

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Theater People of Ohio Project

Theater Experience

O. H. 840

RONALD PRATHER

Interviewed

by

Carol Mills

on

December 9, 1981

RON PRATHER

Ronald G. Prather was born in South Bend, Indiana on December 2, 1939. From early childhood Ron displayed an interest in movies and acting and was active in plays during childhood. Ron did several seasons of summer stock while otherwise engaged in winter seasons in children's theater during his teens.

After his early successes earning his living at Petoskey Playhouse in summer and Pittsburgh Playhouse in winter, Ron decided to make the move to New York City to pursue his career in 1961. Once settled in New York, Ron secured several acting engagements Off-Broadway and also touring summer stock companies emanating from New York. He was featured in the world's longest running musical, "The Fantasticks" which opened in New York City's Sullivan Street Playhouse and is, in fact, still playing there, twenty-three years later. Ron was featured as "The Mute" and also as the "Old Actor" in this play and then went on tour with it with the John Gavin company. Again Ron did the role of the "Old Actor", who is probably the most well-loved character in the charming show, and whose favorite saying for all occasions is, "Picture it in light."

No motto could be more appropriate for Ron Prather himself, as he has proved so consistently at the Youngstown Playhouse, where he has been employed both backstage as technical assistant and in the front office as administrative assistant since 1976. This situation enables him to be available for acting in the evenings on the Playhouse stage. Ron has proven himself to be a

steady favorite of playgoers as well as the quintessential actor not in a league with anyone else his age. His performances have been of such a rich variety, and his characterizations of such a broad range that many aspiring actors and actresses as well as seasoned professionals regard him with both awe and admiration.

Mr. Prather is a master at British farce, which is regarded by all knowledgeable theater people to be among the most difficult of challenges in the theater. In addition, he is unsurpassed at light comedy, older character parts, and romantic leads. In view of this, it is interesting to note that Mr. Prather states that his interest in theater is deeper at the regional level than at the "professional" level, as in New York. He says this is because he feels that there is a more well-rounded lifestyle available to those in community and regional theater. It may well be said that Ron Prather chooses to do theater in a situation like the Youngstown Playhouse rather than the arena of the New York stage, as he has been successful at both levels.

Ron Prather travels extensively each summer in Europe, which is his major source of delight. Ron's keen wit, his loving nature, and dependable personality traits have been to those lucky enough to know him as a friend, also a major delight.

Carol Mills

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INTERVIEWEE: RONALD PRATHER

INTERVIEWER: Carol Mills

SUBJECT: Acting, Summer Stock, Children's Theater, New York Theater, Tours, European Travel.

DATE: December 9, 1981

M: This interview is being held for Youngstown State University's Oral History Project. The date is December 9, 1981 at 9:00 p.m. and I am interviewing Ronald Prather, who is an actor and who does work in the theater in many other capacities as well. He is now employed at the Youngstown Playhouse. The interviewer's name is Carol Schaffer Mills, and the subject matter is called People in Theater in Ohio.

Alright we are going to talk Ron Prather now. He's going to start with the beginning of his life I hope.

P: That is all right Carol you called me everyone. I don't mind at all. Although I am not from Ohio I have worked in Ohio and with the community theater for about four and a half years at this point. Actually I'm from Indiana, I was born there, South Bend, Notre Dame University is there. I was born in 1939, I am 42, and I have worked in theater for about twenty years.

I was always interested, mainly I suppose in movies, when I was about ... Well the first things I remember is about three which didn't have ... As I say, from when I was about three and we were moving into a new home. My father had built a garage first, which was all they could afford to do, and I didn't really talk apparently, according to my grandmother, until I was almost five years old, at which point I started the first grade. At any rate the first sort of exposure I had to being involved with theater, aside from what I had heard and enjoyed things, odd things I suppose

combinations from radio like Let's Pretend and Johnny Dollar. They didn't necessarily seem to go together but none-the-less. But in school in the second grade I was quite short, there was only one girl shorter than I, who's name was Linda Lee Irvin or Irving, I can't remember. We were asked to do a little song sort of thing in the middle of a program, so we sang "Easter Parade" and then I was promoted to a lead the fourth grade still with Linda Lee, because she still was the only girl shorter in the class than I. And we did a production of something called "Tom Tit Tot," which was in a way based on Rumpelstiltsken, but at any rate I suppose that was where I first was interested.

In the meantime, it was during the war and I don't know if it had anything to do with the war effort, but in the grammar school they decided that they would have all the classes pit themselves against one another and collect newspapers and magazines. The class who collected the most, the largest number of hounds of these things won some sort of prize. Well that sounded fascinating to me, I didn't know you could sell newspaper and magazines. So I started going around the neighborhood with a red wagon and getting my mother to cart me down to a junk yard and sell them, which would bring me maybe \$.75, \$.80 and then I would go spend the afternoon at a movie, there was a little, local movie house. I guess I was then perhaps seven, I could ride a bicycle down there and watch whatever the feature was and the current serial. And then I started picking blackberries and selling them and picking strawberries and I had all kinds of ... Setting pins in bowling allies, and packing things in grocery stores, and all of those. At any rate in high school I was more interested in theater, but not ... they told me in my freshman year I should not be involved in dramatics because I was too young. So I went then ...

M: Who's they?

P: The counselor, it was the counselor. I was there only one semester and my family moved to northern Michigan, and from there to Grand Rapids.

M: What did your family think of your interest in the ..

P: They were, they ... Whatever I wanted was fine with them. There was no question of that. I was allowed to take dramatics in my senior year, which amused me because the person who taught drama taught one other thing, which was track. So I was made assistant director of the senior class play, which was a true classic called, I think, "Jim Graduate." It was just wonderful. Any rate in my senior year there was a girl in one of my classes who had worked with the community

theater there, but I had planned to go to the junior college and I was frightened about even going around a community theater. I didn't know anything about it, you know, that much. At any rate I started junior college and ran into her on the street and she said, "I told them you were coming to the theater and you to walk in the front door, there is a meeting of the prop committee. Just go in and tell them I told you to come." Well that was the end of junior college and I started working there, and my job on that show was to drop a crash box from the grid. That was it, period.

At any rate I worked there that season and then I was very lucky and worked with community theater in northern Michigan, and then worked with children's theater in Pittsburgh. We toured all the time. That was great fun to get up at 9:30 in the morning and your makeup would be frozen in the back of the stationwagon and drive around. But I do think it is fun to work with kids.

M: How old were you then?

P: I was eighteen. And from the stock company I had worked with was a fellow who was studying, as a ... Well he was an undergraduate student, but it was his last year at Yale, and was directing a production of "Comedy of Errors." So I went there and did that show for him at a break in the season. And through that then worked through the Pittsburgh Playhouse in costuming. Let's see, I was back and forth there. Working, well pretty much, year round, there would be a week between the stock and fall season with the children's theater and then another two weeks at the opposite end. I had the chance then to go to New York and see a show or two.

M: You earned a living at this then?

P: Yes, my living was from, it wasn't princely, but yes that is how I earned a living.

M: That is very unusual isn't it?

P: ... back and forth. Certainly at ..

M: Would you like to tell how unusual that is for a person to be able to earn their living in the theater?

P: Well it is extremely unusual, and especially that quickly because it happened immediately within a year. I was earning my living, that is, until I moved to New York. It took a little longer then.

M: We all know about that.

