

Marita Woodruff Interview/March 8, 2004

Marita Woodruff Interview  
March 8, 2004  
Kathy M. Gaynor

Good afternoon. This is Webster History Oral, Webster University Oral History Program Recording #2. Today's date is Monday, March 8, 2004, and the time is approximately 2:50 p.m. This is tape #1.

My name is Kathy Gaynor. I'm a Reference Librarian at the Emerson Library of Webster University and I'm also responsible for the Webster University Archives.

Today it will be my pleasure to interview Marita Woodruff, a graduate of Webster and former professor of theatre at the University.

MW: I'm just going to put this over my shoulder. Oh, I messed the whole thing up, didn't I?

KG: No, it's fine. This interview is taking place in Room 330 of the Emerson Library at 101 Edgar Road in Webster Groves, Missouri.

MW: Seems like there is a breeze coming through.

KG: Oh, I'm sorry.

MW: That's all right. It's very light but when you sit there all the time. Just put it over my shoulders. I think I've got it mixed up on the line. That's good, that's perfect. Sorry about that.

KG: Oh, no problem. St. Louis in March, you never know what the weather is going to be like.

MW: It's very light. If I were facing it it wouldn't be cold at all, but it's over my shoulders kind of thing. This is fine.

KG: Well, why don't we start, why don't we start. I understand that you're from St. Louis originally and grew up in this area. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

MW: Well, I grew up in Webster Groves many, many moons ago. And, but we were Catholic and very close to Holy Redeemer Church and that area and I went to Webster Groves High School, public high school and liked that pretty much.

KG: You did theatre there, I believe.

Marita Woodruff Interview/March 8, 2004

MW: Oh, yes, that's where I first got the bug, if you will. We did, we loved our drama teacher and she later went on to be in charge of the theatre in Kansas City. She was a great lady.

KG: Do you remember any roles or productions?

MW: Oh, yes, I was in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. I was one of the crazy ladies in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. And I was, I had a terrible job collecting props for *Pygmalion*. It's a three-act show with all these period props, things which was quite an event.

KG: Now that was the play on which *My Fair Lady* was based?

MW: Yes, it is. And so I was very very active in the whole theatre business. They had National—I can't remember the name of it—Thespian Society, which was a national society that really motivated a lot of students, but it was not just here in St. Louis, it was a national group. And in high school I did plays, mainly, well the one I mentioned and took classes in theatre.

KG: Did you always have your sights on coming to Webster or did you look at other colleges?

MW: Well, I think I went to Webster because it was the most economic possibility.

KG: Oh really?

MW: Well, we were close to the university and we didn't have to spend a lot of money on transportation. And it was there and so we went. Of course, my family, we had five children all going to universities and colleges which was a fairly big challenge for my parents and so we all had to be careful.

KG: I see. Were they supportive of your...

MW: Oh, yes. We all went to the university, went to college.

KG: But on the majoring in acting, were they supportive of that?

MW: Oh, yes. It was fine. Think of the plays that we did at Webster. The Shakespeare Festival now, you know, is going to be this summer again, they're doing *As You Like It*. Well, I remember I played the lead of Rosalind at Webster University, Webster College. That was the biggest thing I did.

KG: Now did they have women play the male parts or did you bring in men to...

MW: One thing that I did...I'll get a kleenex here...The girls played the male roles until I came there and then they no longer did that.

KG: Oh, you're kidding.

MW: No, we got males to do the male roles, and I just forbid it. I didn't think it was good even for training, to put masculine airs on and all of that kind of thing so I do give myself credit for stopping that. And neither was...what's his name...the man that taught at...

KG: Oh, that Harry McClain?

MW: Harry McClain. He was a very nice person but didn't teach us much theatre.

KG: Well, I wanted to ask because he was such a name for so many years and I wasn't sure if he overlapped with you.

MW: With whom did he talk to you about?

KG: I haven't, I mean I just read his name in the history...

MW: He had been at Webster for a long long time. Did a Shakespearean play every year.

