

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Theater People From Ohio Project

Theater Experiences

O. H. 604

HELEN MOYER

Interviewed

by

Carol Shaffer Mills

on

December 13, 1981

HELEN MOYER

Helen Moyer is one of the most astonishing ladies living in the Youngstown, Ohio area. She was born on August 6, 1906 in Montgomery, Alabama to a family of social position where the cultural pursuits were taken for granted. Her father was in law, and saw to it that his three "Southern Belle" daughters were well-traveled, and privately educated, and trained in the arts. She was born Helen Weil to an old, southern family.

After Helen went away to study theater in New York, she met Sidney Moyer, a Youngstown, Ohio young businessman, and had a complete change of scenery in her life style, as she has moved to the industrial northern town of Youngstown.

Helen and Sidney had two sons and were established as a socially prominent young family in this area when Helen's interest in theater again cropped up. She was instrumental in the founding of the Youngstown Playhouse at its first site on Arlington Street on Youngstown's north side. In the year 1927 Helen had gone to a small group of theater-minded souls who did dramatic readings for the socially prominent citizens that indulged in theater for a hobby. Helen found herself one of the youngest members of this group, who also engaged in a lot of social activities that were popular for the "better" families at the time. Because Helen had attended Carnegie Tech, quite a daring feat for a young woman in that era, the group looked to Helen, even at her young age of twenty-one, as a leader. Her husband, Sid, always helped with the business end of the theater. The zealous, young group went

to Carnegie to get themselves a director, and this accomplished, they set about their performances at the old Arlington Street Theater.

The Depression arrived, and Helen tells how the group did all of the chores themselves. At that time they engaged the services of young Henry Jones, the courteous and gracious young, black man who had quite a prominent position at the time with a well-known railroad executive. Henry is still with the theater today, as is Helen.

In 1941, the group had raised funds and been given land on the north side for a new theater when World War II broke out and they were unable to get building materials to go ahead with their project. They then rented an old movie house on Market Street from 1941 until they built the theater on its present site at 600 Playhouse on Glenwood and Glenaven Avenues on the south side.

Through the last fifty-some years, Helen Moyer has always worked unflaggingly for the Playhouse, having been its president for seven years. Literally, the Playhouse would probably not have been built in 1959 at its new site without efforts and funds of Helen and Sidney Moyer. This magnificent theater is one of the finest community theater in America, and is known from coast to coast in theater circles. It seats some 700 people, has sophisticated equipment, and many well-known theater people have learned there. It has become so big that it has lost some of its piquant charm of camaraderie. This closeness has diminished somehow, in proportion to the growth. Nonetheless, the Grand Lady of Youngstown theater, Helen Moyer, remains as loving and giving as she was 50 years ago.

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INTERVIEWEE: HELEN MOYER

INTERVIEWER: Carol Shaffer Mills

SUBJECT: Culture in the South, world travel, women's suffrage, theater involvement at the community level, Niles community theater

DATE: December 13, 1981

MI: This is an interview with Helen Moyer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Carol Shaffer Mills, on December 13, 1981. It is 4:00 in the afternoon. Helen Moyer has been involved in every facet of the Youngstown Playhouse for many years. We are going to talk to her about that and the rest of her life.

MO: I was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1906. My mother and father were both born in this country. Their whole families were all born in this country. I was brought up in a very protective background. I lived in a great, big house on the top of a hill. We always had many servants to take care of us. When I was a little girl, my mother used to bring governesses from New York to teach us and make us real ladies. It was really quite a different world from the world we live in today.

My mother had a tremendous influence on my feelings about the theater later on in life. Later in her life she started a community theater in Montgomery. They had built a theater She would act in it. She was in several plays. I can remember one or two that she was in. They raised money, and they built the theater. That was many, many years ago. It was quite a social thing. The people that were all in it, you would let them use your furniture. I remember one play that they did. They had to have flowers on the stage. One of the ladies had a beautiful garden with millions of daffodils, so she wanted to have lots of daffodils on the stage. There

were so many daffodils that you could hardly see the people. When I was in my teens, they were having a community theater; that was many years ago.

MI: What was it called, do you remember? Did it have a name?

MO: Montgomery Community Theater as I remember.

MI: How did your father feel about this?

MO: He always thought everything my mother did was wonderful. He was a lawyer; he was a studious type of man and was very quiet.

MI: What was his name?

MO: His name was Leon Weil. My mother's name was Maimie Weil. My mother's maiden name was Greil. We lived in this world where, as I say, we were mostly surrounded by family. We had a very different type of life than people do today, but I think it was very pleasant.

MI: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MO: I had two sisters; there were three girls. My older sister was five years older, but my other sister and I were only two years apart, so we were very close.

MI: What were their names?

MO: My older sister's name was Janice, and my other sister's name was Mera.

MI: They both are New York City residents now?

MO: Yes, they both live in New York.

My experience in the theater when I was a little girl was absolutely nil. The only thing I remember is what my mother did; I didn't do anything.

MI: It must have rubbed off on you.

MO: I adored my mother because she did so many things, and I thought that was important. I think I wanted to do things like she did.

I went to a private school. I started in a public school. There was a public school only two or three blocks away from me; I started there. That wasn't good enough for us; nothing was good enough for us. My mother, with a friend of her's, started a private school for girls in Montgomery called the

Margaret Booth School. We went to that school from the time we were about seven or eight years old, I would say, until we graduated. It was a real typical ladies school. My husband, Sidney Moyer, used to say that the only thing they taught us was the history of art; they didn't teach us geography or mathematics.

MI: Do you remember the curriculum?

MO: Yes, we had everything, but they stressed history of art. We knew about all the artists in the world. I graduated from high school when I was sixteen.

My mother went to the New England Conservatory of Music to study voice. She went away to school long before people went away to school and studied voice. She wanted to go on the stage even then. Of course, she wasn't allowed to. That wasn't the thing you did when you were a lady from the south. She was always interested in music and in theater all through my life, so I heard about all of these things.

From the time I graduated from high school I had no interest in the theater except, as I said, from seeing my mother do things, but I had never done anything. I then went to Goucher College, and I stayed at Goucher for one year. I wasn't much of a student, and I really didn't like it very much. I don't remember whether I met someone at school or how I ended up that summer going to the Gloucester School of Theater. I'm not sure whether I heard about it or whether somebody I knew was going.

MI: Where is that located?

