

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Political Cartooning

Comic Books - Newspaper Illustrations

O.H. 1490

RAYMOND H. OSRIN

Interviewed

by

Dan O'Brian

on

March 4, 1992

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
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INTERVIEWEE: RAYMOND H. OSRIN

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SUBJECT: Cartooning, Comic Books, Political Cartoons,
Newspaper illustrations

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DO: This is an interview with Raymond H. Osrin for the
Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on
Political Cartooning, by Dan O'Brien, on March 4, 1992.

RO: Do I just wait until you stimulate or ask questions?

DO: You can just

RO: Well, it all began in Brooklyn, New York, on October 5,
1928. I should never have left.

DO: Brooklyn?

RO: Yes, I do have a love affair and a romance.

DO: With the Dodgers?

RO: Well, not the present ones, no. The old Dodgers.

DO: George Shuba.

RO: Yes, George Shuba.

DO: Shotgun Shuba, I interviewed him for the program.

RO: Did you?

DO: Oh yes, he was one of the greatest.

RO: He was one of the boy's of summer. No, I grew up about--I didn't know it at the time. I found out later--about three quarters of a mile away from Woody Allen. He was my hero in life. I don't have many heroes. He is it. I have no politician hero. I have no statesman hero. I have no Ghandi or any of those follow people who I consider assholes in one way or another. Woody Allen comes as close as I can think of to a hero. Even though we are ten years apart, it was only three quarters of a mile. I am proud of that. We are very much alike, if you have read his books and know about him personally. That is just a coincidence. Nobody modeled themselves after anybody. I am very proud of being a New Yorker; and for most of my life, in all honesty, I have felt like a fish out of water. Sense of humor-wise, big mouthed-wise, sarcastic-wise, cynical-wise. I ran into a solid wall with gentlemanliness in the mid-West that sometimes was very stifling. Even though people like Kay Ballard and Dean Martin and Jonathan Winters came from this part of the country, I don't know how the hell they ever did it. Because you know they were eccentric and colorful and wonderful and wild.

DO: You don't think Mr. Traficant is?

RO: Yes, but I really have, for a lot of years, felt like I didn't belong. I went to . . . I don't know if you want a life history type thing.

DO: Yes, this is fine.

RO: I was working in comic books while I was still in high school at seventeen, seventeen and a half. I dropped out of high school because I got a job, a permanent job, in the comic book business.

DO: Which comic books were you doing?

RO: What it was, was a studio that was like an art service, so it did books for many publishing houses. But, the biggest publishing house at that time was Fiction House, and they did things like Kanga Queen of the Jungle and--I'm sorry, Kanga was not the Queen of the Jungle. Sheena was. Kanga was a man. He wouldn't like that. Kanga was like Tarzan, and Sheena was the Queen of the Jungle. Wings Magazine and things like that.

DO: Okay, Father used to tell me about Wings, growing up with that. As a matter of fact, I ran into a few of them; found copies. I didn't buy it, mind you. It was a little bit expensive for my taste. They are around, if you see some of them.

RO: The shop was run by a guy named Jerry Iger, who just

died recently in his late eighties. He provided a service. We also did the art work for a lot of classic comics. I worked on Lorna Doone and was it, I never remember, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and Two Years before the Mast. I sometimes get those backwards. Treasure Island and stuff like that. I was primarily an inker. I learned how to do inking, and I think I became a good inker. Inking, today, is one of my favorite parts of drawing.

DO: Is that it? Boy, you are out of the loop.

RO: Let me hasten to add here, since this is for a university, I mentioned dropping out of high school. I went back at night, and I got, what in New York is called, a Certificate of Literacy, which shows that I graduated from high school. I didn't want to go to college, and I'm not so sure that was smart; but I didn't want to go, then. I was fortunate and stupid because I was an only child, and I had the kind of Jewish mother who would have scrubbed floors to send me to any school I wanted to go to. I didn't choose to go. So, I went to the Art Students League of New York, and for awhile I entertained the idea of being a serious illustrator.

Those days were the golden days of the illustrators you have to remember. There was Colliers Magazine, and there was Liberty Magazine, Look Magazine, and The Saturday Evening Post. They all had stories, and they were all illustrated by the greatest artists of the day. Most young people growing up in that day wanted to be illustrators. Now it's dead; it's finished. Norman Rockwell was that before he became a famous Norman Rockwell, who did covers.

DO: And, the best caricature artists I think I have ever seen.

RO: A guy who gets a bum rap who really just is sensational. . . .

DO: I can't. . . .

RO: People say, "What you can do that with a camera! Here take this brush and let me see you do it like he did it." Anyway, I was in the comic book business and was doing rather well for the times. Considering we are talking about a period from 1945--[I] graduated in 1945--through 1949, I worked for Jerry Iger in his shop. Met a fantastic man there, named Matt Baker. I identify him as being black only because this was very uncommon in 1949, number one, for there to be a really top notch, black cartoonist in New York; I mean a really good one of the illustrative style.

DO: Where was this at in New York?

RO: Well, he was from Pittsburgh, and he had come to New York to make his way in comic books. We met in the studio that Jerry Iger ran.

DO: Was it like. . . I'm trying to think what street.

RO: The street?

DO: The big Madison Avenue type, or was it just back streets?

RO: No, these kinds of places--no, you would die. These kinds of places were warehouse buildings with elevators that went up to the forty-second floor. They looked like factories. No, it was not glamorous at all. In fact, I can't remember where the first office building was. It was down near the river, in a very low rent district; but Jerry Iger, then moved near Canal Street. That is about as famous as I can get for a street name. Canal is not a glamorous street; but it's a famous street in New York. The shop moved to Canal Street and had a very unique thing about it. . . . You're too young to remember the first Dave Garroway shows on television, I suppose?

DO: Today shows you mean.

RO: They used to come from on the street, a glass window; and the people walking by could look in the glass window and watch the show in progress, watch Dave Garroway and all the people. Well, our cartoon shop was on Canal Street, on the street with big glass windows and guys lined up sitting at drawing boards, and people could walk up and down the street and watch comic books being made. They would hang around for hours watching a guy finish inking a page or something like that.

