

TRANSCRIPT OF  
INTERVIEW WITH ARNOLD SUNDGAARD

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for the

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JO: .....what you were doing prior to Federal Theatre and how you became involved in the Federal Theatre.

AS: Well, I'd like to go back to the beginning of 1935. I was given a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation to return for a year at Yale. Actually, I had a play done at Yale called This Fallow Ground. And Allardyce Nichol was the head of the department at that time, and he arranged for me to get this fellowship to go back for a third year. I'd worked nights at the New Haven Hospital as a dishwasher, and this gave me a year to go to Yale without any worries at all. I was receiving the munificent sum of about \$200 a month and all my expenses and everything else. So I returned to Yale and finished that last year. I finished then in the spring of 1936. I was married and had two children and then returned to Wisconsin. So three months later, after having had the fellowship, I was broke, absolutely broke in Madison, Wisconsin. So I hitchhiked down to Chicago when I received a letter from Susan Glaspell. She had written to Walter Pritcher Eaton at Yale who had replaced George Pierce Baker teaching playwriting. And she asked if he knew of any writers, playwrights, in the Middle West who would be interested in submitting plays to the Midwest Play Bureau which she had come out to Chicago to organize. She wrote to me in Madison on Mr. Eaton's recommendation, asking for a play. And I decided I'd better go down there and see what was going on. So I hitchhiked down and arrived in Chicago in, I think, just before Thanksgiving of 1936. Yes, 1936. I arrived there with about 50 cents that the man I'd hitchhiked with had given me. And I walked over to the --where I thought that part of town was where the Federal Theatre was and checked into the Delano Hotel on the corner of North Rush Street with the 50 cents. It was a room for 25 cents

a night, and I got one at the very, very top floor for 25 cents a night. I had enough for two nights. The next morning I went out to look for Erie Street because I knew that the Federal Theatre -- her address was on East Erie. And the hotel, miraculously, was at the corner of Erie and Rush. So I just started walking toward the lake and found the building and found Susan -- Miss Glaspell, as we called her. She said she thought I could get a job as a play reader but I'd first have to go on relief. Well, that was no problem. I qualified. And so I went up to Madison the next day and it was just before Thanksgiving. And she said I should come back down and she'd arrange some of the papers for me to apply for -- to go on relief. I think there was some residence requirement like 30 days or something like that. I think I had to come back. But I did come back in December of 1936, and you've no idea what the Depression was like. It was cold and I went out to a high school. They had taken an abandoned school and set it up for applications. And I got in line with all the other unemployed people. At that time the line was blocks long of people coming through and this was an unusual project, to apply for the theatre out of that long, long, dreary line of ragged people. There were vaudevillians and actors and people looking for jobs shoveling snow and we were all sort of together. And I finally got through to a table where I was interviewed and they asked me what my last job was. And I said, well, I hadn't had a job. They said, "When did you receive money last?" I said, "The last money I received was from the Rockefeller Foundation," which surprised them. And it was \$200 a month, which was a lot of money in those days. Also, the last employment, in a certain sense, was at Yale University. So from Yale to the line there in that dismal, cold -- there was the smell of fumigation

in there. They used to fumigate buildings like after smallpox or something. It was really a terrible smell, the smell of poverty.

They said that I would be notified in time, but Susan had done something to speed up the process so that I could get a job. I went back up to Madison again for Christmas and came back down, I think, in January then of 1936.

JO: '37?

AS: Well, it would be '37. Yeah, must have been because it was December of '36, I came back down again and got the job. By that time I was on relief and qualified. And I think we got \$94.50 a month. I think that was the salary or whatever it was.

JO: I think it was \$23 something a week so that would be \$94 a month.

AS: But I remember it seemed like — I was very happy to get the money because I had then taken a room at the Delano Hotel way at the top floor for \$2.50 a week. So out of the \$94, I was able to manage. I then became a play reader with the Midwest Play Bureau, and we met twice a week in Susan's office, Miss Glaspell's office in the building over there at East Erie Street, which was right across from the Furniture Mart near the lake. I remember she was a beautiful, fragile woman. And it was so windy at that corner, I remember many times trying — she would get blown down practically from the wind coming off the lake that cold, cold winter.

On the play-reading project, there was a writer named Alice Gerstenberg, who had published some one-act plays. There was somebody named Sidney Blackstone and sometime after that Fanny McConnell and two other people. There were just about fiye of us, and we read two plays a day. We met twice a week to discuss our reports and then we exchanged our reports and discussed them with Susan. And they came from all over the Middle West. By that time she

had rustled up some interest in the project and how it got around I don't know. But there was a fairly steady flow of scripts coming in of all degrees of calibers, some good and most of them bad, most of them written by people who had never even seen a play before, it seemed to me. They came from North Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and all over. And the forms in which they appeared, you know, they didn't even know what a script really looked like. Some of them were handwritten from farmers in Minnesota or North Dakota and we read these scripts. And one or two came in from college towns like Grand Forks or Lincoln, Nebraska. And usually those were the better plays.

Anyhow, she thought that I should write. She'd try to keep my burdens as light as possible. About that time Meride Le Soeur was a writer. She started a publication called Midwest, and on the cover of Midwest was a sort of a panoramic view of the Middle West. And I was so struck, and the word "Midwest" was even in a kind of a perspective. You sort of looked from Chicago off to the Dakotas. And I got the idea of writing Everywhere I Roam from just that cover of that particular magazine. So I began working on Everywhere I Roam that spring. The form of it was taken pretty much from John Martin, who was a dance critic for the New York Times, and had spoken at Yale the year before. I always remembered something he had said that, "One day," he said, "the theatre will return to dance from which it had begun." And so I envisioned the kind of a very loose form in which there would be dancers and then because <sup>of</sup> working on the Federal Theatre, the problem of the number of actors was never a difficulty. So I decided to write this play for the Federal Theatre based on this magazine Midwest that Meride had written, and Susan encouraged this.

She was from Iowa, and she was a marvelous, marvelous person because this thing was with her, with her experience and was her kind of remarkable liberal tolerance. We all of us were encouraged to write, those of us who wrote. None of the others did really much. But I really did, I really worked hard at it. And she would assign me bad plays to read because it didn't take as long. I could get through the bad plays quite quickly and turn in my report. And so when she got bad plays in, she let me read the bad ones and occasionally I read some of the good ones and I was an expert on bad plays. Because I could read two bad plays in a morning and have the rest of the day to myself.