KG: And his sister too, I believe, Anna Sankey?

MW: Oh, Miss Sankey. She did the costumes.

KG: I see, I see. So there was a well-established players and productions going on?

MW: Really, certainly compared to other schools in the city, there was clearly live theatre work. I wouldn't say we were the leaders in it but nobody was, really. Whether or not there was any other even departments in the universities.

KG: Oh, really. Now you graduated in 1949 and then shortly after that you went into the Sisters of Loretto.

MW: That's right.

KG: Was that something you'd been thinking of doing for a long time? Were you influenced by being at..

MW: Seemed like the next thing to do. And I think you come to a point where you decide you have to make a decision and that's what I did.

KG: And I assume your family was very supportive of that because that was...

MW: I had a brother who became a Maryknoll priest.

KG: Did you look at other orders or were you so...

MW: No.

KG: So you went down to Kentucky and didn't do a lot of acting down there or you did some?

MW: No acting down there. I did a big Christmas pageant, things like that.

KG: What direction were you going to take, you went into teaching. Were you teaching Speech and Drama or...

MW: It seemed to be my destiny. And I enjoyed it.

KG: What grades did you cover?

MW: Well, it wasn't exactly grades, no it was departments, the departments were all in their field of expertise. You know, like, Sr. Mary was in the history department, I was in the theatre department, and on like that.

KG: But when you were teaching before you came here was it elementary school kids, I'm sorry, I should have explained that more, middle school or high school?

MW: I taught, I taught in the Loretto Academy in Kansas City, and the Loretto Academy in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was fun, and several years in an inner-city school, DeAndreis, I don't know if you've ever, it's gone now.

KG: Is that here in St. Louis?

MW: Yes, it was in St. Louis, it was an inner-city. It was just the beginning of the mix of black and white and that was really nice, a thrill.

KG: I see.

MW: So I taught there and then I came to teach at Webster.

KG: Did they ask you to come here or did you request it?

MW: No, at that time the way that, you were appointed to a place. You didn't ask questions of why and wherefore. You were obedient and you went where they told you to go. And they sent me to Webster.

KG: That must have been a nice appointment.

MW: Yes, I was glad.

Marita Woodruff Interview/March 8, 2004

KG: What was the status of the theatre department when you got here? What did you find?

MW: M. McClain and Miss Sankey, no, they were gone by the time I got here.

KG: They were gone.

MW: It was an all-women's school, we worked hard to get men, and they came, were in shows, there were some very good people. And we had a technical director who did all, who built the sets. It was very active.

KG: Now you were performing was it the stage that's in the Administration Building, was that your...

MW: That old old stage

KG: That must have been a challenge.

MW: That was, it was pretty, pretty adequate, I think. But you see we did a lot of shows.

KG: Was there a lot of women interested, maybe not in majoring in it, but in just performing?

MW: Yes, I think so. Of course there were the people who were really interested, like Marsha Mason, Mickey Dwyer who's in charge of the daytime soaps, and things like that. So there were several that really went on.

KG: And you went on and you got your master's degree at St. Louis U. and then you also went on and studied at...

MW: I got my master's degree while I was teaching full-time.

KG: Oh, my.

MW: And going to class on Saturday, Saturday mornings and I was trying to write my thesis so I didn't have to take any exams. If I could make a thesis I didn't have to take exams. What I was trying to do was to get through as fast as I could. But it was constant work, you just taught full-time and then you went to school full-time, it was busy.

KG: The story of a junior faculty life, right. And you also went to Yale for a year.

MW: Right.

KG: That's a very renowned drama school.

MW: I wasn't, I was a sort of a, what should I call it, visiting professor. Just worked as much as I could and that was good but I was sort of alienated by the fact that I wore a habit. And they didn't understand that at all, they had never seen one in a theatre before, so it was kind of lonely, actually. They didn't know what to do with me. But it is a good school.

KG: And opened you up to other ways of doing things.

