

MK: And so what I'd like to ask about is if she was ever your teacher—

SR: Oh, yes.

MK: —and your memories of her as a teacher.

SR: Oh, of course. I came to work for Hallie—I was granted a fellowship, a

teaching fellowship. I had gone to the University of Iowa and had worked with E. C. Mabie, who was the head of our department. And Mr. Mabie and Hallie had continued their relationship over the years. And to make a long

story short, I applied for my Master's with Hallie which I got, the fellow-

ship, and came to work for her in 1944. And I don't know if you realize, but the Theatre Department had just really been a very short time.

MK: She established that?

SR: Right, in the two years. And to have graduates already, people working for

Master's, was I think an extraordinary example of why she was extraordinary.

At the same time that lady was dean of the theatre, a dean of the college, a

rather large woman's college, as well as head of the theatre. An example of

how unusual she was in terms of being able to accomplish a great deal, when

she gave up being dean of the college and finally became just head of the theatre, two people replaced Hallie as dean of Smith College and they did not

do anything else. She could have kept—as she did in the Federal Theatre—thousands of people at work. She was an extraordinary executive.

So I came to work here for two years but because there was nothing I could

really teach, because everything was sort of gone that I was qualified to teach, I became Hallie's secretary. I came there on a two-year basis to

be

her secretary and get my Master's. So that for me it was an opportunity more

than maybe some of the other students, being a woman secretary to be closer

to her. During those two years I got my Master's and then Hallie came back to

Iowa in between my 1944 and 1946. She came back to the University of Iowa to direct Muriel Rukeyser's play, *In the Middle of the Air*. And I was privileged to come back that summer—I had to take that summer in Iowa with

Hallie. I would have taken any extra time I could have had with her. To go back to my alma mater was exciting also and to have worked on Muriel's play, in which I happened to get a leading role playing the mother, the whole thing was—I was very fortunate.

MK: Tell me a little about that summer and that play.

SR: Oh, well, that play was—as Muriel Rukeyser and Hallie Flanagan were both

ahead of their time—Hallie had a thing about flight. I don't know if this is reflected yet, if you have read enough of her papers to know. But she

really—it's a shame she was not here with the man in the moon and all that and the astronauts. Because flight was an image that she had very early in her writing and in her talking and in her feeling. And Muriel's play was really about Lindbergh and Anne Morrow Lindbergh. I don't think it was disguised really at all. And it was, I thought, a very exciting play which

I'm sure they hoped would have later come to Broadway.

I remember vividly Paul Engel, the writer, who was head of the Writing Department at Iowa, wrote his review which I have kept for my children and

my grandchildren because it was a devastating review for me. He did not care

for me at all and I've kept it because he is one of the few people that has

ever reviewed me and, good or bad, I thought it was wonderful to have it.

MK: Were you Anne Morrow?

SR: I was the mother. The girl who played Anne Morrow was one of the most unusual actresses who did not go on with that but went on in speech pathology.

Norma Walcher, extraordinary. But it was so exciting because Muriel was there.

And I think when you have the opportunity to work on a play, a new play, with

a—not because Muriel was a noted poet but because she came there to teach so

we all had the privilege of working with her that way. But to watch a play

being formulated with the idea of the writer being there adds a dimension that

you don't often get. And Hallie and Muriel had this communication which I think those of us who were fortunate enough to have had the privilege—if

I

sound prejudiced about anything I say, I have to tell you it is a total prejudice based on fact. Because it is difficult for any of you who did not

know this lady to know that I think in educational theatre, which I followed

very closely, not only in the years I was obviously in school, but because

Hallie got me my first job to work for ANTA (American National Theater and

Academy). And I followed educational theatre for many years across the country because we were obviously tied up with any outstanding schools and

trying to help then here in New York. I think in a lifetime, you know, if you're fortunate to have one person who does something that lifts you up above the throng and says to you, "Go do it, whatever it is, but do it," well, she was that. And I think anybody who was fortunate to have touched base with her and my years with her—in addition to the two there, the summer at Iowa and then the six years during her illness—to be with her all the time working on the collection and then to relive parts of her past

and read those letters and speeches that I had no part of sharing except that

way, I never will be able to stop talking about Hallie Flanagan. She was undoubtedly the greatest influence in my life.