I met Matt Baker there, which was a big break in my life, because he taught me a lot. Matt and I became close friends. Then, we decided to become partners because he was basically a penciler and I was an inker. We could do a lot of free lance work and keep production flowing more smoothly that way. Inkers got paid less than pencilers; so it was more profitable for him to keep on penciling and do as many pencil pages as he could, and then, I would do the inking. We actually were a team for, like from 1949 to 1957 when I left New York, because the bottom dropped out of the comic book business due to a man, a doctor who wrote a book, which I understand is being reissued today. Dr. Frederic Wertheim wrote The Seduction of the Innocent.

DO: That killed Tales of the Crypt.

RO: Yes, right. A great book.

DO: Killed everything with that one. The art work was absolutely beautiful.

RO: That was the zenith, as far as I am concerned, for comic book art, even if one of the editors was a guy that I didn't like very much. I don't know if I should name him, because he worked in the same shop with Jerry Iger that I worked in. He became a very big shot editor with Mad Magazine, which grew out of the Tales from the Crypt. Yes, that book killed it all. It got to the point--I had little children two and three years old, and we lived on Long Island--it reached the point where some little kid on the block had said, "What does your daddy do for a living?" My little girl said, "He draws comic books." The parents wouldn't let their kids play with my kids. "So," I said, "I guess it's time to get out of the business." They also appointed a judge to oversee comic books. It got ridiculous. They blamed all the evils of society on comic books.

DO: The stamp, what was the

RO: There was a stamp on every cover. It was a stamp that said . . . I forget the words.

DO: Sort of like the . . . not Gold Key but. . . .

RO: No. I worked for Gold Key by the way, now that you mention it. I forget the words of the stamp, but the stamp signified that this was a healthy and clean comic book. What it meant was that if you saw a guy holding a gun in a panel you couldn't show the bullet or the smoke coming out of the gun. You could see "Bang." You just couldn't show the old, you know, comic book way of the smoke and the bullet's trajectory. Of course now, New York City has nothing but guns in the schools.

DO: Yes, they could just go outside. Why read? Just walk out the door.

RO: Yes, it is ridiculous. You mentioned Gold Key. After I left New York, I moved to Pittsburgh and went to work for an industrial motion picture company. The ad for which I found in the New York Times. Loved the job! I was learning television animation and was doing station I.D.'s and beer commercials; Iron City, Duquesne Beer commercials, when the Eisenhower/Hoover recession hit. That was the last big recession--I think the worst one since this one--in 1957, 1958. Certainly in Pittsburgh, which was really a depressed area because of the

steel mills, the business folded; and I was unemployed for four months collecting unemployment checks.

It is a long story. I'm not sure you want me to go into all of it, or how I got on the Pittsburgh Press; but I landed a job on the Pittsburgh Press as a staff artist. That was my intro to newspapers. So, when you ask me if I am a journalist, I never dreamed of newspapers or journalism until that moment.

I was already maybe twenty-nine years old at that time. We loved Pittsburgh. We adored the city, and we were happy to be able to stay when I got the job on the paper. This was a very lucky break because this turned out to be one of the greatest art departments that the world could ever have known. It was a group of men there for a very short time, because most of them were older than me and they began dying and retiring. [They are] names that wouldn't mean anything to you, but [they were] guys who were top notch illustrators and cartoonists and artists. The art director is the man who did the painting which today exists in the Buhl Planetarium in Pittsburgh; Nat Youngblood. He did a mural all around the planetarium. He was our boss. [There was] John Johns, who was an artist, cartoonist, and painter, who wound up running the Art Institute of Pittsburgh after he left the Press, after many years. It [the Pittsburgh Press Art Department] just had people on the staff there that were tremendously skilled in retouching. There was a guy there who did movie illustrations for the theater page with air brush every week. That was magnificent, just gorgeous stuff.

So, as I started to say, it was there in Pittsburgh that I had to do a lot of free-lance work, because I now had two children and, I think, a third one coming. So, I started doing all the free-lance work. One of the things I did was for Gold Key Comics. I did about five editions of a thing called Super Car. I don't know if you remember it, now. It was a British property that was on television with puppets. It was about a doctor and his assistant and a woman, and they had this car that flew through the air. It was called Super Car, and it could do everything. It had all kinds. . . Like the Batmobile, only it flew. It was from England. It had been a big thing on English television. It came here and became a pretty big thing on our television; enough so that Gold Key would do five editions of it.

I forget how I got it. I really don't remember. I must have answered an ad in some trade journal or something, or written a letter cold turkey to Gold Key and said I was interested in doing free-lance work. They sent me a couple of test pages. I did a couple,

and they hired me. That was nice. It brought me back into the comic book business that I really loved.

If I could have made a steady good living at it [cartooning for comic books], I would have loved to have been in the comic book business because you're a free lancer and your time is your own. I didn't mind working from after dinner until four or five in the morning and sleeping for a few hours. It was the summertime, going to the beach all day and putt-putt. So, that was great; but you mentioned Gold Key, and that reminded me of that. I did that for them. That was really the end of my comic book work until . . . well, about the same time. My chronology is getting screwed up; but I know there was some hard times in there and that Matt Baker, my old friend from comics, was now doing Lassie for Dell. He had reached the big time. That was considered a real plum.

DO: Lassie was. . . .

RO: Well, it was the movie property, and they did actual movie scripts in comic book form. I'm not going to use foul language on this thing.

DO: I interviewed athletes.

RO: As Matt said, "I'm so sick of drawing that fucking dog every which way." This was a guy who specialized in drawing beautiful women. That was his forte. You asked me what characters we did back in those days, and there were no characters. It was a period where they had romance comics. There were no set characters. The characters changed with every story. The big Superheroes had died for a period of seven or eight years. They came back strong now; Superman and Batman, but they were all dead.

