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Jared Brown

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Meg Miner

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Oral History Interview with Jared Brown
The Ames Library, June 14, 2012

Meg Miner: Good morning. My name is Meg Miner and I'm the Archivist here at Illinois Wesleyan University, and today is June 14th, 2012, and I'm in the Ames Library with Dr. Jared Brown, and if you could start out by telling us your full name and your affiliation with the University, we'll just go from there.

Jared Brown: Sure. Full name is Jared Allen Brown. The Allen stands for Fred Allen, by the way.

Miner: Oh. Hah!

Brown: My father was an actor on the Fred Allen program, and so Fred Allen is my godfather, and one of the only memories I have of my early childhood is when Fred Allen was holding me up in front of a microphone, but I don't remember anything beyond that.

Miner: So you had an early broadcast career. [Chuckles]

Brown: Well, I was a child actor from the age of ten—

Miner: Oh, interesting.

Brown: —and continued into my twenties, and then I—I sort of dropped acting. Um, so that's the answer to that question.

Miner: Okay. How are you affiliated with Illinois Wesleyan University?

Brown: Well, I was a professor here and director of the School of Theater Arts from 1989 until... '99 and then I stayed three years beyond that, not as director any longer but as a professor in the School of Theater Arts.

Miner: So you officially retired.

Brown: Yes. I retired in 2002, and since then I've been writing and doing some directing, and occasional teaching. I'll be teaching a class here at Wesleyan in the fall of—what are we coming up to—2012.

Miner: Yes, yes, will be the '12-'13 academic year.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Interesting. Well, you want to maybe outline some of the significant memories you have of your time on faculty, things that either happened on campus, or the department specifically?

Brown: Mhm. Well, you know, I was directing shows here. One or two, usually two a year, and previous to that I directed plays when I taught at Western Illinois University for many years, and so a lot of my memories have to do with the plays that I directed, and the interaction I had with students at that time. I thought that I succeeded in a lot of the things that I hoped to do as director

of the School, but failed to get a new building, which I thought was very important for theater, and it still is. Here we are ten years later, and there's still no new building. But I know discussion has been going on about it for many years. But in terms of building a faculty and enlarging the—the school in terms of student population, I think I was successful at that. And it's—it's a very good faculty, by the way. I drew upon some friends that I had made before, some associations I had at Western Illinois, and a couple of the faculty members came from there, including Curt Trout, who's now the director of the School, and he—he used to be my student. He was a graduate student.

Miner: Oh interesting!

Brown: Yeah. And so then he—he went into scene design. He's a brilliant scene designer. And when we were looking for a scene designer, I called him and asked if he was available and he said he'd like to take a look, and he's been here ever since!

Miner: So you lured him away from Western.

Brown: No, he wasn't at Western at the time.

Miner: Oh okay, okay—

Brown: He was designing professionally; I think he was in Chicago at the time.

Miner: Great... You said that you succeeded in—at Director of School in getting faculty here and—in students? Did you recruit students at all?

Brown: Yeah, I did recruit students, and... I remember when Minor Myers was president, and Minor was a wonderful person. But he was always pushing us hard to—to have more students in the program. And I felt that there was a limit of the number of students that we could handle because of the size of the faculty and our facilities. But Minor kept pushing on that front, and I remember one year we had 42 new students and 42 freshmen and that was more than we could really handle—

Miner: Wow.

Brown: —but I succumbed to his—his pleas, and then the next year I told him “Minor, I just—I can't do that again—it's-it's just—we're so—we've got such a bulge in that class. It's going to last for many years,” so we tried to recruit about 25 students a year.

Miner: So you had how many faculty at the time—that you had 42 new students?

Brown: I don't know, really. I don't remember how many, but we probably had—well we certainly had fewer than ten full-time faculty. We had a number of adjuncts, so it probably amounted to ten altogether.

Miner: So you have a feeling of the ratio that works for that dynamic?—for the amount of contact that you need with students— do you have a—

Brown: In terms of the number of students—

Miner: Yeah, yeah.

