

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Theater People from Ohio

Theater Experience

O. H. 846

RICHARD BOYD

Interviewed

by

Carol Mills

on

December 31, 1981

RICHARD J. BOYD

Richard James Boyd was born in Youngstown, Ohio on March 20, 1937 and grew up in the Warren area, where he still lives with his wife, Gail and his children, Kim and Kirk. Mr. Boyd is self-employed at The Boyd Electric Company in Warren, Ohio, a firm started by his father. "Dick" as he is called, says that he never got too far away from the Youngstown, Girard, Warren area as a child, but remembers that Girard had more of an "ethnic" flavor than the other communities and this was always providing the excuse for a parade, an event he loved to attend in his youth, even though he was terrified of bass drums. He was given lessons in saxophone, clarinet and piano and is still a classical music and jazz buff. He says he was trained in what was termed "the Popular Method" of piano playing, a simplistic way of teaching one easeful piano-playing, which stood him in good stead at parties, and has provided many an hour of contentment for himself.

Dick Boyd acted in school, and although everyone thought he would study acting, he chose instead, the study of law when he attended Miami University in Athens, Ohio and never participated in theater while in college. This fact now astonishes him.

Dick Boyd plans to become a full-time actor when he has sent his children both through college and since he is one of the most creative, naturally gifted and accomplished actors that this writer has had the pleasure of seeing and working with, we are sure his mid-life transition from owner of a company to full-time

actor will be a smashing success. Dick is handsome, witty, versatile and altogether easily elegant man, as well as a natural-born acting talent. We wish his wife and him much happiness when they leave the Warren area to fulfill Dick's dream. We will be in the audience, and who knows, maybe even on the same stage. Two old birds, who flew off to act for the love of it.

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INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD BOYD
INTERVIEWER: Carol Mills
SUBJECT: Acting, life in Warren, Ohio, love of music
DATE: December 31, 1981

M: This is an interview being conducted in Warren, Ohio at the Boyd Electric Company with Richard Boyd, who is an actor in the Youngstown-Warren area, and it is being done for Youngstown State University Oral History Program. This segment of the project is called Theater People from Ohio. The interviewer's name is Carol Shaffer Mills and the date is December 31, 1981 at 10:30 a.m. in the morning.

Here we are with Richard Boyd and he is going to tell us some of his family background, childhood and where and when he was born.

B: Okay. I was born in Youngstown, Ohio and stayed pretty much for my infancy in the Youngstown area, moving from Youngstown to Girard to Youngstown to Struthers and so it was not a very wide expanse of moving when I was a child. My mom was from a rural type family that settled in the Smith's Corners area of what would be called the Youngstown area, in a typical type situation where by the farm and so forth.

However, the interesting thing is that aside from the farm, my grandfather, who I never had the occasion to see, was a funeral director. My grandmother, I'm told, used to play hymns and sing and do those kind of neat things for the various services that he would hold. My mother who would be participating as a child, might have to in the duties of a farm life type situation, and went to church quite regularly with my grandmother and learned to play the piano and enjoy singing as my grandmother did. So there is a little musical back-

ground or a feel for the flutter of a little bit of show biz, if you will, from that side of the family.

M: What was their name on the maternal side?

B: My grandmother's name was Snyder. Beyond that I don't know. I guess there was all kinds of other things involved. I'm told that there was a Pennsylvania-Dutch-Jewish background, although I'm not Jewish myself. My father came from more of a city type life. They were situated in the city of Girard. Again, I never met my grandfather, who was in the mercantile business with an uncle in Warren and decided to go into business for himself in Girard and formed a millenary type operation. I believe it was called Boyd's Men's Clothing Store or some such thing. My grandmother I never got to know all that much; she seemed to be very warm. I was much more close to my other grandmother than my dad's side.

Dad had a flare for music also, he played a saxophone and clarinet and was involved many years ago in the talkie type movies where he would sit in the pits and play the music for the various movies. After mom and dad were married, dad was involved in dance bands and marching bands such as the Grotto and that type of thing. He would play saxophone in various dance bands and mom, on occasion, would play the piano for parties. There is, strangely enough, more nonprofessional musical type situations in our family, but still in all it was the performing type thing. My dad became more serious with business and went from various jobs as a young man until he ultimately started our company, Boyd Electric, back in 1950.

As far as I was concerned most of my memories of life as a child are pretty much in Warren. I can regress just a moment and say that I recall when we were living in Girard there seemed to be more ethnic reasons for having parades in Girard than any place in the world. There would be all these tremendous bands going back and forth and our home, the family property, was right on the main street, right next to the building where our business was. I remember watching these parades with a multitude of people. Every time the base drum would go by it would scare the living daylights out of me. I remember running upstairs into the house and hiding under the bed. The other thing that comes to mind is when my dad played for the Grotto band, I would go watch him and listen to him. I remember one day, he thought it would be a damn good idea it I would just pick up the base drum mallet and go up and smack the base drum. I did and it scared the crap out of me again, so to this day, I've never liked drums.

We settled in Warren on Perkinswood where my mom still lives. I tried the saxophone and the clarinet. They offered free lessons in the public schools, so I carried dad's old saxophone to school and because of my height and the thing was so heavy I decided it wasn't for me. I went back he had a clarinet, which was much lighter, so I carried the clarinet but I hated it. I really tried to play it, but I never really enjoyed it.

M: What would you explain about your height as having to do with playing that?

B: I guess not height so much, I was very thin.

M: What is your height, Dick?

B: Right now I am 6'1''.

The clarinet was never much in my liking, but mom was convinced that I had to have some music so I tried to play the piano. I had a very bad experience there because I had a music teacher and I wasn't into the piano either, the classical and the scales and all that stuff. I remember going and playing for... And there was this smart, little, old lady who was just ahead of me and she made her stay and listen to me go through a lesson. I was doing very badly and both of them laughed and I said, "to hell with this, I will never play piano again," which wasn't very true, but that was the end of that.

