

WILLOUGHBY JAMES CONNER INTERVIEW

TAPE TWO

	<u>PAGE NUMBER</u>
Edris sells out, and Conner Theaters is born.....	1
Tacoma Theater fire.....	2
Stars that played at the Temple Theatre.....	3
"Tugboat Annie".....	5
W. C. Fields.....	7
Sally Rand.....	9
Benny Goodman.....	10
Edgar Bergen.....	11
Robert Fletcher.....	12
Renovations to the Temple Theatre and others.....	13
The Bijou Theater.....	14

T A P E 2 , S I D E 1

Q ...just from reading these disjointed stories in the [news] paper. And I got, every story that I have, over the years, you know, Conner's doing this, Conner's doing that, Conner put this in, Conner's trying this new. And it's like, you seem, the impression I got is that you were always willing to try the latest thing in town.

A: Well, I'd try any damn thing.

Q I like that!

A: Of course, I put on a lot of shows at the Temple. Every year for a good many years, I had a ten-concert program, and every year sold season tickets. Played a lot of big shows. A lot of big people have played there. Before I get into that, you asked how I ended up with all of Tacoma.

My 25% interest added, was what my share amounted to of the whole when we sold Seattle and Portland. We sold Seattle and Portland for two reasons. I was getting up to here from living in Tacoma and having an office in Seattle, I flew or drove to Portland every other week. Gotta check my theaters every- Portland was the only one I didn't check every week. Sometimes three or four times a week. I was only home on Friday, I work in my office in Tacoma on Friday. And I had City Managers, of course, and each theater had a manager, but Bill Edris was getting old, and he wanted to sell everything off. And he says, you sell them to whoever the hell you want to sell them to, keep whatever you want to keep for yourself, and we'll call it a day. So Tacoma made it. Now, I bought the Rialto building, and the Proctor Theater, which is now the Bijou building, after I formed my own corporation.

Q And that was Conner Theaters?

A: I owned it 100%. Up to that time, we had rented those two places, leased them. Because Bill, for some reason, Bill just didn't believe in buying business property. He believed in buying the business and leasing the property. And he must have known what he was talking about, because his wife has got a home in Palm Springs, a home at Hayden Lake, owns a whole floor for life in a big condo downtown

Seattle, and her attorney told me she could buy a Rolls Royce everyday of the week as long as she lived. It worked for him. But I tell you, when Mrs. Moore died, her lawyer closed the estate. See, there were no kids left, or anything. So naturally, I had at that time, about eight or ten more years on the lease, so they came to me, and I bought it [*The Rialto*]. And the Proctor, I knew the husband real well, because he was once with the Bank of California, who I banked with, so his widow came and asked if I was interested in buying it, so I bought the Proctor Theater building from the widow. And I leased the Roxy, and I leased the Music Box. Well, of course the Music Box burned down in 1960. So, see I formed my corporation around 1960, right after the fire. Thank God it was after the fire, because it cost each one of us \$333,000 a piece. We were sued by everybody. See all the stores?

Q *They sued you?*

A: Yeah. See the restaurant on the corner? [*Points to picture of the Music Box Theater*] Our insurance covered everything up to \$100,000. So I don't remember, but I know it cost \$333,000, which was about- It was a restaurant, and a shop that sold, lingerie shop, I guess you'd call it. It sold brassieres, and-

Q *Stuff. [Laughter]*

A: Stuff. They always had it in the window. How long have you lived in Tacoma?

Q *Since 1976.*

A: Well, you wouldn't know anything about the store then, because it burned down in 1960. And a branch of- I forget what bank. National Bank of Washington. Which is something else now. They all sued.

Q *Meaning you and Bill?*

A: The Fire Department figured, thank God the fire happened at 6:00 at night and there were six people in the theater. And the operator was a smart guy. Boy did I ever compliment him, over and over and over. He closed- He knew the fire had started. See, the heating plant was in the attic. And we had central heating, and we had big motors that ran the big fans, hell the fans were as big as this room. And it blew the heat down into the theater. And the Fire Department figured it was a

spark or something from the motor running the fans that started the fire. So the fire started above the booth. So the projectionist was the first one who knew it. And we only had six people on the lower floor. Very quietly he shut the picture down, turned all the lights on, walked, downstairs and he said "We're having trouble and I don't think we can fix it. Would you please leave?" And by the time they left, the Fire Department was there and brother did it burn. I had just returned from Seattle, and I was home eating dinner. My son-in-law, who was City Manager at the time, called me on the phone. The closest I could get to it was about where the old Tribune building was on St. Helens Avenue.

