TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW
with GILBERT MAXWELL

by John O'Connor
for the

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GM: . . .He was fired from Federal Theatre in Atlanta. He went on to Hollywood to do dialogue coaching on Gone with the Wind and married Maureen O'Hara, incidentally.

JO: Why was he fired from Federal Theatre?

GM: Well, you really want to know?

JO: Yes. (Laugh)

GM: Are we on?

JO: Yes.

GM: Well, he was fired, as I understand, for threatening the--he was the supervisor to begin with. And he threatened some of the tent showmen with pink slips if they didn't lend him some money, and we caught onto that. So he was fired and Sara Sanders Thomas, who together with Paula Causey, had set up the whole thing in Atlanta--you see, what we had in Atlanta was we had a Theatre Guild, which was for amateurs, and then we had the Federal Theatre. And Will Price was in charge of the Federal Theatre, the first supervisor that we had, and Paula Causey was the head of the Theatre Guild. Sara Thomas was not anything very much except working around there the way the rest of us were. What I did actually was from the very beginning -- I was one of the first people they hired. They hired me off the Writers' Project. And the first thing I did was set up a filing system along with a very cute little girl named Bert Strickland, who turned out to be the ingenue for the company, the Atlanta company. I was more or less the juvenile. We set up the filing system and I trained the ushers, and then I did all the interviewing of the people who came from New York and various other places to star in the plays and to produce, as Gordon did, you know, and to direct. And we just did everything, I mean, like practically

almost swept the theatre out to start with. So then as I said, Sara Thomas, who was a rather retiring, very pretty little lady, was put in temporarily to take Will Price's place when he left. And she stayed because she turned out to be extremely efficient and just couldn't have been better at her job. But as time went on--the theatre lasted only about two years there.

As time went on, people were brought down from New York and there was a determined effort on the part of certain factions to get Sara out and put in a rather abominable little man whose name I'm not going to mention, who had came down from New York to direct.

Now, would you like me to talk about the interesting people who came?

JO: Yes. I have one kind of organizational question and that is what the relationship between Birmingham and Atlanta was. Like you talk about productions and people.

GM: Well, as I understand it, the Birmingham project wasn't doing so well by itself. You see, we brought down—first we had a large bunch of people in Atlanta. Atlanta was always a good theatrical town for stock and that sort of thing, and we had sane very talented people to start with. For instance, I had worked, and so had Bert Strickland, in the Little Theatre there. We had just done a personal appearance just before Federal Theatre came with the Little Theatre group. So we were sort of among the first people hired and then there were some very talented semi-amateurs and semi-amateur people working with that. So, we had a company to start with. Also we could draw upon the Theatre Guild, which was going to do its own plays. So the first thing they did was <u>The Drunkard,</u> using Guild members mostly, and it was an enormous success. It was supposed to be amateur, but it turned out to be a very professional little melodrama and they made a lot

of money on that. Then they brought down a company from New York, and they had some good stock actors in that company.

Then, as I said, the Birmingham Project wasn't doing so well, so the Rimingham Project was moved over to join the Atlanta plant. And they brought with than some interesting people and by the way, one of than you should talk to is Helen Stringfellow Rust, who was the leading lady in that company and who is now living in Birmingham, Alabama.

Among the most interesting people who were brought down from New York was a girl who I think was one of the finest actresses I've ever seen. Her name was Mildred Van Dorn, and she had been with the Group Theatre. We did The Adding Machine, and she was superb. I don't think I've ever seen a more magnificent actress in my life than she was. And I saw it the second night.

For same reason I was busy and I didn't get to see the first night. And they had a noisy audience because, you see, we were drawing people who had never seen a play before then. And sometimes they got carried away and rolled Coca Cola bottles down the aisle and that sort of thing.
So I went backstage and Millie was a charmer, a very beautiful girl. And I said, "My God! I've never seen such a performance."

And she said, did you really like it?"

And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Oh, darling, they were so noisy and ugly last night. I simply won't do it tonight." And she could not have been better than she was, you know. She was such a good actress she couldn't have given a bad performance if she had tried.

Now among the more interesting things, I think, that we did, the most interesting thing probably was Mr. Graham's Altars of Steel because, oh,

God, we were written up. It drew tremendous houses because all the newspaper columnists and writers of the different papers attacked us for being "pinkos." I mean, there wasn't anything Communistic about the damned thing but you know, everybody—we had a sort of Communist bug in our heads anyway.

So of course this stimulated, you know, business tremendously. We turned them away night after night after night, and I think Altars of Steel played two weeks or something like that.

Then we brought down a marvelous man from New York, a very well-known, very beautiful man named Walter Armitage, and he played Dr. Faustus with us.

That again was a tremendous success, but the most successful thing we did vms Boy Meets Girl, in which I played the boy and this girl, Bert Strickland, played the ingenue. We toured with that and we took it throughout Georgia and Alabama, and my most distinctive impression of that is that, as we entered the hotel in Birmingham--I think it was either Birmingham or Montgomery, I believe Montgomery-and I thought perhaps that I would enter with great dignity. And I tripped on a rug and fell flat on my face right in front of the desk of the hotel. So everything was very informal after that. This thing though, I remember thinking what a tremendous thing this is for this community because we played in the old Atlanta Theatre and when we did Boy Meets Girl, one night I just lifted my eyes and I looked up. I thought, "My God, this old, abandoned theatre, and tonight there are 2,000 people here." You know, it was just packed to the last row in the back and we played it for two or three weeks. We took it on the road, we brought it back and played it again for three weeks.

Now the interesting thing to me about this was we made a great deal of money on these various shows. And Sara Thomas said, "What are we going to

do with all this money?"

And I said, "Why? Can't you use it?"

She said, "No. It can't go into salaries or anything else. And we've got all this money in the bank, and we're not supposed to have it. You know, we were supposed to just make expenses and nothing more." So each time that we made an awful lot of money, all that we could do was put on another lavish production and spend it, you know, on costumes and scenery. Because the Goverment, naturally, hadn't thought of anything as practical as telling you what to do with some money if you made it. Now the practical thing to me would have been to increase the actors' salaries, but this was never done. I think we got a maximum of $85 a month in those days. I believe that the New York people got $123 a month, something of the kind.

