

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Teaching the Blind

Experiences as a Teacher of Blind Children

O. H. 39

DR. PAULINE POWERS

Interviewed

by

Hugh G. Earnhart

on

March 3, 1975

## PAULINE POWERS

Pauline Valeria Powers, was born on April 19, 1893, in Hubbard, Ohio, the daughter of John A. and Rose Weitz Powers. She attended the Rayen School, graduating in 1912. She received her Bachelor of Science in Education from Western Reserve University, and her masters and doctoral from the University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Powers taught for one year with the Hubbard School system, then was hired by the Youngstown Board of Education, where she remained for fifty years. For thirty-one years, Dr. Powers taught blind children of every age group. During that time she assisted these children in growing socially as well as academically. In 1950 she was recognized as the National Best Teacher. She was listed in Who's Who of American Women, in the National Social Directory, and in 2000 Women of Achievement.

She attends St. Patrick Church in Hubbard, Ohio, and is a member of various education associations. Her hobbies include crosswords puzzles, pets, reading and flowers. She makes her home at 422 North Main Street, Hubbard, Ohio.

SILVIA PALLOTTA

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Pauline Powers  
INTERVIEWER: Hugh G. Earnhart  
SUBJECT: Experiences as a Teacher of Blind Children  
DATE: March 3, 1975

E: This is an interview with Dr. Pauline Powers for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project by Hugh G. Earnhart at 422 North Main Street, Hubbard, Ohio, on March 3, 1975, at 1:00 p.m.

E: Dr. Powers, would you describe for us your early childhood, where you lived, who your parents were, and your education, please?

P: My father was John Powers and my mother was Rose Weitz Powers. She belonged to a German family. Her father and mother came from Germany during the Franco-Prussian War and went into the cattle business. She had four brothers who followed that line for the greater part of their lives.

My father was paymaster for the Andrews and Hitchcock Company and got inflammatory rheumatism and died at the age of thirty-six, very young. They didn't know what to do, you know, about things, then, and I remember they didn't even give him water. I was seven years old and he called me his "little old woman."

I remember I came into the room one Saturday morning to see him and he said, "Go get me a big pitcher of water and we'll have such a good time." I trotted out after it, but a couple of doctors intercepted me. I suppose if I had gotten it for him, they would have said that that was what killed him. The next night he had a cerebral hemorrhage. On Saturday, they thought he was really going

to be very well and back to work. They didn't know. That was in 1900, you know, and they didn't know too much about it, I suppose.

My mother was left with four of us all under ten years old.

E: How did she support the family?

P: Well, she had a five thousand dollar life insurance and the house. It was quite remarkable because G.M. McKelvey kept a company store down here for the Andrews and Hitchcock workers. My father was at the head of that store and a paymaster for the iron company. When he died, because they were very fond of him, they came to my mother and invested that five thousand dollars. She raised the four of us for quite a few years on four hundred dollars a year interest.

She was really remarkable. She was a wonderful woman. She cooked and baked and stayed right here with us and did everything for us and we never lacked anything. Of course, in those days, thirty-three and a third dollars a month was more, too. You could get six pounds of sugar for a quarter and so on.

E: We call it "white gold" today.

P: Yes. It's two or three dollars now. I started to school at six at St. Patrick's. Then, I went to Hubbard High School, to go through the regular high school work, but Hubbard High School, at that time, was only second grade school, so all of us had to go to Rayen to finish. I graduated from Rayen in 1912.

At that time, you know, you didn't have your college work finished before they put you in a school to teach. I took a teacher training course that summer. I had to walk three miles, both ways, to the Hubbard-Youngstown Road School where I taught twelve children in eight grades.

E: This was a one-room schoolhouse?

P: This was a one-room school. Then the next year, 1913, I went to Lincoln School in Youngstown where I taught all the elementary grades until June, 1918. Next, I was at Princeton School and Cleveland School. I reached the four parts of town, including Madison on the North Side, and all this time, I was going to college. I think I must have been going for about thirty years. In fact, I went a full year after my doctoral. It was a thing I liked to do. I didn't take any credit for it.

I got my bachelor degree from Western Reserve in 1935 and my master's in Pittsburgh in 1936 and the doctorate at Pitt in 1942. That's the way that went. Then, I went on and had another year at Pitt after that. As I said before, I must have gone to school for about thirty years. It just got to be a habit.

They had taken my corner room at Princeton for a sight-saving class because we had better lighting; there were two walls with windows. They put me in the next room.

Well, I got well acquainted with the Cleveland supervisors of Visually Handicapped. At that time, the blind and the sightsaving classes had their supervisors from Cleveland.

E: Did they come to the school only on certain days?