Q Because the heat was so intense?

A: Oh God, yes. I lost, hundreds, dozens- I had two rooms, an office, much larger than this living room, and then I had another room off that, with files and what not. And I had every wall loaded with photographs of stars. I had stars that nobody today knows about.

Did I answer all your questions? Oh you asked me which of the Tacoma, which theater was your favorite in the Tacoma chain? You know that's a hard thing to answer. I think I'd have to say the Temple. It would be the Temple or the Music Box.

Q How come?

A: Because we could do more things at the Temple. Oh, the shows we played at the Temple! We got damn near all the New York shows. Now, some of them were not, didn't have the same stars.

Q Yeah, the road companies.

A: The road companies. And sometimes, well, for instance we played "The Grapes of Wrath," but what's his name was not in it. Oh, great shows. We played stars like- Here's some of the things we played in it: Grapes of Wrath, had a concert series and played Paul Robeson, Hazel Scott, Isaac Stern, Marian Anderson, Lilly Ponds, Russian Ballet, New York Ballet, Draper and Adler, Gala Opera Company, Arthur Rubinstein, Liberace, Victor Borge. We played Victor Borge two or three times. Matter of fact, he was a great guy. One night after the concert, it was just the stage hands and my manager and myself, just the two of us, and he played for real. God almighty! You know, you see his act, and you wouldn't think, but he can really play. I've got

notes that I've done on television, in years gone back, and radio and that sort of thing. That's mostly concert stuff I gave you. We played Music Man with Robert Preston, George White Scandals, Lucille Ball's show, Burt Lar's show, Ray Bolger's show, Andy Griffith's show, Ziegfield follies, Carmen, all kinds of shows. I used to spend thirty days every year in New York booking stuff like this. I did most of the booking from Columbia. It's got nothing to do with CBS, but it's Columbia Concert Company. Here's some more of that: Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Mills Brothers, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Bob Burns, Cliff Arquette. You'd know Cliff Arquette, I'm sure. What the hell name did he use?

Q He's got another name?

A: Yeah. The act was he and his brother doing old hillbilly stuff. They'd both play it. But he was in television for ages. Hollywood Squares. I'm trying to think of what his name was.

Q Not that old guy who was on there forever? The old white haired guy?

A: As I remember he was kind of half bald.

Q Yeah! And he was just funny.

A: But his real name is Cliff Arquette.

Q Oh! Now you've got me thinking. Because he was on there forever. And the squares would always changed except for this one old guy. I can't remember, but it will come to me at 4:00 A.M. [It did. It's George Gobel.]

A: I played Sally Rand, Chick Sales-

Q Sally Rand, isn't she the one with the fans?

A: Yup.

Q You had strippers at the Temple?

A: I could tell you a story about that, but I don't think I will.

Q Oh come on!

A: I was more embarrassed than she was. She wasn't embarrassed at all. Well, I'll tell you this, I don't think it should be for the public. Not that it matters, hell, with television now you can see people practically sleeping together. You see, I'd be in the jail- You know, I was closed down in, I was- Grapes of Wrath closed, it was on the stage at the Temple Theater. I had three performances sold out, Saturday night, Sunday afternoon and Sunday night. Saturday night, the Censor Board was all powerful. The Censor Board remember, could close you down. My lawyer had a good friend who was a judge who lived in Gig Harbor, and he went over there Sunday morning and got him to sign a restraining order till Monday. I didn't give a damn Monday, because the show was gone. And the Music Box in Seattle was closed for two solid weeks before I could get a court hearing and get it open. But, for nothing. It was a guy and a gal. They weren't in love, and it wasn't a love scene, they were mad at each other. They worked on a farm, they both had overalls on, and shirts underneath their overalls, and they were mad and they were wrestling. It was in a barn and it was wrestling in the hay. And they closed the damn theater!

Q Was this live, or was it a motion picture?

