

**Hazelle Nassif  
George Nassif  
Narrators**

**Jim Baccus  
Interviewer**

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**JB:** This is Jim Baccus, and this is November the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988.

**HN:** [In background] Hey [unclear].

**JB:** And I am visiting with Hazelle and George Nassif in their places of business. George is ill and will not be speaking directly today, but through his wife and through me. We intend to have a very interesting visit about the Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre, its history, and its accomplishments.

Before we start, Dustin Hoffman is a very famous name in the American theatre. And you had...you had a personal visit with him, as a matter...a personal visit to Fargo with Mr. Hoffman. Tell me about that.

**GN:** [Unclear].

**JB:** I know that he came to Fargo as a temporary director. And you and George were kind enough to put him up.

**HN:** Well, as a matter of fact, he...George and two other board members [coughs] called for a guest director, because the director became ill that was directing. And she suggested that we call New York. And Dustin Hoffman was on the phone, and he [said], "Well, I'll come." He needed...needed money. [Chuckles] So he came. They hired him for two shows.

George met him at the airport, and George looked at him and he said, "Are you a *director*?" [Laughs] He said more than that. But...he says, "Yeah, I am!" And then he said, "Okay." And then he came to the Community Theatre, which was located across from the Elim Lutheran Church. We were in the First Christian Church there. We'd been many other places, but didn't have a regular home, so we had to put in seats there at the First Christian Church, and...and that was in 1963.

**JB:** And was...?

**HN:** And Dustin was very pleased.

**JB:** [Chuckles] I might mention that Dustin Hoffman now is a superstar, of course, in the cinema. He was...he did *Kramer Versus Kramer*.

**HN:** Oh, yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And several other great performances.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** But he also was an aspiring actor and an aspiring director from New York.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And he had been sent out by the theatrical organization.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** By...was that ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers]? Well, that's not exactly ASCAP, it's a...it's a theatrical group that supplies all kinds of performers and directors to community theatres.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah.

**JB:** And as I remember, Mr. Hoffman got interested in you and your family.

**HN:** Oh, he was a wonderful man.

**JB:** And... and he...he still, I'm told, speaks kindly of you whenever he is interviewed about North Dakota and about Fargo. Before we talk about the theatre, let's talk about you and George. Were you born in North Dakota?

**HN:** Yes, hmmm, north of Bismarck.

**JB:** North of Bismarck in Burleigh County.

**HN:** Mmmm-mmmm. No, no, in Sheridan County. [Chuckles]

**JB:** Sheridan County.

**HN:** Yeah, and of course, he...

**JB:** And...and George?

**HN:** Near McClusky, [unclear].

**JB:** George is also a native North Dakotan?

**HN:** He...no.

**JB:** No.

**HN:** George is Sioux City. No. Born in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

**JB:** I see. Born in Albert Lea.

**HN:** Born in Albert Lea. Mmmm-hmmm. His father had a big department store in Albert Lea. And...Dr. Borland came from Albert Lea, too, he knew him there. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And how did you get acquainted with George?

**HN:** Met George in church.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**HN:** In Sioux City. [Laughs] When I was sixteen years old.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. [Chuckles]

**JB:** You've been married for a long time.

**HN:** Well, a little while. Your...your wife Grace...or your first...ah, wife, knew him...er, I mean, knew us then. And she...she saw...she happened to go by when we were getting...or just coming out of the church, they were throwing...they were throwing rice at us, and saw it.

**JB:** [Coughs]

**HN:** And I don't know if she ever told you about it.

**JB:** That was in Bismarck?

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** You were married in Bismarck.

**HN:** Yeah, in the Episcopal Church in Bismarck, it was. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And you...did you plan, did you operate a store in Bismarck?

**HN:** No. No, I just...

**JB:** You came to Fargo.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And...and decided to go into the garment business?

**HN:** No, no. George was in Sioux City.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** For a while. He had a store there, and then he moved up to Fargo.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** You were...

**HN:** It was a few years after we were married.

**JB:** Yes. You were...you were located on Broadway at...

**HN:** That's right.

**JB:** For...for a while.

**HN:** For a long time. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And now you are on...what is your address?

**HN:** 514 Fourth Avenue North.

**JB:** 514 Fourth Avenue North.

**HN:** Yes.

**JB:** Well, from the very start of the...talking about Community Theatre, you and George must have been interested. Had you had any prior community theatre experience?