P: But the point of all of it is that after working there I then did move to New York and became, I suppose, well a professional actor quote in that I joined Equity and worked off Broadway, did some tours, packaged things. But I liked community theater and I had lived in New York, well I lived a total of fourteen years in New York before coming here to Youngstown. I wanted to change. I thought first just to move to different apartment. I had been living in one apartment all that while. Then I got a call, well I had been called on occasion from Youngstown because Bob Gray who works with the playhouse and Bentley Lenhoff, executive director, were two people I had worked with all those years before my first season in stock. They were looking for someone and they said they didn't think I would be interested in the job which was as an assistant to our designer, building scenery. I said "why not, that sounds interesting" and that is why I came. Plus, of course, I had met, through knowing Bob my intervieweress, if I should call her that Carol, I had met in New York several times. So on coming here I knew several people who worked with the playhouse and I like community theater, I had liked it before and I still do. I think it is ... there is much more sense of, well I suppose you call it a community spirit. Because people don't have to think about their livelihood in the sense this can be the work they consider seriously but they can also have fun. They know what they are involved for, I mean in terms of period of time. Four weeks rehearsal or five, three weeks of a run, or four, or five. From the other end of the stick you are looking at it from New York, or somewhere else for example, that is where you are earning your living and perhaps you spend four weeks of rehearsal and maybe you open and maybe you don't. Then you have no job, you have no income, and you start from scratch every time. There is never ... there is no such thing as tenure or, you know, a twenty year gold watch or any of that.

M: I would like you to point out, because you are very conversant with that problem, while you are on that subject, just how very flimsy that is and how that if you do, you know some of the experiences you have had and certainly countless friends of yours and acquaintances when you do have a job in New York to keep yourself alive and to earn a living so that you can pursue the theater, then it becomes a monstrous occasion because if you give all the time to the free thing you are contributing to get into the theater then you worry about your data. Just sort of explain that whole cycle of madness that goes on there and why there is no relaxation like there is in a community theater.

P: Part of it is the competition, to begin with, is great-

er. Hundreds of people for every role instead of ten, perhaps twelve. But more importantly is the fact that you obviously have got to work to earn a living. Most often you have to work during the day, but if you work during the day you can't look for work in the theater because your days have to be free. So you work at night, and you work at night, and then you have to get up. So you are spending twenty-four hours a day and you are dealing very often, not always, but very often having to try to get an agent. Many of whom no absolutely nothing about theater and dealing with them can be terribly frustrating. Because they have no idea how, even if they were to accept you, they often don't know how to present you or try to sell you or even to suggest to you, if you don't know, how best you should function for yourself.

M: Could you explain because no one has done that in these series of interviews and I think it is a valuable thing to be recorded? The fact that, like you say, agents don't know what you are doing or what you are about. How in the name of anything these agents get to be agents of people that are actors and without having any camaraderie with them or any kind of friendship and how very difficult it is to speak to an agent, to get to see one, to have him take your picture? The whole game there, if you could do that, because I haven't covered that at all?

P: It is difficult because anyone can become an agent. I think there is, I don't know this, I think there are some qualifications. What they may be I don't know. But certainly, not necessarily, any qualifications in terms of theater or theater knowledge. There are just so many people that if you hang up a sign and say agent you are inundated, and they may have a couple of friends and they may know someone, or they may have worked as a secretary, or something, to another agent. So they learn these things and they see someone come in who, maybe they spot someone they think is talented. Then they branch out on their own and pick up that person because they know they are going to make money. Which means they are going to make money. Then they build their own stable, as it were, and that is pretty much it.

The minute they have some strength, some power, then... Which is understandable. In the same way I can understand a producer, or even a director, by the time they have seen 600 people for one part I don't think they even remember what they were looking for to begin with. You know it is very difficult to always remember who you were, or why you were there, or whether you fell down, or sang, or stood up, or had a limp on, you know, they just simply can't remember, and might wind up

casting the last person that they wanted because it is so confusing. But then equity as well, getting an equity card. That is why I think it would be ...

I got very annoyed hearing people on talk shows who are established people, not only from this country but from others. There simply is no place for young people to train. But that is because they are the very people who refuse to recognize community theaters, and so on, throughout the country and they hear community theater and they immediately think of that as like an old Judy Garland movie, or in a barn you know an army blanket. Instead of looking into it to see this is a wonderful facility here, and there are others in the country. I think it would be terrific if there couldn't be something in conjunction that would offer a professional group to be available, not to the exclusion, but to work in conjunction with the community theater. So that as people learned and developed in the community theater they could move in, perhaps, into smaller roles in the professional area, gain an equity card, and when they felt they were ready or the people from whom they were learning felt they were ready and wanted to go off to New York, they could be sent off as an equity member. Not that that is any special treat, it is just simply that you can't get into an audition without an equity card period. It would be, I mean I would like to see this community theater be the first to do it, because it is one of the oldest and number one, I understand, in terms of membership, in the country.

M: Do you think perhaps that you might be able to implement such a program?

P: I don't know that I can. It has been tried in the past but I think that there was a threat felt on the part of those in charge, to the degree that they are members of the board, and that sort of thing, that it would, it would work against the community effort, rather than with. In other words they didn't want something like that coming in and supplanting what they had already established and worked for. Which, as I understood it, wasn't the idea at all, but to aid and abet what we already had. I just think it would be very helpful, I think it would then, as well, at least I would hope, make people more aware that there are community theaters that are very... And there are a lot of wonderfully talented people around, and that there are places for people to train and there are some very good people training them. It is only that you leave Youngstown, or you leave whatever city, and go to New York and there are infinitely more, a larger number of bad actors in New York simply because there are an infinitely larger number of people.

M: Would you tell something about that too? About, I know I don't know what you feel, but I felt dismay. When you found out how many incompetent, untalented, lack-luster people were involved in productions in the mecca of theater in New York City.

P: Well, it is difficult, and it is difficult for one reason I suppose. Prior to going there you have the idea that it is the ultimate, and that is what you expect. Very often totally disillusioned and ... I would guess the same thing. Just so many people! There are those folk whose real talent has nothing to do with being on a stage, it has to do with charming and ... I mean they are able to charm their way into agents offices, charm their way into contracts, charm their way into all of this. And they get on the stage and they aren't nearly so charming. I mean they don't have ... their talent lies in getting the job, often they don't keep it, but often they do. Whereas if you might ... There might be someone who would be a truly wonderful, well trained actor who would never get a chance to show it because he can't get through the agents door because he is not going to spend eight hours a day and, you know, being adorable and cute and inviting for cocktail parties, and giving them presents, and running around town, and meeting everyone, and knowing everyones name, and what show they are doing, and what time they get up, and there favorite restaurant, and being there at the right time, and all that kind of thing. To me it is like begging for work and I can do many of the things, which can also be a curse. An awful lot of people spend there time studying very hard and theater is what they want, and they suddenly discover that they don't know how to do anything else. So, sometimes it pushes people who are like that into work that they might not otherwise achieve because they simply don't know how to do anything else.

M: Well you know, you and I have spent lots of times talking into the wee hours about how we both found that we don't have the type of personality that is required to be rejected 150 times a month. And we found it pointless, boring, hurtful, and many other things, and finally just couldn't cope with it, or didn't wish to cope with it you know?

P: The rejection is difficult. I don't mind the rejection so much from auditioning for someone and they are saying ... Well several times I have auditioned not knowing what the part was, perhaps being given a minute or two to look over the scene. Then once I have read with someone, and the director or stage manager, if that happened to be the person says, "I'm sorry I don't think you are right for this." I have often agreed and

said, "Fine, I don't think I am. Well, I would appreciate it if you would keep me in mind in the future, on the chance that you are doing another play. Perhaps there is something in that play." But I don't necessarily like being rejected by someone, I don't care if there are nine or a hundred and seven sitting in an outer office, who has no idea what they are talking about.

M: Hasn't even seen what you can do.

P: Oh not only that, or anybody else I think, you know. And the union is very disappointing too, it is so weak and it is so, I mean working with the "Fantasticks" when I was off Broadway at one point I had to be, I wasn't have to be, but I was elected to be the deputy of the company.

M: Explain what a deputy does.