But we were very conscientious about it. We did turn in the reports and as a matter of fact, the reports very often would go back to the writers. She did a composite of our reports and in rejecting a play and returning it, she tried to be as helpful as she possibly could. Because we felt that, scattered out through there in the Middle West were people who would eventually come in to the theatre. The fact is plays don't emerge from rural conditions very much. Most plays are urban-bred because that's where the theatre is. And so when a play comes from Milbank, South Dakota, we could almost invariably count that it would not be -- whatever the sophistication needed to write a play, wasn't developed in those situations. And I know that if I had continued to live in Gladstone, Minnesota where I came from, that I would have been in the same position. But I was lucky to have gone to Yale so I think I knew a little bit about technique by that time.

Anyhow, I finished Everywhere I Roam then in the spring of 1937 and Susan gave it to George Kondolf who was the director of the Project in Chicago

with the idea of their doing it. We all assumed -- because by this time all of us on the Bureau had read it, and they all liked it and thought it was a rather interesting experimental work and just assumed that George Kondolf would like it. Well, his training was pretty commercial. He was a Broadway man who had been brought out there and I must say that we were at variance on our ideas about what the theatre ought to be. And I don't think Susan had a great deal of respect for his, let's say innovative ideas and he wanted to do things like, I'm sure, Broadway hits. And I think that's what he represented in our minds. He was the enemy in that sense. He was a very, very nice man, a very, very nice man, but intellectually and aesthetically we were <sup>the</sup> at/opposite ends of the poles. And, of course, Susan with her whole Provincetown Theatre and O'Neill and all the feeling of experimentation -- Anyhow, he didn't like the play. He didn't like the play at all and it was rejected. It was not done.

JO: Did he find the form of it wrong or was it the content also? I mean, was it too provocative for him?

AS: I don't know whether it may have seemed too far to the left for him because it was written out of the whole populist tradition. And whether it was that, whether it was the political -- I never talked with him about it. He never discussed it with me. In fact, he was embarrassed by the play. Whatever discussion took place was with Susan and George Kondolf and whatever Susan and George felt about it, I never really learned. In fact, it's one of the problems. As you know, a playwright never really gets the truth when a play is rejected. It's very seldom that he really gets the truth about why it's turned down or it's very unusual when he gets the truth. Usually they say casting or production difficulties. It's always euphemisms you know that they develop. In any event, it was turned down.

I then sent it to Halstead Welles whom I had known at Yale and Hal, I thought, was a very bright experimentalist. And Hal liked the play.

JO: Did you send it to him at Yale or was he now --

AS: No, he was now a supervisor in New York. So this was now the summer of 1936, and I'm trying to think of the productions that were done at the Federal Theatre that spring. I just can't remember at the moment, but I do remember they were working on a play that George Kondolf had called in a writer from New York. A play doctor had come out from New York, a play doctor! There were such things. And I remember that he worked there for about six weeks at a very good salary, much more than we were getting. He was getting like \$200 a month to rewrite this play, and Susan was rather indignant because she thought the play shouldn't have been done in the first place. It was not a very -- you know, it was a commercial play that George had gotten. And I remember that we went to a runthrough and as we were leaving the theatre, Susan grunted and said, "Hell," she said, "he's no play doctor. He's a play coroner, and he really had deadened whatever was there."

JO: (Laugh)

AS: Anyhow, there was within us, within the Play Bureau and the management of the Federal Theatre there -- we never understood why Hallie Flanagan had appointed a very commercial Broadway producer.

JO: And then brought him to New York in that last year.

AS: Yeah, that's right.

JO: And replaced Phil Barber.

AS: That's right. And as I say, I liked George Kondolf very much, that is, personally very much, but aesthetically and artistically we were just at the opposite end of the poles. Two years later I was with the Group Theatre and I was out bicycle riding with Max Gorelik, Mordecai Gorelik,

who was the designer for the -- and he had written the book on New Theatres for Old -- and as we were riding along on the bicycles, I remember Max asking me, "When did you first get interested in epic theatre?"

And I said, "In what?"

And he said, "Epic theatre."

I said, "What's epic theatre?"

And he said, "Well, you wrote it. You wrote Everywhere I Roam and Spirochete," which he considered epic. But I had never read Brecht and whatever epic theatre I had done I had created pretty much out of what I knew about the Living Newspaper. I never saw a Living Newspaper when I wrote Spirochete later. And Everywhere I Roam was in that direction of a very free use of the theatre -- dance, music, of all the elements that I thought ought to go into it.

Anyhow, that summer I was still at the top floor of the Delano Hotel. There was no wallpaper on that room, and my ambition was to get down on the next floor below where they had wallpaper in the room. I think the rent went from \$2.50 a week up to \$3.00 a week. I spent the summer writing a long -- it started out to be a novel. It was a novela called What'll I Say To Her Now that a year later was published in Story Magazine. I didn't write any plays that summer at all. I worked on -- I continued to read and used to hitchhike up to Madison to see my wife and the two children. I still didn't have enough money to bring them to Chicago and by that time the marriage was a little shaky anyhow from this long separation. I worked on that novel. Then --

JO: Everywhere I Roam was just kind of temporarily shelved?

AS: That was shelved then.

JO: Welles had it then?

AS: Yeah. In the meantime it was in the New York office. I didn't know what was happening in New York. Hal was a supervisor, I think, in New York, if I'm not mistaken, and Hal was interested in it. And that fall somehow or other, the idea for writing Spirochete came from Susan. They were thinking of doing, I think, Brieux's play on Red Robe, or something, that dealt with syphilis or something like that. Susan was the one who suggested to me possibly doing a play about syphilis. They were having a program then in Chicago, a mass blood-testing program run by the Department -- the United States --

JO: Health Service?

AS: Health Service. Surgeon General. And Paul de Kruif, who had written Microbe Hunters, was part of that program. I didn't know those people at all, but I decided to do some research on it and decided to write a Living Newspaper. By this time I was still reading and I worked on it on my own pretty much. By now I don't know whether/<sup>even</sup>Kondolf was here. Harry Minturn was now in charge of the department. Harry Minturn was an old stock company manager of the Minturn Players, and he too represented the kind of theatre that we, you know, that we didn't stand for really. We represented something else, experimental and much more in keeping with, well, I guess younger people. Both Kondolf and Minturn were a little generation ahead of us. Certainly, artistically they were working in a different direction. And Harry's big success out there had been something called Broken Dishes, I believe.