A: No! It was a motion picture, in Seattle. And it took me two weeks in court to get the damn theater open again. That's how tough- You know the first swear word ever on the motion picture screen was in "Gone With the Wind," when he says "I don't give a damn." That's the first swear word, and I got letters, I got- We played it at the Music Box Theater. I got letters, I got telephone calls, people giving me hell.

You know that Tacoma had it's only, only one world premiere?

Q "Tugboat Annie."

A: "Tugboat Annie." I was looking back, this is from the Tribune, 10/21/90. You know, that "Looking Back" part they have in the Tribune? It says "Fifty years ago October 18, 1940, still another item in today's full day celebration honoring 'Tugboat Annie,' and the various Hollywood stars arriving for Tacoma's first world premiere, will be a waterfront banquet at the Hotel Winthrop. 'Tugboat Annie' day will begin with the stars Marjorie Rambeau, Allen Hale, Ronald Reagan, Donald Crisp arriving at the Foss Landing aboard the tug 'Arthur Foss.' After an official welcome by Mayor Harry P. Cain and

other dignitaries, the stars will watch the master watershow scheduled as part of the festival from the Coast Guard cutter 'Atlanta.'" Well, I put all this on, and I have no memory whatsoever of a Coast Guard cutter 'Atlanta' putting on water festivities, but jeez, we had *everybody*.

You see, in the early days, when the studios owned, owned is a bad word. When they had their own contract players, they sent them out to different cities to promote their pictures. I used to sneak them to Tacoma. They'd come because I had theaters in Seattle and Portland, and then I'd sneak them into Tacoma on the way. And then, of course, during World War II, when I MC'd a show at Tenth and A every noon to sell war bonds - and the studios used to send stars after stars - we had stars damn near at every program. Often times I'd take them out to Fort Lewis, to the theaters, and we'd do a personal appearance at the theaters on Fort Lewis. That's during World War II. And we used to go early in the morning, the stars, I'd take them out to the shipyards. We built ships, you know, during World War II, out in the shipyards, and they were 24 hour workers, and we'd catch the group that was getting through at six o'clock in the morning. I used to have a helluva time getting the stars up.

Of course, a lot of the stuff we played in the Temple, the concerts, we got to be rather friendly [*meaning Will and the stars*] because there was no night restaurants in those days. We had a Swedish lady who was a wonderful, a cateress. No, not a cateress, she'd come to your home and do the cooking. And then the stars would come over to our place, we lived at the corner of North 37th and Stevens, and we had to take the stars out and have dinner. You see, a singing star, most any star, they'll eat a terrific meal, like at two o'clock in the afternoon. Then they won't eat again until the shows out. And back in those days, we only had one restaurant that was open all night, and that was between Broadway and Commerce on 11th Street, and you went down the steps. It was down underneath, I forget the name of it. I ate there many times. But it wasn't a place that you wanted to take- You know- Fancy people. But we got to know them.

And then of course, in the days back then, we were welcome at the studios anytime. Because of three counts. Because then, those days, there was no bidding like there is now. They didn't bid for pictures, you bought everything a company made for a whole year.

Q Oh. Like just a one year contract. Whatever you've got, we'll take it.

A: That's right. Whether they made the pictures or not, you'd buy the whole contract. Some of them were flat rental, in my day. Some of them, the biggies, would be, maybe as high as 35%. We always stayed at the Ambassador Hotel, because, the Ambassador was owned by a family that owned theaters in New York, and they catered to theatrical people and stars. And of course they had a beautiful-. That's where, oh- What's the guy who owns the game that's on television? And once a week, a piano player, and a singer? I used to know him well. Anyway, he was the pianist with the band at that time. Now he's a multi-millionaire. He's the guy that bought out one of the casinos that Trump had.

Q Merv Griffin?

A: Merv Griffin!

Q He plays piano? I didn't know that!

A: Oh! He's a beautiful pianist. And a good singer. And that's how he started. And he was this wide [*holds hands farther apart than his own waist*]. I haven't seen him lately. I got to know him pretty well for awhile, but he was about this wide, and he played in the band, in the dining room and concert hall together in the Ambassador. And the stars used to go there a lot. We'd go there and stay, and of course the studios knew we were coming and they'd send the limousine to take us out, and always at lunch, they had from two to four stars sit with you in their place. So we got to know a lot of them pretty well.