P: Responsible for any problems in terms of management with any actor in the show. It can be that an actor has a complaint, it can be that the manager has a complaint. It is the responsibility then of the deputy to go to our union, the equity union, and determine how things are written into the contract so that you know who is in the right or the wrong, and iron things out. It is just as a union, probably ... The only problem is finding someone at equity who knows what the rules are. That is the difficulty.

M: For a creative effort I think perhaps what we found out to our chagrin, here is something that is creative, certainly that word is overused but acting, you know it does require a little bit of creative ability, and it has been beauracritized until it is so business like. It is the great fervor.

P: Well it is a business. That is ... I get angry often with sometimes directors or more often producers who say that actors are idiots or they are stupid and they don't know anything about business, or anything of that kind. David Merick was a producer, that in many ways I admired because he did a lot of commercial theater but he knew it was going to make money. He used some of that money then to present things he knew were going to be failures because they wouldn't be that popular, publicly. I mean to the general public it wants to constantly come ... but I also feel that, I mean I do definitely feel, that it is a business. It is like the community theater right here. We have to do comedies, we have to do things like that. I don't know why we can't also do a couple of things within a season that take place that are, that perhaps everyone isn't going to like. Not that everyone likes comedies. But in

order to continue going the coffers have to be filled, and we have got to do it by doing those things that maybe I don't ... I find nothing wrong with Neil Simon, I happen to like it. I play a lot of comedy and I play farce. But I would occasionally like to do something other than that. As, would I guess, everyone else around.

M: No I don't think everyone would, do you?

P: Well many. Perhaps not everyone.

M: I find that a never answerable question. But I know people like yourself, that have such a unique talent in so many areas, and you can find more satisfying work here in Ohio than what you found in New York in theater by and large as far as acting parts out.

P: Well, I suppose, except that I was a little disenchant-ed. I didn't audition, I didn't go, I didn't care, I just wasn't interested.

M: In New York?

P: I just refused to go through all of the stuff. I can't think of a better word for it. It's just stuff. It hasn't anything to do with what you ultimately want to achieve, or at least work toward achieving. I worked quite a lot in New York, I did some work out of New York.

M: Tell some of the productions and things you did?

P: Well, the only actual production in New York, I mean I worked with Equity Library Theater and did some scenes and cuttings for a director and choreographer's ... I don't remember what they called it... Seminar or something, and I worked off Broadway in "Fantasticks."

M: Could you explain that both of those are very prestigious things? People listening to this may not realize that.

P: As the assistant stage manager in "Fantasticks", played the mute, and I also played the old actor. I toured with the show to some of the best and well known along the eastern coast and in New England.

M: Tell something about that show?

P: About the "Fantasticks"?

M: Yes, because it's a phenomenon.

P: Oh true, true it is. It opened in 1960, I believe, and

is the longest running musical in the theater. In the history of the theater, "Mousetrap" I think, which of course is not a musical, is the only other play that has run longer. And it is a small ...

M: But it is the same theater?

P: Exactly ...

M: Sullivan Street Theater?

P: The same theater on Sullivan Street. It seats about 125. A charming show. And people like it in ... Well, when it opened it was rather avant-garde. It, at this point, is not that at all. But there are people who came there when they were engaged and they come back on their wedding anniversary every year, or they come every New Year's Eve.

M: They bring their teenage kids?

P: Right, and they have seen it dozens of times.

M: When you went on the star package, as we call it, on the tour and John Gavin, I think, was the star in that package. How long were you on that tour?

P: We were out for ten weeks.

M: Tell about a tour, some of the things you...

P: Well, now that tour happened to be ... I have never done what is called a bus and truck, where you can often play one night or two nights in a town and that sort of thing. This was, as far as I was concerned, except of course ... I should have finished the first sentence. Which as far as I was concerned was a wonderful way to spend a summer. Because we were in terrific theaters and beautiful management. We played a week at a time, each of the different theaters. Good transportation, you had an advance man, an advance director, and his job is to move ahead of the company and arrange for lodging, arrange for the set and scenery, and costumes, and lights. Not costumes, we travel with those but lighting and everything to be ready. So that when you arrived all you did was move into the little spot that had been chosen for you. You had one rehearsal, your days were free, and you performed at night. So that you could see the country side. I had never been in New England and one of the theaters, as a matter of fact, we played was the Dennis ... It is in Dennis, Massachusetts, I am not sure it is the Dennis Theater. But Henry Fonda, and it is a very old theater obviously, very well established, and Bette Davis were ushers and apprentices there years ago. So the whole

New England area was lovely, and it was a very nice summer.

M: But some tours aren't that comfortable are they? -

P: Oh, no.

M: Where you have to scrounge your own lodgings?

P: Like the University of Syracuse. As I was leaving a friend ... I asked where he thought he would be staying and he said, "I am staying at the Hilton." I had no idea how he could afford to do that. But I discovered the Hilton had nothing to do with Conrad. It was one of the only buildings in downtown Syracuse that hadn't been taken over by the renewal program. It was in the middle of, shall we say, the red light district. So we had little rooms and we kept things like a head of lettuce, and mayonnaise, and bologna, and ham on the window sill outside. We made sandwiches at night and played cards and things of that kind.

M: I remember I met a man on a tour once that he put a sign up over ... He lived in the back of the shop where they did the scenery and the nail and hammer department. He moved into that room because he said it was better than the actor's hotel. And he put a big wooden sign up over it that said "Tarantula Arms" from the "Street Car Named Desire" and a spider hanging over the door. Mostly I have seen those kinds of places to stay in, more than the others.

P: Exactly that, yes.

M: You pay your own lodging too. I think many people don't realize that actors pay their own lodging.

P: Oh, indeed that is true. Equity does require, for example, if you are working ... Well, let's say minimum or just above that, the management must furnish, or find lodgings for you within a certain price range.

M: But they don't have any complications on those many times.

P: Not necessarily. Usually the dressing rooms in the back stage are ... Well, not quite as grand as one might think. It is interesting sometimes in a situation like that when you are in a smallish town, it doesn't matter the size. But someone may come to see a show, well in a situation like this there I'm sure there are some people who came to see John Gavin. I mean that may have been the only reason.

M: Just to see him?

P: And it may have been the only time they had ever been to a play. Then the theater looks very attractive and all that, and they come backstage, and they look over their faces when they see, you know, a couple of bare lightbulbs, paint peeling, and all of that kind of thing. There really isn't anything wrong with it but I think they expect the backstage could be more opulent than what they are seeing out front. It is a real intersanctum sort of situation.

M: Well you know what one of your best characters you played, the old actor in "Fantasticks". Picture it in light, you know. That is what you supposed to do all the time. But it gets kind of difficult to do after a while, doesn't it?

P: Well, and there are funny things. I am amused at you talking about people, I shouldn't say the man doesn't know anything about theater, I never even met the man, but just how strange things happen. When I worked at the University of Syracuse this company worked in what had been a movie house, an old movie house. But just adjacent to that was a brand new theater department that had been built and apparently the head of the theater department designed the building. The stage was so poorly designed that it was almost useless, but it did have an elevated orchestra pit. However, they put the building up first and then they couldn't get the elevator equipment into the building. So the pit never rose, or lowered, or did anything of that kind. It just sat there. Thinking ahead perhaps might be worthwhile in some instances.

M: That is a typical story isn't it? I would like you to tell the diversity of roles that you have played since you have come to Youngstown, Ohio. Your regard is the, well I would say, the foremost actor at the Youngstown Playhouse by many, many, many people. Mostly your versatility is what is commented upon. How did you train, or does it all come naturally, to do that many types of roles that you do?

