A TEI Project

Interview of Daniel Gordon

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE (AUGUST 20, 1988)

CEPLAIR:

> Mr. Gordon, let's begin by your telling me when and where you were born and what your parents were like, what kind of a family situation you had.

GORDON:

> I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1902. My mother [Sadie Levy Gordon] was American-born, and her parents came from England. My father [Morris J. Gordon] from Lithuania when he was a boy to flee from the czars and the Cossacks, which I knew about very early in life. When my—

CEPLAIR:

> What did your father do?

GORDON:

> Well, when he came out here, things weren't very—he hit every depression that ever hit the country in the early 1900s, '03, '07—he had a kind of a mail-order business. It was doing very well, but the final depression knocked it to pieces. Just blew it up. So he decided to make a complete change. He came here with my mother, my younger sister [Mildred Gordon], and myself and started all over again. Since he was born in Lithuania, he had quite a thick accent. Despite that, he studied law by himself at night while he was trying to make a living selling something. Passed the bar examination, became a lawyer,

which I always rather admired in him, because it wasn't easy. And then he practiced law from then on. My mother had a peculiar interval then. Next door was a cowboy, a little boy who was a kind of cowboy actor. It was so easy to get into pictures in those days, and we knew nothing about them. My mother was a typical—like a New England spinster almost in type, in personality. But the man said, "Why don't you take your little girl? She's pretty. She looks like Shirley Temple—curls." So she did. My sister worked in pictures for quite a while as a child actress. And then my mother, having learned her way around—which meant running from casting office to casting office on foot or in a car or streetcar, carrying your suitcase with makeup—began to work in pictures, too. For some years she worked, and it was very helpful. She didn't make a lot of money, but whatever she got helped. So she had that interval, and then it ended. My father got going, I guess, and she stopped., That was the end of it. She became a housewife again, but I've always admired that period in her. She had the gumption to go around by herself and do it. So I've always had some connection with pictures, but I've never had any real interest in them. Then, I guess, I suppose it does lead into what I did in pictures, too, doesn't it?

CEPLAIR:

Well, before that, what kind of an education did you have?

GORDON:

Oh, the routine. I went all through the school system here, high school. I went to the first class that ever was at UCLA. It was called the Southern Branch of the University of California.

CEPLAIR:

When did your family move to Los Angeles?

GORDON:

1912, towards the end.

CEPLAIR:

And your father was already a lawyer at that point?

GORDON:

No, he studied here. He was already a grown-up man with two kids and no money. He studied law all by himself. He used to read stuff aloud to my mother at night, I remember. A typical immigrant's energy and desire to get on. He became a lawyer. Small practice, I guess, most of his life.

CEPLAIR:

Where did you live?

GORDON:

Here, right in Los Angeles.

CEPLAIR:

In what part, do you remember?

GORDON:

Oh, well, first we were around what they used to call Angeleno Heights, somewhere around that area. I don't suppose you know. Near Temple Street, Edgeware Road, and that area—all the Victorian streets there. Then we moved to other places. We moved around—flats. I don't know what else to say about that. I went to the regular school, through the whole school system.

CEPLAIR:

What high school did you attend?

GORDON:

Los Angeles High School, which was up on Fort Moore, which ain't there anymore. And then L.A. High School moved way out on Eleventh Street [now Olympic Boulevard] someplace. It used to take two streetcars to get there. Then the University of California, which was only there, I believe, at the time, started up what they called the Southern Branch. I had two years. Not a junior college, I suppose. That's all they offered you. But it was free. Then I went to Pomona College for some reason—I think a professor influenced me in going there—a small college, and it turned out to be a religious college, which I had no interest in. But they let me in anyway, and I stayed there. It was two years there. Then I went to USC [University of Southern California] law school because my father was a lawyer, I guess, because I can't think of any other reason. And I took that for a year, and I guess I did pretty well in it. But I

couldn't stand the feeling of laws, courts, gray-faced clients, gray-faced lawyers, and elevators [laughter] in the courthouse. I became a law clerk for the [Los Angeles] County counsel's office for quite a while.

CEPLAIR:

What years were these? Do you remember? I mean, when did you start college?

GORDON:

Well, I suppose I finished college in '23, and then I had a year of law school. I actually finished in three and a half years, college, and then I had a year of law school. That was all my formal education. Well, then, I suppose you're interested, how did I get into pictures? Because I was here, really. I didn't think of what to do. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to write, I think, at that point, very early. Write something—essays. Then I began to kind of ooze my way into poetry. That got to be my interest, to write poetry. But of course that solved no economic problem. So I had to work. I had one little job for a while, and then somebody said there was such a thing as readers in the motion picture industry. I had never heard of it. So I went around to some studio, and they gave me a job as a reader. And then I became head of the reading department that same year. I was just in my middle twenties. And then I couldn't stand it. [laughter] I didn't care for pictures really. I was more literary-minded than anything. I was beginning to write a little poetry, and it started growing. Then I decided I better go to New York and get into the literary world, but I ran into no jobs. I ran into anti-Semitism. I was told by an agent, "You'll never get any jobs here in New York in 19—" probably '27. So I stayed there a few months. And then I eventually came home. By that time, I didn't know what else to do. So I became a reader again in various jobs in story departments, though I never was a screenwriter ever. I didn't want to be. Despised it. [laughter] I [inaudible] comment. And then, well, oh, yeah, I had various jobs: head of the reading, assistant story editor, story editor in various studios, many studios, all the studios over the years, because they were very erratic in those days. They threw you out overnight. Old departments were closed out. Nothing political, I think, purely the Depression. I got married at the depth of the Depression to her.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Hi.

CEPLAIR:

And her name is?

GORDON:

Her name is Henriette [Goldfinger Gordon]. I got married to Henriette. We've been married for fifty-seven years, I think. So that made a change, too. I had to work then. I couldn't just loaf around and write poetry. So I continued with reading and story editing, always the story department. But I was never a writer. Then I took to writing poetry. It was published in some magazines and anthologies.

CEPLAIR:

What magazines?

GORDON:

Well, the most important one was *Harper's*, I suppose. I had several in there. They were the only ones that paid anything at all, and that wasn't so much. Little literary magazines.*Harper's*, *Nation*, *New Republic*. I don't remember—and various anthologies and so on. I mean, considering how difficult it is here and how unimportant I was, it came out—I began to get more political writing as it got into the thirties. As I say, the Depression hit everybody in different ways. But it had enough to do with what I wrote. You know, I began to be more social-minded and less general philosophies and so on. I always had meaning, because I don't believe in poetry without meaning, as we see a great deal of today. And then, well, that took me through the thirties and forties. I thought you might be a little interested in this. The blacklisting really began way before it became official. I was blacklisted, personally, without it being open. You want an example of it?

CEPLAIR:

Sure.

GORDON:

For example, I was the assistant story editor at RKO [Radio Pictures, Inc.]. The head of the department, who was a young man, he took me into his office one

day and said, "I have the funniest thing to tell you. You're being fired." I said, "Something wrong with my work?" "No, no, no, not at all," he says. He wouldn't talk. I said, "Well, what is it all about?" He says, "I don't know, but I never thought of you as a flaming red." But he gave away the game. This is early 19—probably '41, somewhere in there. The blacklist officially was about 1947, with the [Hollywood] Ten. So I had an agent then who tried to find out from the top level what—there was a blank wall, that I was fired like that. Fortunately, I got some little job to read at home for somebody else, for Orson Welles, to be exact, for about a year. He was doing a radio program. And then, gradually, I got back into some other studio. I've forgotten which one now. I worked at Paramount [Pictures, Inc.]. Then I was offered a job as story editor at Republic [Pictures Corporation], of all places. That only lasted for about a year. A fiasco. Not political, but just the kind of studio that I shouldn't be in, making, you know, two western stars a week. So I went back to reading, and then I became head of reading at Paramount. As I say, their early roots, that I found out later—I could have had jobs that I would have gotten if it weren't for my reputation, which originated actually with the founding of the Screen Readers Guild. That was my major activity, actually, politically. This dangerous business of forming a guild of readers, the most underpaid people in the business. They got their wages down to $25 a week. I had originally gotten around $50 or thereabouts, and that was pretty standard. But it was the Depression; they kept chopping it down. So the writers invited us to come to a gathering. They were forming a guild, the [Screen] Writers Guild. There was no writers guild. There were no real unions at all to speak of, except for the electrical workers and things like that. They said, "We're forming a writers guild. Maybe you'd like to form a readers guild." Do you want me to go into that much detail?

CEPLAIR:

Yes, please.

GORDON:

Well, then he left the room, the guy, the fellow from the guild. I couldn't stand just sitting there. Nobody would budge. Readers were timid people. I was just as timid as anybody, but I couldn't stand just sitting there. So I got up and said, "Well, why don't I act as temporary chairman here while we get somebody to

lead the thing and form a guild?" So I did that. And, of course, they chose me to be the chairman, which I was not seeking and didn't want. From then on, I was associated with the guild. And then I got a very bad reputation with the heads of reading [departments], because I was—they considered forming a guild to be very radical. There were no such things. There were no office workers guilds, unions, no writers [guilds], except then. This is the thirties, thirty-something. 'Thirty-five maybe, somewhere in there. So I got my name in the papers, because I would get up at a Writers Guild meeting, or I did once, and the headline in the Reporter, the Hollywood Reporter, the next day was "Gordon Denounces Sweatshop in Industry." Now, that fixed me good. It really wasn't quite like that, but [inaudible] use of such words. I became known to all the heads of reading, who'd give you the jobs, as a, you know—what do they say?—troublemaker. "Troublemaker" was their favorite word. At the time, actually, I didn't belong to anything. I was just myself.

CEPLAIR:

You had not been politically involved at all?

