, and my father knew him very well, you see. my father was a politician. He was a Taft Republican,

later turned to an Eisenhower Republican. I'll never forget when he said to me, "You know, becoming an Eisenhower politician, I feel like a Communist." And I said, "Pa, you don't even know what Communism is. How could you--" And he said, "Well, I feel like such a traitor." (Laugh) But he was a staunch Republican. Finally, when he was able to go to Washington during the convention and he seconded the nomination on television and came back, he was not the happiest man in the world. (Laugh)

LB: I'm sure he wasn't, but he stuck to his guns.

RL: Yes. But he was a remarkable man, absolutely. I'm very proud. I felt very lucky, very, very fortunate that he fathered the five of us. We all five feel that way, very fortunate, because it wasn't easy for him. And how he did it I don't know, but he raised five children. He lived till he was 82. He was the first black vice president of the New York State Republican County Committee. He knew than all, knew all of the top people in it. He was a staunch believer in a one-to-one relationship, not based on color, religion, or creed, but based on just you and me. And he raised all five of us staunchly that way, so that even through the Civil Rights Movement, though we felt that a lot of it was necessary, he still made it known about that at dinner table. You see, I think what happened to the delinquency and the problems that we're having now is they took the dining room out of the apartments. That **was** the downfall of family life because we were much like Life With Father. Our home was always everybody at the dinner table a few minutes before he got there. He didn't want to get there and start to say grace with one or two there. Don't come running in. Hair brushed, nails clean, face clean, and you sat down. Then we had dinner quietly, and then he went around that table and checked out what you had accomplished in school or what was new in school. And then he would lean back and he would evaluate for

the day what we had accomplished, what he had accomplished, check out my mother as to how she felt we were after we came back from school. And if you needed a spanking, you just had to go in back. If you didn't and you deserved a lecture. If not, he'd tell you one of his what we thought were very funny jokes, but we would laugh and kick each other under the table. (Laugh) And it was organized on a schedule about who washed the dishes and who dried the dishes.

LB: That was quite an organization, wasn't it?

RL: He was like that. That was the way he was, and that's how his father and mother brought him up in the West Indies. He was from the French West Indies, Dominique, and they brought their traditions right over here. And that's how we were raised in an all-black community in Harlem. And he wasn't interested in what was happening around him or the next-door tenant or how they did it upstairs. It was in this unit. This is the way we did.

LB: Tremendous security for you in that whole, being a part of that, wasn't it?

RL: Yes. So that I have been completely indoctrinated on a UN/United Nations/ basis, and all of us have been. I often tell people, "All right, yes, we went through that civil rights thing. And a great deal of it was necessary, but a lot of it in bad taste." I thought it was very bad, and I never had to wear and Afro to know that I was black. I was always told from a child that black is beautiful, so I didn't need it, you see. And even when it hurt because there was a period when they weren't hiring you unless you did have an Afro, I just went through the pain of not having an Afro. So I took my exams and went into playground instructing and taught in the playground instruction through theatrical techniques.

LB: It didn't occur to you to compromise your principles?

RL: I wouldn't. I won't do it. I'm too stubborn. No.

LB: I keep dragging you back to the Federal Theatre.

RL: That's all right.

LB: But I do want to—what was it like during the time of the rehearsals in that Macbeth that Orson Welles did? Tell me a little bit about your auditioning.

RL: It was, well, I'll tell you, those men made it a home away from home.

LB: Did they?

RL: Yes, they did. And they taught all of the black men and women the production end, which we'd never been permitted to do. And out of it came the black local of the IATSE because there were no blacks in the IATSE.

LB: That's the stagehands--

RL: Union, International Stagehands Union.

LB: Yes, I talked to James Kinnard this week about that.

RL: That's right, and he would know, my darling, because he was there with paper in his shoes, walking and picketing. Now they don't have a separate union any more. They're all blended in, and that took years to get done.

LB: Could you go into that a little bit? You said that both Houseman and Welles taught than what they needed to know?

RL: And Feder, Abe Feder. Yes, they all came up, and they helped, not only in producing Macbeth, which I suppose a lot of people downtown thought they were crazy. But they taught these guys how to hang lights, how to focus lights, how to make plans, Perry Watkins came out of that era right there. Although he had taken it academically, he had never, never done it in practice. And so it was just refined for him, and then he in turn helped to teach than how to build sets, how to paint sets, where the ideas of creativity of it all. And that's why they are all over now, you see. I know than all, I know than all.

A lot of them we've just recently buried because James Kinnard's brother just was buried, Bubba Kinnard. Just buried him last month. And Marshine Reynolds now has had one leg amputated. All these stagehands, we were all together, all of us working together.