We always had a lot of difficulty with the jealousy faction going on, and I never have understood exactly why they wanted to get rid of Mrs. Thomas, who was just marvelous. But they brought this funny little man down from New York, and the first thing that I did was go over and get acquainted with him. And I said, "I think you and I'd better have an understanding from the beginning. I know why you're here. I know what you've been brought down from New York for and that is to oust Mrs. Thomas and take her place as superintendent of this project, supervisor. And you'll get no help from me on that score at all." I said, "We may as well get it straight right now that I'm on her side and will remain so." So of course I was not very popular with him and as a result of this, he used to bait me a great deal. And one day he had me working with a tent showman. The tent showman didn't know his lines, and he told me that I didn't know mine. And I raised hell

and he said, "I didn't know that I was coming to Atlanta to get temperament." And I said, "Well, you're getting it, aren't you? What are you going to do about it?"

So what he did about it was that he suspended me and he didn't cast me.

There was a woman named Miss Gooch, who was the head of the—Agnes Gooch, believe it or not, was the head of the Blackfriars at Agnes Scott College and she had borrowed me two or three times to play leads. I played out there in Double Door and Stage Door and I think a Greek play or something, I've forgotten. But anyway, Miss Gooch was very fond of me and so she said, "Why aren't you appearing?" And I told her and she said, "Oh, I'll fix that." So on the stage one night after a show, I was there with him and she went to him. And she said, "Mr. L., why aren't you casting Mr. Maxwell?"

And he said, "Well, we're going to find something for him to do."

She said, "You bet you are because if you don't, I'm going to withdraw the support of Agnes Scott College. Because all that I do is bring my girls here to see Mr. Maxwell. He's the only thing that I want then to see in the Federal Theatre." So he was forced to reinstate me for a while.

But this man was a real little monster and I think just for fun I'd like to tell you something. I thought about this before you came.

As I said, Millie Van Dorn was a marvelous actress, and she said to me, "This really is a son of a bitch."

And I said, "I know he is."

And she said, "But I'm going to fix him this afternoon."

And I said at the rehearsal, "What are you going to do?"

She said, "You wait, you'll see. But I'll tip you off. I'm going to do

everything different from what he tells me to do it." And so he would give her a direction and she would do an absolutely opposite thing. I was the only one that was in on it and, of course, I *was* in hysterics. I was hiding behind a tar paper; we were rehearsing in the back of the theatre.

He kept saying, "Miss Van Dorn, are you being deliberately stupid this afternoon? What are you doing to me?" And she burst into tears.

And she said, "Mr. L., I just don't understand your attitude at all. I'm doing everything I possibly can to please you. And I may seem stupid to you, but I just don't understand what you want." And so for two and a half hours, she almost had him crawling up the wall, pretending that she didn't know what he was talking about or what he wanted. (Tough)

JO: Why was Miss Thomas--what was the nature of resentment or--

GM: I don't understand it. I never have understood it. It was something—there were some people who worked with us from New Orleans, and again they're still alive. I don't want to talk about them, a couple of executives from New Orleans, who had teamed up with people from New York and they wanted to get the theatre in their own hands. I don't know why. Perhaps they simply resented this pretty little woman having become such a tremendous success, you see. For instance, one day—she had marvelous ideas and she never had had any experience except she had sung a little with light opera.

But she just turned out to have a marvelous business head. I don't know what they were doing. It was something to do with politics, I think. It may have had its origin in New York.

But anyway, I'll tell you a "for instance." One of the most wonderful things that we did was we decided to do a premiere of Robert Nathan's One More Spring. And she and I were chatting one morning and all of a sudden

both of us got the same idea at once. I said, "Why don't we—"
And she said, "Bring Mr. Nathan down from New York."

And I said, "Of course." So we wrote to Nathan and he said he'd be delighted to come to the premiere. Well, of course, all the city turned out for that, you know. And Robert Nathan, who was quite—well, I wouldn't say too much of a womanizer, but crazy about women to start with, just almost died. He said he expected same old lady with a reticule, and when this beautiful little thing met him at the train, he couldn't believe his eyes, you see. And I was playing with a man named Roy Elkins and a very lovely girl named Evelyn Eden. I was playing the Jewish violinist in this thing, and this guy Elkins was directing it. Of course, I was working with a very deep voice and that sort of thing. You know, it's about three people who, during the Depression, find a home in a tool house in Central Park.

JO: I thought I had a picture of it, but I guess I don't.

GM: Who's that, Elkins?

JO: Of <u>One More Spring.</u> I guess not.

GM: Well anyhow, this thing was very successful and Nathan was a poet, you know, and so was I and still am. We had all kinds of luncheons and dinners and things, and Nathan was nice enough to read some of my poems at a dinner, along with his own, or at least one of them I remember. He came back to see me afterwards, and he had sent me a letter saying, "Dear Gilbert, In playing this part, I want you to remember please that the voice stays up in a high Jewish whine."

So Elkins said, "Well, good God, we can't possibly change his characterization at this late date. We can't do that." And so Nathan came back after the opening and took my hand in both of his and he said, "Oh, Gil, I think you

were absolutely marvelous. But if I'd known that you were going to play this guy like a Yale man, I would have written him that way." (Laugh) Morris. "If you were going to play Morris like a Yale man, I would have written him like that."

Well, as you can see, we had a very exciting time. I'll tell you one of the most interesting things to me was Tallulah Bankhead, who was an old friend of mine, was coming down to do--we moved to the Erlanger Theatre. And I would say that this man's hatred for me increased. He had arthritis and a few other things the matter with him and I think they might have, you know, influenced his attitude toward other people, which was pretty sour and nasty. I tried being very friendly with him. I used to go by his house and have drinks and all, and we did sort of start a friendship for a while. But underneath he was determined to get rid of me, along with Mrs. Thomas. And so eventually she was fired and first my salary was reduced, and then I was let go from out at the Erlanger Theatre.

When we first moved in that, Tallulah came down in a play called I Am Different, which was a real stinker, and she wasn't happy about it to start with. And as God is my witness, I was walking up Peach tree Street and I saw on the marquee, instead of "Lee Shubert presents" "Your Federal Theatre presents Tallulah Bankhead in I Am Different." And I went upstairs and told Sara and Sara said, "Good God!" And she went and looked out the window and I said, "I want to tell you something, girl. This is one way that you can get rid of him if you want to, if you let the public know that he has given orders to have Miss Bankhead presented in the Federal Theatre. But what's going to be much worse is if Miss Bankhead sees this on the marquee. Because heads will not only roll, but there will be

bloodshed in this theatre."

So she ran and got him or sent a messenger for him and said, "Why are you being such a damned fool? I mean, Shubert is presenting this." He had to take this down, you see. But I've always sort of regretted that we didn't trust, you know, sort of use our power at that moment to get rid of him and trust to God in regard to Tallulah's wrath when she saw it. (Laugh)

JO: Here are some of the photos of some of the productions. Here's Help Yourself. It got some good reviews and--

GM: What is this from?