MW: Oh, absolutely.

KG: Well, we talked a little bit about the early sixties, the middle sixties, there was so much going on and I've listed a few things here. Theatre Impact, which was the summer stock, summer program. How did that get started?

MW: We decided we wanted summer theatre. Nobody else was doing it and so Wayne Loui and I did it together. And it was out in Kirkwood Park, you know where that is, it's got the big hill and we did a show a week. The neighbors, everybody loved it and filled a full house, it was on a hillside and people came full house every night. It was very...And this was the beginning, the result of this was demanded that we get male actors who were really good. And we'd use them, sometimes if we could get them, we'd use them in the winter as well. But we developed a clientele of male actors who wanted to be in theatre so that was a big big help to us.

KG: Were these like local amateurs or students at other universities?

MW: Or professional....

KG: It must be challenging staging a play outdoors.

MW: The reason I started laughing is that I was just thinking of the planes, and then it would be the trains,

KG: And the locusts.

MW: Yes, but everybody loved it, you know. It went on for five years, and in a sense it laid the groundwork for the Hilton to happen, it made it possible to talk about it at least.

KG: You certainly built up that community interest in theatre and brought it to the people.

MW: There were very few summer programs in theatre. The Muny Opera, of course.

KG: Right.

MW: But that was about it.

KG: But serious theatre, serious plays, the classics. I'm always interested in that how popular Shakespeare is, performed outside in the summer, there's something about it.

MW: Well, we did, we didn't do a Shakespeare, well, not sure that we did a Shakespeare every summer but we did three or four plays every summer and many of the Shakespeare plays. It's fun. I think we charged four dollars, and if kids or young people would come to the box office, "We really don't have any money, can we come in?" we would say oh here, go on. One of those neighbor things.

KG: That's great.

MW: Yes, it was.

KG: Well, you mentioned bringing men in and Webster started officially enrolling men in 1962 so that must have made your job a little easier.

MW: Very definitely.

KG: Did it have any other impact on the theatre in terms of play selection?

MW: Oh sure, to be able to do a play that needed men and you had the men and we did lots of musicals. And what happened, I think we sort of did develop a good reputation and there were a lot of young men who were interested in theatre and wanted to do theatre so they would come and be in the musicals and really supplied all the males that we needed. And some of them were older, you know, the right age for what we wanted and... Marsha Mason's father, she admitted this in the interview so I guess I can say it, he was an alcoholic and his friend was an alcoholic. They used to sit down in the basement under the theatre and wait for their time to come on and it was about *Playboy of the Western World*, this great Irish play. By the time they got off the bar and into the theatre it was really for real.

KG: You never knew what lines were going to come out.

MW: No, they did it but I didn't know how much they had drunk downstairs... You wouldn't know it now and I don't think they use this now but we had the stage and then we'd go down into this dungeon where we had dressing and all that stuff, it was really. It was a dungeon.

KG: I want to make sure your microphone doesn't get, okay, yes, I just wanted to be sure it doesn't get covered up. Well let's talk about the new theatre because it must have just been, having come through a building project with this new library I know the details that had to be discussed and the planning, and you were really front and center for the Loretto Hilton planning.

MW: Well, we got a Ford grant, you know about that and that enabled us to go to all of these great theatres, like the Guthrie Theatre and the Stratford, all around the place. So

we went and had a great time. The wonderful story I love, Tyrone Guthrie, he was such a darling, you know of course he was a great, he brought theatre to the United States. But we went to visit him and the Guthrie was just about to open but that didn't bother him. He came and talked to us forever and at the end of it we said "Thank you so much, Dr. Guthrie, and what is your fee?" and he said "Oh, I don't charge you guys. I'll go and do a play on Broadway and get some money but I'm not going to charge you". He was so dear. And I really should mention when I retired I brought a book with me, it was the biography of Guthrie, and in it I scotch-taped a lot of the letters we had back and forth, what he was doing in London and the last letter I got from him he said I wonder if I brought—he had a jam factory that supported this little tiny town—and he said I will put little jars of jam in every Hilton Hotel as a sort of favor if you will, if you will get me the directing and, if I can direct something. But then Conrad died and his son was not that interested. But the letters are wonderful. I don't know if they're still in the book or not but I pasted them in it.