P: They'd spend a whole day with me every two months, after I took the class. This Miss Olive Peck would come after me every once in a while and say, "I want you to go into the sight saving work." And I'd say, "Oh, I wouldn't think of it. I don't want to." What I really wanted at that time was to teach Algebra and Latin in high school. She'd always say, "You're silly."

So one summer day, she hunted for me on the campus at Western Reserve and she said, "I want you to take the Braille class in September." I said, "Oh, you can't be serious. I don't want it and please, don't ask me. In the first place, I'm afraid of the blind children. I'm afraid I'll hurt their feelings." So, she said, "Just to please me, go see Mr. Roudebush, the superintendent, next Saturday." I went into his office and I said, "Please Mr. Roudebush, don't move me. I don't want to change. I don't want this at all." He laughed a little bit and said, "Don't worry. Go on. Learn some of this Braille stuff up at the Cleveland Board of Education. It won't hurt to know about it." He said, "We'll talk about it some other time later. Don't worry."

So, I heard nothing and I thought that I'd go back to my regular class. The Saturday before Labor Day, in the morning, I was baking a cake and my mother answered the telephone and she said to me, "A lady wants to talk to you. It's urgent." So I went to the telephone and the girl said, "Mr. Roudebush wants to talk to you." He said, "Miss Powers, report to Chaney braille at eight o'clock next Tuesday morning," and he laughed and hung up. You see, I never accepted it, never in the world, and I stayed with it for thirty-one years.

After I got into the work I tried to take the word "see" out of my vocabulary until I nearly had a nervous breakdown. Miss Peck came one day and said, "Are you trying to kill yourself or just go to a mental institution?"

E: Before we go to that new experience, what was a typical day like at Rayen, when you were a student?

P: Oh, we had about four class periods and study halls. Just that.

E: How did you get there?

P: Oh, I went on two streetcars or busses, the same way I went when I taught there.

E: From Hubbard!

P: Yes, I got a bus from Hubbard to Youngstown, downtown, and then a bus to the North Side.

E: What time did you usually get to school?

P: Oh, we'd get a bus here at about seven thirty and we'd get up there a little after eight. I taught there for nine years later on, with my Braille class.

E: What was a typical day like at Rayen? Do you remember some of the teachers you had and some of the students?

P: Oh, yes. I had Mrs. Sara Jane Peterson for English. Have you heard of her? She was very wonderful. For Latin, I had Mr. Andrew Button. I think I had fourth year Latin, fourth year English, and two other very liberal arts courses. I had second year German with Miss Phillipene Kerwer and History with Mr. Francis Herr.

E: Did you know a student there by the name of Patrick Kennedy?

P: No, I was sort of isolated with my blind children when I taught there.

E: When you were a student there, there was a Mr. Hugh Foster who taught Economics. They were all fine old timers, you know, dedicated.

E: Did you find that all students got along quite well, being the only school there outside of South?

P: The only high school? South wasn't built then.

E: Yes. South wasn't built yet, that's right.

- P: No. Everybody was very happy. The students, then, were ambitious and thinking about their future.
- There were about one or two blacks in the school. There was a black girl in my class who was very nice and a black boy who was a hero, a football hero, so they showed him every sort of respect. I think those were the only two I ever ran into then. It was very peaceable. Everybody obeyed in those days. You didn't hear anybody oppose anything in class. What the teacher said was law. If you wanted a good grade, you did the work required.
- E: Did you find that the training that you got at the Rayen School prepared you for your work in college?
- P: Oh, it was very much like college. It was really like a year in college then. It was maybe a little less free because you were younger and followed the teacher's example a little better, I guess, but there never was any word of opposition there.
- E: What changes did you notice from the days that you were a student until the time you went back to teach at Rayen?
- P: During my senior year at Rayen School, 1911-1912, I had Mr. Francis Herr, later Principal, for History; Mrs. Sara Jane Peterson for English; Mr. Andrew Button for fourth year Latin; and Miss Phillipine Kerwer for second year German. They were all well known, with long years of experience.
- I didn't teach at Rayen until 1954, when the new Chaney was built, and distance made it impossible for senior Braille students to travel this distance from the old building, next known as West Junior High. The changes you ask about were many.
- One day Mr. Joseph Wilson, now Assistant Principal at Rayen, said to me, "When you and your pupils were here the student body tried to help in every way. Now, they might run over them in the halls."
- E: You've lived here in this house all your life?
- P: Right.
- E: What was Hubbard like in the 1920's?
- P: Well, it was a village. Everybody knew everybody else. You didn't have to lock your doors because the neighbors came in. When they did, they brought good words or food or anything that they wanted to share. No, there was no coolness at all. Everybody was friendly, and when new people came, everybody got to know them very quickly and made them feel at home.