JO: Help Yourself.

GM: Where did this take place? Atlanta?

JO: Yes, Atlanta. You're playing the first part, Frederick--

GM: That's not called Help Yourself. It's called Up She Goes, and there's me right there. And that's Harry Lee, who turned out to be a novelist right there and wrote two books, Fox and the Cloak and--Harry wrote a book called Fox and the Cloak and then he wrote another one called Sir or Brother. And he was the son of Edna Lee, who wrote The Queen Bee, which Joan Crawford starred in. You see, we really had sane talented people around there. I thought that was the correct name. It's Up She Goes. (Laugh) Or am I wrong?

JO: I think so. (Laugh) It might have been one title or something like that.

GM: Oh, for God sakes! Oh, yes, of course. Where did you get hold of this? Isn't this something!

JO: That's a xerox of either the production notebooks or the loose bound notebooks and they would have a program and then there's reviews.

GM: There's Sara Thomas. She signed this thing.

JO: Harry Lee is mentioned.

GM: Oh, yes.

JO: W. J. Reese. And yourself. There's another review on the next page.

GM: Oh, I see, yes. I think I remember they said that I *was* good in a thankless part or something of the sort.

JO: That's right. (Laugh)

GM: Which is very true. I'll tell you something secretly, but you must not reveal it. This was the little man who was causing all the trouble and who was guilty of--

JO: —Hope then I can ask you now about another person because I didn't ___ know whether it was this one or the other one. Did Clyde Waddell then replace--

GM: Clyde Waddell was the director for the Birmingham Project, and he was a fine man and a very good --he directed Boy Meets Girl and played one of the writers in it. Jack Barefield played the other one. Clyde was an excellent stock person. He was terrific. In other words, Clyde was supervisor and director of the Birmingham Project when they came over. What have we here? I'm going to have to have some xeroxes of these. Oh, this is my favorite thing. Yes, I love this. This is Fly Away Home, certainly. I was Corey. How did you know all this, to start with? Gee, I wish I had some copies of these pictures.

JO: I can make, get copies made.

GM: Could you? You know, we did so marvelously with this and I'll tell you why: because we called on practically everybody in the theatre. There's this beautiful little blonde kid right here was nothing but an usher, and we brought him in to play the youngest of the problem children. I'll tell

you who was a fascinating person. She's not on the stage at the moment, and who was, incidentally, not Mr. Director Lovejoy's favorite person because she always told him exactly what she thought of him, was a gal named Vera Thomas, who was an old vaudevillian who had been with us. She *was* the character actress for our company. She played the mother in this thing, and I played the oldest--

JO: Son?

GM; Yes. And oh, gee, that's interesting. And is this Gordon's--

JO: This is Lost Horizons and I don't know--

GM: Well now, that was a stinker.

JO: Oh, I didn't know.

GM: Yes, that was a real stinker and that was the last thing that they did before they folded up. I was long gone by then. No, I wasn't. I played a tiny part in it. He gave me about four lines.

JO: I didn't see you in any of the photos.

GM: No. I mean, I appeared very briefly in this, that's right. This was a very bad play, Lost Horizons. Yes, Vera Thomas, a character actress, is here. I'm here for just a minute, that's right. This was when this director was hating my guts, and so he didn't cast me any more than he could possibly help toward the end.

JO: There's a set of Altars of Steel.

GM: Now, I was on top of that goddamned thing. Is that me there?

JO: I can't tell.

GM: I hated Gordon for that and I'll tell you why, because he had this terrible fire music going on, music from The Firebird at the top of its lungs. And this thing, as you can see, is way up in the air. We climbed up to it by

ladders, and I shook like a leaf every night before I went up there. That's me. I was one of the reporters in that very small part. (Laugh)

JO: Here's the last one, Man in the Tree.

GM: That was unbelievably bad. That's Jack Barefield He played one of the leads in this and Vera Thomas played the other. This was written by some man who should have been shot, and he came down for it, to see it done. The kindest thing you could say about this script was that it was inept. This was very bad indeed; everybody hated it. But for some reason we had to do it because the guy was a government--

JO: He was in the Federal Writers', John Woodworth, a member of the Federal Writers' Project.

GM: Oh, that's why we had to do it because he was the—have you got the program on this?

JO: Yes. I've got--there's a great review about talking about it being a Communist play. The first review is it's a good play. It's a good review simply saying that it's not a very well-constructed play and mentions you as being one of the people--

GM: They say I'm playing Washington Irving. I don't think I was even in this thing. Maybe time has drawn the veil over it for me because it was something that I was sure I wanted to forget. Yes, I guess I did. You mean this is a good review?

JO: No. It's good in the sense, it seems to me, that it's revealing and talks about it as a badly constructed play.

GM: Well, it was and they couldn't do a thing with it. They tried their best. They directed it as well as they could.

JO: The second review is the comic one, which talks about it as a Communistic

plot,

GM: Well, they were looking for Communism in everything, you know, which really killed the Federal Theatre in the end. You know that, was their suspicion of Communism, you know.

Now tell me, are you going to New Orleans?

JO: Yes, I'm going there next month.

GM: Are you going to talk to Sara?

JO: Okay. I don't know her.

GM: Oh, you'll love her. She's Mrs. Leon Weisberg. She's in the telephone book, W-e-i-s-b-e-r-g. I'm just amazed to realize that almost all of us who were connected with this thing are still alive, you know. (Laugh)

JO: We have had a hard time tracking where people were in the Atlanta or Birmingham projects. Anybody you know would be helpful. I'm going to see Josef Lentz in New Orleans also, who is--

GM: Is Joe still alive?

JO: Yes. He came up from the Florida Project.

GM: Well now, gee, I'd love to have some of this material. I'll tell you why, because I owned the scrapbook. I kept one of the scrapbooks because, you know, I did all the newspaper stuff. And somehow it got lost down the years. Sara gave it to me as we left the Project, as I remember. She took it with, her, and she gave it to me, and somehow it got lost. And I would love sane of this material for my scrapbooks. How did you get hold of most of this?

JO: This is all the material that was in the warehouse that just--

GM: Golly, this really takes you back.

JO: It's been sorted out.

GM: Isn't that strange, I mean, that I couldn't remember being in The Man in the Tree? (Laugh) I must have hated it so much that I didn't do it. This man here, Albert Lovejoy, stayed with us longer than most of them. I'll tell you who was a fascinating person who came down as a director was John Cameron, who now runs a theatre in--a quite successful theatre, too--in Pennsylvania where a friend of mine, Bill Hughes, is the leading man every summer, Ephrata Star Playhouse. And he came down, and this really sounds as if I'm tooting my own horn, but it's all true and it's very funny. He liked me enormously. He put on a thing called Excursion, and he would go and sit with me and have a beer at the Atlanta Theatre. And he said, "You know what I'm going to do, don't you?"