P: Well the training came really from working. I think there are things you can learn and things that you just ... Well, you accumulate things and you put them together and they come out, or they don't, however best. But to work in a situation in stock, where you rehearse a show during the day and you play a different show at night, and you have to learn a new show every five days, for ten weeks. You learn many bad habits. But you also learn how to put something together very quickly. The next experience was to work with the children's theater, as I talked about. Where we would only rehearse a week, but we would play for four or

five weeks. It would be fascinating to find yourself in the middle of a stage playing the same show for the thirtieth time and wonder why you had delivered a line the way you always had, why it never occurred to you to do something else. Because you never had time to think about it before. "Fantasticks" I played for, off and on, well, I think the longest stretch at one time was a little over two years. But you do learn different things from the different ... From a short rehearsal period or a long. It is difficult now ... Was difficult when I first came here to get accustomed to a five week rehearsal period again. Because I had to slow down. Then you don't play the shows. You play a weekend and then you have three days off. You have to pick yourself back up so that you are not just ... you can't spend the first performance getting ready to do the other one, you know, you've got to be... But I did play, at eighteen, people who were sixty and that kind of thing. I did musicals and the third, or fourth, show I did was "Taming the Shrew." Farce, and comedy, and musicals, and Shakespeare. So that it was just having the opportunity.

M: Well, the opportunity and the talent.

P: And some awfully good people to work with.

M: I would like to ask you what you think about that idea of what they call talent? As opposed to being trained by technique only and being taught in school how to act. Do you think the one can exist, that you can turn out a competent actor, devoid of talent?

P: No.

M: Would you care to speak about that? Because a lot of them apparently think that it can be done. Because a lot of people go to school that are, you know, have no ability whatsoever, but they have the money to go to acting school.

P: True, True. There is a lot you can learn. I think there are some people who can go into a situation and take classes, for example, and learn all the rudiments. Learn up stage, down stage. Learn all of the specifically technical things. But I think it is no different from learning to ride a bicycle or something of that kind. You can try for nine years and you can not stay on the bicycle. You learn how to hold the bars, how to work the pedals, but then it is up to you to ride the bicycle. Then it is up to you to ride it down the street, and go up and down hills, and turn corners and all that, and remain upright. I think the same thing is true of acting. You can learn this is stage left, right, up, down, back and forth. All of

those things playing in the arena, and you have learned all of the technical things. But you have to then ... They are all in the back of your mind. That no longer has anything to do with going to have to do a performance. It is there, and you need them, but then it is your turn to do the show. And some people beyond that can learn if they work ... They need, I think some people need a kind of thing, I hate to use, I won't use the word but they need to study with someone like ... I will say the method, Strausburg. They need the kind of sort of pulling out from within themselves in a work shop, work class situation before they are ever, ever able to allow that to freely flow. They have to go through a whole other ... So that someone might, from that strictly technical point of view, initially appear as though they have no talent at all but they need that to bring it out of them. Others, I don't think, no matter what you did ...

M: Well, I think of you as a natural actor who also has a polished technique. But I don't think that is common. I guess I'm angry, frustrated and I wanted to know how you felt about it, in opposition to that if you have it. To people that say they are actors and they are not actors and they are not actresses and they never will be. It is like saying you are an airplane pilot and you don't know how to fly a plane.

P: Well, precisely that. I hate having to bring up New York but it wouldn't occur somewhere else necessarily. Here in Youngstown, for example, if you ask someone who might be playing the lead in the play, "What you do?" "Well, I work with Bell Telephone", or "I work with ...", but in New York if they were working with Bell Telephone they would say "Oh, I'm an actor." "Oh, well what are you doing right now?" "Oh, I'm not doing anything right now. I'm working with Bell Telephone," or "I'm driving a cab." "Well, then you are a cab driver. You know that is what you are doing, you are a cab driver. You aspire to be, and you hope to be but at the moment you are a cab driver." You know there is nothing wrong with that?

M: No, but it is very hard to find people to just say what they do. I found it very frustrating in that almost ninety percent of the people that I would meet would be actors. And I knew they weren't. I don't know if you met that many but I know I did.

P: Oh yes, many, many, many. But I admire also an awful lot of people. Now, for example, I don't even remember names, it is not important to, but some people that I just saw perform occasionally, oh they might sing a song in a restaurant or something. Maybe someone knew them at your table or whatever, and they would come

over and they really were not very good but I don't know that they knew it. But aside from doing just that they found a little place and they got a group of kids together, or people, they weren't all kids, and they did shows. They would do maybe a cut down version of a musical. They did all the work and they presented them and they weren't making any money really, but they wanted to work. Now I could go and see something like that, and not criticize it in the way that I would a Broadway show that was just as bad as that. That cost \$2 million and cost me \$25 to get in. It is difficult to understand if you have got a Broadway theater, the best people that you can find, and \$2 million, how you can't see somewhere in eight weeks that it isn't very good.

M: I'm constantly amazed.

P: It's hard to understand that.

M: Well, I guess it is because the people going into it, that were the backers, the people that have that money that is so important, they just aren't aware of what is required and they furnish the money and then the other people take license with it.

P: Oh well, that is true, yes. I mean the backers perhaps don't know. Some do, some do not. But once the money is given they have nothing to say, ultimately. But it is, it is just hard to quite comprehend that they wouldn't see something was wrong. But of course, there are those times too when you know something is wrong, and you are desperately trying to fix it. Because you don't want to lose all those people.

M: Up until opening night yes. You try to patch it up and get it going right, yes. That is a heartbreaker. I have been involved in things like that. You know that it is going to limp on stage and you hope that something about it will catch on.

P: But unfortunately it is still a business.

M: You remember Miss Katherine Hepburn's last effort before. She's in another show right now, "West Side Waltz." Well, I believe you went to see the last one she did, didn't you, or your friends did, that you were close with? "Cocoa Channel."

P: Oh, I saw "Cocoa," yes.

M: Wasn't that the last thing she did?

P: I think it was.

M: Well, tell a little bit about how a great lady like herself can get involved in terrible Broadway productions, and she's in another one now.

P: I don't know.

M: It's astonishing isn't it?

P: She obviously was convinced. She wasn't terrible in "Cocoa" but it wasn't ... you know, there were beautiful girls and beautiful costumes. Fine, but there wasn't really a singing voice, but she knew that. For the people who wanted to see Katherine Hepburn on stage, they went anyway. I think she got good notices and so on, but it wasn't a good show. I don't know about this, I haven't seen it.

M: My family saw it and I kind of respect their feelings. What my son says. I read some reviews that were terrible. Well, you would think in a case like that perhaps Miss Hepburn would just appear on stage in the theater in some lovely clothes and talk for two hours. I think people would be much more gratified.

P: Well, there is no way of knowing. I mean people were laughing, or not. I shouldn't say that but skeptical at least with Elizabeth Taylor, apparently she was ...

M: She was very good. But that is the point, she tried it and she was very good. Oh, I believe they should try it.

P: I think it is just a case of being convinced that everybody would want you to do this, and they will love to see you, you are a legend in your own time, and that kind of thing, and can do no wrong. I suppose once you become convinced of that you take the shot, I suppose. I don't know.

M: Well, there is many, many things I will never understand about it I guess. That is why it enchants so many people. You had opportunity when you lived in New York City to go to many auditions, like you said. But you didn't want to play the game, which you do have to go through. The humiliating thing of going through the ritual of applying for the jobs, that is much more dreadful than auditioning. The smiling, charming, unflousness that you have to go through so much. Now, tell some of the things that people you know in the theater there did to keep themselves going as opposed to the people here. You know make a comparison somehow, if you can.

P: Well, for example in the "Fantasticks". I think this is something that people most often do not understand.

I think even people, some people, who are involved with theater do not understand ... when I worked off Broadway in the "Fantasticks" we worked under equity contract for minimum. Everybody, whether it was the leading man or the smallest role in show, earned the same money, \$75 a week. But that was before taxes you understand.