- E: Was the Fourth of July a big day in the 1920's?
- P: Oh yes. There was a parade and all the flags were out. I've lived kind of a quiet life. I went to school almost all the time. I didn't go around very much. The little that I did travel was to teacher's conventions.
- E: Well, let's talk about your real life work--that of teaching the blind. You commented that you got into it by. . .
- P: Accident.
- E: Okay, accident. How did you really get yourself mentally prepared to do that?
- P: I was scared to death. I never put in a weekend like I did that Labor Day weekend. I knew that I was going to be deathly afraid of the children. I remember I had two very bright girls in the class and when the mother brought them in in the morning, I said, "Mrs. May, I'm scared to death." She said, "Don't worry. The girls will help you." They were always very good and they had high IQ's. They were marvelous.
- I had one boy who is the first blind man to teach in the New York City schools. Another one is a computer programmer at Patterson Air Base. They both came to see me this summer with their wives and I had thought of them as little boys. Then, I had four of my pupils from the Beshara family of the B and B Construction Company. That Frank was a marvel. I remember one time they had, what do you call it when they visit the classes to check up on anything?
- E: Evaluation?
- P: Yes. I remember the day I was teaching Latin, and they all visited me, you see. I can remember Frank was studying his Vergil lesson and they went over to his seat and they asked him to do it out loud. Do you know he translated that Vergil by running one hand over that page as fast as he could. He made real poetry of it, and took notes with the other hand. Of course, that didn't hurt me any, either, you know. They just stood there with oh's and ah's. The B and B Construction Company is building Youngstown's new post office.
- I had some funny things happen, though, too, that way. I had a little midget who couldn't control his arms to read braille. They didn't stay put long enough and I had lots of company always. It was sort of a place to do slumming I guess, and the women were always all around the room.



One day they came to this little buddy and he wanted to read too, you know. I was afraid because I knew he couldn't hold onto the line. He read them "The Little Red Hen," but he said, "The Little Wed Hen." It was done with all the embroidery he could manage. You never heard the story told that way. Oh, they thought it was wonderful. I thought, "Well, will I tell them the little guy is faking or break his heart?" So I thought the women wouldn't care and I kept quiet. I think he was making most of it up though.

I had another funny memory. I had two six year old twins and they were the naughtiest children I've ever seen. You couldn't understand their baby talk, but they swore continually, the most awful words. I'll not tell you some of the things they called me. It was just like "good morning" to them. Oh, it was awful. Every time I went to the office, I had to take a twin on each side because it wasn't safe to leave them. They would throw something at one of the older ones. One day, I think I read one little fairy story to Jimmy I believe for the hundredth time.

The father liked Sammy and didn't like Jimmy. I don't know why. The neighbors told me that one day, little Jimmy was sitting on the floor beside the father and the father put his hand out to touch the child's head and the child turned toward him and he said, "You made a mistake, Daddy. I'm Jimmy." The father didn't like him at all.

Talking to them at their home over the telephone was like talking over the battlefield at Gettysburg. It was terrible. The father was putting the boots on the little three-year-old one day and broke the child's leg doing it. Well, I felt so sorry for them. I just hoped and prayed that I could get through to them.

Well, one day, at noon, the other children were listening to the radio and they both came over and one got up on each knee and oh, they were so good. I said to myself, "Now, I'm getting through. Now, I'll teach them something." Do you know what happened. They were covered with measles. You know, I never caught them either. I thought that was funny.

Well, I had children of all ages, kindergarten right through high school.

E: You taught all grades there?

P: All grades. They went out to every one of their classes every day. We were determined that that would be the

case, otherwise they might as well be in an institution: We wanted them to have all the contact with sighted children that was possible. They did all of their homework with me, put in all their study periods, all their free periods. Even kindergarteners would go to the kindergarten for five or ten minutes a day.

Then I taught for twenty-two years at Chaney and we had everything under one roof. At Rayen, they took the junior high students to Hayes from eight o'clock until twelve o'clock and then they came back and did their work with me. The things they'd write there went out to their classes. The little ones we took over to Harding twice a day for an hour each time.

E: Who was behind this program?

P: I had every blind child, except the ones that were in Columbus, in the institution, from northeastern Ohio. They'd come and board them during the week at some place and send them every day to school. My pupils had a piano lesson each week, also, for the twelve years.

Youngstown was the only area in the state to carry pupils beyond ninth grade and through the twelfth grade to graduation. It helped that I had two Life Certificates, elementary and high school.

E: Was it the Youngstown School Board or was it the Blind Foundation?

P: I think it was the state.

Mrs. Burns : I would like to interrupt here. I was a foster mother for two of her blind children.

P: Yes, she was a foster mother for a couple of years for two high school students who lived in Windham and Steubenville, after I retired.

P: It was done through the Catholic Service League.

B: Yes, it was done through the Catholic Service League. I had two boys, twelve and fourteen years old, for three and one half years. It was during that time after Dr. Powers retired. They had a compulsory retirement age. Dr. Powers came down to my house two or three times a week and tutored those boys because she wanted, after she retired, to make sure that they got what she wanted them to have in order to graduate. I thought that was pretty nice.