And I said, ***"No."*** He said, "If I stay here, this is going to be just like a stock company." I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "You're going to do all the juveniles, and I've already got in my mind what I want you to do. I want you to do the baby-faced killer in Blind Alley and all this." But all this pipe dream went up in smoke because he got fired. I forgot what for, but he left after one show. He directed Excursion and then he played Boy Meets Girl and then he left us.

JO: Why was there such a turnover?

GM: I haven't ever known exactly why, to tell you the truth. I'm afraid to say because I don't know what the politics were behind this. I don't know why there was an absolute determination to get rid of Sara. Why don't you ask Joe Lentz this when you see him because he may know. There was an absolute determination though, as far as I could see, to get rid of her and to make Mr. Lovejoy producing director, supervisor, and everything else. I don't

know why they didn't want Sara any more. It's very strange because I never knew her to do anything, you know, underhanded or Wrong. As a matter of fact, she was extremely efficient and as I say, we made an awful lot of money while she was the supervisor of the theatre.

JO: Was there a black group also in Atlanta? There's one play that I've come across that had black--

GM: Well, we did that. Sara did that; that was her idea. There was a beautiful singing group out there and they did a pageant, a black group, and it was called---what ***was*** the name of the thing--Heaven Bound, and it was magnificent. We made a great deal of money on it, and it ran and ran and ran. And I must tell you this about that. They were all angels, the black warren, and they were sitting on these various chairs, you know. And Sara and I were sitting watching on the second night and all of a sudden one of the angels toppled over and fell from the next to the last row to the stage. And of course, the curtain came right down. We rushed back, she and I, and by the time we got there, they had brought her around. And she opened her eyes and said, "Where is my gold tooth?" (Laugh) She wasn't hurt. I don't know why she wasn't killed, but she had fainted and fallen. The curtain stayed down for just a minute and we made an announcement and brought it up again. That was one of our most successful things and that was Sara's idea, you see.

This, I think probably, was one of the altogether, for the brief time that it lasted, I believe that this was one of the most successful plants in the whole country, certainly one of the biggest.

JO: You put on a number of very good productions.

GM: Oh, yes, and as I said, a lot of talented people came down. I'm trying to think if there ***was*** anybody else outstanding among the actors and actresses

who came. As I said, the finest actress that we had was Millie Van Dorn, who came and stayed for two or three plays. But I'm sorry that Walter Armitage is still not alive because he was an absolute Sensation whereas Orson Welles was always a little fat, you know. Orson Welles really put together, as I understand, Dr. Faustus in the beginning in New York and then Armitage took it on the road. But Armitage was six feet four and he was an absolute knockout. When he first stepped through those velvet curtains in his white knee pants and silk waistcoat and white tam, I mean, you know, there was hardly a dry seat in the house. I mean, the women, you know, they tracked down there like for a matinee idol. He was just terrific in it, and an awfully nice person, too. What else can I tell you?

JO: What seemed to be the attitude of people coming down from New York? Was Atlanta considered hinterlands or were they willing to--

GM: Well, they loved it once they got there. They were very angry because the first thing they did, they put on a play that was not very appealing. As a matter of fact, Frank Daniel on the Atlanta Journal—it ***was*** a play about the Depression. I've forgotten what it was. And they used the whole New York cast in it and none of us. So, I remember Frank Daniel in reviewing it said that Depression is about as attractive as a country cousin at this point, you know, which was a bad choice.

And then they were very upset because the second play they did because I liked it and because I had done it at Rollins College and had made a big success of it there. And I also had played the same role with a very fine actor called Glenn Hunter in stock. So we did The Wind and the Rain, and there was nothing for most of those actors in that play. And they were sitting in the back

snorting and criticizing all the Atlanta people and calling them amateurs and that sort of business because they weren't cast. So there ***was*** a little bit of that, but then we had some parties and everybody got to know each other. And I would say the actors got along beautifully with each other. . .

. . .Maybe I was wrong, but I think that it was a very, altogether a very professional level was kept in the plays. We did sane outstanding things.

JO: How were plays selected? Would that be up to the director or was that something out of Atlanta?

GM: Well, I was just thinking. Well, I believe, for instance, Waddell brought over Altars of Steel, I think probably from Birmingham, and we got very excited about that one. Then I guess they contacted Gordon in New York and he got excited at the idea of doing it because of the spectacle, you know. He played that all over the house, I mean in boxes, as they did--of course we got Dr. Faustus because we wanted it and we wanted Walter Armitage. Then as a matter of fact, I think we did The Wind and the Rain because I suggested it and I wanted to play my part over again. But Altars of Steel was the thing that we thought—we expected controversy, but we also thought it would draw crowds, which it did, you know.

I think that the main trouble was Atlanta did not support the theatre the way that it should have. I don't know why I say that except—maybe I'm wrong because we did draw enormous crowds. There was no question about that, but I think toward the last--I know what it was. I was starting with The Man in the Tree. The productions were not very attractive.

That was after Sara left and whether her departure had anything to do with it or not, I don't know. But there was nothing very much to excite the

imagination. Lost Horizons was very bad, a very poor play. The Man in the Tree was an amateurish, inept script. Then the last thing they did that actually. closed the theatre was The Fireman's Flame. By that time we weren't attracting any crowds at all. So obviously it was the choice of plays that did it in the end, you know.

JO: So this is the question I had. One More Spring was done earlier. This is the list--I tried to reconstruct a list of plays that you had done.

GM: Yes.

JO: I don't have a date for One More Spring. These are the dates. You see, that was much earlier then.

GM: One More Spring was in the springtime, too, I remember. Well, I'll tell you. The productions that were not successful were High Tor. God, I don't even remember The Best Cure or Journey's End.

JO: That's that last winter.

GM: That's when we were drawing no crowds. I was gone, but they were--Sara and I were gone, and they weren't drawing any crowds at all at that time. Whether we had anything to do with it, being gone or not, I don't know. But I still say I think it ***was*** a bad choice of plays toward the end. Fly Away Home was a delightful comedy. Lost Horizons was a stinker. High Tor was dull, a Maxwell Anderson play. As I said, I don't remember Journey's End, what they did with that. But The Fireman's Flame was just an old melodrama that they did over again. One More Spring was exciting because it was a premiere, you know. But I think if you look at that, you'll see it's a difference between what's entertainment and what is not entertainment. In other words, entertaining plays did well, and the others did not. The first one, the Martin Flavin play, Around the Corner, was the first one we did from New York, with the

New York company, which was not a very attractive script. It did all right. Faint Perfume was a very weak play by Zona Gale and that was done by the Theatre Guild with Paula Causey directing. And I remember Will Price always referred to that as "small stink." The Wind and the Rain was a big success.