GORDON:

No, no. We were just recently married. I was younger, and I was trying to write. She had—we had—a little girl [Tina Gordon]. She had a little girl, ten years old. No, my interests were not particularly, directly, political; socially minded I was, but not political. I didn't know too much about it at all. But the circumstances began to shape all of us the same way. My writing became more political, I suppose. The activity with the guild, which was really all I can remember doing that was threatening to the world or to the motion picture industry, forming a guild, which is now very respectable. They've raised the pay from $25 up to several hundred dollars a week, I understand. I don't know how it operates now. But the word got around. For instance, we tried to keep very quiet when forming the Readers Guild. It was not very many people, under a hundred, and timid people, young people and people wanting to get into pictures or something, write or something. So we kept very quiet and semi-secret while we get it going. But, one day, I walked into Paramount to ask for one of my old jobs back. As I walked in the door, the head of reading said, "How are you getting on with your union?" And I said, [laughter] "Oh, jeez, it's all out now." So some little stool pigeon went to report, you know, to

the boss, and that gave me more reputation, all of which has nothing to do with communism at all. It has to do with problems within the industry: guilds, better wages, and trying to survive in the Depression. But I became more and more involved, of course. Do you want me to tell you the fat truth?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

I don't know if I want to put this on record, whatever I was. Should I or not? I got more and more interested in politics. Of course, it was in the midst of the Depression and all the influences of it. And there was the liberalism of President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. Around here, the feeling was that you joined the Communist Party hoping to do some good to the world, to fight fascism primarily at that point and to develop unions and so on. There was no program of revolution ever, that I ever heard of, except in books, theories. They were remote as anything could be. But that was the beginning of my actual association with the Communist Party, which went on for some years. At the time of my hearing, however, I was not a member of the Communist Party. I had a very hard job at that time, very exacting and exhausting, and I just couldn't go to any meetings. I didn't change my views. I had become a Marxist in theory. But I couldn't do it. So they gave you a choice of getting out of it. The pressure was getting tremendous at that point. This is later on, 1950 perhaps. By that time, the Ten had been up or started—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

But did you mention where you were working?

GORDON:

I was at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc.] as assistant story editor. I didn't have a title, but it was assistant story. It was a good job. It paid me more than—not a great fortune, but more than I had ever gotten. I was there three and a half years, and I was out of the Communist Party. I just couldn't go to meetings. I didn't change any views. It was like a series of—now that I look at it—progressive steps toward a broader view, towards a Marxist view of life and towards—I guess I was predisposed, maybe, to it, but certainly not from

the family. My father was an ardent Republican, until Roosevelt converted him to the Democratic Party. So I was brought up in the most, you know, reactionary [laughter] sort of thing. And—I don't know where to go from here.

CEPLAIR:

Let me back up a little bit. You were in the—did you join the Readers Guild before you joined the Communist Party?

GORDON:

Oh, sure.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Oh, years!

GORDON:

Oh, wait a minute. Yes, yes, yes. I don't think—I wasn't a member of the Communist Party, as I point up there. Somewhere, that's fuzzy. Roughly around 1935-36 was actually the forming of guilds. Somewhere in there, I got into it.

CEPLAIR:

Did you read a great deal of Marxism?

GORDON:

Not a great deal. Yeah, I read quite a bit. It appealed to me as a philosophy, generally speaking. But the thing I'm trying to say, it's a philosophy. It's not necessarily shooting guns off somewhere or enslaving anybody. It has to do with theories of society. But they didn't enter into what we were doing, really. There was the general theory that what we were all doing here was supporting Roosevelt, supporting the antifascist cause, supporting the Spanish republic, supporting Democratic candidates usually, and supporting guilds and unions. All of this is going on at once in the middle of everybody being fired and not fired, the Depression, you know, the whole atmosphere. And so you have to understand that period, which young people simply do not, to really get the feeling. Had there not been that Depression, maybe everything would have been done differently. And really, the Communist Party had only a helpful hand in forming guilds. There were communist members, but there

were many more members of these guilds than there were ever communists, of course.

CEPLAIR:

Did Marxism affect the way you wrote poetry? I mean, did that—?

GORDON:

I think so. I think, in general, it kind of informed it. Yes, I think my early stuff tended to be about hunger marches, strikebreakers, things like that, real direct themes. I tried not to write the most blatant propagandist-type stuff, trying to make it a point. I don't know how I succeeded or not, but it got published in books. I've had five books out and the sixth one coming up—supposed to be coming out next month—and really quite a lot of publications, small publications, considering the subject matter, which kept me out of most magazines actually, but not all.

CEPLAIR:

Did you ever publish in New Masses? Was that—?

GORDON:

Oh, yes, poetry.

CEPLAIR:

Did anyone in the party ever comment critically about what you were writing or try to change the way you wrote?

GORDON:

The leaders were not interested in poetry, and certainly not in mine. Mine was too—it was a little complicated, I admit. I look at it now—I see my early stuff was complicated, more complicated than I would do now. No, they weren't really concerned with poetry at all. There was no interest in it.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

I'll interrupt now. He did write down to the workers. He wrote poetry.

GORDON:

Well, I thought it was.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And if you read some of his poetry, you will understand it.

CEPLAIR:

Okay.

GORDON:

[laughter] He never will.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

It's literature, you see.

CEPLAIR:

Were you a member of the League of American Writers?

GORDON:

I don't think so, because I wasn't a writer.

CEPLAIR:

Oh, that's right.

GORDON:

They don't count poetry as writing.

CEPLAIR:

They don't want poetry as writing?

GORDON:

Not in this country.

CEPLAIR:

What about as a reader? Did the kinds of projects you recommended—? Was that influenced by your increasing political sensibility?

GORDON:

[laughter] You sound exactly like the [House] Committee [on Un-American Activities]. That's one of the questions they asked. I said, "You're foolish. You

don't even understand how it works. It is impossible!" In the first place, I wouldn't do it. I was a very honest editor. I dealt with the material itself and nothing else, because anything else would—I wouldn't have done it anyway. I just don't believe in doing things that underhanded way. I didn't make the final decisions of purchase. I was only one step. But I was an important step at Metro, at least—my last job. I could recommend material or kill if off right there. But it never would have occurred to me to be influenced by my political views. I might lean a little, perhaps, towards liberalism in the material, but I never picked anything that could be injurious to anybody.

CEPLAIR:

I didn't mean to suggest that you would have been trying deliberately to [inaudible].

GORDON:

Well, that's what the committee had asked me. Did I? I said, "You don't understand how it works." I said, "You—" Oh, me, I don't remember what I said, but it was to the effect, "You don't know what you're talking about. Such a thing is not possible." I said, "I wouldn't have lasted twenty-four hours in the studio if I did that, if I influenced my editorial comment by my sociopolitical views. I wouldn't be there the next day. It wouldn't work." And I never thought of doing it anyway. It doesn't work that way. I could prove it, too. Because one of the stories I recommended, one of the last things I recommended before I left the studio, was written by a stool pigeon, and I knew it. See, normally, if you're going to be prejudiced, that's what you do.

CEPLAIR:

But I mean—I guess what I was asking was did certain kinds of stories appeal to you more than others. And would you have sent, you know, a story that was sort of more realistic—would that have been more something—?

GORDON:

I don't think anything influenced my thinking about stories. I was considered a good storyman, evaluating what is here for pictures and whether or not it's possible to do it and things like that. Not that everybody took what I said seriously, but it had its effect on some things, especially there at Metro, my

last job. As head of reading, I didn't have any discretions—the readers read and synopsized, and I read the synopses and passed them on to somebody else. Sometimes I got rid of them right there. The whole question of politics almost didn't enter at all. I suppose you're always—I mean, I would say, perhaps influenced towards something a little more socialized or a little more liberal, but that's about all, just like anybody else would. But you couldn't work on the base of reactionary reaction or liberalism or radical—it doesn't work in the studio. They won't do anything very radical anyway. And they wouldn't do anything even liberal then.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Don, you might quick—your head, head of the department, told you to name a few names and you could stay there forever.

GORDON:

Oh, yeah, they offered my job so long as that administration was there. She says, "You could stay." Because they thought well of me. They needed me, they thought.

CEPLAIR:

This was at MGM?

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Yes!

GORDON:

That's what I just said. A lot of stuff went through. You see, it's a lot of material. Then we had about twenty readers there, perhaps an equal number in New York, and another batch in London. All that got to my desk. That's why I say it was an exacting job. It was an awful lot of material to get through in one day. I've got to get through it that day and comment on it. I don't say that—my opinion didn't determine whether they bought a story or didn't buy a story. They bought some; some they didn't, you know. At the most, I could say my general direction of thinking was towards liberalism at the desk. I wouldn't want to do something that praised fascism. I wouldn't refuse it if it were a good story. It wasn't up to me. I would say, "This is a fascist story." But there weren't any, really.

CEPLAIR:

Did you like being a reader?

GORDON:

No. [laughter]

CEPLAIR:

It was just a job that you—

GORDON:

I hated it. I hated studios. I am not interested in pictures; I never was. I had to make it up; I had to live. The only thing I would do around here was pictures. There was no television then, and there was no radio either—not much radio. No, I never really took to it or liked it, but I didn't know what else to do. I tried to escape to New York. I tried to escape to San Francisco, Before I was married, I fled around here and there. But I always had to come back to make a living. I always had a hard time making a living. That's the one thing I learned to do, and it did enable me to live—us to live too, with her help—and enabled me to write poetry in between. That's the only way you can do it. You can't live on poetry.

CEPLAIR:

Yes, that's true. All poets need a job.

GORDON:

Yeah. I was that realistic.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

We were very respectable. I worked at Bullock's Wilshire [department store], entertaining children with puppets. [laughter]

CEPLAIR:

Did you associate with other poets in Los Angeles?

GORDON:

A few.

CEPLAIR:

Was there a community of poets?