KG: I think we might have taken them and stored them.

MW: Did you?

KG: But was there any particular one theatre that strongly influenced you or did you...

MW: Oh, yes, the Guthrie with the thrust, with the thrust stage, not just the Guthrie but the Stratford Ontario which Guthrie did. He brought the thrust stage to the United States and at the time the proscenium was the only stage that they used, anybody used, so we watched the Guthrie and we talked to Guthrie. He came to St. Louis and gave us all kinds of information and that's what started the trend in thrust stages.

KG: And this was the section of the stage that didn't just go across horizontally but thrust out into the audience.

MW: That's right. It thrusts out, that's why they call it.

KG: Did you find that, it must have been both challenging to work with but also opened up all sorts of creative...

MW: That's true. I'll never forget that moment. We had meetings constantly with the architects and there came that moment when the architect, now before we go any further we have to know, do you really want this to be a thrust stage? Because it was not anywhere else anywhere. And I sat there for a minute and thought, God, I don't know, I'm not sure this going to survive, whether it will be a popular way to stage a play. I loved it because of the intimacy between the actor and...but I remember sitting there for quite a while and finally saying yes, we'll make it thrust. That's the way it was.

KG: So all that weight was on your shoulders.

MW: And some of the people hated it.

KG: The people in the department?

MW: Just generally, it was too innovative. The actors loved it.

KG: Did you have much working with Conrad Hilton or did he just kind of show up and?

MW: Yes, no Jacqueline's the one you ought to get for that. Oh I'm sure there is, haven't you done something with her?

KG: I haven't, but I know other people did interview her for.

MW: She did a wonderful thing. We would not be what we are today if it had not been for Jacqueline, would not be. The theatre itself was a leap into well, let's do another one, let's build another one, it was the theatre that generated the idea of building buildings here.

KG: It really took it to the next level in terms of the facility, it's just wonderful. Looking at it today, is it still holding up well?

MW: Oh yes. And professional, well, they're all professional actors, and staging, everything about it is professional, wonderful for the students, they work together.

KG: That was really interesting to learn more about, once the theatre opened, you had the professional company and you then had the co-existence with the theatre department.

MW: It is the only undergrad department, I mean theatre that we know to be true where the professionals and the students work together, that students learn that way. Now there are graduate programs that have that kind of relationship but we're the only undergrad that have that program in the United States.

KG: Do you think that's because of a reluctance to let undergraduates have those roles or

MW: No, I just think that you have to be really committed to let that happen and that most of the schools find the student conservatories and the student theatre schedules to be adequate. But we're the only one where they work together all the time, the professionals and the students. Very significant.

KG: That's wonderful training for the students. The theatre did go through a difficult financial time. Is that an understatement?

MW: Yes.

KG: Did you have much direct involvement with that or

MW: Well, Michael Flanagan was, you've heard his name? I hired Michael Flanagan to teach in the theatre department and he was a wonderful director, a great comic actor, just wonderful, and I was very very fond of him. But he, well, he very nearly bankrupted the whole theatre department. He brought in beautiful, wonderful actors, but when it happened you know I went into Jacqueline's office and I said Michael is a great director, a wonderful actor but he is not a manager and he's not going to be able to do it. She felt that I was saying that because Wayne Loui was not the top man. I knew Michael too well, he was not a manager, he just, we were really bankrupt. But then there were other men who came in and took his place but it had been severely wounded by that time. That's when, well, I guess it was Leigh Gerdine said we can't do the Rep Theatre now. He called in the whole Conservatory, you know, and he said that and he was so hopeful. You walked out of there saying it's going to be okay eventually. Oh, Leigh Gerdine was just an amazing person, amazing.