**HN:** George was in many shows. And going all...going through school, and high school, he took the lead in his class play, and so on.

**JB:** And this would be in...?

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. Theatre was very...

**JB:** This would be in North Dakota then?

**HN:** No, in Sioux City, is where it was.

**JB:** In Sioux City. I see.

**HN:** Yeah, where *he* was. Anyway, he...George always loved acting. So he was in this...when someone said...on the board said, "Let's close the Community Theatre down, we're in the red, a hundred and fifty dollars in the red." And George says, "Long as I'm on this board, this theatre shall never shut down."

**JB:** [Chuckles]

**HN:** So then George got out the old telephone directory, and that's how it...it came about. He called everybody in the directory for season tickets, and so on, and so forth, and they got pledge cards made up, and then that went on from there. Yeah.

**JB:** Well, that's an interesting story.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** The...to go back just a little, when there was talk about a community theatre being launched in Fargo-Moorhead, it was in part because of Aubrey Hook. Aubrey Hook who is now deceased.

**HN:** Yeah, he was president, wasn't he?

**JB:** Was the...was one of the leading lights.

**HN:** Right.

**JB:** He had lived in Omaha.

**HN:** He did? Oh...

**JB:** And I think he worked for the telephone company, did he not? And he had had some experience.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And was very enthusiastic. And so he got a number of people, including myself, brought together.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And just...just to visit about the possibilities of a community theatre in Fargo.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And this would be about 1946.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** So the theatre is forty-two years old, isn't it? Here in 1988.

**HN:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**JB:** Hmmm...were you at...in attendance at that organizational meeting, so to speak?

**HN:** Well, we weren't in Fargo then...or in Fargo then were we?

**GN:** Oh...oh...

**HN:** Now...yes, we were in Fargo, but no, not...we weren't in the [unclear] for that.

**GN:** No...[moans]

**HN:** We were in Fargo before that [unclear].

**JB:** But when George...

**HN:** 1951 was it when...? 1951?

**JB:** In 1951, hmmm, when George was opening the store.

**HN:** No, 1951 is when he became involved in theatre.

**JB:** I see. Mmmm-hmmm.

**HN:** In fact, he was putting on an act someplace near our store, and the director happened to be in there. And he...George didn't know he was the director of Community Theatre. I don't even know what his name was. George would know. And...[coughs] and he looked at George, and he says, "Hey...you're an actor!" He says, "I want you to come down to the Community Theatre and try out for a show."

**JB:** [Coughs]

**HN:** George did.

**JB:** Well.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. That's how it got started. The...just an accidental meeting...and accidentally meeting the director.

**JB:** George was wearing a funny hat. Like when you remember George...[Laughs]

**HN:** Yes!

**JB:** ...doing some individual turns! [Laughs]

**HN:** Yes, yes, yes. That's right!

**JB:** [Laughing]

**HN:** Exactly! Maybe you happened to be around then when that...when it happened.

**JB:** [Laughing] It's possible.

**HN:** Yeah, because...

**JB:** At any rate, the organization was pretty tentative, I can tell you. It just was a bunch of people including Don Bishop.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Including, I guess...June Dobervich. I guess, Aubrey Hook.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Ah, Mrs. Hook, who, hmmm...after Mr. Hook died, became a teacher in the Fargo school system.

**HN:** Oh, yes, she...she went to our church and [unclear].

**JB:** And...is very much interested in the theatre and the children and all kinds of organizations.

**HN:** And very nice.

**JB:** And out of that, hmmm, Beverly Haueisen[sp?] was one of them.

**HN:** Oh, yes. June Dobervich was one of them.

**JB:** And numbers of other people thought that it would be a fine idea to have...to put on a show and see if...[chuckles] if the community responded.

**HN:** That's right.

**JB:** And so it did. *My Sister Eileen*, was that the first effort?

**HN:** Mmmm.

**JB:** Ah, I think...

**HN:** George wasn't in that one.

**JB:** At any rate...

**HN:** [Speaking to George] Were you in *My Sister Eileen*? Were you in...? Oh! No, not in that one.

**JB:** I think that it was the...maybe it's the first fully...fully accredited. [Chuckles]

**HN:** It was one of the first shows. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Now do you remember where that was shown?

**HN:** Oh, I suppose it could have been up at the Ben Franklin School.

**GHN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Ben Franklin School? Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** The theatre, before it found a home, had a number of locations.

