

Interviewee: Pye, Malcolm J.

Interview Date: July 31, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

"The Grand 1896 Opera House"

Interview with: Malcolm J. Pye
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdés
Date: July 31, 2007.
Transcribed by: Carol Valdés
Location: The Grand 1896 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice, Galveston,
Texas 77550.

EV: This is Ernesto Valdés, I'm interviewing Malcolm James Pye, his wife is in attendance who promises that she will give us some footnotes. Her name is Lucille Anne Pye and we are at the Grand 1896 Opera House, 2018 Postoffice, Galveston, Texas. I have explained to you all how these tapes are used and that they will be kept in the archives at the University of Houston for the purpose of future research. We already have your full name, now can you tell us when you were born?

MP: I was born on July 13, 1937.

EV: Where were you born?

MP: I was born right here on the island, I'm BOI [born on the island].

EV: Oh really in 1937.

MP: In 1937 I was 70 on July the 13th. My daughter gave me a big surprise party in this room and I didn't know nothing about it and she come in from Memphis and did a good job.

EV: Where did you get your education?

MP: I only have a high school education. Went to Kerwood (?) High School, which is now O'Connell. At that time it was an all boys school, we had one all

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boys school here in town and two all girls Catholic schools and we were taught by the Christian brothers and got a pretty good education from the Christian brothers.

EV: Were they as mean as they say these Catholic teachers were?

MP: Yes, they were (laughter), that's why I said we got a good education because they didn't really stand for much funny business, it was really serious.

EV: So you got as far as high school....did you go into the military?

MP: Yes, I went into the national guard. I was in the 36th Division, we have a medical unit here in town and I spent 6 years as a medic in the medical unit here, Company C, Under 11th Medical Battalion.

EV: Did you go into active duty?

MP: I went through basic training and my medical training and then, come back at that time you didn't have to stay in.

EV: Right. When did you do your basic training?

MP: Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri.

EV: Fun place.

MP: Oh yeah, "Little Korea."

EV: Were you there during the winter time?

MP: No, I was there on the other end, during the summer time.

EV: (Laughter) Little Thailand.

MP: By the time we got out... I went in July and got out about the end of September, so we were just starting to get cold. It wasn't the real cold that they get there.

EV: Where did you do your medical training?

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MP: San Antonio, at Ft Sam [Houston].

EV: And when did you all get married?

MP: We got married Aug. 23, 1958, next year we will have 50 years.

EV: Really! (Turning to Mrs. Pye) Is that right that's good?

MP: Yes.

EV: How many children did you all have?

MP: We had three children. Our oldest son, who was Malcolm James Pye, Jr., he died on AIDs and that was in '92.

EV: Do you have any grandchildren?

MP: Yes, we have three grandchildren that are in Memphis with my daughter and Jeff married a lady who has 3 children. They are our step-grandchildren and we have two great-grandchildren, two little boys.

EV: Where do you live now?

M.P: I actually live in Clear Lake [Texas] now. After I got out of high school, I went to work for the telephone company for 36 years and retired from the phone company, doing the stage work on the side. We moved to Houston in 64 and have been in Houston ever since 64.

EV: Okay, and when you, as I understand it your grandfather worked here.

MP: My grandfather started the union in 1896.

EV: So like when you started, when they opened the house he was here?

MP: Yes, they were here working, but it took them about two years to get the union organized and find out about where to get it all started at.

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EV: So like was he actually like working here on the stage while he was organizing?

MP: Yes, he was the head carpenter in this building when it opened, and worked all the way through until it became a movie theater.

EV: That's Martini?

MP: Martini bought this from whoever originally built the opera house. And then he later built that Martini up the street, that's closed now. And this was sold to the Interstate [Theater] chain and it became the State Theater, and it was a movie theater when we were all kids.

EV: So when your grandfather was working here, do you know about what age he was when he began working?

MP: He was most probably in his thirties and then my dad and his brother both worked here, and then I work here, and now Jeff works here, so he's fourth generation, to be on the stage working in this building.

EV: Got to change the name of this theater? (Laughter)

MP: Don't tell Maureen that.

EV: Pye's Place?

MP: No, don't even mention that to Maureen.

EV: When you were born in the mid thirties, was your grandfather working here? Was he still working here?

MP: Uh, yeah most probably, was most probably right towards the end of Vaudeville, in '37. Then they built the City Auditorium, which is now torn down after Hurricane Carla tore the roof off of it. It was on 26th between H and I

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[Streets]. And when this closed up he moved over there to be the head carpenter of the City Auditorium.

EV: I'm trying to think, if he was, was he, were you of age where you had any kind of rapport with your grandfather, I mean did you have some overlapping time there?

MP: Oh yeah.

EV: Did he ever tell you any kind of stories?

MP: We lived, my mother, daddy and my brother, and my sister and I lived in my Grandfather's house on 5th and Mechanic. So we lived with them and so I was involved in all of the people coming and going that were friends of his and his operations with the stage union here in town and ...

EV: Did he give you any kind of a, did you hear any kind of stories from him about the theater, or the movie stars, or the shows or any kind ...?

MP: Yeah, they use to talk, when this was Vaudeville, it was part of the Orpheum Circuit [early Vaudeville from 1885].

EV: The what?

MP: Orpheum.

EV: Orpheum. O-r-p-h? Is that it, o-r-p-h-i-u-m, or something?

MP: Yes. You could look it up on the internet, cause it was like a league of theaters that was all over the United States, and all of these people, these Vaudeville shows would go from town to town to town to town to town to town, and they, when one left and they would clean the place all up then another show

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would come in right after that. I mean they were just traveling road shows that moved all over the country.

EV: So for the sake of the young historians who may read this, Vaudeville was not just one show going through, it was a series of Vaudeville?

MP: A whole bunch of them. Yeah.

EV: And they were considered Vaudeville because they were, uh, they had different acts, unconnected to one another, and they were strung together; one act after another?

MP: Yes, they were... Yeah, all of the people liked the Jack Bennies and the, all of the old named people that you saw when TV started, they were all Vaudevillians, that uh would go out on the road, Burns and Allen, and all of these people, they just traveled. That's all they did. They were like gypsies and they moved all over the country and had a home somewhere when the season was over. Also in those days the younger people they don't understand, but like this building was not air-conditioned.

EV: Right.

MP: They had ceiling fans in the top of it, and opened the windows. And then in the summer time when it got real hot, the Vaudeville season stopped. And these people would go home to their homes, wherever they lived. And then when the weather cooled down again they'd go back down on the road again. But they would get too hot in the buildings with the lights on to have a.... you'd die on the stage in the summertime, you know? But they would go home during the summer

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and have their vacations during the summer, and then in the winter they would go back out on the road.

EV: Do you know how long your grandfather worked before he retired?

MP: Uh, he worked to most probably 1950, then he started to get sick. He died in '54.

EV: Were there any particular stories, I mean my grandfather had like four or five stories I made him tell me every time I'd sit down. Did you have those kind of stories about the Opera House in particular?

MP: They use to talk in those days also, the temperatures were a lot different, and I can remember my daddy saying the, when we go back in the building I'll show you where the wall use to be that was the back of the stage, and on the alley's side there's a door. And it's actually on the second floor, and they had a, a man had a business of these trucks that were like scissor lift trucks that had an "x" and they could raise the bed up and he would go to... all the road shows come on railroad trains in those days. And he would go to the rail yard, and he could line his truck up with the side of the box car and they'd load all of the trunks and the scenery and everything they needed onto this truck, and he'd drive it over and then he'd get in the alley and raise it up to the second floor level and take it off the truck. Then when they emptied everything, they would put the trunks out in the alley, up against the wall. Nobody messed with them. I mean it was perfectly safe, but in the winter, it would rain, when the northers would come in, and they'd get ready to take the show out after a week, and they'd have to go out with sledge hammers and break the ice off the trunks because they'd be frozen to the wall. Back even

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when we were kids in school it still got real cold down here in the wintertime. But it would, they could leave these trunks, in those days it was perfectly safe.

Nobody would walk off with anything. They'd just put them in the alley and leave them against the wall, and leave them for a week, and then go back, pick them up and load them back up again.

EV: Did you ever establish any kind of rapport or relationship with any of the travelers, I mean they didn't stay here long enough I guess, to get to be buddy buddy with them?

MP: No, they were just in and out.

EV: So do you know if he was ever in the service, your grandfather?

MP: No, my grandfather or dad, neither one were. They both fell between wars back in those days.

EV: Where was your grandfather born?

LP: My grandfather was born here on the island also, so was my dad and me were all Galvestonians, East-end Galvestonians.

EV: All right, and how many of you all were there, how many children did your father have?

MP: My dad had three, me my brother, and my sister is the oldest.

EV: Okay, and what about your grandmother? What was she, was she a housewife?

MP: Yes, she was just a housewife, did all the cooking...

EV: Just a housewife?

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MP: Well I mean yeah, in those days, the olden days they ... she cooked on a wood stove, didn't like a gas stove, she thought they would not cook as good. So she had an old wood stove in the kitchen and she cooked three meals a day, and that's what she did. Did all the washing by hand and hung it out on clotheslines.

EV: Mrs. Stewart's Bluing in the sheets?

MP: Oh, yeah. And they had the tubs all around the washing machines where they could rinse them and put them back through the ringer. We had clothes lines all across the yard with clothes line poles to raise them up and you'd lower them down hang everything up on the clothesline and stick it up in the air and the wind blow dry it.

EV: Must have taken a long time down here with the humidity. In El Paso, shoot, the stuff gets dry in fifteen minutes.

MP: (Laughter) Yeah. We tried clothes lines out here in West U, when I lived next door to [Douglas] Kornegy, we tried that one time because I liked the smell of the sheets dried in the sun and wind, but it takes days...

MP: Especially if you leave them out the next night, they get just a wet again.

EV: Yeah. [to Mrs. Pye] Well, let me ask you also an islander?

LP: I was born in New York City but I came here when I was 2½.