MO: That is in Massachusetts, in Gloucester, Massachusetts. I went to this summer theater. That was my first experience in the theater. I worked on costumes mostly. There were two ladies who ran it by the name of Cunningham; neither one of them were married. One of the ladies taught and the other directed. We had these special things. We had speech classes and we had to know how to express ourselves. We got on the verandas and we talked to the wind and threw our voices out and did all this sort of thing. I didn't really have any parts to speak of. I had a little part now and then, but did mostly backstage work and costume work. At that time they had a tearoom connected with the theater and I worked in the tearoom one or two afternoons a week. I met a lot of fellows that summer that were in the theater too. One of them later on became well-known in a way, and his name was Hardy Albright. He talked me into going to Carnegie Tech.

MI: Was it even at that time a very prestigious theater school?

MO: That was really the only one. The Yale Drama School wasn't in existence then. It was still sort of strange for the nicer people to go into theater in those days. My mother finally said I could do it, so I decided to go to Carnegie Tech. Hardy Albright was a senior there, and he talked me into going there. That was how my first start was in the theater.

MI: What were some of the things you remember from there?

MO: It was like all universities in those days. You had to be in at certain hours and go out at certain times if you lived in the dormitories. I was in really only one play that I played any sizable part. It was in a one-act play that they used to do for first year students. Ivan B. Paine directed it, and he was quite a famous Shakespearean director. He took quite a fancy to me, and he was very nice to me when I was there. I only went to Tech for one year. I didn't go any longer because then I met Sidney and got married.

MI: You met there?

MO: No, I didn't meet Sidney there. I worked there. I worked backstage, onstage, everywhere in the theater and went to classes all day. We learned about history and speech and so on and so forth.

The next year after I left Tech I went to New York to try my luck on the New York stage. Through my mother--she knew someone who was a friend of Rachel Crauvus--I got a part in a play to understudy Marian Hopkins.

MI: Where did you live?

MO: There were three of us who had an apartment together--my sister who had graduated from college by then, and her best friend, and another friend who was from Cleveland, Ohio whose name was Sue Schoenberger. We all lived together in this apartment on the west side.

MI: How did you feel as a young, southern girl being in this big, overwhelming city?

MO: I had a very nice time. I was fortunate that I got this part. Unfortunately, this play was called "Now Desperate Pilot," by Zoya Akins. It only ran two weeks, so I only had a part for two weeks. I never got to do anything more than be an understudy.

MI: That was quite a beginning though.

- MO: Yes, but I did get to see Miriam Hopkins. She was a big star then. After that play closed I had had some costume experience at Glasta. I had a lot of nerve. Somebody told me that Wanamakers put on a Christmas show every year and that they needed people to do the costumes. So I went down and applied. I got a job working with the costumes for the show.
- MI: Where would the show actually take place?
- MO: In Wanamakers.
- MI: Inside the department store.
- MO: In Wanamakers they would do the show. She would design the costumes. I was her shopper, so I went around and bought things that she wanted and so on and so forth. I had that job until Christmas time. It was funny; I met a lot of people connected with the theater. I went to a party once at Richard Rogers' apartment with some people. I was eighteen at the time. I wasn't impressed, but of course, Richard Rogers was nothing then. He was just a young man like everybody else.
- MI: That was there in New York, yes.
- MO: My roommate Sue Schoenberger was George Gershwin's girl. She used to go out with him all of the time.
- MI: Do you have any memories of him coming around? What stays in your mind about him?
- MO: I just remember he would come to the apartment, and we would all talk. After all, George Gershwin was just starting then. He was a very nice guy; he really was. He was crazy about her. They went together all of the time. She wasn't serious with George Gershwin; he just took her out. All of those people around in their younger days were just beginning. I was a very unsophisticated person, and I would never think of getting in with this one or that one because they were so-and-so. Nothing like that ever entered into my mind of who I was meeting or if I should be especially nice to this person or that person.
- MI: That was probably good in the long run. At least you had all bona fide relationships.
- MO: Yes.
- I met Sidney and got married and came to live in Youngstown. I had just been out of the theater. That was why I left to get married, so I was still interested in it. I went right away when I heard there was a theater in Youngstown. I went

down. At that time they were just doing one-act plays or three-act plays, but it was all done locally with local directors. It had only been in existence about three years.

MI: Would you please tell where it was.

MO: It was in the barn on Arlington Street. Dr. Schivandi had let them use this barn which was behind his offices which were on Arlington. His office faced Bryson down below.

MI: I know it wasn't called the Youngstown Playhouse.

MO: Yes, it was always called the Playhouse.

MI: I thought it was the Youngstown Players?

MO: Well, it was in the original. Yes, it was the Youngstown Players.

MI: I was looking at an old brochure.

MO: When we had the playhouse, it was called the Youngstown Playhouse. It was always called the Youngstown Playhouse. When I first came, there was a group of local people who were interested in theater. They were putting on one-act plays. I was in a play that at that time a teacher . . . I can't remember her name, but she taught at a private school called Yale School. She taught there, and also liked the theater. She directed me in a little play down there. Then the next year I decided that I would direct a play which shows you that there was not very good directing in those days. I was twenty-two years old at that time or maybe even twenty-one. I did "The Followers." Mr. Reed and this lady-- I can't think of her name now--were in the cast. Mr. Reed was the principal of Yale School. It was a one-act play which was a very nice play. Then we did this series of one-act plays.

At that time when I was in the Playhouse, Mr. Charles Ousley, who was an architect here in those days, was interested in the theater. He was president of the theater. In those days the Playhouse was very social. The best people in town were on the board, like the Ousley's, the McCalla's, and the Sampson's, and the Wick's, and all the old-named families in town. This was their hobby--the Playhouse.

MI: It wasn't the north side.

MO: Yes, it was the social side of town. These people were the people who had enough money to do things. This was their

hobby. They liked the theater. They were interested in it. They would come down; we would go out to supper together. We would go to their houses for dinner together. When I first lived here, I never really thought about age. They were years older than I was, but it never really entered my mind. We all liked the same things, and that was all that mattered.

I was very friendly with Mr. Ousley. I said that I thought we should get a professional director. We couldn't ever have a theater if we didn't have a professional director. Why people listened to me when I was twenty-one years old or twenty-two . . . I think it was because they thought I had a background in the theater. So they thought I knew something.

MI: Well, you did.

MO: I probably knew more than they did, but that wasn't knowing a great deal. Anyway, we decided that we would go down to Carnegie Tech, and we would get a director. So we went to Carnegie Tech, and we got our first director to come to Youngstown. We hired him for the following year. His name was Vern Haldine. He came here the following fall. I think we went down in the spring, and he came here the following fall. He started the Playhouse in its first steps toward professionalism. He was a very good director. He just graduated from Carnegie Tech, and he was talented. In those days we didn't have a technical director. We did everything ourselves.