Altars of Steel was a tremendous success. The Pursuit of Happiness was charming. That was done by Paula Causey. She directed that for the Theatre Guild. And believe me, the Guild plays done by the amateurs were not far behind these and they were pretty darned good. The Torch Bearers was hilarious; Paula also did that for, you know, Theatre Guild, using sone—you see, sometimes the Theatre Guild would use our actors, too, and that was a nice thing. I. mean, the Theatre Guild--I won't call than amateurs. I'll say the "semi-professional group." They used Vera Thomas in The Torch Bearers as the leading woman, you know, and she was a tremendous hit. As a friend of mine said in there, "Just like a maypole holding up a tent."

And Heaven Bound, that was the thing we spoke about. And by the way, Julian Harris, who directed that, was Sara Thomas's boyfriend. And he is the man who has just done the new coin for the White House, the head of the new President, you know, of Carter. Did you see that in the paper?

JO: No.

GM: Well, Julian designed the coin that has the President's head on it. Anna Christie was directed by John Cameron. You don't have that, do you?

JO:

GM: I want to tell you this because this is extremely funny. You won't believe this, but I said to Cameron one day--they had an amateur actress playing this thing, and I think she slipped somebody some money in order to be able to be hired to do it. I think it was done by the Guild, really, and

Cameron directed it. And I said, "That actress is perfectly terrible, Cameron. I could do Anna Christie better than that. Why don't you let me do it?" And so many years later when Bill Hughes was talking to him up at Ephrata Star Playhouse about me, he said, "Oh, I remember Gilbert so well. I liked Gil a great deal but, you know, I never understood one thing. He always told me he wanted to play Anna Christie." (Laugh) I don't know why he ever took it seriously. Oh, dear.

Oh, The Night of January 16th was a very successful play. Help Yourself was so bad. Hell Bent for Heaven was good. Fly Away Home. You know, I can see right now what happened. The last plays that they chose were not plays that attracted an audience. That was it.

JO: How often would plays go on tour? How would that be arranged? You mentioned a couple of times that you'd gone.

GM: Well, I think the main reason we did it was because, if I remember correctly, we had to keep these people working. And there was such a tremendous plant. Of course, Waddell had connections throughout Alabama, you know, and we had through Georgia. So I believe that we took a touring company with Boy Meets Girl because we wanted to send it on the road and produce something in Atlanta at the same time. We wanted to keep our own bunch of people working. And so naturally if we had one cast out, then we had another play going for the people who were sitting around doing nothing. We tried our best to keep everybody working, and that was rather difficult. For instance, we had a whole raft of old tent showmen, you know, and it was always difficult to cast them. But they would try to do plays with crowd scenes where they could use these old burlesque and vaudeville comedians, in it too, you know. The road tours were very successful.

Oh, incidentally, I think you'd like to know this. When we got to Montgomery—we traveled in Clyde Waddell's big, old Packard, some of us--and when we got to Montgomery, we played a schoolhouse and we couldn't get the scenery for Boy Meets Girl in through the back stage door. The doors weren't big enough in back to bring them in. He said, "We've got to play this thing against the blank walls."

And I said, "Not me."

And Clyde said, "Well, what are you going to do?"

And I said, "We will take the scenery in the front way."

He said, "You're out of your mind."

I said, "It's all very light. Why can't we do it?"

Jack Barefield said, "I'll do it if anybody else will." So we rounded up the cast and the stage crew that we took with us. We carried the scenery piece by piece up the stairs of the schoolhouse and through the front of the auditorium and set up the set and took it out again that night. You know, you had to be very ingenious for these things.

Oh, I think that this is just marvelous that you're doing this, I really do.

JO: I don't quite understand the relationship between the Theatre Guild and the Federal Theatre. Was the Theatre Guild getting Federal Theatre money also?

GM: No, the Theatre Guild supported itself. You see, the Theatre Guild, whatever they did as I remember, whatever they made at the box office was theirs. They used the theatre with the—you see, it was set up as the Federal Theatre and the Theatre Guild, to begin with, and that was an amateur or semi-amateur group, separate and yet connected at the same time. And of course, they didn't use government funds. They made their money first by putting on The Drunkard, that's what it was, and they made enough from The Drunkard

then to present Faint Perfume, you see. And I think I'm right about it. Sure, that's where they got the money, and they paid for everything, you know But they would occasionally use professional actors, you know. It was an unusual setup. I don't think there was another one around the country like that. God, we had an awful lot of people there.

For instance, I think one of the funniest things that ever happened, there was a very talented actress there, a semi-professional actress named Lillian Star. And she called me up one day and she said, "Gilbert, how can I get--I really ought to be down there with you all. And how can I get in there?"

I said, "Well, have you got any property?" And after sone hesitation, she said, "I have a bird dog ."

And I said, "I don't think that's going to keep you from getting into the Federal Theatre, but you know, you've got to prove that you don't own anything, that you really need the job and you're on relief."

And she said, "Well, what'll I do?"

And I said, "Well, you can't look too prosperous when you go down for the interviews."

And she said, "What should I wear?"

I said, "Well, you're an actress and you have imagination." (Laugh) So I said, "Come by the theatre and show me what you're going down there to apply for the job in."

Well, she really had done it up. She had an old beaded bag and she had on the most battered hat I've ever seen. And she had a very dreary dress and the heels of her shoes were turned over, and there was a hole in the back of one silk stocking. (Laugh) And she almost got away with it. She was just about to be certified when they discovered that her mother was president of the Community Chest in Atlanta. (Laugh) So we had to say No to

Lily, which was too bad because she was a very good actress, and we wanted her.

JO: You said before that you wrote the publicity for a lot of the things. How ***was*** the Federal Theatre received in the community during that time? Were the papers--

GM: Well, when we first started out, there was tremendous enthusiasm.

JO: As I was reading the reviews, it seemed to me there was one paper that was consistently sympathetic, and another consistently was unsympathetic.

