

Clair O. Haugen
Narrator

Catherine Murphy
Interviewer

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CM: This is Catherine Murphy interviewing Dr. Clair Haugen from Concordia College for the Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project. Dr. Haugen has been and is very closely related to the development of the theatre program at Concordia College.

Clair, could we begin with just some...oh, early biographical material? From where did you come?

CH: Me? Oh!

CM: [Chuckles] Yes.

CH: Folden Township in Otter Tail County, [Minnesota] on a farm between Henning and Vining.

CM: Oh...now that's...

CH: So that makes it lengthy, when someone asks where I was born.

CM: Yes. Okay.

CH: I have to fill all that stuff in...and yes...

CM: Alright. Somehow I had assumed you came out of North Dakota, I don't know why!

CH: No, no.

CM: But you are a Minnesota...Minnesotan born and bred.

CH: Well, I have a rural look to me, yeah. Yeah.

CM: Good.

CH: And not too far from here, actually.

CM: Fine. How did you develop an interest in theatre?

CH: Ah, I suppose it is connected with my personality in some way. I think most of us, and you might be able to vouch for that yourself, who are attracted to theatre find audience response a supportive thing. And the possibility of developing alter ego characters in a socially approved way, you know!

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: It...it's really an extension to the kind of child's play that we all indulge in. Hmmm.

CM: Did you have a particular teacher in early years who encouraged...?

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...participation in speech and theatre activities?

CH: Hmmm, there were two people, one in high school and one in college. I don't think I thought of theatre as a field, you know, as something to do more than as a hobby, until I got to college.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And in college that man was named Donald Spencer. And ah...I'll probably talk more about him later on. But hmmm...I can remember his suggesting to me once that if I were interested in continuing in theatre in some respect...And at that time the idea was, if you're interested in theatre, then you go to graduate school, and then you get a job at a college or a university, you know.

CM: Right.

CH: And that he would not hesitate to recommend that to me. "I would not hesitate to," is the phrase that stuck in my mind. And I thought, hmmm, that sounds interesting.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: You know, I can continue doing something that I like to do, and possibly even get paid for it. And remember this is about 1955 [chuckles] when one could get jobs, you know.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Right.

CH: So...so that was an important point for me to think about theatre seriously and not just another...student hobby.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And I had been interested in music and...and you know, I had sung, I'd played several musical instruments. And I had been interested in school journalism. And when I went to college I was going to be a *student*. I wasn't going to do any of this extracurricular stuff. Well, I found out that I simply had more spare time; I wasn't any better a student. And theatre was a really absorbing kind of thing. I believe it gave me a sort of stimulation and motivation, a place to do things and accomplish things that I did not in more channeled kinds of activities. And it did...to be honest, I think most colleges like Concordia were not so rigorous in the 1950s as they are now. And students who had...who had an ability to catch on to things quickly...and I was that kind of a lucky person [who] had a lot of spare time.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And theatre was there to fill it in. In fact, I think I hit a point where I went to school in my spare time.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: [Laughing] And so...

CM: [Laughing] I identify with that! I...

CH: [Laughs] But those are good years!

CM: I do think that's a good description.

CH: Yeah.

CM: And so it...it appeals not only to an imaginative participation, but theatre is a social relationship also.

CH: And it...yes. Yes.

CM: Because it's a group activity.

CH: Really multidimensional. Hmmm, I...I...the people that you meet and that you work with. Some people that I don't see any more really, but I think about every day, and more or less keep in touch with.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: They're dear, good people.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And hmmm...and the intellectual challenge, too, because understanding the literature, speculating on meanings...

CM: Right.

CH: The whole task of criticism, interpretation leading to theory, and theatre history, and all kinds of other things I found tremendously stimulating.

CM: Right.

CH: And still do.

CM: It kind of gets to you in spite of yourself. I think it's a *wonderful* way to work with...with students in interpretation...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...particularly of literature.

CH: I...I think I started out with a kind of a suspicion, a good Folden Township, Lutheran Free Church suspicion.

CM: Sure.

CH: Of...of the performing arts because...well, it's pretend, you know.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And you don't make things with your hands, at least I didn't think so.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And it was self-indulgent and the hours were probably immoral, you know.

CM: Oh, absolutely.

CH: Too late in the morning and too late at night.

CM: Sure.

CH: And so I needed to overcome those kinds of things. By the way, another dimension of theatre that I discovered was just the craft dimension. And I learned how to use carpentry tools in the theatre.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And soldering irons and all kinds of stuff. And I gained a...I'm good at that stuff now!

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And I gained a dimension in my life and a self-respect that...now like...like lots of nineteen-year-olds, you know, you *need* in theatre.

CM: Yeah, well that's interesting. You didn't bring that with you when you arrived.

CH: No.

CM: You learned it through...through all the crew and construction work.

CH: And...and patient people who said, "No, not that way, do it again." [Chuckles]

CM: Then do it again.

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: Well, that's very interesting. The years...your years of being a student at Concordia were what years?

CH: Mmmm. Ah...autumn 1953 to spring 1957.

CM: Okay. And from there where did you then move on?

CH: I did a quickie two semesters Master's at the University of Wisconsin. I had enlisted in the Army Reserve and it was about the same point I enrolled in college. And the Korean War was going and I felt remiss because people I knew were serving and the Minnesota Forty-Seventh Infantry Division had been called up to active duty.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And there were some people I knew who had opted to leave school even to go active with the unit. And so there were...there was a lot of "do your part" kind of feeling around.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And I felt that very strongly. I think I still do. So I enlisted in the Army Reserve. That was an *eight-year hitch*.

CM: Oh, boy.

CH: [Chuckles] But one of the things that it did for me is that it...it gave me exemption from active military service, and I didn't need to take a 2-s student deferment, and that was important to me.

CM: Yes.

CH: Hmmm, so my plan was after I finished college, I was going to go active duty for six months and go to some kinds of schools that related to my military occupation specialty (MOS).

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: I was a counter-fire specialist. [Chuckles]

CM: I see. [Chuckles]

CH: And ah...well, I sat around all summer being put off at two-week intervals until after I graduated, until August when I decided that the Army had had its chance at me. And I decided to go to graduate school. So I phoned my teacher and mentor and he phoned some friends at the University of Wisconsin and they came up with an assistantship. [Chuckles] It...it seems so easy now, looking back at it. In the space of a few days, all this was arranged. And then as I was packed and ready to go, then I got a job offer. If, when I came back, I wanted to teach at Concordia for a year...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: To replace somebody who had resigned [unclear] point, then I could do that. That was an exciting prospect. And I think I was overly impressed with the possibilities of going to work at alma mater and...and my ego received a considerable boost.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Someone else I knew who ran a rival theatre around here advised me against it, said that was a bad idea, and I should come talk to *him* when I came back with my degree!