GORDON:

There were a few. Well, there may have been many that I don't know about. There probably were quite a few. Yes, poetry has been read a lot in Los Angeles, read aloud. And now there's more of it than ever being read, from what I've heard of it. Of course, it isn't very good. But no, not a group, but a few friends of mine would meet and read some stuff. One of them was a stool pigeon, [laughter] and one was not—and one died. Eddie, Edwin Rolfe, fought in Spain. I don't know what he fought. He was there with the [Abraham] Lincoln Brigade. He died—here—I'm sure as a result of the Spanish civil war. He was a poet, published poetry. Edwin Rolfe. He's long dead, so I can mention him. Where do we go?

CEPLAIR:

Did you associate with screenwriters at all? Were they part of the people you—?

GORDON:

Well—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

We had friends.

GORDON:

Yeah, most of our friends were involved one way or another, one level or another, yes. Yes, sure I did. Most of our associates—well, I couldn't associate with fascists. And I didn't even, you know—

CEPLAIR:

When did you learn that you were going to be subpoenaed by the committee? Did the subpoena just arrive one day out of the blue?

GORDON:

No. Do you want to hear how it came? Are you interested in that?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

GORDON:

It is kind of funny, in a way. A fellow named Wheeler, whom you've heard of—what's his first name?

CEPLAIR:

William Wheeler.

GORDON:

William Wheeler called me up one day. He said, "I'm William Wheeler." I said, "Yeah, I've heard of you." He said, "I'd like to see you." I said, "All right. Come up." Another day, he came up by appointment. Looked around, "Nice up here." Very friendly. I said, "You know this neighborhood?" "Oh, yes, I know it very well." (He has had stool pigeons all over the place, I think.) And he said, "You know, we hate to come to the studio or do anything that threatens anybody, but we have to ask you some questions and so on." So he said, "We don't like to bring subpoenas and stuff." I said, "Well, do whatever you want. Give me a subpoena if you want to. I don't care." Anyway, he was very friendly and easygoing. This is the soft approach you start with to see what I'm like. There wasn't any real give-and-take. I didn't know what was going to happen. So then he just went away. He said, "I'll check with you later." "All right." Then, a week or two or three later—obviously, nobody in the department where I worked knew anything about it—I was called up to one of those huge offices. It was an attorney's office, whom I didn't know, an enormous office. There's Wheeler, standing beside the guy, and off back here some gray-haired man, I always say "skulking in the arras." He says, "I have to hand you this subpoena," and he began explaining. I said, "I can read. You don't have to explain it. Well, why did you come here? You had access to me at home. You were there. Why didn't you do it there or put it in the mail? I'm not hiding anything." Well, he got very mad. "Well, I just did!" That was the first set-to I had with him. He changed his tune; he wasn't so polite. I knew it was a threat, waving the subpoena in front of the legal department to show that he gave it to me. And I took it. What else could I do with the subpoena? It was a way of threatening the job, right then and there. I couldn't miss the point. I found out

nobody knew about it in my department; my immediate superior and [the man] above didn't know anything about it. So I told them, because I liked them, and I thought I'd save them a lot of headache when they looked for somebody else. I said, "I know what's going to happen here." She, the immediate boss, said, "Well, don't let them lead you down the garden path," and things like that. But then she didn't push it. And the bigger—the big office—story editor, I guess he was, he tried to convince me to take it easy, you know. All that. But you don't know. Nothing happened for maybe another six weeks. But I did them the courtesy of telling them so they could look around for the next—

CEPLAIR:

And you kept working?

GORDON:

I kept working. I kept working. I got my paycheck. And then they came, the hearing—

CEPLAIR:

Was that in Los Angeles?

GORDON:

Yeah, at the down—

CEPLAIR:

Federal Building?

GORDON:

Downtown, the Federal Building. There were a lot of people there. This was the subcommittee of the main red-hunting committee of the [United States] Congress. [Francis E.] Walter was the immediate superior here, with three or four congressmen. A congressional committee is what it was, a House committee. Well, you know about that, perhaps. I don't know if you ever read—did you read all these things?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

You've read the testimony?

CEPLAIR:

I've not read your testimony; I've read other testimonies.

GORDON:

Yes, I have a copy of it, but it's all I have, is one typewritten copy. The lawyers gave—

CEPLAIR:

Who was your lawyer?

GORDON:

Well, it wasn't any one person. There was a group of people subpoenaed and a group of attorneys helping. You want the names? They're no secret.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Remember, you didn't appear with an attorney.

GORDON:

Well, yeah, that's something else. No, no. The judge, Judge [Robert W.] Kenny was one of them, who's only a liberal man.

CEPLAIR:

[Ben] Margolis.

GORDON:

Margolis, of course. [William] Esterman, I guess—no, he wasn't in that group. There was a new man on the scene who was doing it. It was a group of maybe twenty or twenty-five people meeting and getting coached—not coached, trying to do this. What to do, how to answer questions, and so on. You want to go on with this?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

And me, trying to raise money to pay the lawyers for this purpose and so on. This went on for quite a while until finally the hearing itself. What's important about that? Oh, my wife is trying to tell you that—I guess it was because my father was a lawyer—I resented the attack. I took a lawyer named Esterman and grabbed him, threw him out of the room practically. I didn't throw him, but the marshals dragged him out, because he was getting noisy, and he was. [laughter] He was shouting, which I do not like. In any proceeding, I don't think that's the way, but that's what he did. So they dragged him out. Suddenly, something clicked in my head. I said, "I'll use this. I'll do it." It came up the next day or the next day. So I said, "Could I say something?" "Yes." They gave me permission to say it. I said, "Well, the way you treated the attorney the other day makes me convinced I cannot subject another attorney to such an attack. So I haven't got an attorney here, although I meant to have one." I needed one really for protection, theoretic.

CEPLAIR:

Right.

GORDON:

Oh, they were very polite to me then. They were very nice."Yes, let him speak," and so on. So I did go without a lawyer. I heard behind me such a gasp from my friends.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

"This is a stool pigeon."

GORDON:

My comrades, former comrades, who then thought I was going to be a stool pigeon. Only stool pigeons went up without the lawyer, because they don't need any defense: they're with the committee. [laughter]

CEPLAIR:

Right.

GORDON:

And I did the best I could with it. I think I muffed one. I muffed one quite badly, but it wasn't important.

CEPLAIR:

Did you, in effect, use the Fifth Amendment?

GORDON:

Yes, oh yes. I used it for every question.

CEPLAIR:

Every question?

GORDON:

I think every question that I didn't want to answer, yeah.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

"Come clean, Mr. Gordon."

GORDON:

Oh, God, [Clyde G.] Doyle, Congressman Doyle.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

That son of a bitch, I could have shot him! [laughter]

GORDON:

A fuddle-headed old man from Long Beach [California]. "Come clean, Mr. Gordon, as other men do." Oh, God. It was a farce. But I knew all this. You know, there was no surprise in it, in a sense, except you have to fend the questions. I wasn't too bright. There were things I hadn't thought of. As, for instance, I'll say my one mistake that I know of was that stinky little man—I've forgotten his name already. He said "Are you a member of the Communist Party?" I declined to answer. So "Are you a member of the Silver Shirts?" I said, "No," loudly. I just—spontaneous. So he just stopped at that point. He had trapped me into showing that I really was a communist, or else I wouldn't have answered that one. But it just infuriated me. I know it was a mistake, but it made no difference. Nothing made any difference. It was like a plow going

through you. Whatever you did or said, you'd be in trouble. To me, all this was anticipated years ago. I knew it was going to happen.

CEPLAIR:

You knew they were going to get to you at some point?

GORDON:

Oh, sure. I just was lucky I went on working. So then I went to the studio the next day to go to work. There was one sheet of paper on my desk, and I said, "I'll stamp this quickly, because they have to pay me for today." So I did. That's all there was. Usually, it's—they let me alone till about noon. I went out to lunch and came back. My secretary was befuddled. And then I was summoned to the big office, the head of stories and my immediate boss. He said to me, "We are severing your connections with this studio as of today. Here are your checks." Right up to the minute. That's what delayed them, half the day, getting checks ready to pay. They were scrupulous to pay me while I was at the hearing. And I said, "Is there anything wrong with my work?" "Oh, no, no." As a matter of fact, he said, "You can use me for a reference anywhere you want." Which my boss said he shouldn't have said, he wasn't supposed to say. So I didn't make any fuss. I said, "All right" and went out. That's all. I packed up what I had and left. The readers were extraordinary. There were about twenty of them. They were glued to the television, they told me later, during the hearings, of me especially. It was pretty close to home. One or two of them sort of sidled up to me and said, "Oh, you were great!" [laughter] And somebody else, an agent, came in. "Well, if I hadn't been in the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], I would have been where you are, too, in my younger days," he said, and so on. So there are a few nice things around.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And how about after the New York paper came and shook your hand.

GORDON:

Oh, yes. Gladwin Hill, I never forgot him. He was at the hearing, reporting. He came up to me right during intermission or something and said something very nice about my—he said, "You made some points that I haven't heard of before," and so-and-so. Said maybe he was going to write it up in a friendly

way, but he wrote it just like everybody. Just reported what happened. But I never quite—it was very funny. Funny incidents, too. I didn't want to get this spread all over. It was enough that I had my picture in the paper. All the things I don't like. I thought, "Well, in the neighborhood, what's going to happen?" I said, "Well, they won't know anything about it." But the next morning, some young man came up and spoke to me about something over there, and he said, "Didn't I see you?" He says, "I was a cameraman at the hearing yesterday. I didn't know who you were." Funny things like that appeared. And I got an—well, I call it an obscene phone call. Really a vicious attack on me. Some woman—Henrie, "Do you want to speak to her?" I said, "I'll speak to her." I spoke to her. I said something. Then I said, "Turn on the machine, Bill." And she hung up. I gave the impression that I was taping what she said. And so funny little things like that occurred with it, but that was it.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Nice letters came, too.

GORDON:

But all these details I don't know are of any importance, except there's a human side of what occurred.

CEPLAIR:

Did the studio try to coach you into being an informer? Did they encourage you to—?