In the meantime, in the building over on East Erie the Writer's Project was the floor above us or below us and we would come over for our pay checks

once a month. We'd get the \$93.50 or whatever it was. I think we were paid once a month; I'm quite sure it just was once a month. Nelson Algren was above us and Dick (Richard) Wright was a writer there and a fine poet named Mark Turbeyville. And on the way across to the building -- the Poetry magazine offices were on East Erie, 230 East Erie. I would drop in there and in the back room all of the publications from all over the world came in. There was correspondence, you know, with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot and all that kind of thing, so it was fascinating to go in there. I got to know Poetry magazine officers quite well. So there was a whole kind of literary life on the near North Side in Chicago that was really quite remarkable. Katherine Dunham was on the Dance Project and Dick Wright was, as I say, on the Writers' Project and Nelson Algren. And Jack Conroy, who was a proletarian writer, had come up from Missouri. So there was quite a wild Bohemian life in all the bars on the near North Side where we met. I remember that on payday we would all chip in and each buy a bottle of Scotch. I remember Vat 69 was \$2.80 a fifth, and so every payday that's the first thing we'd do. We'd each buy a bottle of Scotch and have a party some place, at somebody's loft or studio and that kind of thing. So the life there was, I think, a remarkable one. Fanny McConnell was a very interesting person and there were a number of other people we got to know on the project. John Huston was there somewhere along the line, and I didn't get to know him very well. He did a play about Lincoln.

JO: Prologue to Glory?

AS: No, no, it was another play about Lincoln and he played the lead in it. It was about -- but it was done there. John was there and there was a very, very fine director named Robert Milton who had come out to Chicago

and he was a --

JO: Do you know what has happened to him?

AS: No. He must have died some time ago. He had originally done a lot of very fine work in New York. I think he had worked with Arthur Hopkins, and we found him -- oh, he was a much more, again, kind of commercial director than the kind of thing we would have liked. But he was still a very interesting man.

Susan was the remarkable one though. You know, she really had the kind of --

JO: How did she get along with, particularly Kondolf?

AS: I don't think that they agreed on anything. I don't think that she agreed with anything that Kondolf did. And I think when Kondolf left, I think that Susan felt that the thing should be taken over by younger people and not bring in somebody like Harry Minturn, who was a stock company director and would continue in that direction. I think that she much more felt that somebody with our, you know -- I'm beginning to hate the word "orientation" but it certainly was leading in that direction and would take over.

Well, I went to work on Spirochete then and worked at the Parrar Library and at the <sup>Newberry</sup> / Library and worked very, very hard. I really worked. I wrote the thing in oh, about six weeks. I did all my own research, and when it was over, the Federal Theatre assumed that it belonged to them. But I had been a play reader all the time. I read these plays all the time, and so when the question of the copyright came up, Susan felt that I should get the copyright. And the Federal Theatre, the Government, felt that they owned it because I was, had written, they thought -- And she said, No, I had not, that I had written it as an extracurricular project, that I had continued -- I was not hired as a writer. I was

hired as a play reader. So there was a little controversy over that. She wrote to the Dramatists' Guild in New York. The Guild was very firm about that, and said if I wasn't given the copyright, the Guild would not allow them to do any plays by a Dramatists' Guild author. They protected my rights on that and she protected it, and so I got the copyright. If you notice, I —

JO: I've seen a strong letter from her that's in the Archives.

AS: Oh, really? About this?

JO: Saying that she will go to the Dramatists' Guild.

AS: Well, she did and as a result, I remember coming to New York and Sidney Howard, I think, was President of the Guild at that time. And they supported my stand on this and as a result I got the copyright. So they had to pay me royalties for the various productions. There were several other productions at that time, so for a very brief period of about six weeks I was making a lot of money.

JO: Yeah, a number of <sup>the</sup> other productions -- this was one of the questions I had -- a number of <sup>the</sup> other productions were <sup>then</sup> about a year after the Chicago one and they all opened up roughly the same time, around February or so.

AS: I remember for about six weeks I was making like \$500 a week.

JO: Was there an attempt to make it a national play to open up in a lot of places at once?

AS: I think so. I think they sent it out to all the -- I think it came out of New York. Yes, it did come out of New York, Yes, it did because I remember they sent their script over to Random House when it was published. When I came to New York, Random House asked me to come over and check the galleys. And the script they had sent was not the script that we had done

in Chicago with one of my original versions. And I made all kinds of changes in the galleys. Later on I found out I had to pay for all those changes. They deducted something from my royalties, so I never made any money on the royalties on the thing. Because by the time I'd paid off correcting the galley sheets -- but they had sent the thing over from, I think, Emmet Lavery's office. There was some lack of communication there. But I was no longer with the Federal Theatre by that time, you see, because I worked myself out of a job by making money. So I was disqualified. I'd gotten to the point that I was making a supervisor's salary by the spring of 1938. Hal did the production of Everywhere I Roam in New York just about that same time. But I had given the play -- I'd always liked Will Geer as an actor, and Will Geer was with the Actors Repertory Company in New York. I'd always thought that Will Geer would be great for Johnny Appleseed. I thought that he would bring a kind of different approach to Johnny Appleseed than anybody else. Through that Fred Stewart, who was a director with the Barter Theatre down in Virginia, got ahold of the script. And Fred liked it so much that they decided to do it down at the Barter Theatre in the summer of 1938. So that spring I had the production of Spirochete in Chicago, I came to New York for that other production -- I didn't see the one that Hal did at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. But in the meantime the Barter Theatre was going to do it and I made money on those other productions of Spirochete and I also -- that novella was published by Story Magazine and I had a lot of offers from publishers at that time to write a novel. So I had to kind of decide what to do, and I opted then -- I decided I'd better forget about fiction and concentrate on Everywhere I Roam.

So I left the Federal Theatre then simply because I had disqualified myself by making some money.

JO: What did you do then?

AS: So then that summer I went to the Barter Theatre where Everywhere I Roam was done that summer. So that was my -- my period with the Federal Theatre was then from December when I went on relief in Chicago to about June or July of 1938. I was roughly there a little over 18 months, but I wrote the two plays and the novel and read plays all in that brief period of the 18 months.

JO: Everywhere I Roam -- some places I have seen it <sup>as</sup> written with Marc Connelly.

AS: Yeah.

JO: Is that true and how did it happen?

AS: What happened was then it was done at the Barter Theatre that summer of 1938, in August of 1938. And the company took it to New York and gave a performance at a matinee at the ANTA Theater, which is now ANTA. It's a Theatre Guild theatre on West 52nd Street. And they invited -- they sent out postcards, and they invited all the producers in New York and everybody to come to see it. A tremendous audience showed up. Everybody showed except the Theatre Guild itself who owned the theatre. They were busy with something and they didn't see it. We had a lot of offers from a lot of different producers to bring it into New York. The Barter Theatre production worked out with, sort of in collaboration with the commercial production in New York. Of all the producers we've found, we've found Marc Connelly seemed the most impressive. He had the Green Pastures credits behind him and all that, and he took the option. But what I didn't know -- Marc was not only a director but he was a writer, and he

in purchasing it had decided, which he didn't tell me, that he intended to rewrite it. So in the process of its becoming a Broadway play, it was a very, very unhappy experience because he rewrote it, disastrously. Some of it, the first act and a half --

JO: So the New York production was rewritten?

