

Wright State University

CORE Scholar

Theatre, Dance, and Motion Pictures Faculty
Publications

Theatre, Dance, and Motion Pictures

2-5-1984

George Grizzard: A Conversation with Abe J. Bassett

Abe J. Bassett

Wright State University - Main Campus, abe.bassett@wright.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/theater>



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), [Dance Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Bassett, A. J. (1984). George Grizzard: A Conversation with Abe J. Bassett. .
<https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/theater/8>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Theatre, Dance, and Motion Pictures at CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theatre, Dance, and Motion Pictures Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact library-corescholar@wright.edu.

GEORGE GRIZZARD

A Conversation With
Abe J Bassett
at Wright State University
February 5, 1984

Introduction

American actor George Grizzard's first connection with Wright State was in October, 1974 when he directed William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, the dedicatory production of the Creative Arts Center's Festival Playhouse.

In January 1984, he returned to Wright State to create the role of Dr. Martin Dysart in the very successful Department of Theatre Arts production of *Equus*.

The following summary of his film and theatre career is from Wikipedia:

Grizzard memorably appeared as an unscrupulous United States senator in the film *Advise and Consent* in 1962. His other theatrical films included the drama *From the Terrace* with Paul Newman (1960), the Western story *Comes a Horseman* with Jane Fonda (1978) and a Neil Simon comedy, *Seems Like Old Times* (1980).

In more recent years, he guest-starred several times on the NBC television drama *Law & Order* as defense attorney Arthur Gold. He also portrayed President John Adams in the Emmy Award-winning WNET-produced PBS miniseries *The Adams Chronicles*. In 1975 Grizzard played a Ku Klux Klan attorney in the NBC-TV movie *Attack on Terror: The FBI vs. the Ku Klux Klan* about the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi.

Grizzard made his Broadway debut in *The Desperate Hours* in 1955. He was a frequent interpreter of the plays of Edward Albee, having appeared in the original 1962 production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as Nick, as well as the 1996 revival of *A Delicate Balance* and the 2005 revival of *Seascape*. He also starred in *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*.

In 1980 he won an Emmy for his work in *The Oldest Living Graduate*. He starred as reporter Richard Larsen in *The Deliberate Stranger*, a television movie about serial killer Ted Bundy. He won the 1996 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Play for *A Delicate Balance*. Additional Broadway credits include *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Country Girl*, *The Royal Family*, and *California Suite*.

He would also appear in *The Golden Girls* as George Devereaux, the late husband of Blanche Devereaux; as well as Jamie Devereaux, George's brother.

Grizzard made a guest star appearance in the outdoor drama, "The Lost Colony," as the comedy character "Old Tom" on Roanoke Island, North Carolina in the summer of 1984. The show was directed by Joe Layton.

In 2001, Grizzard played Judge Dan Haywood in a stage production of *Judgment at Nuremberg* opposite Maximilian Schell under the production of actor Tony Randall. Grizzard appeared as Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at the Kennedy Center in 2004.

Grizzard's last film appearance was in Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers*.

He was inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame in 2002.

> > > > < < < <

AJB: George, I would like to start by asking questions about your early influences. Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, your birthplace—about 13,000 people—was that a nice place to grow up?

GG: I didn't grow up there. I left when I was about five or six and grew up in Washington, DC. I used to go back there and visit my grandmother in the summer. I went to part of the first grade there and that was it.

AJB: Your mother lives in North Carolina now?

GG: Yes. We lived in Washington for about twenty years and then she and Dad went back. And now she's a widow and lives there near a little town when she grew up: Snow Hill.

AJB: What was your first theatrical experience? When did that occur?

GG: I don't know. I don't know what that means. I don't know whether it means the pilgrim pageant in the third grade or what, you know.

AJB: Or even earlier than that...anything that was the trip wire in your life that led you to become an actor.

GG: I have no idea.

AJB: But was that third grade pilgrim pageant a memorable experience?

GG: Yes, because we had our pictures in the paper. I was about three feet tall and I had a pilgrim outfit. And there it was in the Washington paper. That was pretty exciting.