EV: "I wasn't born here but I got here as quick as I could."

LAP: Exactly. My dad was from Galveston and he met my mother in New York and got married and had a couple of kids and he had been pressuring my mother for years to come back to Galveston but she wouldn't relent so finally he just

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picked my brother and I up and got on the train came down and called her said, 'If you want your kids here they are.'

EV: Is that right, really?

MP: Nowadays you'd get arrested. (Laughter)

EV: No kidding. So she relented and

LAP: She came down and fell in love with his family and that was it.

EV: And you've been in Galveston ever since....pretty colorful.

LAP: Yeah.

EV: (To MP) You know about when it was that your father started working here?

MP: Most probably in the '20's, during Vaudeville.

EV: What was your grandfather's name?

MP: Both of them were "Ebenezer Francis Pye." Then my daddy turned around and named by brother that. Luckily my brother was born before me or I would have been an "Ebenezer." (Laughter)

EV: You didn't get "Zacharias" or "Nebakanezer?"

MP: No, I was named after an uncle of mine.

EV: Do you know if your father or grandfather ever saved any pictures that they took while here?

MP: No. You know....it's funny about stage people. Like when I was a kind living with the both of them in the same house. A show would come that they were go work and they'd come home...."How was the show was it good?" "Ah, it was just another show." Any you get that way....you get very jaded. In my history, after I went to Houston, started working up in 51 territory, we were Local

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65 down here. In those days if you went to another town you'd just call the business agent and go to work in that town, but can't hardly do that any more, it's not working that way any more. Another piece of history about this that we might need, is that when the Union 65 started down here it was Galveston-Houston, because Houston was the smaller in those days. As then Houston grew the people that were in the Houston part of it, broke off and got another number. They started handing them out; No. 1 was in New York, that's the main local, then they went 2, 3, 4 as towns started coming around. So we were the 65th Local in the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, is the name of the local. When Houston requested a number, a union had dropped out and they gave them 51, they get it until 1911, but their number is lower than ours. My grandfather and all of the guys who started the local knew all of the guys in Houston and they would come over to the house and sit on the front porch. So when I started going up to Houston as a kid in 60, was when I started going up there, I knew a lot of the old men that were still working (they were old men to me), most of them were as old as I am now (laughing) but they were all men to me then. I knew all of them and they knew me, so the business agent, Don McClendon, his father used to come to the house all the time and I knew him and his two brothers when they were kids, and he was the business agent and I ran the spot lights and a lot of people didn't like to run spotlights but I was working for the telephone company eight hours a day. So I could go in and work spotlights on a show at nighttime and not have to do the "in" or the "out", all I had to do was run the spotlight on Ice Capades and Shrine Circus and Livestock Show and Rodeos, so I got to see all

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kind of people. And a little pat on my back myself on the back here – When I was at the City Auditorium and we used to have a Louisiana Hay Ride, which was a branch off of the Grand Ole Opry and they were the traveling end of it. They would come in and it was all the big names y’know that were on Grand Ole Opry and they would go out and they would travel in stretch Cadillacs.

EV:and do what?

MP: Stretch Cadillacs....like limousines, and they would go from town to town to town with the country western show and usually the Fire Departments sponsored them. A lot of times we would have more people backstage than we had out in front in the house (laughter). But it was all going to charity, so they made a lot of money. A lot of people bought tickets but didn’t use them. So, I’m sitting over there working the Louisiana Hay Ride and we’re sitting at the table, kinda of like this, drinking coffee, and this guy’s out there with black pants on and a gambling shirt, one of those lace kind of...with a bowtie and he’s talking about how he’s just to go out on the road and he really didn’t know what to do, these guy were taking real good care of him. And I guy came up and said, “Elvis, come on, you’re next,” and it was Elvis Presley...(Laughter)

EV: Oh really, wow.

MP: And I’m in high school the next day and I tell them, “You all shoulda seen the guy who was at the Louisiana Hay Ride.” We were into....at that time it was called “rhythm and blues” before it became “rock and roll.” Black groups that started this music, and he was playing all this music that we were listening to. So, like I said, there were probably more people backstage than there was out in front

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of the house. After he left, he hooked up with the Colonel [Tom Parker], so the next time the Louisiana Hay Ride came into town they stayed for two days and the City Auditorium was sold out for all four performances because Elvis Presley was there.

EV: So he really wasn't known the first time he came out.

MP: No, nobody knew who he was. He was just a kid and he was scared to death and he went out and did his songs and he was really good, but he was just a nobody at that time, it was his first road trip.

EV: Do you become jaded too after that?

MP: Yeah, you do get that way. I like certain things that are really funny, like these people who are here [now] the Tuna group. I think some of their stuff is the funniest thing ever, and I hear the new show that they are doing, Tuna Does Vegas....one of their road people with their show says it's the funniest one they've done yet. They have been coming here for 15 years - they're like family. You saw us talking to Jaston [Williams], and that's the way he is and Joe [Sears] is the same way, this is their second home. They come down here two or three times a year and do the different show that they do...they'll come in at Christmas and do "Christmas Tuna." They have a following.... We've done some pretty big names here, I don't know if you've talked Maureen [Patton] about...

EV: Yeah, I've seen some to the history stuff....

MP: We've had Ray Charles, has been here; Fats Domino, Julio Iglesias....Gregory Peck was here just before he died.

EV: Yeah, what did he do?

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MP: He just did a...he had a movie screen that he would show movie clips and he'd talk about his career and the movies. I, of course, being the senior person would get all the good jobs (laughter)...all the other guys had to do the hard stuff, I was the old man. I sat back stage with him, he had two chairs sitting there, one for me and one for him, and he would go out through the curtain and I would open the curtain section so they couldn't see me and he would walk out and he pace the two shows, pace up and down the stage and I said, "Mr. Peck, what's the matter?", and he said, "I'm scared to death." I said, "As long as you've been in the business and you're still scared?" He said, "Until that curtain opens," he said, "I have got the most butterflies in my stomach, you would not believe how scared I am right now." (Laughter) The I'd open the curtain and he'd go out and you'd never know he was scared. Harvey Korman and Tim Conway, they're funny too and both love each other to death and they think the other one is the funniest person in the world....in real life, I mean, they're not playing, they get along so good. Gregory Hines, came here two times and....

EV: He passed away recently didn't he?

MP: Yeah, he passed away not too long after he was here. One of our stage hands, his name was, we call him Tex Avery, but his name was actually Avery Guidry and he was a very tall black man, very nice, one of the nicest guys you'd ever want to meet....

LP: He was big-broad shouldered, he must have had shoulders that wide...

MP: He lived in La Marque and he was going home one night and flipped his truck, didn't have his seat belt on and it threw him out of the truck and got killed.

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And there is a picture by the cage when you back there....and he had a digital camera and he had it up like this and he has his arm around Gregory Hines [demonstrating] and he took a picture of them and the two them died within six weeks apart and we have that picture up on our bulletin board.

EV: Wasn't it Hines, Hines, and Dad originally...the two sons were dancers, right?

MP: Yea.

EV: What happened to the other Hines and Dad, do you know?

MP: I suppose they just retired out, y'know, they were up in age back when he was starting.

EV: I remember they used to come out on Johnny Carson.

MP: Oh, yeah, Ed Sullivan and all that kind of stuff, y'know. All of these people that come here, you'll find most of them, especially the older groups, that's been around a long time, they are very nice people. Every now and then you get one in here that thinks they're super stars but most of the time they're just down to earth people and this is what they do for a living. But, like you asked, "Do you get jaded?" yeah you do, you see it all your life and it gets to where it's just another thing.

EV: Anyone ever be a horse's ass to you backstage...

MP: Oh yeah...

EV:that you can mention because they've passed on? (Laughter)

MP: No (laughter) I wouldn't say any of their names, but there are those people that think they are super stars, and they don't realize....I guess they do realize but

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they just don't care....they've had people take care of them all their life....and like I said most of those are the younger people. Like we did a....can't think of what the rock group was, they did a video here years ago. But they were rock and rollers, a whole different genre of people that have a whole different idea of what show business is about. These older people that have been around forever they've gone through all the hard stuff to get where they're at and they're just thrilled to death to be there (Laughter). And they're real nice people, most of 'em and they're uh easy get along with, but like I say sometime you run in to one that's...

EV: So you were with the telephone company like thirty-two years?

MP: Thirty-six and a half.

EV: Thirty-six and then did you ever work here full time?

MP: Here at the theater? Oh yeah uh huh. Once it started to be rebuilt I was already, I came back down here to work a show um at Ball High School, and I found out that the union was kind of getting into disarray. There was some, bunch of younger people in it and they had no idea. There was one old man still left his name was Joe _____ (26.4) and he was a business agent, so I come down here and started going to union meetings and decided I would come back down here and reorganize this union down here. So we come down and got it back up to we had eight-teen people when we merged with local fifty-one. And when the opera house got refurbished, the first show we did was Steve and Edie, Steve [279] and Edie Gourmet. And after that I was working here you know just as much as I wanted to. Not full time. Not like Jeff does. We have, we have four people that

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are full time employees of the opera house. Jeff is the stage manager and we have a head carpenter, and a head electrician, and a head soundman.

EV: When you talk about carpenter, you're not just talking about a guy who just saws lumber and nails stuff, right? So you have a different definition for it I take it?

MP: No, no. Yes. In show business most people go to a theater and they have no idea what happened before they got there. Uh, like we do maybe five Broadway shows a year on a weekend, usually, Friday sometimes, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Sometimes just Saturday and do two shows [280]. These shows will come in and they'll have from two to four eighteen wheelers filled with equipment, and they'll back up to that loading dock that's out there where all the trucks park. We unload all of that stuff out of the trucks and they have a road crew that travels with that show that knows how it goes together. And we take all the stuff out and put it on the stage and then build, they break us into crews. You're either in the intellectual department, which is all the lighting. You're in the sound department which is the microphones and the speakers, or you're in the carpenter department which is all of the set itself, all the pieces. Some of 'em are drapes, some of 'em are hard pieces, and the road crew tells you how to put it together and we build it. We may get here at six o'clock in the morning, unload three trucks on a Saturday, do two shows, an afternoon show and an evening show, tear everything back down, put it back on the truck, clean the stage and the back stage all up and leave at two o'clock in the morning. But the people, when

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the curtain opens they think all that stuff there all the time. And it's not. It just showed up there that morning and we built it and put it all together and...