But this is true if you follow, talking as you're going to to people, obviously

since you're limited to the Federal Theatre, but if you will notice, anybody

that she's ever worked with, the paths that all of us have taken, which are

quite varied and not necessarily in the theatre itself but where we've gone

and what her communication has done for us.

But this was about flight and about Lindbergh and so forth and about his isolationism and everything. I don't know now, 30 years later, what I would

feel rereading it. I don't have a copy. But it also helped me to have a contact with Muriel Rukeyser which I considered a privilege. And if you've

ever read anything that Muriel has ever said—I don't know if any of you ever —

MK: I went to hear her last night. She gave a reading last night.

SR: Oh, you were lucky. Yes, I knew she was going to. But at the memorial service for Hallie, Muriel was very unusual. At the dedication of the Experimental Theatre which I was fortunate to be at at Vassar and Muriel spoke. But also there was a very interesting program on "The Creative Person"

series —I don't know if you were aware of it—that NET (National Educational

Television) did.

MK: I've not been able to get a copy.

SR: Well, it's in my collection,

MK: Oh, it is?

SR: It should be, there. It should be in the collection at the Lincoln Center.

It's called The Creative Person Series and Muriel is in it. I'm doing Hallie's voice in it because Hallie was disabled obviously in the nursing home and she allowed me to be her voice. So you hear me speaking for Hallie.

MK: Do you mean the actual film should be there or the script?

SR: Oh, no, no, only the script. Now the only way you could ever—you'd have to

contact Channel 13 and see if someone would give you that opportunity to see it.

Emmet Lavery's on it; Muriel. Even though to do that woman's life in a half

was not easy, I was just thrilled that someone realized that she was truly

one of the few creative people that you'd want to write about or do a film on.

MK: There's a woman right now named Dorothy Coleman. Have you ever run into her?

She does television work. She wants to do a whole series on Federal Theatre

and have Hallie be the star.

SR: Oh, how marvelous.

MK: Like maybe six or seven—

SR: Where—is she here in New York?

(Interruption)

SR: . . . in the years before that had been writing to Hallie and then when she

was incapacitated and really could not answer letters, I used to answer correspondence from students from all over the country. The challenge to me was

that I knew that once—outside of the fact that Jane Mathews had to go literally and live it—the only way you could do was you had to be able to have the money and time to sit in Washington and live there and use the Archives. Otherwise, there was no place, and students had been writing for

years to her, wanting to do Masters', wanting to do Ph.D.'s, and even though

my part of the Federal Theatre was only part of the collection, the fact that people wanted, that there were students always and that I knew would be

maybe for years to come. It was the challenge to get it finished and also that's why I begged Hallie to make it what I considered the focus, not because

I'm a New York-oriented person but I could not see it—Michigan wanted it, Hyde Park wanted to do, as they had with Harry Hopkins' things, which would

be a natural because of the Federal Theatre and so forth. But I said, "Hallie, it's got to be where it's at and where they can all come to the Center," And so thank God, it finally was. I had dreams of a room that was

gonna be called the "Hallie Flanagan Room" and all that. But since I had no

funds, I did this all on my own, and I—you know.

MK: So you went and would every day go to—

SR: Well, what happened was you wanted to know about my—so I stayed with Hallie

from 1944 to 1946 at Smith and since you really probably don't want to know

about that, so I got my—

MK: Oh, yes, I do.

(Interruption)

SR: The women in the 20th century, if one were going to talk about, you know, it's

Eleanor Roosevelt and it's Helen Keller and it's Hallie Flanagan, to me, those three.

MK: And yet there she is, not even in some books of notable women.

SR: Thank goodness when Life did the issue this year of women, they did a little, you know, at least knew that she existed.

MK: Well, you see, they had called us up and I sent them some pictures and I also

said, "You can't leave her out." As soon as I heard that woman on the phone from Washington, I was saying, "Now you have to realize how important

she was." Because the woman said, "I'm not promising you we're gonna have her in. There's so many." And I said, "Yes, but—"

SR: You know, the only thing I want to say to you is, since you applied for the

Rockefeller, since Guggenheim, since Hallie was the first woman to get a Guggenheim—of course, the man is no longer alive, Henry Allen Moe—

MK: He's dead then?

SR: Yes, he's dead.