AS: Got marvelous notices. Yeah, it was rewritten by Marc Connelly and then he became -- in fact, I left the production. I walked out on it before it was over, and it was produced and Marc Connelly whose name was then put on as the co-author because he rewrote the last third of it kind of pretty much. I thoroughly disagreed with what he was doing, but it was one of those things. It was like getting on a toboggan slide and there was no way of getting off and I just sort of jumped off and got lost in the drifts.

JO: How did he change the play? Do you remember?

AS: Well, instead of -- I didn't see any simple solution. I don't know what my solution here was or what I did finally down at the Barter, what my original solution was. But somehow he felt that the farmer becomes corrupted by prosperity, and I didn't feel that that was the way that -- And so he becomes wealthy, he goes on a guided tour of Europe.

JO: . . . See the difference between an Easterner and Mid-westerner, can't you? (laugh)

AS: Yeah. The whole thing, whatever it was. I remember it was just a false ending to me. I had a choice then of going to the Guild, calling off the production. And they said, 'You don't realize how fortunate you are to be working with Marc --

(End of side 1, continued on side 2)

JO: Were you in New York or were you working with him or how did you happen to --

AS: I didn't see the production because I was busy then. It was done in April just about the time that Spirochete was being done in Chicago. So I never did see Hal's production of it, and I don't know why the Federal Theatre didn't go ahead with it then because there was a lot of interest in it. I don't remember the details of that, but I do know that by that time the idea of going down to the Barter Theatre in Virginia and they offered me a very good production. And they did do a beautiful production of it down there, Fred Stewart directed it.

JO: That was a good place for it,

AS: And it came into New York and was really -- if it had been done that way. There was a kind of innocence about it, the production there and the actors were not as professional as the ones we finally had in New York. But they did have a kind of innocence that was kind of right for that particular play.

JO: Was it done with a lot of movement and a lot of dance?

AS: Felicia Sorrell staged the dances, and at that time that was considered quite an innovation. The first act particularly got marvelous notices from Brooks Atkinson and many of the critics, that part of it, that use of the dance. And so I think that what John Martin had said for me had sort of come full circle. Of course, years later I did work with Martha Graham at the Neighborhood Playhouse on some productions there using that form. For me it was kind of a use of Living Newspaper in a sense but mine was -- what would you call it -- kind of a fictionalized documentary. I used history and then in some sort of distilling process.

JO: There seems to have been a very powerful movement in the '30s towards documentary and towards fictionalized documentary, whether it was the Farm Service photographs or the Living Newspapers or other history plays. Do you think that was special at that time or no? A lot of plays, going back and looking at them --

AS: Well, Living Newspapers were certainly on that. Incidentally, getting back to Spirochete for just a minute, after we were in rehearsal -- the director of that play was Addison Pitt. Addison Pitt came from an old theatrical family in New York and was a marvelous -- he'd been with the Arnold Daley Stock Company back around the turn of the century, and he was a very, very distinguished man, a fine director in again, a kind of the old company actor-manager tradition. And he didn't seem like the right choice. Again, you would have thought that a young Orson Welles type would have been better. But Addison Pitt was a remarkable man. He really was a remarkable man, and Harry Minturn assigned him to the job. I don't think they thought too much of the production when it first began. But right after that, Dr. O.C. Menger, who was in charge of that syphilis mass testing program in Chicago, he heard about it and he called the Federal Theatre and asked if they could come and see it. Paul de Kruif came and the U.S. Surgeon General's Office then got behind it and made it much more important than the original production could possibly have been if it hadn't been for that. We gave them the script to see whether or not it lacked -- whether it was inaccurate medically or whether my research was okay. And amazingly, I had to make practically no changes after the Surgeon General's Office read it to see if everything was okay. So what is in that play seemed to be pretty authentic from their point of view. And as a result, they gave it a lot of publicity that it

ordinarily wouldn't have gotten. As a matter of fact, for years after that I was considered by people to be kind of an expert on syphilis. I remember years later getting calls in the middle of the night from frantic young men who wanted to know where I might recommend a doctor. They were suspecting that they had picked up a venereal disease and wanted to know if I could help them with it.

JO: You did have to change Christopher Columbus' name though.

AS: Pardon me?

JO: Later productions had to change Christopher Columbus' name.

AS: That was in Philadelphia. Oh, when that came up, Emmet Lavery called from New York; Emmet was a Catholic. And Emmet said, "The Knights of Columbus in Philadelphia are objecting to use of Christopher Columbus' name bringing syphilis back to Spain. They said he was a good Catholic and a very virtuous man and he couldn't possibly have picked up a venereal disease, or his men couldn't have. So," he said, "could you change it?" I said, "Well, it's impossible to change that." I was adamant about it. I said, "You can't possibly change that, Emmet." I said, "Call off the production. I don't care."

He said, "Wait a minute now, let's think this through." He said, "Would you mind calling it an unidentified explorer who returns to Spain in 1493?" (Laugh).

JO: (Laugh).

AS: So I said, "No, not at all." As a matter of fact, it kind of improved it because people in the audience nudged -- they were very knowledgeable -- and they said, "Oh, he must mean Columbus." (Laugh)

AS: So that's how that happened there.

JO: But you hadn't seen a Living Newspaper then. You said that before, that Power hadn't come out to Chicago.

AS: No, I didn't see -- I think I had read Power. I think Power was the one I had read. I had seen a script of Power. But I hadn't seen one and as a matter of fact, I never did see another one. To this day I never saw -- I never saw Triple A or any of the others.

JO: Did you choose not to -- for instance, one of the things in all those New York productions is the use of a Loudspeaker as a quasi-character person who cajoles and questions and provides statistical information and some transitions. There's not a Loudspeaker.

AS: No, no, I didn't use that. I think I deliberately didn't use it. One, it seems so impersonal to me, I think. What I wanted to<sup>do</sup>/was write a series of little sketches, try to make each one a little vignette. Each section, no matter what it was, a little -- I tried within that little unit to have a kind of -- no matter how short it would be --. And that was influenced a little bit by a book of Thornton Wilder's of little short plays. Some of them only run it seemed like three minutes. I think it was a book called The Angel That Troubled the Waters or something like that. I can't remember. But I'd been impressed with that, that he was able to take, almost in three pages, take little tiny dramatic situations. I tried to find the little kernel of drama in each little moment and make them -- and spun them out that way into the larger fabric of the thing. I think that was one of the reasons.