As far as the school is concerned I got involved with things in church like the "Three Wise Men" like most kids do in Christmas type situations. I guess the only other stage situation I had, I remember I was involved in art a little bit when I was in high school. I got fooling around with charcoal and I remember being on stage one time; I think it was a graduation thing. We all had our little special things to do and I did a tree. That was my first exposure on stage performing as such.

M: You weren't a tree you were doing a tree?

B: No. Right. I was a charcoal holder and placer on paper.

Then we get into junior high school and that's when I first started the theater business, with a gal by the name of Miss Grimsley, I remember a super gal. I remember that's where I first started being in plays. I don't remember what the first one was only that I participated in almost as many as I could get into, and had a great deal of success in doing so. Those years you went to ninth grade in junior high school then you

"graduated" into high school. I remember I got into the play with the lead part in ninth grade.

M: Do you remember that play?

B: I don't remember that play, but it had to be something... Yes I think I do. Isn't that strange. I think it was called "Mr. Berry's Etchings". No that was in high school. I don't know what it was, but it had to be marvelous, right?

M: How did your family feel about your interest? Did they really object?

B: No, I don't think so. My mom had elocution lessons many years ago and so she was for anything like that because she loved doing those things, although she never pursued it to any great extent. My family's reaction to this was my dad was very busy in starting his own business so he was in to that more than any thing else and my mom was attempting to help there--not that they were neglecting me, it's just that they were for whatever I was for.

In the high school is where I really got in to it. Then I belonged to the dramatics club and they had what they called the Frolics, which was like a big variety show. It was a big deal every late spring.

M: In which school?

B: This was Warren G. Harding. That's where they have people play the piano, doing the singing and tapdancing. It really was a lot of fun and I always got in to being the MC (master of ceremonies) and with that I could tell the jokes and do all those neat things. That was kind of a neat situation.

While I was in high school my mom, being again interested in my musical career, sought out this gal who they knew who played at the Elks lodge where mom and dad used to go. She played what they called a popular music system. What that meant in those days is that you learned chord systems on your left hand; you read the nomenclature on a piece of sheet music, which was guitar chords. For example, if you were playing a tune and it said G-seventh, G-seventh meant that you played that particular chord on the left hand and played the melody on the right. Believe it or not, I really got into that.

M: That worked?

B: Yes, for me. It was one of those things where I could go down to any music store and pick up sheet music and

play the stuff and I would have a good time. We would go to parties and there would be the people who did all the classical things all their life and they had to go through the whole routine with sixteen piles of music. I could commit these things to memory because they were simple, little ditty-do type things and people would sit down and would play; we would play and sing and have a good time. I would say, "I wish I could play like that", well, heck, I certainly was not a musician, but I still play that way to this day, and I play for my own amazement. I just go down and I just sit down and I play.

M: I would like to try that.

B: It is neat. It really is. It's therapy for me .

The theater was obviously there through the dramatic type situations, and throughout the high school era I enjoyed that type of thing and I was known for that situation. In the yearbook, they talked about what you were going to do. I don't know why, but I always said, "I want to be an actor." All of a sudden, I decided I wanted to be an attorney, of all things. When I graduated. . .

M: Just like a caprice of the moment?

B: No. I thought that is what I should do. It sounded like I could make some bucks there. In my yearbook it kept saying acting, acting, acting and maybe an attorney, so I went away to school at Miami University. I never touched theater. I went to Avery for a tryout and for whatever reason it wasn't important for me. I never got involved in school at all with theater in college. To this day, I look back and I wonder why I didn't go into radio or television if I really was into it; for whatever reason, it just wasn't there.

M: Don't you think a lot of times it has to do with a person that might crucially say something and just start you down a path, too.

B: Could be. I just look back and I can really kick my self; I really could--not that I haven't been successful in what I am doing now, it is just that I wonder what it would have been like.

After we got out of school, I was home and everyone was doing their own thing and I didn't have a heck of a lot to do. A friend of mine from high school was involved at Trumbull New Theater in Warren. "Why don't you come up. They're auditioning for a play called "Laura", and, "would you want to take a small part?" I said, "Gee, that sounds fun." I went out and I read

for the part and I got it. It was a small part and my mother who played the mother part opposite me was a gal by the name of Francis Pendleton. After all of this doggone thing came about, I did the show and met the people, really enjoyed it. The people were neat; the part was small, but fun. From that, I just got infected.

M: What year was this?

B: 1958. I have been doing that type of theater now ever since and I have gotten, I think, some fine, fine, shows under my belt since then to the point where I can look back and check off a lot of really good parts. If you're going to ask me what they are, I probably can't remember them now. There are some very fine things I was able to do.

M: Do you feel that people get more out of regional training and community theater? I myself have found it to be true and I just wondered what your thoughts were. I don't think that I have ever had the richness of roles that I have been able to do if I were in a large city.

B: I can relate a story to you that was interesting. As I progressed in my interest in the community theater here in Warren, I got involved in the politics, being the president of it and on the board, and so forth. The theater belongs to an organization called the Ohio Community Theater Association and I got involved with that and ultimately became president of that.

M: You were the president of OCTA? Isn't that called OCTA?

B: Right. So I was president of OCTA and prior to that time I had to set up a conference which I got a chance to meet Howard Lindsey, for example; he was our guest speaker. He was sort of a super individual, neat guy. I got into talking to people all over the state about theater. When it came time to be my turn to be president, I didn't have to do too much except make a speech.