A couple of them, like for instance, the guy that paints those beautiful cloud paintings- Oh jeez. It burns me up when I can't think of names. I knew him real well, had dinner with him so many times. His sister-in-law lived in Seattle, he used to call me up and ask me to send his sister-in-law passes. Red Skelton! We had dinner with the Skeltons a number of times. We were very fond of his wife. It was her sister that I used to take care of passes for. But Red, the big dummy, he divorced her and married a young woman here a few years ago. Which is none of my business, of course. But you know, that guy can do anything? He can take his arms, and [*dangles arm down*]-

Q Just slip it out of the joint, make it go around?

A: Anything. He could do anything with his hands, his fingers. He's a terrific comedian. I think probably one of the greatest. He and W.C.

Fields. Although Fields, you know W.C. Fields started - and I knew him real well too - W.C. Fields started in vaudeville as a juggler, used to juggle cigar boxes, mostly. And he started like Will Rogers. Will Rogers, you know, had a rope act and started talking one day, and jeez, he got such a terrific response from his talking, he quit throwing the rope and became a comedian. Well, W.C. Fields was about the same way. He was quite a guy. I played him back, way back in the vaudeville days, and then I used to see him in the studio once in awhile, when I'd go down, when he was making pictures with-

Q He was with Metro, wasn't he?

A: Yes. There was a story came out in the paper about him, and I remember this well. The story came out in the paper one day saying that he'd been ill and that his doctor had told him to quit drinking. He was a helluva two-fisted drinking man.

Q That's what I've heard!

A: And it said that he'd quit drinking. Well, about six or eight weeks after I'd read this story, I was down at the studio, and on his set. He was sitting in a chair, it was one of those old fashioned wicker chairs that had magazine racks on each side. He had this side full of empty wine bottles, and this side was full of full wine bottles. He was waiting his turn to go on and I looked down there - we were just visiting, talking. He talked offstage same as he did on. I said "I read in the paper where your doctor made you quit drinking." And he said, "Well, that's true." But he says, "You know," he says, "He told me not to drink any whiskey. The damn fool didn't say anything about wine." [Laughter] That's the kind of guy he was. He didn't trust anybody. They figured when he died he had money in- Every town he went to he started a bank account. Under all kinds of funny names. He was a strange man.

Q Did they ever find them all?

A: No.

Q Did he have any family, though?

A: Well, I don't- There was some second cousins, or something. They tried to check- I read this someplace long after he died. He and Mae West made some pretty good pictures together. Then he made a

picture with- Oh how he hated that kid. He hated kids, period. Then the day that I was on the set, he was resting. It was one of those kids, and I can't think of his name, of the baby. The kid was on at the time, and he says "God how I hate kids!" He talked offstage *exactly* like he did onstage.

Q You know, I've heard stories about this dressing room wall, down in the bottom of the Temple that's all covered with signatures. I haven't actually gotten to see it yet, I'm still waiting. It's all covered with the signatures of the stars that have been through there. Who started that?

A: Yeah, there used to be a lot of them, but I thought that by now they'd be painted over. You're talking about the dressing rooms? Yeah, and the big orchestra room. I wonder if it's still there. See, the orchestra would gather in the Orchestra Room, down underneath the stage, and then they came up through a door right in, so the audience couldn't see them coming in at all. Well, you could see them, but you had to be looking right at them. But that is probably the greatest dressing rooms. They got showers, toilets- How the Pantages, I don't what they did to the Pantages, but how it was ever able to run vaudeville I don't know, with the junky [*dressing rooms*] and that, in all theaters, is called the Green Room, where the dressing rooms are.

Getting back to the story that I said I didn't want to, I hesitate to tell you. You asked about Sally Rand. Well, Sally Rand, of course, she was an old timer, and I'm just a young snot-nosed kid in the movies. And she, it was right after she had appeared at the World's Fair in New York and had made such a big name as a fan dancer. She really didn't have any talent whatsoever.

Q It was just the scandal of the fan dancing?