Brown: —that we have in the program? I'd say if we have 25 in each class, the freshmen class, sophomore class, and so on, then we were doing well. And if we could retain them all until they were seniors, and we mostly did, then it seemed to me we were handling them properly. But if it got too far above 25, it was a—just a difficult situation all around, and too far below, it was too much pressure from the administration. So if I could keep it to 25, that's what I wanted to do, although Miner kept asking, "well couldn't you take two more, five more, ten more?" But we tried to keep it there.

Miner: Great.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Any other particulars you want to talk about as—in your time as director for the curriculum? Were there curriculum changes?—

Brown: Yeah, there were. There were a number of new classes that were added, and we revised a lot of the existing classes, and I noticed that's been done since. When I was here, I was teaching a lot of theater history, and I found that I had so much material I really couldn't cover it in two semesters. So we expanded the theater history sequence to three semesters—

Miner: Hmm.

Brown: —of which students had to take two, and many elected to take the third, but now I notice the—the department has gone back to two courses in theater history. So, you know, it's an ongoing process, it changed when I was here and it's still changing, and I would be surprised if it weren't any different.

Miner: Change is—change is mandatory, as they say—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —and always happens.

Brown: Yup.

Miner: And I think that's one of our strengths that we, you know, can change and reinvent ourselves.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: It's interesting...

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Were there any significant productions that you were involved in that you would like to talk about? Or...

Brown: Well, I remember *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, which was a—I had a very good time doing that. And one of the actresses, who played Miss Jean Brody, in fact, is still acting, professionally now. And she recently played Lynn Fontanne, in a play about Lunt and Fontanne.

Miner: Oh my—

Brown: And I had—since I had written a book about the Lunts, I was eager to see the production, and it was my first chance to see the Milwaukee Rep, where it was playing. So that was definitely a highlight, and then there was a production of *Man of La Mancha* that seemed to work out very well. I had a particular idea about the way I wanted to do it and it took a while for the actors to understand where I was going, but I think we all wound up on the same page. But there were many productions that I really enjoyed doing. We did *Brighton Beach Memoirs* by Neil Simon [in the summer theater program], and then *Broadway Bound*, also by Neil Simon, and also about the same characters, and we asked all the same actors to stay, and with one exception we had them all stay, and we invited John Randolph, the Broadway actor, to come and reprise his role of the grandfather. He had played the grandfather on Broadway and he won a Tony for it and it took some persuading, because he thought that a young cast couldn't possibly handle that play, but I think he had a very good time here. And I certainly enjoyed his performance and the production as a whole.

Miner: That sounds great.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Something you said about *Man of La Mancha*, the vision that you had for the production and—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —getting the students, do you want to elaborate on—

Brown: Well I could, I wanted it to be as real as a musical could possibly be. And I wanted the audience to forget in some way that they were in a theater, and that they were—I wanted them to be watching reality. So when Aldonza is raped, I wanted it to be as vicious as possible.

Miner: Mhm.

Brown: And I know it's often done as a kind of ballet, but it seemed to be that that would definitely distance the audience from the reality. And my choreographer—my choreographer was always trying to move toward ballet and I was trying always to keep it as real as possible—

Miner: Interesting.

Brown: —and as frightening as possible. And I didn't want any applause between the musical numbers and the dialogue. I wanted to go right from the numbers, pick up with dialogue and go on, so it didn't seem to the audience as if they were...jumping out of the production in order to applaud, and then they had to get back into it. With the exception of "The Impossible Dream," I remember, I mean everyone was looking forward to that song—

Miner: Mhm.

Brown: —the singer was from the music department, he was brilliant, and I knew he was going to get great applause, and there was no way to stop it. So we did put in applause at that point, but I—I remember often having to tell the actors “no you don’t want to stop there, you want to just keep going, just keep going. Don’t wait for applause, just go on. And if the audience does applaud, just keep going!”