DO: Yes, that would have been what years?

RO: [It would have been in the] 1950's somewhere.

DO: In the 1950's and early 1960's?

RO: Yes.

DO: It wasn't until probably the late 1960's that you really saw them coming back in after the man landed on the moon, stuff like that, because I remember when I was growing up. I was a kid in the early 1970's and the late 1960's, and things like that, that was all you grabbed. That was it. That was all you looked at. Well, actually a lot of people didn't, but I was always fascinated by it. It seemed like it was a whole new style emerged out of the whole thing. You look at the

early 1960's stuff and then bang. [During] 1969 and 1970, it just seemed like everything was little bit more sophisticated. Maybe going back to the old. . . .

RO: Well unfortunately, one of the things that happened after that period with Dr. Frederic Wertheim was that a lot of seedy characters came into the business for a fast buck. They suddenly had the idea. . . Like you talked about the wonderful artwork in EC. When that was killed and when that ended, two guys again--I can mention names--their names were Levey and Saintangelo. . . .

They [Saintangelo and Levey] met in prison, literally. One had made a fortune with the song sheets. Do you remember in the old days how they published song sheets with the lyrics to all the popular songs? He made a fortune with that, but he went to jail on some tax evasion thing. A guy named Levey--that was St. Angelo--I forget what Levey did wrong. They met in prison.

When they [Saintangelo and Levey] got out, they formed the Charlton Publishing Company. The Charlton Publishing Company's theory was, for comic books, why give people quality art work? [Why not] hire kids who can barely draw; pay them \$75 a week, not per page; and have them grind out shit for you on a studio basis and produce crap in comic books? That is another reason I got out of the business. That went on for a lot of years until near this current day in the 1980's, or maybe late 1970's, when they decided that the quality did pay off and that readers could discern good stuff from shit. Charlton was a disgrace to the business. By the same token, they kept a lot of starving cartoonists at least working during a period when there wasn't much work in the comic book business.

I was invited by them [the Charlton Publishing Company] to go up to Darby, Connecticut where the deal was that if I wanted to, after I got there and looked their plant over. . . They printed their own books and everything. They had warehouse type arrangements with printing presses, color presses and everything. The deal was that they would pay me \$75 a week, and I would work five days a week in the studio for them grinding out pages. It was just like the old company store with the coal mines. If I wanted to buy a house, they would help me get the mortgage; but I would belong them. They would advance me the money, and I would work it off. Anything you wanted like that they would do, but they owned you.

So, I said no, and I decided to quit the business. But, a lot of guys did it, and a lot of guys kept on

working. Maybe eventually, they made a little bit more money, got raises or something from Charlton. I don't know what finally happened, but Charlton just seemed to fade and go out of business. I don't know whether they died or what.

Suddenly I noticed, after I was long gone out of the business, that quality was coming back and good drawing. I was happy to see that inkers get credit; inkers got no credit in my day. It was only the artist. Now it says, "inked by," "penciled by," "lettered by," "written by," and you at least have credits. That is all good. I still yearn. If I had an opportunity to do free-lance inking for some comic book publisher today, I would grab it. I would love it.

DO: Yes, I've talked to a lot of other people in the business. Inking is just the awful, awful part of it.

RO: Really?

DO: Oh, a lot of people I have talked to. They said, "I can't do it." I get the idea. I get the idea. I get all jumpy. I got it all on paper. It is all sketched out; and now, I got to ink all night long. No! I know I don't mind it either. I find it enjoyable. You find new styles, and you kind of fiddle around with it a little.

RO: What happened in the comic book business, and it was probably good training that. . . . I always feel that if you didn't. . . . You'll have to forgive me for this. Talk about provincial New Yorkers; but I don't know how anybody makes it, those who doesn't grow up in New York, in the art world. Because I had such a training that I wouldn't be able to do what I am doing today if it wasn't for that.

What my specialty became was taking art work that was either shitty or that was not drawn thoroughly, because the artist wanted to move onto something else. The penciling that he did would have been sufficient for him to ink, because he knew what he wanted; but my specialty was to take that work, as an inker, and turn it into something really good. So, I began making very decent money because my boss appreciated that fact. I would get all the difficult jobs, and I would make them into something, like an editor I guess, in a film or something.

I loved it. It was great. I really felt like I. . . . When I look at, not my own, but when I would get a piece of art or several pages of art. . . . One artist I'm thinking of in particular whose name was G. Colan--I understand he is still working in New York

somewhere--when I would get his pages, I would almost salivate looking at the penciling and not being able to wait to pick up a brush and start inking this stuff. Believe it or not that helps you in drawing because you are repeating this thing over and over again. You are absorbing a lot of drawing lessons by osmosis. I just don't know how anybody does it any other way.

DO: Vic Cantone, as a matter of fact, does the same thing.

RO: Well, that is a popular name. I am familiar with his name. Oh, that is the political cartoonist!

DO: Yes, from . . . Well, he's not doing much. I talked to him over the phone.

RO: I know who you mean. I think I met him in Washington, D.C.

DO: Who is he with? New York Daily News, with the big thing going on with Murdock, or not Murdock.

RO: Well, Murdock owned it.

DO: All that stuff going on.

RO: Maxwell, I'm sorry.

DO: Same thing.

RO: There was a Murdock who owned other newspapers. Maxwell was Jewish; Murdock was a Scott.

DO: Either that or Australian, I can't remember. Yes, he said the same thing. [He was] very New York, Long Island accent. He was talking to me on the phone. He seemed like a character. He did the same thing. I asked what is going in with him now. He goes, "Well, I'm just free-lancing right now. I'm having a great time."

RO: What happened to his New York. . . ?

DO: The strike I guess. I believe there was a strike going on.

RO: Yes, there was but. . . .

DO: Somehow or another he got left out in the cold. I didn't think he was doing much when I talked to him, and that was only a few months ago.