A: That's all it was. But, she covered her body with a silver, I don't know, to tell you the truth about it, it looked like silver nail polish, except it was a cream, and yet it wasn't a cream. But I went down, I always used to go down- We had bells that the stage hand would ring, ten minute bell, before the curtain starts, one five minute bell. I was backstage and my stage manager said "Sally wants to see you." And I said, "What does she want?" And he said "Damned if I know." And it's about thirty, forty minutes, she's getting ready to go on. So I go down and I knock on her dressing room. And she is just finishing putting on her silver, which she covered her body with. She's standing there

naked. Absolutely bare-faced naked, with, and she never batted an eye. She said "Come on in." And she starts giving me hell because we had- For popcorn oil, in those days, 'cause it was during World War II, or right following World War II and they're getting all the popcorn butter from the Hawaiian Islands, and it came in great big barrels, and we'd have to scoop it out and then warm it up in the popcorn machine. Later, I used to always buy peanut oil. But one of the ushers or somebody had dropped some on the floor of the stage. And the act, and the time she was on before, she stepped in it. So here she is, stark raving naked, except for the- Stark raving naked. And she's just about, she's standing on a chair like this, doing her feet, see? The fans are laying over here. And I didn't know whether to laugh or go blind. So, she started cussing me up and down because of the grease that was on the floor of the stage. And did she ever tell me off. And I stood there like a dummy and took the whole damn thing. And then I left. But, she went over big. And of course, she could handle those fans, so never was- Never saw a thing. She could switch them, her breasts never showed or anything. She was good, but that was the only thing she was good at. That's all she could do.

Q [Laughter] And so people pay all this money hoping she'd slip up.

A: We did a helluva business with her. Oh, I've got a lot of fine tales. What's the great clarinetist?

Q Benny Goodman?

A: Benny Goodman. I played Benny Goodman, and he's still living, I think. He acted like an old, old man. He insisted that I have a couch in his dressing room. And he'd do his show, and he'd go- Of course he had a background orchestra with him, it was the whole show. But he was the thing. And he'd go right from the show right back and lay down. And I'd go in and visit with him. But he'd never leave the theater from the time he'd come in the morning until the time he left in the evening. He was always laying down. This is a helluva lot of years ago, and he's still living. I thought he was about the end of the road.

Q [Laughter] Well, see that's why he's living so long, you know. He paced himself.

A: Yeah, I guess he did.

Q Either that, or he's just a hypochondriac. And I've been told they live the longest.

A: Well, that may be true. Edgar Bergen was quite a guy, too. This was before he became famous, he played vaudeville. And he was, you know, he was a lousy ventriloquist.

Q Oh, you're kidding!

A: Well, his lips moved! But he was the greatest comedy writer in the history of the world. And right after we played him in vaudeville, right after we played him - this is when he just had Charlie McCarthy before he had the [unintelligible] thing - he got a chance to fill in for somebody that dropped out of that NBC weekly program. Oh dear, it was on for years. Who was that guy who sang with the megaphone?

Q Boy, search me.

A: Rudy Valle! That was weekly for years. Well, somebody- Edgar was in New York and some act wasn't going to show up or something. So Rudy Valle put him on. And it just, the whole country went wild for Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. And he stayed on for I guess the rest of the life of the show, for another year or two, or something like that. But I went down to the dressing room and was visiting with him. He's sittin' where you are, Charlie's sittin' on the bench, on the makeup bench over there. And you know, Charlie would talk to me. He'd throw his voice clear over there! [Laughs] That's how good Edgar was. That's his daughter, you know, that's Murphy Brown. I never knew her.

[Irrelevant conversation about Bobby Fletcher, the Building Engineer for the Masonic Temple Building. He's lived in the building for 20 years. I asked if Conner knew him, and he replied that he did not.]

A: Well, you see, it always was all the time we leased the thing- You see, they have big boilers, they never had central heating, 'cause central heating never went up that far. So they always had boilers, far as I know they still got them.

Q They still do.

A: And they have to hire an engineer. And the engineer always lived in that apartment.

Q Yeah, that's where Bobby lives.

A: It's kind of over on the side of the- It's above the hall. The fellowship hall. And he used to come, not this particular man, I went through four or five engineers, with a flashlight and check the thermometers, see how the heat was and do all that. So I know the apartment this guy's in, but I-

Q You didn't meet him. Yeah, I think that's what he started out doing, was being the boiler engineer, and he's just been there for so many years that he's got a little office up on the third floor, and he does little things and stuff. He's really a neat person.

A: What's he live on?