JO: How about the historical patient that appears in one scene after another asking for the cure? There's a picture of him<sup>in</sup>/there. He's kind of grayish

and that kind of thing. Had you written that in originally or was that something that came up in the casting ?

AS: No, I wrote that in originally. I think that might have been my jumping-off point. I can't remember how it happened because it happened so fast. I really wrote it so fast. I knew that if I got it done in time that they would do it. The facilities were there and there was interest in it, and Susan wanted me to finish it. So I worked very hard and finished it very fast. I can't remember exactly now, but I'm quite sure that was one of the early things that I thought of.

JO: In the early Living Newspapers they were doing in New York they were absolutely factual, very concerned to have all the documentation verified and everything. The later ones, particularly Power and One-Third of a Nation, there were fictional scenes --

AS: Freer use of it, yes.

JO: And I wondered whether you had read Power, whether you saw that there's the varied scenes.

AS: I'm quite sure I'd read Power, but I think that's the only one I had read.

JO: Because near the end, the powerful scene of the blind son is, I'd say, credible but fictionalized.

AS: Yes, yes.

JO: There are similar things like that in Power but there's not in the earlier Living Newspapers.

AS: No, no, the early ones they were -- I think when Elmer Rice, when they first began under Elmer Rice, I think they stuck -- didn't they stick on Ethiopia --

JO: Yes, that was the first one.

AS: That was the first one. I think that stuck very, very close to the actual documentation. So I think we tried to catch the spirit of whatever the truth was without quite that rigid documentation. So already you can see the form was taking on a kind of a whatever creative drives were involved. And so that with my own work, a few years later I began — I was approached by Oscar Surland in New York who said that he had the rights to a book called The History of the Associated Press. And he wanted to do a production. He said the Associated Press covered everything and we could do a history of America with — and he wanted me to act as an editor on that. There would be other writers assigned to it and it was to be done at a theatre now at Radio City. I think it was called the Center Theatre. It was a great big theatre, an enormous theatre, and we were to do the thing with, oh, tremendous electric — it was to be a really big production. I began — I did a lot of research on it and found that I couldn't write it. I didn't agree with his ideas about it for one thing, and I found that the — as far as I was concerned — the Associated Press had always been on the wrong side of the reporting. It seemed to me to be all Establishment reporting and I wanted to do something else.

In the process of that, I got interested in third-party movements in this country, that each third party that has cropped up serves a certain purpose. Once the purpose is over, the party disappears. So I decided to do a kind of Living Newspaper on the history of third-party movements. I left — I quit the job with Surland, which wasn't too painful. I was only getting \$40 a week anyhow, so when you think of the money —

Anyhow, I began working and I wrote Great Campaign. That was one of the first productions by the ANTA Experimental Theatre in 1947. And that was

really quite remarkable. Alex North did the score, Anna Sokolo did the dances, Joe Losey directed it.

JO: I didn't know that.

AS: It was really quite a production and played at the Princess Theatre. That used pretty much that form. There were dances in it. Glenn Tetley was one of the dancers in it. And it was really, I think, a very, very interesting production. In that case, although I documented third-party movements, the thing was a completely fictionalized recreation of an imaginary situation. And that's as far as I went in that direction because, well, you couldn't get casts that size any more and those conditions. I think that probably put an end to that, pretty much that kind of thing.

JO: I think so, too, the economics of it. How about the projections? I noticed there was one picture in this scene of a projection of the map of Europe and there are some shadows in the background. Were there other --

AS: Yes, we did -- that was a marvelous scene, as a matter of fact. Katherine Dunham worked that out. She had a dancer, a very lovely dancer, and her bodies cast a shadow against that map. We had kind of like neon tubes that ran through the map of Europe, and as her shadow -- the body of this girl -- as her nude shadow and those tubes spread out across Europe, it was a very, very dramatic device, and there were other devices. I think Clive Rickabaugh, the designer, worked that out. I can't remember the name of the lighting man. But that's why Addison Pitt, who was really a traditional director, was marvelously flexible in working that out.

JO: Were there other projections used during that production?

AS: Yes. I remember when they discovered the spirochete, there was a projection of a microscopic blowup. And I remember we tried to have something

to take the blood tests, which was a sort of an important step. And after it was all over, one of the letters I got was one from a woman who wrote and said, "I saw your play on syphilis last night and enjoyed it very, very much. To think all you've been through!" (Laugh)

AS: Later I was approached by Harper's to write a book about the U.S. Public Health Service's work in this field. I traveled all through the South. Later I worked on the Federal Writers' Project in New Orleans for a very brief period when I was working on that book. But I ultimately left the field of syphilis and got onto other things.

JO: There was also some talk of a movie of it, too.

AS: Yes.

JO: Was the movie made?

AS: Oh, Pare Lorentz. That's right, Pare Lorentz was going to make a movie of it, and he and Paul de Kruif -- de Kruif went to New York before Pare Lorentz was leaving for Europe, and it collapsed. I never found out -- I know one thing. I know that Pare Lorentz and Paul de Kruif couldn't quite remember the whole conversation that came out of it because apparently they'd gotten drunk. I remember that detail, that he was a little muddled about what Pare Lorentz had told him.

JO: So it never got to a screen writing stage or --

AS: It never got that far, no. I forgot about that. Yes, it was just about to go through. Everybody assumed it. I assumed it. I don't remember what the reasons for it were now. I forgot about that. You forget about many of the things that don't work out and I can't remember exactly how they don't happen.

JO: Right, right. Tell me about more people on the Chicago unit, or tell me more things about the Chicago unit. I think that you've hinted at the kind of not really dissension, but the kind of aesthetic disagreement between Kondolf and a number of people working on the Project. Was that true of the actors as well as the writers and readers, do you think? Who were the actors in Chicago for the most part? Were they older stock company people?

AS: A number of them were older stock company people, and I remember we used to go to the auditions for the — I loved to go to the auditions. There was a vaudeville unit there, and I know that these people would come out and some of them were former jugglers, you know, throwing Indian clubs around everywhere. I was afraid they were going to kill each other, you know, they were so inept, and they were flying off with this. And I loved those things.

JO: There were some good Indian club people I saw on the corner last night, about three or four blocks down.