RO: One of the strange things that I have never been able to figure out, despite all of my sitting here bragging about New York, they never had. . . . They were never

a ripe field for political cartooning. That is very strange. The Daily News had one great one in the old days named Bachelor. Now, I'm going back to the 1930's and 1940's. He was great. After that, they really didn't have anybody of note, and none of the other papers in New York did unless they were syndicated like the . . . papers in New York. In those they would carry Talbot. He was pretty bad. That was from outside.

DO: I've heard that name Talbot.

RO: Well, he was one of the real old timers. You know that the stuff was so hokey. At least Batchelor, that I'm talking about, he had a lot of power. You may know one of his cartoons is reprinted everywhere, every time you pick up a book. I just picked one up in Booksellers the other night, The History of American Cartooning. And there is Batchelor's cartoon, political cartoon, that shows it was World War II, and it shows a young GI being talked to by what looks like a hooker outside. . . .

DO: The war cartoon!

RO: The war cartoon. He's saying, "I'm your daddy. Come on in. . . .

DO: ". . . I'll treat you nice. I used to know your daddy." Oh, yes.

RO: Well, that was Batchelor. So, his stuff had power and flare. He was a cut above most political cartoonists, I believe. He was under The New York Daily News; but after he left in the mid 1940's, I never even thought of looking into the field there because there was nobody doing anything until Herblock came along in the Washington Post. Then, I started to pay attention to political cartooning.

DO: Herblock was really the first one with so much humor involved in politics.

RO: Right.

DO: Other than that, you had the very--this was either a dramatic [trip] to Europe or the March to the Sea and things like that. Then Herblock was, "You guys are taking this a bit too seriously." This whole thing in the late 1940's and early 1950's, it was great to see Herb Block come along and really look at ourselves with a bit more lightheartedness.

RO: Yes, well he started me watching. . . . Of course, he ran in the New York Post, which was the liberal left

wing paper in New York: and in those days, I was very liberal and very left wing. Now, I'm just the opposite. So, I was that way until 1968; then I saw the light. In New York growing up, especially when you're Jewish and when you're brainwashed by your parents into thinking that Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt was God and then you find out he wasn't. You know, that he was actually an Anti-Semite in many ways. I don't take any of it seriously, all of that stuff, politicians.

People usually ask us how much clout we have and how much we have changed the city. I don't think we really have much influences in those areas. I think all we can do is what you hinted that Herblock did: make people laugh a little, entertain them, get a point across. It should be certainly a point that you sincerely believe. Some cartoonists. . . .

DO: Back to work and do it again.

RO: Yes. As you know, and again I don't want to mention names because I like one of these guys very much, but there are some cartoonists today that are criticized even by their colleagues for being simply one line stand up comedians. A lot of them feel that that is not the role of political cartoonists. A couple of people do it very well. I don't want to mention.

DO: You do a good. . . .

RO: Huh?

DO: You do good.

RO: Well, you know it's a difference between being sardonic or funny. I probably fit that group more than. . . . Like, Oliphant, for instance, doesn't. He usually doesn't cling to the obvious. The typical gag that would come along, that everybody else would use, he tries to avoid. He usually has some humor in the stuff, but it is not a known gag. It is not a parody. It is not a play on something, which I do a lot of. I rely on things in everyday life; movies and all that stuff.

DO: Oliphant seems like he gets in the situation and tries to put something very blunt in there somewhere.

RO: Right.

DO: It could be like an international episode, and he'll have some things like, "Kiss my rear," and something like that; something with a little bit of this big thing that is going on.

RO: But it is not a gag.

DO: It is not like, "Well, the other day take my wife . . . please, please."

RO: In fact, he's one of the guys that makes that criticism of some cartoonists.

DO: Yes, I've heard him before.

RO: Well, but I see nothing wrong with it. One of the guys--I've got to mention his name because I love his work. I think Mike Peters' work is tremendous. He gets a bad rap from a lot of people.

DO: Peters does it in such an inventive way.

RO: I think so.

DO: I agree. Peters does it. He is the guy who will come across, but he does it. He can go around tomorrow and say, "Well, I'm not going to do a . . . cartoon. I want to something with a little bit of serious." It will be just as poignant as something to do with the guy. He can be funny and at the same time bring that point right across to hit you and entertain you all at the same time. That's great.

RO: I like him a lot. He lives in Sarasota now. About three hours away from where I hope to be.

DO: So, he is just using the FAX machine up to Dayton, then?

RO: I guess. I don't know. I guess so. I don't know how he does it. He is so busy. He is doing so many things. He just seems to have greeting cards now, that I've seen, and T-shirts. He's got a great one of the dog. . . . I love Mother Goose and Grimm, the syndicated strip. He's got the dog from . . . That's Grimm. [It] is the dog--Grimmy--on a T-shirt, and it shows Grimmy humping a lamp post. It is called safe sex.

DO: I don't know how safe that would be.

RO: Anyway, I know Mike. I have met him, and I have been to a convention with him. He is a wacky, zany guy; very peripatetic. Must be living the fat life on. I think he lives on Siesta Key, outside of Sarasota.

DO: That's a ritzy little area. What year did you finally land the Plain Dealer job?

RO: I left Pittsburgh to come here in 1963, to wait for my

predecessor to retire.

DO: George Toukes?

RO: Ed Kikas. He won a Pulitzer prize for a war cartoon.

DO: The Korean War cartoon, I think.

RO: Right, called The Aftermath. It shows two guys carrying a fallen comrade, and the one is saying, "How old was is?" And the other one says, "Not old enough to vote," or something like that.

DO: No, how did it go? "Do you think he voted?" "No, he wasn't old enough."

RO: Yes, something like that.

DO: That was a good one.

RO: That was, I think, 1954. They had a forced retirement here at that time. They don't actually have it now. I'm just choosing to leave. They had a forced retirement. Ed had to quit at sixty five [years old]. All the executives had a forced retirement. This is an executive position here at this paper. They knew Ed was going to leave; and two and a half years before he left, as they were doing with me a little while ago, they began looking for his replacement. I had just blindly applied for a job in the art department. I was invited to come up. I used samples I had sent, and I met with the editors. They asked me if I ever considered political cartooning. I was flabbergasted, and I said, "Hell, yes!" By that time, I had been in the business in Pittsburgh for six years newspapering. So, I learned about it, and I knew what was going on.