GORDON:

No. My immediate boss, the woman whom I'd known as a reader, said, "Don't let them lead you down the garden path." You know, "Don't do it" and so on. And the head of the department, whom I hardly ever saw, big wheel, gave me a little spiel about it, too. But nothing, no pressure, no.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Well, we were friends.

GORDON:

Well, they saw—yeah, we were all friends. But you could see—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Played cards with all of them.

GORDON:

Well, yeah—well, no, no. I wouldn't say "they," because they really were not—they're just steps in the process that's being done by the legal department.

CEPLAIR:

Well, what about when we were getting to the subpoena? Did the people in that office say you should cooperate with the committee?

GORDON:

No, no. At that point—am I getting the subpoena with the lawyer?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Mention some dead ones.

GORDON:

What? Oh, I don't know. There—no, there was very little of that. They knew my position obviously. I made it very clear right away that I wasn't going to be a stool pigeon no matter what. And so they didn't pursue it. No. They would like to have kept me, I'm sure of that, because I was useful.

CEPLAIR:

Were you angry about losing your job over this?

HENRIETTE GORDON:

I was.

GORDON:

No, no. It was inevitable. I knew it was going to happen. You know, I sort of planned in my head to try to save what money I could out of it, more than possible, more than ever. No, to me it was an inevitable step. I wasn't

surprised or shocked. Each step was rather peculiar. I didn't know what was going to happen, but I just went about my daily work there, about six weeks, I think. [laughter] I looked at it a little differently than other people. In the first place, it was inevitable.

CEPLAIR:

What did you do then?

GORDON:

What did I do?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah, after you lost your job.

GORDON:

I thought, "Well, I'll see what I can do with writing some fiction, or non-fiction, articles, which I had done occasionally over the years, but never very—I was never very good at it. My interests were in poetry. I'm afraid I sat down [laughter] and just really didn't know what the hell to do. I was already like forty-nine years old, almost fifty. I have to say that my wife knew what to do. She made herself into an interior decorator on her own. She didn't know architects, modern architects, but you can see from all this stuff around—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Mr. [Rudolph M.] Schindler, the architect, an old friend.

GORDON:

Gregory Ain and Mr. Schindler helped her by giving her some jobs.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Mr. Schindler gave me—

GORDON:

Oh, she became a decorator. She's just a natural decorator anyway. She began to learn the business, taught herself in all the business of taking—I didn't know what to do for about four or five years. If you want to know what jobs I then got—do you?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah, I'm interested.

GORDON:

Well, a friend had me help him a little bit moving his office, helping him with some advertising, and that was temporary. I applied at an employment place for a job. They sent me to a place called Sunset House, a mail order house, with hard physical work for $1.15 an hour. It was really two jobs: keeping the stock going and moving the new catalog across the street to the post office, a heavy job. They admitted it: it was two jobs. So I lasted about six weeks or so. There was one of the fellows that was really smart. He said, "I just wanted you to see that you could get a job." And then didn't do anything. So that was my first one. And $1.15 looked pretty big by that time. But then somehow I discovered an interest—or I met a young woman—

GORDON:

Who brought the young woman here?

GORDON:

She brought somebody up who was a customer, and she brought a young woman up here.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Two real pretty gals.

GORDON:

The young woman had been working as a—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Actresses!

GORDON:

Yeah, she was a pretty young actress. She had been working with the mentally ill in what she called a "supportive role." I had never heard of it, particularly. I've always been a little interested in mental, you know, sort of psychology and stuff, like everybody.

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GORDON:

By meeting this young girl and hearing the words "supportive therapy," it struck something in my head. "Supportive therapy," meaning a person who helps somebody who is mentally ill, not as a nurse or doctor or psychiatrist. Of course, I had no preparation for this. So I got interested in this, and I went around—somebody said, "Go around and see doctors." I went around. I knew a few psychiatrists. They weren't very hopeful or helpful, some of them. But one of them said to me, "Compton Hospital is starting a new thing in Beverly Hills called a day center [Beverly-Compton Day Care Center]." I never heard of a day center. He said, "Go and see so-and-so." So I went to see the doctor, and he seemed a little bit interested in me as a person who could help. He says, "You'll have to help with shock treatment, too"—which I had never seen or knew anything about, really—"and just generally be helpful and supportive of the patients. Run the office and interview people as they come in, families and so forth." That was paying me then $200 a month. This is 1955. Well, it was a beginning. I had no background for this work. But I stayed there in that little day center, which never became very big. I learned a great deal from nurses and doctors and so on. Took naturally to working with sick people. Could relate to them. Could keep myself out of it and learn rather to like the work, the responsibility, and so on. It was a small place: one nurse, one occupational therapist. I helped with everything. Drove them around and so on. Then I was offered from there— Oh, yeah, I took some patients around at night. Some doctor wanted me to take some guy around, another guy around. Finally, a hospital had invited me, "Would you like to take charge of a halfway house which we're setting up next door to the hospital?" It was an apartment. You know what a halfway house is?

CEPLAIR:

Um-hmm.

GORDON:

"And I'm inviting you to be the administrator." Well, it was a little more money. It was like $450. By that time, I was already getting $300. But, anyway, it was a temptation. I was rather flattered that a doctor would invite me.

"Invite me?" So I did become the administrator of that place for about a year, a year and a half. I think that—he was paying me too much money, he decided. It wasn't doing too well, but he had patients. That was fairly interesting, because they just turned me loose and here are the patients! It must have been fifteen or twenty pretty soon. It was a very clean, neat apartment house. I did what I could with them, made up programs and so forth. Then when that petered out, a doctor whom I knew said, "I want to have you have a day care center within a hospital. I'm taking charge of a small hospital in the [San Fernando] Valley, and then I want you to have a day care center in the middle of it." So I did. That was very interesting, because there they were. Day patients were my care, and nobody to boss me. But I helped out with the hospital patients, too. There I was, right in the middle of it all. No professional training for this at all, just experience. It worked pretty well, but they decided they were paying me too much. It was like $500 a month. And I had to leave there. What the hell did I do next? Oh, then I finally wound up at a place called the [Benjamin Rush Center night clinic]. It was a night clinic of a sort, where people could come in off the street and be seen for a certain number of visits by professional people. I was to be the coordinator, to coordinate. I was a coordinator for a year or so, but I wasn't doing the direct work with patients much, very seldom. A lot of administrative crap, papers to the state of California and everything. So I got to be like sixty-two or something, and I retired.

CEPLAIR:

I assume you're writing poetry all along?

GORDON:

No. During this whole period of like ten or fifteen years—ten years, I guess—I didn't write at all. It just did something to the poetry. I just didn't write. Which is the only time since I was in my twenties that I wasn't at it a little bit, although I was never very productive. But at any rate, this job as coordinator, I didn't have enough to do with patients. I didn't seem to be going anywhere, so I retired. Then a friend of mine, a psychologist, was opening another kind of a center for counseling [Los Angeles Counseling Center] by nonprofessional people to anybody who came in at night. I said to him, "You're going to get the sickest people that have ever been through the whole county system, and

they're going to be right here." "No," he says, "but there's nowhere else for them." So, with that, I accepted the idea, and it worked out pretty well. And I liked that. I was in charge of my patients. [laughter] I can't call them "my patients." And that was interesting.

CEPLAIR:

You mean you saw people on a—?

GORDON:

I saw them the way a psychiatrist sees them, in an office for an hour. It was no pay or low pay. The most they ever had to pay was $10, and most of the time they didn't pay anything. I was very lenient about that, I'll tell you. I did that for a year or so. And what? I've forgotten what I did. Oh, then I had a chance to go to Mexico on a trip with a friend. And I did. And then I didn't go back there. Did I do anything after that? No. That, I think, really ended my work of that sort. But it was an interesting period. I really became alive in it. It was exhausting, exhausting, spending eight hours with a bunch of patients who were sick. You have to hold on to yourself very tightly.

CEPLAIR:

Personally, how did your personal relations react to the fact that you were blacklisted?

GORDON:

My friends?

CEPLAIR:

Yes. Did you lose a lot of friends?

GORDON:

No, I don't think so. No. And one of the friends whom we lost wasn't a close friend, but he came and gave me $100 towards the lawyer's fees at that time. Another friend who had promised to give me some money—not for me, but for the lawyers—he disappeared. But I didn't hold it against him. He got scared. He has a family. No. Our friends, by and large, those that didn't become stool pigeons, which weren't very many—no. The friends who were comrades at one time remained friends—the good ones.

CEPLAIR:

Were you named by anybody, or did they just subpoena you because of your Screen Readers Guild activity?

GORDON:

No. Martin Berkeley read off a—I was sitting right next to him when he went up. He rattled off 150 names, and I listened to this. He couldn't possibly know them all. It couldn't be. I knew him only slightly myself, because he'd been a reader at one time too when he came out here. He became a writer. No, very few of our friends became stool pigeons. Ben Maddow is one. I'm not even sure what he did exactly, but there was something funny about him. He just disappeared. He disappeared from our sight and other people's sight. They said, "Find out what's going on." And I couldn't get through to anything. I know you don't—do you know his name?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

He must have been something—

CEPLAIR:

His testimony was secret, wasn't it? And never released?

GORDON:

Yes, I never saw any of it.

CEPLAIR:

But he was working again, sort of, not too long after that.

GORDON:

Yeah, he did other things, like a book of photography and things like that. He was very talented.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Well, we were very close friends.

GORDON:

Yeah, I tried to get in touch there, because somebody asked me if I—so I called him, and I got his wife. I said something about, "Where are you? How are things?" and so on. She said, "We're just about to go to Europe," and so on. But that was all. Obviously, they cut themselves off.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And the man that took your job. Remember?

GORDON:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, of course. Well, he came from New York, and he and I became chummy. I think he was a leftist in his mind, though he probably didn't belong—somewhere in his family there was something, or his wife's family. And he got my job. He was due here for a—we used to have parties. When was it? Christmas, New Year's, somewhere in there. We'd have a party, a pretty big one in those days. Henrie wanted to keep the tradition going, and he was one of those invited. He said he'd come, but he never got here.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

He didn't want to see us.