AS: And there were people from Toby shows that used to, tent shows that traveled through the Middle West, and they would be wintering in Chicago. In fact, at the Delano Hotel where I stayed there was a troupe of, a Toby show troupe I don't know where they put their tent in the wintertime, but they stayed in Chicago until spring came. And I remember leaving that Spring 1938, I remember the girl who played the lead for that troupe, her father -- this was an old troupe. Every spring they would go out through Iowa and the muds of South Dakota, you know, and that thing. And some of those people showed up and they qualified because, you know, they qualified for relief. But it was rather sad sometimes. We felt that they didn't fit in. But I

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don't recall now any kind of antagonism because of that. I think it was a compassion we all felt for each other. We were all broke, and I know that one of the older actors in Spirochete had a terrible time remembering his blocking. Addison Pitt blocked fairly rigidly and he came up and he said, "Well now, all you have to do is count three, walk here, count four, and then go over there." And one of the younger actors came to me and he said, "It's so marvelous. Every night I can hear him over there. He says, 'One, two, three.' He takes the four steps. 'One, two, three, four.' He goes over there. He's put it into his script." (Laugh)

JO: (Laugh)

AS: And some of the older actors, I think there was a difference in style between -- in approach, and I think that Harry Minturn represented to us a good deal of that. He was a slick commercial stock company producer-director, and when he was made head of the project I think we all kind of groaned because we felt that was the end of any kind of experimentation. I have no idea what went into those decisions. Furthermore, I frankly kind of didn't care as long as I could read my plays and had time to write. I was more interested in that. And I wanted to get off as soon as I could.

JO: How about blacks in the Chicago unit?

AS: Who?

JO: Black people in the Chicago unit. Were you aware of -- Ted Ward was  
for  
writing/the Chicago unit.

AS: Yes, I knew Ted Ward. Ted Ward had gone to the University of Wisconsin. I went to the University of Wisconsin and Ted was there. I didn't know Ted at Wisconsin, but I do remember -- I didn't major in drama. I took

a couple of courses in drama. I majored -- I took agriculture. I started off to play football and they sent me out to the Ag School. They'd think I'd stay eligible. I finally ended majoring in English. I was very lucky because it had a great English department. I think Ruth Wallenstein, Helen White and Paul Fulcher, really fine people in the English Department, really great people. So I was very lucky. When I finally turned in my uniform in the middle of my freshman year, I could never have made the team anyhow. But the only reason I got in was because I played football. But getting back to Ted Ward, Ted Ward I remember had learned a number of the scenes from Roark Bradford's book on which Green Pastures was based. And he did monologues of those, and he was a young, gifted, very gifted young speaker. I knew Ted Ward in Chicago, and he wrote Big White Fog. We always deplored the fact that the Negro unit was a segregated unit. We knew all the people on that. I don't remember their names now. One time a Mrs. Harrison, Henry H. Harrison -- her husband had built the Hudson Theatre in New York and he went down with the Titanic. She came out there and worked -- Susan, I think, had met her. I don't know how she got out there. But I remember when they asked her what her assets were and she said something like \$150 or something, and they said, "Do you have any liabilities?" And she said, "Yes, two million" because apparently she had inherited the Hudson Theatre or something and had gone bankrupt and she was about \$2 million in debt. Anyhow, she used to tell Ted Ward about the great Negro performers like Burt Williams and the others who "knew their place." And we used to wince when she told these stories to Ted. One day I remember Ted saying, "Yes, one day I'm going to write about that kind of man."

And I do remember another time when Richard Wright, who was not too long out of Mississippi then -- there was an art exhibit at one of the galleries over on Michigan Avenue and Dick asked if I had seen it. I said, "No, but I'd like very much to."

He said, "Would you mind if I went along?"

And I said, "No, by all means." So I remember we went over to that art gallery on Michigan Avenue and I know that he went with me because he was afraid that he might be turned down at the door. So that kind of thing was prevalent then and the Negro project, I think, was part of that segregation, wasn't it? It must have been.

JO: Yeah, it was.

AS: We were disturbed by it, but --

JO: Were any of the -- some places like New York but not in Boston, for instance, members of the black unit would occasionally be used <sup>the</sup> in/white unit's plays. It would be occasional, and the only real -- as far as I know -- the only really integrated, significantly integrated, units were in Seattle, surprisingly enough.

AS: Oh, really?

JO: They were. Do you know if there were black actors or actresses loaned to the white units if the stage was at all integrated?

AS: All I know is that I'm quite sure that the dancer in Spirochete behind that map of Europe, I'm quite sure that she was one of Katherine Dunham's dancers. I don't think Katherine was the choreographer but she had some -- I think there was a connection there. I didn't know her too well, again because they were in another unit. The link between this was in Chicago there was a thing called the Chicago Group Theatre. It was a sort of a

winning of the group, and they had a place about two blocks away from the Blackstone Theatre. And D. V. Gilbert, an actor in New York still today, D. V. was a member of that and a very fine director named Charles DeSheim was the director. Well, the group was the left wing. They put on Waiting For Lefty. They were not on relief. As a matter of fact, Bobbie Block, who was one of the backers of it, her father owned Inland Steel.

And she used to come to this workers' theatre and I think she left her mink coat over on Michigan Avenue, probably in the chauffeured car. And they were very interested in the Federal Theatre and in the Negro unit. I would say that they were the kind of a catalyst between those of us on those units.

JO: Was the Goodman Theatre still --

AS: Yes; the Goodman was there then, but I don't remember too much --

JO: They weren't allied with --

AS: Well, at least if they charged admission, as they probably did, those were the things we didn't see much. We saw things at the Federal Theatre and I would save up to see, you know, whatever came in from New York, commercial productions that played the various theatres around there: the Vickers and the other theatres in Chicago. We saw those things.

But I must say that on any given day -- what was exciting about it -- on any given day, after we'd meet in the morning and we'd drift away, we could drift into a rehearsal of a dance troupe here or a vaudeville troupe there. We'd go the rounds of <sup>the</sup> different theatres that they had or Eisler Solomon had this symphony, the Federal Symphony at that time. We'd go to rehearsals of those things, and so the thing -- there was a ferment there in Chicago for any young person. You know, it was really quite exciting.

And in the evening, there were all those bars on the near North Side where we congregated. Ricardo's down by the river was -- Studs Terkel was part of that at that time and Meyer Levin, he was an editor at Esquire at that time. And slowly you got to know the painters through parties at studios. It was a kind of a village, a Greenwich Village in a sense. It was a Bohemia, and for me one of the really exciting periods of my life, now that I look back on it. That kind of free subsidy. I would say, too, though that the towering figure for me above all of this was Susan Glaspell.

JO: That was just going to be my question: what were the strong influences during that period. Was she an influence for <sup>your</sup> writing also? Or just kind of personal magnetism?

AS: Well, personal magnetism, I think. And she talked about the Provincetown. She was not -- well, she never told the same stories over and over again. There wasn't anything of that, but she told about the founding of the Provincetown. She told about her relationships with O'Neill and Robert Edmond Jones whom I had later met and how she and George Cram Cook -- why they went to Greece. Her book Road to the Temples is a very, very fine book, I think, telling how -- that -- and the kind of ideals <sup>that</sup> they stood for. I remember she said that she came over to the Provincetown -- George Cram Cook had built a plaster dome there. It was one of the things he wanted in the theatre. He finally got that built. It was a great -- that was an achievement for him. And I think they both came from Iowa. If I'm not mistaken, they both came from Iowa.