CM: Ah. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: So, I...I felt very good about it and very motivated. Went off to graduate school, did a two-semester's Master's and then came back to work.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Came back to work. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And then...and then that...that's where I've been, with time off for good behavior from time to time, go off on leaves and things like that.

CM: Right. Why...what was the area of emphasis at the University of Wisconsin that attracted you there?

CH: I think...

CM: Was there a specialty in theatre that particularly intrigued you?

CH: Well, it was a...it was a generalist's degree. But like so many people who go to graduate school, that was the only institution that I really *visualized* as a viable graduate institution.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And I...I see that with so many students.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: You know, no matter how many places they look at, there...there's someplace that they can identify as the place to go.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: In my case, it was because one of my teachers had been there and he named names that I could...I could see what it would be like. Hmmm...when I went back to tackle my Ph.D. (and that was a toughie because of the short Master's [chuckles]) then I was more hardheaded about picking a graduate school.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And I decided to go to the University of Iowa. The reason for deciding that was...hmmm...a man named Oscar G. Brockett, who's a...who still is a scholar in theatre history, criticism, and theory...had a fine reputation, and I wanted to go study around him.

CM: Particularly with him.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But I spent a year, and then went back to the University of Wisconsin and finished my degree there.

CM: [Chuckles] I see. Yes.

CH: Stayed in the Big Ten though, that's the main thing.

CM: Well...good. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: You were asking about specialty. I don't think I developed a notion of specialty until I had...hmmm...I was trying to develop a dissertation area. And I had an ignoble reason for picking my dissertation area: I wanted to travel. [Chuckles] And so I picked a topic that required leaving the country, and the University of Wisconsin had good support funds for travel grants, and I got one of those. And went to England and studied nineteenth century theatre innovation.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: And that has since developed into...into theatre innovation in general, contemporary theatre innovation.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Yes, I still work on that research area. But that was something that...that really went back to my early years as an undergraduate at Concordia, because I was around people...one person in particular, Donald Spencer, who had a kind of reformer's zeal about doing things differently and doing them uniquely.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And...and an intense pride and integrity on doing things his way. That extended to his students. Not that we were expected to do things *his* way, but we were expected to find our *own* way and do things our own way.

CM: Find your own.

CH: And...and that gave me a respect and enthusiasm for innovative kinds of theatre. And that has persisted all through.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: So I guess, although I didn't realize it at the time, the pattern behind everything I did was to seek a place where I could, you know, develop as an innovative, creative theatre person.

CM: Well, that's very interesting to see the links and put them together.

CH: Yeah, I've had...

CM: Because I hadn't realized this chain of influences before, so...

CH: I also turned into a theatre historian, so I suppose I tend to find patterns where none exist, so you can take that with a grain of salt.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Sure.

CH: But I think that happened.

CM: Well, the purpose of this history project is to try to survey programs in the community of Moorhead. I think basically a time period given to us was from 1930 up to the present. And I know you didn't really come on board at Concordia until midway there or more.

CH: Yeah.

CM: But perhaps you know something about early activities...

CH: A little bit, yeah.

CM: ...in theatrical presentations at Concordia. Can you recall...?

CH: Well, so far as I know, theatre has always been a part of the social scene at Concordia anyway. And I would have expected that a college which was founded as a sectarian school would give inordinate attention to plays with religious kinds of content.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And a couple summers ago I did a retrospective production list of everything that we'd done at our place.

CM: Oh.

CH: And hmmm...I think I found maybe two productions that could be called religious drama.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Otherwise, it was straightforward...hmmm...combination of what good contemporary plays are being written. I guess modern, you know, ten, fifteen years old maybe.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And the classics.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: *Twelfth Night* [written by William Shakespeare] has been performed at Concordia more than any other play, I think.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: And *As You Like It* and [*The*] *Taming [of] the Shrew* [both written by William Shakespeare] several times so, you know, almost from the first year, if not literally the first year.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: There has...there has been solid attention to the classical literature. At the same time, there ran with that a strain of...it seems to me, let's do a play, you know.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: The activity-oriented...it...it's fun to do a play.

CM: Yes.

CH: And so a lot of titles showed up that...

CM: And maybe sponsored by a society of some sort...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...rather than by a department or academic part of a program.

CH: Yeah. Hmm...I can get to that.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But actually, until Don Spencer came to Concordia, all the theatre at Concordia was sponsored as an activity by a student organization.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. I see.

CH: One or another.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But what I meant is plays that were potboilers, the kind of things that high schools might be doing.

CM: Yes.

CH: That...hmmm...easy farces by authors that no one remembers.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And it's fun to do it and put it on, and the audience comes and recognizes their friends in the play.

CM: Yes.

CH: And everybody has a good laugh and then it's over. Ah, that's not what I think theatre is for.

CM: No.

CH: I...I...I expect more of it. But there were these two strains working. And the same people were doing both kinds of plays. After a while, Concordia joined a national dramatic honorary society. Now I'm not so sure exactly when it is. I think it was about 1928. It was Alpha Psi Omega [National Theatre Honor Society], and Concordia has the Alpha Alpha caste, which means...

CM: My goodness! That's...[Laughs]

CH: [Laughs]

CM: [Laughing] ...the beginning of the beginning!

CH: Just about! I suppose Alpha caste was the first one. So at the point where they started going through the Greek Alphabet the second time, you know...[Chuckles]

CM: Yeah. Okay.

CH: Then that's when we joined in.

CM: Alright.

CH: Hmm...so that organization became the governing body for something called Concordia Theatre.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And Concordia Theatre was a student organization that produced plays. It was...it was a club theatre. And I've discovered since then that just fits in the pattern of what was being done at colleges and universities all over the United States and in Europe. Not in universities, but as part of the independent theatre movement, people who believed in theatre or were interested in theatre would get together and sponsor the production of plays. And the way they underwrote it was to buy season tickets. There was a time that you could not act in a play at Concordia or hammer nails into the scenery unless you were a member of Concordia Theatre.

CM: Oh, I see.

CH: And you became a member by buying a season ticket at the beginning of the year.

CM: A season ticket. Yes.