EV: So they may bring the drapes or something, and then you all build....

MP: We don't actually build it. It's already built. We just have to put it together. It comes in pieces.

EV: And then I understand too that these guys build this scenery kind of versatile so that they adjust it to the size of the stage?

MP: Yeah.

EV: Is that right?

MP: Right. They can add pieces or take pieces off.

EV: And then the actors themselves they got, we have a shorter walk space here?

MP: Right. They call that blocking.

EV: Blocking?

MP: Blocking. They block the stage. We'll set it all up and then the actors will come up and they'll do a practice, see how far they are from a chair or the table, or whatever it is they have to use in that part of the show.

EV: Now do you know when the lights come on, you told me you were a light man. So how do you know you're going to follow the skater? How do you know to follow the...

MP: You got a head set on and like I told you the road show, they have people that are with them, and they have a guy that calls the cues, just for spot lights there's one guy that calls spot light cues. That's all he does. There's another guy

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who calls the electrical cues, and once you know how it's set up then they just, like nowadays it's in computer, but in the old days they use to have great big dimmers that were as big as an old LP, and about two inches thick.

EV: What's an OLP?

MP: An LP, a record you know?

EV: Oh, an old LP. I got you.

MP: A record. It's like twelve inches disc, and when you're all the way up at the top it's off. And as you start pulling it down more electricity goes through this coil, and the lights get brighter, and brighter and brighter. And they would have a thing about this big, as big as this table six foot long - since nobody can see it when were talking - six foot long box that had maybe twenty of these dimmers in it and they would set on the side of the stage run all the cables out to the lights or up on the pipes wherever they went. There would be an electrician that operated each one of these boards and depending on how big the show was there might be six of these, and you've got a headset on and this guy is telling you, "OK, preset dimmer 1, 6, 8, and 4," then you pull them down just a little bit and you put a stick across them. Then he'd tell you to go 3/4s and there's this thing that says, "1/4, 2/4, 3/4" and you'd just pull those down to that point when he'd say go. In show business the terminology is "get ready for cue 17" and you'd have a sheet that would tell you what to put in there and you'd set it up and they'd say "stand by...go" and when they so "go" everybody goes at the same time. But you don't do anything until they say, "Go." Some of these people, like we have the amateur thing that come in here at the Opera House and we have to tell them, when they

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call the cues to the light board and if they don't say, "Go" the guy ain't going to hit the button that makes the light come on (Laughter). So we have to retrain these people when they come in about the correct terminology we use for show business.

EV: You all don't practice this ahead of time?

MP: Sometimes you get lucky and you do, sometimes you don't.

EV: You mean you do this on the seat of your pants on every show?

MP: Yeah, yeah.

EV: Damn!! (Laughter)

MP: Like running the spot light on the Ice Show (Ice Capades), in those days it was at the Coliseum, I don't know if you ever....were you in Houston when the Coliseum was still there?

EV: Oh, yeah.

MP: We were 80 foot up in the air, right at the ceiling, you could reach up and touch the ceiling. The lights in those days were carbon-arc lights, nowadays they're zenon light bulbs....don't ask me how to spell it....Jeff could tell you how to spell it but it's a great big light bulb and it's super, super bright, but in the old days, back when I started there was two pieces of carbon, like an electric welder, and the electricity would run through those carbons and as you got them together it would arc across and start a fire, like an electric welder and there's a great big reflector mirror at the back that the light bounces off of and goes out to the front of it. There's a thing that you can move up and down, we call it a "trombone" because it's kind of like the slide trombone, and then there's three levers on the

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top that you can make it either smaller or cut it off, or make what we call “barn doors,” like when you want to make a long strip of light. We would up at the start of the Ice Show and the lights would go dim, and you’d have a head set on and they’d say....each light has a number position in the house and you know what your number is and they’d say, “1, 3, 5,7,9, & 11 pick up skater coming out stage left”also, more stage terminology, when you are on the stage looking out at the audience, stage left is on your left and stage right in on your right. When you are in the house looking at the stage it’s exactly opposite of what we call it....

EV: (Showing Mr. Pye a diagram of stage position) Like this.....

MP: Yes, uh-huh. This here is the actors point of view of the stage is the way it’s named. Now, upstage, down stage....this is more information for the younger generation, the reason that it is called “up stage” or “down stage” is that old stages were what we called “raked” – they were higher in the back than they were in the front because the theaters, all the chairs were on a flat floor so the stage was higher in the back so as the actor walked up the incline, it may six inches in some stages, it may be 30” depending on how the stage was built.

EV: That must have been a booger for the dancers.

MP: Yes. My grandfather used to say that the old Vaudeville dancers hated raked stages. When they come to a theater like this with a flat stage it wasn’t bad at all but if they went to a house with a grade stage, with an up stage and a down stage, it’s really hard because they’re always wanting to go....gravity always pulling them down towards the footlights. (laughter). If you notice in the opera house nowadays we don’t have footlights at this theater. All of lighting in the

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front of the house is from booms from side of the theater and out in the back of the theater. But in the old theatres these were light bulb sockets. And like at the old city auditorium, you put a white one, a red one, a blue one, a white one, a red, a blue, a white, a red and a blue light bulb. And if you wanted white foot lights you would throw the switch that lit up first all the white bulbs. If you wanted red you threw the one that turned the red one on.

EV: Out of curiosity what were the wattage of those bulbs?

MP: They were most probably 100 watts. Now my grandfather at the city auditorium when I was a kid, a light bulb would go out and I would always ask him, "How do you know if the light bulb is out or if the socket is bad?" He said, "Oh it's easy you take the light bulb out and you wet your thumb and you stick it in and touch it to the side..." (laughter)

EV: Inaudible.

MP: No, you could do it. The old stage hands could stick their thumbs down in the socket and touch...

EV: (laughter) (34.4)

MP: I said, "No, I'm not sticking my finger in there. That's hurts."

EV: Man.

MP: But see a lot of the old stage hands were seamen. And meaning they worked on boats, sailing ships and stuff.

EV: Right.

MP: They needed these people because of the ropes, if this house... when they redid the opera house we have a back part of the fly floor...

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EV: Excuse me when you talk about redid was that after the storm?

MP: No this is when...

EV: The big remodeling in 80?

MP: Right the big remodeling in '82 something like that.

EV: Okay.

MP: We have a back part of the fly floor that we call a counter weight system and it's actually got great big iron bricks that weigh 40 pounds and we can balance the weight of whatever is out on the pipe with these bricks.

LP: Isn't this an old style of?

MP: No this is a new style.

LP: Oh, okay.

MP: The old style when you walk out and you look at the stage and you look up there's four ropes that go to each pipe. They go up and across what we call the grid and the ceiling and back down in four different places and they hook to a pipe. Now these sailors were used to working with these ropes and that's the way they used to do them. You bring the pipe down to the floor and then you get people to stand on it and you pull the slack out of all the rope so it's flat and then you put a... now we use a piece of... like iron rope, steel rope around it and hang a bag on it and you put it up in the air and that bag goes up and... goes up as the pipe goes up and then you balance it and you find out how much weight you've got to put on it and then you put it all the way down until the pipe goes all the way up to the ceiling and then you take and start putting bags on it to balance the

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weight that's out on that pipe and it... we've had Chorus Line and the back pipe weighted 7,000 pounds.

EV: Are you talking about the show Chorus Line?

MP: Yeah. It had motors on it that turned three sided like tubes that went from the floor all the way up. One side was black and one was silver and one was gold. And they could turn it and change the different... the back of the wall.

EV: Those were about... 99% of that show you don't really have any theatre you have a blank stage.

MP: Yeah right.

EV: And then the black part of is just hell.

MP: They love the opera house.

LP: Pack it up and go home?

EV: Well I love that show that's what I mean.

MP: They love the opera house because it's had a wall like an old stage wall. That's the original wall, back wall of the theatre. After the 1900 storm they had to do a little rebuilding. They lost the roof on it but it's the original wall so they use that wall actually as the back wall of that show.

EV: Let me ask you this... because I've seen that show every time I get a chance.

MP: I do too I've got it on tape.

EV: Do you have one of them performing?

MP: No, we can't tape anything legally. They won't allow us to tape.

EV: But you're talking about the movie?

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MP: Yes.

EV: They ruined it, don't you think?

MP: Yeah I like the Broadway show better.

LP: What show are you talking about?

MP: Chorus Line.

LP: Oh, okay.

EV: How do those guys walk out... the very last act when they start doing, one..da ta da ta da da (singing).. They march up and all the sudden they on with those tuxedos and hats and it's [snap] instantaneous?

MP: That's what she used to do. That's a completely different department and a different unit. It's called the wardrobe unit.

EV: Okay, you're on...

LP: I have to excuse myself because I have short term...

EV: Short term what?

MP: Short term memory loss.

EV: Oh okay.

MP: But they have them... they call them dressers. And each one of these people have a dresser from the time the show starts until the time it ends. Sometimes they might walk up and they just come back with a hat on or something.

EV: Each person?

MP: Yeah.

EV: Every person in a show has his own dresser?

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MP: Yeah, on a show like Chicago because of the quick change.

EV: Right.

MP: So they walk off, say stage right. They exit stage right. They are standing there in a line with a laundry basket with a new outfit in it. As soon as they clear that back curtain where nobody can see them...that's okay go ahead and finish... they start taking that outfit off, whatever they've got on. And they've got dancing tights on underneath it and as soon as they get their shirt off, they start putting the other one back on. And they can change costumes in 30 seconds.

EV: I mean it's instantaneous almost.

MP: Yeah.

EV: It is incredible to watch that.