M: What year did that start? Were you in it?

P: I started, let's see, as an equity contract member in 1968. Now, after taxes you had about \$59. So virtually everybody in the show had a job, they had to have a job. There was one fellow who drove a cab. Now another man who was with the show for many years, did a lot of commercials. So it didn't make any difference, he made a lot of money from his commercials. Oh, people worked. One fellow worked at the travel agency. People worked with Olstens, doing temporary typing jobs.

When I was first in New York I sold draperies at Macy's. All I needed to earn some extra money and I decided once there used to be a chain of restaurants, Schraff's, which are no longer there. And they had people in addition to the restaurants ... They sold pastries and things like that. So I had a job once which lasted only until the day I was to go to work. I mean by that I had to train for three days. I was to arrive at work at 4:00 in the morning, in the Wall Street area, in the third basement of the Chase Manhattan Bank. My job was going to be to make this big urn of coffee. It was a huge room full of people who were doing nothing but pushing on IBM machines and working on punch cards. Just this sort of ... It was like locust, that is the sound. I went down for three days and followed this man around so that I could learn the business. How to make the coffee in the urn and how to push the cart, with blueberry danish and things on it, around to all these people, so that they could buy coffee and a danish, or maybe they wanted a cinnamon donut. Those were on the second shelf. It was hard to learn. I worked from 4:00 in the morning there until 7:00 and then I went home and changed and went to Macy's at 9:00. Unfortunately, he was leaving on vacation and the day he left I didn't get up to go to work at 4:00 in the morning to go to work. So I lost that job. They did pay me, I think I got \$15 or something for the three days I had worked. I don't remember. And I think two dozen blueberry danish, I don't remember.

M: There are so many what we would call bizarre jobs there.

P: Well, I don't know this is necessarily apropos but we

were talking about a strange job one has. A friend of mine had moved to New York before I did and he had worked wooden printings. So he had a job with a company and they manufactured packaging for cosmetic's firms. I wanted something, anything. I think I was working but just to earn extra money in the evening. He said, "Well, if you want it is kind of dull work but if you don't mind coming down." The place where they printed all of this was in a little factory in lower Manhattan. They were doing a package that had golden glossing on the front. As the packages came through around the embossing there were little flakes of gold and they had to be brushed. I said, "Well, Frank, how would you define this job?." He said, "Well, you are called a box wiper." Now, I had no idea whether I could put that on a resume or anything, and I did not work at that very long.

M: Until I went there I had never realized how many part-time, idiotic jobs there were, did you?

P: Well, I had worked in some ... Well, as I think I said before I had set pins in bowling allies and things like that in Michigan when I was a kid. But there are, it is truly bizarre. I had worked in marketing research and their major function was to test out new products that a large company would manufacture. So that they could get a feel of the public's acceptance before they put all the machinery in. Then the interviewers would go around door to door and leave off the dog food or gelatin supreme or whatever it was called and come back the next week to get the opinion of the person who had been using it. You would get these strange responses. The interviewer would say, "We gave you a weeks supply of dog food. Why did you only give to your dog for three days?" She said, "Well, I planned to give it to him all week but he died," or "I couldn't stand up long enough to cook the jello," or "It tasted like vulcanized rubber," or whatever. But then I built things, built shelves, knocked out walls, and all kinds of things. Carried lumber from the West Side Lumber Yard through Times Square on my shoulders. Usually then was when I would run into somebody from your hometown.

M: Because I always considered you to be a ... When I met you I was very in awe of the fact that you and your roommate, my friend Bob Gray, were actual living, throbbing New York-ites, who lived in New York. Right in Greenwich Village, where I had always dreamed of being for ever. I always did consider you a typical New Yorker. I realize you had been there like thirteen or fourteen years but you seemed to me the ideal New York person. You seemed so acclimated to the life there. Could you kind of give a routine day in New

York? What it is like when you are living there being an actor, being in theater, and doing everything else? Because I don't think people realize some of the good things there are. And there are. You can go, if you are depressed, have a drink at 4:00 in the morning. Walk ... those kinds of things.

P: Well, I think it is some of that that I miss about New York. For example even if you are working two jobs in New York. It seems to me, at any rate, but perhaps that is just the way I function, if I could work from 9:00 to 5:00 and then I would need to be at the theater at 8:00 and I worked ... Well, you had eight shows a week. So I had Saturday during the day free and Monday evening free. That was it, period. There wasn't one free day at all. On the weekends you did two shows Saturday night back to back. You had to be up to do an afternoon and evening performance on Sunday and up at nine to work Monday morning. But it seemed you could accomplish more. Maybe because you used your time better, I don't know. But I think people, a lot of people, are leery, in a way, of New York. In that they think it would be much more difficult to work there. I find it easier in a sense.

In the jobs that I have had at least it is some what less stringent, you are still expected to be at work at 9:00, you know, but that is it. You work from 9:00 to 5:00, with an hour for lunch, and within that hour you can, if your working midtown let's say, you can have virtually any food. Any kind of food you would like because there are fifteen, eighteen, twenty-five restaurants close enough and all varied cuisine if that is what we want to say. The same is true at home. I would get home after a walk. Well, first of all I walked down four flights of steps and down another six to the subway and then up six and so on and return and do the same thing. But if you didn't feel like cooking something or if you wanted to just go out and eat, you could easily walk within a few blocks and have Italian, French, Spanish, German, any of those. I miss those things and I miss friends. I do not miss ... One of the things I don't like about living ... I am not blaming Youngstown it would be virtually anywhere outside of the city the size of New York. I hate to have to go out and try to warm up a car in the winter and scrape the windows and worry about the tires and the gas and all that. None of which you need to worry about in New York. It is a great luxury not to have to worry about that.

M: I think it does expedite your movements to be able to jump on those subways and busses. Although, as we both know, it has become more dangerous to jump on them because of being accosted.

P: That is true.

M: That has changed greatly in the last five years.

P: That is right. I have been here virtually that length of time.

M: You moved here about that time ago. When I used to visit you constantly on Eighth Street in the Village, by Sixth Avenue, there was a West Fourth Street subway station that we used constantly. We never had any trouble in that, that was our local subway stop.

P: That is right.

M: Well, now there are people lurking in the doorway of there to attack you constantly. You must be on guard and must always be afraid. It is a shame to see that happen. I have seen that change with my own eyes.

P: Yes, that is very true.

M: I have seen it the last five years.

P: The whole village has changed a great deal. Well, that area in particular. Because when I moved there you could just wander around, look in shops, you could browse, and people didn't follow you around. But even before I left the shops had iron gates coming down in front of the entire front of the store. Like a garage door with open mesh that pulled down and locked in the cement in the sidewalk, because there were just too many robberies, and too many muggings.

M: This doesn't sound like a life of the theater but it is because it forces a lot of theater people and other people out of that place. Do you attribute the increase in that kind of violent life to drugs in any way? Because I myself have found so many people there, that seem to be acting in that way, were on drugs.

P: Yes, especially that because the Village East at ... Well, it has been several years now. I never spent much time there. There wasn't that much to attract me, restaurants, or theaters, or movies, or anything of the kind.

M: Of course you should point out that your apartment was a block and a half away from Washington Square Arch, a very desirable neighborhood in the Village.

P: Yes, but it began moving west and there was a little hotel. I don't remember whether that was still functioning. It had a little piano bar and there was a

fellow there who had played for years.

M: The Hotel Earl.

P: Yes, and there were still ads in the New York Magazine and many people would come all the way downtown to see him, and it turned into just a terrible hotel.

M: It is now a halfway house for drug addicts.

P: That is right.

M: Isn't that tragic.

P: It is right on the corner of Washington Square.