**HN:** That's right.

**JB:** It used the Ben Franklin Junior High School...it used, if I am correct, one of the Moorhead school stages?

**HN:** Oh, it didn't...

**JB:** It...

**HN:** Did it?



**GN:** [Unclear].

**HN:** High school? Yeah.

**GHN:** [Unclear].

**HN:** MS [Moorhead State]. George says MS.

**JB:** Moorhead...or Minnesota University. And it used...hmmm...and you said earlier it used a church, maybe an empty church.

**HN:** Well, it was given to us.

**JB:** It was given to you.

**HN:** By...yes, First Christian Church. They...

**JB:** Is that right?

**HN:** They got a new church, I guess, and gave us this one.

**JB:** And was that just west of the Post Office, of [unclear]?

**HN:** Yes, that's right. Uh huh.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. And hmmm...

**HN:** And that's where Dustin Hoffman helped us with two shows there.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** Or directed two shows, that one. *The Time of Your Life* is one Dustin Hoffman directed.

**JB:** That's a Hoffman production.

**HN:** Yeah, he's showing you the picture of it.

**JB:** *The Time of Your Life*.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. Jerry Mulready and George Nassif were in that one.

**JB:** Which included Jerry Mulready and George Nassif.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. That's right.

**JB:** Do you recall the other production that he...?

**HN:** Oh, he...who? Ah...

**JB:** Mr. Hoffman?

**HN:** Dustin? Oh, yeah.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** Ah, hmmm, *Two for the Seesaw*.

**JB:** *Two for the Seesaw*.

**HN:** Vic Tardue and somebody else was in that, too. Or, [unclear]...I think it was Carol Margitte[sp?]...

**GN:** Mmmm...

**HN:** Vic Tardue and Carol Margitte. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** I...I recall that.

**HN:** Ran the box office for eighteen, twenty...

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** Twenty years before I helped with it, before that. And I...I know that he...Vic Tardue was house manager. And he was back and forth all the time. [Chuckles] But this show, it was pretty...he was tied down with them as an actor in it. He was with Carol Margitte, and Dustin directed it, and...like I said, Dustin was up and down the stairs, up and down the basement. [Chuckles] Had a lot of fun there!

**JB:** Well, I recall that production was...it was splendid. And then...

**HN:** The second one? Or the one...

**JB:** Jerry Mulready...

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. That one.

**JB:** Did Jerry Mulready do *Harvey*? I think it was...it might not have been Jerry.

**GN:** Mmmm.

**JB:** It might have been someone who worked at the...at the Straus Company. He was a salesman, and he did a beautiful Harvey.

**HN:** I don't remember the show at that time. But I know we did *Harvey* recently.

**JB:** Very successfully for the first time. Yes.

**HN:** Uh huh, and the first time.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** I don't remember who was in it the first time, but it...

**JB:** You suggested that the Community Theatre had hard times. And since you were a manager of the box office, you knew...you certainly knew intimately what...what serious problems we were in financially.

**HN:** Oh, absolutely. George is the one that would know every inch of it, because he was janitor, he was...*every* part of the theatre. [Chuckles] And he knew exactly...ah...how much money we did need. But I'll tell you, we sure got out of the red...ah, we got in the black...we stayed in the black, we...whenever we needed lots of money for the show, we sold extra seats and kept...kept repeating the show. We kept repeating it. In fact, *The Odd Couple*, we did nineteen days, didn't we?

**GN:** Mmmm.

**HN:** Uh huh. George. Yeah. And we made real good money on that one.

**JB:** *The Odd Couple*.

**HN:** See, after your season tickets are all used up for that show, people are paying the cash. And that money is gravy. I tell you, it helped. We bought a lot of extra portable seats that they're still using now at the theatre.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** The...*The Odd Couple*, again, was a memorable production.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And hmmm, do you remember who were the costars of that?

**GN:** Mmmm.

**HN:** I know that...[chuckles] oh, George would know it.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Margitte? Yeah.

**JB:** Oh.

**HN:** I'm sorry. I just remembered [unclear].

**JB:** Miss...Miss Margitte was in it.

**HN:** Yeah, well, her...yeah.

**GN:** [Moans]

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** Her husband was in it, too.

**JB:** Well, ah...

**HN:** Lou. Lou was in the show. He was...wasn't he the lead in that show? Lou? Mmmm-hmmm.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Oh, there's so many. You know that...it's so many shows that it's hard to remember every...every one. We remember a lot of them, but who played in what for so many years!