Our guest speaker, that particular year was a gal by the name of Mildred Dunnock. Mildred Dunnock came into Columbus and she sat in our hotel room prior to the final banquet and we talked for quite some time. I was enthralled by meeting my first, honest-to-God true star. I was telling my frustrations of why what I was doing and I wanted to be an actor and so forth. She started asking me the different parts that I had had and what I had done in the community theater life. Then she asked if I was married, and I was, and did I have a job, and I did, and did I have a family, yes I

did. Then she went back into the various parts I had. Then she finally said "You're a very fortunate young man. You have a lovely family; you have an income from your job, and you have played some of the finest roles that have been written for the American stage. I want you to know that there are a lot of actors in this world who don't have that responsibility or opportunity. So I would suggest that you stay where you are and continue to enjoy your theater in the method in which you are doing and consider yourself very lucky." I remembered that and I went back to Warren, Ohio full of enthusiasm for which she had told me, being very satisfied with what I had done, and I continued to do theater for a long, long time.

There is a reason for all this jazz I am talking about. I got an awful lot of fulfillment that way and then, of course, the association of someone truly fine in theater which is Frances Pendleton, who taught me so very much. I think of any one person, she probably taught me more than anyone ever has to this point in my life.

I did Summer Stock some years ago in Williamstown and I went there as a thirty-seven year old, strange person going in with a bunch of eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-one year olds on an apprenticeship program.

M: I would really like you to give some detail on this.

B: I will talk about that later. I walked in to get my room assignment and who do you think was standing there?

M: You are going to torture me now, aren't you?

B: Mildred Dunnock.

M: Oh for heaven's sake.

B: She's just a little gal, very frail type. I recognized her and I went up to her. She didn't know me from straight up. I walked up and I grabbed her; I literally grabbed her on each shoulder and I said "Miss Dunnock" and she looked at me like get your hands off of me, you're going to rape me or something. I related the story and she said, "I remember going there and speaking. Unfortunately I don't remember you." She said, "I'm sorry," but she was very kind and very gracious. I said, "Remember you said stay home and do your thing," but I said "I didn't follow your advice." She said, "I noticed that," and said "I wish you all the good luck in your Summer Stock program. I hope that it's meaningful to you". I don't even know why I brought that up, but I thought that was kind of an interesting thing. But, I would never have had a

chance to meet Mildred Dunnock initially had it not been for community theater. I would have not had a chance to meet various heads of departments at Ohio State and Bowling Green and places like that belong to OCTA, had I not been in community theater. I would have never had the opportunity of meeting Frances, who in turn I met Austin, her son, and in turn I have met very many different people that Austin has brought to Warren to see the shows his mother has done.

It has been a tremendous exposure, tremendous enlightenment. For example, one of the shows that I participated in was one that Austin directed, which was "Glass Monastery". His mom was in it and I was there with Tom Schroth and a guy by the name of Leslie. It was a marvelous experience to have Austin direct us. The fighting between his mom and Austin was just absolutely exciting. They really got into it because they both have very strong wills.

The other thing which was interesting is that remember I said I played her son in "Laura" and many years later there was a show you and I did in Youngstown called "Look Homeward Angle". I had done that before in Warren and they had cast a fellow who played W.O. Gant, which is an older part and the guy had backed out. Ted Cromer was directing it and he was very upset because he was stuck. He asked me if I would take the part and I said, "Jesus, you've got to do something with me. There's no way I can look this old. We had a gal in the theater by the name of Marcia Peterson, and she was a graduate in theater and knew how to do makeup quite well. She built me a beard and did some magic on my face and I played the part rather convincingly. Who do you suppose was my wife?

M: Then you got to be Thomas Wolfe's father then in the play, right?

B: Yes. But who. . .

M: Frances Pendleton.

B: Frances was my wife. Can you imagine that? The neat thing about that was that I was able to do 360 degrees with this gal and she has directed me in so many shows since. So that is another marvelous thing. Then I did one show down in Youngstown which I did with you.

M: Is that the only time that you have ever gone over there?

B: That is the only time I've gone over there. I've gone down there for auditions, but they never did the show that I auditioned for, for whatever reason. For exam-

ple, they were going to do that "Championship Season" and I wanted to do that in the worst way. Even though it was a Pulitzer prize and a marvelous show there was some language in there that bothered a lot of people and so they had to scuttle it.

M: Who were those people it bothered? I've often wondered.

B: I wasn't told, but I'm going to guess they were the people on the board, I would guess, probably benefactors that are money people in the theater. I do know that Bentley was going to be the director, really was truly destroyed by it because he had done his pre-casting and the guys that he had in line were shazam. Don't ask me their names because I can't. . .

M: I remember the lineup that he was so happy about. I also thought that you would show up at the Youngstown Playhouse for "Moon for the Rest Begotten" when they had the readings for that. That was about 1974.

B: I don't know why I didn't do that, but it was a marvelous experience with you and your son and the rest of the cast.

M: It remains one of my favorite plays.

B: It was rewarding for me too because, God, here I was the first time down there and they honored me with an author, with which I was thrilled. It takes a very predominate place in my den at home.

M: I think that that production was one of the better things they have done there. I lean toward that kind of drama. You are pretty dramatic; you like drama more than comedy, don't you?

B: That's interesting too. I enjoy musicals, but I get absolutely one hundred percent paranoid in dancing because I've never done it. When I have to do it, I just fall apart. I concentrate so hard on the dancing that I don't remember the lines or I'll remember the lines so much, I don't remember dancing. From now on I'm going to stay away from it, unless it is a very soft shuffle, or something that I can't monkey with.

M: I did "Maine" and that happened to me; I did "Vera", and I just thought I had to worry about the delivery of the lines. When I danced in "Maine", they had to rehearse me hours and hours; I kept falling over myself.

B: I understand that. I guess another honor that I have that I am proud of, and I don't like to blow my own

horn, but I guess since I. . .

M: This is the time for that.

B: If I don't no one else will.

M: Blow, yes.

B: I did "I Never Sang for My Father" in TNT again and we had a fine cast for that, and it was marvelous, marvelous, and I played the son. We entered into a contest that OCTA sponsored and on the regional basis, I won the best actor award. I was truly thrilled with that.