CH: And that provided the working capital, and theoretically, then gate receipts...[Laughs]

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: [Laughs] More than one theatre has foundered on that dream! Gate receipts were to provide the rest of the money in order to maintain the program. Ah, at...at the point where I came in was really the end of those days at Concordia. In my sophomore year a man came, whose name is Donald Spencer (I've referred to him several times) who was a new Master's out of Wisconsin, had been teaching in north central Minnesota in the Bemidji area, hmmm...and was *determined* to do something *significant* in theatre. And he did. And one of the results was a splitting away between the people who had the activity interest and people who had a more rigorous...oh, I don't know, professional...or academic or that kind of a rigorous interest in theatre.

CM: So at that time it became part of the academic...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...department of speech or whatever the department was named.

CH: In fact, I was [chuckles] the last presiding treasurer of the Concordia Theatre.

CM: Oh, of the society. I see.

CH: Yeah, and I personally brought the books over to the business office when it...

CM: Good. Alright, well...

CH: And there was some trauma in that because...and I think one of the things we lost was the...hmmm...the initiative that rested with the students.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Hmmm, and there's a tradeoff there. So long as it's the people...so long as it's the amateurs that are running the operation, you've got that kind of...hmmm...team spirit. But you also are limited to the expertise of the beginners. Then no one's going to have more than four years' experience. Hmmm...and...and we traded off at that point. It was the proper thing to do. But since then we've been...ah...we've been at a loss sometimes, and for instance having to work very hard in order to maintain the ah...the kind of interest and support that used to come from the grass roots.

CM: Sure.

CH: Yeah.

CM: I remember when Donald Spencer came in for his initial interview.

CH: Oh!

CM: I was teaching part time in the speech department at that time.

CH: I've heard a number of stories about that occasion, yes.

CM: Well, there was a tornado, I think...

CH: Yes!

CM: Close to a tornado on the day he came.

CH: Yes, his...

CM: On the day he came.

CH: And if there hadn't been, he would have caused one, I think! [Laughs]

CM: Maybe! But I thought, you know, he'll never come back. *Who* would choose to live in...in this place where geranium tops were blowing away? And it was in the spring, I think, people had just planted a few isolated little flowers and we *literally* blew off the map. But he was not particularly...

CH: But Joe Knutson had told me a little bit about that.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: And...and Joe said he was unimpressed with the area, and with the college, and with Joe Knutson. [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs]

CH: And he left and...and then thought better of it later on, and decided it might be a good place to stay. It was lucky for Concordia that he did, because he brought a kind of an influence that was necessary for us at that stage in our growth. I suspect...ah...well, he's not in educational theatre; he's not in theatre anymore of any kind.

CM: Oh, he's not?

CH: No. Hmmm, he had one other theatre job after he left Concordia and then left theatre. Ah...but...I think his...his tendency to be discontented with where he was made him such an innovator of new things.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And now the new thing he innovated was a conscientious production of *The Rivals* by [Richard Brinsley] Sheridan, an eighteenth century play, and that isn't all that new. But to do it in such a workman-like way, to all of a sudden uncover new higher standards of achievement than anyone around our place had ever thought of...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: That was impressive. You were talking about interviewing stories. Another one that I should add to that, a friend of Don Spencer's came to work at our place a couple years later, A. Scott Beach; he always thought it was a great injustice because he figured he was "the" Scott Beach.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: Hmmm, he taught at Concordia maybe three years. And when he interviewed, they put him up at what was then the Frederick Martin Hotel, the F.M.

CM: Yes.

CH: Now the Midland Federal building. And he had a room...well, all the rooms vibrated when...[chuckles] when the trains went through.

CM: When the trains...

CH: [Laughs] Yeah, that's the...the NP [Northern Pacific] on that side. And hmmm, in the morning the desk clerk had reported to somebody from the college, he had come by to check out and said, "Can you tell me what time this hotel gets into the station?" [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs]

CH: Because he'd been hearing trains all night long. I...

CM: Good question. I remember Scott Beach playing Uncle Vanya [in *Uncle Vanya* written by Anton Chekhov].

CH: Yes.

CM: And it was a wonderful production.

CH: He also did an Algernon in...

CM: Oh...

CH: In...in...in...

CM: *The Importance of Being Earnest* [written by Oscar Wilde].

CH: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, of course.

CM: Oh...yes.

CH: He was a kind of an Algernon. Hmmm. He played Astrov, actually. I...I did Vanya.

CM: Oh, *you* did Vanya.

CH: I did Vanya.

CM: Excuse me, now I remember the production!

CH: [Laughs]

CM: I don't remember the cast. [Chuckles] It was a *wonderful* production, I remember. And Chekhov is not easy to do.

CH: No. I've...I've tried to do Chekhov myself and...and Chekhov is not easy to do! I...

CM: Well, not for college students. It calls for some...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...maturity, I think...

CH: Yes.

CM: ...that college students, you know, have trouble finding.

CH: I think...[unclear] the maturity would be [sighs] hard to understand Chekhov. Hmmm. The characters are all, you know, what? Forty-five going on sixteen or something.

CM: Yes. Yes.

CH: The characters, I think, by and large, are...are emotionally very young. *But*...it's hard for someone whose emotional age corresponds that to understand the phenomenon. And I think to play Chekhov one needs more age.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: What was it that said that...that's said about Juliet, too, by the time an actress is mature enough to understand Juliet, [chuckles] she's too to be convincing in the role.

CM: Too old play the part. [Chuckles]

CH: Yeah.

CM: Right.

CH: Yes.

CM: Well, I...going back to Scott Beach.

CH: Yes.

CM: I have heard him commenting for, I think, the San Francisco Opera. And what did you say he's doing today?

CH: Well, I understand that he is the principal drama critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*. He also has a talk show. It was the first call-in radio show in the San Francisco-Bay area. Ah, and every once in a while somebody sends a newspaper supplement with a story about Scott in it. And once in a while he'll phone, usually Ralph Hoppe, to ask about things at Concordia.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And he remembers you, Cathy, and me, and Walt Prausnitz, and a few of the old timers and he wonders how we are, you know.

CM: Well...

CH: And we still remember Scott.

CM: That's great.

CH: He...he also is one of the founders of The Committee which was an improvisational theatre group in San Francisco similar to the Second City Company in Chicago, The Committee actually did a New York production. Scott had...wasn't part of them at that point. In fact, when [chuckles] Ralph Hoppe (who has also taught at Concordia for a million years—man and boy have been there a long time) was in San Francisco and went to the club where The Committee was performing.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And Scott spotted him.

CM: Oh!

CH: He recognized him in the house.

CM: That's wonderful.