[Miner laughs]

Brown: “Because they’ll stop if you’re talking.”

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: So that was my concept. And I—I think it worked well. I think people were more involved in it than they were when they normally—when audiences normally watch *Man of La Mancha*, I know a number of people told me that.

Miner: That’s nice.

Brown: So...yeah, I felt good about that one.

Miner: Great. Are there other...observations that you have about changes to Illinois Wesleyan over the years?

Brown: Well, this building we’re sitting in right now is a change; it’s a very significant change. I don’t remember when the Library was built but—

Miner: Ten years—

Brown: I’m sure you do. Ten years ago, okay—

Miner: —2002.

Brown: —well, it’s a wonderful addition to the campus, and this didn’t exist when I first came here, and a number of the other buildings didn’t exist either, so there’ve been tremendous physical changes to the campus, which I think have...have improved the climate here. And I just enjoyed my years at Illinois Wesleyan very much. I like working with the people I’ve worked with, and I’ve—I’ve really enjoyed working with the students. So...yeah, I think it’s a wonderful place. If I had children of college age, I would certainly send them here.

Miner: [Chuckles] that’s great, good to hear, unsolicited.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Well, there have been changes to faculty governance responsibilities too, perhaps, over the years? Have you—

Brown: Mhm, mhm.

Miner: —ah, participated in those, and have observations on, you know, the relationship between faculty and students or faculty and administration or anything?

Brown: Right. Well, of course I've been retired for ten years now. So I'm not sure that I can really answer that question very cogently, but when I was here, and Janet McNew was the provost, Janet and I got along very well together, and I felt that I had a considerable amount of input in her decisions concerning the theater program, and she was a very good person, I felt, to interact with.

Miner: Great. I think another thing that is significant, perhaps even unique to the theater department, is the relationship to the community.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Because I know there are a lot of community connections. Want to talk about that at all?

Brown: Well sure, we would try to involve the community, especially through our productions of course. We didn't do any specific children's theater, which I think had been something Wesleyan had done prior to the time I arrived. But we also brought in guest artists. I remember before I came, Helen Hayes was here, and when I was here, Kitty Carlisle-Hart came, and Jacques d'Amboise, and other really distinguished artists. And we invited the community to those programs, and I think the community appreciated them. We also had the ACTERS theater, A.C.T.E.R., it was, from England, and they came and did a production of...I think it was *Romeo and Juliet*, but there were only five actors, so they switched roles constantly. Men would play women; women would play men, and so on. And again, we invited the community, and...I really wish that more people had come because it was a wonderful production.

Miner: Interesting.

Brown: Mhm. We had a lot of community support, I think especially for summer theater. I'm not quite sure why Wesleyan has dropped the summer theater, because it was—it was very successful I thought...ten, twenty years ago, and I think it still could be. I think the community would like to have another theater company.

Miner: Hm. It was a long-running program here, wasn't it, summer theater?

Brown: Yeah, certainly when I came, it was pretty well established, and we continued it until I retired in 2002, and then the—the chairperson at the time decided that she didn't want to continue with it, so it was discontinued.

Miner: Another one of those change moments.

Brown: That's right.

Miner: Yes.

Brown: One of the distinguishing features of our—our summer theater was that we brought in guest artists frequently, not every year, but frequently. John Randolph I spoke of before, and he's an example of that. We brought in other artists, some of them with Wesleyan connections, who had had professional careers, and they interacted very well with the students and with the community. I mean, I remember the reaction to John Randolph when he spoke to members of the community before one of the—before the production of *Broadway Bound*—oh they just—they just loved him.

Miner: Hm.

Brown: And I think he loved—as I said before, I think he loved the whole experience.

Miner: It's great to be responsible for that.

Brown: Well, yeah, and I don't know if I was responsible for it but I was part of it.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Would you like to talk at all about your writing career? You have published several—

Brown: Sure.

Miner: Books?