MI: What was the space you were literally working in?

MO: It was a very small stage. I don't remember the dimensions of it, but I would say the whole stage from the back wall to the front footlights was more than fourteen feet deep, and the width of the stage I would say was maybe--counting offstage and everything--was fifteen feet.

MI: That is the wings and everything?

MO: When we would do a play, we would come sweeping . . . everything was very limited, but we did some very nice plays. I think we thought they were a lot better than we would think they are today.

MI: What year was it when he came?

MO: He came in about 1930.

MI: Was Sidney involved?

- MO: Sid always was involved because I loved it. He was always involved in the finance part of it. He would help us with everything we needed help in. He later--many years later--became treasurer. He was treasurer for about seven or eight years.
- MI: He just kind of approved of what you did and was happy.
- MO: He would work at the box office. In those days we ran our own drives; we did everything. We made the costumes; we cleaned the stage; we did everything. Then the Depression came along. I can't go into the whole history of the Playhouse. It is just too long to do that. But after a few years Vern Haldine left and went to Des Moines, Iowa. Of course, he got a better job there. The community theaters were beginning all over the country. They had chances to get more money. I can't think of the name of our second director now. We didn't hardly pay anything in those days. In those days there was a place called Lincoln Apartments which is now part of the university. It was on the corner of . . . It was from Wick and the next street over.
- MI: The one in the middle by the edge of Jones Hall there--that little side street.
- MO: It goes from Rayen to Wick.
- MI: Yes, it is a short street.
- MO: That was where the Lincoln Apartments were. They have since torn them down and built something for the college there, but in those days all of the directors lived there because it was so near the Playhouse. It was just around the corner. They could get a room and a bath there. Then they had a restaurant downstairs in the basement of it which was a tearoom which was very nice. We used to eat there all the time. The directors lived there. They would come over to the Playhouse.
- Then Ted Veeman came. He had taught at Carnegie Tech, so he was quite a step up from anything that we had had. He was really a fine teacher and a good director. He stayed for three years, and he married a local girl.
- MI: From Youngstown, Ohio?
- MO: From Youngstown.
- MI: What was her name?
- MO: She wasn't from Youngstown. I think she was from Girard or something, from this area. I don't remember her name anymore.

MI: You lived on the north side?

MO: We lived so many places the first ten years we were married. It was during the Depression. Every house we would live in would be taken over by the bank, or we went to the bank and the bank would sell it; we would have to move. We moved five times in ten years.

MI: All on the north side?

MO: All on the north side. We lived on Elm Street, Upton Street, Fairgreen, and Selma, so we lived all over.

We had many years of many directors. Then we closed the Playhouse because of the Depression; we couldn't afford to keep it open, and we owed the bank money. We had a mortgage because we remodeled the barn and made it into a theater.

MI: On Arlington Street?

MO: Yes. We had closed it during the Depression. This friend of mine, Mrs. Richard Jones, who doesn't live here anymore, and I got together and decided to give a play out at Idora Park to raise money to open the Playhouse again. I was very naive. I was going to direct the play. We had the tryouts at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), and all these people came. Two or three of them were very good and very attractive looking. I thought this was just fantastic. I cast this young man--I won't mention names--into the play. He is from a very prominent family in town. I cast two men. One was a lawyer, and he also is a very prominent lawyer in town. They were both very attractive men. I thought this was just going to be so great. Then I started calling rehearsals, and they wouldn't show up. I finally got desperate and called their offices. This one lawyer's secretary said to me, "Well, Mrs. Moyer, I think you should get someone else in that part because so-and-so is out of town, and I don't know when he will be back." After that happened with the other man too I found that they were both alcoholics. They were good, but they weren't dependable. The one stayed in the play; the other one just disappeared. I had to put someone else in his part. The one stayed in because he didn't have such a big part. The first night the show opened at Idora Park he bought a case of liquor.

MI: Where was it staged at Idora Park?

MO: They used to have a theater at Idora Park. It used to be where Desmond Players used to play.

MI: I wish you could tell about that.

MO: All I know is that they had this theater there.

MI: I never knew that.

MO: She had what they called the Desmond Players in the summer.

MI: Where would that be, down at the entrance by what they used to call the old German Beer Garden or down toward the dance hall way?

MO: Down the dance hall way.

MI: I had no knowledge of that. How long was that in existence?

MO: I don't know how many years it had been there before I came, but they tore it down maybe ten years after we did the show in it.

We opened the Playhouse again, and we got it going. We started on a whole . . . We hired a director and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Veeman, who came. Everybody was so poor in those days. They had these two boys with them who worked for practically nothing. They used to sleep at the Playhouse on cots, and they used to wear nothing but T-shirts; they couldn't afford to have any shirts. In those days people who loved the theater would work for nothing. They really did. One of the boys got quite far up in the theater, not a great star, but he worked in a theater for years after that with jobs that paid. They had nothing. They just went with the Veeman's because the Veeman's took them along and gave them enough to eat.

MI: They had a roof over their head, and that was about it.

MO: Well, we left Arlington Street. This was long after the war. We decided to build a new Playhouse. We were raising the money to build a new Playhouse. We had raised about \$150,000. The city had given us a lot where Wick Avenue extension is; it runs up into Thornton. It was on the corner of Wick and--I forget the name of the other street that runs down the hill to Logan. They had given us the lot. We were already to build when the war broke out.

MI: This was in the 1940's then?

MO: Yes, so we couldn't get any materials to build. We had to give up the idea of building because we couldn't get the material. So the Playhouse would have still been on the north side. So we couldn't build the theater, so we decided to buy. We didn't have a theater because the Playhouse had burned down. We decided to buy the movie theater on Market Street.

MI: What movie theater was that?

- MO: I don't know the name of it. We bought this old movie theater, but it was on Market. We took off the front. We changed the front of it from a regular movie theater thing, and we added a wing onto the back to have more stage room and dressing rooms. We fixed it all up. It was really quite a nice theater. It seated about 250 or 300 people.
- MI: That was quite magnificent for those days in this town.
- MO: We had some really wonderful years there. When we first went in, the first play that we did there was just nothing. We dressed in the basement, and there was water all over the basement while we were trying to get dressed in between.
- MI: Who were some of those early people who worked with you that stand out in your mind?
- MO: There were so many who aren't even in the Playhouse anymore. There were several girls who have moved away since from here who were in the play at that time. We did "The Women", I know, and Esther Hamilton was in it. There were a lot of people as I have said that have gone out of town and who are married and have different names now. Richard Reynolds was president, and at that time he was working at the funeral home on Arlington. I forget what it was called then, but now it is Shriver-Allison. Then it was something else. He was the president. His wife was very active. We had different presidents. We had Dr. Esseck, who was principal of the school. There has been a whole line of people who have come and gone since those days. It would take me two years to tell you all that stuff.
- MI: Through all those years you always remained involved.
- MO: I have always been in the Playhouse. I was president for seven years when it was on Arlington Street. Then I have been on the board ever since.
- MI: I think that is why you are usually regarded.
- MO: I am the only one, I think, who has been around that long. As I have said, I started and I have stuck through it thick and thin. Then we decided to build a bigger theater. It was really through my husband and myself and some people who are no longer around that we went out and raised the money to build the theater we are in today. So we really have raised the money to build all the theaters that we had.
- MI: I know little about how one goes about raising money. I know that you just don't go and open a door and a wheelbarrow fills up with money.