AJB: Do you have any [artistic] genes from mother, dad, or from grandparents, was there anyone there with an artistic bent?

GG: Well, I had one grandmother who was a great storyteller and I stayed with her a lot when I was a kid. The rest of my family, I don't know. I can't think of anybody. No, I don't think so. My father was an accountant. My mother won a medal for recitation in high school; that's about as dramatic as she got, I suppose.

AJB: Did she tell you about that experience?

GG: Yes.

AJB: ...when you were young?

GG: I guess. I don't know. I don't remember. I was an only child; that's where my theatrical imagination comes from. I used to make up playmates. It was a very lonely childhood so you make up people to fill your life. And so I had a very active imagination. And that's probably more influential on my being an actor than anything, the fact that I was an only child and lonely.

AJB: Did you read a lot?

GG: I guess so. I don't remember.

AJB: Well, of course, unlike kids today who have television to occupy their time, there was no television.

GG: Oh well, yes, I certainly read more than modern kids do, I think.

AJB: In high school, do you recall taking a drama class, a speech class?

GG: Well in junior high school, the high school class came over and did a teaser; they were doing *Charlie's Aunt* at the high school. They came over and one assembly they did a scene from it. And so I got a date and she and I went to see *Charlie's Aunt*. And I thought, boy when I get to high school I want to be in the drama club.

AJB: Were you?

GG: And I was. And the second year, I was vice-president. And the senior year, I was president. And I was in the plays. They did only one play a year.

AJB: Those were good experiences?

GG: Yes, I guess all three years I was in a play.

AJB: Now, you went to summer stock in a suburb of Alexandria, Virginia when you were about seventeen.

GG: The year I got out of high school, yes, I was just seventeen. And that was my first time when I . . . I think at the end of the season they divided up the profits and I got something like twenty-three dollars for the whole time. But I was only an extra in *The Corn is Green* and then I played a little part in *Kiss and Tell*, which was a comedy, a 40's comedy. And then I went to college and then each summer I'd come back and get a job during the day in an office with the government usually in Washington. And then at night, I would go out ten miles into Virginia and work in this amateur stock company.

AJB: The same one?

GG: Yes.

AJB: Those were great learning years for you.

GG: I guess. I don't know. I guess they were. Of course, it was all experience. But I didn't know anything and they didn't really teach. You would get a director who would be kind of stimulating and he would show you something about timing, comedy timing, or something. I didn't know anything about make-up and nobody bothered to tell me. I didn't know you put powder on over grease paint. I used to go in looking greasy and shiny all the time. It was a barn. I mean there were cows outside in the pasture. And the make-up room was the stalls. It really was called Crossroads Theatre. But it was an old barn, a cow barn.

AJB: But you were having these summer experiences and you had a good experience in high school with the drama club and yet when you went to the University of North Carolina, you went there in advertising. Did you have a chance to study acting or theatre or drama?

GG: I took one course in the drama department indirectly. It was the only 'A' I got in college. And then I worked in radio drama a lot—acted and directed and wrote for radio.

AJB: Did you take any art or music classes, do you recall?

GG: I took a music appreciation class, but I never had much training or background in music and I didn't take to it very well. I don't know much about classical music and loud music of any kind really depresses me. So, well, rock and roll and opera are bad for me. It's just the decibels that get me. I can't take big sounds.

AJB: In College, which of the courses that you had, do you recall most fondly?

GG: In College?

AJB: Yes.

GG: I don't remember any very fondly.

AJB: Do you remember any teachers that you had either in junior high, or in high school or in college that were a particular influence?

GG: Well, Foster Fitzsimmons at Chapel Hill taught that directing class that I took. And Earl Wynn was teaching, but Earl told me that I had about—and he laughs a lot now—and he says he told me that I had a snowball's chance in hell of ever becoming an actor. And he taught radio speech. You know, everyone had to sound like Martin Gable in those days; he was the great radio actor. And I sounded like Henry Aldrich a lot and so I never could get a job on the radio. I had to go on the stage.

AJB: That first summer stock, did you audition or simply show up?