Brown: Yeah, I published six books. And the first one was a biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne that I mentioned before, called *The Fabulous Lunts*. And that was—that was very well reviewed, I'm pleased to say. And then I wanted to write a book about blacklisting, because my father had been a blacklisted actor.

Miner: Oh, really?

Brown: Yeah. And he was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee. I had never had a chance to write about it, I wanted to write that for my doctoral dissertation but my adviser wouldn't allow it. He said..."Well, where are the sources?" And I said, "There are no sources, nobody's written about this." And he said, "Well you can't write a dissertation about it," and I said, "Well, I'll do original research. I—I know many of those people, and I'll talk to them." And I mean he said no, you can't do that.

Miner: Oh my.

Brown: So, I wasn't allowed to do it then, but I still wanted to write a biography—a—a book about blacklisting. And my agent at the time suggested that I'd be much more successful if I chose a person who had been blacklisted and described blacklisting through his or her eyes, so I chose Zero Mostel, and...I think my agent was right. It turned out much better that way; I could focus things around a central figure. But there's also a history of blacklisting in that book so, I'd written the book that I wanted to. And then it took let's see, it took—after I came to Wesleyan I was really busy as Director of the School, and it took a long time but in '95 I guess it was, I

published a history of the theater in America during the revolution, which—which turned out well. It's—parenthetically here—it's the kind of book I write. I'm not the kind of person who likes to write about, you know, the 500th biography of Benjamin Franklin—

Miner: Ha-ha.

Brown: I would rather write the first biography about—

Miner: Mhm.

Brown: —some person. And that was true with Zero Mostel. Certainly it was true in the theater, of mainstream theater during the American Revolution, nothing like it had ever been written before. And there was a great gap in the sources. They talked about the Colonial theater up to the Revolution—

Miner: Mm.

Brown: —and then they talked about theater continuing after the Revolution. But everybody sort of ignored—or most people— ignored that period during the revolution, and I wanted to try to document that. So let's see, after that—

Miner: Why do you think it—?

Brown: —I—

Miner: Sorry, why do you think it was ignored?

Brown: I...don't know—

Miner: Do you have—did you—

Brown: I guess—I guess just the...the material, it came down to people more and more that there was a Colonial theater and then there was a theater after the Revolution, and nobody really thought to investigate that middle period. But—although, it had been done by one 19th century writer, although his facts were largely wrong, but—but he was right to investigate the period. So I thought I would like to take a look at that and see what I could find, and then be as accurate as possible. And then I wrote biographies of Moss Hart, the playwright and director, and of Alan J. Pakula, who's a film director, and many people don't know his name, but they would know his films, *Sophie's Choice*, and *Klute*, and *All the President's Men* and so on, I think he was one of the outstanding film directors but he was not a self-publicist at all. He didn't really care if people knew who he was. He knew who he was. And then most recently, I wrote a novel. It's a mystery novel, in which I included two stories that are also mysteries. And now, I've stopped writing that sort of long-form book, and I'm writing plays, which have been done at Heartland Theater, and have been done at McLean County Museum of History and another one is being done this July at McLean County Museum of History, and then there'll be another one a year from now.

Miner: Quite busy!

Brown: Yes, I think so.

Miner: Interpretation of retirement there. [Chuckles]

Brown: Yeah. Well I enjoy being busy within limits, you know. I didn't retire to become one of those people who say, "oh, I'm busier than I ever was when I was working." I retired because I do enjoy the leisure, and I enjoy being able to choose my own hours. You know, when I wake up in the morning, and what I'm going to do during the day. But, yeah, I do stay reasonably busy and I enjoy that.

Miner: That's great.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Great. In your first book, the one, Fontanne—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —book, you mentioned was well received.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: And...you sounded, maybe, a little bit surprised at that? What do you think you would attribute the success of that text to?