- MO: You have to have teams. You have to get people, and Sid was very good at that. He did a lot of that in Youngstown. He had lots of friends who were willing to help him because he had helped them. We just went around to people and sold them what we believed in, that we needed a new theater. We built it. When we first built it, it wasn't like it is now. We decided to build a big shell and fill in afterwards. We knew that if we didn't build it big enough we would be sorry. So we built it big enough. We had the theater and the seats in it, but the rest of it wasn't finished. Everything was just concrete walls.
- MI: Was that 1959 that it opened?
- MO: No.
- MI: I'm trying to recall in my lifetime that it was in the late 1950's.
- MO: We have been in this building about twenty years.
- MI: I know that during the war years you were opened.
- MO: We were in the Playhouse on Market Street.
- MI: How was the business during the war years?
- MO: We always had good audiences, and we always sold membership tickets. In those days you belonged to the Playhouse. We sold a membership, and then you bought your ticket separate.
- MI: The membership was to keep it going and to sustain it?
- MO: That is right, yes.
- MI: There are so many different things about that type of building. That cooperation that is needed among people . . . When I first went away to other parts of this country, I was surprised to learn that it is known all over America--the Youngstown Playhouse.
- MO: Well, it is.
- MI: It is quite well-known and it is respected. When you say you worked there in New York City, in California, in both Los Angeles and San Francisco, in Chicago, in the south and Florida, people know about the Youngstown Playhouse. It has produced a lot of very talented people, but not just people who are famous.
- MO: No, people who are good at what they are doing.

MI: And the training ground for young people. It is invaluable. You get a chance to make mistakes there.

MO: The difference that I see in the theater today and what it was when we were on Market Street and on Arlington Street is that we had much more of a dedication to what we were doing. We had directors who were very interested in teaching people about it. Today it has become that they do very good work and they do, but it has gotten so big that people don't have the same involvement in the institution that they used to feel.

MI: Kind of like a camaraderie thing.

MO: That is right. If you were in a play, you would always have parties afterwards. It wasn't the party part, but everybody felt very close to each other. I'm sure that the kids who are in plays today feel close while they are there, but they don't feel any connection with the Playhouse.

MI: It doesn't really remain a connection even between each other I have noticed.

MO: We were so interested in each other. If you did something in the theater, you weren't just interested in necessarily being in the play or interested in any part of the play.

MI: The whole place as a whole?

MO: The whole place, yes. It is important to you to be part of this life that you have. The director was much more interested in each individual. It was much more personal than it is today. I suppose when it gets to be this size, it is hard to have that.

MI: What is the size now, Helen, of memberships?

MO: We have 5,000 members. In those days if we had 2,000 we thought we were doing very well. I don't think we had that many, not on Market Street.

MI: How many seats does the present Playhouse hold?

MO: We seat 600 now. The plays run much longer. We used to run about four or five nights. Now we run three weeks, three weekends. There is so much more going on. We used to do six plays a year. Now we do eight plays a year. Things have gone up so in cost that you have to run things to pay for everything. We used to always make both ends meet. In the days when we were on Market Street, for instance, my husband was the treasurer. He watched every penny that we spent. We could only use so many tons of coal a month. We had a coal furnace in those days. We were only allowed

to use X amount of dollars. If it got cold in the theater, we just had to work when it was cold. We weren't allowed to burn much. When we turned over to gas, we weren't allowed to use it up. We had a budget, and we had to stick to it. There was so much for heat, so much for lights, so much for this, and we stuck to that budget.

MI: When you say that now, I am reminded that the young people that I do know through my children who are involved don't even think of the budget. It is kind of like this magic place that is just there. What bothers me--I don't know about yourself--but they don't even think of it as a magic place. They take it for granted; it is there.

MO: That is right.

MI: Money never enters their mind, that it would cost money to run that place and leave the lights on and run the water and take the make-up. When I first went there, I noticed that make-up was handed out to you very carefully. A record was kept of it. You were assigned. You just didn't have an endless supply of things. You were aware of it, and that was twenty-one years ago or so. It seems that the bigger it got the more . . . It branched out. The theaters branched out. They have that room that they call the Helen Moyer Room where they hold banquets and things of that nature. They also rent that out to different places, don't they?

MO: Yes.

MI: For different functions it is possible to rent it.

MO: There is a big difference in the way everything is to begin with. The technical directors, I know this year when I was in a play, I couldn't believe that the technical director works during the day and doesn't stay at night. When we used to be, the technical director ran the show practically every night. He never left the theater at night when the shows were going on.

MI: That was when he mostly had to be there, yes.

MO: They worked every night. In those days while we were working onstage, they would be working backstage.

MI: Now it is set up that they will stage it and set it up and then they leave.

MO: And nobody is there.

MI: Then there is the stage manager and that is it.

MO: The stage managers take over, and the technical director goes

home at 5:00. Nobody works at night at all anymore.

MI: Helen, would you say something about working at night? I don't know anybody who would know more about this than you. They used to have things in the theater called work nights.

MO: That is right.

MI: Tell about that. I think those were great, and I think they are needed.

MO: That was when the technical director would be there at night. Then they would have work nights. They would have everybody come in and paint scenery and do all of these things together and costumes.

MI: It was fun too.

MO: Everybody worked together because the technical directors were there. We had one technical director. Now we have three, and nobody is there at night.

MI: You would think perhaps they could work that out where they could rotate that duty.

MO: I don't understand it. Of course, I have said a lot about that, but it doesn't do any good.

MI: What I am curious about is that I remember it was fun to participate in that to go down and learn how to paint a flat.

MO: That is right. We used to do all of those things. We have great, big workshops back there.

MI: Now, yes.

MO: They could be doing it all the time at night. In those days you didn't have any room hardly, but you did it at night.