Q I don't really know. I don't know if has another job besides that. I think he's in his early seventies. So he might have some pension or some security [Social Security benefits] or something. And I know he's a Mason. He's been with the Masons for years and years. He's the one that's been squirreling away all this stuff about the Temple. And it's like this, he's got just boxes of it sitting around, and we went through it and- Something that came up that I thought was kind of interesting was, we were looking through, we found like the original invoices from when they first built the building, you know, for the carpeting, and for the pipe organ, and for everything. And every single one of those invoices was followed by a dun notice. More than one. Apparently the Masons were really awful about paying their bills.

A: Well, I'll tell you something, they went broke a long time ago. And the Grand Lodge had to take them over. That's when I had leases with them. They went broke. You see, they really never had a real manager. They always had somebody that would sit in the office and take the dues, and things like that. But they never really managed it properly, in my opinion.

Q Well that is what I was getting from the paperwork. And apparently that they had a lot of money problems and even when they were building the theater, they ran out money pretty quickly in the middle of construction and had to raise a bunch of money.

A: I didn't know about that. That's before my time. But they had a lot of trouble. As a matter of fact, they came to me, one time, and asked me

to increase the rent, even though I had a lease, for a period of time. Which I- And they said that they would make it up. Which I did increase it, and they got on their feet, and they did then, repay it, by cutting my rent down to below the lease until I got my money back. We worked very well together. But I never was very hot on their managers. I always figured that their managers didn't know what they hell they were doing. As a matter of fact, I used to fix a lot of things that they should have fixed, being the lessors.

Q Yeah, that's kind of the impression I was getting.

A: As a matter of fact, I had to put a whole new- When I put in CinemaScope, we had to get more power than our- Course, my day was the carbon arc [*lights*]. That's all gone. Now it's the globe. Matter of fact, the last two years we were in business, the only place I could buy carbon was from a guy that shipped it in from Japan. All the American companies quit making carbon. And the carbon arc lights were going out of style fast. But what we had to do at the Temple - and I paid it, or the business paid it - we had to run new water lines up to the booth, because we couldn't get enough water- See, the lamps were cool-water circulated to keep them cool. 'Cause you had a tremendous- You know, carbon arc lights make tremendous heat. And we had to increase the amount of wattage for CinemaScope. It took a wider screen, and it took more power, and- Water costs under the bridge-

Q *Do you know, when you sold the theater, did you have the same theater seats that had originally been put in there?*

A: Well, see, I leased the Narrows too. I put new seats in the Narrows when I leased it. Whoever had it before I did was running kids shows, I mean, letting kids get in there for a dime, and then they'd kick the hell out of them. All the sides I had to re- That was part of the deal, when I signed the lease. It was a little guy and his wife that lived up in Issaquah or someplace, that owned the whole building. And they weren't getting along very well financially. I wanted a theater where I could play more arty type pictures. So I put new seats in that theater and built half the walls up around. Brought a curtain up from Portland, from one of the theaters. Waterfall curtain, kind of like I had at the Rialto.

And at the Temple Theatre, we remodelled it twice, once when we started, and many years later we remodelled it and we had the seats

rebuilt, not- In other words, the iron pipe for the- The iron bases were left, and we had the seats built over, new ones. We did a lot of remodelling in theaters, back in those days. We spent about a hundred and some thousand dollars, which probably equals a quarter of a million today. We took out all - which if I had to do over again, I wouldn't do it - but it had all beautiful cedar covering. That whole foyer was cedar panels and all that stuff. But I wanted to build a bar. And I had to tear half of it down to build a bar, so we just took it all off. And at that time, I made room for wheelchairs. That's long before you had to do it. But we had some wheelchair people, particularly for road shows. More than pictures. When we had concerts or roadshows. And I took three rows of seats out of the two side aisles, and you could get about three wheelchairs on each side. Nowadays, you got, whatever you build you gotta build for wheelchairs. Oh, you know what happened, the lady that finally bought the Proctor Theater-

Q The Bijou lady [laughs].

A: The Bijou. You know, she got clipped pretty good. I don't know-

Q She lost a lot of business over that. [The owner was sued in 1990 by a wheelchair patron who claimed that the owner had not made the theater accessible to the handicapped. There was a lot of publicity and the owner appeared on a national morning television show and created even more publicity with some inflammatory comments against the handicapped.]

A: I think she lost a lot of money too, didn't she? She lost the suit, I know.