DO: Were you in the editorial cartoonist's business in Pittsburgh?

RO: No. On the staff, I was doing cartoons and illustrations. But, my illustrations. . . . In a way, I was more famous in Pittsburgh than I ever became here. My cartoons were all over the paper everyday, seven days a week, and in color on Sunday, but no political cartoons. What they call little "gloomies," little illustrations with funny stories, a little two column shallow drawing.

DO: No, they don't do that anymore.

RO: Yes, right. I think it was a lot of fun. They had a little weather bird on page one everyday, and I did it every day for years; called Donald Dingbat. He forecast the weather, kind of a "Woody Woodpecker" type

character. Sunday magazine illustrations, and they had a Saturday magazine, which I shared the cover responsibility with Nat Youngblood. He did two a month, and I did two a month. I got paid extra for that, which was a lot of fun. I really had a ball in Pittsburgh. I loved the paper. I loved the city. I made good friends in Pittsburgh. When I went home and told my wife that we were moving to Cleveland, my first wife--I think that is why she's my first wife--she was very upset. I mean very willing to go always, but she was really upset about leaving a city that she had grown to love and a house that she loved. The kids grew up there.

DO: It's a great city. It is a great city. I mean I see a lot of people around here saying, "Pittsburgh, that is just a football game."

RO: Oh God! That is so unfair because it is the other way around. I was there when Mazaroski hit the home run in the 1960 World Series. By that time, I had adopted the Pittsburgh Pirates as my new baseball team because the Dodgers left Brooklyn the same year that I did.

DO: Is that why you left Brooklyn?

RO: No.

DO: But a lot of people did.

RO: No, no. I never picked up my allegiance like one asshole I know, who no longer works here. He was from my area, not Brooklyn actually, but my area. He picked up and became a Los Angeles Dodger fan, and that is ludicrous. I mean these guys no more represent what the Dodgers used to represent, the common man, the scrapping poor blue-collar worker.

DO: Who was it I was I was talking to? No, I'm sorry. I was listening to an interview with Jimmy Breslin, and he said. . . . He and this other guy were sitting there talking one day. They were probably imbibing a little, I imagine. They said, "Well, write down on a list the five people you hate the most." Number three was Walter O'Malley, number three. There was Hitler, someone else, and Walter O'Malley. He was number third on their list. That's wonderful.

RO: I'm surprised he was third.

DO: Somewhere between Hitler and Attila.

RO: That is very true because up until that point the Brooklyn Dodgers were the only franchise, I believe, in the history of baseball, that moved while they were

making money. They weren't losing money. They just wanted to make more money. So, they pulled up this tremendous institution.

I lived and died with that team, and I loved it. My kid, to this day. . .I have a thirty-one year old son living in Miami who knows everything there is to know about the Brooklyn Dodgers and Jackie Robinson because the greatest ball player I ever saw, ever . . . and I saw them all. I saw Willie Mays. And, I'm not taking anything away from Willie Mays. I saw Ted Williams, and Joe DiMaggio was magnificent. But, day in and day out, there was no baseball player, ever, like Jackie Robinson. None.

In Brooklyn, we were fortunate because they televised 154 games. So, we saw them every day. They televised home and away. I don't know if they are still doing it. Well, the Mets are there and I don't know if they still do it with the Mets. But that is the way the Dodgers were.

DO: Then the Dem Bums cartoon must have been, to you. . .

RO: That brings up--I'm going to be running out of time, because that brings up another one of my favorite stories. Willard Mullen who created Dem Bums, I met in Pittsburgh strangely enough. I worship the man. He lived in Manhasset, Long Island. I knew that. He was the greatest sports cartoonist who ever lived.

I met him in Pittsburgh one time, and I was assigned to take one of his cartoons up to the engraving room. He had come to Pittsburgh because his paper in New York was on strike. The Ezard Charles fight--I forget who Ezard Charles was fighting--was in Pittsburgh. He was sent to Pittsburgh because of the strike to cover the fight and to do--in those days, they did a sports cartoon--a half a page of a big paper. He was sent to go to the fight, do a cartoon and have it appear the next afternoon. This was not a morning paper; it was an afternoon paper. I was the early man in the art department. I started work at seven in the morning. This guy came and sat next to me. I was almost beside myself. That night he was going to go to this fight and he said to me, "Kid, in the morning you will find my cartoon here on your desk. You come in at seven. Run it up to the engraving room for me." So, I said, "Sure. I would be glad to do it."

I came in at seven in the morning. There was an empty bottle of scotch on the desk, which could never happen today. You would be fired. There was a bottle of scotch on the desk, with a note stuck in the empty bottle, which he had polished off while he was doing

these magnificent anatomical drawings of the fight. The note in it, hokey as it sounds, said, "Okay coach, here it is. Take it upstairs." What a thrill it was for me to take that upstairs. He spent about four days in Pittsburgh, then died a few years after that.

Now, there is a guy [Mullen] who you might call a journalist as well as a cartoonist because he wrote as good as he drew. All of his drawings. . . . Well, that was the one Mullen episode. That was in Pittsburgh. Never had anything equal that here, where I met anybody as famous as that. What else would you like to know?

DO: Oh, just. . . .

RO: It all went down hill from there. I must confess, I found that I didn't like a lot of my fellow cartoonists that I met at various. . . . Some of them I did. Some I did. In the old days, I liked more than I like today. I used to go to conventions every year and take my other wife. The highlight of that whole episode was a day at the L.B.J. (Lyndon Baines Johnson) Ranch. L.B.J. had been a tremendous requester of original cartoons, all cartoons, and he always promised us that he would take good care of us at the end of his reign. He promised us that when the library--his Austin, Texas library opened in 1972, he would invite us all there as his guests. We really didn't pay too much attention, but he did. We all got invitations to spend a day at the ranch and to spend our convention in Austin, Texas. It was going to coincide with the opening of the library where all of our cartoons were in the archives.