MI: That was part of the magic of the theater, to learn what went on back there too, not just out on the stage. My children got to learn. I was able to take them down. My one son became very involved. You never thought of money. That was where you went after school and worked backstage. Money wasn't part of anyone's thoughts.

MO: When you only work to 5:00, any school children or anybody who wants to work who is working can't come until after that time.

- MI: If there was just somebody there because that person has to be there to supervise, to instruct, and to guide . . .
- MO: That is right.
- MI: Their presence is needed.
- MO: It is a whole new world when a theater is run on a time schedule where everybody stops at a certain time.
- MI: Nine o'clock to five o'clock like a regular business.
- MO: That is right.
- MI: That is not the theater.
- MO: That is the way it is run. That never was theater. Theater just doesn't run on a time schedule. I think that is why we have lost a lot. It is still successful, so you can't knock success. I think one reason that a lot of people don't have that dedication is because they don't feel a part of it because they will only do one show and then they are off.
- MI: That was when you used to get to know everybody too when you did all that backstage. I know when I first went there--of course, you were doing a lot of work at that time--you got to know all the different people from different back-grounds. I loved to go down there at nights. That was a place that was free; I didn't have to spend money. I met people; I had company, and I was learning something and doing something that I loved. All of a sudden that went away, and you can't do that anymore.
- MO: I know. I think it is a shame. I think people who feel that way should say something about it.
- MI: I said something. I even talked to Ron Fraser about it. He tried to start something like that in a way, but I don't know what happened.
- MO: I think that was why he didn't stay around longer. I think he is not backstage anymore because he did want to do all of those things, and they didn't fit in with the plans.
- MI: Yes, he said that he would stay at night and that he would help alternate and that he would show people things. He lived a stone's throw from the theater which was an advantage. This was a young man who came in from New York City who was quite experienced in theater for like twenty years. At the age of forty he was in theater twenty years or twenty-two years. He was willing to do that. He does know a lot about that. It seems a funny feeling even now to walk back-stage at night and see it all empty.

- MO: I think it is wrong. I think that any theater to be alive should be busy all the time. It should have people not just rehearsing, but people doing things backstage, front stage, all around. But it takes somebody to be there who is willing to oversee them.
- MI: And give their time. The time is the thing.
- MO: Paul has a family and wants to be home at night, which is all right, but they should have somebody else there at night. He doesn't have to be there.
- MI: Young people used to fight for that honor to be the person to kind of be in charge backstage.
- MO: Yes.
- MI: I know that.
- MO: Now they have trouble finding people.
- MI: They have to go out and drag people in. I remember my friend Patty; she is a production manager. She used to get on the phone with a big list and a notebook after she left her job in the daytime and call people, and for hours.
- MO: Maybe it just isn't the Playhouse.
- MI: No, it is kind of an attitude everywhere.
- MO: You will find that in all organizations today. Everybody is having this problem of finding people who will work and do things because they love it, not because they think they are getting paid. They want to be paid for everything. They want a job; they don't want to do volunteer work anymore. There is not an organization in any city that is not having trouble finding volunteers.
- MI: In any aspect of any kind of work or business.
- MO: In anything, yes.
- MI: I'm reminded of Carousel Dinner Theater over here southwest of us. I went there three years ago to do shows. I remember I said to them, "What time do you want me to come help work on the sets?" They acted like I was crazy when I even said that. They asked me what I meant. I said that I thought in summer theater we all pitched in.
- MO: They used to be that way.
- MI: They said that the actors didn't do that. I wanted to do that. That was not welcome. In fact, that was not to be done.

MO: It is not just here it is happening; it is happening everywhere. I think that is one of the saddest things about the theater here. I don't know about other places, but I'm sure it is true everywhere else.

MI: They don't have work nights in New York. I know that.

MO: You can't do things because you love to do them and care about them. You have to do them . . . Everything has to be put into a certain groove.

MI: As you say, people said that we could go there and work if we wanted to, but they couldn't just let us have the keys. There has to be that one willing person--at least one--who leads a responsible position in the organization who will be willing to take on that command post even if it is just overseeing and being there to disperse keys even maybe. You can't just have a free-for-all because then you would have a problem.

MO: I just don't think people have the dedication and the love for what they are doing that they used to have. They are doing it because he or she wants to do it for what they get out of it.

MI: It is kind of fashionable to do this or that.

MO: That is right. Now everybody is going onto television and dancing. Ballets have become a big thing. They want a career. They want to be this, but they are not doing it because . . . naturally you ought to love what you are doing, but it is all sort of a selfish thing. They are only taking that part thinking that it might be their chance to get something better.

MI: Can you think of any way it could be changed, Helen?

MO: Yes, I think that it could be. I think that the people who lead these groups, if they had that feeling about it and they were willing to give up their time and energy and efforts to do these things . . . Bentley runs the Playhouse in a very businesslike way, and it has been very successful. I'm not criticizing the success, but Bentley doesn't feel this way about having the Playhouse alive at night unless somebody was paid to do it.

MI: Not only that, but I know that it has been remarked to me when we have brought this up that it costs money to keep it open.

MO: That is right.

MI: It costs money to pay the lights.

MO: Yes. It is open at night.

MI: If someone is rehearsing in there and all the other rooms are empty and the backstage is empty, is it a couple of dimes more to turn on a few more lights?

MO: When we did "On Golden Pond" we had five people in the cast. We were there every night and except for the stage manager, there was nobody else in the theater.

MI: Empty, yes.

MO: It was absolutely empty. There was nobody backstage; there was nobody front stage. I feel that there should be other activities going on there at night, I really do.

MI: There is wonderful costume space.

MO: We used to have people working upstairs in the costume room every night. They would be up there--a whole group of people--sewing and fixing. Now they have one girl. She does all that herself. Nobody helps her. There is nobody there doing any of that with her; she is doing it.

MI: I remember feeling a nice, warm feeling. I would go down to the Playhouse at night just to see what somebody was doing and help. It gave you a relationship to have, a group of friends.

MO: It used to be so . . .

MI: I got in at the tail end of that. That was all. I miss it, so I can imagine how you would notice that difference from being the kernel person who started it all.

MO: Everybody did everything, and everybody was interested in everything. I would spend hours on the phone calling people about getting furniture for the plays and getting clothes. There wasn't a friend who didn't lend me their clothes for people to wear in the Playhouse. We would call up everybody in town and go to their houses and pick out the furniture. Half of my house was on the Playhouse stage most of the time. Paul does very nice sets, and he gets things, but he doesn't have anybody working with him to do these things.

MI: No, he doesn't.