GG: Yes, I auditioned. I had auditions in Washington and I went and I got a—I think I still have it—a little piece of onion skin paper with the typed instructions of how to get to the theatre to do a final audition or something. And that was about the most exciting thing that had happened to me in my life up to that point. And I went out and got the part I wanted in this play.

AJB: If you could look back and see yourself at that age, how would you describe yourself then? What qualities as an actor or a person made you castable?

GG: I don't know. I was small and blond and cute and very enthusiastic and untrained and like a sponge trying to learn. And I just had a great deal of enthusiasm. And I had a wonderful time. I mean, I was really pretty nice around the theatre because I had such a good time there, as opposed to being in the office all day.

AJB: Okay, so you were there for several seasons and then you graduated. And almost a year after you graduated from North Carolina you were at the Arena Stage.

GG: Yes.

AJB: So you must have learned a great deal or been awfully good with not having a terrific amount of experience being young, about 22, and still being able to get into the Arena Stage Theatre Company.

GG: That was just a fluke. Also during the year, I worked in advertising. After graduation I did five plays with the different community theatres in Washington at night. And I found I was having more fun at night than I was in the daytime. And I was advancing in the ad agency and I had become almost a junior account executive. I had taken on an account, and had built a campaign for it, and it had been sold to the client, and I was still making thirty-five dollars a week so I thought it was time they gave me a raise. The old man said, "I don't have time to talk about it." And I said, "Well, I don't have time to come in anymore." And so I quit and he fired me. And he came back and said, "Get out. I told you I fired you." And I said, "No you didn't, I quit."

And I was in such a fury that I went right down to the Arena and it was just luck and timing because they had a play coming up and they had a part they hadn't cast. It was a young cowboy. And I auditioned for it the next morning, a Saturday morning, and on Tuesday I went to work as an actor. And so I was out of work one day, Monday, I guess. And it was just a wonderful timing thing for me. God just said, "Now is the time, quit advertising." And, you know, I've been lucky in a lot of timing things like that.

AJB: You've been acting for thirty years now professionally, and you said that you have never been out of work more than three months.

GG: I think that's about the most, yes.

AJB: That's phenomenal.

GG: Yes, it is. And then I turned down a great deal of stuff that I didn't feel I could contribute to. I started doing that very early, as soon as I had enough money to be able to afford to because I just didn't want to get typecast. You know, you do one thing on Broadway and then that's all you get sent. And so I kept saying no. After I did a big melodrama, the first one, *The Desperate Hours*, I wanted to do a comedy. And so I held out. I didn't do a play for about two years, I guess. And then I got in *The Happiest Millionaire*, which was a big comedy, and that ran a year on Broadway and a year on the road. And then I wanted to do a serious drama. And so I got *The Disenchanted*, which I really was excited about because I had fallen in love with the novel back in 1951. And Budd Schulberg and Harvey Breit made a play of it. And I got back from the road tour of *The Happiest Millionaire* and I was on my way to Europe and my agent said, "I got you a reading for it." And so I went up there and read for them. I told Budd how much I wanted to play that boy and how I had empathized with him for seven years. And I got that part. It was my first play with Jason Robards and Rosemary Harris. And we did that for about a season, I guess, on Broadway [1959].

AJB: You said last week that there was a point in your career very early on that you knew that you were going to be able to make a career out of the professional theatre. Do you recall that time?

GG: I don't know when it was, no. I guess it was when I stopped saying, "I'm just an actor" and started saying "I'm an actor." And I don't know when that was.

AJB: Your formal study in the theatre was limited to, besides working with directors and working with other actors—Sanford Meisner and Alan Schneider.

GG: Yes, Alan is a director, but he was also a wonderful teacher while he was directing. He had a great deal of influence over my career and the kind of actor I became. And Sandy was wonderful acting teacher. I learned more the first three months I studied with him than I had ever known about acting. And then I went back to the Arena for two years and worked with Alan. When I came back to New York and got in a Broadway play, I went back to Sandy and studied with him some more. And he started a classics workshop because he said, and he was quite right I think, that the reason we are up to our ass in English actors, is because American actors aren't trained to play the classics. So he started a workshop in the classics and we only worked on the big plays.