CH: And then in the middle of the improvisation, burst out into singing *Soli Deo Gloria*...[Laughs]

CM: Oh, my goodness! [Laughs]

CH: It was the...the alma mater for Concordia.

CM: Oh!

CH: [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs] What an experience for Ralph Hoppe!

CH: Yeah!

CM: Goodness!

CH: Well, yes.

CM: You know.

CH: And I...I think about that tightly bonded group that Scott was part of, and Don.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And the students. Hmmm. [Sighs] David Lohman[sp?], who got a letter of commendation from the Governor of North Dakota for being such a good Teddy Roosevelt in the first Medora project.

CM: The first Medora production.

CH: See, he did Teddy Roosevelt.

CM: Yes.

CH: And David, hmmm, married another Concordia theatre person. And the two of them very quickly had a young David. And then went to Pongo Pongo where he assisted in the English language instruction program. [Laughs]

CM: Goodness.

CH: Yeah. Janice, his wife, said, “How nice it is, little David and David can come of age together in Samoa!” [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs]

CH: And David went from there to...to Panama, and then died young.

CM: Oh...

CH: Ah...it was a good group and a close group.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And...odd people. Theatre attracts odd people!

CM: Well...it sounds like a nucleus of people who really gave birth...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...in a way to...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...to the program that exists probably today.

CH: Yeah.

CM: And when you have a strong heritage to reach back toward, hmmm, in that case.

CH: Mmmm-hmmm.

CM: I think that's strong support for the development of a program. Which when Don Spencer came, probably it was the first time that courses in theatre were offered...

CH: Well...

CM: ...as part of...you know, for academic credit.

CH: No, there had been courses. Hmmm, the usual.

CM: Mmmm.

CH: An acting course, and a play production course.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that may have been all.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But the curriculum was expanded.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that's moved to a point where just now we...we now have a major in theatre.

CM: Yes.

CH: And that's been a long time of boring.

CM: Well, I'm sure. Right.

CH: Thirty years.

CM: Yes. Well, is there...? Is there some particular educational philosophy or theatre philosophy that governs the program that could be described?

CH: Two things, I think, are important.

CM: Okay.

CH: One is that we are an educational theatre in several respects. I think, first of all, we're educational for our audience. Hmmm...now that could sound awfully stuffy, you know, that we're here to improve your minds, and that's not the point at all. But we feel that an exchange for the time and small money investment to come and see the play, we have to try to provide some kind of growth, provide an experience in the theatre like life enough to produce spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And if we've done that, then we've satisfied our educational function. So in a sense, I suppose, any production of a play is a microcosm of the whole liberal arts objective, so that that's part of what we do. And I think different people in the theatre, people I work with, have worked with, people that have been there before I have, have maybe different ideas as to what

constitutes a proper sort of educational experience for the audience. But still, the commitment to that experience is there. In other words, it never has been just, “let’s do a play because it’s so much fun to do plays,” or, “let’s earn a few bucks so that we can do this with it,” or, “I love the curtain call and the applause.” And...and the mood around the place, which is deeper than a policy, it’s like a constitutional provision in Britain.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Which is more important than anything you can write down on paper. Ah, that’s...that’s part of what we do. Another thing has been a commitment to originality. Hmmm...it sometimes has...sometimes we have done things our way and been less polished than it would have been if we had done a faithful replication of a production that had been done someplace else. But that’s a commitment to...to the innovation idea, to try new things.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, the existence of a good studio theatre space...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...has made it possible for you to be a lot more experimental, has it not?

CH: Yes. And...and...hmmm [sighs] there was a time when our main productions, by and large, had...were experiments of one sort or another.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Now marketplace realities are such that that’s a little risky now. There are certain kinds of audience expectations in the area, and...and we have become more and more conservative in the kind of thing that we attempt. But in recognizing that, we want to take...starting next year, in fact, we want to take particular advantage of that experimental space that we have in our theatre building, the room that we call Lab 300, because on the architect’s plan it’s called 300. It’s our laboratory, or the place to experiment. And we plan to institute the first year of an ongoing series in which there will be a major production done experimentally that will be allowed to run long enough so that it can build an audience. The trouble with something done experimentally is at first it really looks weird. But after word of mouth goes around, and people have learned what to expect from it, then it develops an audience. So there’s one commitment we have. Perhaps a reinterpretation of a classical play, or a production of a play that’s so problematic that it’s...it’s thought to be unproduceable, or new writing.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: We’re experimenting with new modes of staging, or mixed dramatic media, or something like that.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: In connection with that, also some workshops, possibly a playwriting workshop. We want to start an annual playwriting competition.

CM: Good.

CH: To invite new scripts. Hmmm. And so...so we're on the edge of implementing this.

CM: Yes.

CH: This idea. Yeah.

CM: Well, good. When was the new theatre...? Not so new...[Laughs]

CH: 1969. [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs] Not so new even...

CH: [Laughing] Right!

CM: It was constructed and opened for use in...in that...

CH: Yeah. It was delivered in 1969.

CM: Yes.

CH: And hmmm...[sighs] And this...this summer we're finishing it, finally.

CM: Oh! [Laughs]

CH: The last of the deduct alternates that were in it that we needed to add (which is improvements in the lighting equipment) is being finished.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And what is that? It's...it's fifteen or sixteen years later.

CM: Fifteen or sixteen years. Yeah.

CH: Yeah, well, I still think of it as a new theatre. Before that we were in the building called Old Main in the room that was built as a chapel, and recital hall, and theatre.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that had gone through several stages of remodeling.

CM: Well, this has greatly increased your technical ability in staging to have a new facility.

CH: Yeah.

CM: And also seating capacity for your audiences.

CH: Yeah. Actually...

CM: It's a *beautiful* and intimate theatre.

CH: Yes. Much, much more comfortable for the audience than anything we had way before.

CM: [Chuckling] Oh, and...Yes.

CH: Once in a while...one patron in particular announced to me one day he was never going to come back to our theatre so long as we were in Old Main. It had been a hot day.

CM: Oh...

CH: He'd taken off his coat and his shirt had stuck to the varnish in the seats!

CM: Oh, oh.

CH: And when he came away, he came away with some varnish on his shirt. He was angry.

CM: Oh, oh. Yes.

CH: Our facilities have provided some kind of technical opportunities, and I think that's...that's been a striking kind of growth we've had in what we've been able to do in technical theatre. A couple people occur to me who have been responsible for that. And one is...is Robert and Julia Dunham.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Who are off in New Hampshire now.

CM: Ah ha.

CH: Bob is restoring eighteenth century houses.

CM: My!