MO: He calls up the people he knows. When I was in "On Golden Pond" I got a lot of the furniture because I was interested in doing that. Most of the people in the plays don't even know what they are going to wear. There used to be a committee who would come and watch the clothes, and they would

say if they thought the dresses were hanging right or if they thought the costumes were right. They would take an interest in what everybody was wearing. Today nobody knows, except the technical director and the costume person will come and talk to you. You will bring over what you have, and if you don't have it, they will find it. There was a group of people that that was all they did was find clothes for the Playhouse.

MI: I'm thinking of a time in the last seven or eight years. I had taken a piece of furniture there, an old, wooden rocking chair. I brought it down to be used at the Playhouse. There were a group of young that were found to be taking things out of the Playhouse and furnishing their apartments with them. Thence went my grandmother's chair. I was very upset about it. That was nothing. Imagine some of the finer things they took. That is a new type of people.

MO: That has happened. I mean, people do steal things over there. They take things.

MI: There is always theft.

MO: There are all kinds of people that come into everything. They have had problems like that.

We furnished this house on the corner that the Playhouse owned. The technical director used to live over there. One technical director that left took all the furniture with him. I don't remember his name, but I remember he moved out everything. All the things that I had given the Playhouse he just took.

MI: There is more to that. Like you said, it is more than just theater. That attitude . . . Aren't laws in the commercial businesses numbering in the hundreds of thousands per proportion of what is used to be. People take home paper clips, rubber bands, paper, envelopes, anything that is in the country today.

MO: As I said, I don't think it is just the Playhouse that these things have happened to.

MI: No.

MO: I think it is all over. I think it is just a change in the whole attitude of everything in the world. People don't care about anything. They don't feel that they owe things to their community; they feel the community owes it to them.

People took clothes out of the costume room. People would give clothes, and other people would go up and take them.

- MI: When I was going to college at Youngstown State University and working at the Playhouse, I said to this one fellow at college what a really beautiful, old Civil War coat he had. I asked him where he got it. He said, "Oh, I was in a show at the Playhouse, and I just took it."
- MO: That is right. People took costumes. They still do. It is an attitude. They don't mind taking things anywhere else. It is this feeling that if it is public, it belongs to them and that they can just take anything they want because everybody thinks . . . They don't realize the Playhouse had a big budget they had to meet. We have a budget of over \$300,000 now. That is a lot of money to raise every year. We have a big staff, and we have tremendous light bills and tremendous heating bills, and tremendous upkeep on the outside. We have huge parking lots that have to be cleaned and taken care of. The Playhouse has to be cleaned. There is tremendous upkeep in the Playhouse. The people who come in and use it don't even question where the money is coming from.
- MI: You are right there. It never enters their mind.
- MO: It never enters their mind. We have to raise some money this year. I said at the meeting the other day that we have to make people realize that we need the money. Nobody seems to understand that the Playhouse doesn't just float along. Nobody thinks we need anything; they think we are self-supporting.
- MI: That isn't ever impressed upon newcomers, Helen.
- MO: No, nobody.
- MI: I remember in the old days too--I can't name the names--but there would be people that would sort of greet you when you first came into read for readings. They would acquaint you and talk to you. I know Nancy Jones for one used to do that somewhat. I think she did it more on Market Street; I'm not sure. I know it happened to me when I came there, and people showed me around. I was instructed about the place, not instructed, but somebody who cared enough to talk to me about it.
- MO: I think that would be a very good idea that everybody who is in a play before the rehearsal starts should be told all about the Playhouse and how it started and the background and what it costs to run it today to understand the cost of it so they will know what they are doing. When they come to be in a play and just walk out and leave, they don't have any idea of the Playhouse.
- MI: They read. Then if they would get a part, they would show up at the rehearsal.

MO: That is right. They have fun; they enjoy it. They want to dance; they want to sing; they want to act, and they are only thinking about that. They are not thinking about the Playhouse. There is something wrong with the whole idea of not making these people feel a part of the institution that they are taking a part.

MI: Who can be the people to start that?

MO: I think the production manager could start it, Laurel; he is in charge of production. I think he could start it very nicely.

MI: Are they open to suggestions like that?

MO: Sure. We have a committee now that is planning for the future of the Playhouse of things that we think should go on, and I will put that in there.

When I was over there, I hadn't been in a play for ten years or hadn't seen anything backstage really for ten years. I could see the difference in what has happened in ten years. They would have all the lights on in all the workshops. I would tell them that we didn't need all those lights on. Nobody worries about turning lights anywhere. I will say that Bentley tries to tell people to turn out the lights, but they have to understand why they have to turn out the lights.

MI: I'd like to do something, and I feel very helpless. I know that it has to come from individuals. It starts that way. A magic solution doesn't come overnight.

MO: You can start at the Playhouse. You can start offering to go down with each cast, taking them through the Playhouse and telling about it, what it means to be a part of it. They would be delighted.

MI: Do you mean like give a little lecture to them on the history?

MO: Yes, something about caring and what it has meant to get this building and how hard it is to take care of all these things. How much it costs and how much they need everybody to feel that they are part of it and it belongs to them, that they must feel important in this institution.

MI: Do you think a good night to do something like that would be after the cast has been selected?

MO: Yes. I think at each play you could do that. You could even do it in between plays.

- MI: I was thinking the readings bring many more people in than the casts.
- MO: You could do it for the readings; you could do it for the casts; you could have special nights just for people who want to come and see backstage.
- MI: And let them be aware of it through the paper and announcements on the radio and things.
- MO: Yes.
- MI: I was thinking without the Playhouse in my life when I was in my twenties, I wouldn't have had any social life or friends.
- MO: You could suggest to Bentley to do a membership drive. All of those people who work on the membership drive don't have any idea of what they are doing, none of them. People get on the drive to sell tickets. They don't know what they are selling. They are selling eight plays, but they don't have any feeling for the plays. You could have a special night for the membership drive people. During the membership drive you could have a program; in the intermissions you could talk to the people and tell them about the Playhouse and what it means and why it is important and how important the audience is because they are a part of it. The audience pays for their tickets, support, and things. Tell them about the budget and about the Playhouse. They don't know; they just sit there and see a play.
- MI: Would you think it would be too crass to have graphs hanging around showing how the Playhouse dollar is put in?
- MO: I think anything that makes people understand it . . .
- MI: We are such a graphic nation anymore. We want to look right at something physically rather than listen.
- MO: Yes. You could have that. You could have a whole lobby show of something like that. I think it is important. I think it is a wonderful project that you could do for the Playhouse. It would be very meaningful if you did it in a way that people would enjoy.
- MI: Is there anything that you would like to sum up saying about having a career that spans how many years now in Youngstown?
- MO: I have been in the Playhouse for fifty years.
- MI: Fifty years?