Brown: Well, it's hard to say, really. I don't know why it was so successful. I mean, I worked on it for a long, long time. It was the first book I had written, and I remember accumulating 3,000 pages of research—mostly things that I wrote down in longhand. And...it just seemed that everything worked right. I wanted to interview Lynn Fontanne before she died, and that didn't happen because, although I wrote her a letter and I had it out on our front hall—she died during the weekend, so I wasn't able to mail it. But I did get to speak to a number of the people that they knew and had worked with, and were friends of theirs. And I got to speak, several times, to their brother-in-law and his daughter. So I made all the right connections I think and then I found the right agent who—who was very helpful in placing it properly. And then the reviews were just—in general, they were so good, you know? My mother could've written them and I—

[Miner laughs]

Brown: —I—I was so pleased with them. I mean there were some—a couple of really negative reviews that I had. But one of them, I know, is a—a person who had an agenda. She didn't like the idea of a book being written that—in which she wasn't included. But otherwise, it did very well. It—you know, my greatest pleasure was that it was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times*' book review magazine and my agent called in a kind of hysteria saying—

[Miner laughs]

Brown: "Have you seen the *New York Times*?" And I was—I was happy with that.

Miner: How exciting.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: I would imagine.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: And so, maybe in a similar...line of questioning, the Zero Mostel book, did you find that the topic was still very sensitive? Blacklisting, was it hard for people to talk about that, or to deal with?

Brown: For some people...it was hard for them to talk about it, those who had not been blacklisted but feared that something might happen to them. And I remember speaking to one woman, I don't even remember her name, but she—she was sort of reluctantly interviewed and then she called and said “I really don't want to be mentioned at all or associated with the book in any way,” and that was all right.

Miner: That was forty years after.

Brown: Yeah. But a number of the people who had been blacklisted were very eager to talk about it, and wanted to be included and have their thoughts known, and so I found them very cooperative. Let's see, there was something else about the Lunt-Fontanne book I was going to mention...but...I guess it's been lost, I can't remember what it was.

Miner: Do you want to talk anymore about your father and the significance of him being an actor and you going into—?

Brown: Mm, sure. He was a radio actor, primarily, and he—when he was in New York, he acted both on the Fred Allen show and the Jack Benny show and then Benny moved to Los Angeles— took his show to Los Angeles, and invited my father to come with him and Fred Allen said ‘well you're welcome to stay here, I'd love to have you stay on the program,’ and my father decided to go to Los Angeles. So that's where I was brought up, and my father was a very successful radio actor. I mean he would do as many as—this is going to be hard to believe but it's true—25 shows a week. He would do a show at ABC and a taxi would be waiting for him outside so as soon as he finished the show he would be driven over to NBC where he would—

Miner: Wow!

Brown: —do another show there, and this went on seven days a week. And then it all ended when he was blacklisted in 1953. And I mean it—it abruptly ended. He was the most industrious actor in Los Angeles, and the next day he had no jobs at all. Well, actually he did have one job that continued for a while—and this was a big surprise—he was on Ozzie and Harriet, and Ozzie Nelson was a right wing Republican. And my father always figured that if the day ever came when he was blacklisted or his name was too controversial Ozzie would be the first one to drop him from the program, but Ozzie said “No, you're a good actor and that's what I want you for. I don't care what your political opinions are.”

Miner: Huh!

Brown: But finally the advertising agency got to Ozzie Nelson and said “Well if you don’t take him off the air, then we’ll take you off the air,” and Ozzie had to capitulate and that was the end of my father’s acting career. I guess that I was certainly influenced by my father’s success, and wanted to be an actor myself, from the age, as I said before, of ten. And my father and I together were in a show called *Barnaby and Mr. O’Malley*. Barnaby was a little boy and Mr. O’Malley was the fairy godfather. And I played Barnaby, he played the fairy godfather. And I guess I would say that was the highlight of my young career as an actor. And then when I went to college I was certain that I was going to be an actor and I dropped out after only one year because, you know, I thought college had nothing more to offer me, but I was wrong. And after two years, I was becoming really disenchanted with show business and wanted to go back to college. So I did go back to—to Ithaca College in New York, and finished my bachelor’s degree there, and then after another year of going back to trying to continue some acting, and getting into writing, I really got—I really didn’t like being in show business at all, so I went on for my Master’s Degree with the idea that I would get a Doctorate and begin University teaching.