MK: Bob Schnitzer said maybe he was still alive. That was a question for you, the

SR: No, he's dead, not too long ago, but he's dead. I remember reading about it.

I'm sure I'm right. But he was a great believer and understood, you know, very much what she was about. But I'm just thinking that they might be a possibility.

MK: If you tell us any other avenues besides Rockefeller because what I'll do is—

SR: I'm not good. I've never gone to anybody for a grant. Well, I have a Rockefeller that I had. Hallie helped to get me—I got my Rockefeller grant

when I came to work in New York, Hallie got me the job with ANTA, which was

very green then and had no money and I was the only paid person. The rest were all volunteers. But I received a Rockefeller grant in order to work there because they couldn't afford it my first year here in New York, 1946—

1947, I think, was when I got the grant, not 1947—1948. I worked for them for two years, But I'm not very good about that because that's not an area

in which I've ever—you know, I've never gone to pursue it. I know many theatre

people who have the avenues. But I can't—it has been so inevitable to me that the

book must be written.

MK: Well, if for all of these people that I'm meeting as I go around, who are

still alive and are now successful in whatever they're doing—and no one says, "Well, it wasn't because of Hallie Flanagan."

SR: You see, I'm sure, since you're talking to other people, I cannot believe I,

you know, talking to the students that I know. I don't talk to the Emmet Laverys except when I was working on The Creative Person thing, and that was

only correspondence which we had. What I tried to do for Hallie, during the

years of the collection, she really couldn't write to people. That was one of

the hardest things for her. So I had a correspondence with Emmet Lavery for

her. So I became kind of the third person and then as a result, my life—you can imagine how exciting it was for me to deal with that. Well, what would it be like if you were suddenly sitting and you're picking up letters

from Eleanor Roosevelt, from T. S. Eliot, letters from Lady Gregory,
people
that you had studied in college that were to this woman like I'm sitting
and
talking to you. And when you realize the bases that this lady touched
upon
and when these people came into her life, I'm not just an emotional ex-
student
of Hallie Flanagan's. You sit and spend enough time with the collection
and
see the walks of life, the professional people, and what their reaction
was
upon meeting this lady and talking to her, going way back to 40 years
ago,
there has got to be some reason for this. And here was this little pint
of a
nothing, looking, as I said when I talked to the girl who has just done—a
thesis has just been done on Hallie which I'm going to give to the
collection
if I can get permission. A young lady has just finished her Master's on
the
Federal Theatre and Hallie, and I'm hoping to give it to the collection.
And
as I said to her when we talked originally, there is a lady that you
really
thought should be sitting doing needlepoint, sitting by a garden. And
this
little, tiny dynamo who used to wear capes—who would, that size, under
five
feet, wear a cape except Hallie Flanagan, and could keep thousands of
people
efficiently working? She was probably the greatest executive and all, and
you'd sit there and you just would not believe it, but there it was. And
it
was because she could light the fire in you. I think a great gift of a
person
who either organizes or is an executive is that they would sort of be
able to
have an antenna into you. What is it that I can do? Of course, as a
teacher
this is an extraordinary gift to have, that could find in the students
something
that would set them off onto their path and light something that would
get them
to go ahead and do something that they would never have thought of doing
or, as
she recommended students there to go on in other walks of life and she
would give them recommendations upon graduation. A friend of mine, Joan
Lundberg, who was an undergraduate, Hallie said, "I think she would be
great
in research." And she worked for the U. S. Steel Foundation for years and
has been teaching, and — pardon me.
(Interruption)

SR: ... is very emotional for me. So let me be concrete as I can, discipline me.

MK: After ANTA, what were the years that you--what were those six years?

SR: The six years? Let's see because I came back to work. I had retired to have

my children. The six years ended the year that I came back to work for Hallie,

1963. So let's say, I guess they were 1957-1963.

MK: And then in 1963, is that when the whole collection was done and then you

presented it to Lincoln Center?

SR: Right, Got Hallie's permission and gave it to George Friedl and Paul Myers at

that time was his associate. Cleared it with the family, which was a big thing, Hallie was very funny about legal things. I wanted a paper from her

lawyer because I was spending a great part of my life doing something.

After

the family each said Yes--you see, I thought maybe Eric Bentley might be interested because of his marriage to Joanne.

MK: That was one of my questions about whether he ever was interested, like using

some of her writing.