MO: Really fifty-two. I started in the Playhouse the year after I came to Youngstown, and I have been married for fifty-three years. It is really fifty-two years that I have been active. I'm seeing lots of changes, but I still love the theater.

MI: You still go to the theater. You just mentioned you went to New York.

MO: Every year I go to New York twice a year and see every play there is to see. I go to every play at the Playhouse. I go backstage every time and see everybody. I still care about the theater. I think we should have much more feeling and dedication and belief in what it is. We owe it. You can't have things without owing them something. If you love something, you have got to give something to it just like you do to your family. So you have to do the same thing with the Playhouse. You get as much out of it as you give. If you love something and do a great job in it, you are getting as much reward as the organization or the thing that you love is receiving.

MI: I've known some people who have had some very dismal lives and the Playhouse opened up doors to them and welcomed them. It gave me and my children a place to belong to when we were on our own with no family and just us. It certainly must have done that for countless dozens of other people.

MO: It meant a great deal to a great many people. I feel like it would be wonderful if we could get one night at the Playhouse and get everybody back who the Playhouse has meant something to at some point in their lives, to just come back and talk about what had happened to them.

MI: Like a reunion.

MO: Yes, I think it would be very exciting. We have a list of all the people who were ever active in the Playhouse. We should just send them a letter or call them up.

MI: It doesn't have to be a ruby ball or anything.

MO: Oh no, no. Just a night at the Playhouse. Come down and talk about what you thought and what you felt and why you were in the Playhouse and why you left the Playhouse. We should all get together and talk everything over.

MI: I want to ask you a question about Henry Jones who is the custodian or grand title of superintendent of maintenance. He does everything.

MO: He has been there so long.

- MI: He is busy every minute doing something, and this man is eighty years old. I never saw him sit down. There is a man who gets up at 6:00 and goes over to the Playhouse and opens it up and does his little rituals that he is so proud of. He takes a little time off then, comes back over and is there at night. Henry is part of that thing that is missing that you are talking about. What is your feeling on that kind of a thing? Henry does more than just work at the Playhouse.
- MO: He came from a generation when people felt that way. They cared about what they were doing. It wasn't just a job. You cared about what you did. You didn't mind working overtime. You didn't mind doing something because you loved it. Today everybody feels that they have to be paid for everything they do. They can't do any more than they have to. There is just a whole new attitude.
- MI: I know that Sidney Moyer was active there until he was ill.
- MO: He was always very important to the Playhouse because he helped raise all the money to do all of these buildings. They never would have had it without him.
- MI: It isn't all just art.
- MO: No. He really worked at the money part of it for the organization for years and years. All these drives, without him we wouldn't have gotten the money. He was the person the people knew and respected. I was just active in the Playhouse, so they wouldn't have listened to me like they listened to him.
- MI: Alone, but you were kind of a formidable combination.
- MO: Together, yes. It was only because he had this ability and knowledge that we could do these things. He knew the right people to see and who to talk to and was respected.
- MI: I remember I brought up Henry because it seems to me that he spoke about Sidney Moyer with great love and respect when I talked to him.
- MO: Yes. Anyone who knew him felt that way.
- MI: How many children did you have?
- MO: I had two boys. Neither one of them are in the theater.
- MI: Had they any proclivities or interests in it?

- MO: Richard used to be interested in the theater, but I discouraged it. Knowing theater people I didn't think that was the career. In those days you didn't have television to go into and all the things that have developed today. Maybe I was wrong, but I didn't want him to be just an actor. I didn't think he had that much talent. I think he had to be so talented to really get anywhere in theater to make a living out of it.
- MI: Bentley said that you had to have monomania and to keep working at it too.
- MO: That is right. You have to have really great luck as well as great talent. You need both. I think you can do much more in television. I think there are lots of things you can do that you don't have to be that talented to do. In those days there wasn't that field, so I discouraged him in that respect. I think that lots of people when they are young love to think that they want to be on the stage. I think it is because of the type of person they are more than their ability. I think that Richard just heard about the Playhouse so much that he thought it was an important thing to do.
- MI: You do have to have some talent.
- MO: A lot of it.
- MI: Anymore a lot of people act like that just doesn't even matter. They think that just because they have money to go to school for acting and learning things . . . School, I think, is nice. It rounds you out and it helps you. It is important. It does not give you talent. It can enhance it.
- MO: You can see even at the Playhouse there is very rarely, when you see these plays, that you see a very talented person. They may be talented in one way, but if the stature is wrong, if they are too small or too fat or too tall or too something else, they are not going to make it. When they dance when they go across the stage, you can just see the way they walk. A walk can make you or break you on the stage. You have to be able to cross that stage and just look . . .
- MI: Pure effortlessness.
- MO: You just can't have a bad walk or you can't have something else. You can have it at the Playhouse in Youngstown . . .
- MI: And try it out there.
- MO: But you can't have it on Broadway and get it to the top.

Certainly at the Playhouse in Youngstown where you have a limited group of people to pick from you can't start worrying about how they walk and how they do all of these different things. If you are talented and you want to go to New York--of course, you are not going to listen when you are dying to go to New York when you are in your teens--and you want to go on into theater . . . Before they would leave town I could tell you who was going to get there and who wasn't because you have to have a certain quality or something different or be exceptional in so many ways to be noticed.

MI: Also to survive with the money until you get it.

MO: And contacts besides. If you can have all the contacts in the world, if you didn't have these other things too, it wouldn't matter.

MI: I am reminded of someone like Frank Sinatra's son. He certainly had a pleasant singing voice. He had all the contacts in the world that could be available to you in one way or the other I would imagine, and parental support. He just didn't ever make it big. We were aware of him.

MO: To begin with it is hard to follow in a father or mother's footsteps that are great stars because you are always being compared to them. Liza Minnelli is the only one.

MI: Yes. She certainly has proven herself for her own self and really had a hard act to follow.

I don't know all of the roles you have done in the theater. I know that it is legendary at the Playhouse that you have been in "Glass Menagerie."

MO: Three times.

MI: Would you care to tell the different spans of time between those productions.

MO: The first was when we were on Arlington Street and Ella Gerber directed it. That was about twenty-five or twenty-six years ago.

MI: Shortly after the play came out then.

MO: Yes. It was around that time when it was one of the newer plays. Then I was in it again at the Playhouse when we did it at the Arena Theater when we moved to Glenwood. I was in it there at the Arena. Then we did it on the big stage, and I was in it on the big stage maybe five or six

years later. Last year I was going to be in it for the schools. It was just shortly after my husband had died, and I found that I was getting myself so emotionally involved and not sleeping at night that I thought it was silly to go through with it; so I dropped out of it.