GORDON:

He got panicked, I suppose.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Some people. But our closest friends—

GORDON:

But they weren't the intimate, close friends. They were friends. No, it was no problem, our friends, I think. Why would there be? Almost all our friends were of like minds. They weren't necessarily all communists, but they were friends who saw things similarly. Even the professor was liberal, a very liberal-minded guy. Just concerned about his job.

CEPLAIR:

When did you start writing poetry again?

GORDON:

After I finished up working with patients. I didn't expect—

CEPLAIR:

You did that, what, for about a year?

GORDON:

Well, I don't remember exactly, but that was a period, as I said—I forgot whether it was ten years—where I didn't write. I had lost the talent. I didn't want to, I didn't have any need, which was the first time I didn't do anything. And then I began again. And since then I've published two books, and I have a third coming out, my last one, and other miscellaneous things and anthologies. And the Russians—I don't want to put that on there, do I?

CEPLAIR:

That's fine.

GORDON:

Would it do any good?

CEPLAIR:

Sure.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And how about the one in England?

GORDON:

Well, I don't know—you know, I'm really not a known person at all. There are very few poets that I know, but I'm least of all, except in certain circles, leftist circles still. I got a lovely letter from a professor at the University of Kiev, I think, somewhere in there, a very nice letter in English, asking me to send him material. He's heard through a friend of mine, who's a traveler there, about me. So I sent him a book, and then I didn't hear anything. And then, all of a sudden, they sent me a check which was $340 something, more than I ever saw in my life from poetry. More than my country paid me in fifty years

probably. With everything officially listed. A draft of a New York bank, and every poem listed—eleven. So I know which ones they used.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And the check.

GORDON:

And the check, which I cashed. I would like to have not kept it, but I kept it. I didn't think it was right to send it back. So that one, and then I recently had a letter from University of Oxford Press in England. They wanted to use a poem of mine which is published in a book in 1958 [*Displaced Persons*]. Apparently, the book is copyrighted in my name, which I didn't even know. All the details, they want to use that poem. It's a book called Peace and War, an anthology, I guess. That's due out any time. They're going to send me $95 and the book.

CEPLAIR:

My goodness.

GORDON:

Yes. And now some guy from East Germany—a friend of mine told me to send him some poems, and he's going to do something. What, I don't know. So I sent him some poems. What else? Funny things happen. I sit here and I don't do anything about it, because I've stopped—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

But then someone else wants to publish one of your poems. It's marvelous!

GORDON:

Oh, yeah. I got a little magazine with a group of my poems from the past and a letter from the editor of this little publication, which has a fairly peculiar title. What is it? Subversive Agent. It's the last title I'd put on a magazine.

CEPLAIR:

Right.

GORDON:

And thanking me for giving him the right to publish a bunch of my poems. I have no recollection of this at all. I must have done it in my sleep! And I had that here. And then he offers to reprint a whole book of mine, which was published in 1958.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Because it's out of print.

GORDON:

Well, sure, but apparently—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

So nice things have happened.

GORDON:

Apparently, I had the copyright and I didn't even know it.

CEPLAIR:

Is your poetry different now than it was then?

GORDON:

Well, I can't speak of now. Yes, it's quite different. I hope it's clearer and simpler. And it's perhaps not as directly political, no. It's more social. But when I said to the—I wrote back to the Russian gentleman and said, "But some of my earlier stuff is more political than these, than this book." I got no reply to that. He wasn't a bit interested. He just picked out what he wanted. So nice things have happened, you know, anyway, when you don't do anything. East Germany, the Soviet Union, England. You know, you'd think I was an international figure.

CEPLAIR:

Which you are.

GORDON:

Which I am not. No, I am very obscure. The one who is known is Thomas McGrath. Do you know his work?

CEPLAIR:

Uh-huh.

GORDON:

Have you been in touch with him at all?

CEPLAIR:

No, I don't know a lot about poetry. I just know some names of poets, but—

GORDON:

You do? Do you know enough Russian—? Well, never mind. Let's finish this first.

CEPLAIR:

Looking back over the blacklist years, were they very bad years for you, do you think?

GORDON:

No, no. After the first few, when I didn't know what to do, I tried to write stories, and I made a few bucks, but nothing serious. Henrie was working.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Somebody owes us some money.

GORDON:

What?

HENRIETTE GORDON:

[laughter] You know, they give the Japanese-[Americans] $20,000.

CEPLAIR:

Uh, I see, yeah.

GORDON:

Oh, yeah, yeah. We're coming to—they ought to stop doing that to those people. It makes them look [inaudible]. No, I don't think so. They were, in

many ways, fruitful years. For her it was good because she got a profession which she never had, and she liked it.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

Hey! I had it in New York before I came here.

GORDON:

Well, you had it—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

A little bit. [laughter]

GORDON:

I know, when you were a pup. And I got into this field which I found quite fascinating. For me to be in daily contact with sick people and trying to help them it was good for me. It did as much for me as it did for them. You know, it helps you understand yourself and theories and so on. I think I was fairly good at it. I didn't cure anybody, but I helped them, got them going sometimes. No, no, I don't really regret it. I'm glad I'm out of pictures. That was the one good part of it: I don't have to work in pictures anymore.

CEPLAIR:

And you weren't politically active in any way after that?

GORDON:

No. There wasn't any activity that I knew of around here. There may have been, but I didn't see it.

CEPLAIR:

When Philip Stevenson started California Quarterly, did he ask you to be a part of that?

GORDON:

Oh, I did have some things in it, yes.

CEPLAIR:

Some of the things you had written in the past were in there.

GORDON:

Were they in the past or just then?

CEPLAIR:

I think it came out in the mid-fifties, and you said you weren't writing then.

GORDON:

Oh, well, I didn't get into this mental hygiene work until 1955.

CEPLAIR:

Oh, I see. So you were writing up until—

GORDON:

From '51 to '55, I was—I can't remember exactly. I was trying to write prose, but I probably did some poetry. No, he did publish some of mine, I think. I can't remember what now. Sure. I published in a lot of magazines, but they were small ones, mostly. Although some weren't, like *Harper's*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Nation*, the [*New*] *Republic*. I think I did pretty well, considering the nature of my writing, which was obscure then, one, and leftist, clearly, you know. So I'm not unhappy about any of it. I never wanted money or fame. I was interested in the poem. That's all I still am interested in. That's why I don't want any publicity, you know.

CEPLAIR:

Do you get a pension from the Readers Guild?

GORDON:

Oh, no, no.

CEPLAIR:

They don't have that sort of thing?

GORDON:

No, they didn't have any money when I was there. I was out of it anyway, because I became an executive.

CEPLAIR:

Is there still a Readers Guild in—?

GORDON:

I don't know. I suppose so. Last I heard, somebody said their salaries got up to $300 and something a week, from $25, so I figure I contributed to something. I don't know whether they have departments or how they do it now. I'm totally out of touch with it, and I don't care, either.

CEPLAIR:

Just to go back for a minute, did you have to—? Did the readers have to strike to get recognition?

GORDON:

No. Well, not exactly. No. They were dealing with us. I, in fact, went to the first bargaining session and immediately had a fight with the head of my studio, the personnel head. And then I was out of it. What was that question again?

CEPLAIR:

I just wondered if the readers had to go on strike to get recognition.

GORDON:

No, but they were in a strike, and a long strike, of about seven months. They got caught up in the Conference of Studio Unions. Do you remember that? Do you know that name? Do you know the labor history here? They were a group opposing the IATSE [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees], which was a monopoly and run by gangsters—they say.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

But you weren't in it because you were their boss.

GORDON:

Well, I was already head of the reading [department]. I couldn't, I didn't strike. I just sat on my ass the whole period. Went to the gym and played out with a friend of mine. No, they were in it. They joined it, I guess, for strength themselves. But they got caught in the two strikes. One was very long, and out of it I don't think they got anything at that time. But eventually they got—I think the last I heard, they had joined the IATSE, the enemy, which we had

originally set it all up to avoid. We were setting up—the Conference of Studio Unions was a serious attempt to bring together all the unions in the studio, not just to oppose the IA [TSE], but to make a decent—and before—oh, yeah, before that, I had some connection with—not as a communist, but as myself—a group of guys who wanted a real industrial union here. It would cover a whole industry. The industry was crying for such a thing, but it never got anywhere. You've got to be—

CEPLAIR:

You've got Jeff Kibre in that group?

GORDON:

Jeff Kibre, God, you even know—yeah. Harvey Wolfe was really the leader. Jeff Kibre, I think, was involved in it. Gee, I haven't heard that name for years. Yeah, all the good guys are on—not just communists. We were working—we really got several hundred working people together: carpenters, painters—people who didn't have unions—miscellaneous set designers, and all kinds of people that were moving towards—if we had maybe big leadership or money or help, it could have changed the whole nature of trade unionism and the industry, which was crying for it. We all split up. Did you know that?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah.

GORDON:

The IATSE had nobody. The business agent came over to see our little group meetings from the IA[TSE] to see what was going on. Because he had his own office and no members. It was busted up by—I think the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] broke them up in some strike. I was just beginning to get into it. So I learned a lot about trade unionism in Hollywood, which I knew nothing about, from these guys. These are the working people.

CEPLAIR:

Were you an active unionist all the way up until you were blacklisted? Or did you begin to—?

GORDON:

No. CEPLAIR When did you—?

GORDON:

When I became a half-assed executive.

CEPLAIR:

Oh, so you had to leave? You had to resign from the union?

GORDON:

What could I do? I was the head of the reading department. I sat there and—

CEPLAIR:

So you were an executive in effect?

GORDON:

Yes. Small.

CEPLAIR:

So you were no longer a worker, no longer in the union.