MP: Well Joe and Jason that's doing Tuna... that's...

EV: That's right they have a lot of costumes.

MP: They do 11 characters each in Tuna Christmas and they walk through that door and they have microphones on with body packs that don't have to have a cord on them, they are like a radio, and while they are being changed they will be talking to the other guy in the voice and that's what so amazing to me about Joe and Jason... they will be in this one voice of whatever they were on the stage and they are getting the clothes put on to be another character and it might be a woman. And they will run around and come in stage left and when you walk in stage left they have a completely different voice that they are using and they can keep track of these voices. And to me they are two of the best that I have ever seen do that. I mean they can just...

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LP: How long is the show, two hours?

MP: Yeah about two hours.

EV: Let me ask you this... let me go back to the mics a little bit. Before they had remote communications or microphones, like how did your grandfather, did they then have to rehearse?

MP: Yeah, they would tell them what to do ahead of time most probably and they'd... in those days they didn't have as much... as fancy a thing. The spotlight would pick up the star...

EV: So take for instance....

MP: The star came on you put a light on him and when he left you put the light out.

EV: So really, how you run a show or how you present a show kind of goes hand and hand with the technology.

MP: Oh yeah...

EV: Oh well I went to go see, I forget what opera it was at Wortham and they had a back drop... what was it? The (40.4) so they had a backdrop and it seemed to me the backdrop never went up or down they just changed the lights and had different scenery.

MP: Oh yeah. What they can do is they can use paint that if you change the color of the light the paint will..

End of side 1 tape 1

MP: have like a... there's a thing out now called moving lights. It's called a Whole Hog System. I don't know who named it that.

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EV: Whole Hog?

MP: Whole Hog. And these lights kind of look like a watermelon with the end cut off. And there's a board backstage, goes up to these lights and you can move them all over the stage with this board with a joystick like a video game. And they come out with these things and you'll see them a lot in TV and a lot of Broadway shows use them and they can put patterns in them to where they look like a spinning wheel or a frame or like a lattice work or whatever they want and they can move these lights all over. One guy can operate 20 or 30 lights from this board.

LP: Wow.

MP: Just by punching the number of the light in and start moving it and that light will move. And he has to watch, usually a TV monitor so he can see his lights on the stage so he knows where they are at. But you know all of this stuff is now a power point. We used to use slide projectors, regular 35 millimeter slide projectors for showing slides on the thing. Now they put it on a computer and cut in on a disk and it's called power point and your computer most probably has a power point system and they make this thing up and they put a disk in and you put in a power point player and set back stage and hit stop and go on the pictures or the movie or whatever you put on that disk comes up on the screen. And we do a lot of those. It's called rear projection. Where you are sitting behind the screen showing the picture on the screen but it comes out forward to people because all the pictures are put in backwards.

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EV: So when you... when you started here you've been through the one major change right... that was 1980 changeover?

MP: Right.

EV: Alight. And I understand that part of this... this was still part of a hotel.

MP: Yeah well the hotel is still upstairs it's apartments now.

EV: Yeah they took some of it... they have taken some of it as of late... I thought Maureen said they were going to move some of the offices over here because they used to be some of the rooms.

MP: Yeah.

EV: Yeah and are there people still living in there?

MP: Yeah, there are apartments upstairs over the office on the second floor.

EV: Do they hear the shows?

MP: Nope.

EV: Really?

MP: Like this wall here, there's a stairway, there's a storage room right behind this and then there's a stairway and then there's the wall to the opera house so you can't hear anything. It would have to be real loud.

EV: And this... is this all the original brick here?

MP: Yes.

EV: But some of it I guess was replaced after the storm. Was this hurt during the storm, the 1900 storm?

MP: Yes. Some of it was damaged and had to be rebuilt. Now these were all... where we are sitting now, when we were kids growing up and it was a state

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theatre and it was a movie theatre, these were store fronts. They were businesses in here. Right where we are sitting was the Melody Record Shop, it was a phonograph record place where we used to buy our records when we were kids and they have just rebuilt it all little by little. They would get money and when we first started the rebuilding and we used to use this for a storeroom it didn't even have a floor in it, it was dirt. It was just front wall, back wall, the ceiling and dirt.

EV: In here?

MP: Yeah. And they didn't have air conditioning. And we would do a thing every year, the Southwest Band Festival which is a high school band competition and when they first started remodeling this, this was the warm up room for the bands and they had to bring in a portable air condition and set it out in the yard, in the dock area there and pump air conditioning in here because the bands couldn't stay in here it was too hot. And then they got money and they put all the air conditioning and stuff. It's all... a lot of it is money, grants and things that they get from people. Money they make on the shows.

EV: Well let me ask... so when you guys have a show coming up, I'm talking about the crew now, you all have the show coming on, don't you get butterflies and... if you don't rehearse this thing don't you get a little up tight about what you are going to do?

MP: A little bit but it's, it's kind of the same thing no matter what show you are doing. You know it's just you have to... like I work in the department called the props department. I was the prop master before I quit working. And that is all of

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the little books, all of the guns, all of the cigarettes, all of that kind of stuff that they have, vases, glasses all that kind of stuff. So you have to know where it is. And you work with the prop person with the show. And we have a prop person on each side at least one, sometimes we have three or four depending on how much props is in the show. And the first show is a little nerve racking because you don't know when the things have to happen. You have a sheet of paper that tells you. Some of these sheets of paper are done by somebody who cares and some of them are done by someone who doesn't give a damn, you know. (laughter) They know what they are doing and they figure that everybody knows. Some of them have, you know, some have 15 minutes after you do this, 15 minutes before your next move.

LP: I've got a question... do you wear head sets while your doing your...?

MP: No.

LP: No?

MP: We're standing with a prop person.

LP: You're doing it from a piece of paper.

MP: Yes and the prop person with the show. And you know once you do it once or twice then there's nothing to it. You get to where it's like anything... it's like riding a bicycle. It's... your doing the same thing you did in the last show but it might not be the same things you're picking up, you know.

EV: With all this complex stuff I don't guess there's too much drinking going on... (laughter)?

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MP: No. We do not allow you to be under the influence of anything. Especially like when we are setting a show up, everybody's really got to pay attention because there's thing coming in, lights coming down, stuff being set up. Things can fall...

EV: It's mayhem perhaps?

MP: Yeah it gets a little hectic and we were doing "Fame," the Broadway show "Fame" and all of the drapes on a stage are fire retardant they are treated with a chemical. And the light guy, the electrician was in a big hurry. And he pulled up a pipe full of lights and these lights when they come on get hot. And he caught a border going up with his electric pipe and he didn't notice it. And the wardrobe mistress, the lady that was doing wardrobe and I were walking around and putting marks on the stage, like, "hit your mark" you've heard them say that on the? There's actually a mark on the stage for them to see. A piece of tape, different colors for different acts and things like that. And we go around and we put tape on it and write a number on it or the lady tells you what to put and you write it down. And we were setting marks up on the stage and all of the sudden stuff is falling on us. And she says, "What the hell is that?" And I look up and the curtain is on fire.

EV: Oh my...

MP: It caught on fire. And I hollered, "There's a fire in the house!" And Jeff was in his office and he comes running out, we almost had the whole show set up and they lowered the lights down and sprayed fire extinguishers from the fly floor

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on it and it was that white powder stuff and it went all over the theatre, the air conditioning system, soaked it all up.

EV: Oh my gosh!

MP: We had to mop and clean, had to drag the curtain down, untie it and drag it out and throw it out the back door because it was still smoldering, this stuff won't catch on fire flame but it will, kind of like fire cracker punk you use to light... it just keeps getting bigger and bigger, red ambers all around it. And we threw it out of the building and the fire trucks had to come. And then we had to clean the whole stage up and re-hang all the stuff that we got all wet. And vacuum all the dust we had all up and the show started. Maureen made a big announcement about how good we did to get the show on, on time.

EV: And the show went on. And that was "Fame?"

MP: Yeah and everybody got, we used tape, we call it gafers tape. It comes in all kind of colors, but we mostly used black and white. And we had white tape on our shirt and instead of "Fame" it said "Flame" on it. We renamed their show for them! (laughter)

EV: (laughter) Did they... let me see, I saw a huge drawing on a desk when I walked in there, because I knew I was going to ask you about your rehearsal, your plans, is that like the plotting of the stage, or where the stage... do you know what I am talking about, did you see it out there?

MP: Where was this?

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EV: When you come in from the way left hand side and there's the... I guess you have the lighting, lighting monitor whatever... and there a big desk there and I saw these huge... like an architects plans...

MP: Oh yeah, yeah. That's "Tuna's" plan. See this is a brand new show. So they've never set this up before.

LP: So they had to put up plans so the guys.

MP: They've got a drawing an architect's drawing of the stage and there is feet measurements, how far they want to be from the front of the stage and on center marks so they get everything set up right. So they... all those shows usually have those drawings but most of the road shows after they have been out for a while, the people don't need those drawings anymore. They've got all the numbers in their head and they can....

EV: So they just come by and tell you all. They just tell the local folk what needs to be done.

MP: Right. You know the chalk lines like carpenters use?

EV: Yeah.

MP: String with chalk in it?

EV: Yeah.

MP: Well they'll say, "Pop me a line at 6 foot across from the front of the stage." And we'll measure 6 foot from the proscenium and pop a line across there and put tape down over that and start from there and they know how, what the distance from what that point is that everything has to be on the stage. It's really amazing, these people have got a lot of know how that go out on the road.

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EV: Yeah they do. And the actor himself to be able to follow all these cues that he's got. I mean he's got to come in here and here...you know all that stuff.

LP: Remember his lines...

MP: And hoping nothing is in the way when they come off. You know each stage. Like our stage, we've got maybe 10 foot of off stage room. But like the, is it the Palace in Austin downtown? It was an old movie theatre too. They've got like about 5 foot and we pack all kind of stuff on these stage right and stage left that has to go on and off the stage at different times. So it is just crammed full of chairs, tables and all kind of stuff. So they have to watch coming off and we have to leave a path for them to get on and off the stage.