- P: I was afraid that they would quit high school if they went back to their homes, you see. One was from Steubenville and one from Windham. I loved them though. It was fun. I enjoyed it. I had all kinds of students. I had two idiots that drooled. One said "Hoover Sweeper" all day long.
- E: Why would they select Youngstown for this type of program rather than Cleveland?
- P: There were three centers, Youngstown, Cleveland and Cincinnati. Youngstown was the only one that carried them through the twelfth grade.
- E: In other words, this was sort of a regional project?
- P: Yes. Ours was for Northeastern Ohio. Who paid you, Mrs. Burns?
- B: The Catholic Service League got in touch with me.
- P: But who paid you for their keep?
- B: The Catholic Service League.
- P: The state?
- B: Well, I think it was the Service League.
- P: I think it was a separate thing, part of the Youngstown Board of Education.
- E: How many students were in this program at any given time? How many did you have in your room, for instance?
- P: Well, I had twelve seats, twelve big desks to hold those big books. I was never supposed to have more than twelve, but I'd have two in each desk, so I had twenty-four. For twenty years I did that by myself. I had every grade. There was never a dull moment. From six thirty in the morning, I was out there putting books into braille for them because it was impossible to get every textbook that Youngstown used, you know, in braille.
- E: You actually did this yourself?
- P: Yes. For the ones that weren't available. Then, a few years later, Mrs. Julius Kahn came out to visit me and she said, "Well, this is terrible for you to have to do all this extra work." She said, "You're working ten to eleven hours a day." She got her group that transcribed for the adult group and changed them over to helping me braille some of these textbooks. These Jewish women were wonderful to me.

- E: There wasn't anything at that time like what the Library of Congress does?
- P: Yes.
- E: Was it available in some areas?
- P: They had the talking books. Then we got the books that were available, but they couldn't see to it that Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Youngstown all used the same textbook in Latin or in English or so on. That was when they needed extra work.
- Then the parents looked at it so differently. Some of them just adored their children and pampered them and some of them would like to lose them. Sometimes I'd be there at five thirty in the afternoon waiting for a parent to pick up a child and he'd say he forgot. Dr. Essex said to me one time, "What do you do it for?" I said, "Well, would you tell me what to do?" The cleaning women don't have to look after my children. Suppose there was a broken home and one of the members kidnapped the child and I was to blame for it or what if he walked out onto the street and got killed? There would be an inch high headline in the paper asking where that teacher was. I just don't see any other way. So that's the way it was.
- E: You've used a term which obviously you use very affectionately, "my children."
- P: See, I had them for twelve years. I've had lots of them from first grade or kindergarten right up through the twelfth grade. I've felt as if they belonged to me.
- E: You know, it's sort of like that one-room schoolhouse relationship.
- P: Yes. They were closer even than sighted children, I think.
- E: How did these children get along in other sections of the school?
- P: With other children?
- E: Yes.
- P: Fine. The other children made such a fuss over them. It almost spoiled them. That was the way unless my students were less friendly. The four Lebanese children were very clannish and they didn't want to take part in the things that the rest did. I never could break through that.

I don't know what it was or whether they are still like that. They were all brilliant, those four.

E: You honestly enjoyed teaching.

P: Oh, I loved it. I would like to get a good job right now. I told Dr. Pugh, my Oculist, that that's all I needed--a good steady job. But I don't think they'd take me, at my present age.

E: What were some of the problems that you faced in teaching the blind?

P: Well, you had to make certain to act a little differently toward them. Sometimes they were very withdrawn, sometimes very bold, you know. My brother-in-law said, "It all starts down here with mother and dad." That's who he blamed for the children's ability to adjust. I never tried to spoil them. Oh, I will tell you this.

Once when I asked Miss Peck, "Why are you so persistent about my teaching these children when I don't want to?" She said, "Well, I think you're warm enough and outgoing enough to have a shoulder for them to cry on."

She also said, "You're not sloppy and sticky. I know you're not going to kiss them a lot and spoil the life out of them. That's the last thing they need."

You had to be careful about that and, of course, never show partiality. They could sense that even if they couldn't see. I don't know. You just grew with them. I guess that's the secret.

E: Did you feel that their lack of sight made up in other sensitivity areas?

P: Oh, yes. In touch and hearing, they were as keen as could be. That's why I catered to these senses. Oh, yes.

E: How was the funding for this program? Were you always able to get the materials and the things you needed?

P: Oh, yes. I don't think they ever refused anything within reason that I asked. Never. I think it came through Cleveland, but I'm not certain; at least everything went to these Cleveland supervisors. That's no longer true. The reason that I tutored those two little boys was that when I left there were three or four children still in high school and they put men teachers in. They had no braille at all. The child just had to depend on his hearing and maybe the teacher read to them, I don't know. They certainly were handicapped and that's why I worried about them.