**JB:** About how many...?

**HN:** Guess how many years that's been! [Laughs]

**JB:** Yes. About how many productions then? You have...hmmm...you've mentioned, I think, that about seventy productions George was...figured one way or another, either in the cast or in the production.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** George figured...well, he's telling...he's showing you on his hands. Fifty, George?

**GN:** Mmmm.

**HN:** Yeah. George says fifty.

**JB:** [Chuckles] Remarkable!

**HN:** Oh, yes. He was in *every one* for twenty-six years that I know. He didn't miss...it was a...[coughs] pulling up your socks in the morning, as [unclear] show...shows [laughs] during one and...Otto Frank is the lead in another...my, he took...whenever there was...somebody fell out, or got sick and couldn't take it, they called and George took it.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** He saved the shows!

**JB:** He was a great understudy! [Laughs]

**HN:** Yeah. Yeah. And what?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Tell him about what, George?

[Clunky noises, recording interruption?]

**JB:** Well, we have certainly, I think, stressed the fact that, you, Hazelle, and you, George, were really the spirit of the Community Theatre. Because you knew how difficult it was.

**GN:** Mmmm.

**JB:** And you knew also, you and George knew that if an emergency came and George was there, he would...he was a great understudy. He could...he could step into a role.

**HN:** That's right.

**JB:** And learn it quickly. And...ah...one of them, or two of them, certainly, are productions that I had some connection with, ah, *West is the Land*.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And *Show Goes the Nation*.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** These were musicals. Full dress musicals, with a ballet and a full orchestra, and they were very successful.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Now they played in the Ben Franklin Junior High School, and played in successive years, about 1952 and 1953. And George also, in addition to those two productions, was in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which...in which he played a leading role.

**HN:** He took the lead in that one.

**JB:** Took the lead.

**HN:** Yes, he was Otto Frank.

**JB:** And he played in...number of others, as well as being in the background, and be it behind stage when that [unclear].

**HN:** He was in every show for twenty-six years. He never missed.

**GN:** [Moans]

**JB:** That's...

**HN:** Either a lead or a small part.

**JB:** [Chuckles] That's amazing.

**HN:** Very...you ask...just ask...if anybody...oh, George was in there. And he was in every show, it seemed. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Twenty- six years.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Well, I remember that *Show Goes the Nation*, which followed...I think George was also in that. *West is the Land* was quite popular. As much as I think it played eight times, ah, in order to accommodate those who were interested.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And it had a great cast.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmm.

**JB:** Fine singers. And with a musical score that was prepared by Frank Scott.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Frank Scott, a former Fargoan.

**HN:** Right.

**JB:** Former member of the WDAY Radio organization. And also a fine pianist with...with, hmmm...

**HN:** Lawrence Welk.

**JB:** Lawrence Welk.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** That's right. And recently, in 1988, he came back to Fargo and figured in a concert.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** What do you...? What do you think was the guiding spirit of the Community Theatre? Hmmm...why did it succeed despite all of its problems?

**HN:** Well, the real...one of the things is every...everybody that was interested in theatre was happy that it was one of the things that we were going to have here. And it became quite active because it was well planned...

**JB:** It was well received.

**HN:** ...and it was well received.

**JB:** [Coughs] Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah.

**HN:** And so on, and...

**JB:** This is a community that's full of talent.

**HN:** Yeah, a lot of talent here.

**JB:** Lots of talent of all kinds.

**HN:** And wonderful directors.

**JB:** Yes. I remember...hmmm...Barbara Oliver.

**HN:** Oh, yeah.

**JB:** And her husband.

**GN:** Mmmm.

**HN:** I didn't know her, but George...yes.

**JB:** They were...they were a team.

**HN:** Uh huh.

**JB:** And hmmm, at one time, the headquarters of the Community Theatre was in Island Park.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** They had removed a...a large gymnasium, you might call it, and moved it Hector Airport.

**HN:** That's right.

**JB:** But they had left behind a portion of the place, which was enclosed, and it was big enough for a small stage.

**HN:** [Chuckles] I guess.

**JB:** As well as the...as well as the residences of the Oliver's.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And tryouts were held there. And...

**HN:** Is that what...what was called the Armory?

**JB:** It...

**HN:** Or...

**JB:** Well, it would today be...it would today be what people consider to be the bleachers on the north end of the present swimming pool at Island Park. A great portion of it has been removed, but still...part of the structure is there.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And then this was where the directors or the officers of the Community Theatre began to realize that what they needed was a...a theatre of its own.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.