EV: I take it that from what you have been describing to me that backstage has a certain consistency of a pattern.

MP: Oh yeah.

EV: I mean one guy says the spot guy sits here, the guy... every stage follows that same pattern.

MP: Yeah. Our spot lights are in a booth out in the front of the house, up on the top balcony and when you go in the theatre you can look up there, it's a big glass window there's two of them. We can have as many as four spot lights up there. And we have two that belong to the house and we have two that are not as good as those, they're not zenons they are a smaller wattage bulb.

EV: Have any of these actors, performers I mean from a dancer to the star ever come by and say how much they like this particular stage?

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MP: Oh they love this house. The people will come in, especially the road people, when they first get here in the morning, they are sitting outside because they've been driving from God knows where. And they get here, maybe 4:00 in the morning in a bus, they travel in a bus. And we'll unlock the door, and go in and turn the lights on and we've got a great big drape that's called a Staley, a man named Staley painted it I don't know whether you've ever seen the front curtain when it's in but we'll go over and raise that curtain up and when the curtain goes up and they see that house they all go, "Oh my God look at the building, this is a beautiful building!" And Dianna Shore, the piano player,

EV: Right the Jazz girl, blind.

MP: Yes, she's blind.

LP: What's her name?

MP: Dianna Shore.

LP: No that's... Dina Shore.

MP: No Dianna.

LP: Oh, I'll shut up.

MP: And she had a grand piano there and of course her band. And she come out and they had microphones on the piano and microphone for her to sing out of. And for the people who have never seen our building, this building was built before electronics. It's got wonderful acoustics. You can see... we have to watch what we are saying on the stage because it goes right out into the theatre and they run tours of people through the building.... You know looking at the remodeled building and so we have to watch what we are saying because it will just go out

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there. And she starts playing the piano and she hauls up to the sound man, "Turn the microphones down in the piano a little bit they are loud." And she's playing and "Turn them down a little more." And "Turn my microphone down it's starting to squeal. Turn it down a little more." He finally opened the door and said, "I don't have anything on." She said, "Good leave the microphones out I don't any microphones in this house." And she did her whole thing acoustics without any microphones at all, Dianna Shore.

EV: She's a great jazz singer.

MP: Plays that piano too. Now we have some of these outfits that come in and again this building has fabulous acoustics. And they will come in with these rock and roll speakers. They weigh about 90 pounds, 100 pounds a piece. And they will build a stack on each side of the proscenium, maybe four speakers high. And then they play it like they are in an outdoor theatre somewhere in a football stadium and the people can't hear. It gets so loud. We did Little Richard came in here one year. We're setting all the band up and everything and he had a piano and we have, there's monitors that go in front of each one of the people and different other instruments come out of that monitor so they can hear and his monitor was up full blast, he's deaf as a coot, can't hear and he's getting very, very old too.

LP: He's dead now isn't he?

MP: No he ain't dead yet. But right behind him was two bass guitar players that had two six foot tall base guitar speakers, so there were four of them, he's here, he's got a monitor in front of him that is up as high as it will go and I told

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Jeff, I said, "You need to go find a box of ear plugs" because we keep ear plugs. I said, "Because when they turn this on we ain't going to be able to hear." And they started playing, rehearsing and the floor of the stage was vibrating it was so much noise.

EV: I can imagine, yeah. You know I had... excuse me we're talking about Jones Hall now.

MP: Jones Hall in Houston, the spot light operators hated it when it first was built because those pods that are all at different levels, some of those pods have got spotlights in them.

EV: Do they?

MP: And they are hung upside down. So everything operates backwards and you're sitting in a pod on a little wooden box in the pod booth.

EV: Oh my gosh with the audience?

MP: The spotlight is anchored to the framework so it's steady it won't move but you move and it was really hard, some people didn't like it at all because the pod moved and they were always...

EV: A little unnerving?

MP: Yes. The people that are afraid of heights to start with, if it's not solid where they are standing they don't like it at all but it was very strange. I only ran one show there it was a dancing show of some sort but it was awful hard to run because everything we could get we had to think backwards because the light was upside down.

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EV: But I get the feeling that here too, I have the feeling that the intimacy of this theatre is probably... as well as its acoustics but I think a performer likes to have that sense of an audience and they almost kind of feed off of each other.

MP: And this theatre here from the front lip of the stage to the back row of seats, the furthest seat away is 70 feet. So there's, they sell some tickets that are partially what do you call them... the poles?

EV: Obstructed?

MP: Yeah obstructed view. There's a pole that holds the balcony up. That's the only problem that's in the only building and they are not that bad. It's a great building to see any kind of show in. You're so close and like you said the actors like it because the acoustics are good and they are close to the people and they can... especially people who have contact with the audience during their show. We did Steve Allen come in, he had a road show out for a while, this was maybe ten years ago, and it was kind of like The Tonight Show set. And he had Louis Knight was there and all of the people that used to be on the old Tonight Show and the guy that was our stage manager at the time his name was Bill Lindstrom he has since died now, we're sitting there on stage right and Bill Knight turns around and goes like this... wanted a drink of water. So I go get a bottle of water and what we don't... if you can't tear the label off you put tape over it so that the bottle company, water bottle company don't get a free ad, you know. So I tape it up and I'm standing there and I look at Bill and I said, "Bill, how am I going to get Mr. Knight this bottle of water?" And he turned around and looked at me and said, "Come and bring me the bottle of water." So I walked out there and I handed

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him a bottle of water and Steve Allen turns around and says, "And just who might you be?" I'm out on stage which is where we never want to be. If you've seen us we've done something wrong. And I'm standing there and I said, "My name's Malcolm Pye" and he said, "What can I do for you?" And I said, "I'm just brining Mr. Knight a bottle of water he was thirsty." He said, "Well could you get me a bottle of water too?" I said, "Yes sir I could." So I went and got him a bottle of water and brought it to him. And I think I was set up actually. I think they most probably do this to a poor stage hand in every town they go to just to get a good laugh and I was the one it was pulled on. But we've had some funny things happen in the building.

EV: Well do you remember any more of those things?

MP: Well Tim Conway and Harvey Corman. I was sitting back stage with him. We had built a little box for Tim Conway's little character that's a midget looking guy. He's actually got his legs stuck down in a box and his feet are on the ground and he's got these little shoes that fit where his knees are and he buckles them around and he was going to do the golfer thing that he does. And we were... Harvey Corman and I are sitting on the box down there and Conway's out doing his number and Harvey Corman is just dying laughing and I said, "What are you laughing about?" He said, "He's the funniest man in the world how can you sit here and not laugh?" I said, "Well you hear it all the time." He said, "I don't care you can tell me the same joke every day and it's just as funny as it was the last time." And we got a dentist chair and they did that skit that he did years and years ago where he was a dentist and it was his first patient.

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LP: And he was shaking?

MP: Well no he was reading out of a book how to fix his tooth. And Harvey Corman was sitting in the chair and they hadn't done this in a long time and he's trying to keep a straight face but he's just laughing up a storm laying in his chair and the more he laughs the more Tim Conway would do things to make him laugh. Part of the thing, he fills this bottle up with the deadening and he accidentally sticks it in his arm and his arm goes to sleep and he can't pick his arm up and he's supposed to be pulling his tooth. That's funny... he's supposed to be pulling his tooth and Harvey Corman's trying to keep a straight face (laughter)...

EV: (laughter) Was that impromptu?

MP: No it was all part of the thing... then he stabs himself in the leg with a needle in his leg and starts going to sleep and Harvey Corman is just falling out of the chair laughing. He's laughing worse than the audience is laughing.

EV: Well he was so good at impromptu... Steve Allen was talking and gave us some stories on him one time about some crazy thing he did on their show and that Steve... not Steve Allen...

MP: Johnny Carson?

EV: No, Steve Lawrence.

MP: Oh Steve Lawrence.

EV: Yeah Steve Lawrence. And he just cracked up. They couldn't finish the skit because what's his name was doing all this impromptu stuff...

MP: He just adlibs all the time.

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EV: Yeah and the one that he did ad lib I think on television was, of course for all I know it could have been planned but Harvey Corman brought in that great grandfather clock and he was playing the little old man...

MP: It's those shuffle foot.

EV: Yeah he's trying to put the stethoscope to the clock and he's humming like a doctor, "Humm, hummm" then he goes to the back and he opens it and puts his head back and says, "cough." (laughter)

MP: (laughter) yeah they could get carried away. Back with the vaudeville stuff, a lot of their stuff was pretty blue. It was pretty rough and rank and you know they were the old comics and the old slap stick stuff and the daddy and grandpa both said, "You never knew what these people were going to do." A lot of them, you know it's kind of like Joe and Jason after they do something so much they can...

LP: They start adlibbing on the...

MP: They can leave what they are supposed to be doing and do something else and then come right back to what they were supposed to be doing and keep on going with it you know and that's what these, the old vaudeville people were good at that. They could do a lot of this off the cuff stuff that nobody even knew they were going to do and the guy that's out there with them has to pick up on what he's doing and go on with the jokes that are supposed to be part of the show you know.

EV: Well I have a friend of mine who was a jazz musician and he says they do that a lot when they improvise with jazz because you get tired of doing the same

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thing every time. And like he said, he was telling me he was giving me a comparison of Beethoven. You know every time he... I guess because he was deaf he didn't have that many alternatives. Whenever one of these composers do their works or did their works they always added something different just because they wanted to experiment with something else.

LP: Improvisation sure.

EV: There's no two renditions are you going to hear the same unless once they write it down. Once it's written down then the improve becomes on where you emphasize things but yeah I guess they do that a lot.

MP: Well the thing that amazes me more than anything else in show business is dancers.

EV: Really?