They're smart, too. The boys pretty nearly all married nurses. Now, I didn't teach them that or how to make money, but they knew how to marry somebody to take care of them.

E: Maybe they learned that from you by osmosis.

P: I wasn't aware of that.

E: Well, did your pupils that came here from out of the city stay then in private homes and things of this sort during the week?

P: Yes. That's right, they stayed with women like Mrs. Burns. They went home each weekend. They were brought in, not usually in taxis, but more often in cars that were hired by the board of education to bring them.

E: In other words, they didn't ride the school busses or anything of that sort.

P: No. I don't think any of them did except Pete Waback. He has an orchestra now in a night club. The driver of the Poland bus said to me one day, "Honestly, Miss Powers, I think that kid knew which brick to get off at. I never needed to tell him to get up." None of mine had dogs or canes. The fellow in New York City that teaches there has a blind wife who's a social service worker. They go all over that big city without a cane or a dog and I get lost when I get outside of Grand Central Station.

E: What other work did you do with the blind other than teaching?

P: Well, I tried to get them into any of the outside jobs that I could find where they would fit in. My whole ambition was that they would be just people like everybody else, no different, and to be treated that way and to act like that. That was what I worked for all the time. When things would come up, I tried to make them a part of it and I took them myself if I could to various events or got somebody to take them, so they'd know as much as possible of what was going on.

E: What was the salary of a teacher at that time in the 1930's and in the 1940's?

P: Well, the first out at Hubbard, I got forty dollars a month. I walked six miles every day. Then the next year in Youngstown I got forty-five and then fifty and fifty-five. Then, when I taught the blind, I think in addition to whatever your salary would be, there was a

subsidy of a hundred and fifty dollars a year. That was all. There weren't any seven and eight thousand dollars in those days.

E: There aren't any today either.

P: No, no, no.

E: As you look back on teaching the blind and your work as a teacher, do you see anything that you would have done differently or you would have changed in connection to this special type of education that you did?

P: Well, I might have tried to get them into certain classes that were forbidden to them at the time. There were very few. At Rayen, one teacher refused to have any pupil of mine in a biology class.

E: What reason did she give?

P: She said that they did most of the work with microscopes. But one of the men there was extremely nice about it and he said, "That's nonsense. They can get a very great deal with their ears and they can come into my class." So they didn't lose out.

I suppose some people thought it was a bother too. I don't know. I tried to keep that very low. Some of the teachers sent them back pretty quickly when I'd send them over to visit in the lower grades. I would be a little bit hurt about it, but I had to take what I could. I remember the first year I taught them, one of my little boys in the fifth grade came down and he said, "Miss Powers, the two fifth grade teachers up there said that they had a big enough room to take care of and since you were hired to take care of us, they didn't know why they had to have us." I said, "Well, don't worry. Now, just keep quiet. We'll try to find out what's wrong."

So the two teachers came down at noon. I said to them, "Now, I had nothing to do with scheduling these children. They were scheduled last spring before I came. I will talk to Mr. Ricksecker and ask him if he would like to take them out of your classes." They said, "No, no, it's all right. Let them come." They didn't like that, not one bit.

E: Can you remember, looking over all those years you taught, how did these blind children do overall in their school work? Were they average students?

P: Well, it was still a matter of IQ. The ones with IQ's of 150 really were tops, you know, like this Frankie Beshara. You go into his office now, in the B and B Construction Company, and he's talking to New York on one phone and Chicago on another, like a big tycoon. If they were low mentally, they didn't do so well, some just average. I don't think that the matter of the braille had too much to do with it. I think it was entirely due to mentality.

I had two idiot children. I had to take them. They said they had to have a chance and psychologists said they belonged more in a blind class than in a retarded class. Of course, you can see that the retarded use sight for most of their training, so it was fairly possible to teach them in my class. But finally, they took them away. They came from outside cities and after a year or so, after we'd given them a chance, they were taken away.

One of them never talked about himself in the first person. "David does this. David does that." One day a group of women were in the room and he wasn't feeling well so I had him on the couch. One of the teachers in the hall had come at noon and as she went out, she said, "Pauline, will you quit your worrying?" Well, in the afternoon, when I had this crowd of women in the room, out of a clear sky David said, "Pauline, will you quit your worrying?" They looked at me as if they thought I'd lost my mind.

E: Did these women serve as volunteers?

P: Well, the Jewish group did. They were the only ones at that time. The others just visited, you know.

E: In other words, would these be parents or guardians of these children or just people who'd come in?