LB: So that was a crucial time for them?

EL: That was a very crucial time, but it was one of the most productive and positive times of our lives. We didn't care about knowing. We didn't know it then, didn't care about knowing. We were too interested in what we were doing.

LB:_ How did you get cast as a witch?

RL: Well, there was no problem. You were hired by the Government. You were in Federal Theatre. You came up, you read, you know, and he made allowances for you not being well-versed in Shakespeare. And he taught while doing it, all of us.

L8: That must have been quite a company to work in.

EL: It was heaven. It was a slice of heaven.

LB: And you could see the performers really growing, well, as you yourself were growing at that time.

RL: That's right. I never dreamed of doing Shakespeare. Black people never thought of it. But they do everything. Way later, years later, I walk on the stage and who do I walk into in the Mansfield Theatre, which is now the Brooks Atkinson--(Interruption)

. . on tour from the Federal Theatre.

LB: Did you go? You didn't go?

RL: No. I left it to go into the Hot Mikado. That's right. But it toured, it toured successfully over and over and over again.

LB: What was Jack Carter like to work with?

RL: He was sensational. He was a sensational person.

LB: There was a good MacDuff, too. Who played--was that Daniel--

RL: That was Canada Lee.

LB: Canada Lee played MacDuff?

RL: That *was* Canada Lee.

LB: I guess it was James Kinnard said to me he thought that that was almost a better part than Macbeth because he was so good in it.

RL: It was the way he was so wonderful in it. And when we went to Broadway with Anna Lucasta, he played the sailor in it. And I'll tell you, I played it seven years straight, and I played it with a number, because he had to leave us when he went to do The Dutchess of Malfi in white face, you know. But there has never been another sailor like Canada. There was a mercury or something special about that man that he himself never recognized.

LB: Is that so?

RL: No. He reminds me of a Marian Brando.

LB: What was his background before he came to Federal Theatre? Had he been acting?

RL: A fighter. He was a fighter-violinist. Because I used to play the piano as a child. I'll never forget him. On Sundays he had this leghorn hat with the long streamers, the stovepipe, little buttons up the side, and I with my little dress and the little skirt starched out to here, and we would go to what we called the CYO, the Catholic Youth Organization. That was around about 5:30 in the afternoon, and we would go. And we always have to perform, and he would play the violin and I'd play the piano, make our parents very happy. (Laugh)

LB: Then if you were in Anna Lucasta, you knew Ralf Coleman?

RL: Very, very well.

LB: He's just died, as I'm sure you realize.

RL: Yes, Luella just called me. Well, he's been sick for a long, long time. In fact, my son and his wife lived in his home when my son went out there for a six-week orientation course. He was taking a special course for Bendix. And that's where he stayed. He stayed right in his home because they went on out to the island every summer. It was nice because they were beginning to worry about the area in Roxbury where they were, and so they were there. It was very nice. Yes, I talk to Luella quite often.

LB: Well, he was very ill when I spoke to him that afternoon. I don't think he knew how ill he was.

EL: He was a good actor. I think he did because some things he said to me the last time I saw him made me realize that he was acting for Luella and his children.

LB: You were in Anna Lucasta, too?

EL: Seven years.

LB: What part did you play in that?

EL: Stella, married to Fred O'Neal.

LB: I see. Fred O'Neal is still around, too, isn't he?

RL: Fred O'Neal is working his head off for us all and has never stopped, with the AFofL-CIO.

LB: Was he with Federal Theatre?

RL: No, no, no. No, he wasn't. He was not in the Federal Theatre. In fact, he was in Hecht Manufacturing as a stock clerk. And that's why he and Abe Hill organized the American Negro Theatre in Harlem in the library, based in the library, and brought Anna Lucasta to Broadway. That's where it originated.

LB: I was speaking to someone the other day who thought that probably the--I've

always asked the question, "What kind of influence did the thirties theatre have on the theatre of the sixties?" And what I got back was the answer, "Probably there was more direct influence on the American Negro Theatre than maybe on the sixties." But what would you say about that?

RL: All I can say is that I see a complete growth from when I entered, and that the growth for a period had been in hiatus. But now in the last, I would say, 10 years, it has leaped like I never expected it to be, the recognition, the honesty, the black artist or individual in the culture on every level has really grown tremendously, tremendously.

LB: To what do you attribute that? What has helped that along?