Miner: Hm. It was the plan that you stuck to, then.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: That’s great.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: Are there other...topics in your career, or your life, generally, that you’d like to talk to us about?

Brown: Well, I’ll just ramble for a little while and we’ll see where this leads but—

Miner: That’s good!

Brown: —my wife Judy and I have been married for more than fifty years, and our children are both in California, and we have two grandchildren, a sixteen-year-old boy, and a five-year-old granddaughter. We don’t get to see them as often as we’d like, but we do visit every Thanksgiving at our daughter’s house. She has a big house, and so our son and his family come up from Los Angeles. She lives in Oakland. And Judy and I fly out from here and we all get together. So, I mean, that’s been a very important part of my life, certainly, is my relationship with my children and my wife. I have—since I gave up acting—I have continued to act occasionally, but very rarely. I’ve done plays at—acted in plays at Western Illinois University, and here at Heartland Theater, and—so occasionally I get back into that. But I really consider myself a writer and a director foremost, and acting is something I will do occasionally, but I’m always saying, “I’m retired, I’m not going to do any more acting,” because I—it’s very stressful for me, and I don’t enjoy it very much.

Miner: Interesting.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: You’ve been on the other side of the scene, I guess, maybe.

Brown: Yeah, I know there was this kind of nervousness that I had about acting that I've always had about acting, and I didn't have that as a director. And I was always, you know, a little bit apprehensive that a scene wouldn't go well—

Miner: Mm.

Brown: —but that's normal I think. But I was always very comfortable as a director, and so I've—I've stayed with that. And like I said, there were a couple times when roles were offered me that I—I really couldn't refuse.

Miner: Mhm.

Brown: I was asked to do Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*—

Miner: Oh.

Brown: —and I was interested in doing that, and I did it. And then when a colleague of mine at Western Illinois did a musical that...I can't even remember the name of it now. Fairly obscure, but I—I enjoyed it. And so I tried out for him and he cast me, and I took vocal lessons for a year so that I could meet the vocal demands of the role and that—that was challenging and enjoyable. But I guess, you know, the most fun I've ever had as a director, I did a production of *Annie*, which features a lot of children— little girls. And we wanted to make sure that if one little girl got sick it didn't stop the performance. So we double cast all the roles. We double cast Annie; we double cast all the little girls. And I just had such a great time with that cast, and that whole production, I look on it very fondly. But mostly I do plays by people like Chekhov and Ibsen and Pinter and so on. And I like those plays very much.

Miner: Is this a family business? Are your children or your spouse involved in theater at all?

Brown: My wife is involved in theater. She's the producer and director of the Cemetery Walk at Evergreen Cemetery every year. And that's become a very successful event I think, in—in Bloomington-Normal.

Miner: I enjoy that very much.

Brown: Yeah. And she's also expanded now. She's producing many other things. And really, in a sense, I think I could say that I'm working for her now, because when I have an idea for a play, I'll tell her about it and she'll go out and find the money for it, or find somebody who wants to produce it. And—so she's very active. She's out doing something today for the Chamber of Com—no, for some other gala, that's having a performance done tonight. We did the Chamber of Commerce gala together several months ago. Judy produced it and I wrote it, and our friend Rhys Lovell directed it.

Miner: Sounds like a wonderful partnership.

Brown: Yeah!—

Miner: Great.

Brown: —it's good.

Miner: You told me it was...

Brown: Yeah. So we have a lot to talk about at dinnertime, and so on.

Miner: Huh!

Brown: Our children both went to California to be musicians, but that didn't work out in either case, although our son worked for Virgin Records for several years, but he was in the administrative side, rather than the musical production side. And then when Virgin closed its offices in Los Angeles, they offered him the same job in New York or London, but he didn't want to go to New York or London, he wanted to stay in Los Angeles, so he is now selling real estate there. And our daughter is a fundraiser, both for arts organizations and educational organizations.