And he brought Phillip Burton over from London, who lectured to us and demonstrated Shakespeare. And we worked on Shakespeare, and Sheridan, and Shaw, and the big plays. That lasted for about a year, I guess until Sandy went to California to be head of the new talent for Twentieth-Century Fox.

And when he left town, I wrote to Kazan and asked him if I could come observe at the Studio. And so I went to the Actor's Studio for about a year and watched the classes. I never

participated because I was just an observer. But I listened to Lee lecture. And I watched some private moments and acting exercises and, mostly, listened to Lee pontificate about acting. And he would be absolutely brilliant for about five minutes and then he would go on for forty more minutes and you didn't even want to be an actor when he got through. I mean, he would just rant and rave about whatever was on his mind. It was his podium for speaking his mind. And I said to one of the guys I was sitting next to, a wonderful actor who has now become a director, "What do you do?" He said, "You listen for five minutes and then you work a crossword puzzle." I looked around and there were a lot of people working crossword puzzles. But he was wonderful for some actors, Strasberg was. I think though that we didn't learn the communication of speech and how to do the . . . I mean, we do American plays very well but the other plays, the foreign plays, we don't do too well because we're not trained for it. I don't know why. I just think that.

AJB: Do you see that changing among the younger actors?

GG: Not necessarily because now films and television are where the audience is. And the audience has gotten so huge because of electronics. And there is very little big acting done on that little screen. And so the training for Shakespeare and the other big playwrights is not as necessary, because the market place does not give you a place to do those things. And I have a friend who says, "The only people who enjoy Shakespeare are the actors doing it; it really is boring to the audience." And for the most part it is.

AJB: You spent two seasons at the Guthrie: the inaugural season there and then a second season also.

GG: Yes, the first two seasons.

AJB: Were you pretty excited to go there at that time?

GG: Oh, boy! I sure was, yes.

AJB: Did that end up being a good learning experience for you?

GG: One of the best because Guthrie wouldn't let me do what I had been doing—contemporary American drama. He wouldn't let me be in *The Glass Menagerie* or *The Death of a Salesman*. I was in the Shakespeare and the Moliere and the Chekov and the Ben Johnson and the Shaw. And that was great for me because I got to stretch and found muscles I didn't know I had.

AJB: You mean that figuratively speaking?

GG: Well, also vocally. I did *Hamlet* and that was tough enough and *Henry V* the next year was vocally even tougher because it's like one battle cry after another. I didn't have the voice for it. But at least I had the chance to have a bash at it and try.

AJB: Did you voice develop?

GG: It did a bit, yes. I worked with Arthur Lessac before I went out there to play Hamlet and he was a great help to me.

AJB: Have you incorporated a lot of Lessac's technique into your acting now?

GG: Not into my acting, no. I used his warm-up exercises. I am amazed that none of the kids in this show do a vocal warm-up. I am the only one in the play that does a vocal warm-up before the show at night. I think it's a shame because there are a couple of them that don't even know how to breathe. I mean, they can't get the words out because they don't have the breathing technique to get the language out.

AJB: I watched you during performance one night and you kick with your diaphragm before every speech. You do it instinctively and it's what singers do and it's what theatre people do when they need to support their voice. But it was fascinating because I could see the muscles on your diaphragm ripple your shirt.

GG: The shirt's too tight then.

AJB: It was a little loose actually. You don't need, for your career, to come back to college campuses, and yet in the last year, you've been back to three campuses: Viterbo, Yale, and Wright State. Why do you do that?

GG: Well, I find it very stimulating. I find working with the young people a terrific experience because they're greedy in their minds. I mean. They want to learn. And there's openness and a willingness to try things. It also makes me go back to basics, which I tend to forget when I work in films or on the stage. It makes me go back and explore because it's not only acting, it's also a teaching experience when I'm in a college. And I keep saying, "Why does this work? Why doesn't this work?" And it makes me explore deeper than I would normally, probably. And I find a lot of things about myself. And sometimes diminish my performance because I'm so wanting them to be good because I'm wanting them to take what I've had to teach and be terrific at it. So, I'm concentrating on what they're doing.