KG: He had such an affinity for the arts, so supportive

MW: He was hurting just as much as we were but he was so strong and he said it's going to be okay, it's going to be all right. So we didn't have a season that year. But then we started slowly slowly coming back.

KG: And it seems to be very successful going as an independent entity but still maintaining the relationship with the Conservatory. It seems to be a good, good relationship.

MW: Well, and Peter Sargent came as a lighting designer and he gradually then became the chair and put some order into it. You ought to get Peter to tell his story.

KG: He would be on the list. He would be interesting.

MW: Oh, yes, he's ...

KG: I love to look at the pictures of Wayne Loui in the productions. He just looks like he's so into the characters. Was he fun to work with?

MW: I loved him, yes. He came as a teacher and he became, well together we ran the summer theatre and became very close. But that was the other things, that Michael and Wayne did not really get along.

KG: Really?

MW: He fired Wayne, but then he was fired and Wayne came back. That's our dirty laundry for the day.

KG: Well, that happens even in the best of circumstances. Well, the other major thing, backing up just a few years, was the transfer to the lay board and did that have any impact at all on theatre or was it mainly at the upper administration?

MW: By that time we'd survived our wounds and were but lots of alumni were just very distraught with the nuns. So we were, I don't know, hard to describe what. Because they thought Jacqueline was just going much too far, that she started it all...

KG: I wanted to talk a little bit about your philosophy on how you approached your teaching and directing and wondered what you looked for when trying to choose a play or plan a season.

MW: Well, I think when you plan a season you try to give as much variety as possible, doing a classic or doing a mystery or doing a melodrama or doing Shakespeare or doing Chekhov. We tried to get as much variety as possible and also look at the material that you have that might work well. So it has to be a very pragmatic choice in many cases.

KG: Do you also, are you also thinking okay of, okay I know I have these five seniors and they would be perfect

MW: Yes, that's what you do.

KG: Did you have any particular favorite period or playwright that you just felt comfortable

MW: Yes, I loved Chekhov and Shakespeare of course. Those would be the main ones. Of course, Stoppard is a wonderful writer, some of the contemporary writers are wonderful. There's that wonderful Rep show, that *Blue/Orange*, did you see it?

KG: No, I'm sorry I didn't.

MW: But they try to have a mix, you know, you're always thinking of the audience. Will they like it, will they, can they like it?

KG: I suppose there are some people who don't want to see anything new, they just want to see the old, comfortable favorites.

MW: Well, that's one of the moments when we did the production of *Normal Heart*, the one we mentioned earlier.

KG: The play about AIDS that you did.

MW: But it was causing a lot of furor among Webster Groves and people who didn't think we should be doing that with students. But it was one of the most meaningful moments for me, because I thought I am doing something that only theatre can do to make people realize and look at this and see what power the theatre itself can have on people and so I was a little bit, people were a little bit mad at me for doing it. There was a, one of the Missouri colleges wanting to do it and they called me and they said "Well,

what'd you do? How did you get the faculty to let you do this?" I said the faculty wasn't involved in making my decision. But that's typical of Webster and always has been.

KG: So you always felt you had a fair amount of independence

MW: Oh, yes...

KG: Do you think that, having acted yourself, that helps you as a director?

MW: Oh, yes, I think, I didn't act that much at all but in school, certainly it was good but directing was what I really liked.

KG: Is there a difference in how you approach it when you're directing a professional company as opposed to a student production?

MW: I didn't actually teach that many professional productions. It was at the very beginning but it was a struggle to do it. I really loved teaching students and working with them.

KG: I wonder how you go about quote grading acting, you know, as a teacher when you have to assign a grade. It seems so subjective. I guess, did you have some sort of a checklist or, how did you approach that?

MW: Well, we had, the Conservatory and they still do it to this very day, wrote paragraphs describing your work, etc. and you need to work on something something. So they were like letters that we wrote, no grades.