CH: But when he was with us, he was a technical director, and had a grasp of some kinds of theatre techniques that were mindboggling, just exciting. Some ideas he...innovative ideas he had for the use of materials. And two other people are still with us, James Cermak, who is our

managing director now, and Helen Cermak, who is Jim's wife, who is another director on our staff and supervises our wardrobe. These people, in addition to other talents, I think, are administrative geniuses.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And hmmm...Jim is an [Actor's] Equity stage manager, card-carrying stage manager. He is skilled and one of the best people I know about organizing production details.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that's given us a strength that's necessitated by having the building that you mentioned.

CM: Yes.

CH: And then certain kinds of growth in our program have been possible. We've...hmmm [sighs] it is...

CM: Well, I think audiences today expect...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...hmmm...a technical production at a higher level...

CH: Yes.

CM: ...perhaps than audiences did twenty-five years ago.

CH: Yeah.

CM: And so that becomes a built-in part and strain on your budget...I think a *big* expectation of a college theatre.

CH: Yeah. Hmmm. The growth pattern for academic theatre is, by and large, where first they hired directors, and then the director started a program, and then hired a technical director, and then they...new theatre facilities came in after the technical directors, and then growth beyond that in audience development, front-of-house management, marketing, that sort of thing.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Arts management people.

CM: Yes.

CH: And that's been the development phase in the educational theatre. And as I look at what we've done, that's been the progression at our place as well.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And this has given regional audiences a much, much better quality theatre than they've ever had in this country, I think. I think the colleges and universities are responsible for providing theatre throughout the United States. The professional theatre can't do that because it isn't...it *needs* the subsidy which educational institutions provide in one way or another. At Moorhead State, it's a student activity fund, at our place it's an academic budget...whatever, one place or another.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But it needs the subsidy to survive. And one result of the growth in the educational theatre has been educating the audience expectations.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: To...to expect better theatre. That's healthy, that's good, too.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, I have some favorite productions over the years such as...

CH: *Candida*.

CM: Ah...

CH: No.

CM: [Laughs] No!

CH: [Laughing]

CM: [Laughing] I wasn't thinking...and that goes back almost pre-history.

CH: [Laughs]

CM: Although I think I mentioned...I think the Guthrie Theatre is producing *Candida* [written by George Bernard Shaw] as part of this year's upcoming season.

CH: Yeah.

CM: So I'd like to go back and see that again.

CH: Maybe we should put together...

CM: We should...a tour.

CH: ...a party and go to it.

CM: We should!

CH: Yeah.

CM: We definitely should. Hmmm, but I'm thinking in terms of more recent productions, and some of yours. *Indians* by Arthur Kopit was...

CH: Ah...Oh! That was an amazing...*amazing*, amazing production!

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: We started rehearsal for that [chuckles] when we were doing—and the three colleges—and it...oh, what we were calling Indian Emphasis Week.

CM: Yes.

CH: And we had Dennis Banks, and Vine Deloria, and a whole lot of people.

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: And I was going into tryouts with *Indians*, a play which I *knew* had had a record of drawing American Indian Movement [AIM] protests. Any production of it done in our area had been picketed by AIM. The woman who [chuckles] on our campus was...hmmm...our minority students...

CM: Advisor.

CH: ...specialist, yeah...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: ...a Native American herself and a member of AIM, did some advance party work for me. And I told when I was planning the production, and I asked for her help, and she ran interference for me. And we weren't picketed or anything like that. We also got the cooperation of people in the Indian community in Fargo-Moorhead in a way that I think helped the production. And something else that...that was...hmmm...it's something that affected me personally very, very deeply. We were in the last stage, the casting stage in which you invite people to come back and find out what roles they're going to play.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And at that point about a dozen or fifteen Native American men showed up saying that they were there to try out.

CM: Oh.

CH: Well, some of them were Concordia students who hadn't tried out earlier.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But had been pressured by my friend the AIM member to try out.

CM: Sure.

CH: So there they were. And the rest of them, they were there actually to provide some moral support. It's an intimidating thing to be crashing into what is clearly an Anglo activity.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: You know, the theatre is not an Indian...

CM: No.

CH: ...kind of institution.

CM: Tradition. No.

CH: And then have to do things that would run against their culture patterns in so many ways. Well, there was a confrontation. The rehearsal ground to a stop, I split them into small groups, and we talked openly about fears. I ended up casting one of the people who tried out as John Grass, one of the principal male roles.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Then when we were in rehearsal, I had cast a white student as Sitting Bull. And Sitting Bull is an important man in Native American history...in *all* of American history.

CM: Oh, yes.

CH: But particularly to Native Americans. Hmmm. So this guy was being conscientious in developing the part. And when there was an AIM powwow in St. Paul, the Indians on our campus offered to take him along.

CM: Oh.

CH: So he could be around some Indians. And they thought this was very funny. He was their tame white person. [Chuckles]

CM: [Chuckles]

CH: [Chuckles] And they brought him along to...

CM: Kind of a role reversal.

CH: Yeah, right. He's token...

CM: ...situation.

CH: He's token Anglo.

CM: Yes.

CH: And they brought him along. And he...while he was there, he was confronted by Eddie Benton who is a Native American Ojibwe medicine man, AIM member. He's from Wisconsin. And asked him, "What do you think would give you the right to play Sitting Bull?" And he asked them that several times during the evening. And...and what Brad concluded is that what Benton meant was: what do you need to do to earn the right?

CM: Oh. Oh...

CH: It...that...that night he was warned by some friends, if he had someplace else to stay in St. Paul, he should stay there tonight.

CM: Oh...frightening.

CH: Because someone else had announced they were going to kill him. Well, anyway...

CM: [Gasps]

CH: Ah, we got our production on...

CM: Yeouch!

CH: [Laughing]

CM: I didn't know all this was going on in the background!

CH: We...we had...

CM: I just...you know...

CH: But Indians from the community were sewing costumes and doing beadwork for us. On one night we had one or two extra people in the community who just popped in for a crowd scene. And in the last performance when the actor...ah...Ken Bordner, who was a faculty member playing Buffalo Bill, when he went around to shake hands as part of the business with all the Indians near the end, they gave him the brotherhood handshake, the AIM brotherhood handshake.

CM: Oh...

CH: And that was *moving*!

CM: Well, what a tribute!

CH: Yeah.

CM: What a tribute! Was...was the objection of AIM to the fact that white Lutheran students were going to be playing Indian roles? Or was there a basic philosophic difference about the text of the play?

CH: No, I think the objection was when the play had been done originally by Arthur Kopit, it had been...had...he had *not* consulted with Native Americans.