MI: I remember everybody was talking about this.

MO: It was just too much for me at the time. That was why I got out then. I started back at Arlington. The first show I was in was called "The Enemy." It was about a war play. I had just had a baby. The baby was killed or something; I don't remember. It was very dramatic. In those days I did everything very dramatic. I was in "The Doll's House." I was Hedda Gabbler. I was every lead of every kind you could think of in every play. When I look back on it, I tremble to think how horrible I must have been.

MI: You knew no fear.

MO: No, I would try anything. I did comedy; I did coquette; I did the dreamer. There was just nothing that came along that I wouldn't try. As I said, I didn't know any better, so I thought I was great. The directors always thought I was good, and I thought that was all that was needed.

MI: That does seem to be the main thing.

MO: I don't know. I think I always had a certain quality that connects with audiences. I don't know what it is.

MI: You have to know what you mean, and you do have it. People have been trying to put a label on that for many centuries. It is that indefinable thing. I'm glad you said that yourself, because the person knows when they have it; they know.

MO: I never had any problems with an audience no matter what I did.

MI: The audiences sense it immediately.

MO: I had the lead in "A Streetcar Named Desire" which I see they are going to do next year. I did very dramatic things. I died in every play under the sun. I was carried off and killed and everything else.

MI: What was your most dramatic death in a play?

MO: Hedda Gabbler because you shoot yourself on the stage.

MI: What was one of your favorite roles?

- MO: I really like anything I ever did. I enjoyed coquette because in those days I was young and I was the right age for it. "Death Takes A Holiday" was very dramatic, and I liked that. I never particularly liked Ibsen; I did it. I did Hedda Gabbler. I did "The Doll's House." I understand "The Doll's House" much better now than I did then.
- MI: Yes, because the world has changed.
- MO: That is right. I did a play called "Mrs. Moonlight" once when you are an old lady and you turn out to be very young and you go through the years. That was fun.
- MI: Who wrote that?
- MO: I don't remember. It was a very pleasant play. You changed from all these different costumes.
- MI: How old were you when you did this?
- MO: Your husband is an old man and he is remembering all of these things that you used to do.
- MI: I like that idea. I will have to look that play up.
- MO: It is a nice play. I don't know why they don't do it.
- MI: Do you have any favorite playwrights?
- MO: I think Tennessee Williams is . . . as far as being the best playwright that I have done I think "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Glass Menagerie" . . . I don't think there are any plays that can touch those in the other plays that I have done. As I said, I never particularly enjoyed Ibsen. I never did Shakespeare.
- MI: It seems like a lot of times we see people in positions of authority choosing plays for the Playhouse. I don't know the particular people. I do not mean anybody in specific terms. They don't read plays; they don't see plays; they don't see theater, and they choose plays. I don't understand that.
- MO: I know what you are talking about. It is very true at the Playhouse. Up until seven or eight years ago we always had a play reading committee, and we read lots of plays. We didn't always do every play we read, and we did plays we didn't read, but at least everybody was reading plays and knowing what was going on. Bentley did not want a play reading committee because Bentley does not read plays.

MI: Why?

MO: He just doesn't like to read them.

MI: So he didn't want the play reading committee then? I didn't know that.

MO: He got rid of the play reading committee.

MI: I did not know that.

MO: Yes. That is one of the things that we have been fighting about for years. That is one of the things we have in this group that we are planning for the next few years that we should have a play reading committee whether Bentley is part of it or whether he listens to anything they say. That has nothing to do with it; there should be people reading plays at the Playhouse.

MI: I guess I read about thirty plays a year. I always see at least ten and sometimes twenty plays in New York. I have given up almost every other pleasure in life to do that.

MO: I used to stand for plays when I was in college and in New York.

MI: I don't mind it at all. How can people who never even go to see plays and don't know what is happening in the world of theater . . .

MO: Bentley doesn't go.

MI: I get disturbed about that.

MO: This is one of the things that I said to him that he didn't like. He never goes to Cleveland; he never goes to Pittsburgh; he doesn't go to New York. He is an excellent business manager. You couldn't have a better one. He is an executive director who really runs the Playhouse financially and keeps a well organized shop. But he does not love theater.

MI: He said that I still had the stagestruck thing about me and that he didn't have that. He said that he didn't love it. He admitted it himself. He says that to anybody who comes up to him.

I also find it strange that Bob--although Bob really works hard on the plays--doesn't like anything contemporary. Life goes on, and I think you should continue to see some of it.

MO: I think Bob really cares for the theater.

MI: He loves theater; Bob Gray loves theater.

MO: But Bentley really doesn't.

MI: I think you have to keep abreast of it. You can't say that you stop liking everything after the Lunt's didn't act or since John Barrymore left the stage. You have to kind of keep your ear.

MO: I went to see "Nicholas". That was the greatest theater experience I have ever had.

MI: I hope you continue to go on and be an institution in the Youngstown theater, which you are.

MO: I have reached an age where I won't go on too much longer, but while I'm going on I hope to be in a play next year. I loved going back on stage.

MI: It was wonderful to see you come back and do "On Golden Pond."

MO: I hope to do something again if there is another part for someone my age.

MI: How did you feel about doing that wonderful show?

MO: I loved it. I enjoyed it. I never had more fun doing anything. It was one of my favorite parts. I was the right age for it. I didn't have to be older; I didn't have to be younger; I could be just what I was, which was nice.

MI: How did the audience respond?

MO: They loved it; they loved it. You can't do a play at the Playhouse that the play isn't fairly good. Even if you put the Queen of England in it, it wouldn't go over here if it was not a good play.

MI: That is true. We tend to do the stuff that is tried and true. The people love it. We have to remember that people have something to say about this. They stood in line; they bought tickets to that. It was a hit in New York first.

MO: I didn't know it was a hit in New York.

MI: Some of those people would come every day because they could get half price tickets there, of course. They would come every day until they had seen every show off and on Broadway. I got to know a lot of the regulars. They know their theater. Those are the people who keep the theater going, not just a little group.

It is about an older couple. That was a good thing. That isn't dwelt upon in a lot of shows.

MO: That is right. Most people don't want to see anything about older people. But the older people do and they enjoyed the play.

MI: But not just them. Didn't everybody like it?

MO: Yes, but I wouldn't say young people. When I say young people I mean in their twenties and thirties. I don't think they really understand that play. You have to have had a little experience with age to appreciate that show. If a son and father would have seen it together, they might have understood it. You have to in order to get the humor out of those lines.

MI: Okay, thank you Helen Moyer.

END OF INTERVIEW