AJB: You were really terrific. You gave the kids the stage when it was their turn. You diminished your prominence. You didn't insist that the stage was yours always. I think a lot of professional actors wouldn't do that.

GG: Well, they're bad actors then. Rosemary Harris and I have done, I think, seven plays together now and she's wonderful. When it's your turn she turns her back to the audience and goes "Ba-Dum", you know. And I just think that's what we do for each other. I worked with some actresses that will not give up the focus even when they don't know what to do with it.

It's not theirs, and they don't deserve it, but they've got to keep that audience looking at them. And they're boring people that I won't act with again. I don't have time for that.

AJB: In working with our students in "Equus," just generally, not thinking of specifics, what do they need most to understand, to work on, and to improve? Is there one thing that they are most lacking?

GG: I don't know. I think that the preparation before the performance. I mean, there's a lot of screaming and yelling and giggling, and stuff going on in the dressing rooms. Maybe they don't need as long a time to prepare as I do. But there's a lot of irreverence for the theatre, for the temple, for the place in which we have come to work. It's still a lot of fun and I don't want to do anything to destroy that because I remember when it was fun for me. I mean, it was just great fun to be in a play. It's not great fun to be in a play anymore; it's a terrible burden especially if you have to star in it and carry the evening. And I feel obligated to do that as well as I can, so I get testy when people play their rock music back stage after half-hour or giggle and run around and cut-up. And they're just still having fun. I mean, it's not a profession for them yet.

AJB: When I first called you and suggested some plays and you said yes, you would like to come, could we find a play? And we had a whole number of plays and mentioned Martin Dysart in *Equus*, your first reaction was negative. And then a month later a couple of months later, it was an okay vehicle.

GG: I think you were the one who wanted to do it so badly, I said "Alright."

AJB: Well, having said "yes" to it then, there came a time where you were intrigued by the role?

GG: Yes, I think I always was. I wanted to play it ten years ago, whenever it was when I first saw it, ten or eight years ago. And then it doesn't happen, you kind of think, "Oh well, right, that's alright. I don't need to do that." But then I started looking at it and it had something to say that I believe in, something I could contribute to, and illuminate in some way through my life. And I enjoyed doing it. It's an interesting part.

AJB: Were you ever frightened of the role?

GG: No, I don't think so. It's pretty hard to get frightened after Hamlet.

AJB: Do you consider it a difficult role?

GG: Yes.

AJB: In what way is it difficult?

GG: Well, because the play is about Martin Dysart. And the story that tells his story is so much more interesting than his story. The doctor's story is told through his helping this child and the child's problem is so much more interesting to an audience than the doctor's problem. That's the main problem with the play—to keep the doctor's story the dominant story because the other one is theatrically so much more interesting than his.

AJB: You amazed me about one thing. Your agent's assistant had said, "Oh, George is a quick study." You really are a quick study. You learned that role very quickly and it's a very big role. Have you always been a quick study?

GG: Yes. I worked a lot on the big speeches and the big soliloquies that I have before I got here because they were the things that didn't involve other people. And I thought, "How am I going to learn all of these?" . . . because I was working on a film at the time. But I knew for a long time that I was going to do this, if it was at all possible. So I kept reading the play, and reading the play. I would try to read it at least once a day no matter where I was just so that I got familiar and knew the progression of the story and where the big speeches were and when I could rest and when I had to pull it together to do another big scene. You have to pace yourself in a play that goes on like this.

AJB: After the show opened, did you continue to read the part?

GG: Yes.

AJB: Did you read all of it? What would be your regimen once the play opens?

GG: Well, in the beginning, I just read the play every day to find out what I wasn't saying that Peter had written. I mean to make sure that I was saying it as he wrote it. And then when we had two days off, then the day before we did it again or the day we did it again, I went through the play totally again, just to make sure that I would be familiar with the lines. It will be a delight to do one more performance and then not have that over my head, I'll relax a lot. You know, it's a big thing about the theatre. You wake up in the morning and it's half-hour. I mean your whole day is headed toward that performance at night. You have to save yourself and yet you have to not just sit at home and be a hermit. It's that kind of discipline that is getting boring to me. It's more fun now to do films where you do something different every day. But the burden of having your work at the end of the day is that everything you do is headed for that eight o'clock. You miss a lot of stuff.