P: They were from various women's clubs. There were ones that just were curious, you know. One lady came in one day and one little girl was reading something in Braille. Some of these women had the idea that if they couldn't see, they couldn't hear either, you know. This lady leaned over and whispered to me something about the little girl who was reading the braille to her. She said, "Doesn't she see even light? Doesn't she see anything?" The little girl said, "Not even light," and went on reading. She had heard it. They weren't insulted, I don't think.

I taught them all to knit just for pleasure. You know, one nice thing about it, was that a lot of the girls



worked in the x-ray departments afterwards. I wrote to Kodak and different companies and they arranged to finish the x-ray with a bell rather than with a light. Formerly, they had lights, see, so the blind could not do that, because they did not know when they were ready. A good many of my girls did that kind of work.

Some of them were very musical. One of my girls was music supervisor in Youngstown for many years. She just retired last year. They are quite musical because they have good ears.

People were awfully nice to me. I had lots of honors. I was National Teacher of the Year in 1950. I was in Two Thousand Women of Achievement in Community Leaders of America and in Noteworthy Americans and in Who's Who of American Women and I am listed in the National Social Directory. You know, each one gets something from the other and that puts you on their list. It isn't much fun when your mother's gone. You know, nobody else cares.

This thing came last Saturday. I don't know whether it's something from bygone days or not.

E: Oh, the Bicentennial Award.

P: Oh, I guess that's what it is. Oh, it's nice to be remembered. I always tell them you have to be sick to know how many good friends you have.

E: Well, it's just that sometimes when you're sick, they take time to pause and remember.

P: That's right.

E: You know, when you're up kicking and they're up kicking, well, you know the world still stands.

P: Sure. Everybody has his own problems. It was very worthwhile, all of it. I hated terribly to lose it. But the children are so nice. They come to see me in the summer-time when they're back in Youngstown and bring their wives and children along.

E: What else did you do besides knitting for a special project, as far as teaching?

P: Well, they couldn't do much drawing, of course. It was mostly some kind of a hand work. Some of them took sewing in the sewing classes. I had to teach them typing from the beginning to prepare work for teachers to grade their papers. If the pupil prepared his work in Braille or took a test in class he had to type it later or I had to write underneath the Braille for the classroom teacher to read.

During those years, I taught night school at South. I taught English for foreigners for twenty-two years. That was wonderful. I had many of Mussolini's and Hitler's refugees. Some of them were brilliant men, you know, doctors and so on, but they lacked the idiomatic English to pass our tests, so they couldn't practice here. You should have heard some of the stories they told me. They would have had flu, they said, during the flu epidemic. If they went to the hospital, they rarely came out. They would hide under the streets and the Gestapo was up above walking, trying to catch them.

I had paid to me the nicest compliment I ever had. It was from Dr. Ben Friedman. He and Doris Burdman, his sister, were my students. I saw him afterwards. You know, he's head of Benada Aluminum Company. He sold it for three million and bought it back on sale for one million, in Girard. So he wasn't too stupid. Anyhow, I met him at an anniversary of one of the Jewish ladies. He came over to me and said, "Miss Powers, to me you are America. When I think of how I was abused in Russia and downtrodden and not able to look at anything, somehow, you gave me back some human dignity." I didn't do anything, really. In the other cases, too, I just tried to treat them like people, that's all. In fact, I never did anything except listen to them and try to help.

Your Mr. Coffelt took me to the Lions Club party a year ago. He came and got me for the Lions Club Christmas party, where the available blind children come and then are brought home. Mr. Coffelt and Mr. Fischer, those two came a year ago for me, so I got to know them. The Lions are wonderful to me. They were my right arm all those years. They came down every day or so and did a lot of entertaining for the blind children. They had a very close acquaintance with the children. I don't think they bother to visit so much anymore.

- E: How did you land the job of teaching foreign citizens the English language? Did they call you up on the phone and give that job to you?
- P: No. I don't remember how I got it, to be honest. I think they opened a class and I don't know whether I applied or not.
- E: Did you teach this every night?
- P: Two nights a week.
- E: How long were the sessions?
- P: About three hours each.