CM: Oh. I see.

CH: And that whenever it had been produced, they had not taken Native Americans into account.

CM: Okay. Alright.

CH: And so this was, once again, the white community giving their interpretation...

CM: Yeah. I see.

CH: ...of what noble savages were.

CM: Yes. I see.

CH: And when we decided...

CM: Even though it seemed on the surface to us who saw it as very sympathetic to...

CH: Yes.

CM: ...the Indian Movement. It...it brought things to my attention, for example, the effect of the white missionary movement, the devastating effect of that on Indian communities. I guess I hadn't really thought of that before. So I would have thought AIM would have supported what would be interpreted by the play, but I...I see, you know, their point of being left out.

CH: Yes, and I think they also found it patronizing.

CM: Okay.

CH: That we in the white community were going to do this nice thing for the Indians.

CM: Yes. Yes. I...

CH: [Laughs]

CM: I understand now how complex that is. But what...? I'll bet you didn't realize you had launched something nearly that controversial when you decided to do the play.

CH: I had a...had a glimpse of it when we were getting it ready.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And ah...well, there were all kinds of...we had repercussions of all sorts.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: There were protests about language in the play, and there was a space where it looked like I might be fired and the theatre closed down.

CM: Oh, my word! [Chuckles]

CH: So that...

CM: Yes. Well...

CH: That...that was a memorable production in a lot of ways!

CM: I'm sure.

CH: But I think you see...

CM: Well, I'm glad I brought it up.

CH: Yeah, I'm glad you did!

CM: [Laughs]

CH: But I...I think that kind of...of hmmm, I don't know, conflict and turmoil, all those goings on underneath provide a kind of energy and life.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that's just the point, I think, that dramatic art is not something that you rehearse and you do slickly, maybe in the same way that you make a car.

CM: Right.

CH: It is art because it comes out of what you care about, and where you hurt, and where you feel good.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Right. Well, another one I...maybe I shouldn't go on with these controversial scripts as...!

CH: I'll try to come up with shorter responses to the others! [Laughs]

CM: Okay. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

CH: *Circle*, yeah.

CM: Is...is a marvelous [Bertolt] Brecht play and...

CH: Yeah.

CM: And you did a beautiful production on it.

CH: That was...that was the first production that I worked with Helen and Jim Cermak on.

CM: Oh. Yes.

CH: And in some ways it's probably the best thing we've ever done together. I remember that. I remember a moment at the end when...well, the story of the play is that a young woman, just out of her spontaneous sense of decency—she's not a bleeding heart liberal or anything like that—she picks up a baby that's been abandoned and takes care of it at considerable cost to her. Well, it turns out that this baby that's been abandoned is the son of some rich people who have been overturned in a revolution. When at the end of the play the mother is back in power again and decides she wants the baby back, Grusha, the good servant girl, says, "No, we've been through some things, you know. We live together, die together, this is my baby."

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And hmmm...and so a judge decides whose baby it is. And that's the same as the Solomon story with the baby in the circle.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. Right.

CH: But at the end of that there is...there is a moment in...in which all the characters get together and dance. And Grusha and the little boy dance together. And it...it's kind of a...oh, it's the kind of thing that can happen in the theatre. Life is...does not end so neatly paired off and dancing. But the audience *loved* it. And I did, too.

CM: Yes.

CH: And the just the sense in the audience response in...in the rightness of justice, and mothers and children being brought together, and the bad guys sent off and foiled, and the whole thing.

CM: Right. Well, I've used an argument that I always thought came from that play. You know, he who farms the land should own the land.

CH: Yes.

CM: Hmmm. And my own interpretation is, you know, she who cleans the house, you know, lives in the house, and...or the cabin or whatever structure is really the primary...

CH: Yeah.

CM: ...owner since that person is caretaker. But Brecht's epic theatre has been a major theatre influence in this century.

CH: Yeah.

CM: And I think these productions seem experimental perhaps to audiences but have a profound effect that maybe aren't realized.

CH: Yeah. That...that...

CM: And that's an ambitious thing to take on.

CH: That had a particular meaning for me, and for us locally, because we had...had just recently within a year or so adopted a...a black son.

CM: Oh, yes. Yes.

CH: And so all the...are you...you know, who's his real mother questions came up.

CM: That's right. Of course.

CH: And so then you end up with, well, what is it? You know. And...and to be the owner of the land or who is the real mother? And...and the answer you quoted is Brecht's answer. I saw another production of this in Glasgow. Hmmm. I've been greatly influenced by the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre Company, a *marvelous* organization. I've tried to find out as much about them as I can.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: I've gotten to know several people in the company. And I was there for production of *[The Caucasian Chalk Circle]* which Giles Havergal directed. And one of the ideas he had in there was to question the wisdom of that...this conclusion on ownership. Hmmm. And that production leaves you with the question: should a person own the land simply because that person can make it prosper? He said, "Should the Gaza Strip be owned and controlled by the latest inhabitants of that land who have pushed off the Palestinians who were there before, simply because they can make it produce more grapes than the previous owners?"

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And so he...he took my thinking a stage further, and went back to what I think is maybe a more faithful Brechtian ending that leaves you with a dialectic wondering. [Sighs] Now what is the real solution?

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Instead of saying, oh, yeah, that's...

CM: And is there an absolute answer to these questions?

CH: That's right. Yeah. And as you say, Brecht's influence in the theatre has been in part that he forces the dialectic, he forces the argument.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Without allowing the easy solution.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: That makes him a provocative writer; it makes him a risky one to produce. Audiences are going to be annoyed with him because audiences, by and large, and I...me, too, when I'm in the audience, I like the answer at the end! [Laughs]

CM: [Laughing] Well, true!

CH: [Laughs]

CM: We like a resolution.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Probably. Well...my favorite year at Concordia for me was the year of was it an Ibsen...what, bicentennial?

CH: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CM: When Dr. Einar Haugen came to do the lectures. And I think you did a production of *The Wild Duck*.

CH: Yes.

CM: Which was another very successful and...difficult...

CH: I've good luck with Ibsen.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Hmmm. I find things I understand about Ibsen. There is a man named Rolf Fjelde, whose father was educated in Mayville Teachers [College, in Mayville, North Dakota] who is related to the Wrights who live in Fargo and Moorhead.

CM: Oh.

CH: Hmmm, who...his...Rolf Fjelde's father was a sculptor and had sculpted...father or grandfather? Grandfather, I'm sorry. Had sculpted Ibsen from life in a bust. We have a plaster of it at Concordia. There is a bronze of that in the park at Wahpehton in Chahinkapa Park.