M: It seems like it gets worse everyday and I just wondered if that affected any of your decision also. Because you were so attuned into living in the city. I never met a person so in tune with their surroundings as you seem to be in New York.

P: Well, I was very comfortable and a lot of good friends.

M: You taught me about New York and you taught me all the nice things and how to get around and made me feel like it was a place I wanted to live.

P: Well, it is a wonderful place. It is just ... I don't know. As I say, living there that length of time, I suppose people who live there longer have seen the neighborhood perhaps they lived in start to deteriorate and so they have moved somewhere else, and found that to start going down for whatever reason. Perhaps in an area that is very bad, they start cleaning up or rebuilding in that area so that people start migrating to other sections. I don't know the reason actually for it but I do think drugs played a large part of it. Because I know I could walk out my front door when there were very old established shops along. They began to change and I would walk out and people would just pass me on the street asking if I wanted marijuana, or if I wanted heroin, or if I wanted ... And of course you could indeed go up to a policeman and say, "This person just asked me if I wanted to buy heroin," but there was nothing that could be done. They wouldn't have any on them, there wouldn't be any proof, it would be your word against his. But that had never happened before.

M: That is right. They also would offer all kinds of pills.

P: Oh, yes.

M: Uppers and downers and even cocaine.

P: Virtually anything you wanted.

M: Yes. In the lunch hours it is interesting to note that they, the pushers, in the midtown especially where the heavy consolidation of workers are in the offices, at lunch time they go through the parks and the places where people take sack lunches and sell them marijuana, cigarettes, joints, for a \$1 or \$2 to have with their lunch. That is just a common thing, they peddle marijuana. No one bothers them.

P: Oh yes, that is true.

M: I never got used to it.

P: Nor have I.

M: Even when I watched all the people in the offices buying them and realizing they were going back up to their office stoned to work.

P: Exactly. But it is interesting too, that there are people ... Well you sell them, I suppose it depends on where you are, but you sell them in Manhattan, at least I think ... Meet people who are genuine New Yorkers, born and bred New Yorkers. I can remember meeting, not only on one occasion, but in places I worked, people who had been born and raised, not necessarily in Manhattan but in Brooklyn Heights, or Brooklyn, who didn't know anything more about Manhattan than getting from their house to their job and back. I worked in a place that was about ten blocks from Central Park. There was a lady there who was about, I believe, forty-five years old, she didn't even know where Central Park was.

M: I know.

P: Just remarkable.

M: And yet many of us, what you call midwesterners, they certainly called us midwesterners, if you are beyond New Jersey you are a midwesterner or a Californian. That is all they think of, they are very insular. Many of us foreigners, I guess is what they thought of us as, I found to be the people truly seemed to be more caring about New York City and look into its history, and go and see things, and knew more about the actual city. What did you think?

P: Oh, I think that is true. I also think that generally people in New York tend to be more helpful. I mean you may have gone in for a week and you had never been there and you are standing on a corner and there is

this, just a look on your face that you are not sure which way to turn or where is Sixth. You stop and ask someone, "Where is Lexington Avenue," or "Where is ...". They are just as likely to say, "Well, I'm going in that direction I'll take you," as to say, "Well, I don't happen to be going that way but the streets are all numbered and the next avenue is Fourth and then, but then it will change and it may be Madison, and Lexington, so don't get nervous it will be the next one over." They are just, they are very helpful in that way.

M: I always found them too, and people said they are cold I don't think they are at all.

P: Right, I don't think they are either.

M: I depended very much on the kindness of strangers in New York and found that they were lovely. Tell about ... I'm trying to think of some things that you have told me about in your theater experiences here in Ohio. Well, like you worked on a summer project theater a couple years back because you so strongly believed that there is more that can be done. Would you like to talk about that at all?

P: Well, I don't know that there is all that much to say. The hope was that the ... They hadn't done anything in the Arena in that sense, in a summer project or summer program for several years. The board agreed that we could do that. They wanted us to use, which is understandable, mainly new people.

M: Tell them what the Arena is?

P: Well, the Arena ostensibly really is just a very large room off of the lobby in the theater which is used basically for a rehearsal hall at this point. I don't know whether it was built as such, but it is set up with space enough that it can be arranged to present shows in a total arena production, total circular seating area with an arena production, or it can be used in a three-sided fashion. There is space to seat about 150 people plus facilities for lighting and sound and all of that. So the equipment that would be needed is there. The space is somewhat limited, not that particular space, but doing productions during the season it is mainly needed because we have to have the rehearsal space. But in the summers generally, there isn't much happening at the theater. So several people had wanted to try to reestablish a summer program, and a lot of people were interested.

Most of the directors, I think there were four productions done, had not directed before. So it was a new

experience for them. The shows turned out to work quite well and the audience responded, I think, very good, very good fashion to the productions that were done. That has yet to be repeated. I don't know that it will be. It is expensive to keep the theater open: I guess there are many reasons for it, I don't know all of them. I don't think that the executive director necessarily wants that kind of program. I think more because of the fact that he feels that he needs to be around and would like to have some free time himself during the summer when it is possible. So that could be in large part the reason for not being that enthusiastic about it. As I say, it is an expense. It is very expensive to keep the theater in operation during the summer because you can't just open that section of the building, and then the whole building is open, that is it. So then you need security people and that kind of thing. But it still is exciting because although it wasn't necessarily done that season, in a situation of that kind you can do plays that generally speaking, our audiences upstairs wouldn't accept. They might be ... I don't mean that they are dirty or anything of that kind, but perhaps subject matter that they would find offensive or whatever. Which keeps us from doing them upstairs and it would be wonderful to have the opportunity to do them. Everyone is willing, as far as I know, but perfectly willing to do them in the Arena. They don't feel they have to be done upstairs they just like the opportunity to do them.

- M: I find the audiences are willing to come to the Arena.
- P: Oh yes, indeed they are. It is interesting that some people who have seen productions in the Arena, and not objected at all, I'm quite certain would have objected, the same people, objected to them being on the main stage. I don't understand why but I think that is true.
- M: I never will understand it. There is a difference in attitude and I guess that gets that take experimental theater in the Arena.
- P: Right, right.
- M: I have always been amused by that title. That means anything that isn't straight down the middle.
- P: But why does the word experimental make it all right.
- M: Because this might not turn out right.
- P: However, it could only be experimental down there.
- M: I know.

P: You could use the word experimental upstairs but it still would not be acceptable.

M: It is very amusing.

P: Perhaps it has to do with elevation or altitude, I don't know.

M: The peculiar mind structures that go on in the building hierarchy of theaters. I think that the Youngstown Playhouse being as large in size as it is ... I just found out yesterday, I was checking with Bob Gray that the largest east of the Mississippi. There are two others larger west. Now that is quite a reputation to have.

P: Oh, yes.

M: Therefore, I think this theater here should be more diversified.

P: Plus I think it is interesting that I have now ... Let me think, there have been, I would say, a dozen people that I know who live in New York, have lived in New York, and one ... I think it is only ... No, two of them. One born and raised in New York, the other ostensibly Yonkers but into New York. I guess they all thought community theater. Well, two of them have been here and directed. Others, a friend from California, coming through stopped. They are all amazed at the facilities, what is available. Some have seen productions, some were not able to and are enormously surprised by the quality of what is going on. They just can't comprehend that it still goes back to some little thing, you know, a few people getting together. They don't know what exists outside of the two coasts. That is pretty much it.

M: The thing though about the playhouse here is that it is quite ... The seating capacity is of a size larger than several Broadway houses.

P: That is true.

M: And that always astonishes New York visitors. They go, "Oh, I had no idea." I think they think we are out here in a tent, you know?

P: Well, and when they see a space and they say, "Now what is this rehearsal space can be used for other things." They are accustomed to, even if they are doing a Broadway show, to working in little, dank studios, and tiny little places, or any place that they can find. Occasionally an old hotel ballroom or, you know, whatever, and moving all about town, working in other places,

before they are ever near the theater.