RL: I think that the white populace has been more or less educated, and the heavy load of discrimination has been lightened. So therefore, the light comes through better. They see better, and what they're after now is not the color. They're after the performance, and they don't care who does it as long as the voice satisfies. They've learned something. They've been educated in same way that evening in the theatre. That's all they care about now, and they would just as soon come to see something with mixed artists or black artists, if it's good, for $2.50 as to walk out, paying $18.00, of an all-white show or a mixed show or a black show that is not quality. They'll walk out. They don't care. They just want something good.

LB: I saw Colored Girls last night.

RL: All right. Then you know.

LB: it's wonderful. I was surprised to see audience there because it's what that play says, as well as the quality.

RI: The quality. The only thing is I thought, and I flipped out on it, I was so thrilled and so proud of every one of those girls. The only thing is--again,

it goes back to me as an individual and comes down to whether it's a shortcoming on my part or whether it's farsightedness or fair play. I think it should have been called "For Women Who Have Contemplated Suicide" because there wasn't one woman on that stage that I don't feel—women of all races don't go through the same experience.

LB: I think that's true. I think that's an excellent point.

RL: I wrote to than and told them.

LB: Did you? Well, I think that's good.

BL: Because then it does something that I want some day to wake up and find has been completely erased in the minds of people, and that is that all black men are of that type. It's not true. I had, my mother had, my aunts and uncles, and I've got friends that had celebrated their fiftieth and sixtieth wedding anniversaries, most marvelous men. But I can't say that every black man was like my husband or my father, nor can I say that some of my very closest white friends were as nice as some of the other white husbands that I know. But I just hated like the devil for it to be pinpointed to just black men. It's not true. It's about men, men across the line. I don't care whether they're in Japan or China, Puerto Rico, but it's men. It's just their attitude. Sometimes I look at them, observe than from a distance, and I can relate than to a friend who was Puerto Rican or a friend who was. .

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. now, but sometimes I bow out of appointments only because--and she's white and he's white—because she reminds me too much about my husband I just buried three years ago. They couldn't be happier. Now every time he says, "Well, Rosie, I've got a job--" they both come running to me because they're much younger. "Rosie, I have a job, but it's going to take me away." And I said,

"Don't. If you can't take her with you, don't." And when she, "Oh, Rosalie, I've got a good opportunity. It's going to take--"__ "Um-um. If you can't take him with you, don't, because there is too little time. If you live to celebrate your fiftieth anniversary, it'll still be too little time. Don't spare those moments." And yet I know others who I'd say, "Oh, I couldn't take it. Thank God I'm not married to him," you know.

LB: It's not my problem.

RL: Yes. So again it's on a one-to-one basis.

LB: One more, if we have time. What was the audience like? We've talked about the change in the theatre, but I'm very curious, since you've played so many different kinds of audiences, both on the road and up to the present time, how would you say audiences have changed or starting with the thirties, what was the audience at the Federal Theatre plays like? What was it like on the road? Or however you want--

RL: Well, it was rough on the road for all of us. Living conditions were rotten, and you never could eat with the people that you were working with when you were on tour. And you never could live near them, so you didn't get to know them. You only saw them in the theatre. You left and you were separated in the train. You got out and you went to the theatre. They went their way, you lived with a minister. So there were no friendships built at that time, and so now there's a difference. You join a show and out of that show, you can bet your life out of that will come a lifelong friend, really friend. You will visit each other's homes, you'll have dinner, you'll be at the christening, they'll be at the baby's christening. If there's a wedding, you'll be invited, sometimes you are even a witness. The closeness now on the professional basis is so fantastic, but you never could generate that in those days. And you were

lonely all the time, you were so lonely. The people you lived with were strangers. Now when you're on the road you pick your own friends based on how you relate to each other, not on color or anything like that. And that's what enriched the profession as far as I'm concerned. We learned about each other from each other and found out in a lot of instances how similar we are.

LB: It gets back to what you were saying about before.

RL: Yes, how similar we are. And the audiences are so outgoing and freer. In the old days they were a little afraid to come up to you as you came out the stage door, or they just didn't care. Now they see you as an artist, and they're warmer and are more outgoing and reach out to hug you and kiss you. They care, they bring, they COMP backstage to you and they have about five, fifteen, twenty programs that you might have been in. And you say, "Where did you find all that?" "Oh, Miss Le Noire, I know. I've been following you. I saw you in this. Would you sign all my autographs, all these photographs for me?" So it's an entirely different thing.

LB: So there really has been a revolution since then?