AJB: Are you saying that in your own career, you would be less interested in accepting another Broadway role than you would a film role?

GG: Yes, indeed. But I think I would like to do something there because I haven't done anything there in about four years and you have to keep your papers, you know, or they run out. You know, I use the time when I was doing a play a year on Broadway and now I haven't

done one for four years. And I would like to do another one soon just so that I keep my reputation as Broadway actor. That's where I live.

AJB: Back to half-hour again. That's your concentrated preparation time although you've implied that you're really thinking about the role from the time you get up in the morning. But during half-hour, what specifically do you do?

GG: It depends on the play.

AJB: How about Martin Dysart?

GG: Well, there's not much I can do as far as privacy is concerned because I share a dressing room with nine guys. I go off in a room by myself and do a vocal warm-up for about ten minutes. And I try to not bring them down if they're having a good time. And I try to establish a rapport with Kenny because he and I have so much to do with each other in this play. And I try to stimulate him and calm him down and get him to do his preparation so that he comes on with a right amount of intensity building a relationship because I think that's important to us in the play. The play is basically about the two of us. And so I've spent a great deal of my private time with him trying to get to him, trying to get to know him, you know, spending time with him, getting him to trust me, and my getting to know him better. And we've become good friends. I'm just crazy about him.

AJB: Then there is a bonding that has occurred there.

GG: Yes.

AJB: Even in a professional play, is it often necessary to develop, at least for the duration of the play, some kind of personal relationship with the people you're most playing with?

GG: Yes, I think so. It is for me. It's the same thing with an agent. I mean, I have to have an agent that I have a friendship with, a trust because I can't deal with people that I can't trust. And sometimes it works on stage. I've been in plays with people that I have never had a rapport with. But I've done three plays with Jason and I just love acting with him. And, I've said, I've done two with Maureen Stapleton and about six with Rosemary Harris and there's a trust with them; they're just wonderful actresses. The better actor you work with, the better you are.

AJB: I said to the kids that your work on *Equus* for them was an acting clinic. They had a chance to watch a professional at work. And the thing that amazed me when I said that to a couple of the students, that you're really doing fundamentals out there. The key to acting is not some great magic thing that exists in the sky that you have to work fifty years at. What you do as an actor is pretty fundamental. And you said—is there anything else? I guess what I meant by that was that terrific concentration and concentration on the moment, on what the character wants. Am I correct now? Am I describing what it is that you do in your acting?

GG: I guess so. I don't know. It's very difficult for me to talk about acting, I don't know. You have your body and your voice and then you have your personality or whatever else communicates to an audience. And some nights I can tell when it isn't happening, I am not communicating. I mean, I can hear them rustling and coughing and I know that I'm not concentrating on communicating with them because usually, if I do, I can control them, make them listen. And some nights when they don't, I don't ever blame them now. I used to always blame the audience, and it's not the audience, it's me, I realize that now. I am the stimulus; they're the response. And if I don't stimulate them, they don't respond the way I want them to.

AJB: When you are on your longer speeches, do you act with images going through your mind? Do you see pictures?

GG: I don't know. I guess I do. I see what I'm talking about. Sometimes I see the subtext, or some subtext I have put into it.

AJB: In rehearsals, there were many times when you would say to one of the student actors, you would chide them because they weren't connecting for you. You were saying, "I don't believe you." What was it that you were saying to them? That moment wasn't true as far as you were concerned?

GG: Yes, that they were just saying the line. They didn't say it because of the reason. Many times you have to stop and say, "Why are you saying that? Do you realize why you are saying that line? What do you want when you say that?" And that still happens. There are certain times that I get bored in the play and I know it's because the actor's boring. He hasn't gotten it off the page yet. And there are some people that don't have any instinct for acting or directing. They have no creativity in them. And that's what's tough, for those people to realize that they don't have that type of mind. Like, I don't have the mind to be a stage manager or a technician. I don't have that kind of mind. And there are certain people who don't have actors' minds or actors' instincts or directors' instincts. And if you don't have that, you can just work forever but you're not ever going to get above the certain place. You can get stuck at it maybe. And some actor told me "There is a place in the theatre for people like me." And maybe he was right, but not in the kind of theatre I want to work in.