Miner: Hm.

Brown: And she's done very well. She works from home whenever she can. She makes up plans for the organizations to do their own fundraising, and then when she can't work at home, she'll go in, of course, and work with the people.

Miner: Very busy—

Brown: Yes.

Miner: —productive, people.

Brown: Yes, I think that's true. I think they are busy and productive and we're really proud of both of them.

Miner: I think that's all of my formal questions. If you have anything else to add?

Brown: I don't think so, although this might be something that would be interesting. When Kitty Carlisle Hart came to Bloomington, she spoke here. And she was pretty close to eighty at that time. Maybe she was eighty. And she was fully in control of her faculties, and she was a wonderful speaker, and she and I got to know each other pretty well, for the three days she was on campus, because we spent most of our time together.

Miner: Mm.

Brown: And it wasn't until years later, maybe...close to ten years later that I decided I wanted to write a biography of her husband, her former husband, Moss Hart. So I—I called her, and wrote to her, I don't recall which, but I got in touch with her, and she didn't remember anything. I mean, she had forgotten ever being to Wesleyan, she had forgotten me. She had forgotten everything. And I told her, "Well you wrote me a letter, you know, after—I know you read my book, *The Fabulous Lunts*, and you gave me your book, and you wrote to me and said how much you enjoyed the book, and you hoped I would visit you in New York" and...She didn't remember any of this.

Miner: Oh, geez.

Brown: So it took a long time for me to persuade her, because many people had asked her in the past if they could write a book about Moss Hart. She had always said no. She finally said, “Well I think I’ll let my children decide because I’m just too old to make this decision,” and her children both decided that I would be a good biographer. So that was an interesting experience I had, and every time I called Kitty, which was pretty often because I tried to fill in the details; she had a good memory for the 1930’s, although she had almost none from the 1990’s—

Miner: That’s interesting.

Brown: —but every time I called her, we would go through the same thing. She said “Who is this again, and—“

Miner: Oh dear.

Brown: “What’s your name, and...how did you get my number?” And then I would tell her—“Oh yes, oh yes you’re the one who Chris selected to write the biography, oh I remember now, okay.” But she turned out—she was a very charming person. But this was always a problem, reminding her who I was, and why I needed the information, but she was always very cooperative and helpful.

Miner: That’s good.

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: Must’ve still been stressful though, the first time—first few times you heard that.

Brown: Well, I don’t know if it was stressful. Every—every biography I’ve written comes with obstacles, and this was just another obstacle, really. I mean, it was—at first I thought it was going to be a more difficult obstacle than it turned out to be. But... you know, when I was writing, let’s say, the Lunt and Fontanne book, I would always try to identify the one person that I really needed to help me write a book. And with Lunt and Fontanne it turned out to be a person, who was living at the time, but has died since then, named Alan Hewitt. He was one of their best friends, and he acted in their company, and he was very well read. And I thought if I could get his cooperation then I’d be in good shape, and I did. And with Zero Mostel, it was Zero’s son Josh, who was very helpful and—so there’s always been—there’ve always been certain obstacles associated with getting the information. But so far I’ve always been able to reach the people I wanted to.

Miner: Mm.

Brown: And I remember, with Alan Pakula, it was his widow, Hannah, who was especially helpful, because she got me the names and addresses and phone numbers of all the people I should contact, and some of them were people who I thought I would not get an interview from, or a satisfactory interview from, like Jane Fonda, and Robert Redford, but they were—they were very helpful.

Miner: Mm.

Brown: And so I've had—I've had few occasions when I couldn't break through the obstacles, but the obstacles have always been there and...so, you know, I've come—I've come to expect them. And with the Lunts book it was definitely...well, I mentioned Alan Hewitt but it was also the brother-in-law, who is not still living, George Bugbee. [Coughs] And if he hadn't provided me with the right to look at all of Lunt's correspondence and so on, I don't know how I would've written the book.