And when O'Neill -- I think after Emperor Jones when O'Neill sort of went uptown with the Guild, she came over to the Provincetown Theatre one afternoon and George Cram Cook was sitting there alone. He'd always wanted to

go to Greece. And he said O'Neill more or less had sold out and he said, "Now is the time to go to Greece." And she went to Greece and he died there. But I felt there was an idealism, dedication, in both -- certainly in George Cram Cook and in Susan Glaspell.

JO: How do you think she got out to Chicago?

AS: Hallie sent her out there, I think. I think Hallie Flanagan sent her out there. You know, Hallie Flanagan came out there one time to speak to the whole unit, and Susan was so kind of proud of all of us, her little flock, you know. And I don't think we were introduced to any of those big shots who came out from New York. We didn't even meet them. I never met Hallie Flanagan until long after. I never met any of them at all. And it seemed to me, well, in a way the supervisors were our enemies, too.

JO: That's my sense of it in Chicago. You see, it's not that -- it was that way in Los Angeles, too. It was not that way in New York. Oftentimes the supervisors -- you've had people like Halstead Welles and Orson Welles and James Light. The supervisors could be the innovators.

AS: I felt friends with all the people in New York. I felt much more a bond .

(End of side 2, continued on side 3)

AS: ...you see, and I felt that some of them were getting bigger salaries than others. I don't know exactly what they were but I remember that Robert Milton stayed at the Chicago Athletic Club and they served Perrier's water with Scotch. (Laugh)

JO: They didn't do that in the late '30s. (Laugh)

AS: That seemed to me elegance in the extreme. I don't know how you could have done that on a WPA salary. So I always thought there was a little something corrupt about that. I liked him very much but I did feel that he still continued to live an elegant life that us workers down at the bottom didn't have. However --

JO: Did you know a Don and Sylvia Martin? Or Don Martin and Sylvia Martin? There's a script called Living Newspaper Follies that came out of Chicago. I wondered if they were play readers.

AS: No. No, I didn't know them.

JO: How about Ruth Stewart? She'd been an assistant to Don Farran who was the first of the series of administrators in Chicago. I think he was probably on before you started. Then Kondolf took his place and he, in turn, took Kondolf's place. And he did a living newspaper called Dirt that again wasn't produced.

AS: (Laugh) Great title!

JO: Yes. (Laugh) It was on Iowa soil is what it was. A woman by the name of Ruth Stewart assisted him and she was some kind of administrator in the Chicago project. Who are some of the other influences in terms of playwrights for you? You've mentioned this Wilder short one-act play as far as trying to catch a dramatic moment in that -- Who are the other playwrights either when you were in Yale or --

AS: I think Albert Bein who had written Little Old Boy in about 1929 or 1930. I'd liked that; Wedekind somewhat; Sudermann in Germany. Some of these, Of course, I picked up at Yale. /the American writers at that time O'Neill, of course, the experimental things of O'Neill like Great God Brown and that sort of thing, Marco Millions. And, of course, you know at that time Waiting for Lefty was a kind of an important innovation in the theatre. The Group Theatre in Chicago did that. I'm trying to think of the writers on the Federal Project and I can't remember specifically now.

JO: Well, there's going to be another question and we'll come back to that in a second. How about, you mentioned Gorelik asking you about the epic theatre. Was there much consciousness of European drama, reading European drama, or conscious of European staging devices and techniques. People like Joe Losey have mentioned working in a '37 production. He had been in Russia and came back and did Injunction Granted in New York and in some ways that's influenced by that. Was any of that felt in Chicago? Or maybe your year in Yale?

AS: I can't quite (pause) — there was a book of plays by Montrose Moses that I recall some things, experimental European theatre. I think the Brothers like Insect Comedy. I know — it goes back to Wisconsin. Bill Totman was the director when I was there at Wisconsin, and he did other things like The Insect Comedy and a number of /things like that. So that my interest was always — and as a kid I had ushered at the Metropolitan Opera House in St. Paul, Minnesota, and all the road shows came through. So I had seen Walter Hampden in those early days and Kopinsacki. And those are the plays that interested me then more than Philip Barry, for instance, or Sidney Howard even although Sidney Howard with Ned

McCobb's Daughter and a few of those things, I think. Well, certainly the traditional plays -- by that time the proscenium arch as such was starting to disintegrate, I think, in our minds. And I think anything that contributed to that was what we were interested in.

JO: You mentioned -- I know I've seen a note -- talking about Spirochete by you mentioning Yellow Jack as one of the significant plays that was something of a model for Spirochete.

AS: Was Yellow Jack -- I saw that production in New York once later and Gorelik mentions it in New Theatres for Old. Yellow Jack was a sort of a newspaper of that time. There is a reference to it I know.

JO: This is a note by the author.

AS: Oh, really? Isn't that incredible? Where did you get that?

JO: That's more of the same, more of the material.

AS: Oh, Injunction Granted. (Reads - silence)

JO: I think you mentioned Howard Hunter in there, didn't you?

AS: Howard Hunter. Wasn't he at one time the national director of the Federal WPA's or something like that? Didn't he have some connection?

JO: Oh, that's it. Okay. Deputy director of the WPA's, yeah.

AS: Yeah. (Reads) I can't remember writing this. Obviously I did though.

JO: Well, if you were writing that play in six weeks, you'd do a lot of writing.

AS: My God! I did all my notes on the backs of street car transfers.

JO: One of the very first things I want to come back to, and as a play reader you said very few plays were very good, but were there many regional plays? One of the things that Hallie Flanagan was supposedly trying to do with Federal Theatre was have regional theatre.

AS: That was the intention of the Midwest Play Bureau and I have a funny

feeling now that you ask how Susan Glaspell came out there, I wouldn't be surprised if Susan Glaspell came from Iowa in the first place. I wouldn't be surprised if she may have gone to Hallie Flanagan with that idea. Because when she wrote to me, that's obviously what she was doing. I was in Madison and she was writing to different people in the area whom she had heard about and I'm quite sure she said in that first letter did I have anything/of regional interest.

JO: Everywhere I Roam. I liked that play. I'd call it a regional play. The sympathy is with the Midwest and the farmer. I mean, there's the scene where Johnny Appleseed goes back to the East and there is the hoarding of food by the shopkeepers and that kind of scene. Most of it is set --

AS: Set there.

JO: -- in the West.