GM: I think they were always sympathetic except when there was sone suspicion of Communism, as there was with Altars of Steel and that was ridiculous. It had tremendous notices, though. My God, I remember that I called Gordon and waked him up to--he was in a rage because he'd been up till four or five o'clock in the morning. And I said, "Well, have you seen the reviews?" And he said, "I don't want to see them. I'm going back to sleep." But anyway, I know they gave columns and columns to it, but at the same time, maybe it was just one of the papers. Was it the Atlanta Constitution that was all--I think they were a little more hidebound than the Atlanta Journal and The Georgian. The Georgian was a Hearst paper, you know. But they were always very cooperative. I mean, we got a great deal of cooperation until, as I said, it got to be--I'm completely right about this, after we moved to the Erlanger and the plays got to be a big bore. After all, let's face it, I wasn't doing the publicity anymore. And I think Barefield, he remained with than till the last, but I think he was even a little bored with doing the programs by that time. Not much enthusiasm. Let's say it was this: when there began to be all this friction and the determination to oust Sara Thomas, I think that the whole company certainly got very blue and

depressed. I mean, I think that whole situation hung like a pall over the theatre. Then they made a bad choice of plays. By this time, since Sara was a local person that had been removed, I'm sure it had a great deal to do with the newspapers' lack of enthusiasm. In other words, they knew there was sone chicanery going on. They didn't know what it *was*, but naturally, I mean, when you're--she had done a tremendous job and the papers knew that and the people who worked on the papers. And so I think they more or less withdrew their support. It was a terrible fiasco and it was something that never should have happened, and I would certainly be interested to know what Joe Lentz's explanation of it is, because he would know as well as anybody what happened.

JO: How about John McGee?

GM: He came down. He was an awfully nice man. I never knew him very well. He chain-smoked, I remember. Where was he from? New York?

JO: I think he was from the Midwest originally, possibly from Chicago.

GM: Well, he was one of the big cheeses that was sent over to investigate us and that sort of business. But I shall certainly never forget--as I said, to me the most infamous and heinous thing was the way Mrs. Flanagan *was* not allowed to get anywhere near me because I was determined to give her an earful at that time. And it was actually outrageous the way they would run up and grab her by the arm and take her away to keep her from talking to me. Because I know Mrs. Flanagan wanted to hear some things. And I'll tell you what happened was, they had brought her down to remove Mrs. Thomas, and she was very sharp-eyed. And she said, at the end of the day, she said--I think Joe Lentz was there that day. And she said very quietly, "Mr. Lentz, I would like the operation of this theatre to remain exactly as it is," and left.

So the effort had been made to get rid of Sara, but they didn't do it at that time.

You know, I'm intrigued right now, as long ago as it's been, to know what the real motive was in removing her. I never have understood it, but I think that the downfall of the theatre did begin with the removal of Sara Thomas. I know she'd be happy to know that I was saying this about her. Of course I loved her and so did everybody else in the company.

JO: She's dead now?

GM: No, she's Mrs. Leon Weisberg; I told you I thought you should contact her in New Orleans.

JO: Oh, I thought you said Vera.

GM: Vera Thomas was the character lady. I don't know whether she's still alive or not, but Sara is. Would you like to hear something very funny, a really funny story? Well, I got an infection, a strep infection, in the middle of the rehearsals of Fly Away Home, and it's the only time I've ever known Mr. Lovejoy to have any sympathy for anybody. He had arthritis though. That probably was the reason that he felt sympathetic, and I went to him and I told him I had this strep infection and I'd been to the doctor.

He said, "Oh, Gilbert, I'm terribly sorry. I'll make it very easy for you in the rehearsals." So I went to Bernard Wolfe, who was a friend of mine that was a doctor in Atlanta, and Bernard said, "Well, I've got a new cure for this, but it's very tricky. Do you mind being a guinea pig?"

And I said, "No, not at all."

And he said, "Well, it's a sulfa drug, and it hasn't been completely, you know, refined yet. But I think I can get you over this thing in three days, if you will use it."

And I said, "Well, what'll it do to me?"

He said, "In the first place, cigarettes are going to taste dreadful. You won't like food very much. And in the third, you're going to turn pale blue." And I said, "Well, that's all right if I can get rid of this in three or four days." So he gave it to me and on the opening night of Fly Away Home, I put on beautiful makeup. And I was 28 and I was supposed to be 18, and I looked 18. So when I came off at the end of the first act, this blue had bled through the makeup, so I put on another makeup for the second act and a third one for the third act. And the next day somebody stopped me on the street and said, "You know, that was one of the best performances that you've ever given that we saw last night. But it was the most peculiar thing. I wondered if there was something the matter with my eyes because you came on at the opening of that play and you looked absolutely marvelous. Then you just sort of faded out throughout the first act and you became sort of pale and washed-out looking toward the end. Then at the beginning of the second act, you were all bright and bushy-tailed again and at the beginning of the third act. And at the end of the third act and the second act, you were really as pale as a ghost and a strange, a really very strange color."

I said, "I don't understand that at all. It must have been a trick of the lights." (Laugh) I thought you'd like that. (Laugh)

JO: (Laugh) How were the technicians and stagehands in supporting--

GM: They were all pretty nice, yes.

JO: Were they professionals from other theatres?

GM: Yes, they were old pros, you see, because Atlanta had been a terrific stock town. And all of these old stagehands, they had worked with Belle Bennett, you know, and all those great people down the years. And they were real

troupers, they really were. You know, in a group like this, there were always little factions standing around whispering about--gossip going on every minute about everybody connected with the technical end of the theatre. I mean, like Joe Lentz or the big bugs were always under discussion, you know, and "Are they really going to get rid of Mrs. Thomas?" and all this sort of business. It would filter down from the main office to the tent showmen and they would be whispering among themselves.

By the way, one of the most difficult things that I had, after having trained these green ushers, and they were mostly farm boys, one of the great difficulties I had, they always insisted on seating the critics from the three papers in the few very dead spots in the Atlanta Theatre. So then the critics could say that we weren't projecting. (Laugh) I didn't catch on to this at first and then I had the critics moved to where they could hear. (Laugh)

JO: You mentioned Jack Barefield before and you said he's still alive. Do you know where--

GM: Yes, and Barefield's at--I'll give you his address and telephone number. As a matter of fact, he wrote me. Gordon told him to get in touch with him, and I've gotten in touch with him already. Are you going down there?

JO: Where?

GM: Where he is?

JO: Where is he?

GM: At Burke, Texas. Anyway, somebody was going to see him because he wrote me. I'll show you his letter saying--that's how I heard about this first, and then Gordon wrote to me after that. You know, Gordon Graham is one of the great personalities of this age. I hope you have a chance to talk to him.

He'll talk to you five hours about this, but he really was tremendously successful with the Federal Theatre, and he's one of the best directors I've ever seen.

JO: He's got a good vantage point of having been in New York, Atlanta, and then Miami and Tampa.