- E: How many students would be in there?
- P: Oh, a whole room full. One night the principal came in and said, "Honestly Miss Powers, I never saw so many kinds of arithmetic in one room in my life." Everybody was at a different spot you know.
- E: You were trying to teach them the language, which is in a sense, a foreign language to them. How did you teach?
- P: I tried to write a little book myself that would fit into it. I thought there really weren't too many books that would help. They were rather too difficult for them. I had a good many colored people from the deep South, too, that hadn't had any English. I had a girl from Mexico. One of our soldier boys married her and brought her up here and then abandoned her. She was trying to learn so she could get a job, you know. I had some barbers that suddenly out of the blue, after they worked downtown for twenty or twenty-five years, faced a new law that required them to pass an eighth grade examination.
- E: The barbers' examination.
- P: A regular eighth grade examination. At that time, the junior high was 7th, 8th, and 9th grades only. There were no separate eighth grades, so Carl Soller, the principal, and I had to make some tests so that the poor man could work for another twenty years. Some of the new laws though, are rather ridiculous, aren't they?
- E: That's right. In other words, you just simply taught what would be a typical three hour class?
- P: Well, sometimes I'd let them choose. Now, I can remember one night when one man wanted to learn division of fractions. I went over it with him on the board. This Ben Friedkin I told you about, who was supposed to be reading came up to me and said, "Miss Powers, if you go over that once more, I'll do every problem on the page" and he did. They were bright enough. They had a strong desire, you know, and that's what it takes.
- E: Well, they didn't want to be different.
- P: They wanted to get a respectable job, don't you know? That was it. When you heard them tell the stories of what went on in their youth, you'd be ashamed of yourself to think that you'd ever grumble.
- I had one boy by the name of Helmit Fellers; I don't know if he was Russian or German. He said to me one day, "My father was a Nazi and my mother was Jewish.

They put her and her family into a concentration camp. - One sister was a ballet dancer for the government and she was all right. She was with Dad, the Nazi, see?" He said they took him to a camp when he was just a little kid and I think he had TB. Anyhow, one day, they were moving him and he was going through a lineup of people and his grandmother saw him and ran out to him and they shot her dead, right in front of him. A little while later, the same thing happened to his dad who had been taken into custody. The dad tried to come over and talk to him. They killed him right in front of the child.

E: Were most of those who were in this evening class, people from the continent of Europe?

P: Yes. There weren't many South Americans, or Mexicans. A few but not many. Pretty nearly all came over here after escaping from Hitler and Mussolini.

Mrs. Burdman said that they would arrange it this way for the Jewish children. She said she lived in a little town and had to go to another town to school. They went through forests that were filled with wolves, but they would allow only so many Jewish from this town to go to school. Then they would put the price up so high and screen them again, see? She said, "I was lucky. A teacher in the town liked me and took me to live with her. That's the way I got through school." She later graduated from Youngstown College. She is a great philanthropist, in many of Youngstown's charities.

We don't know what suffering is, I guess. I felt so bad for them. I never got gushy with the blind. I never spoiled them that way at all. I wanted them to be on their own as much as they could because they were going to have to live without me afterwards, and they surely do. They go all over that town without me. A blind girl, one of my former students, called me yesterday. She lives in New Castle. She went down the street a few weeks ago and a girl in a car came along and struck her guide dog. She was the only one of my students who had a seeing eye dog. And the girl's car tore the harness off the dog. He had to have seventy stitches. There was that blind girl standing in the middle of the street and the dog, she said, picked itself up and walking on three legs, took that girl home before they took it to the hospital. She said that it had to be there 29 days. Now, it's back to work again.

E: Well, all the time you were teaching the blind and teaching a new language to students at South in the evening, you served as a trustee for the Hubbard Library, too, didn't you?

- P: Yes. From the time it started, I was on the Board of Trustees for thirty-seven years, from 1933 to 1970. Oh, that was just one meeting a month, you know.
- E: What were some of the pleasant experiences you had as a trustee?
- P: Oh, it was nice. I liked it. We had pleasure when we went many times to meet with other people.
- E: You started to tell us about some of the pleasant experiences of being a trustee at the library in Hubbard.
- P: Oh, we visited other libraries sometimes and conventions; things like that were very pleasant. It certainly was a pleasure to see it grow.
- E: What did it start out as in size?
- P: In the school, in Roosevelt School, there were just a few rooms and then as it got bigger, we built the building for \$90,000. They hadn't done much about the children's library, so I was lucky enough to be able to give them a kind of sizeable contribution. So, the children's library, the one I'm most interested in, is the Rose Weitz Powers Children's Library. I'm proud of that. I'm sure that the children who use that part of the library aren't going to learn very many bad things, but good ones.
- E: You hope not, anyway.
- P: No, there weren't many bad books. I think if they read, they're not going to get into trouble.
- E: You also taught at Youngstown College, didn't you?
- P: Yes. Dr. Mayer and I were good friends. We had gone back and forth to Pitt year after year, together. So he waited for me for several years to teach the Psychology of Exceptional Children. I said, "Well, wait until I retire," so I did. He gave me that course and I taught Mental Health, Psychology of Adolescence, et cetera. Then, one day, he didn't like something very well. An old friend of mine had asked me to teach a Children's Literature course in the School of Education, and I did. He said, "I found out. I wanted you to stay in Psychology. Did Athams Reese get you into that?" Later, I taught Communications, I think, for a year or so.
- E: What years did you teach at Youngstown?
- P: I taught after I retired in 1963 up until December 1967. Then they became the State University and went into

a retirement system. We old timers were already on retirement, so we had to get out. We couldn't very well pay in and pay out to the same system. That's expensive. I hope that's the only reason.