KG: Oh, okay. So not letter grades—ABC—but descriptive

MW: But mainly we wrote, as you say, these letters.

KG: Did the Conservatory always have the setup it has now where you have to audition to go to the next level or to be accepted?

MW: Say that again.

KG: I'm sorry, don't students have to audition or have portfolios to be able to go to the next level, to continue on.

MW: Right. They're either very good and continue on or they're not good and

KG: And they're out. I see.

MW: There's no in-between there, well the in-between is that we wrote these letters every, you know, twice a semester and they know they're in trouble.

KG: That must be hard to

MW: Except that if they really work then they can go

KG: Did Webster through the years, in terms of recruiting students, were more and more minority students sought out?

MW: We tried so hard to find minority students. There were many sometimes. Right now they're having a hard time finding men that are interested in doing theatre because you don't, you have to be really good to make it. We tried very hard to find minority students. But again, there aren't that many of them.

KG: Well, and I guess the economic uncertainties of the acting career makes it a tough choice for any

MW: Doesn't help.

KG: It would seem like that would open up a lot more productions or plays that you could cast...Did you intentionally look for materials to cast minorities or did you try to do totally blind casting?

MW: That's right. That's what we did. Never thought of it. Well, I know at least one time we had a very talented black student and so we did *Othello*.

KG: Are there any particular aspects of directing that you find difficult or the most challenging part of it?

MW: It's hard to describe. I used to spend hours and hours and hours on the script trying to get the paper in my head, you know, and I staged every inch of it before we got into rehearsal. But then, that would change. But first you had to get it up there somehow. And then you started changing it and bringing it to its most theatrical point. So you do many changes and the actors are doing that too. And I think teachers, the most important thing the director does is establish this contact with, this bonding with the actors, and working together, and establishing a trust in their work, a belief in them. And you fall in love with the script and follow up with the actor. They're very close, very close.

KG: Did you actually do a storyboard or anything, did you actually sketch things out beforehand or just kind of work through it?

MW: No, I would just wrote notes, like cross down stage left. Cross back. What's the motive here? Why did this happen? Just tried to explore everything about that play before we start. And then you work with the students, and say now what do you think this is about, why do you think this working. It's fun.

KG: Well, speaking of students, of course, your most favorite, famous student is Marsha Mason, I suppose. You know I know in looking at photos we have in the archives she

was in quite a few productions, like *Electra*, and *Bell, Book and Candle*, and *The Crucible*. Was there a particular role that you thought, that was your favorite of hers or that you thought she really nailed?

MW: I think she did a beautiful job with *Playboy*. In fact, that's when Mr. Hilton fell in love with her.

KG: Oh, really.

MW: He saw her do that show. She did a beautiful job on that. She's was a good actress.

KG: I think a lot of people who know her from movies and TV sitcoms don't realize that she had the training and she did some of the really serious plays.

MW: Of course, Neil Simon fell in love with her and wrote these plays, these movies for her specifically. And I know, I was in New York at the time and Marsha was doing a show that was just down the street and so I wanted to see it so I just went on down. And after Neil Simon was there and so they became, even though they got divorced, they became very good friends and he was very supportive of her and it was pretty nice to see.

KG: Are there other students that come to mind that you really have favorite memories of, favorite productions?

MW: Oh gosh.

KG: You've taught a few students over the years...

MW: Well, I think, I do think that Norbert Butz who is taking lead roles on Broadway now, today. I was casting for *The Normal Heart* and I just walked into Peter's office and said I won't do it unless I can get Norbert. And Norbert was a sophomore and I said he's the only one who can do this role. So Peter said okay and he was. He had come from a family of 11 children and his brother's working too and doing very well. So they were very good. In fact, you might want to check out with Byron the programs that we have for the Conservatory. There's one page that tells you what all the students are presently doing. And that might be interesting just to give you an example. It's amazing how many of them are working in theatre, not necessarily in acting but in other things. But there's always one page, and so-and-so is doing this, and so-and-so is doing that.