AS: Yes, I'm quite sure. I have a funny feeling that's probably the way she came there because she <sup>was</sup> interested in -- and I'm sure that Hallie Flanagan agreed with her about this, and certainly what we were doing. Because we wrote to people, too. I do recall that we kept up -- we had a self-interest in seeing to it that we had plenty of scripts to read. And there were very often times that we were occasionally ordered to fulfill our moral obligation to the project when we would reread a script for the second time to make sure we hadn't overlooked something, but also we were required to read a certain number of plays each week. We read two plays a day, theoretically --

JO: But Kondolf's aesthetic or theatrical views was in some ways working against that.

AS: At a variance, yes.

JO: I mean, the plays that the Chicago unit in fact produced, for the most part, were not regional plays.

AS: No, they were not.

JO: The limitations of the New York shows — although his big success and I think what brought him to New York was The Swing Mikado coming out of Chicago.

AS: That's right, yes.

JO: In Everywhere I Roam it seems to me that the diction and the style is informally poetic. Was that again something you were trying to do along with the dance? Do you remember?

AS: I think so. I was trying to develop a rhythm —

JO: Rhythmic?

AS: — a rhythmic speech of some kind. And sometimes I think it worked and sometimes I think not. I look at it — I reread it about a year or so ago and I found now I wince at some of it. It's a little bit of — Alec Wilder refers to efenu plays. In efenu plays where you — efen you stand over here (laugh)

JO: (Laugh)

AS: There's a little bit of efenu even -- I never spelt the word your y-o-u-r but yer, you know. It was always y-e-r and that kind of thing. I think there was a little of that. But then I think it was --

JO: The problem there, I think, still is the form of dialogue in American poetry.

AS: Particularly with Johnny Appleseed I wanted to get a flavor of that. I don't think I was conscious really of what I was doing. I was so intent on getting it done and immersing myself in the feel of the prairie and

I crossed the country the year before. A classmate of mine at Yale had died, and I took the body across to Portland, Oregon in the middle of that Dust Bowl era. I had published a story about it in The New Yorker in 1959, the memory of that, crossing the country with that body in the middle of the Depression. And I was so impressed with what I saw there on that slow, slow journey across the country. I think that was 1934 or 1935 when I went across, and so there was a memory out of that. And, of course, I was raised in Minnesota and my family -- my mother and father came from Norway so that the immigration thing was very real to me. And as a kid we used to go to western Minnesota, out on the prairies of western Minnesota where a great-uncle of mine lived. So I think that the feeling of the soil was a very real thing with me and I also felt that again from Susan Glaspell, who did come from that part of the country, and I think a little bit from Willa Cather, who had written similarly about Nebraska, and as I said, Meride Le Soeur. Then when I was at Yale I used to write short stories for a lot of the little literary magazines that were published at that time. Jack Conroy had The Anvil, which was published in Moberly, Missouri and that published what was called "proletarian literature."

So I wrote for some of those magazines: magazines called Kosmos (spelled with a capital K) and / <sup>left-wing</sup> magazines. I was blacklisted later; I'm quite sure I was blacklisted. Somebody asked me some years ago how come I was blacklisted. And I said I didn't know I had been blacklisted.

JO: I didn't know you had been either. I guess everybody says,

"Good." There was a lot of reverted praise out of that. (Laugh)

AS: I said I didn't know. This was somebody in television. I worked for Omnibus. I was doing some programs for Omnibus sometime later and I remember one time refusing to sign the loyalty oath on one of those contracts.

This was after it was all -- the whole McCarthy thing was kind of over, and the loyalty oath was still there. And later on I remember somebody in television asked me how come I had been blacklisted. I said I didn't know I had been blacklisted because I was not looking for that/<sup>kind of</sup>work much, so it didn't really affect me that much. But apparently I was blacklisted.

JO: Over what period of time would that have been? Do you know?

AS: I don't know. I never asked. I suppose on Freedom of Information I could go back and find it out. I don't know what the period was, but this was a very -- a man who was an executive producer in television who asked me that. He must have seen my name on a list one time. But, of course, I had so many friends that were blacklisted that it was amazing that I wouldn't have been. I was at the Group Theatre with Phil (pause) great, great comedian, committed suicide in the Taft Hotel. He was blacklisted. Oh, what was his name now? He played in the Goldbergs. Anyhow, and many other people that I knew who were blacklisted, so I would be surprised if I hadn't been. But I think the identification of the Federal Theatre would be the beginning of that. I'm positive the finger must have been put on a lot of people.

JO: There's an amazing number of Federal Theatre playwrights that are --

AS: And of course I worked with Joe Losey, you see. And Joe left the country ultimately because of it. And I worked with Anna Sokolow and Alex North and a lot of people who had worked with left-wing theatre. But that's where the excitement was, that's where the experimentation took place, you see. (Pause) Politically, I don't know what I thought, but certainly artistically I knew where the experimentation and the excitement was.

JO: Well, that's about all.

AS: I don't think anything like that can be revived in quite that form. I think the National Endowment is a very, very helpful thing. But a playwright has to work in a theatre. That's the real, the important thing. No playwright can work outside of the theatre. He has to work in a theatre, whether it was O'Neill at the Provincetown or Odets with the Group. What the Federal Theatre did was provide a playwright with a theatre in which he could function. And he could mold it and shape it and work with with other people doing it. And unless they do that, grants by themselves don't do it unless there's a theatre. I think that's the great thing about, you know, Paul Baker down in Dallas or Zelda in Washington or the Guthrie — not so much the Guthrie. I don't think that they do that much, but the other theatres that do new works, they do create the ambience in which a playwright can function. And that's what the Federal Theatre did.

JO: It seems to me that was the first thing is that you were connected with the playwrights who weren't for any particular theatre and they didn't have the restrictions of money and caste and those kind, such as physical constraints, if you can call them physical. And the second thing is you had, although I didn't know you wrote Spirochete in six weeks, you had the time. I mean, a number of playwrights were being play readers and therefore had a job where for so long people like, I mean, Arthur Miller in fact was a play reader for a while. And Norman Rosten was a play reader.

AS: Yeah, Norm was a very good friend of mine, by the way, and still is after all these years.

JO: Oh, is he? He speaks quite well of Federal Theatre.

AS: Norman?

JO: Yeah.

AS: Oh, yeah. He's great.

JO: But it seems to me that combination of two things made it a good theatre for playwrights, that the constraints weren't there and the time was.

AS: As I say, and again I'm repeating myself, we were fortunate in having somebody like Susan there in Chicago who kind of protected us from the slings and arrows.

JO: When Spirochete went into production, were you there, were you welcome?

AS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I was there all the time.

JO: During rehearsal?

AS: Oh, yes. No, I enjoyed it very much. Well, good.

JO: Well, thank you very much.

(End of Interview)