M: What year was that?

B: The years go by so darn fast. I would guess it had to be around 1968, 1969, 1970, or something like that. Then we went down to the state and competed and lost miserably. We lost I think because of politics, I guess that is sour grapes, but it was politics. At that point I thought, heck with this; who needs that aggravation; we knew we had a good show and we pleased the people who came to see us. After all that's what it was all about.

I guess the only other thing I can tell you is that I am married to Gail--a super gal. I have two beautiful kids: Kimberly, who is now twenty-one, and Kurk, who is now nineteen. Kurk is a sophomore at Denison University and Kimberly completed two years of Hillsdale College. We are proud of them both; they're just marvelous kids.

M: Where did you meet your wife?

B: I have known my wife longer than I have know my mother. Gail came to Warren from living in Denver and Province and different places. When she was in about the sixth or seventh grade, I met her at East Junior High School and have known her ever since. We went together as seniors in high school; we went to the same college. I couldn't get away from her. We really believed if you can stay together and enjoy each other that long it had to be good, so we have known each other for a long time.

M: What age was she when she moved in the area?

B: She came into Warren on or about 1949. We are both forty-four.

M: I would like you to talk about more details of all the many things you have done--the shows that stand out in your mind, and what it means to you as you sit here now

in your office at Boyd Electric Company.

B: Would you want me to relate anything through the Stock situation?

M: I would love you to tell about Williamstown, Massachusetts.

B: When I was thirty-seven years old, I decided I was going to leave everything and go to seek my fortune such as it may be in theater. I went to see my head mentor, Mrs. Pendleton, and told her what my idea was and would she help me. First of all, did she think I had the talent to do it. She was supportive and said "I think I have another idea for you." At that time she made a little call and around the corner came Austin, who I hadn't seen in along time, didn't know he was home. She then said, "You should go to Williamstown and start Summer Stock program. Austin has been there many years and he directs there and I think you should go. It's terribly late." Now this is like in the first part of May. She said, "Austin, make a phone call." It's not what you know, it's who you know, right? He made a couple phone calls while I was there. When I walked out of there, I was going to Williamstown.

M: That quickly?

B: They said that they could pull strings, but as I left, Frances said, "Now, I'm sticking my neck out for you, as is Austin. We'll write the correct letters of recommendation as we have to, but don't disappoint me. You stick it out and you do the best you can." I guess I did.

I went up there as a thirty-seven year old amongst all those kids I indicated and went through pure hell, physically. First of all, we had classes, which were great. They made me lie on the floor and pretend I was a door. I had to do all these weird, strange things. As I was doing this I said, "God, I don't believe this; I'm married, have two kids, have a responsible business and I am lying on a floor in Williamstown, Massachusetts pretending I'm a door, for God's sake. What kind of a life is this?"

As the summer progressed, I learned an awful lot from the classes. I pounded nails with the best of them they required us to do all these scene things that would require you to start maybe a shift from 7:00 and end 3:00 at night. Then you would have to get up the next morning and work that day, go to class and have a performance, if you were on there; and it was exhausting but the most exhilarating experience I've ever had

in my life.

M: I envy you so much because when I did Summer Stock a few summers ago to get my equity card--at not such a prestigious place--I went in the morning real early in the theater and said, "When we start working." I thought we all had to go and pound nails and we stopped to make movies. They looked at me. "We don't do that." All the other actors and actresses were sleeping till like 3:00 in the afternoon. I would be wondering around at around 7:30 in the morning asking if I could help do something. I thought that was part of. . . That's what I thought that experience entailed. In a place like Williamstown it does.

B: That is true and here is the reward I got out there: I went there prepared; I gave my audition for "I Never Sang for My Father" as did everybody else. There was this variety of people in the background making notes and sizing you up. I was scared to death everyone was. So we got through that. I found out very quickly that what they were doing. . . They understood that you could read and talk and walk, but they were looking to see what size you were what facial hair--in my case I had a mustache--things of a physical nature. When they had a call for various things, why, the casting director had already lined up people like Ken Howard and Ken McMillan and the fellow who played Dracula, Frank Langella and Blythe Danner and of course my friend Miss Dunnock--people like that. They were all lined up to come in to do the major parts. All they had to do was to fill in the perimeters with all the walk-ons and the standard barbers and so forth, and that is when cattle calls would come. I went to my first cattle call and I didn't know what that was, but I found out.

M: Tell about what it is.

B: Cattle call is interesting. You are called for an audition and you're--My God, I'm finally going to get in a show. You get there, only to find out, there are about 17 million other people standing there. In this particular thing, it was a crowd scene, and the cattle were taken into this room and pretending they were at a ball and were dancing and having a marvelous time. There was a director, Miko Supporapas; he's the guy who runs the whole show. He's there and all these other people are ground watching and you are thinking, what am I doing here. Everyone is talking in front of people. So finally I walked off, I walked over to the side and there was a gal standing there. Here she was a second company person. I thought she was one of the cattle. I said, "I don't know what the hell is going on here; I don't know what the hell to do here. This is the damndest thing I've ever been through in my

life. Why don't we just talk like they do at parties," and I got cast. Don't ask me why. This is what it is. All these thousands of people and I did a stupid thing and I got cast, but the sad thing about it is a cattle call is where you go and they just size you up to see what size beef they want for that particular part. So we did all these marvelous rehearsing things and so here I am on a professional stage-- my first, professional performance-- and I know I just have a little pantomime type thing and you know what, the lights went up and you heard all the filaments echoing as they were getting ready to go up. This is very dramatic and I got to throw them the dimmers and I hear all the filaments rattling and the lights blazing up this fantastic thing and the sets that I had been working on and here I am in this marvelous costume and I'm behind a scrim. They never told us that; it was a scrim, so that was my first experience and I thought God, this is show biz, I can't believe it.