M: I don't know that you ... You had so much diverse experience at such a young age. But I myself had only worked at the Youngstown Playhouse, and several places around here. When I got to New York and saw the wretched space available for rehearsal, I was absolutely dumbfounded. I was so spoiled from having all that room here.

P: Right. That is true because it also entails something else that is not thought of often, but you work in a space that is quite small or cramped that doesn't begin to give you the size of the stage you going to be working on. Then you must adjust to the stage and you have either got to make three steps cover twelve feet or nine steps cover two. You have to do that very quickly. Which again is something that is wonderful in a sense about touring. Because you may be doing the same show but you don't arrive in time to have a rehearsal and you might be working on a stage half the size of the one you did the day before. You just have to fill the stage. Once you get accustomed to that it is alright but that too is an experience that gives you a different sense of things. To work a theater that seats 200 and then one that seats 300.

M: I am sitting here looking at your face, Ron, under this little kind of spotlight we have in here. I am thinking, "Here is Ron, that I have been looking at his face for fourteen years and he never changes his looks. He is a nice looking, blond haired person, with blue eyes." I was wondering if that has anything to do that you can play different ages. From sixteen to ninety, I have seen you do so many diverse roles. I try to figure out what is the ability, what is the basic thing that you have that you are so believable in all of those.

P: Well, I don't know. I don't think I could play sixteen at this point. I think that ... I don't think...

M: Maybe twenty-one then.

P: Yes, but I will tell you there has been such an enormous change in several years, several like maybe even fifteen, twenty years, where I felt that I used to be able to play quite a bit younger than I can, than I feel I can now. Hasn't to do necessarily with a look or anything but that I don't necessarily understand a person of that age now.

M: Inside?

P: No, I don't understand what they are talking about. I

don't understand their feelings or attitudes. It makes it much more difficult. I did spend a period of time looking a certain age which made me very angry because outside of New York you have a larger opportunity to play a wider age range. But at thirty-five I wanted to play someone twenty-eight and they said, "You look seventeen." Well, I said, "But by the time I look thirty-five I will be eighty. How can I play thirty-five I won't be able to stand up."

M: I just wondered if that had anything to do with it beside your talent. Name some of your favorite characterizations, some of the roles that you really enjoyed the characters, and why.

P: Well, I liked playing Clyde in "Five Finger Exercise" because I liked the family situation. I liked what was happening within the family, British family. That is several years ago. But I like the character. Well, that was a young character. Well, I was younger then as well. I like playing farce to a certain degree. I don't know that I could pick out a particular character in any farce. I enjoyed to a degree "Chase Me Conrad" earlier this season just because he was so ... Not this season, last season ... So bizarre, I mean just crazy almost burlesque kind of thing. That was great fun. I would liked to have played Henry in "Lion in Winter," but I think I need to be a little older for that. That because I like the strength of the character, and the language is wonderful.

M: How did you feel about playing Geoffrey, the son?

P: Geoffrey was fine. I didn't think I was necessarily right for Geoffrey but I guess it worked well enough. I don't know what else would I ...

M: Well, you have done dozens of roles. That is why I thought some stand outs in your whole life.

P: Well, I like the old actor in the "Fantasticks," because he is very poignant, and he is very dear and I think was never very good as an actor. I sort of felt that he had a one time shot as a Shakespearean actor and was terrific and never could match it and just made up his own company and now there is nothing left of it, you know. That was enjoyable. The mute in that show is a beautiful role because you need to be so fast on it. It is almost like doing mime or something.

M: That show is hard to describe because it has got that stock company of type actors. We forget sometimes, I think, that a lot of people, like I, have never seen it. It is hard to believe.

P: Oh yes, of course.

M: But it is still filling up daily. Even though it has been running that many years a lot of people don't know it. Do you think you would like to do movie work or try movie work?

P: I don't know. I have done virtually nothing. There are a couple of television things I have done that I was able to see. But I didn't like that at all. I didn't like what I was doing. I haven't any idea because I have never done it. It would just be a whole different thing, certainly. I mean, you know, hitting marks, and forgetting about projection, and working in such an intimate way, and yet with no actual intimacy because you are not working specifically with anyone much of the time.

M: Where as stage work you can feel the build of the character in the play and the inner play with the other people is very strong. And, as you said, the projection of your voice is important.

P: And the feedback, the immediate feedback from an audience being there with you.

M: The live audience.

P: Even if there is no sound they are still there and you feel them. There is a sense of it.

M: Yes, you do. You feel their presence, that is right. That is a wonderful feeling. I just wondered, I thought perhaps you had done some television work and I didn't know what it was. What is it exactly?

P: Oh, just ... I did a thing when I was in Pittsburgh, well we did little things from childrens plays, but we did something for the Pittsburgh, I think it was the bicentennial, I don't recall now. I don't know what it was for. Anyway some celebration which was, I think, a halfanhour program about the city being settled. It was a colonial kind of story was what it was, and they did it on whatever they used at the time. So that we saw it immediately after it was finished and it was rather amusing. It wasn't meant to be but it was.

M: Ron, I would like you to spend a little bit of time telling about what you told me once about any job that you do that you feel you are doing well and you have a sense of accomplishment about it is okay with you? Because I always asked you how you could bear to give up your life in New York to come here. Although now that I have spent time there I understand better. I always thought that the dream of my life would be to go

and live there, until I did. But at any rate, you told me that you are very happy as long as you have time to travel and you have become like a really experienced traveler. You love Europe and you go there frequently. You said, "As long as I can put money aside every year and know that is something that I have to look forward to, and that is a great joy in my life." Now, you have that in to a kind of cycle now and every year I never know what country you will be ending up in, but tell something about that?

P: About?

M: Talk about that.

P: Just about being able to be content normally?

M: Your philosophy. Yes, and then your going into traveling.

P: I don't think I can be content doing anything. It depends a lot on the people around me, the people I am working with. If it is something I think I can do reasonably well it is all right so long as I say if I can have ... If I can do some things I want to do. In other words, I know a lot of people in New York, for example, who will go ... They get a job in theater, whatever it is, and it lasts for eight weeks or whatever. Then they are on unemployment and that is the way they spend their lives. I can't stand that. It would drive me totally crazy. I like to be active. So I would be just as happy to be working research firm or working in an office or ... So long as I knew that I could take a vacation or that I could go off. It was enough money that I could put money away and go off someplace, maybe to New York for a weekend. I did want to go, I wanted to go to California several years ago and I realized at that time that it was more expensive to fly to California than it was to London. I thought, "I think I will go to London." Then, of course, I more or less I fell in love with London and what I have seen of the British Isles. So I have been back there several times. I haven't been all that many places but I spend as much time as I can. I spend time in Italy, and in France, and then in the British Isles, really in England, Scotland, and Wales.

M: What do you find is the main, if you can define it, the main difference in the lifestyle between there and here that you like so much. Can you pin it down?

P: Well, I know what I sense, what I feel. I don't know that it would be the same if I was living there, and having to work, and manage on. Many people earn less money than me, generally speaking. But there is an

attitude which is more relaxed. I am speaking of England now. People seem more honest but very gentle, and they all seem to respect one another. If your job happens to be picking up the papers in the park and tidying it up, you are not looked down upon generally speaking. You know you do that well and it is like a profession that is admired because people come and will pass by someone like that and say, "The park looks lovely. You are doing a beautiful job." You know because they love their parks and they do look beautiful. There aren't many papers to pick up so they may spend time trimming little hedges along the sidewalk, you know, and curving out little places in the flowerbed where a couple of weeds have gotten in. That may sound silly, but there is enormous pride in that and it looks beautiful. So you don't feel like you are in a concrete city. There are trees, and gardens, and parks, and you can sit, and not be bothered or you can rent a chair in Hyde Park. Rent your chair for, I don't know, five pence or something like that, and you fold it and return it. You know, and no one bothers your chair.