CM: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

CH: And then in Loring Park in the Twin Cities. And then there is another bronze of that in [unclear] that was just made in the last ten years in a new Ibsen park that they've put up in Norway.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Well, Rolf Fjelde translates Ibsen plays. I think his...the best translations available are ones that Fjelde has done. And hmmm, we've had some contact with him. I like to do his translations. And the key to success with Ibsen, I think, is the key to Rolf's translations, is that his characters speak English the way Norwegian-Americans speak English.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And the idiom, the personality seems familiar in a way that...ah, you know, it doesn't strike me as familiar when I'm reading an English translation. Then the characters seem...seem English. But that production of *[The] Wild Duck* you talked about, I think, was...was successful in the sense that the characters were...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: ...were real human beings.

CM: Well, it's also one of...I think one of Ibsen's very best plays.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Yeah. But it, of course...it...it's a difficult thing to produce and...and to *do* well. But I think your students achieved an understanding and sensitivity to it.

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: Ah, to all of...

CH: I lit a production of *[The] Wild Duck* once when I was a student. And with our limited equipment I tried to duplicate as faithfully as I could, literally, the effects that Ibsen called for in the...in the stage directions.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that was one of the times when I got mentioned in a review for a production device, and simply because, although the reviewer didn't know, it had been what Ibsen had intended. I think that's another thing about Ibsen. He understands what works on stage so well.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: I say understands. Isn't it funny about...about these long-dead people whose work is still so important, you know.

CM: Oh, yes.

CH: They...they...their ghost is around.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But hmmm...Ibsen's understanding of what works with audiences—and not just Norwegian audiences, or not just European, or probably Western audiences even—was so accurate in his understanding of the stage technology and...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And when a long speech is called for and when a short one, and when polysyllabic words are needed, and when they have to be simple, ordinary words. Hmmm...a very bright man. And whether he did that because he consciously knew it, or whether he sensed it, I guess doesn't make much difference. But he *did* it. And he did it consistently again, and again, and again.

CM: Yes. Right. And left a marvelous body of work.

CH: Yes. And of course, himself, an experimentalist, you see. I didn't realize that when I...when I got hooked on Ibsen as a student.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But his play *Ghosts* started the independent theatre movement all around. It was the first important production of the Freie Buhne in Berlin, the German Free Theatre.

CM: Mmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: It was the first production of J.T. Grein's Independent Theatre in London.

CM: Was it because of the text?

CH: I think so. And it was...it...

CM: The...the subject matter.

CH: Right.

CM: Right.

CH: And the Théâtre Libre in Paris by [André] Antoine.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: That was also the first production, *Ghosts*. And I think it was partly the text of the play. It was a controversial play.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: But it was also the personality of Ibsen, in that he himself was always on the frontier of what he did. In fact, he...he alienated supporters just with about every new play he wrote.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Because they said, “Oh, *this* is our Ibsen. Now he’s...he’s fostering our cause.” But then he would go on to something else.

CM: Right. Well, he did finally leave Norway and live in exile, didn’t he? Or...

CH: Well, he did that early on.

CM: Early.

CH: Yeah. He was better treated outside of Norway, and maybe the climate was better.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Certainly in Rome than in...

CM: Well...yes. [Laughs]

CH: [Laughs]

CM: Oh, we can all understand that!

CH: There were other things about Ibsen that were not admirable, but it...[Laughs]

CM: [Laughs] Right.

CH: But his...his ability to keep on moving on things that are new. And then he quit writing when he ran out of new things to write. He’d...he didn’t get *stuck* into something that had worked before.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: In the theatre there is...there’s something you know about called second night slump. And if you have a strong first production, you know, first night, then there’s a great tendency to try to duplicate the good things that you did before.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And if you try to do that then it’s stale, and flat, and it lacks spirit.

CM: Doesn’t work.

CH: You have to do it as though for the first time. And I think that’s true of creativity in general. It needs the innovative spirit.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: [Chuckles]

CM: Well, these are...productions are part of the past. Is there something in the more recent past that has been a particularly fond memory for you?

CH: Oh. Ah...[chuckles] I think, hmmm...well, I did a Brecht recently, I did *Threepenny Opera*.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Ah...that...that was pretty exciting because it was the first musical theatre I'd done in a while. And it was fun to get back to stating ideas with music. Hmmm. And I did *As You Like It* just this year.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And with these productions I have...I've been doing things that were consciously more pictorial and visual than I'd tried before. I've always been interested in the texts, it's the way I was educated.

CM: Yes.

CH: And literary values, and ideas, and dialogue. And I still that they're as important as I always did. But hmmm...I feel stronger, a little bit better at providing visual kinds of things.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: We played *As You Like It* on a rake, a sloped stage.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And had a croquet match in the...

CM: On a sloped stage?

CH: On the second stage. That...that required square croquet balls.

CM: [Laughs]

CH: They were not an unmixed success technically, but they looked a treat! [Laughs]

CM: [Chuckles] That's innovative, Clair!

CH: It is! [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs]

CH: [Laughing] Sometimes they work, and sometimes they don't.

CM: Right.

CH: I think the trick was for the actors just to hit them just hard enough. If they didn't hit them hard enough, they didn't go anywhere.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: If they hit them too hard, they...as in two nights, they went out into the audience. And a three and a half inch square maple cube [laughing] with edges is a dangerous missile when sent at deaf old ladies in the back row!

CM: [Chuckles] Right! Goodness. Well, how about plans for the future?

CH: I talked a little bit about the experimental theatre idea.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And that's about as an exciting thing as I've run into. I...ah...[Speaks in a deep, pseudo-serious voice] *I've hit a point in my life...*[Laughs] [Returns to speaking normally] When...yeah, I...I feel gathering for another leap forward, and I have something else to do. And, you know, doing something new. And for me to make my major effort in experimental production of some sort or another, with the idea this is going to be part of what I do for a future, *that's* exciting.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Hmmm...ah...one...one thing that I have been looking at, and I have been doing this for several years, and it's going slow because it'd...it'd need a lot of rewriting...hmmm...I've gotten...I found out some things about Eastern Orthodox religion, and what an icon is. You know, icon is a window through which you see reality. Well, that's very much like what an actor is or what play is, too. But I've also become interested in the Greek literature, particularly the character of Oedipus and the character Creon. Hmmm...and to see that Oedipus, you know, ended as a kind of a saint...you know, Elijah went off in the fiery chariot, and Oedipus vanished into who knows, an earthquake or something. But he became a hero of the sort that Hercules was for the Greeks and was worshipped. So to blend the...the notions that Eastern Orthodoxy have about what sainthood is, and I think they have a clearer understanding than those of us in Western Roman tradition have...ah...and the mysticism; a production that would involve choral odes, which sound like orthodox chanting.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And a setting which combines features of an iconostasis and a theatre façade. The iconostasis in a Greek church has three doors. Well, so did the skene on the Greek stage.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Hmmm. There are some interesting possibilities. To view Oedipus as an icon of...of what it is to be a human being, the *best* that one can be as a human being, the most complete. And that...that includes his shocking, repellent, you know, sin, his having fathered children by his mother. And that this repulsive person...ah...goes off in glory. That...that's...