GM: Yes, he used to visit in Tampa a lot. There are many stories I could tell you, but I mean I would have to know you better before I could. (Laugh) But I really think we had a tremendous amount of talent connected with this theatre. Now James Reese, who is here, was marvelous. He went on into the New York theatre. I mean, from the Federal Theatre he went into the commercial theatre. And by the way, James Reese created down here at--you know, we tried out--no, Sweet Bird of Youth, Tennessee's play, was presented here the first time. Do you know Sweet Bird of Youth?

JO; Yes.

GM: Well, Reese created the role of Boss Findlay, and he came from Federal Theatre. And then he worked in the New York theatre a great deal. He started out simply as an actor in Atlanta. He's one of the people who went on to be a pro.

JO: Sweet Bird was put on at the Kennedy Center this past year as part of the bicentennial programs.

One other name, that's Herbert Price, not William Price but Herbert Price was a man who came down from New York and worked in rural Georgia.

GM: Herbert Price? I never knew him.

JO: Okay. It was a matter of trying to promote community drama in small towns in Georgia.

GM: Will Price was tragic because I don't know, he was a cute little guy in

a lot of ways. And he must have had something to marry Maureen O'Hara and to talk his way into being Susan Myrick's assistant dialogue director, you know, on Gone With the Wind. But he drank himself to death. He died an alcoholic at the age of 49, something I never did understand because, I mean, if you're married to Maureen O'Hara, that ought to be almost enough, don't you think, to keep you alive for a while?

I think that Will Price's problem, I think maybe the real reason we lost him *was* because he was very nice, but he was very homesick in Atlanta. And I think also that he was rather childish in his attitudes about many things. And it may have been booze, although I wasn't conscious of his overdrinking at the time.

We had one of the funniest people with us---God knows what's become of him--that ever lived, an extraordinary wit, One of the most amazing people I've ever known was Whitney Hayley, who came down from New York. I don't know whether you could ever find him or not, but he worked with us from New York. He played the cowboy in Boy Meets Girl, an extraordinary piece of casting. And he turned out to be a teacher. First he became manager of one of Best's stores in *New* York and then went on to be a teacher. And I wish I hadn't brought him up because I can't tell you too many things about him. But he *was* a rare and delightful wit and a very funny person and quite a good actor, too. I don't think we had any more real names with us.

Oh, we did have a woman who came down, a character actress, and her name was Florence Coventry. (Laugh) She didn't make herself too popular because she was rather imperious. Her face had been done over; she looked very good and she, of course, absolutely--I mean, I fell in love with her because she told me that with the exception of one old actor who was playing in Boy Meets

Girl, that I was the only professional person on the stage. (Laugh) But anyway, I remember her distinctly because she was one of Mr. Lovejoy's pet peeves. And one night just before the opening when he gathered everybody on stage for criticism before the dress rehearsal, he said, looking at her, "Well, in the first place, I don't like the wig."

"Well," she said, "in the first place, it's not a wig. It's my own hair. (Laugh) She was a sassy old piece if there ever was one.

We had fun with this thing, I must say, with this project until the arrival of Mr. Lovejoy. I think we had a delightful time. One of the funniest things was in Boy Meets Girl, the casting director at the end--she says, "The midgets are here," his secretary says.

And the producer says, "Midgets? I didn't order any midgets, you see."

And I. said to Sara, "Let's have the midgets."

She said, "What!"

I. said, "Let us have the midgets." So we brought on Clyde Waddell's tiny son and her daughter as the midgets all dressed up in grown-up clothes. It was a great hit. I mean, it wasn't written that way, but we thought, "Why not bring the midgets on." So they suddenly made their appearance.

JO; You mentioned Paula Causey before as director in the theatre. Was she in the Theatre Guild?

GM: She was the head of the Theatre Guild and Paula was a riot. I mean, I loved Paula. She and Sara and I and Julian Harris always used to run around together a lot. And Paula was a very lackadaisical, lazy sort of person. And one day the Atlanta Theatre caught fire and everybody was down in the street. And I looked up at the window and Paula was standing at the office window smoking a cigarette. She said, "Do you think there's any real reason for me to come downstairs?" (Laugh)

I said, "No. Just stay where you are." (Laugh)

JO: That is lackadaisical. (Laugh)

GM: I think that there's nothing more fun than a bunch of people, you know, working together in the theatre and getting along together. And from the very beginning, most of us did get along together and enjoyed the work, enjoyed each other, enjoyed the productions and--I must say--I don't know whether he's still alive or not, but I can state categorically that with the arrival of Mr. Lovejoy, the theatre began to go downhill.

JO; Do you think there was an advantage to having the regular paycheck and one play caning after another, did that help by the commercial base being solved in sane sense?

GM: Well yes, I think it was—as I said, there was the problem of what to do with the money, as I remember it. But I think there was a great joy in being able to spend as much as we wanted to, not of government funds, but of money that we had made on scenery and costumes, you know. Of course that meant that we really could have some lavish sets and beautiful hangings and all that sort of stuff, you know, and huge stage, as you can see.

JO: Was there much competition or sense of competition with New Orleans or places in Florida? Or was there a sense of being part of a national theatre?

GM: I think that in every project there must have been a great many petty squabbles in the inner workings of the project. But no, I think there was a nice feeling of camaraderie. I mean, I remember the first day that Millie Van Dorn arrived. We spent the afternoon talking about the difference between New Orleans and Atlanta and the Atlanta Project. New Orleans had a pretty good project, too, as I remember, didn't they? I think they were very successful. I believe that monetarily, which we weren't supposed to be,

and as to notoriety, I think we probably were the most successful theatre in the country for a year and a half at least.

You know, it's a damned shame that this thing was killed when it was because I never have understood why anybody objected to anything that the WPA (Works Progress Administration) did because the Republicans were always howling about what was being done with their money and all that bit. But you know, after all, when you give a man or a woman just enough money to live on and they're spending it and it's going right back into the stores and into the community, what loss is there to anybody? I mean, you're just giving a person a right to live and make a decent living. And think of all the people who came out of the Writers' and the Theatre Projects. It's beginning to be a part of American history now. That's why I'm very excited about this. I do hope that this will be a book. I think it would be a tremendous book.

JO: It is interesting, partly I guess because of blacklists and things like that, that a lot of people who just a few years ago would not in any kind of biographical sketch mention that they'd been in Federal Theatre or the Federal Writers' Project now very much want to say the things that a number of people--

GM: Well, I was always very glad that--I know when Tallulah came down bringing reflected glory and we were in the Erlanger by that time, she said to me, "Gil, you're with the Federal Theatre here?"