KG: That's wonderful. Do you have any thoughts about the current state of theatre and theatre education, what you're seeing now on the stage?

MW: Well, I'm very pleased with it. I haven't been to New York for quite a while. Yes, I think it's doing well.

KG: Certainly the production of the Rep this fall, I forget the name of the first production...

MW: *Metamorphoses*?

KG: Yes, what did you think of that?

MW: Well, I thought it was wonderful. I'm not sure what all he was saying but I loved the way he said it. It was so funny to see something like that on the stage and have, witness this faith of images, the beauty of images, the beauty of the players themselves, you know. It was such a vital production. Once in a while you get something that's really special.

KG: When you go to a play can you just sit back and enjoy it or do you find yourself saying what's she doing at stage right? She ought to be over here.

MW: Oh yes I do. It happens. When I feel that way I just concentrate on it and play around with it. But when it's a good production, I let myself enjoy that and appreciate the art like, did you see *Blue/Orange* at the Rep? The acting was so good in that, I thought. I just let myself enjoy the acting.

KG: So if it's a good production you don't notice the technical aspects as much?

MW: Tend not to, but if they're wrong you do notice them.

KG: I wonder what would have happened if you had gone to Peter at some point and said I want to do this play, I want to build a swimming pool on the stage.

MW: He would have said yes, okay, just don't drown.

KG: Do you actively work with the costumers and the lighting and the set people? We always think of directors as being so involved with the actors but all of these elements

MW: You have production meetings daily practically, where you all meet together, you all talk about how it's going to work, this or that or whatever. Very much a collaborative spirit. You wouldn't be able to do a production without them. Well, you see on the pictures in the Rep, when they post the designs up of the costumes, see that's what you see when you're working.

KG: Oh, okay. That's what they show the director. Do you actually go then and see the clothes as they're made, that is get the colors and the fabrics.

MW: It's exciting.

KG: It's a tremendous job...

MW: It really is. Well, we do have a, the Rep has a really good production staff. I think the sets are just wonderful.

KG: Oh, they are.

MW: And the costumes. And it's stimulating for the students to see that, to be involved with the pursuit of excellence. We assume they will be, you know. They learn that and that's the only way to be in theatre, it's what so exciting for the students.

KG: It sends a message that no matter what level of theatre, you know...

MW: Well, and they get to meet the actors too.

KG: Do you wish you could just be starting your career now or are you kind of glad to have it behind you?

MW: No, if I was back in my youthful days I think that I'd want to start over. But I miss it to this day.

KG: Miss the hustle and bustle of...

MW: It's exciting.

KG: It is exciting. It's thrilling to see when it all comes together on the stage. Do you have any feelings about where theatre at Webster should go from here in terms of the Conservatory? Are there changes you'd like to see?

MW: Well, I don't know. I think that pursuit of excellence is very much always there, there's always a unity and bonding among the faculty members. And I think it still exists, it's, comparing it with other departments, even though they also must really be very excellent in what they do, like Sister Mary, but what happens between people in a play. They become so close, so bonded, so you really have a unity there that is priceless. It isn't like other departments, you know, you go home in the afternoon or the evening and you write your paper. You hand your paper in and you get criticisms, recommendations, and so on. That's good and that's important and that's the way you learn. But it's not like going back into rehearsal right after school is out, after classes are out, and working from seven to eleven six days a week. The bonding that comes with that is what's so vital about theatre.

KG: Do you find that your students remain close even after they've graduated because of that bonding?

MW: In some cases, yes. You know if they ever are around they always drop by.

KG: Well, this has been really interesting to hear about this period of history, as I told you on the phone, it's one thing to look at pictures or to read student newspaper articles but it's another thing to listen to someone who's been there and lived it and talks about it. I want to thank you for your time this afternoon.

MW: I'm so sorry I came late.

KG: Well, better late than never, right? And we will have these recordings and memories to share for generations to come long after you and I have gone on and so I want to thank you and I think we'll just stop right there.

MW: Okay.