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: That's about as theatrical as you can get.

CM: Right. Yeah. Hmmm.

CH: So that...that's...that's the big project that's been in the back of my mind. And I've got to find the time to do it. [Chuckles]

CM: That sounds...something almost cosmic in proportions.

CH: I think it is.

CM: And reminds me of an earlier production of a Greek drama, can't remember the name of it.

CH: *Prometheus Bound* [attributed to Aeschylus].

CM: *Prometheus Bound*.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Which you had to produce an earthquake, I believe.

CH: Yes.

CM: [Laughing] On stage! Which was...

CH: The man...

CM: [Laughing]...no small accomplishment!

CH: [Laughs] The man who played Prometheus and who also engineered the earthquake had been Hjalmar Ekdal in that production of *[The] Wild Duck* that you talked about.

CM: Oh, I see.

CH: He's off finishing up a combination speech/theatre Ph.D. at Carbondale.

CM: Oh!

CH: Hardly anyone does those anymore, you know.

CM: Uh huh, no.

CH: Ah, but...he's a genius.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And...and some of the things that he provided for that production...we used film in order to protract the...we used slow motion film of the earthquake, and we used all kinds of fog.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And a rock that vanished down into the abyss, and light and...[Sighs] Ah...that...that was...that was an...

CM: That was an ambitious undertaking.

CH: It was exhausting! [Laughs]

CM: I'm sure. I think another student from that era whose name I run into occasionally is Rolf Olson.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Who is coaching theatre and teaching theatre in Eden Prairie.

CH: Yes.

CM: And he's going to be serving as one of the panelists for operating support for the State Arts Board this year.

CH: Oh, really? Really. He's been on the Guthrie Literary Advisement Board as well.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Good. Good.

CH: Yes. And Rolf...hmmm...he did a number of things at Concordia when he was here.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Yes.

CH: I think it was Rolf that played Gregors Werle in that production of *[The] Wild Duck*.

CM: Of *The Wild Duck*, right.

CH: I think so, yeah.

CM: Well, the...I think our time is...is running short here. But the Concordia theatre program has been a really core program in cultural opportunities and development in this community.

CH: You know, one thing...one thing we didn't talk about...

CM: Okay.

CH: ...that probably should be mentioned...

CM: Alright.

CH: I think Concordia did the first summer theatre ever done in this community.

CM: Oh!

CH: And that was Don Spencer's innovation and *you* were in on it.

CM: Yes, I was.

CH: It was *My Three Angels* [written by Samuel and Bella Spewack], your production.

CM: Right. And *Candida*. Those were my two plays.

CH: And...yes. And...and Edward Pixley who was in that cast is now the principal author/editor for the latest revision of George Kernodle's book on introduction to theatre. Ah...

CM: Well, that's interesting.

CH: Yeah. [Chuckles]

CM: Wonderful.

CH: That was an interesting bunch of people then.

CM: Well that...yes it was.

CH: Yeah.

CM: Well, that was perhaps the first summer theatre project in this community. Had there been anything?

CH: No, there had never been anything else.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. And we did produce four plays that summer.

CH: *In eight weeks.*

CM: And even went on tour. Do you remember, we went to...you all went down to Detroit Lakes. Carried the whole...

CH: Yes, we lost ten dollars on that production, I remember.

CM: Well, I don't remember the financial transactions, but...[Chuckles]

CH: [Laughing] I was keeping books on it! But we came by pretty well, I think, for it.

CM: [Chuckles] Right.

CH: We moved it in Doug Sillers' grain truck.

CM: I see.

CH: And we kept stopping because the sediment bowl kept filling up with sediment. [Laughs]

CM: [Laughs]

CH: I think there was grain in the tank. Hmmm. You know, hmmm...there goes that innovation thing again. George Kernodle is a theatre scholar who is not in the mainstream. He's written a book called From Art to Theatre [University of Chicago Press, 1944], which is...which was his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago. No one believes it, but no one can take it for granted. So anyone who writes anything about the theatre, somewhere along the line has to...has to refute George Kernodle.

CM: I see.

CH: He has taken the same evidence that everybody else consults, and he has come up with strikingly different, well-argued conclusions. And I think that's interesting that Ed Pixley, who is a product of that same milieu that I talk about, has gotten attached to George and Portia Kernodle. Somebody who is on the cutting edge and still...still is.

CM: Right.

CH: That's...

CM: I'm very interested in hearing that.

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: Right. Well, do you think there's any...? This is a bare beginning and scratching of the surface, certainly, of the history of a program that spans so many years. But we're trying to hit the high points. And do you think there's some other...idea we've used?

CH: Some other thing that could...could be added...hmmm, there was an organization at Concordia for some time called Student Productions.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: That was started by a number of people, Ron Moen[sp?] and Robert Dryden who now is at Brainerd Junior...Community College, Bob Dryden is. Ah, they did the first musical theatre productions that were on a continuing basis. [Unclear] at NDSU [North Dakota State University]...

CM: Yes.

CH: Also was doing them at...starting at about the same time.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: Hmmm...mammoth kinds of things were done in the Fieldhouse, thousands of people, technical problems that never could be solved. [Chuckles]

CM: Yes. Right.

CH: But some of the...the student interest and initiative that I talked about as having founded Alpha Psi Omega way back when, 1928 and before that. Hmmm, that same spirit had gone into the Student Productions organization.

CM: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, another thing that I think could be commented on is the cooperation between the theatre department and the music department in the production of the annual Christmas Concert.

CH: Yes.

CM: Which is such a hallmark for Concordia College.

CH: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

CM: And I...I remember telling students, you know, that the...the musical performance had to borrow a lot of elements from drama.

CH: Yes.

CM: To keep it visually appealing. Hmmm, the lighting, the scenery, the movement, there were lots of dramatic elements in that presentation that made it very....

[End of interview]