Miner: Mhm. Timing, I guess—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —opportunity—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —you know, this is probably a good opportunity to say that you have donated those sources that you used for those books—

Brown: Mhm.

Miner: —to Special Collections right here at Illinois Wesleyan.

Brown: Right.

Miner: Well, are there things that you want to—

[Brown coughs]

Miner: —talk about maybe, about some of the recordings, and the people that you did talk to, for these books? Or, you want to fill in the significance of this collection?

Brown: Yeah. Well I guess in a way the tapes speak for themselves, but I did try to tape-record all the interviews that I did. And I don't remember anybody ever saying to me, "I'd rather you didn't record this."

Miner: Mm.

Brown: So I tried to tape record everything, and I tried, while I was recording, to tell them, number one, that I was recording, and number two, ask them if I could quote them. And in most cases— I mentioned one case that didn't apply a while ago—but in most cases, the people said, "Yes, it's fine." In some cases they said "Well, send me what you're planning to publish and we'll tell you." And I think in this one case when I couldn't recall, a writer wanted to rewrite what he had told me. But otherwise, people would say, after they looked at the material, "Yes, why don't you go ahead and do this." And I remember, you know, a really good interview I had with Julie Andrews, who was in *My Fair Lady*, and Moss Hart directed her, and really established her career, and she credits him with really changing her approach to acting. And she said she would like to see the material, and then when she saw it she called me and she said,

“Well I’d like to add this, and maybe you could change this sentence,” and so on. It was very good, we spent a number of hours together, and I felt like she was an editor, and a good one.

Miner: Oh nice.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: That’s nice. Anything else about the people involved in these books? Or...

Brown: There’s such a wide range of people, you know? Some of them are very well known, I’ve mentioned some of them, and some of them are not very well-known at all, but they have intimate knowledge of the subject of the books. And I appreciated the cooperation of all of them. And many of them told me things that had never appeared on paper before.

Miner: Hm.

Brown: Redford, for instance, told me that although William Goldman got the credit for writing *All the President’s Men* and received an Academy Award for writing the screenplay, that in fact Goldman didn’t write the screenplay, he—the writing he did, Redford was very dissatisfied by, so Redford told me that he and Pakula together had completely rewritten it.

Miner: Oh my. Heh!

Brown: Redford said, “I was just astonished when Goldman accepted the Award and didn’t say anything, you know, about what he had been through.”

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: But I know Goldman felt ruined by the experience too, and I talked to Bob Woodward, and he—he was, you know, he was one of the original writers who broke the Watergate story. And Woodward said, “Well I think Redford is correct, but also Goldman has some points on his side—“

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: —“a lot of his screenplay was intact, but a lot of it was changed.” So in any case, what Redford told me had never appeared in print before as far as I know.

Miner: Hmm.

Brown: And I don’t think he had ever told anybody. And I said in the interview, I remember saying to him, “Well, I’ve never heard this before.” And he said, “Well I want to tell you, you know, what I know,” and he did. And most people I interviewed were very forthcoming in that way.

Miner: Wow. Sounds like they’re wonderful resources that have a lot of potential still, for future use.

Brown: Yeah, it’s getting to them, that’s sometimes the problem.

Miner: Mm.

Brown: I remember writing to Dustin Hoffman also about wanting an interview, and I got back from him an autographed picture.

[Miner laughs]

Brown: I think that his publicity person didn't show him the letter, but, you know, gave him my address, and he just said, "Send him a picture." But in general I've had very good success reaching people, although not—not in every case.

Miner: That's great. Well, I would say, thank you so much for sharing your reflections with us.

Brown: Sure. And I thank you for being interested, and letting me spout off.

Miner: Oh no, that's great, look forward to talking with you more.

Brown: Good.

Miner: Thank you and thank you for your contributions—

Brown: Thank you.

Miner: —on all fronts, really, on all regards.

Brown: Okay.