**JB:** And so planning was done along that line. And hmmm, I suppose that from the area in the Island Park, people would look over south, we'll say, of the YMCA, and hmmm, looked very longingly at the vacant land that ultimately was going to be the home of the present day theatre. It was not an easy struggle, as I remember, to get this theatre built.

**HN:** Or to get the land for it.

**JB:** And first to get the land.

**HN:** Right.

**JB:** It was not the simplest thing. And did you figure in that?

**HN:** Well, ah, George and the different members had strived and worked on it. And I know that Chalky Reed was on the Park Board. And I spoke to Chalky Reed in church that day and I says, "We have a plan this afternoon to...there is going to be a meeting, and we're going to get...try to get the land. And now George and different ones have been working on this." And by golly, that's what had happened. They got it, of course, to build the theatre on. Chalky Reed has been...yeah, was in the theatre, oh, a few years ago. And he says, "We got it. We got it. We got the land!" [Laughs] Yeah.

**JB:** [Chuckles] Park Board.

**HN:** And we were so happy! Yeah.

**JB:** The Park Board dedicated a portion...several acres, as it turned out.

**HN:** Yes. Two miles...ah, two...ah...two acres of it.

**JB:** Two acres. And it's a lovely setting today.

**HN:** Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh.

**JB:** And once that land was secured...

**HN:** No, I think [unclear] was on the board...exactly what went on, or how...whether what...whether NSP[Northern States Power]...it belongs to NSP, I think.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Or is it the Park Board and NSP?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Well, that's railroad land to begin with, George...and Jim.

**JB:** I see. So there's a possibility that it did figure in it then.

**HN:** It's probably...ah...for ninety-nine years, or something like that probably.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** I don't know exactly what it is, but we have it! [Laughs] And I worked the box office for many, many years. And George was in there all the time, in the box office, in the office, and so on, and so forth. But we've had a lot of fun doing of all of this, Jim, many years of it. Sold a lot of season tickets. Sold a *lot* of...well...well, in fact, that's how they got started. George got this...hmmm...got on the Calling Committee...and I mean, started calling everybody, and started selling the season tickets that way. How many did you sell?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Nine thousand dollars' worth, wasn't that? How many season tickets did you sell before you started digging?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Ten?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Four thousand?

**GN:** [Unclear] One...one thousand.

**HN:** One thousand season tickets, yes, at nine dollars a season ticket.

**GN:** Mmmm.

**HN:** Oh, five? Whatever.

**JB:** That certainly...

**HN:** Uh huh.

**JB:** That was a good start.

**HN:** You bet.

**JB:** Hmmm, and in the final construction, the...the labor unions figured in. And...

**HN:** Then...exactly. Right. Because I was just going to talk about this.

**JB:** And with the...with the...the Emma K. Herbst Gift was made to the construction, and so it...it's named that today. Hmmm...

**HN:** Yeah, well, they had made a pledge, you know.

**JB:** Yes. The theatre today is...

**HN:** Or the union.

**JB:** Yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

**HN:** The union, we had seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of free labor from the labor union.

**JB:** Oh, yes. Yes, that's extraordinary when you think about it.

**HN:** And ah...right now it would be tripled. And they put their hearts and *soul* into that building. And Wayne Kanter[sp?] was head of the...

**JB:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**HN:** ...of the labor union. And he...bless his...God bless him, he...he certainly did a lot.

**JB:** Yes, he did.

**HN:** And got his union members in there and...

**JB:** He had a great hope of..

**HN:** Oh, yes. His wife. Uh Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** ...sailing down the Mississippi.

**HN:** And he and George worked together on that and they...they had...we have a union night that we have every...before every show. We call it Union Night, and that's the night that George wanted...and...and notifies, had notified the union members to...that they are supposed to see the show Union Night.

**JB:** I see.

**HN:** And free. And so they had access to that night, and it went on for years. And I know union members still ask us about it.

**JB:** Is it...? It's still possible, I suppose, for them to be...?

**HN:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes!

**JB:** The Wednesday night, or the dress rehearsal, or...?

**HN:** It was...it was the last...last year, unless they've changed something since...since...yeah.

**JB:** Mmmm.

**HN:** But it was last year, I'm sure. Yes, yes, we had Union Night. You know, when you've been with the theatre all these years, that we should have a reason to even...ah...or to know that there should be Union Night for members.