SR: I don't know, I don't know.

(Interruption)

SR: I asked whether or not--and nobody in the family was going to do anything

about this and there it was sitting all this time. And I can't remember at

the moment why I got the idea to do it. I don't know what instigated.

MK: Did you go to Hallie and say--

SR: You see, I kept visiting Hallie at the nursing home. No, long before the

nursing home, when she was in retirement at Poughkeepsie. And I lived in Scarsdale and it was a very, you know, not difficult. And I would go to visit her and you see, her bedroom--Hallie was a person who could work in bed.

She knew how to conserve energy better than anybody and she could sit there as

she did at Smith and I'd come to take dictation or something. And she would

be lying in bed in the morning, sitting up, and off we'd go for the day's thing and there would be in a half hour, boom, boom, boom, boom and all this.

But she knew how to conserve herself which is, I think, why she was able to do

all that she could in each day. But then when I came to Poughkeepsie, I'll

never forget, all these things. The kitchen was filled with file cabinets like

I have, all these cabinets, All this stuff had been stored there. Then in room, of course, her books and books from--and all inscribed.

MK: What Happened to the books?

SR: Well, the books now have been given. I gave a bunch of the books back to the children so they could decide where they wanted to have it. Her son is no longer alive, Fred. I brought a lot of books to White Plains where he lived near me and gave them to him. And then anything that she would allow me to give to the collection.

MK: I don't think they have many of the books there.

SR: No, the books I sent to—you see, when I did the collection, by the way, I saw to it that Iowa got some and that Smith got some. Did I send to Vassar?

Isn't that awful? You see, I did this work with Vassar. The wonderful thing, an example of how she is with people, when I got the idea I said, "But all of this, Hallie, we ought to do something with it and put it together. And I'd never done editing or collating, anything like it, in my life. But there I sat and I thought, "We gotta do it" and I began. I don't know, there it was.

And over the years, as I began it, it was such a huge undertaking and I had children and I was commuting. I wasn't living there and I couldn't come to see her, you know, every week. But I would try to get every few months because

I would take—you see, what she allowed me to do was I would take the work home and she knew she could trust me. And then many times I would copy it, bring it back. Then I would have to sit with her and say, "Okay, when did you write this?" if it didn't have dates on it. And "Why did you say this?" and so forth if there were any notes that I could add to it. So that kind of thing I did.

I really, if I had realized what I was getting into, I would have kept—I didn't have a tape recorder. It's unfortunate.

MK: That's what I wish you could have done, a memoir with her.

SR: And you know how many things she said to me that I didn't take notes on. I

just sat and absorbed it and I can't kick myself now. You can't do Monday morning quarterbacking. At least, thank God, there is the collection. But that's where I was remiss, not ever visualizing that nobody would ever write

about her and that who's going to say that she would die and where would it

be, you know. So that I don't have. It's all in me, in my head, which is no good to anybody. But anyhow, what happened then was I said that it was a

large undertaking and she said, "You know, there's somebody that you should see. Somebody in Scarsdale, one of my Vassar girls, and you two would be great together." Well, it was the most incredible, again, understanding of why people should work together or what you have in you. Mimi Obler then, who was a student of hers at Vassar in-

MK: Had she been Dworsky?

SR: That's right, Mimi Dworsky. You'll see her in the "Dynamo" book, a writing about her, and then in the collection. Mimi then assisted me during those six years. Not only did we hit it off and start an extraordinary friendship, she is now my assistant here. And Hallie did not live to know that. She would be thrilled but it's just she knew what was in a person, what personalities would work or not. It was like, you know, making a marriage of talents, as she was able to do in the theatre with students, with putting people together and maybe in an area that you would not have thought that you would not have known when you woke up that morning, "Is this what I'm going to be doing?" But that, I don't know, it was an extraordinary.

MK: Did she ever talk about it analytically, like that that was something that her father, a gift from her father or-

SR: Well, about her family-

MK: That's what I would love it if we had some time when we could spend several hours, if there are things like that, talking about what she told you about her family and those earlier years.

SR: I have something that I cannot confide in you which I would love to confide in you,

but I would have to discuss with Joanne Bentley before I could.

MK: Talk with Joanne because she wants me to write this book and she-

SR: You've talked to Joanne about this?

[End of Interview]