MP: Dancers are the most amazing people. They travel with these shows, these Broadway shows and they come in and as soon as they can get access to the stage they will start working. And they will dance and they'll dance and they would do two shows and they are dripping wet and they've got to be fabulous athletes. I mean these people they have got to have tremendous muscle strength. And they just work, work, work... The stars who are the singers and actors they just do their little walk around thing and say their lines but these dancers, especially in like in Chorus Line or Cabaret or one of the ones that's got a lot of dancing... these people, I don't know how they... they've got to burn out. They can't do it for very long.

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EV: All the kids in their twenties, you know. I mean they are doing that while the other guys that play jocks getting their head knocked off on the football field. You do that at twenty... you do that.

MP: They've got the strength. They can just dance and dance and dance. Ballet dancers are...

EV: Very exquisite.

MP: That's amazing to me.

EV: That's what I kind of learned about the classics when I really started to appreciate the classics was that when I learned that an operatic voice is tough. You do an opera, it's a lot rougher than doing some of this stuff these rock guys do.

MP: Yeah.

EV: And then the next thing are the athletes. I mean the dancers as opposed to say football players. Ballet dancers go through a lot more excruciating work.

MP: Oh yeah.

EV: Than a jock.

MP: A lot harder on their muscles. A woman that can stand up on her tip toes and spin around and not get dizzy... that's another thing I don't understand.

EV: I don't understand...

MP: I don't understand how dancers can spin around like they spin around and stop facing the audience the way they are supposed to be and not fall over or fall down.

EV: I'd fall on my butt every time.

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MP: (laughter) me too.

EV: Do you remember that interview they had of Ginger Rogers when he said that about Fred Astaire and she said, "I do everything Fred Astaire does backwards and in heels."

MP: Yeah.

LP: There you go! I remember reading that.

MP: (laughter) Yeah they are a different breed. And the male ballet dancers that a lot of these people make fun of that they are sissies and all... but if you are standing there and this woman she might only weigh 90, 100 pounds but she comes running across the stage and you grab her by the waste and pick her straight up over your head, I mean you've got to be strong.

EV: Those guys are powerful.

LP: And have great balance.

EV: And, but they have to act like it's one fluid motion.

MP: Oh yeah.

EV: It's not like a...

MP: It's got to be smooth.

EV: It's not like run up baby and I'll catch you _____ (inaudible 25.6) its nothing like that (laughter).

MP: Not that jitterbug stuff it's got to look a certain way and it's got to look that same way every night and that's...

LP: I don't know how they do it but they have to be so disciplined.

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EV: Well I don't want... you may have answered this already and I didn't get it but who is the quarterback for all this stuff? I mean who does the...

MP: Here at the opera house you mean?

EV: Yeah exactly. Do you have, is it one guy runs the lights, one guy does this, one guy... so who melds that altogether or does it just happen?

MP: The stage manager.

EV: Okay and where is he during all of this?

MP: He most of the time will sit stage right. Every now and then you will get a show that he has to be out in the audience somewhere. And he will either go up in the light booth or they will set him up a table up on the third balcony away from where people are and he's got a head set and a microphone and he can talk to us. But there is a...they will find.... But he is the quarterback, he is the man that knows the show and when a road show comes in our local people usually don't have head sets on. The crew for the road show that travels with it has a head set on and they are getting the cues from him and then they tell us what to do.

EV: Okay so you guys are kind of for the most part, in most of the shows you guys are kind of the back up?

MP: Yes.

EV: And, but if we have a one man show, like you said you had Gregory Peck or some... what then you guys are it. Then you guys are the first team, you're the "A" Team.

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MP: Usually like Gregory Peck or Gregory Hines or one man show kind of thing, he'll have one or two people that travel with him and they will set the lights up and do the focuses and tell you pretty much that "We're going to be doing this and this and this." And then we just take it from there. I mean we did Bill Cosby and he did two shows and we put a rug out there and had one of those tall directors chairs and when he come in he had on a pair of blue jeans and a pair of flip flop shoes like thongs and a t-shirt that said "Temple" and a baseball hat on. And he was carrying a little leather bag kind of thing like a little small over the shoulder briefcase kind of thing and Bill Lindstrom and I are talking, he and I are about the same age so we used to talk all the time even... he was the stage manager and a lot of the people were scared to death of Bill because he had the persona, he was a very tall guy and bald headed.

LP: He was kind of gruff speaking.

MP: And he was very gruff speaking but he and I got along fine he didn't bother me because I already knew who he was.

EV: What was this gentleman's name?

MP: His name was Bill Lindstrom and he was the stage manager and was part of the front office group but he was also a member of our union. And he and I are talking, "I wonder when Cosby's valet is going to come with his clothes for the show?" He said, "Go ask Mr. Cosby when should we be expecting his valet?" And I went and knocked on the door and said, "Mr. Cosby do you have a valet that is going to be brining your clothes for the show?" He said, "What clothes?" And I said, "Do you have another outfit you are going to wear?" He said, "No

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I'm wearing this." I said, "Okay." So I went back and I told Lindstrom and said, "He ain't got no other clothes he's going on what he's got on." So he comes up and talks to us, he's very nice, very funny man. And he goes out and he does the show and did about an hour and a half, just talking and doing all of his stick that he does. And he come off and he thanks us, "You all did a real good job, spotlights were good, every thing went good." Lindstrom said, "Well what's the show going to be like tonight do we need make any changes?" He said, "Did you see what I just did?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "It's going to be the same thing." So he walks out that night and he walks out on the set, on the chair and somebody hollered something at him. Some "Do such and such or so and so." And he went off and did a completely different show.

EV: Really?

MP: Of course he's just sitting in the chair with the spotlight on him so it wasn't no big thing but he just went off on a completely different tangent. And they... when the big stars are here they have security, they have a deputy sheriff or a policeman or some body and they lock all the doors and all that stuff to keep everyone away from them. And the green room upstairs, the star dressing room has one door in it, it's the only way you can get in it. So he, when he got ready to go out he said, told the police officer who was a lady Deputy Sheriff, "Would you lock that door because my stuff is in there?" She said, "Yes sir I sure will." So she locks the door and she comes out and sits on the side of the stage and watches the show with us because it's locked up. And he gets through and he comes off and he walks over and he has her unlock the door and he steps back and she

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opened the door. "Could you go in and check to make sure everything is okay up there?" And I looked at him and he looked at me and started smiling, that big grin that's Cosby's got and she walked in and looked all around he said, "Check in the bathroom too." And I said, "Mr. Cosby there ain't no other door." He said, "Yeah I know it I just like to screw with the police department when I'm in town." (laughter). But he was a very nice man. The second show was no where close to the first show.

EV: Did your father, your grandfather experience these same kinds of
(inaudible) (30.3)?

MP: I'm sure they did but...

EV: It never became part of the family lore?

MP: No, like I said, the more that you did it and in those days and they did it every day because they were doing vaudeville. They would do five to seven days of a show and then it would go out and they would bring another one right in the next day and it would start over again.

EV: Well then each vaudeville should like would have maybe acts but...

MP: They did. They'd have magicians and singers and tap dancers and comics and jugglers and dog acts. Just old hat. We did Will Rogers Foley here and all of our stage hands, our younger hands most of them, and they had a dog act and Lucy was doing wardrobe and she got friendly with the guy who had the dog act and he had, eight or ten dogs. I don't know like you might want to cut this out when I tell you the little story. But the dogs would come and sit out in the annex and Lucielle would sit down and play with the dogs and then they would go out

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and they would do this, this regular dog act like you see on the old Ed Sullivan Show you know balancing and walking and all of the kids that had never seen dog acts before they would go down in one, which was the first wing, and that's where he was at right at the front of the stage and they were just astounded to watch these dogs do these acts. So he had the little like a terrier but all of them were mutts. He had gotten them all from, saved them from pounds. And the little dog was supposed to jump off of a little platform, he climbed up this ladder and stand up and then he'd jump off the platform and hit a little trampoline and bounce up and jump on this other little thing and stand up. And he jumped off of this thing and hit the little trampoline and when he did he pooped a turd about that big. It was tiny and it hit the floor and he jumped up on the thing and it was laying there on the floor and all the dogs are looking at it and they wouldn't do the rest of their act (laughter) and the guy didn't know what happened. Because he didn't... he was watching the dog to make sure it landed and he didn't see it come out and he couldn't figure out why all his dogs went stupid on him all of the sudden but none of them wanted to be blamed for what was on the stage. "He did it, it wasn't me!" (laughter)

EV: The show must go on...(laughter)

MP: (laughter) Then he seen it and he kicked it over against the red curtain.

LP: The dog?

MP: No the pooh pooh. He kicked it over against the red curtain.

LP: No I mean the dog?

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MP: No the trainer guy. So the back behind this red curtain was a set of steps that went up this way and then a set of steps that would come back down. The dancers would walk up this thing and these women had these high heeled shoes on. And the red curtain was going to go up and show these steps as a part of the show. It was supposed to be Will Rogers Foleys. And I knew this dog poop was in the curtain. So I go around the back of the curtain and I figured out about how far it was and I raised the curtain and reached down and picked it up and come off the stage.

LP: With your bare hands?

MP: Yeah I did.

EV: Really?

MP: And all of these kids like Jimmy the Lean had just walked in the movie and they are all saying "Oh God how can you do that?" "It's just dog poop it ain't no big thing it was..." And of course he fed these dogs dry dog food so they had, it was real hard. I took it over and threw it in the trash and washed my hands. I said, "I couldn't leave it out there and have one of them girls in the high heel shoes step on the dog crap in the middle of the stage, that wouldn't have been very good."

LP: What an antidote.

MP: But it's live theatre, you know that's why they call it life theatre because you never know what's going to happen.

EV: There was, I was reading... well maybe somebody told me this because Larry and I when we were in college we were a couple of operas and somebody

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must have told a story that Caruso was doing... one of the operas he was doing he has a gun where you have to shoot somebody and a little cap pistol of some kind. The thing wouldn't work. He just kept pulling.

LP: This guy was just standing there waiting to be...

EV: Right waiting to be shot. (laughter). He kind of looked at the audience and says "Banga, Banga!" (laughter)

MP: Bang with an Italian accent!