EL: A tremendous, positive revolution. And of course this theatre, I'm happy to say, was founded on the, as you'll find, my concept that the best way to get to know each other is to work with each other and to learn from each other about each other and the background for each other. And it's in your work there. You see, everything we do here is integrated, with the exception of one show and that was because it didn't make sense, and that was Glass Menagerie. You could not have a white gentleman calling. You had to have the family, so we used the black gentleman calling. And I must say, it was sensational, you see. Even Tennessee said, "Where did you get that idea?"

I said, "Well, when I first saw it on Broadway, thank God, I saw it with Lorette

Taylor in it. I said to Earle Hyman, 'You know, somebody goofed.'" He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Why, the family. There's no such thing as poor white people because all the movies I see there's all the rich dragging furs on the ground." I said, "So somebody goofed, because I don't believe that about that family." I said, "I know what. One of these days I'll do that play. I'm going to do it with the right company that's all black." So I said, "Then I learned as I grew up, I've always wanted to do it, so that's why I did it. But I've also learned it's about the Japanese family, it's about the Irish family, it's the Jewish family. It is a universal play you've written." And it is a universal play.

LB: Very interesting. I've thought so many of his roles--well, I wasn't clever enough to say what you just said. I thought that very often his women were not White women or that his--

RL: Yes.

LB: That there is somehow or other--

RL: But you see, he only writes about what he knows and his community. He's so much like--he and Langston Hughes, I would have loved to have been sitting in a corner out of sight, I wouldn't even want my presence to disturb them, and just listen to them talk. I would have because Langston lived in the area that he wrote about, among the people. When he was successful as a director, he still lived there. Tennessee also goes back and stays a while, and he writes with absolute truth. It's not fantasy at all, and he writes about them, but you see, you like I, we've been brainwashed to think these people don't exist in any other race.

LB: That's right.

RL: It's not true!

LB: I'm delighted to hear you say that. I'll quote you.

RL: It's not true. You know, these situations are in every race. There are that many levels. That's why they have class distinctions within a group of people, within a race, Which I think sometimes is worse.

LB: Which is what--well, I'm thinking of Hughes Allison's play, Trial of Dr. Beck, was trying to say that.

FL: Yes, yes, yes.

LB: It was an attempt to bring colored hierarchy into the play.

RL: That's right. Absolutely. It's within the race. For the first time I felt, for the first time, born in Hell's Kitchen of West Indian parents, never treated or never had to think in terms of--as a youngster; I'm talking now about before I got out in the world--in terms of color because in the West Indies, that's not there. It's class, you know. So that it was nothing for me to see a mulatto uncle or a near-white aunt Sundays. So the colors at the table and in the home were all various colors. So I was never hung up on that color.

But when I first went out, my first encounter with discrimination was with light-skinned black people. That's when I realized there was a difference, and of course the impact was really such when I went on the road. Then I really realized it when I. got down South. And then it all came through, and then I understood why some of my neighbors,when I was growing up, reacted in a very pious way and what-hot. And I couldn't understand it because we were always taught to sit up straight and be somebody. Because coming from the background we were, we didn't have any, you know, feeling about being inferior. We were taught just the opposite, that you were made in the likeness of God and you're equal period. And that was it. And we went on our merry way.

LB: It's interesting. Did I understand you correctly that in the South you were made to feel this by the lighter-skinned?

RL: No, no, in the North.

LB: In the North?

RL: In the North. You have it throughout, but I felt it, Rosetta Le Noire found it right here in the North. That's right. There was a club I'll never forget called "the Cosmos," organized the blacks. And the only black people in that club at the time--they've probably changed--were black doctors and attorneys. But everybody else was light, especially their wives, if the truth were to be told, you see. They've probably gotten away from it now, but that's the way it was.

LB: So Hughes Allison's play then was very topical at that time?

RL: Very topical.

LB: Did you happen to see that?

RL: Yes, I did.

LB: What did you think of it?

RL: I thought it was fantastic. I think I saw it about five times because I kept going back to see it, to see the acting because it was a tremendous company. The actors were fantastic, and the story. In fact, I had considered doing it here. I had thought about it, and this is something I don't think a lot of young people today, white or black, know anything about.

LB: I think that mould be an awfully good play to do. Is there anything else that you can think of that I haven't asked you? Of course, I've asked you a lot of questions, but there may be something that I don't know enough about to be able to put to you about the thirties or about the Federal Theatre. We talked about it as an apprenticeship program and how crucial that was.

RL: I think it was the beginning of opening the door for blacks to came into the mainstream of the legitimate theatre exactly. I think we'd be further back had the Federal Theatre never been in existence. I think from that, like the trunk of a tree, stemmed all the limbs and everything else that happened and that is happening for us today.

(End of interview)