DO: Yes, I just picked up a book not too long ago on L.B.J. It was L.B.J. and editorial cartoons. It was probably only like three or four select cartoonists in the book itself.

RO: Yes. His favorite cartoonist was Jim Berry. He used to be called the cartoonist laureate of the White House. Jim was from Cleveland and was working in Cleveland at the time; but then, he moved to Washington, D.C. We used to always read that Berry was his favorite, but I'm sure he had a couple of others.

DO: He seemed to like the local guys, too. Well, they were the very first people to cartoon when he was running for the House of Representatives' seat in 1948--in 1938; I'm sorry.

RO: He loved cartoons, and he appreciated them and recognized their importance as a history lesson, I suppose. He had a cousin who was his secretary, Willie Day Taylor. One of her main jobs was watching for cartoons

all over the country in which she saw one about L.B.J., even if it was critical. It [her job] would be to contact the cartoonist and ask if they could have the original. Over the years, I must have sent fifty to sixty cartoons. I'm sure everybody else did the same or better. Then, he invited us, and we had a wonderful day at the ranch. That was very exciting . . . with all our wives and kids. I was very impressed that Lady Bird let 150 snobby, sweaty cartoonists, their wives. . . .

DO: Little brat cartoonists.

RO: . . . Kept coming off busses, use her bathroom at the ranch. But, she did.

DO: It's like inviting a field trip, "Come into my house." You know what that can bring. It is horrible!

RO: He did not live in a mansion. This ranch house, lovely though it was, it was charming, was not by any means a mansion. Maybe they had another bathroom somewhere but they steered us into one bathroom. It was like a huge, beautiful four bedroom ranch, with a swimming pool. Certainly not what you might. . . . The setting was exquisite, on the Perdinales River and all that. We had a wonderful time. He took us all over that day. He led a caravan of buses. We had about four Greyhound buses in our group. He led us in his white Lincoln Mercury convertible, through the 2,000 acres that he had, and showed us points of interest and all that stuff. It was very exciting, and I've done some things and been some places that I wouldn't have been if it wasn't for this job.

I had a junket to Israel on the Israeli government because of the job with four other cartoonists. I've been to the White House many times. That was all nice. There again, my philosophy is the only way I can judge a job: if you have a job, no matter how prestigious, [if] it still doesn't allow you to send three kids to college without worrying about it, you haven't got a good job. Go out and get something better. There was no way that I could have sent my kids to the schools that I might have otherwise. I began to realize that if you are not syndicated, it is just a job. It will pay. . . . Unfortunately, when you are at the point of your life like I am now, where you maybe need it the least, you are making the most money. Your kids are already gone and educated and on their own. I guess everybody can say that about every job. It would be nice if you could switch that around.

DO: Oh yes, that is what I always thought. Why would I work now? Why do I have to get a good job, now? Have

fun first, like that, and then get. . . . Let's retire first and then we'll start working. That is what I always thought was the best way to go about it.

RO: You're faced with other problems.

DO: Of course, it doesn't work that way. But, it was always a good gag to throw around in college.

RO: I'm glad that my earning power is at it's peak now. . . . This is my second wife, and she is a doll. She is sixteen years younger than I am. Strangely--I say strangely because I was on that Israeli junket I talked about--she lived in Israel for eleven years. She was then a young Zionist, but she no longer is. She is like me. She is a fallen away heathen.

It was interesting that we [Osrin and second wife] met in 1980. I was divorced. I was single for about five years. In 1972, we compared notes. We were in the same church in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve in 1972. It is a spooky feeling. You are in the same building with somebody that you are going to meet nine or ten years later and marry. It is weird to me. There is a church in Bethlehem. . . . You might say, "Why was I in a church?" There is a church in Bethlehem that everybody goes to on Christmas Eve. The Church of the Nativity and Jews and Gentiles. . . . It's a happening. It is an occasion. Jews, Gentiles, everybody, you have to get special passes from the Israeli government to be allowed there because of terrorism and all that. They have a midnight mass that everybody wants to see. The place is wall to wall bodies. It is not just sitting in pews. They are standing everywhere, and they are all over the place. The Israelis are outside with guitars singing folk songs about Jesus. It is weird, but it is very nice. It is a very nice thing that they should do more of over there. Anyway, that is Stephanie.

DO: What about your work periods? Can you name one episode or one cartoon you think that generated more response?

RO: I think you know what it was. Do you mean angry response?

DO: Anger response, positive response.

RO: Well, positive response was a cartoon I did, I think, in 1972, which only last week I got another reprint request for. It showed the Thinker sitting in a sea of crap; you know, mud and oil and pollution. He is wearing a gas mask. That was it.

DO: Sure, I've seen it.

RO: That seemed to hit a cord, because I got more requests from all over the world, even Yokohama, Japan. The Harvard Bookstore, at the time, turned it into a day-glo poster--which those things were popular then--and sold them. I got ten cents for every one that was sold. There weren't that many sold. Then over the years, always come requests still trickling in for reprints of that cartoon.

There were two infamous ones. One involved Israel, and the Jewish community wanted to hang me. The other one involved George Forbes, and the Black community raised quite a ruckus. That was a more serious one because they picketed the Plain Dealer. This was when George Forbes was running for mayor.

DO: This was a few years ago.

RO: Yes, right. He knew what he was doing. He knew that the cartoon was not racist. He is not stupid. Most of his friends are White, but he used it. He knew he was also going to lose the election, and he needed an occasion. He needed something to stir the troops up. So, he charged me with racism and with damaging Black womanhood, disgracing Black womanhood in the cartoon. I want to tell you that I have never seen or heard such telephone calls and mail. My boss and I got death threats. It was really, really vicious. It went on for several days. It got so I didn't even want to come in anymore. I don't mind taking the flack, but this was getting very debilitating.