EV: Yeah that was. We had a kind of a thing, Larry and I when we were doing... we were a chorus in **Nabuco (39.9)** and they decided, they didn't tell us, now Larry and I did not... being in the back of the Chorus we spent... I don't know if you have ever... anyway Larry and I reached the rehearsal drunk out of our gore. And they ran this, they didn't tell us that they were going to have Chariots with real horses on stage. And they come running up the horse behind us and somebody said, "What in the f*!%@ was that?" Horses on the stage. You know back then you didn't use the "F" word but for whatever reason it was hilarious in that situation. And then we were sitting there and one of those horses decided he was going to put his poop on the stage and that was it. We couldn't push that it was just too damn funny. It was a dress rehearsal. We were all sitting out there with our spears and all that kind of stuff.

MP: We were doing what is it Song...

LP: That was a nice laugh when I get tears in my eyes when I laugh it's funny.

MP: Sound of Music...at the old Music Hall all those years ago and they had a horse that pulled a carriage and the guy with the show said, "Who is the low man

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in seniority on the show?" And we said, "That guy over there." (laughter) "Not me." He said, "Okay you come here." He said, "See this box, every time the horse comes on that stage I want you right behind that horse and a card board box. And he said if he raises his tail then you stick the box underneath it because we don't want no horse poop on the deck." So we're all laughing, he leaves and we're all laughing because it is the funniest thing in the world that this guy had a job following the horse around. So after a period of time the horse didn't do anything. After a couple of shows and he kind of got lacks on his job and the horse pooped on the stage.

EV: Of course (laughter)

MP: And the guy with the road show comes over and says, "Where is the guy that is supposed to have that box?" I said, "I think he's getting coffee." He said, "Go get him." And he comes back and says, "Pick that box up." He picked it up and then he said, "Now hand it to me." And he said, "Why?" He said, "Because I just fired you get off of the stage!" But sometimes that's the job you've got to do.

LP: You only have to do it once. You have to be there when it happens.

MP: And it just, sure shooting when you're not there... you're talking about those chariots we were doing the rodeo when it was still at the Coliseum and Ben Hur had come out and they brought two chariots with the horses with the Ben Hur movie and they told us that they were going to come out and run this race. In show business if you've got a spotlight on somebody and something bad happens you take the spot light to the ceiling and the people will follow the spotlight up instead of seeing what is bad happening to whoever it is. And we're all following

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these chariots around and they are running around the Coliseum and all of the sudden the nose of this chariot dings into the dirt and the guy goes flying on the reigns and all of the lights that's on that chariot go to the ceiling and he's in the pitch black being drug down the thing. And the guy from Hollywood's saying, "Put the lights on the guy that's part of the show!" And we said, "Well you've got to tell us man we got a rule." We thought the guy got yanked out of the chariot or it broke so we all went to the ceiling, ruined the first show all together. Nobody could even see him he was in the pitch dark. It was the rodeo.

EV: Well they should have told you, they should have known better.

MP: They should have he was a Hollywood movie maker and he's used to doing stuff his way instead of our way.

EV: (laughter) Wow, so when did you kind of retire?

MP: I kind of retired about two years ago when Lucy started getting short term memory loss and she doesn't like being by herself at home. So now I make these calls like I told you Jeff calls me and tells me how many people they need or the union hall will call and tell me "We've got something at the Moody Center and need people out there at Moody Gardens."

EV: Do you have, out of all this experience are there any particular shows you really like I mean you already mentioned Chorus Line you liked?

MP: I liked Chorus Line I liked Cabaret. A lot of people don't like Cabaret, it's kind of a dark show but I like it.

EV: It takes place in Germany doesn't it?

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MP: Yeah before the Second World War. The end of it is spooky if you realize if you really think about how it ends but it's a good show. It's got a lot of good music in it.

EV: I'm sure you've had some magicians here too right?

MP: We've only had about two magicians here but years ago when this was a state theatre and it was a movie theatre we used to have a thing, it would be a midnight show and then they would have a magician and usually a monster of some sort and I actually worked the original Black Stone, the old man...

EV: You are the only person that I know that remembers Black Stone.

MP: Yeah and then after he retired the son, Black Stone, Jr. would come in and he would do these... he would travel all over the United States and they would do these things. And we were, they had... they dressed in black with a black hood over their face and they have all the house lights up and they had these pieces of cloth with a skull on it or a hand on it or a trumpet and it was in phosphorous and paint and they would have lights shining on them back stage. And they would turn all the lights off and these pieces of cloth had a stick went through them and a belly band and a string that went up to a big pole and you had a thing like a flag carrier and you put this pole in it and put the picture towards you so the black cloth was showing toward the audience. You walk out on the stage and you would flip this thing over and it would turn around and this phosphorous picture would appear right out in the middle of the darkness and you could swing the stick out like that and it would fly out like that and come back and then it would turn around and it would disappear and people didn't know how it was done and it

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was just a piece of cloth with a picture on it and they had lost their night vision from the house lights being up so they couldn't see good anyhow and we would do that and they would start throwing things around and start saying that Frankenstein was going to be there. "Frankenstein has escaped!" And everybody, it was all kids, you know midnight show and some kind of horror flick of some sort and they were all looking to see which side of the stage Frankenstein was coming out and they would take him down the sidewalk here and bring him in the lobby and he would be in the middle of the theatre standing in the isle and it would be pitch dark in there and they'd holler, "Turn the house lights up he's lose somewhere!" And they'd turn the house lights up and he'd be seven foot tall standing there with his Frankenstein head on going "UHHHHH" and people would just climb over each other trying to get away from Frankenstein (laughter).

LP: These were kids right?

MP: Oh yeah it was a whole bunch of teenagers in there in the middle of the night.

EV: It's so much fun to scare the bejezzus out of the little kids.

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EV: When you meet somebody that's famous it comes with an aura about you, you know.

LP: A persona.

EV: Yeah. Like when I met LBJ and then after that when I was in the army after the Cuban missile crisis was over we were still in Fort Story Georgia, big formation _____ (.4) came down reviewed the troops and I had to see... JFK

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was my hero so I had to run down to the end because I couldn't see him from where I was in the back of the formation so I went AWOL and went down there, ran out of the formation and got down by the side and there was this little bitty guy sitting there in front of me and he looked so familiar and I said, "Excuse me sir where are you? I've known you from somewhere are you from El Paso, San Antonio?" I'm trying to make a connection with college or home. And I said, "I'm sorry my name is Ernesto Valdés." He said my name is "Pierre Salanger." (laughter)

MP: (laughter) No wonder you knew him.

EV: Yeah and so I said, "Yeah now I know who you are and I'm sorry." Then Kennedy pulls up with his big, he had a Continental convertible, pulls up in that thing and he's sitting in the back and he says, "Come on Salanger." Salanger gets in and I was surprised at how red the President's hair was.

LP: I was just going to ask you that if his hair was...

EV: Yeah it had a reddish tint to it. But he looked at me and says laughing, "Aren't you supposed to be in formation?" And of course the minute he looked at me I came to present arms. So I guess that kind of caught his eye. He is the commander and chief. So he said, "Aren't you supposed to be in formation son?" And I said, "Yes sir."

MP: When I worked for the telephone company Hobby Airport used to be the main airport at that time. And the garage that I worked at took care of Hobby Airport and I used to work out there so I ended up when all of the Presidents started coming in to town when they started traveling a lot for elections, I ended

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up getting White House clearance and put phones on Air Force One and saw Kennedy just before he went to Dallas and got killed and then Lyndon Johnson come in not too long after that and when George came in to be President, First George, he would come into town and we would have to do all the White House stuff. It wasn't fun though I didn't... they are... all those people that work around him, nothing is funny, everything is dead serious.

EV: Got to be dead serious I mean they have to.

MP: Yeah they can't play around but the telephone men and stage hands that's one thing that we are not. We are not serious about anything. If we could find something to make fun of we will make fun of it. (laughter)

EV: (laughter) Is there... if you were writing you autobiography?

MP: Oh you wouldn't want me to do that...

LP: He'd dictate it to me.

EV: He's what?

LP: He's dictate it to me.

EV: Is there anything that you would really include that maybe you haven't mentioned to me?

MP: It's just been a good life. I've got to see a lot of people. People that most people never even think about seeing. And I've been on stage with them and been right there standing next to them, drinking coffee with them and find out they are just regular people.

EV: What about getting to work in this great place?

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MP: This is a... quite a building. It's got quite a history with me and my family. When I was in high school in '51 through '55 that was when all of the movies started coming out with Cinemascope and Panavision and all that kind of stuff. And the movies used to change three times a week. And we had... the screen was on the stage right there and we would put a great big Cinemascope screen in and then we had these big flaps that had black cloth on them that were eight feet wide and as tall as the screen and I would come in and sit in the back of the theatre the night before the last night of that show and when the audience would all left I would go up on stage and I'd holler up at the projectionist and he would put a little shin, a little piece of brass in that was going to be the layout of the next picture that was coming in, how big the screen had to be. And I would take a claw hammer and double headed nails and you would drive it in and it stops and there's still a head sticking out and you would pop that nail loose and slide it over and line it up with the edge of the light and drive the nail in and I'd go over and pull the nail out and slide the other one over or slide it in, whatever I had to do. In show business when you go to work you get a four hour call. So I would drive... pull two nails out and drive two nails in and I would get a four hour call and in the '50s I was making \$2.00 an hour.

EV: That wasn't too bad was it?

MP: No I was in high school. \$8.00 went a long way and we did it three times a week usually and I'd get mad if the same kind of Cinemascope came in two shows in a row because I'd lose \$8.00 you know.

EV: I was sacking groceries for 35 cents and you were making big bucks.

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MP: I was doing good. But my dad after, being a stage hand and then he was a policeman for a while, and he did all kind of things in his life. But he became a motion picture projectionist and when he got ready to stop working he was working at this theatre, at the State Theatre when it closed up. And he and the man who was the manager, Mr. Browning, locked the door on the building and it was shut down. It was no longer a movie theatre. TV had run it out of business. And then when we did the grand opening me and both my sons did the grand opening with Steve Needy.