AJB: Are there any particular roles that you would still like to do? Any theatrical roles?

GG: I can't think of any. I'm sure there are going to be some written that I would like to play. I enjoy working on new plays so that you discover and create a person out of a piece of paper or a playwright's mind, help him to interpret what he had in his mind. That's interesting for me. I always thought I wanted to play Benedict, but I'm too old. And I'm certainly not interested in Lear or Prospero. I am not really interested in playing Shakespeare anymore. It takes such great energy to play Shakespeare because you not only have to communicate a human being; you have to translate a foreign language at the same time.

And I'm not interested in Eugene O'Neill. I mean, I did *Touch of the Poet* last year because of that man. I've just been through a bad experience and I thought something to say

about false pride and that's what [Major Cornelius]"Con" Melody, is about and that's why I wanted to play that part. But I'm not interested in playing *Long Day's Journey into Night* or doing *Whose Afraid of Virginia Wolfe?* or any of those parts that have been played and played wonderfully. If I've seen something played really well I don't have any desire to play it. All I care is that is it done well once somewhere. I don't have any selfishness about saying, "I could do it better." It's just if I see something that I think wasn't well played. Sometimes I get interested in thinking, "Wait a minute. I think there's another idea there that someone hasn't explored."

AJB: You're going out to Hollywood to finish the filming on the Robert Kennedy TV special and then you're heading back to New York. Are you looking forward to going home?

GG: Oh yes. I've been in a suitcase for four months. I'm interested in getting up to the country and sitting down for a while.

AJB: And staring at the outdoors?

GG: And getting out there and cutting down some things and cutting up some things.

AJB: Tending your garden.

GG: Yes.

AJB: Do you do a lot of reading?

GG: Yes, well, not a lot. I read to put myself to sleep mostly. I've never gotten to the place where I can just enjoy sitting down and reading the middle of the day. I always think there is something I could be accomplishing and reading is not an accomplishment to me. I read some modern mysteries and a couple of best sellers. But I've been going back and reading. I'm now reading Sinclair Lewis's "Main Street." And last summer I took Kipling and I read a couple of books I hadn't read of his. The summer before, I took Anthony Trollop and I read "The Barchester Novels." That's a wonderful escape to read wonderful older, classical novels because you get transported right back to nineteenth century England with Trollop.

AJB: Do you like reading poetry? Do you ever read poetry aloud?

GG: No. Robert Frost, I used to. I was hooked on him for a long time. I finally did an evening in Pittsburgh with the Pittsburgh Poetry Forum where I got Coleen Dewhurst to come and we did an evening of Robert Frost. And it was strange because we had one rehearsal, I went over to her farm, which was not too far from me in the country, and we took some poems. And then I think I was in Washington and she was in New York and we flew to Pittsburgh and met in the afternoon and had a run-through and did it that night. Everybody said, "How long have you been on the road with this?" It was, "Well, we've been on the road about an hour and a half, actually." She was wonderful in it. I picked Frost because he was, I guess, my favorite American poet. So we had a successful time with that I think.

AJB: Would you like to do that again sometime?

GG: No. I don't like to do things twice. I don't like to see movies twice or read books twice. There are too many things to do to do things twice. I have friends who go to the same opera year after year after year, and I keep saying, "Don't you know what it's about by now? I mean, how many times do you have to hear somebody sing it?" I'd rather go and see something new. Maybe that's my Aries mind. That's why I can't stay on Broadway long. I think, "Well, I've done it, I had a wonderful time rehearsing it, and I've opened, now I want to leave, I want to do something else. You can't on Broadway. You have to stay a year if it's a success.

AJB: It's pretty hard to get a contract without committing yourself?

GG: Well, if you're going to taking billing, I mean, if you're going to take billing over the title, you should stay a year because they're going to advertise that you're in the play.

AJB: If the right vehicle came along, would you accept a year's contract?