M: Well, see coming from a background where you did so many major roles in this area, it is kind of an ego buster. I did a lot of big roles in this area and when I first found out I was a guppy up in New York, I mean a little, tiny lemming.

B: That pond gets awful big doesn't it?

M: It destroyed my self-esteem and I had to work very hard to be able to accept that.

B: The other thing that I found was interesting. . . That wasn't bad. The rest of the apprentices or even the people who wanted to get on stage were watching and they were keeping track of how many times you got on stage. My second opportunity was to be an assistant stage manager and the guy was Peter Hunt, was the director. Peter Hunt was a volatile, mean sort of a dude and he really was something else. They did a show called the "Savages" and I was assistant director; I learned a lot. I went to all the rehearsals, and I missed class, but so what--I saw these marvelous rehearsals.

M: Had you ever done directing before?

B: No.

M: They gave you a shot at that?

B: Did I say assistant director? I meant assistant stage manager.

M: Or stage manager?

B: Well, every stage manager has his way.

M: You can't just walk right in and start acting in your career, didn't you?

B: Yes. So I sat there and watched all these marvelous things. I was a gopher, you know, go for this and go for that. I had to do a lot of strange things like scale out the drawing and tape off the stage on the thing. This guy was such a nitpicker he would just chew our you know what out if we didn't have the tape in the right place because this was exactly where the actor was going and this is what the actor's expected. They expected to go from a taped floor to the exact same measurements on the stage and if they didn't they just got very uppity and paranoid and yelled and screamed. I learned to be very precise with these people.

The assistant stage manager situation was marvelous training for me because I watched a professional director and professional actors go through a lot of frustration that I didn't--not knowing their lines, not remembering the blocking and all the things that I do as a community theater guy. Then I got my first speaking role.

M: What was that? You have to remember that.

B: I was the militia captain in the production of "Abe Lincoln in Illinois", one of the longest most boring plays ever written. Ken Howard was Abe Lincoln.

M: Strange casting.

B: Well, he looked the part, a huge man, very tall.

M: Yes, I know Ken Howard. I hope he died his hair or wore a wig.

B: Well, I don't recall. I don't think so.

M: Isn't he a toe head?

B: You're right. I'm sorry, he did dye his hair. They would build these sets out of wood and like a house they would build these things. The set for "Abe Lincoln" was marvelous. It was just absolutely unbelievable--all the lumber--it was just unbelievable.

M: It was like being in paradise after working in community theater pounding nails.

B: I left the stage with my last speaking performance full of, back down in the "gungies" with my jeans and I was part of the crew till 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. So

then I would put my jeans back on and we would literally throw the hole damn thing out, where as in community theater you would save each nail, just throw it out in the yard. The next group comes in in the morning and they do it and they sell all the scrap to somebody and they start building the next one.

M: They do use it but it is not used there.

B: No. They throw it out.

M: Have you participated, like I know I have, at TNT and Youngstown? They don't do it so much anymore at Youngstown and I don't know about TNT, but they used to have work nights and days there. The whole cast and the crew would help each other. That is community theater. That is one of the things I take exception to the theater in Youngstown, Ohio for; they don't do that. People don't get any exposure or any knowledge and dilettantes come down and do a play without any three lines, they don't even read the play they are in. I find that strange they don't know anything about the problems that go on in the whole of the theater. I think it shows in productions.

B: I think you are right. They shame you in to it in a way, and I don't mind helping out once in a while. After many years I've been involved with theater, I am tired of pounding nails.

M: When you reach a status, but I think everybody should do it.

B: You better believe it, you better believe it. I stayed up late nights, many a night, doing that and I don't want to go on boredom with my experience at Williamstown, but there is just one thing I want to relate which I think was the key to what Dick Boyd is going to do down the road.

M: I want you to bore us, that is a very unique experience.

B: There was a man in the Equity Company by the name of Emery Battis. Emery Battis has quite a long, long life of good theater at the Long Warf in New Haven, marvelous actor. He did the Shakespearean Festival, for example. He's just unbelievable. His makeup and his characterizations are just superb. He was there for the entire summer. So I had a chance to talk to him one night during "Abe Lincoln" and we were talking about things and stuff and I was telling him about my background. He thought it was rather strange of my age being were I was.

As we started talking, I told him I was married and that I had two children and a business and that I felt that I couldn't leave my business and children just to run off to be an actor and he related a story to me. He said that he was a professor at Amherst I believe, and because he had always been interested in theater, he went to various tryouts and got interested in theater and got such the bug that he felt he had to do this. He took a leave of absence from his job at the university and went out on his own, and got work. However, the work. . .

M: Character work. At what age was he at the time?

B: I don't know. I'm going to guess that he had to be in his late thirties or early forties, or around in there. Went out and got work, but he couldn't support his family the way he felt he should support them. This became rather evident after a while. He then left his acting situation and went back to teaching at the university until his kids were raised and on their own and his certain financial obligations were satisfied--that is mortgage and all that good stuff. Then he said, "Then I handed in my resignation and I went to a regional theater that I had been exposed to," and I understood then it was the Long Warf and he has been gainfully employed as a professional actor at least fifty weeks of every year since he has done this on a regional basis or at the Williamstown Theater Festival or at places where they do good, professional, pay type work. He told me that and I said, "My God, Mr. Battis, you have just straightened up my head."

I went to Williamstown with the idea that when that was over I was just going to turn right around and go into New York or some strange place. It was like he was sent to me from heaven because he gave me my attitude and where I was going to go. I came back then after having a couple more parts there and neat experiences with the idea that this is in fact what Dick Boyd is going to do. When my children are on their own and their college situation is satisfied and my mortgages will then be paid for, hopefully my wife's Strouss' bill will be paid for, I fully intend to go out and hopefully find someone who will buy my business; I intend to sell my house, with some preparation, of course, beforehand certainly, and to find a good regional theater and get attached to it and just do theater.