E: Well, you know, that's true. What do you remember about Youngstown College and Youngstown University, when you were still part of the public school system? What do you remember about the school when it was going through its growing pains?

P: Well, see, I didn't go there until I retired.

E: Yes, I realize. But you were in the Youngstown school system and you saw the school grow from a college to a university?

P: Oh, yes. Quite a few of my friends were up there already, you know. One was Miss Athens who was a very fine primary teacher and others like that. A good many of them I knew. I knew Dr. Mayer for many years. Oh, yes. But it wasn't nearly as big as it was now when I left.

I'm wondering sometimes if some of those buildings aren't going to be empty.

E: Well, I hope not.

P: I hope not, too. But I'm afraid that some of them went to college to get out of going to wars.

E: Well, I think so, but you know, now that we no longer have the draft, we have acquired a student body that is interested in obtaining an education.

P: A little bit of that wanting to put you off track started when I was up there. I remember they kept wanting to start arguments about LSD and about drugs and all that kind of thing. I kept quiet for a few days and I wrote to the American Medical Association to get some facts, and so the next time that somebody brought it up, I said, "Now, I hope we can settle this all today." I said, "I didn't have any facts before so I wrote to the American Medical Association, and they said that these drugs do break up the chromosomes. Chances are, there could be a retarded child." "Now," I said, "All of you men, young men, will probably be fathers in another ten years. This is all I have to say about it. I don't have anything else."

I said, "If you should have a retarded child, it might be as innocent as anything in the world, but if you have doubts about it, maybe you'll wind up in a mental institution." Then I said, "As far as I'm concerned, that's

all I know about it. If you're willing to take that risk by taking a trip, then, I can't stop you."

But, I said, "From here on in, we're going to have two oral reports a year and I want you to read the lesson and I want you to take part in the class." I said, "If you want a good grade, you'll do just that and then there won't be any other problems at all."

Now, I never really had any disrespect, but some of my friends in the lower grades did. One teacher told me not long ago that a seventh grade boy gave her a push and she took him to the office and he said, "I thought she could take a joke." She said, "Yes, a nice joke. Next time, you may knock me down." She quit. That's the trouble, too, Mr. Earnhart. Some of the fine teachers are retiring before their time, just when they get good.

E: Well, I'd like to ask you one last question: Would you have changed your vocation if you had an opportunity to?

P: I think I was meant to be a school teacher, to sit at that desk, really. I tried for a little while to work at the office at the Sheet and Tube, but I didn't like it as well. No. I made out the bonuses in the cost department. It was pretty much like school teaching, but no, I believe I was meant to be an old maid school teacher, a really dyed-in-the-wool spinster.

I didn't try to keep any strict rules or anything with my blind class. They came and went, just like they would at home, you know. If I thought they were slowing up and getting careless, then I saw to it that they did their homework before they went home that night so that they'd have it. When they took tests, the teachers would send the test down to me sometimes and I'd read it and they'd braille the answers. Then I'd write under them. Every child learns to type. I had to teach them to type, too, in the very early grades, so that they would be able to help themselves. They'd either type them or write them in braille and I'd write underneath and send them back to the teacher. Everybody was nice to me. I never had much trouble at any time. I guess I was just foolish enough to be had. I may have been stupid enough not to know.

E: Well, do you have anything you'd like to add for the story in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries?

P: I can't think of anything else. I'm lonesome for school, really. That's the truth.

E: I said I have one last question. I have another one. -  
Do you still see many of your students?

P: Yes. They come to see me. This one in New York comes  
back to see his parents in Youngstown at Christmas time.  
They always come out to see me. The one from Patterson  
Air Base visited me last summer.

One of my girls is a very able girl. She graduated  
from Western Reserve with honors, but she's very bitter  
because the only good job she could get was in the South  
someplace and she has to support her mother. She had to  
accept a concession at the post office and it didn't go  
down very well. She feels bad. She feels as if she did  
not succeed. She wanted to get out and go places. But,  
she does remarkably well. I don't know how she makes that  
change. She told me at Christmas time that she made one  
hundred sets of little booties and things and sold them  
at Christmas time while she was sitting there at the  
stand. They have ambition; they try. That's the whole  
thing. I don't think I have any right to claim much  
credit for that. If they want to do it, they do it, but  
of course, they need a little guidance.

E: And some encouragement.

P: They're all my good friends. I can prize myself on that.  
They call me often. One of my girls called me from New  
Castle yesterday and talked about a half hour. I was  
wondering what the bill would be because it was long dis-  
tance.

E: Well, thank you very kindly for sharing this hour or so  
with us.

P: I'm sorry I talked you to death.

E: No, you didn't.

P: When I get started on my pet subject, you can't stop me.

END OF INTERVIEW