**JB:** Of course.

**HN:** That have...

**JB:** They made it...

**HN:** ....put their hearts and souls into it. You bet they did.

**JB:** It was a very kind gift that resulted. [Chuckles]

**HN:** Oh...that was one of the best things that ever happened.

**GN:** [Moans]

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** We did get...Ah, how much worth of donations did we get for this? Oh, it's a \$250,000 theatre, see.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** At the time that it was built.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Right now it'd be worth...right now it'd be worth a million!

**JB:** Oh, yes.

**HN:** Oh, yes.

**JB:** It has...

**HN:** That's what George just said. One million.

**JB:** Yes. It...hmmm...there were some handicaps at the very start. It was...we...we were not able to build it as large as we had hoped.

**HN:** No, that's just...

**JB:** But today it...it has been expanded, as you know.

**HN:** No, that's the size we did want at that time.

**JB:** I'm sure.

**HN:** More intimate.

**JB:** Yes. And it...and it served very well.

**HN:** Oh, yeah.

**JB:** It was a thrust stage. It followed the idea of the Guthrie.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis had certainly given a big push on regional theatre. And so the...we did have a thrust stage, as well as a proscenium stage.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And today it is a remarkable little plant.

**GN:** Mmmm.

**JB:** That is very popular indeed. The organization is also now attempting to interest children, as well as creative authors and writers.

**HN:** There was...we had children's theatre then, too.

**JB:** Can you tell us something about the children's efforts?

**HN:** Oh, yeah. They had...we have a children's theatre and...

**JB:** I mean, did you...? Do you know something about the history?

**HN:** Going back, you mean?

**JB:** How it got started?

**HN:** Well, there was a wing off the...hmmm...they just called it a children's theatre, a wing off the big theatre. And ah...ah, seems to me like [unclear] and a few of those women were in charge at the time. And we did...we didn't do too many children's shows, but we did a couple of them that I remember. George would know a little more. He knew quite a bit about children's theatre then. George, how many shows did we have, children's theatre did we have...do at the time? Ah, you know, at the beginning, did we do quite a few?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Okay. Yes.

[Click and thud sounds – recording interruption?]

**JB:** I suppose that any listing of the people involved one way or another with the Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre would be just too long for us to list. But certainly, Marvin Hannibal[sp?], the very first director who...who came in by invitation to...to, I guess, make the theatre...a theatre! With a real live director. And he was here for a number of years, and then he was followed...not necessarily in that order, by Barbara. And...by Barbara...

**HN:** Oliver.

**JB:** Oliver and ah...and...and Bill!

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And her husband Bill. And then there was John Tilton and his wife, Shirley Tilton. And Marty and Marvin Jonason, and...ah...others.

**HN:** Ed Bigelow was in between there.

**JB:** That's right.

**HN:** He became...we brought him here early, aboard...brought him here from New York.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** George had contacted him, and a few of the members, he and I think Lou Margitte[sp?]. And they came from New York, he and his wife Penny, and he directed for quite a few years.

**JB:** That's right.

**HN:** And he became a priest of the Episcopal Church, and was killed in a horrible train...a bus accident...or some kind of a car accident anyway, near Grand Forks.

**JB:** Very unfortunate.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm. Did you know him?

**JB:** Certainly...

**HN:** He was killed with the bishop, Bishop Emory[sp?].

**JB:** Ah, yes.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And when you start to name some of the...some of the directors, some of the business people on the board, you certainly have to mention John Bennison[sp?].

**HN:** Oh, you bet.

**JB:** Ralph Rudrud.

**GN:** [Unclear].

**JB:** John Mosley[sp?]. [Unclear] Atkinson, Ralph Rudrud, and of course, Paul Earhart[sp?] and his wife, Corinne Earhart[sp?].

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Paul was one of the more faithful back of the scene...he was a fine carpenter, and he is an electrician, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. And I think that many a production would not have gone to the boards unless...[Chuckles]

**HN:** [Chuckles]

**JB:** If it hadn't been for...for Paul.

**HN:** Oh, ho ho, I believe that.

**JB:** Yes. And his wife also was a fine actress as well as a teacher.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** A kindergarten teacher in Fargo-Moorhead. I suppose that this list isn't...it doesn't even begin to...to start the list. There must be thousands of people who have played, who have been

back of the scenes, who have provided music, who have, as you and George have done, have been behind the scenes in a business way. And after all, that's vital if you're going to have a successful community theatre. [Chuckles]

**GN:** Mmmm.

**JB:** Many theatres' community-wide efforts have failed.

**HN:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** Because they just didn't have the business acumen, the business thinking. And as you said, a few minutes ago, the ability to go out and sell four thousand or more season tickets.