EV: Oh they were the first act?

MP: Yeah they the first, the grand opening of the theatre when, they had a couple of little things just trying to see if it was going to work, if it would pan out and then they tore everything out of the building and rebuilt all the floors, put new carpet in it, put new seats in it and Steve Needy opened it. So my Daddy locked the door up when it stopped being a movie theatre and my two sons and I were on the stage when it opened up the next time.

EV: Oh that's neat. Yeah that's neat.

LP: We had a son, Malcolm James Pye, Jr. who died of AIDS in 1992.

MP: Yeah I told him that.

EV: Yeah. How many years span was that?

MP: From the closing?

EV: From the closing to the opening?

LP: Probably a couple of years.

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MP: Oh no it was most probably maybe eight years. They were at one time talking about tearing the building down completely.

LP: Oh really.

MP: It was just useless. It was owned by the Interstate Theatre Company.

EV: Right.

MP: And I guess they were paying the taxes on it and the Galveston Historical Society found out that they were thinking about tearing it down so that's what kind of got the Galveston Historical Society started was saving this building. And since then they have saved a whole bunch of them. And they went and found a pictures at the library, also there was a... you come through the front lobby you've seen the big staircase?

EV: Yeah.

MP: Well that staircase was there when we were kids. But that wall with all of the box paneling on it was covered up with a two by four wall with sheetrock on it. And when they started tearing this sheetrock wall down all of that wood was still behind there.

EV: Nobody suspected it was behind there?

MP: No they didn't know anything, they didn't know what they were finding and every time they did something they would find things. They pulled the two by fours up off the floor and there was a piece as wide as a two by four of the original carpet that was in the building and they sent off and had it made.

EV: Is that this stuff here?

MP: This carpet here. They found a little piece of this pattern.

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EV: Because this looks... I understand this is the carpet Interstate used all over the place in all of their theatres.

MP: They might have.

EV: Because this looks so familiar from the ones I've seen in El Paso and San Antonio. I went to the theatres with the familiar pattern.

MP: They've had this carpet made and it was in big 20 feet rolls. And we had to carry it in. I had a truck out through the front door to get it into the lobby.

EV: Golly. So they've. So this was rewoven especially for this theatre?

MP: Yeah.

EV: Gosh that's fantastic.

MP: Yeah they got it, had it made somewhere I don't know where Maureen found, Maureen and Bill Lindstrom found someplace that would make it for them.

EV: And I don't want to go too far into this because I hope that Jeff can fill in his section but did you encourage him or did you just happen to start bringing him by and he kind of got into it is that it or did he say, "I want to be like my daddy."

MP: Well show business is kind of a family oriented thing.

LP: Yes it is.

MP: If somebody in the family starts in it and you go, I always tell the people that I call the start of the season I have to start finding new people because Galveston being a transit town like it is a lot of my people will be gone in September when we start the season again so I have to go out and find new people. And I tell them there's two kinds of people that I hire: one of them is I'll be on stage working and they will come up to me at about half way through the

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day and say, "When are you going to call me again this is the most fun I've ever had in my life." Or they will walk up to me and say, "The next time you've got a show don't call me because I don't ever want to come and do this again." That's just the two extremes, that either you do it one time and you don't ever want to quit doing it or you do it one time and you never want to see it ever again. You just either love it or you hate it.

EV: You know it's funny, I did a lot of work on the oral histories that they have of the U.S.S. Texas and you read those oral histories and almost all of those guys, and it... you know it was a World War I ship, it wasn't a World War II ship at all. And they have a lot of the more modern ships but everybody loved the Texas.

MP: I helped with the phones in the Battleship of Texas.

EV: Did you really?

MP: Yeah we were going to a group and the telephone company called the pioneers and we worked with the San Jacinto Monument that was one of the things that we were in the Pasadena area so we kind of...

EV: Isn't that ship an impressive thing?

MP: Yeah. When they brought it back and it floated in there we had to figure out ways to get wires in it. We had to go up through a fuel pump line. It was a line they used to put the fuel into the ship and we opened it up inside the ship and blew a line in there and pulled cables in it and put phones in it.

EV: I was just... I can't think of the words to describe it but I was very moved by going out there every day and working and walking the decks of that ship.

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MP: We got to go places that most people don't get to go because we had to get the phones in the different places so they could call people and all that kind of stuff. And it's amazing that people lived on those ships and...

LP: And died.

MP: And died and was out in the middle of the ocean and somebody shooting cannons at you and you can't go nowhere because you're on that ship.

EV: Yeah. When I was thinking about going into which branch of the service I was going to go on the Navy wasn't anywhere close (laughter) it was not on my short list.

MP: No.

LP: Sharp.

EV: Well you know I thought about that and I knew I had motion sickness so I knew I wouldn't be able to handle this, you know the (12.2) and the up and the down and I didn't want to get shot out of the air. But of course the irony was that I ended up in a helicopter unit. And the army was only two years. The other guys...

MP: The other guys are going four.

EV: The other guys are going four years and they didn't have the draft then. Oh I take it back I did have a draft for the Berlin crisis and that's when I got drafted.

LP: How long ago was that?

EV: 1961 and I had gone into the insurance business, you know, I was looking for myself. And in my search a friend of mine convinced me to go into the

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insurance business so I was, you know, that's like selling encyclopedias door to door but I sold a few policies. I sold maybe eight, ten policies and then I got drafted. But then, anyway, I got drafted did my time but the neat thing was we were only getting paid \$73 bucks a month or something. At the most when I came out at speck four I was making \$120 a month but I was getting the residuals on my insurance. So I was racking in, which was big time back then, another \$200 or \$300 bucks a month over the other guys so I didn't have it that bad economically but it wasn't because the military was so nice to me.

MP: You had some back up coming in there.

EV: Yeah a little back up. So anyway is there anything that I didn't ask you that you maybe want, that you think I need to know?

MP: No I think we covered quite a bit.

LP: We talked about all the people in the family.

MP: Yeah my Daddy and Grandfather...

EV: Yeah we went into that.

LP: But there's more.

MP: Okay.

LP: There's grandpa, there's Uncle Robbie.

MP: I told him.

LP: Daddy.

MP: And me and my brother and Jeff.

LP: And Jimmy.

MP: And Jimmy and now Jeff's kids are doing it.

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EV: Are they really?

MP: Yeah he's got a daughter, when the phone rang earlier and it was Amy, I said, "Amy and John's coming over." That's his daughter, she's got a baby and they, John and Amy both work and his son Stephen works and...

EV: How old are these kids?

MP: They are...

LP: She's in her early twenties.

MP: Twenties.

EV: Really? Jeff looks like a little young to be having...

MP: No he's 43, don't tell him I told you that but... no he's 44, because he was born in '63.

LP: I just pop them out.

MP: Well you were asking me how he got in it. The first thing that Jeff ever worked was Billy Joel concert at the Summit.

EV: Really?

MP: Yeah they called me and looking for people they had a bunch of stuff going on and up in Houston, main local, they would work 450 to 500 people a day on different jobs all over the place, all of the theatres, the hotels, the George R. Brown, the Reliant Center, we work all of those things, all of the conventions. And they had a whole bunch of stuff going on and they said, "Do you know anybody else that can come?" I said, "My son wouldn't mind working." They said, "Bring him as long as he can walk." So we went up and did an in and watched the show and did an out and that was at the old Summit. And then he

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went in the Navy and was in the Navy for four years and then come back out and worked at a few clinic kind of places. And then started coming here and moved back down to Galveston and started working here full time when the building came back to work.

EV: Let me ask you about some of the terminologies you've got. Because I'm not sure you use all of this stuff still. The running crew is that still a term you use?

MP: Yes.

EV: The light board operator?

MP: Yes.

EV: Sound board?

MP: Yep.

EV: Spot light?

MP: Yes.

EV: Fly rail? Is that the stuff the guys up on top, up and down the ceilings?

MP: Yeah remember the guy that come walking up and was Mike and shook hands with me... he's our fly man and he is the one that is the department head on that floor and sometime he is by himself up there and sometimes he may have ten people up there with him depending on how much scenery is moving.

EV: I mean that is incredible coordination don't you think?

MP: Yep, it is. It's an art. You know we do something and most people don't even know we are doing it. That's what I said. If you see us we've messed up because we aren't supposed to be seen.

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EV: Exactly, that's one of those things that if you do it right people don't know you are doing it.

MP: Right. Well a lot of times we are out on a stage behind something that we've rode out there and we sit down on the floor behind it and wait for the cue to take it back off and we use cue lights there's a... a red light is stand by and a blue light is go and the will light the red light and your cue's going to come up and the red light will go off and the blue light comes on and you do whatever it is you are supposed to do like if you are out there behind a unit and that unit has to get off and it's got handles on the back I mean you grab it and just roll it off. It's got wheels underneath it. You might sit out there ten or fifteen minutes sometimes, just sitting on the floor.

EV: Then you have a shift crew is that right?

MP: Yes.

EV: Property crew?

MP: Yep that's what I was I was a property master.

EV: Okay and then Special Effects?

MP: Yeah we don't use a whole lot of special effects here in the opera house. Up in Houston they use a lot more special effects then we do here, they've got a lot more of the new electronic equipment that we don't have in this building.

EV: And the wardrobe?

MP: Yep that was, that's the dressers and the people who take care of all the costumes.

EV: Alright well do you have a whole lot of volunteering here?

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MP: Not on the stage but out in the theatre Maureen has a whole bunch of volunteers that are people who help seat people and take care of the lobbies and all that kind of stuff, tell people how to get to the different seats. But as far as volunteers on the stage, it's a union house and everybody has to get paid.

EV: Okay. Well thank you very much.

MP: Well I thank you.

EV: It's been a lot of fun.

MP: Like I said it's a... either you love it or you hate it.

EV: Yeah well this is the end of this interview.