The fact that someone would pay me to do theater just blows my mind. If I may get a good regional theater, then I think if someone comes by someday and says, "Hey, that guy might be great," then if I get an opportunity to something else someplace else, fine, but I am

not going to go out and jeopardize my health or my wife or anything else to go to a crazy house that I might find in Los Angeles or in New York City or such other place. If I ever do that it is going to be with a little bit of door opening.

M: Can you tell me what you consider four of five good regional theaters that do pay?

B: Well, I'm getting to the point now where I've got to start making some definite plans for me. For example, in the summertime I may take a week just to go out and look and see what is going on. The Long Warf, obviously is a prestigious one. The one, the Guthery Theater, up in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area is another fine one. There is a fine theater out in the San Diego area and I don't have the name of it. Then there is another one, Austin gave me the name of it; I can't recall.

M: Where is it located?

B: All these theaters are primarily in the east area.

M: Except the San Diego.

B: Yes, right. I would guess that that would be a fluff situation. I don't mean to put that down. What I'm saying is it's close to the Los Angeles-Hollywood area and there maybe a little bit more politics played in an area like that than they would any place else. I met a young gal here not too long ago who knows the owner of the Big Apple Dinner Theater in Naples, Florida. Since my father lives down there, I would not be at all opposed of doing some of that to get some exposure.

M: What is this Big Apple? I don't know anything about that.

B: Big Apple is a dinner theater; it's the name of it.

M: Is it a new place? I never heard of it.

B: They got one in Sarasota and one in Naples, Florida. It is like the Carousel up in Ravenna--that type of thing where your dinner ticket takes care of your theater ticket, and you do that type of thing. Instead of calling it Abe's Broadway Theater Dinner Show it is called Big Apple.

M: It is a clever name for it down there since the big apple means New York. We are talking about commercials.

B: We were talking about styles. He said to me, "Geez, you're great, but you're too young." I said, "Too

young? You wanted a guy between thirty-five and forty-five; I'm forty-three years old." "But you look too young. You read great, really liked your reading." I said, "Yes, I even own a three piece suit." He said, "Yes, but you look too young."

M: I am a young executive.

B: So to make a long story short, they called back and they wanted me to give a recommendation to somebody else. I said, "I just don't seem to know anybody." I said, "I'm sorry," thinking I would get the job. They just were too conservative. He said, "He just doesn't come across as being a young executive type guy."

M: Isn't that one of the madnesses of the business?

B: Really. I said, "You know, I had an IRA for five years. I am a responsible business person and I have a family." I said, "You people are just a little bit strange," but it all comes back to the type. I don't give a hoot and a holler how much talent you have; you got to look it. If you have to have a left ear lower than the other, that is the guy we want because. . .

M: Sometimes they are very wrong, they are off-base like this is a perfect example.

B: I'll tell you that's right. The only other exposure that I've had has been. . . We're talking about where have I gone since the theater thing and I've been fortunate enough to do some TV commercials locally that have been on Pittsburgh and Youngstown stations. It is fun for me because I get the studio type situations and read the cue cards and do things like that. So I've got my stuff into two agencies and they don't give you a residuals, they give flat payoff.

M: Oh, they do?

B: Yes. Otherwise then they would get into high production cost. But then I don't care because what I am after is building up a resume.

M: I know that this typing in theater and in commercials is even worse. We all have stories like that. I had some with almost exactly the same situation that say, "You're not the right type and that," and I say, "but that is why you came and got me. I don't understand." I often said that maybe if they did your life story, they would say, "We can't use you because you are not right for your own life story."

B: I thought maybe because I belonged to the Howland Community Church they didn't want me or something.

That is just about as ridiculous as anything else. He said, "Geez, you read well and I'm sure you can dress properly and you're the best one we've had, but we can't use you because you look too young." The fact that I am forty-four and they were looking between thirty-five and forty-five blew my mind. He said, "What about some of your friends?" "Well most of my friends would look the same age I do plus the fact they think I am paranoid for doing this."

M: "Plus I happen to be an actor."

B: Yes. "Plus I want the job. The heck with you."

M: That is the point.

B: Listen, if I knew people I would be an agent, right. I would get the bucks on the other end.

M: Dick is going to tell us about whatever he wants to.

B: One of the things you wanted to ask me was just an idea of the number of shows I was in. Here is a list of things. I don't know how good or bad these are. This goes back to 1957-1958 season at TNT. I will just call off the things and as I came across some ideas I'll lay them on you. First one was "Laura". The second one was "Death of a Salesman", and then "The Man". Then the next season, 1958-1959, was the "Matchmaker" and that was interesting because we had to crawl under the stage. They cut a trapdoor out in the center when Barnaby pops up with his friends. That was kind of fun. Then we did "The Corn is Green". In the 1959-1960 season "Inspector Calls" and "The Boy Friend". "The Boy Friend" was the first musical that Trumbull New Theater ever put on. I played the part of Tony and Frances Pendleton directed that one. It was kind of a fun show and it was very exciting because it was the first we had a pit orchestra and banjos and everything; it was lots of fun. I remember that one very vividly. The next one in 1960-1961 season was "Tobacco Road" and Paul Kimple, who now is the scene designer of Youngstown Playhouse, was the director. That was lots of fun.

M: In "Tobacco Road", who did you do in "Tobacco Road"?

B: I was Dude.

M: You played Dude? I did Sister Bessy once.

B: Really? I've never gotten out of that part, I'm still playing it.

M: I have an idea about that I want to talk to you about.

I think that can be brought back to Broadway. And I was thinking of asking Austin if he might consider that.

B: That would be interesting.

M: Would you be willing to make a guest appearance?

B: Are you kidding?

M: I am dead serious. I'm just writing at home about "Tobacco Road". I think it would sweep Broadway and we will consent to appear.

B: Yes. I would take a part. Just call.

M: How about being Geeter?

B: Geeter's great. Just like in the commercial, I'm too old to play Dude now, I got to find these old gray hair parts.