Q I don't know really what happened there. What I really do remember, though, is the people that used to patronize her that said "I won't go there ever again because of her attitude." Whether she fixed it or lost the suit, or took care of the problem, they were so incensed over her attitude and her going on national T.V. and saying that people in wheelchairs were this, that and the other, that they said they wouldn't ever do it again.

A: Of course, when I sold it, I sold the property of the Proctor. But I held the mortgage on the property of the Rialto. So I was the mortgagee, or the mortgagor, I guess, is the word. But I wanted to get out of that Proctor thing entirely.

T A P E 2 , S I D E 2

A: I, we did all right. We never lost any money there. But there too, was another theater when the people owned it ahead of me, they did a helluva business at ten cents a piece on Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon, and there were bicycles all over. People were using it for a babysitting joint! Well, you can't make any money in filling a five hundred seat theater with ten cents a seat. And so, everybody- When I turned it into a first run theater [*referring to the Proctor, or Bijou, Theater*], I got letters, hate mail, rotten telephone calls. Because I turned it into adults only. I did the same thing at the Narrows and got the same result. But one of the worst things I ever got, was when I raised popcorn from ten cents to fifteen cents a sack, I damn near got run out of town. Can you believe that? They tell me know- Well, the lady that managed my Temple for years, still lives out in Gig Harbor.

Q She was one of the first women theater managers, too, wasn't she?

A: Yeah. Helen Ellis was her name.

Q *I've got an article about her, she started out as a cashier and worked her way up [I was actually mistaken about this. The article is referring to Mrs. Ethel McFarland, who worked for Calvin Heilig and became Manager of the Temple Theatre in March of 1929.]*

A: She's a wonderful gal. She's still living. Her husband was my chief operator. He died a long, god awful- Luckily he was in the Navy in Second World War, and his hospital bill was taken care of. But he was in the hospital- He had bypass surgery that didn't work. And he was in the hospital for two years, and the bill for the- Oh, it was something crazy, like a hundred thousand dollars a month, or something like that. But the Navy, he was in a Veterans' Hospital, and his wife would go to see him, and he wouldn't even know her for the last six-eight months.

Anyway, she's still there. She's a sweet gal. We talk on the phone a lot. She comes over and sees me once in a while. I got a few employees I guess-. Every once in a while, somebody down here in the dining room that lives here will say "I met a girl that used to work for you. Mrs. Zilch." Well, I can't remember-

Q Every single cashier you ever had! [Laughs]

A: Well, cashier, usherettes-

Q She worked for two nights, you never saw her again!

A: Well, I might have seen her lots of times, but you know what I mean. Mary Zilch marries somebody, and her name is now Mrs. Smith. Every once in a while I run into somebody though, that says "I used to work for you." [Laughs]

[Unimportant conversation on whether we'd covered everything.]

Q You know what you didn't tell me? I remember, there was a question hanging. You didn't tell me what you played in the band. What instrument did you play?

A: Oh, you mean when I was a kid going to school? Well, I started with a fiddle. And then one night my fiddle player left town, his folks moved. We were just high school kids, all of us. Not the fiddle player, the drummer left. I bought his drums, and I couldn't find a drummer, and so I started playing the drums. I'd never taken a lesson in drums in my life, but I had damn good rhythm. And you know, I got to liking it so well, that I got another fiddle player and I played the drums from then on in the band. Started out with a fiddle and wound up with drums.

But we used to do a gimmick that was pretty cute at the time. We started it at the ballroom of the Armory. They called it McDonald's Ballroom. Every Wednesday night they had this dance. And I made a ball, about this big around, out of cloth, and then broke up a lot of pieces of colored glass and glued it on to it, and I hung it on the ceiling, and we put spotlights from all four corners on it. And I used to have my fiddle player and my saxophone, we had two saxes, saxophone players walk around for moonlight waltzes and the thing would turn. Oh did that make a hit. I got a lot of credit for that. But the big fun was playing up at the Grange Hall in Enumclaw.

Q [Laughs] Did they share their moonshine?

A: No. They didn't do that. But you know, that was a lot of money in those days.

Q Well, I've probably talked your leg off here.

A: Well it was enjoyable visiting with you.

E N D T A P E 2 , S I D E 2
E N D O F I N T E R V I E W