DO: Do you think that, if Forbes never really opened his mouth, it would have all passed?

RO: If he didn't point out to his constituents. . . .

DO: That is the way it happened.

RO: Nobody would have said anything. As a matter of fact, I find that my Black brothers--if I can say that in the city of Cleveland--are not complainers. They don't complain easily like Jews and Catholics do. They are very slow to anger. They really don't have a lobbying group or a body that gets on the telephone and has a campaign going against you until--George Forbes organized one with Reverend McMickel and some other associates in the clergy. They sent out the word. People were calling us and telling us, "I got home from work tonight, and I found a message on my answering machine telling me to call the Plain Dealer to be angry about something. But, I don't know what I am supposed to be angry about." They were just calling everybody. Many people did respond and say that I offended Black woman-

hood. Actually, the sad part of it was that it was a shitty cartoon. I wouldn't have felt so bad if it were for something worthwhile. It was not a great cartoon.

The Jewish one was when Israel was crashing into Lebanon, when they were really invading Lebanon, and blowing Beirut to pieces. I had Menachem Begin wearing a lamp shade on his head--it was the Jewish New Year--and he was crashing through a door, knocking over tables and chairs, and saying, "Happy New Year!" He had a bottle of booze in his hand, and it turned out that bottle of booze was the objection. The people didn't care. They didn't give a shit that it was Menachem Begin, because most Jews never liked Menachem Begin. They didn't give a shit that it was ridiculing the invasion of Lebanon. But how dare you . . . because Jews pride themselves on not being drinkers. Although, I know Jews who drink real good. Including me, I enjoy it.

DO: I know a few Irish people, too.

RO: But, I had this bottle of booze which represented power. It was labeled "power." He was drunk with power. But, they wouldn't accept any explanations.

Then, there was another time, that I thought of, with the Catholics when they went ape-shit. There were a couple of times with Catholics, but one I had . . . It was the time that the Pope decided to meet with Yasir Arafat. I had the Pope and Yasir Arafat sitting in a big limousine from the back. You could see their faces in the rear window, and there was a bumper sticker saying, "Have you hugged your terrorist today?" The roof caved in on that one with the Catholics. I've also gotten the Fundamentalists damn mad. This was something that people told me later on I should have known better. But, my boss was a Protestant--sort of a fallen away Protestant--he didn't pay too much attention to religion. We didn't realize what it meant to Fundamentalists and Catholics to use the term, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." I did a cartoon showing. . . I have to see if I can think of all the people. I think I can. Who was the Reverend who ran for President? A white guy, can't think of his name now.

DO: Pat Robertson.

RO: Pat Robertson, thank you. Showed the Reverend Robertson, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. They were the Father, the Son--in some order, I forget the order--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Well, I want to tell you. That was a bad time! It was bad because a lot of them know that I am Jewish. That added to it.

Not necessarily now, mean and angry, but they were so hurt. They were so insulted that it was painful for me to listen to them. I couldn't believe that any people, Jews or whatever, could place such meaning on words or titles. But, evidently. . . .

DO: I'll tell you how sensitive people are to that. The other night, we were in class. I got a night class and stuff, and we were discussing something about Eastern Europe. All of a sudden, I refer to the Una de Church. It's the Byzantine Church, I guess, out of Eastern Europe. All of a sudden, this kid goes, "That is a derogatory statement to our church." He is a Byzantine Catholic. I had no idea. It is the way the Hungarians address it, and it is the way Eastern Europeans address it. So, I was going off on my thing from Eastern Europe. He just got rather mad at me, incensed, and I go, "That wasn't my fault. Why don't you sit back down? It is okay." I'm not like that when it comes to. . . .

RO: You're Irish obviously, and I did have one bad time with Irish Catholics.

DO: The IRA?

RO: This is so obscure that you are going to be surprised by it. Let me preface my remark by saying that at that time my dear friend here at the Plain Dealer--he is retired now--is George Condon, our Irish Leprechaun, House Leprechaun. I showed him the cartoon to see if it was anyway offensive and he said, "No, of course not."

I don't remember exactly what the cartoon showed, but it had Patty's Pig sitting in a bar ordering a drink. You know the expression that I grew up hearing in Brooklyn. He's as Irish as Patty's Pig. I never knew that there was a political story behind that. I still don't know and understand what the political story is.

But, I want to tell you a friend of mine, who's Irish, Ned Whelan who writes for Cleveland Magazine and many publications, used to be a reporter here. He was jogging in Cleveland Heights one night after I did this cartoon. Ned and I were friends. I was walking and he was jogging. I see him coming. I said, "Hi ya, Ned." Well, he wanted to beat the shit out of me right there on the street. "How could you do what you did? I don't understand. How could you do that?" I said, "What? What? What?" He started in with the Irish, with the Patty's Pig. I forget the story, but it is a long political story that I knew nothing about. A lot of Irish Catholics wrote letters, and they were offended--by using Patty's Pig.

DO: Maybe it was like a Tammany thing or something like that?

RO: I don't know. I don't remember.

DO: To tell you the truth, I am not familiar with it.

RO: Had you ever heard of Patty's Pig?

DO: Yes, I've heard of Patty's Pig. I would have done something like that too. I got into trouble, as a matter of fact, recently, for something that they said was racist; but it had nothing to do. . . . It didn't mention anything about the Black community. It mentioned a portion of our city, which is so run down and so. . . it is populated by Blacks, and that's the. . . . They turned it around and said, "This is what you are pointing at. This is the cause." I said, "No, what I'm trying to make fun of is the incompetence in our city government, which is not addressing this problem correctly." A lot of people--they had city council on my tail all of sudden--and people shouting this and all these political opportunists, who think they can make hay out of the whole thing. It's just really ridiculous sometimes. That is the business.

RO: Recently we had. . . . As you were talking, you made me think. We had an episode that I was proud of. It is the first time in my twenty-eight years here that I was totally backed up. Did you say you had the support of your paper in that area?

DO: Yes.