M: Wouldn't you love it?

B: Yes, yes.

M: Can I quote you that you would be willing?

B: Absolutely and I'll work for minimum wage.

M: And a bag of turnips.

B: And a bag of turnips. The 1961-1962 season was "Dark of the Moon", that was a strange show.

M: I have done that too.

B: Then we did "Guys and Dolls", which was interesting.

M: What did you do in that?

B: I was Sky Masterson. The youngest Sky Masterson in the world.

M: Did you sing a lot?

B: I can carry a tune. No one has come up and asked me for any recording contracts yet, but I can carry a tune.

M: Only because they are afraid to approach you.

B: True. True. Then in 1962-1963 we did "Tom Jones". Now "Tom Jones" was a show that was written by Austin Pendleton and his friends when they were in college.

They took it from Yale and took into the Phoenix in New York. After that it died a quick death because it was a student type production. Then Frances brought it back into TNT and we did it here and it was the first show outside of the Phoenix and Yale that was produced--marvelous show. Tom Schroth and I were in it--probably the most fun part I've ever had; he and I were the tutors and we had a marvelous time, just lots of fun. Then in 1963-1964 we did "Devil's Disciple" again, a Pendleton production. It seems that I'm following Frances around--"Devil's Disciple".

M: You picked somebody good to follow around.

B: Really. Then in 1964-1965, we did "Look Homeward Angel" and this is where they didn't have a W.O. Gant and I filled in. I did the part of W.O. and Frances was my wife in that one. I think I told about that before.

M: Yes, that's right because you played the father of Thomas Wolfe in this production and then in the production with me, you played the son of Thomas. You were my son.

B: Well there again, that is just a good example, they had somebody who looked the part physically in the part of John, of course. So it worked out well and I was happy to play that part. That was very exciting.

M: It also proves your versatility if you don't mind saying that.

B: Versatility. Better than venereal, right? Then the "Glass Monasery"; now the "Glass Monasery" in 1965-1966 season was directed by Austin, and again Frances and Tom Schroth was in it. I played the gentleman caller in that. 1966-1967, we did "Laffrony and Language", which was a trilogy. We did a checkoff thing that wasn't very long, but it was rather successful. Then the "Subject was Roses", which was a marvelous play, unfortunately it was a bummer.

M: It didn't work well?

B: Well, we had some cast problems and it just didn't come off to well. It was a marvelous show. Then we had a rest of about three years and then about the 1969-1979 season we did the "Odd Couple" and I played Felix Unger. That was lots of fun; I loved that part. I think it is the best of Neil Simon has ever done; it's just super.

M: I think he deserves a lot of credit for that.

B: Then we had a year off again, I don't know what I was doing these years off. I really don't. Then in 1971-1972, I did "I Never Sang for My Father". That was very rewarding for me. It was a very well-cast show, very moving, and very well-accepted. We took that into contest and I was fortunate enough to win the best actor for that one. Then we went down to the state competition and lost out, but I figured, what did they know, right?

M: You took that down to OCTA?

B: Yes. The regional thing we won. . . We went down there and this guy that was criticizing our production said that an actor should never look at the floor. And I looked at the floor.

M: Oh, really?

B: Yes, I told him, "Well, I lost my contact, screw you."

M: Are they supposed to look at their. . .

B: Yes. You're supposed to look at. . . I don't know what they were supposed to do, but that was his big critique of the whole thing. Then the next season, 1972-1973, I did "Oliver" and I did Fagan. That was rewarding for me too; that was really a fun part. My son played one of the street merchants and that was kind of a neat thing to do. The next one in the 1973-1974 season, was "Carnival". That was okay. Then 1974-1975 I did "Six. . .

M: You didn't like it to much I take it.

B: No, I didn't care for it.

M: I could tell that right off, Boyd.

B: Then, in 1974-1975, I did "Six Rooms Riverview" and that was a fun show. You can have fun with that. Then I took a couple years off again.

M: I would like to know what you did on those years off.

B: I don't know.

M: When did you go to Williamstown? You went in 1974.

B: Is that when I went?

M: You told me you were thirty-seven. Seven from eighty-one is seventy-four and you are going to be forty-five in March, March 20.

B: I don't know what I was doing.

M: You must have gone then, that season.

B: Yes. I guess I did. Then I didn't do anything for two years. That is right. The first show, I did one show down at the playhouse then.

M: You did that in 1976 with me.

B: Right. And I got an award for that.

M: You got a best supporting actor award for Benny Ben, the son Ben who dies of tuberculosis.

B: And I am dying in this play of cancer. I have these dying. . .

M: I cried every night when you died.

B: Did you?

M: I really cried.

B: I hope you cry in this show.

M: . . . that I wasn't going to have anyone to work with the rest of the play. That is why I cried.

B: Then we did "Runner Stumbles". That was an interesting show, in that, Frances had her daughter-in-law, Austin's wife, do it who is an excellent actress.

M: Petina Cummings.

B: Absolutely smashing gal.

M: She's marvelous. I just saw her in the "Cherry Orchard" in December and the whole theater company in New York.

B: She is just a marvelous actress and I learned a lot from her, obviously. When Austin came, he brought some of his pals from New York and they liked the production, which was applauded I guess, for everyone.

M: Tell a bit about the "Runner Stumbles". It is not known by masses of people; I would like you to tell what it is about.

B: It is a story of a priest who has a parish up in the wilds of Michigan way up where no one wants to go. He attempts very hard to get a parish started amongst a lot of trials and tribulations. While there, he falls in love with a nun that comes up to help with the

school. He tries to avoid it, but he falls for her and she falls for him. Then she is murdered; The nun's murdered. This is based on a real life story. The priest is suspected and he eventually kills himself, but it is found out that he didn't do it, that his housekeeper did it.

M: Because she thought the girl was a bad influence on the priest, right?