M: You can go in the parks with a much more degree of safety than you can in ...

P: Oh yes, indeed.

M: How is it at night in the parks there?

P: I don't know. The only night I was in the park there was the night they were giving fireworks before Prince Charles and Lady Diana's wedding.

M: Well, that wasn't a typical night.

P: That was insane. But that is the only night I have been in the park.

M: You got to go while Prince Charles and Lady Diana were married?

P: It was the last day. The wedding was the last ...

M: Could you tell me about that? Not many of us have had that experience. What did you see?

P: Well, I ...

M: The marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spenser this summer. July 29th or something.

P: I didn't realize it would be the day, it was either the 29th or the 30th, I can't remember. I realized only after I was there that it was the day before I was

leaving. I had thought we would try and find a spot along the route, you know to the Abbey. But from the night before with all the crowds I thought, "Well, this is ridiculous we won't be able to get near it." Because about three days before we had gone by, and I shouldn't have said the Abbey because it was St. Pauls, surrounded, I mean surrounded with cameras and huge scaffoldings put up so that various tv cameras and people already, two days before the wedding, were sitting getting space along the way. So I went to a little bed and breakfast and we watched it on, as they might say, the telley and the Welsh couple who run the place ... I think there were only three or four people at that point in the hotel, it only has only I think ten rooms. We were all invited down to the dining room, along with I think two or three neighbors, and her family, and she had a huge buffet set up. We all talked about the wedding, watched the television. There was a Spanish couple, and a couple from Wales, and everyone talking about their ideas of the wedding and how wonderful it was. The Spanish couple, who was actually a woman and her daughter, and the mother ... Well, I had taken Spanish years ago, a tiny bit, but I was able to understand some of what she was saying. It made a very ... It was fascinating to hear what everyone else thought about.

M: About this world event?

P: And how it related to them and how excited they were by it. It was great fun. But inspite of all those crowds it was very orderly, very tidy.

M: Unlike crowd scenes in New York City. Yes?

P: Right, right.

M: I was curious about that because I found myself being very interested in the wedding. Almost wishing we had a king and a queen.

P: Oh, I know.

M: I frequently wish that. Especially instead of Ronald Reagan. But there seems to be more of a pleasant all over attitude. I just wondered if you also felt that?

P: I think that is true yes.

M: Courtesy and graciousness somehow that I find there. Since you have gone there so many times I wondered if that is what attracted you so.

P: I believe it is. I mean I was fascinated before, mainly, I suppose again, through films or whatever. Plus

that I ...

M: And a love of history. If you love history?

P: I love history and the fact that they still do have the royal family and all that.

M: I think history drives you there. It certainly helps if you are interested in it because it is absolutely saturated with it.

P: Well, yes, and there is still so much you can see. In terms of architecture and especially in the countryside, that has changed so little, which isn't certain to here, you know? So that you may have read about something, or you may have seen old photographs, or something described in a novel. And you can still, in many instances, see actually a little thatched hut, you know, that looks exactly like what you had pictured from the ... It may not be that thatched hut, I don't mean that, but from what you pictured. Still the little village, with perhaps the one little old lady, or little old man, who is terribly eccentric and everybody completely left alone, you know. I mean they might say, "Well, old Tommy is doughty," or something but that is alright. You let him be doughty, and you let him have carrots if that is all he wants to eat, period. He is respected for that.

M: There is a mutual respect I think. I was just sitting here thinking about another thing is that when you lived in New York I waited to move up there so I could do all these wonderful things with you. Now you live here and I'm here and gone, and here and gone, and here and back again. And do you ever, at times, sit here in Ohio and say, "How did I get here?"

P: No.

M: I mean theater brought you here. That is the whole point of why.

P: Well, in a sense.

M: These interviews I mean. You got in theater and by the people you met in theater you, by a circuitous route, ended up living in Youngstown, Ohio.

P: I chose to go off to New York.

M: I still think of you as living in Greenwich Village. Everytime I come and see you at this house I am sort of surprised that you are here. When I go there I always walk in and then remember that, "Oh no," you are not there. Isn't that peculiar? How do you feel about

that?

P: In terms of whether or not I miss it?

M: Or just with a sense of wondering about how ...

P: No, I don't find myself being here wondering, in a sense, how it happened, or waking up. Possibly because when I went to New York I just decided I was going to move to New York. I didn't do anything at all about looking for theater. I was frightened, I didn't know where anything was. Then I got myself a job and so on. I had some friends there so that worked out well. But then, by the same token, when I wanted to make a change and it came at a time when a job I had ... Well, the company I was working with at that time was closing. The president was retiring. So I was going to be looking for something else, I didn't know what. I wanted to move from the apartment, or I wanted to change, so that when this came up I thought, "Well that is a perfect opportunity. This will make a change. I think I would like to be out of the city for awhile." Now I am surprised, I will say that I am surprised that I have been here now for almost five years. I know that when I first came people would say, "How did you ever leave New York?" That kind of thing. But I would say, "Well, I don't know how long I plan to stay. I may only stay for a year or two or I may decide to move back to the city. I have not definite plans."

M: Content here in Youngstown?

P: Yes. I mean I like to get away, but I liked to get away when I was in New York.

M: You like this to be your home base. Your traveling will always go on.

P: For a period of time. How long, I don't know. I think I would like to live in New York again but I don't know when, or I don't know that it would be Manhattan.

M: How do feel about ever not doing theater. Will there be a point in your life where you would ever look upon not doing it at all?

P: Yes, I think so.

M: Wouldn't be that much of a wrench to you anymore?

P: I don't know.

M: Why is that? Can you sum that up real quickly?

P: Maybe because I enjoy it, I don't need the ... You

know I don't consider adulation from the audience. I think they are responding because something was amusing, or something was sorrowful, or whatever. I don't need that. I don't need to be on the stage, I don't need to perform, I don't need to be a star. I need money, but it isn't ... It's not consuming in a way for me.

M: You are not driven.

P: I suppose it was once but I think it had more to do with the fact that I wanted to meet lots of people. The people fascinated me and the idea of being around them, and listening to them talk, and the stories about what they had done, and where they had been and all of that. More than ...

M: And your travel fulfills that too.

P: Yes.

M: Well, I think that is about all the time we have, Ron. We may have a few more inches. Is there any last comment you would like to make?

P: I can't think of one, Carol. Except thank you.

M: Something that you have left out of your life that you want to stick in. Like something when you were fifteen.

P: Well, I can't think of anything except getting in trouble when my parents had a garden, when I was very young. I would eat all of the peas out of the pods and when they would go to pick them. Nothing but pods, and the roots all the way down. Isn't that adorable?

M: Oh, you little minx. It is so funny because I know you have talked a lot to me about when you were a child and some of the things you did. But those seem to come out in those late night conversations you have, you know, when you are unpeeling everything.

P: Exactly.

M: We have had a lot of those, haven't we?

P: Indeed.

M: Oh, mercy. I think we will just cut this right now. I hate to lose any tape with you, Ron, but I don't know. Unless you have something else you want to say.

P: No, I don't.

M: Extemporaneously we are just going to leave you here temporarily but permanently living in Ohio then.

P: Alright then, fine.

M: In theater at the moment, everything is sort of at the moment, but it is kind of ... Bring your permanence to me.

P: There is a permanence in a sense to it all. But it is just ...

M: You are very settled here. Maybe it is just your character because you have a great openness of character. So that would be what it is. So alright then I will say goodbye to Ron Prather. Goodbye Ron.

P: Goodbye.

END OF INTERVIEW