And I said, "Yes."

And she said, "Well, darling, I'm so glad that you're doing it because, you know, this is a really big thing. My God, Estelle Winwood is in this and she's one of the finest actresses I know." And you remember that

Tallulah was one of the people that went on to Washington to plead for the extension of the projects. I am absolutely positive though. that this whole thing, I have a feeling this whole thing collapsed nationally because of political bickerings. And I don't think it's necessarily Communistic, but bickerings in the companies amongst, not the actors, but amongst the people who had charge: producers and directors and that sort of thing. I don't know why they couldn't have behaved themselves and just let the thing go on as it should.

JO: There was a tremendous, both reorganization and switching of positions that just when you Look and try to establish a chart or something like that, you realize how much movement there was. It suggests that there was various kinds of tension. Part of it was bureaucracy, but there was more than that. Was there, either for the actors or the stagehands or technicians, unions and was there union troubles at all?

GM: Never one bit. No, we never did have any trouble with the stagehands or anything like that. I don't know. I mean, I remember a couple of Wops from New York coming down in the company who talked sort of radically. I thought they were harmless and they were good to me, too. And to call us Pinkos because of a thing like Altars of Steel is kind of silly.

JO: Part of it's the times, too. In the mid- and late thirties, what was radical then and what is radical now and what was radical for New York--

GM: Well, as I remember the conflict in Altars of Steel was between a Birmingham steel plant and some radicals brought down from New York. Wasn't that the theme of the thing as I remember? And so I think they saw the play as a Communistic element being triumphant, and that's why we were criticized so

much for it. But all that did was to fill the box office, I mean to fill the house.

I wish I knew more about politics, but I think that you would have had to be--although all sorts of gossip and scuttlebutt went around--I think you would have had to be almost clairvoyant to know what really was going on in our project and why there was such an absolute determination on the part of a certain faction to remove Mrs. Thomas. I never have understood it and I never will.

JO: You mentioned when Lovejoy came here being--the size of your parts diminishing and then being fired. Was that kind of the result of the bickering or the bickering affecting the productions?

GM: Yes, that was bound to--I mean, his influence in the theatre was bound to be reflected in dissatisfaction among the actors. I mean, I think most of them were completely loyal to Sara Thomas. And certainly he was one of the most thoroughly disliked people that has ever been there. I think he was a sick man and I think that that made him very grumpy and cross. But he had a terribly sour, arrogant attitude toward people, which was just plain stupid. And as a matter of fact, when you were alone with him having a few drinks and talked to him, he was a sweet and charming person or I found him that way. But then, I mean, he was dictatorial like a little martinet with the actors, and that doesn't go. You know, many people don't like that. I mean, they won't put up with it as a matter of fact if they can possibly help it. They had to do it because they were like so many cattle being pushed around.

Well, of course, the reason I was ousted was because of my attitude toward him in regard to Mrs. Thomas and because I took no sass off of him. I just

talked right back to him and so I had to go.

JO: One of the charges of the Federal Theatre was that because people were being paid regularly, they didn't need to actually produce a show. They could stay in rehearsal. Was there a good rehearsal schedule?

GM: All the time, yes.

JO: When it was supposed to come up?

GM: Sure.

JO: Or would they spend too long in rehearsal?

GM: No, we didn't. We didn't do any of that nonsense because as I said, we were very--Sara wanted everybody busy all the time because I mean, after all, she didn't want than lounging around the theatre gossiping and stirring up trouble. She really was an extraordinary person. She had a very cute little office boy at one time and I walked in and I said, "What in God's name is going on here?"

And she said, "Oh, well, it's a form of punishment." She had had a sign-board made for him that he had around his neck and it said, "I Cannot Be in the Pool Hall and on My Job at the Same Time." (Laugh) So he had to wear it all one day. (Laugh) But I mean, I'm sure you can see why anybody would adore a woman like this and to have complete sympathy with—for instance, we had a big party one night after a show And so she knew perfectly well that there was going to be booze. We weren't supposed to have anything, you know. There was going to be a dance on the stage afterwards, and she just said, as the party started and she came on the stage, she said, "Well, I just want you all to know that tonight I have no eyes, no ears, and no nose." And she was there dancing with the stage-hands and all that sort of business. This sort of person is the kind of

person you ought to have running a thing like that, you know, tactful and kind. And oh, I don't know, I never understood anyone who **was** connected with a federal project being a martinet or arrogant or being ugly to the actors, for instance because they were already—those actors are there because they need the work and they're already sensitive, you know, about not being in the commercial theatre. But you have to put up with a lot of crap from the director ordering you to do things. It's just nonsense, I mean. Don't you think that we could say this? Now this sounds terribly Pollyannaish, but I mean I found this true of stock companies and everything else I have dealt with. If there is a feeling of affection and loyalty throughout the company and a feeling of affection, loyalty and trust between the producer and the director and the actors, then you're going to have a successful company. But if there is a lot of backbiting and an element of hatred and distrust, it's going to fall. That's all there is to it. This sounds very naive in a way but I mean, it's the actual truth.

JO: It's a collective art.

GM: Yes, that's right. When you think of a thing like the Barter Theatre, which is so successful and I'm sure is due a great deal to that guy who directed it what was his name?

JO: Porterfield?

GM: Porterfield. I met Porterfield and I'm sure that he *was* just the ideal sort of person to run that sort of thing, you know, just as I'm sure that Sara was the ideal person to run the Atlanta Project. By the way, if you go to New Orleans and talk to her, I want you to play back what I said about our show here.

JO: Okay.

GM: I think I'd like to tell you this because when she sees this, she'll scream.

The last time I saw her, she was bitten by a rattlesnake in Atlanta at one time, and they gave her Cortisone. And from being just an exquisite looking little elfin thing, she got as big as a house. So the "last time I saw her in New Orleans, which was about 10 years ago, I said, "My God, Sara, what has happened to you?"

And she said, "I can't get it off. I tried every possible way. I've done everything and I can't get this weight off." And she really looked like a balloon. So when Helen Morgan was coming out in 1974, I called her to

tell her and she was very delighted I was bringing out a new book. And then she said, "Gilbert, you're going to be absolutely happy with what I tell you." And I said, "What is it?"

She said, "Last year I became very seriously ill and I lost all that weight. I lost down to 92 pounds and I haven't put any of it back."

I said, "My God, you must be really something to look at."

And she said, "Well, Baby, I sure as hell don't look any 68 years old." (Laugh)

JO: I'll try and see her then.

GM: Well, is this it, do you think?

JO: Yes, I think so.

GM: Good.

(End of interview)