GORDON:

No, I never really was in the—when the union got really going, or the guild, I wasn't in it, no. I couldn't be. And I had to work. I worked. I didn't see anything wrong with it. I didn't belong to any guild. Nobody was going to protect me. I helped them a little with money, you know, for families and things like that.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

When they were questioning him, you know, what was against him? That he contributed some money to the strikers.

GORDON:

Yes. I contributed to families, really, every month. Every week.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

You know, they had all that information. Did he contribute? He was working.

GORDON:

Well, they had everything. They asked me about something that happened, I think, in 1933. We'd just married recently. Had I signed—? Did I live on such and such a street? I couldn't even remember it, because we've been in this house over fifty years. Even then, we'd been here, you know—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

But I think maybe you signed it.

GORDON:

No, I probably signed the petition to put the Communist Party on the ballot, although I didn't know the Communist Party from a hole in the ground. But somebody asked me, and I'm always in favor of putting parties on ballots. I still did it again, with eyes wide open, the Peace and Freedom [Party], about which I knew nothing, but a pretty girl asked me to help go—and I don't see why they can't be on a ballot. Do you?

CEPLAIR:

No.

GORDON:

No. So I did. But that hasn't come up yet. So they asked me, did I sign that? You know, as if it were a crime to sign it. It didn't endorse anything. It just said they should be on the ballot. What's more peaceful than putting it on the ballot? That was my view. I never even—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

He wasn't political at all.

GORDON:

No, I wasn't then. I was a liberal character, but I wasn't political. It wasn't my main interest. My main interest, I guess, was me. [laughter] You know how a young man is. Do you remember?

CEPLAIR:

When you were a member of the party, were you involved in things like supporting the Loyalists, the Spanish civil war, the anti-fascist movement?

GORDON:

Oh, yes. I don't know how much I joined. The main thing here was the Hollywood Democratic Committee, I think.

CEPLAIR:

Right.

GORDON:

Yes, we both belonged to it. I don't know, maybe you [Henriette] were active in it. The Hollywood Democratic Committee? That was just Democratic politics. Oh, yes. Of course we supported the Spanish causes.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

You were very patriotic, oh, very patriotic.

GORDON:

Anti-fascists—but what did we call it? The League against War and Fascism here, I guess. I probably belonged to it. I don't even remember. I wasn't busy in them. I couldn't do everything and work and write.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

How about joining the United States Army here during the war?

GORDON:

Oh, God, that's a funny one. I don't think it relates—

HENRIETTE GORDON:

You must, you must put it—

GORDON:

You know all this fuss about Mr. [J. Danforth] Quayle? Quayle, who's the vice president. I am honored to say I belonged to the California [National] Guard for four years during the war.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

And he's got papers to prove how honorable [inaudible].

GORDON:

I said, "I'm insulted," although it really was a foolish thing. The whole thing is such a faker. Fake then, middle of the war. But I joined it, because I wanted to do something. And I was too old for the draft and not well, not really strong enough.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

You were a very patriotic American.

GORDON:

I thought I ought to do something. I didn't care about dancing with the troops, I'll tell you that. So I did join the guard. We never did anything. Oh, we guarded Lockheed [Corporation] one Sunday morning. [laughter] But it could have been—we were told, our commanding officer, who seemed more or less a professional really—"Sir, in the event of a Japanese attack on the coast, your mission is to go down to the beach and defend them. " "Sir, but I only have old men and boys!" "That's your mission, sir!" That was the story. But we never got to the beaches. It was ridiculous. But I had the fun of it, you know, saying I belonged to—

CEPLAIR:

But you never had to go anywhere? You never left Los Angeles during that period?

GORDON:

During the war?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah.

HENRIETTE GORDON:

No! We went on trips, but we never [inaudible].

CEPLAIR:

With the National Guard, you never went anywhere.

GORDON:

Oh, no, no. No, we just drilled in the [San Fernando] Valley—we drilled.

CEPLAIR:

Every weekend?

GORDON:

Every Sunday, every—no, I was a corporal finally. I would have been more, I think, if I weren't me, because I passed one of their exams at the top. But it didn't do anything for me. It was an experience, though, in racism, the most horrible racism in that whole company I had ever set eyes on in my life. And I fought every one of them, not physically yet, but I was threatening them. And I never hit anybody in my life. But I was laying it out for them. You couldn't believe the stories if I told you, the things they said. And they're fighting a war for democracy! Well, anyway, let's drop that. I'm just interested because it relates to Quayle.

CEPLAIR:

There were some incredible racist episodes around the Hispanics during the war.

GORDON:

Yes, Hispanics and the Japanese that were here. There was a Japanese family fifty feet away from the guard's little office. There were mutterings about them; the young punks were going to "take care of them." But, most of all, they were going to take care of the Jews, which is me.

CEPLAIR:

Right.

GORDON:

Not religiously, but I'm of Jewish origins. And so, well, that's another experience. I won't go—[laughter] If I told those stories, nobody would believe me. The things that were said are so outrageous, so absurd, you know. And I tackled them all that I could, every time. I decided, "I can't let this go," and I capped them down.

CEPLAIR:

Were the stories that you received during the war better stories? Was there any period in which stories just seemed to be perhaps a little better or a little—? Because I know a lot of writers felt better about writing in the war than they had at any other time, because it seemed like they could do more of the things they wanted to.

GORDON:

I couldn't really answer that, because I don't remember any particular change. Stories are awful or good, one way or the other; I don't recall any change. There might have been more war subjects, perhaps.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE (SEPTEMBER 2, 1988)

CEPLAIR:

I wanted to ask you a few details from the last tape. I was wondering what your sister's and mother's names were and how long their movie careers had been.

GORDON:

Oh, that's really ancient history. My mother [Sadie Levy Gordon] worked in pictures in silent days, roughly from 1913, perhaps, to '18 or '20. My sister [Mildred Gordon], only as a little girl, age six, with curls like Shirley Temple. And a neighbor introduced my mother to how you go about—well, you go from casting office to casting office on foot or streetcar. [laughter] My sister got good little parts as a child actress. Because she was no actress—she just got the parts.

CEPLAIR:

For how long? About two or three years?

GORDON:

Well, till she got too big to be—perhaps she got to be eight or nine, or something in there. I don't remember that. It wasn't anything, but it was quite extraordinary for the type that my mother was, really a New England spinster type.

CEPLAIR:

What? She played spinster roles?

GORDON:

Yes, she did play old-fashioned spinster roles very often, not always. I have a whole book of her pictures, but my sister was very minor. She had to go to school and everything. I also worked a little bit on Saturdays and summers in mob scenes.

CEPLAIR:

Oh, really?

GORDON:

Yeah. I hated it. [laughter] It was awful scary.

CEPLAIR:

It's just unusual. Very few people, I think, in the movie industry—to whom I've talked, at least—actually had a background in pictures. Most come from, you know, writing careers somewhere else or something.

GORDON:

No. It was just chance. It was really due to the neighbor who had a little boy in pictures and said, "Take your little girl around." My mother never heard of it, but she did it. I think the interesting one was my mother, who really looked like a New England—very thin and spinsterish looking. And that she had this interval in which she got around town by herself, had some parts, really, not just extra work. In those days you didn't make much out of it, but it was money, compared to what we had at that time. My father [Morris J. Gordon] was struggling to get started as a lawyer. And then she reverted right back to being a housewife at some point where he must have gotten on his feet. From then on, she never went near anything of that nature, of pictures. That's about all.

CEPLAIR:

Okay. Was your Jewish background a strong one? Were your parents religious?

GORDON:

Oh, my mother had none, really. I wouldn't say "none." I don't remember—probably her father [Alexander Levy] did. But, no, my father was the one who—he always says I introduced him to it: the holidays and celebrations and things like that. My father was born in Lithuania under the czars. My mother really had nothing to it, except she learned to carry out the holiday foods and things like that. But it wasn't a strong element in our family at all. My father, I'm sure, lost his connections with anything years back, became much more of a liberal-minded, [Franklin D.] Roosevelt-Democrat American. Very proud of being an American, of course. But it wasn't a big influence one way or the other. I went to a Sunday school; that's about it. But my father continued the holidays, so I was brought up in the general atmosphere of a middle- class, semi—not religious, but traditional family. My father was too intelligent to believe any of the superstitions and things that go with religion. But it was with him deeply rooted from childhood. The thing I always remember about him was "hiding in the attic till the Cossack terror swept by," which he put it that way. Which I have used since in poems more than once. It's in the background, you see, not unfamiliar, but not close or important to me.

CEPLAIR:

When did you begin to write? What were the influences—?

GORDON:

Well, I had no thought about really becoming a writer. I used to write little essays and things, anyway, in school. Did pretty well with them. But, no, somewhere in my middle twenties, a girl said to me, "I don't think of you as a lawyer; I think of you as a writer." It was like pulling the side of a curtain. Well, of course, that's what I always wanted to do. But the poetry began in a very rudimentary way, and gradually I kept working, working, trying to develop it. But I didn't really know until my middle twenties that I was even concerned about it. I thought whatever I wrote was desultory and essay-type things. I had no thought about poetry up till then. I didn't have that fifteen-year-old poetry-writing period.

CEPLAIR:

Were there any particular poets who influenced you more than others?

GORDON:

I don't think I was much influenced by anybody, except, perhaps, people like Robinson Jeffers and others who were releasing us from the old forms, so that I never wrote in any form or in very tight rhythms. I wrote more like conversation, much as Jeffers often did or Walt Whitman. But the influence I can't really trace, because I was never much influenced by anybody. Even my friend, Tom [Thomas] McGrath, who's the best poet I knew of—I liked his work, but he never influenced me at all. He was so unlike what I was doing. No, I suspect the whole political movement had a lot more to do with it than other poets, in the sense of the content, in the thirties.

CEPLAIR:

Did you read much poetry to see what other people, your contemporaries, were doing?

GORDON:

Not a great deal, no. I'm not particularly well educated in poetry at all, really. The forms I don't know anything about. I don't see any point to them, [laughter] And the content, today it doesn't exist.