RO: See, that doesn't always happen around here. In that George Forbes episode, I was not supported at all. I was left to hang in the wind; me and Mary Ann Sharkey.

Recently, we had one where I showed. . . . Blue Cross of Ohio bought a loge in the new Gateway Stadium that is being planned for millions of dollars. I showed a little old lady, who is dead, and she is an angel now. She is floating down over the loge, where Blue Cross executives are sitting, and she's saying, "Remember me. I'm Mrs. Feldman. You pulled my hose last week."

Blue Cross's P.R. (Public Relations), William Silverman, in town here, got so infuriated that they pulled out a quarter of a million dollars worth of advertising from the Plain Dealer. Alex Machaskee, our publisher, sent out a memo to his executives saying, "I will not apologize for any cartoon that appears in the Plain Dealer. I will not go begging for business with

my hat in my hand." That was the strongest support I have ever gotten here. God bless Alex Machaskee in that issue. I think his title is "President and Publisher" or some such thing. He is a tough cookie.

DO: Good.

RO: That was very good. Oh, and on top of that, he banned everybody from the William Silverman Company from the building. They are still not allowed to set foot in the building. They are a P.R. firm, so they have business here and other accounts. They want to be in the building, but they are not allowed to set foot in the building. They have been banished.

DO: Oh, from here you mean?

RO: The Plain Dealer building. The William Silverman Public Relations Firm. All of the employees are former Plain Dealer people.

DO: Yes. Well, since I am working for a small company and stuff like that it. It is usually word of mouth and things like that. They have that kind of great support. We were talking about six or seven people in an office. "Oh, yes, we'll support. No problem today." "Thanks guys." And I walk out the door, "What did that idiot do?"

RO: What I mean by support. . . .

DO: Gabriel Wood, who is my editor, she's really supportive of a lot of the stuff. When I get into trouble, she is out there to defend me. She has done it on a few occasions.

RO: Well, when I did that George Forbes cartoon, I just would have liked it if one of the executives would have said, "We don't believe it's racist." But, they never said that. They apologized and all that kind of crap. It was not racist. That is an issue that you really can't argue, anyway. So, I try to stay away deliberately stay away now, from doing those things. You can't win. I'm going to have to run unless you have a specific question that you would like to get in about something. I'll give you another one.

DO: Did you enjoy it?

RO: I enjoyed it. I don't know who this is going to be listened by.

DO: Thousands and thousand of years from now, when they are digging up the archives from the ground, from Lincoln Avenue and Wick Avenue, when they find this interview

then, they will know. So, Boca Raton then?

RO: That's where we plan.

DO: That's where the museum is at?

RO: Yes, coincidentally that just happened. . . .

DO: You mentioned that over the phone, too?

RO: Right, that just happened after. . . . I would like to be able to work for them in some capacity. It is not chiseled in stone. It hinges on my wife getting a transfer within her company. Her company has offices in Boca Raton, and we happen to like Boca Raton very much. We have been there several times. It would be ideal, since she's so much younger than I am and I can live off of her, that if she got transferred to the same company that she loves--she loves her company, which is a rare thing. She loves her job.

DO: Well, you loved your job.

RO: Huh?

DO: You loved the job, would you say?

RO: For a period of time. I can't really say that in all honesty. You know what? Oh, I don't know. Dorothy Parker once said when somebody asked her, "Do you love writing?" I think they said, "Do you love writing?" She said, "I hate writing, but I love having written." So, it is kind of like that. I hope I left something behind. I hope the cartoons that I left to Ohio State University and C.S.U. and this kind of thing mean something later on and somebody can enjoy it. But, it was just a living.

Like I said before, I still couldn't send my kids to school and still couldn't worry about not paying bills. I expected more. But again, I said that may be sour grapes. It could simply be that I'm not a good enough cartoonist; but if I knew that, I wouldn't have gone into the business. You kept thinking you're going to get better and better. I think I am much better than I ever was. People tell me that I am. But, it didn't pay off. Better you should go to college and you should get a job as an executive with some big corporation, or go in business for yourself. That is the best thing of all. Sure, do your own thing, even if it is a McDonald's. I don't care what the hell it is. A McDonald's franchise. . . . That is probably ideal.

If I had it to do over again, I would be in business for myself, something. I was going to do that years

ago, but my first wife wouldn't go along with me. I did all the ground work for checking out a McDonald's franchise when you could have got them for a song. Today, they are untouchable. I would have had to move because of the way it worked when they contacted me. People who already have a McDonald's franchise get the first choice of the new ones that open up, and what's left--like if it is out ninety miles south of Akron--you would have to go and take that one; or [you would have to] pass it by and go on a rotating list and wait for the next opportunity to come up. I didn't want to move my family again. But, I was going to do that.

DO: My uncle, as a matter of fact, looked into a franchise, but it was an Arthur Treacher's. Even Arthur Treacher's is not an Arthur Treacher's any more. Very simple.

RO: There are some around aren't there?

DO: What, Arthur Treacher's?

RO: Yes.

DO: Yes, but they're awful.

RO: Oh, yes. Well, they are all. . . . I think McDonald's is terrible.

DO: But this is especially bad. I didn't think they could actually make stuff this bad, but it is horrible.

RO: Yes, they have one in a shopping center, in fact, where I live.

DO: I think he only had one though. He said it didn't pay off the way. . . .

RO: A young twenty-three year old Australian cartoonist came to visit us a couple years ago. My present wife and I, we took him out to dinner. He was here for the celebration of the Queen's Centennial or something. He won an award. I can't remember his name, but he died at twenty-three years of age. When he went back to Australia, he had a heart attack at his drawing board. [At] twenty-three years old, he died. But, when he was here, he was telling us that McDonald's had just come to Sidney or some place, and we asked him what he thought of it. He said, "Well, we are still trying to figure [it] out. Do you eat the box and throw the hamburger away, or do you eat the hamburger?"

DO: Well, he's no longer with us.

RO: He was a nice kid.

END OF INTERVIEW