**GN:** [Unclear].

**HN:** One thousand.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** Season tickets were sold...

**JB:** But over the years you certainly have...

**HN:** Before we got started...ah, before the building.

**JB:** You certainly have moved volume.

**HN:** Oh, yeah. And...you have. Oh, yeah.

**JB:** You certainly have sold a lot of tickets yourself. [Laughs]

**HN:** Oh, [unclear]...Oh, absolutely!

**JB:** Because the twenty-six years you refer to as George's interest was...

**HN:** It was twenty-six or more.

**JB:** Was also...

**HN:** It was 1951...until just the...

**JB:** Was also yours.

**HN:** Yeah. No. Ah, George was in a little before I could help.



**JB:** I see.

**HN:** The children were quite small then, and I didn't...really, I got into it more or less after 1958. Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** When you could, you certainly became...

**HN:** I did.

**JB:** Ah, you were the box office manager.

**HN:** Oh, yes. That's right.

**JB:** Yes. Yes. And you had...

**HN:** And...everything else.

**JB:** Oh, yes! [Chuckles]

**HN:** And every phase of it.

**JB:** Yes, and every phase.

**HN:** Yeah.

**JB:** Including the...

**HN:** And then I had the...a phone come directly to our store...in fact, that red one. What? How many years?

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** Yeah. What year? Yeah, George said he'd been with it forty years.

**GN:** [Moans]

**HN:** How many?

**JB:** Amazing.

**HN:** Figure it out anyway.

**JB:** Yes.

**HN:** [Unclear] Tilton and...and Shirley did an awful...John Tilton and Shirley certainly did a lot for our theatre.

**JB:** They were dedicated folk who came here, I think, from the theatre in South Dakota.

**HN:** Yeah.

**JB:** Perhaps from the university.

**HN:** We brought them here from Aberdeen, was it? Did you bring John Tilton here from Aberdeen or Rapid City?

**GN:** [Unclear].

**HN:** Rapid City. Rapid City, yeah.

**JB:** Yes. Well, I think the future of the theatre is assured. It has a wonderful plant. It has faced many of the problems of the other regional theatre s around the country, but I think we can be proud of...of what we've accomplished [chuckles] in concert.

**HN:** Well...

[Clunky noises – recording interruption?]

**JB:** Speaking on behalf of George and Hazelle Nassif. And Mr. Nassif recently suffered a stroke, and so I'd like to speak on his behalf for just a few moments for the Heritage Education Commission. It's difficult, really, to say precisely how much George and Hazelle accomplished when they were almost...ah, well, the two people vibrantly and completely interested. And George, as you've gathered, has appeared on the Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre stage in, it appears now, about sixty roles. He was in the productions of *The Fifth Season*, [*The Mousetrap*, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, *The Odd Couple*, *Show Goes the Nation*, and *West is the Land*, two musicals. Ah...he was...received some regional attention when he played a very difficult role in *The Diary of Anne Frank* and that particular production, that particular effort by Mr. Nassif, left many audience members teary-eyed.

At the times when things were very hard for the budget of the Community Theatre, George and several theatre regulars effected a one-act comedy and made over fifty-five appearances of...before various organization meetings, in order to stimulate awareness of the theatre. And he was certainly very instrumental in the fundraising campaign to build the Community Theatre's home, the present Emma K. Herbst Playhouse, which was erected in 1967 due to George's determination, and his interest in the community, and in the trains and labor unions of the area, he was effect...he was very effective in the actual building of the theatre, organizing crews and even installing the lobby carpeting.

And his wife, as you've gathered by this tape, has played a very large part in the theatre history. For twenty-one years, Hazelle and her family supervised the box office, handling reservations and organizing the volunteers. She located ushers, and concessionaires, and the box office workers, and hers was a very faithful service. Recently, the theatre board of directors hmmm...mentioned, made notice that they are appreciative of the dedication and belief that the Community Theatre had benefited from with George and Hazelle. And they saluted them both for what they have meant to the theatre over these many years.

This is Jim Baccus, ending the tape on behalf of George and Hazelle Nassif, and the Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre.

[End of interview]