CEPLAIR:

That's right. Very minimalist.

GORDON:

Yeah. In those days, there was content, but not much form or much talent.

CEPLAIR:

Would you mind telling us the titles of some of your books and collections?

GORDON:

No, I'd be delighted. I'd be delighted. Well, I've had five books. I have a sixth coming out. Small books, small publishers. You want to know the titles?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

Well, I can remember that easy enough. The first one was called *Statement*. The publisher was some outfit in New England. A small outfit, I've forgotten the name of it. *Statement* and then the next, I think, would have been probably *Civilian Poems*, which I wrote during the war. You want to know the name of the publisher? I don't think anybody would know. No, I don't even think they're there anymore. [Beechhurst Press] The next one would have been *Displaced Persons*, which was published by Alan Swallow. And then many years later—I didn't write anything during the period in which I was working with mentally ill people. It seemed to be doing for me whatever poetry did. I don't know exactly why. I never figured it out exactly. But it was all I could do at the time. So then there was—then, finally, another book called *On the Ward*. It was a small publisher up in—I've forgotten the name already. [*West Coast Poetry Review*] And then followed another one by the same publisher called Excavations. And the last book, which is supposed to be coming out now from a New England publisher called Curbstone Press, is called *The Sea of Tranquility*. That's the last.

CEPLAIR:

An interesting set of titles.

GORDON:

[laughter] I guess. Well, I published a good deal in magazines, books (little ones), poetry magazines, literary quarterlies, a few national magazines, and in a number of anthologies.

CEPLAIR:

And you're still writing?

GORDON:

No, I've stopped.

CEPLAIR:

You've stopped again.

GORDON:

I stopped this year. I did the last one or two little ones to add to the book, I think, very early this year. That is it. [laughter] I've lost the need for it.

CEPLAIR:

I wanted to ask you in a little more detail if you could tell me exactly where the readers stood in the studio hierarchy and exactly what a reader's job was.

GORDON:

The readers was practically at the bottom, in the sense of being one of the lowest-paid and little-thought-of persons. He was really out of sight in the whole process. But, well, he just read the incoming material, let's say a novel; wrote a synopsis of it, long or short, according to his own evaluation of it; and then wrote a comment on the suitability for pictures for that company. And then it went on to the next stage, assistant editor, which I finally was, and then editor and so on, up the line, till it got to whoever would purchase.

CEPLAIR:

And what would the assistant editor do?

GORDON:

Well, the last time I was assistant editor was at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer [Inc.], from which I got fired. All the synopses written by the readers in Los Angeles, New York, and London, which was quite a number, passed my desk. I had to read it all, evaluate it, get rid of the bulk, and pass on to my boss, who was the story editor, whatever I thought was suitable for pictures. So there was a little responsibility for a lot of material, a lot of cost.

CEPLAIR:

Would you write your own comment on it?

GORDON:

Yeah. Oh, yes, you always wrote—even the lowliest reader always wrote a comment. However, I think the people read them, higher-ups read them. Because most of the executives I don't think read the original material, unless they got really interested. They read the synopses. And the writers, of course, didn't like that, because they wrote all this work and nobody read it except the reader, whom they despised [laughter] as being just readers, you know. But many readers became writers or even producers.

CEPLAIR:

So the story editor would then collect the assistant story editor's comments and winnow them out even further?

GORDON:

I think in my particular last job, she was a woman, and then somebody above her. No, I think she probably never saw a lot of it. It was responsible in that sense, a lot of expenditure for so many readers and so on. It was just the process of getting it down to what's usable. Should I go into the question of what they asked me about the work itself? Could I influence it? Maybe that would be a point for it.

CEPLAIR:

We talked about that last time. You were pretty vehement that it was not possible.

GORDON:

No, it was an absurdity. I could no more influence it than the man in the moon could.

CEPLAIR:

It was even between what you—even as assistant story editor, there were still several layers before any particular ideas—

GORDON:

Yes, I had an immediate superior, a woman, and she couldn't have time to read all this. She was busy with many things. And then she had a man who would probably be normally called a story editor, who had a great deal to do with hiring writers and so on. But even he—it still has to go up to the top, the executive producer or the head of the studio, wherever it did, or a group. Sometimes the stories were even told. At Metro, they had a storyteller. The executive wouldn't even read a synopsis, so they had to be told a story. That's the only place I ever heard of where there was one, and they would depend on that.

CEPLAIR:

When you began, how many hours a day did you work and how many days a week?

GORDON:

As a reader or as assistant editor?

CEPLAIR:

As a reader.

GORDON:

Oh, forty hours, the standard forty-hour [week], I'm sure. Sometimes, as a reader, you could work at home, take the stuff home and do it; So it had nothing to do with hours; it had to do with the piece, so much per piece.

CEPLAIR:

Oh, you were paid by the piece?

GORDON:

Yes. Especially in the Depression era, when they wouldn't pay you even the $30, the miserable $30 a week. You'd maybe get $5 for a book that you might take two days just to read, let alone write it up. And so that was part of the fury of its readers. Face the situation—[laughter]

CEPLAIR:

When you were forming or starting to form the Screen Readers Guild, did you have any assistance from Herb [Herbert K.] Sorrell?

GORDON:

No. Not directly, no. Except that they eventually—when I was out of it—joined the Conference of Studio Unions, which led the strike, and that was led by Sorrell. But he had nothing to do with the Readers Guild, no.

CEPLAIR:

Were there any CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] organizers who were helping you at that time?

GORDON:

Not that I know of, no. No, it was just a spontaneous thing. Harvey Wolfe, I would say, was the leader for quite a long time of the effort at industrial

unionism. But even— The times were such that even the business agents of unions that had no contract (they just had an office) would come to these meetings—which I went to—which were to explain industrial unionism to scattered, separate union setups. But it was somewhat spontaneous due to the situation. There weren't basic unions in the studios. Somehow they knocked out the IATSE [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees], and that was scattered. It had no members for a while. I think that was the idea, to fill that vacuum with a real industrial union, which this industry calls for by nature. It's so intertwined a job that unions should have been one big union for the industry. That was all new to me. What did I know about it? Nothing. But I learned. I learned from old-timers. So what else?

CEPLAIR:

Now, I think you—I just want to get straight the years in which you were actively involved in activities with the Communist Party. You said you'd joined in '41?

GORDON:

No. I think 1935 to 19—maybe to 1950.

CEPLAIR:

And then you said you just got so busy at work that you just couldn't continue.

GORDON:

Well, a lot of other things happened. The Communist Party was just being driven by a number of laws: federal, state, county, city, police laws. They were all trying to destroy it. So it couldn't function very well, and everybody was a little worried about it. My personal reasons for just getting out, well, the opportunity was offered to you at that time: either get in now in small, very small groups or get out with no onus. Because I didn't want to leave under any feeling that I had great differences with it, which I didn't, so it was an opportunity to leave without any burden of dishonor of any kind. You just left. It kind of fizzled out, I think, around then. That would have been 1950. Yes, I also was—when I was working at this job, it was too exacting for me to go to meetings. I was too tired and so on. But it was also a matter of trying to protect yourself, a little bit, in the future. Which couldn't be done.

CEPLAIR:

Along the way, did you have any serious disagreements with the Community Party?

GORDON:

I had some disagreements, but not serious ones. I didn't make a crusade out of them. No, I might have been too naive or too young or something. Well, I wasn't so young. I didn't take all of it as hard as a lot of other people did. I mean, when there was something you didn't like, so you don't like it. It makes you be different. I couldn't—I guess one of the times I might have asserted myself was when the Communist Party dissolved under Earl Browder and became the Communist Political Association. Well, that was going to be out in the open. I went to one meeting right on Hollywood [Boulevard] at a hall. Hundreds of people were there. I said, "This can't possibly work in an anti-red environment, with everybody chasing after us." So I just departed. I didn't go anymore till it reconstituted itself as a party. Not that I cared so much, except I didn't think it was going to be any good or do anything. Perhaps it could have been, who knows. I'm really not an authority on politics like this, you know. And I didn't feel as strongly as a lot of people did about changes.

CEPLAIR:

So what, then, kept you in the party for fifteen years?

GORDON:

Not quite fifteen, I think, probably ten years. What kept me in? Well, a basic belief that it was doing good, doing serious work with the unions and anti-fascism. And a general belief that Marxism has the answer, if properly used, more than—and the nature of the period. I keep going back to that. It was still a period which ran into the war and the peace and the cold war, you know, all that stuff. So that there was no particular reason to be alienated from it. I didn't—it was no longer workable as far as I could see. And there were things I didn't particularly like. I didn't take it as strenuously as a lot of people did, you know. I don't know why. I think maybe I'm not a profound enough person to take politics that strenuously. I still wrote. I was more interested in my writing where I tried to express what I felt, which was more important to me than being in the Communist Party, although I went to meetings and helped with

things. But I wasn't that active about it. I'm not trying to duck around it. I was active about the Readers Guild. I belonged to all these antifascist groups, the Hollywood Democratic Committee, Spanish Loyalist support, and things like that, yeah.

CEPLAIR:

Do you recall if you had any particular reaction to, or involvement in, the controversy that arose when Albert Maltz wrote that article in New Masses?

GORDON:

Yes. The funny part is I said, "I'm a Maltzian then. He's right, and everybody else is condemning the hell out of him," which I didn't like. He had a right to express his opinions. I thought he was right, as I remember it, in complaining about the rigidity of the Communist Party. I agreed with that, because I never thought it had to be as rigid and fixed as it was. There was no point in it. So I would say that I'm more of a Maltzian than anybody that I could think of. People felt very strongly about it, but a lot of them just followed along the official party line. Well, when I didn't feel like following the party line, I didn't follow it. But it didn't affect anybody or anything. I just didn't do anything. I didn't get into the verbal controversy over it at all, that I can remember. Kept quiet and went about my business. But Maltz was right. It was too rigid, too. Everything was rigid. Too much in control, the few leaders, who weren't bad people, but they didn't know how to be real leaders—leadership not by force, not by being so determined about everything, you know, so hewing to the line. The line should have been more flexible.