GG: Well, the last time I wasn't able to stay a year. I loved working at The Circle in the Square because that was only three months and I knew when it was going to start and I knew when it was going to end. But with Broadway, you don't know. It could run four performances or four years. I don't know how long I could stay anymore because I don't really enjoy New York that much. I would certainly give it a try if it was a part that I really wanted to do.

AJB: You implied the other day that you thought you might spend in the next year more time in Southern California.

GG: I'm going to try to, yes. Because I've been in eight or nine movies and I've never been in one that I thought I was very good in. I've got to learn to work faster because they're always shooting it while I'm still rehearsing it. I'd like to do some films and I just have to learn the technique because I'm use to three weeks rehearsal and we don't get that in Hollywood.

AJB: Would that mean going out and getting an apartment in California?

GG: No, no, I wouldn't go there unless I had a job. I mean, I've been going there for twenty-five years, but I've always stayed at a hotel or an apartment in a hotel. I would like to find a series that I could do. I would like to spend six months to a year there working in television because I've lost my recognizability because I quit doing television about ten years ago, the episodic television. I was doing movies of the week, and specials, and things. But eventually, the networks get to the place that they won't hire you for that unless you are recognizable and so they pull people off the series and put them on the specials. And so it has gotten to be vicious circle where if you don't do television, you don't get to do television. So I'm trying to get back into it so I can get a crack at some of the parts I would like to play.

AJB: Clifford Steven is your New York agent. Does he have a shop in Hollywood also?

GG: Yes, he has an office here. David Eidenberg runs the office in California and he's been very helpful. Since I don't live there, I need very strong representation in California. And David's been very successful for me in that way.

AJB: You have a lot of friends out there.

GG: Yes.

AJB: So when you go out there life is, probably not as good as in Connecticut, but it's different in some ways.

GG: Yes. I enjoy it. I enjoy the weather and I enjoy car life. I mean, I don't like taxi and bus life like in New York because there I never take the car out of the garage. I just take it out to get to Connecticut and back. But I love having a car and being up in Connecticut and driving around. And California's that way, there's a mobility that I enjoy. And I enjoy doing a play in California because the days are free. And California is about days; it sure isn't about nights. And so when you're working at night, that's fine. You have your days free to enjoy the good weather and see people.

AJB: Do you see yourself sometime simply saying, "Okay, I have earned a living, I've earned a livelihood for my life, I've accumulated enough money that I can retire, and I'm not ever going to do a play again, or be in a movie, or do a television commercial, or an episode?" Or do you see yourself working until you are an old, old man?

GG: I see myself working because I have an emotional need to work every now and then, I mean, even though I don't have a financial need anymore. And then times I think, "Oh my God, I do have a financial need," but I've pretty lucky about that. But occasionally I just think, "I've got to work. You know, I've just got to do something in the theatre."

AJB: You came here to Wright State to direct *The Time of Your Life* and that was ten years ago this coming October. Have you directed since then?

GG: No.

AJB: Was that, as you look back upon it, a pleasant experience?

GG: Yes, very much. And I've been offered things to direct and I keep saying, "I want to direct." I call up agents and I say, "Listen, do you have any plays? Send me some new plays and let me see" because people are always finding an excuse not to do it. I think maybe I'm afraid that if I start directing I will be known as a director and forgotten as an actor. I don't know. I cannot figure out why I refuse to direct. But I really think I want to and I know that's what I want to do because I enjoy it. I don't know if it's giving up the spotlight as an actor or giving up

the money as an actor or what it is. But I know that it makes me happier because I don't have to do it every night and I get to be a part of the whole creative process. And I enjoy directing because I think I've worked with so many directors that I think I know now what makes a play work and what keeps a company up, you know, on its toes, and how to make the different departments work, and being in charge and working with a designer, and not what you did, which I disapproved of, you just let the designers do what they want instead of saying, "Now, that's wrong," because I asked you to look at those horse heads and you didn't and they look like pterodactyl they don't look like horses at all and you wouldn't go to that woman and say, "That's wrong." And you see, I think when you're a director you have to do that and you have to say to the set designer, "That's not the set I wanted. Do it over." And this has to be done. This is what I mean by "doing your homework" in every department.