B: Right, and she was one of these into it religious type people and she just flipped out when she found out what was going on, it was an interesting show. It was a very powerful show.

M: You played the nun in that show.

B: Yes, I was the nun in that. (Laughter) I played the attorney for the priest--good show. Then we didn't do anything for the next year. The following year I did two shows. I did "Pipen", which I didn't care too much for.

M: Who did you do in "Pipen"?

B: I was the father.

M: Oh, the king.

B: Yes, the king. I just didn't care for the show. Of all the shows I have done lately, that probably was the one that I had the least fun with. That is a shame. Every time I went to the performances and stuff I just didn't really like it.

M: That is an awful feeling when you go to be in a show you hate.

B: But you know you commit yourself and you got to do it. Then, we did "Artichoke".

M: I don't know much about that. That is an avant-garde type show, isn't it?

B: Not really. She is a Canadian author, playwright. It is a story about people who live out in the Saskatchewan area and she is just a housewife sort of a person. When the thing takes place, there is a conflict between a husband and wife. Then there is a neighbor who used to be there all the time that her wife's family took in. It was a brother type situation. Anyway, there's a little affair going on and the husband gets all teed off. He goes to live with his two cuckoo friends, one of which is Tom Schroth again. We had a marvelous time. He came back and then the guy moves away; and

everyone lives happily ever after--lots of fun, lots of good lines and it is a neat show. It is a shame; they ought to do things like that down at the playhouse.

M: The Youngstown Playhouse you mean?

B: Yes. Last year we did "Rain". That was the last show of the season--good show. It was well received.

M: That is an old show.

B: Yes. I'll tell you, the oldies are the better ones I think.

M: Revivals.

B: Yes.

M: Now I want to talk to you about this project. I'm not joking. You know that Broadway is going through a large. . . First of all, there seems to be a dearth of new writers. Secondly, they are bringing back all old shows. It occurred to me a couple of years ago, I wish I would have written this letter before Austin Pendleton did Elizabeth Taylor because now he is a lot more besieged by people than he was. But for some reason, I just wanted to appeal to him to do it, and I wasn't home at the time. Do you really think that you would be interested in that if I would mention it? I'm serious about it. I think it would be a success.

B: Yes, I do to. It is ripe. I think people can associate with it in many ways.

M: The poverty and everything.

B: Yes, right, and I think it is something that has to be done again. There are a lot of good shows, not like hard ones, but that is a classic.

M: It has been years since it has been done. If it hit it could sweep the season.

B: I think it could be a shazam thing. I would like to read it again.

M: I just read it last year when I thought up this thing and then I just didn't have the nerve to approach him at the time. Now that I have done this I am dauntless. I've waited in people's bathrooms. He is approachable.

B: Yes, when you talk to him about it he won't say to much then all of a sudden he starts thinking. The next thing you know he is really going. But there again, what he does and how he casts it, he doesn't have

anything to do with casting, of course. I would probably be. . .

M: Why not?

B: They would probably go through a casting director and production staff people, so we just have to live with those people.

M: We would have to come up and take our chances.

B: Absolutely. The thing about it is, I think it is one of those things that you have to take a shot at it. If people have faith and talent that's not been discovered or people they don't know of, they got to give them a shot.

M: Maybe they could do an experimental thing over at Williamstown? Would they do that kind of thing?

B: Well, I don't think so.

M: Not that type of show.

B: No. They are rather stayed in their stuff.

M: There is a line where Geeter calls Sister Bessy an old son of a bitch and she said, "You are a son of goddamn bitch." I think that dialogue belongs back on the American stage.

B: Yes. It's part where you can scratch where it itches and pick your nose and all those neat things; it's just so neat; you could really get into. I think character acting anyway is more fun than doing something that is expected of you.

M: Well, I think that show was bad. . . It shocked the world, didn't it, when it was first produced.

B: Yes.

M: At the Youngstown Playhouse, Dick, did you know that that show was the most demanded drama. People cued up and came in the lobby and begged to have it held over and they wouldn't do it. They couldn't do it, that was 1968.

B: Well, maybe we ought to go down and have Bentley do that or whoever.

M: Bentley? We are thinking bigger here--western hemisphere type stuff. When you are going to do these commercials that you do now, how do you go about that?

B: It is a cold situation; they don't give you much of it, they just tell you what they have in mind. They give you the situation and then you attempt to work with it. I've noticed that in the ones that I have done, that there is very little direction. The one guy that I work with seems to have a little bit of talent to do it, but anybody else that I work with, doesn't seem to know what you're supposed to do.

M: In television?

B: Right.

M: I find that very prevalent in a lot of areas in television.

B: Well, I haven't done that much so I can't put too many pieces of experience back. I find that they give you the thing and they just expect you to do it. You know, here it is, read it cold and, of course, they put the cheat sheets up there--those idiot cards--and they run them up, thank God.

M: Tell what an idiot card is for the people who dig this record out of the caves that it will be in. They don't know what an idiot sheet is.

B: Well, they do one of two ways: if it is in television they have a small, windup projector type thing with all the lines written on it. As you are talking they advance it and it is large enough so that you can read it and the screen is situated right on the camera, above or below depending upon where they can fit it. So when you look into the camera, they think that you are actually reading your part. They hold up cards too, but I have not been with the cards.

M: And since you are not an idiot maybe that is why they won't let you have any.

B: Right, that's true.

M: Why don't you try to become an idiot, Dick?

B: Well, I've tried and I can't seem to have the right. . . I don't know.

M: We are talking to a man who is known to be very sophisticated.

B: Yes, I'm just now picking my nose.

M: Everybody regards him as homespun sophisticate. I'm trying to think of a word you call that.

B: Well, I guess that is just the way I am. I can't be anyway else, that is just my personality. I think we are going to get ready to start.

M: All right. Dick is literally talking to me in the wings before he is going out to open his show.

END OF INTERVIEW