CEPLAIR:

When you read, then, about [Nikita] Khrushchev's secret speech in '56, did that make you—

GORDON:

Condemning [Joseph] Stalin?

CEPLAIR:

Yes. Did that give you serious [inaudible]?

GORDON:

No. It's all too big for that. I never quite understand individual reactions to those things. It's part of the great historical movement, their ups and their downs. Of course, I always had grave doubts in my mind about Stalin's performance and the alleged murders and some things that we didn't like here. But it was never enough to drive me away, because I didn't see—well, you can be a communist without all this. You don't have to [inaudible] Stalin. Actually, it's almost now that they're really seeing and saying what Stalin was. But at the time he was such a firm figure, as some people said, a father figure to many of us. He was the embodiment—and he wrote some good pieces, good articles, about all this. Also, he was considered to be a great war leader, too, don't forget. But I was not too upset by it. I didn't like it, but I said, "Well, that isn't a part of communism; that's a part of Stalin and the Soviet Union." Today, it might be quite different in some other place hopefully. Like here, maybe we could do it differently, you know, without murder, without accusations, and so forth. That was my own feeling. So none of these things really threw me, as it did many people. Even the denunciations of Stalin I wasn't really surprised about. I was just surprised that they came out with it, which we always suspected was true. Also, I distrusted all our American reports about the Soviet Union. To this day, I still distrust all reports about them. They do not report anything, practically, truthfully, except minor matters. They report parades, schoolchildren. The Soviet Union has done a lot of things that are good and bad, like all countries. As a matter of fact, I always felt China would be the best example of a country that's run right? eventually—I don't know when. But they're more reasonable.

CEPLAIR:

You were named by Martin Berkeley on September 19, and then you appeared on September 24. [tape recorder off] Why don't you describe what it was like, the atmosphere and—

GORDON:

The hearing?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah.

GORDON:

Well, a little like a mild inquisition. It was a feeling—the mob they packed the—the [House] Committee [on Un-American Activities] had packed the hall with their friends. So, of course, they applauded and hissed and so on. We were just witnesses sitting over here. I happened to sit next to Martin Berkeley when he got up and added me to his list. Then he came and sat down. I didn't have any reaction to him. It was like dead.

CEPLAIR:

Had you known him previously?

GORDON:

Yeah, slightly. When he first came out here from New York, he had been a reader, and I met him then. Yeah, I saw him once in a while over the years. Never knew him well. And I was surprised, actually. But, of course, it was so absurd, the number of names he rattled off. I couldn't possibly have remembered if I had known them. But, anyway, I just pretended he wasn't there. But the atmosphere was exemplified for me by that little incident. Did I go into that, about the attorney?

CEPLAIR:

Yes.

GORDON:

Yes, I already did that. I mean, that gave you a clue. They threw him out, threw the attorney out, [William] Esterman. They really didn't hurt him, but the marshals—I didn't like the feeling. So I used it, and they allowed me to use it. They tried to shut me up. And then the chairman said, "Let him speak." Which was pretty good of him. So I did. I said—you know. I told you.

CEPLAIR:

Had you prepared a statement that you wanted to read?

GORDON:

No, no.

CEPLAIR:

Well, was your attitude you just wanted to get in and out? Or did you want to make a statement to the committee about what it was doing?

GORDON:

No, I didn't want to do that, and I didn't want to yell. I didn't want to do anything but to be let alone. And I just depended on—I made one error that I know of, but it wasn't too important, that I told you before. No, I turned kind of cold about it all. It was like something happening somewhere that didn't seem real, but didn't seem a fantasy. But I think I answered most of the questions correctly, the way they should be. Somebody said to me that I spoke to the committee as if I were telling a bunch of readers what to do, telling them they don't understand the industry if they thought you could use the material to suit yourself. You couldn't do it [laughter] even if you wanted to, which I certainly didn't do that sort of thing. The atmosphere wasn't—you know, it was a crowded room with a lot of spectators, who were always on the committee's side. Of course, they packed the place. And there were quite a few witnesses.

CEPLAIR:

How long did your testimony last?

GORDON:

Well, I don't know. The document I have runs about twenty or twenty-five pages. So I don't really know the time of it, but it didn't seem long. They asked me a lot of questions that I wasn't prepared for. For example, things like, "Did you live at such-and-such an address in 1932 or '33?" I said, "I don't remember where I lived then. I've been in the same house where I am now for years." And what they were getting at was I had apparently—you want this? Apparently, I had signed to put the Communist Party on the ballot, though I did not belong to it or anything else. But I thought they had a right to be on the ballot legally. They did. So I must have done it, but I don't—I said, "I don't really remember that. It's so far back." Whether I lived there, whether I did this or did that. I said, "It's possible," because I didn't see anything wrong with it, you know. That was one thing they asked me.

CEPLAIR:

And they asked if you were a member of the Communist Party, I assume.

GORDON:

Oh, yes, it came along at various times. "Are you now or have you ever been?" I don't know what I would have done if they had said, "Are you now?" I could have said, "No." I hadn't been for a year or more.

CEPLAIR:

I assume they asked you if you knew anyone else who was a member.

GORDON:

Well, no. They couldn't ask me if I didn't admit to being one. I used the Fifth Amendment; that's the best defense. We had a group who were coached by lawyers, and that was the defense we should use, because the Hollywood Ten had used the freedom of expression, First Amendment, and it didn't help them. And it didn't hurt the committee either. So why should you go to jail when you don't have to? That's what the Ten did. They went to prison because they used the First Amendment as a defense against answering questions, interfering with free speech, which, of course, was true. But the Fifth was decided by that time to be the best way of shutting off questions about people. You could talk about yourself, but not about people. I didn't even want to talk about myself. I didn't want to talk to them!

CEPLAIR:

Of course not. And then two years later, Charlotte Darling Adams named you. Who was she and why did she—?

GORDON:

[laughter] Charlotte Darling—she was a young, dear girl at one time, and I knew her slightly. She was a member of the [Screen] Cartoonists Guild. I liked her, and we were in the same—in something, maybe the union. I've forgotten what it was we were in together. Something slightly, and then she disappeared and I can't—and she named me? It was so funny, because I hadn't even seen her for ten years maybe or more. I don't even remember when it was. That was so funny. It was too bad. She was really a nice girl.

CEPLAIR:

Were you aware that she had named you back then in '53, or were you just so removed from [inaudible]?

GORDON:

I only knew about it when it came out. I don't know how I knew about that. It must have been somewhere, in the papers, someplace. It was funny. Some of these things come from so far back that they're meaningless, you know? Like Berkeley—

CEPLAIR:

Were other readers blacklisted?

GORDON:

Other readers [inaudible]. Yes. Oh, yes.

CEPLAIR:

Because very few were called before the committee, but a lot of them, several—

GORDON:

Yes, because they were considered very small people, and so was I. But I was by that time assistant to the story editor. I don't know why they picked me particularly, but, yes, other readers had gotten into it or were named. Or writers whom you haven't heard of, particularly, because they never actually came there. Or one writer I know of was called into some office building by himself—and his lawyer or friend or somebody—and somebody from the committee, one person or so, began to grill him. It was the same thing, but nobody knew about it. It didn't get to the papers. This was a showpiece that I was in, not with the writers, but with miscellaneous people, directors and writers; I can't remember any readers—yes, there was somebody there who was a reader, or had been. This was not big stuff like the Ten, because the names at that point were not that well known. But, more or less, everybody was involved one way in all departments. Except the working people—I don't remember them at all.

CEPLAIR:

There were a few who were quietly blacklisted, more, I think, for their role in the Conference of Studio Unions strikes than anything else.

GORDON:

Might have been, yeah. I can't remember that part.

CEPLAIR:

I think there was a pretty large purge in the blacklisting that went on as a result of that.

GORDON:

Oh, throughout the studios?

CEPLAIR:

Yeah.

GORDON:

That I didn't know. I didn't have information about that, and nothing was said. You'd think the [inaudible], if they had one, would have been from the back-lot workers. But, of course, they weren't as significant in this, really, as the white-collar workers were. See, it was an intellectual exercise due to the conditions I keep telling you of of the time and to the alertness and brightness, I would say, of the white-collar workers. [laughter] Some of them. All right?

CEPLAIR:

Well, that's all the questions I have. Do you think there's any area I've missed that you think would be useful for you to comment on?

GORDON:

God, we've pretty well covered everything, haven't we? The only thing I could think of, whatever's in those papers. But I think I've covered a lot of that, how you [can] mislead about a story, where did I live twenty years ago, thirty years ago, things like that. I don't think so. I think we've pretty well covered the ground.

CEPLAIR:

Are there any last comments you'd like to make for posterity?

GORDON:

No. I don't make comments for posterity. If I did, I wrote them.

CEPLAIR:

Okay.

GORDON:

I think I did write a lot about—is this off now or not?

CEPLAIR:

No, it's on. Are you—?

GORDON:

No. I was going to say what I had to say actually was quite public. It was published in the form of poems in magazines and books. How could I be more open than that? Now, what's secret about it? What's dangerous about poetry?

CEPLAIR:

Nothing, except—I think it's the most radical writing there is.

GORDON:

It can be. Yes, it's often been very influential, but not all of it. But I've considered that, actually, to be my contribution, because it got lefter and lefter, [laughter] more and more to the left, as time went on, I guess. And then finally, later on, it became more in the middle of things, more social-minded, I guess, and less specifically—my early books, I suppose you could call them somewhat radical, but they're really not. They're writing about the time in which they were written: strikes, people buried in mines, unemployed—there's one [poem] called "Unemployed"—and things like that. I wouldn't call them revolutionary. They were pretty social- minded, of course, leftist. Well, I think that's all I could think of.

CEPLAIR:

Okay.

GORDON:

You got enough.

Date: