Jean Marshall Byers was born in Cedar Rapids on December 7, 1919. She has resided most all of her life in Cedar Rapids; she worked one year in Chicago following graduation from Northwestern University and spent several years in Monrovia, California, when she worked for the Daily News Post.

Jean's parents were Verne Marshall, a Pulitzer prize winning journalist, and Frances Fiske Marshall. Her mother died when Jean was eight and later her father married Clementine Robichaux. On November 16, 1946, Jean married Frank Byers, Jr.

In this history, Jean shares her father's views on the United States' involvement in WW I, America First and No Foreign Wars Committee, and his years with the Gazette. She also gives anecdotes about the many famous people with whom her father brought the family in contact and gives background on the Shakespeare Gardens at Ellis Park.

INTERVIEW TOPICS
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

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1--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
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1,2-3,7-8,21, --Where did you go to school?
23,26 1,3--Are you married or single?
3--Did you raise a family? How big?
1,3,15--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

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50--Trolleys (the Interurban)
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--Chautauqua
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--Symphony Orchestra
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4-- **Eisenhower**
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14--**Former Iowa Governors: Hickenlooper, Harring**

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JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview With
Jean Marshall Byers

Conducted by Laura Derr
May 7, 1985
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Transcribed by
Ann Bey and Renae Blasdell

Junior League of Cedar Rapids
Oral History Project
Interview With: Jean Marshall Byers
Conducted By: Laura M. Derr
Date: May 7, 1985
Place: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Jean Marshall Byers, 150 Thompson Drive Southeast in Cedar Rapids. This is Laura Derr and I am in the home of Jean Marshall Byers on May 7, 1985, at 150 Thompson Drive South East in Cedar Rapids.

LD: Jean, will you first of all tell us when you were born and where.

Byers: I was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, December 7, 1919.

LD: What years have you lived in Cedar Rapids during your life and when have you been out of the city?

Byers: I've lived all of my life in Cedar Rapids until I went away to college, which was in 1938 until 1942. Following my graduation from Northwestern University, I worked for a year in Chicago. I guess it was until about July of 1943 that I remained in Chicago. That fall, I moved to Monrovia, California, where I remained for several years--three or four. I'm not sure. I worked on the Daily News Post, a newspaper there in Monrovia, California.

LD: And then came back to Cedar Rapids?

Byers: Yes, came back to Cedar Rapids and was married in the fall of 1946.

LD: And you've been here ever since then?

Byers: I have been here ever since. We live in Florida by virtue of the fact that we are now Florida residents, but I still consider Cedar Rapids my home.

LD: What are your parents names and how many generations has your family been in Cedar Rapids? I suppose that would be different for your mother and father perhaps.

Byers: My parents both lived in Cedar Rapids. My grandfather and my grandmother Marshall both lived in Cedar Rapids. My grandfather and my grandmother Fiske, my maternal grandparents, moved to Cedar Rapids when they were first married.

LD: So, your family goes back several generations.

Byers: Yes.

LD: And your father's name and your mother's name?

Byers: My father's name, Verne Marshall. My mother's name was Frances Fiske Marshall and my step-mother's name was Clementine Robichaux Marshall.

LD: I want to ask you more about your parents in a few moments. Where did you go to school in Cedar Rapids when you were growing up?

Byers: I went to Buchanan grade school, which is now the Ambroz Center, I believe. And to McKinley Junior and Senior High School. It was all in one then.

LD: That would have been, how many grades then were there at that time?

Byers: I started in seventh grade at McKinley Junior High School and graduated there.

LD: Where did you live when you were growing up here? What street?

Byers: Most of my life I lived on Knollwood Drive--two houses, one at 530 and one at 532 Knollwood Drive.

LD: When were you married and who did you marry?

Byers: I married Frank Byers, Jr., in November, on the sixteenth, of 1946.

LD: How many children do you have?

Byers: I have three sons.

LD: Are they also here in Cedar Rapids?

Byers: No. My youngest son is David, who does not live in Cedar Rapids. He's in Los Angeles.

LD: As an adult in Cedar Rapids, can you just name some of the organizations that you've been involved in. I know that you've been a volunteer in a lot of different things. Did you actually carry on any of your career as a newspaper woman?

Byers: Not after I was married. I carried on in a lot of other things. What is the question?

LD: What kind of volunteer activities did you get involved in?

Byers: Well, let me think. I became a provisional of the Junior League as a bride and did a good many things within the League. I was

on the board several times. Just what all of you are now doing in Junior League...lots of hard work, to begin with. When the children were quite small, I was quite active in Republican politics. My husband was a precinct committee chairman in two of the neighborhoods in which we lived--one of them which was on Cottage Grove Avenue, outside of the city limits, encompassed seventy-five square miles, our precinct. It was Marion Township. So, we covered that alone, primarily, and that was a lot of hard work, but it was fun. My husband was very, very active in the Eisenhower campaign. He was the Second District chairman for Iowa. I did a lot of things during that campaign, including handing out buttons on street corners for Ike and I was the one chosen to present six dozen American Beauty roses to Mamie Eisenhower during their whistle-stop in Cedar Rapids when he came in on his campaign train. My husband was on the train and I was the one who presented the roses to Mamie, with a little speech. That was fun! I was in White Cross from the very beginning of my married years. I was in the White Cross by virtue of the fact that I'm the daughter-in-law of Myra Byers, my husband's mother, and we did lots and lots of things. White Cross members are either daughters or daughters-in-law of former members, or granddaughters now. I was chairman of the White Cross Charity Ball two years. I was decorations chairman I don't know how many years. In general, those of us at that time when I was first in White Cross, those of us who were young enough to really be active putting on the ball were called upon quite often.

LD: That gives us just a little overview and we'll come back to some of those things with more depth, but I'd like to shift for a moment to your growing-up years. I guess we could say, generally, that was late...

Byers: The twenties.

LD: Twenties and thirties. When you were growing up here in Cedar Rapids, you were on the Southeast side and you were in a neighborhood that I'm sure at that time had lots of children around.

Byers: Yes.

LD: What were the favorite activities when you had free time as a child? What were the things you did for fun?

Byers: We played a lot of baseball in our backyard and all kinds of childhood games. I'm trying to remember--kick the can, Annie, Annie over. We had a large garage and played all kinds of games with balls over the garage and back and forth. My father built a tennis court for us in the backyard one summer when we were away at camp, but whoever was engaged to build the tennis court simply did not know that you needed outside room beyond the lines. So, therefore, the tennis court never worked very well and it was a great disappointment to all of us. Let me think. I don't know by childhood what years...

LD: I guess I'm thinking of the elementary schools years, primarily. I'm wondering if you had as much organized activity as youngsters seem to have now days.

Byers: No, we didn't have, but I did go away to camp when I was eight. My mother died when I was eight. That summer, I believe it was that summer, my sister Barbara and I went to Stoney Ridge Camp, which was succeeded by Hitaga. Stoney Ridge was at Stone City, very close to the artist colony that Grant Wood, at that time, was very active in.

LD: So he was there when you were at camp.

Byers: Yes.

LD: Did you have any overlapping time with him or interaction?

Byers: I'm not sure if I did at that time during the time I was at camp. Yes, I did have lots of time with him, which I can describe to you later.

LD: Your household, then, was a little unusual as a young woman because with your mother's death. There was a period of time there where your dad was alone with you.

Byers: My maternal grandparents had lived with us for a period of a year or two before my mother died. My mother died very suddenly. I was the oldest of four little girls. When she died, my grandfather had died previously, but my grandmother remained with us. We did have household help in those days. With a very active father, we had to have some help in the house. My grandmother was a very, very wonderful, but very fragile lady. She saw to our every needs. She was an absolute, marvelous person--absolutely marvelous person. She was there until my youngest of those four girls I mentioned went away to college. Meanwhile, my father

did remarry when I was thirteen, so my step-mother and my maternal grandmother together took care of us.

LD: Well, you must have had to take a roll, too, in the family, with your younger sisters.

Byers: Not really. I just recall being told that I was to set an example for them. I really did not have anything to do with trying to raise them.

LD: During those years when you were going to Buchanan School, what was a typical school days like? Was it very much like it is now? Did you go home for lunch?

Byers: Yes. We did go home for lunch. I don't believe there was a lunch program in those days. I remember, primarily, recess and how much fun it was..slidding on the ice down the hill. It was next to the side of the building and things like that.

LD: I'm sure you walked.

Byers: Oh, yes, we walked. We were only two and a half blocks away.

LD: Do you have particular teachers that made an influence on you that you still remember?

Byers: Yes. Yes, but I don't suppose they would be anyone anyone would remember today. Miss Bink was the principal of Buchanan School while I was there. I believe her first name was Minnie, Minnie Bink. The one in particular, whose name I can't recall, was the second grade teacher who remained in touch with our family for many, many, many years--ended up in the Ft. Dodge nursing home

and I'm sure is still not living, but I can't think of her name.

LD: When you went on to McKinley, what was that school like? It has certainly managed to survive over the years, but as an important school, but the district around there has probably changed a good deal since the time when you were there.

Byers: The district was not good, in terms of poverty versus middle class. I do remember, because most of our friends did live in the Franklin Junior High School district. I shouldn't say most of our friends, but a good many of them did. At one point in time, and I say "we" speaking primarily of my one sister, Barbara, who's just a year younger than I, would beg my father to let us transfer to Franklin. In those days, it could be done by paying tuition, by petitioning and then paying tuition. He would never consider letting us transfer. He said, "You must learn to get along with everyone and there is certainly no difference in the quality of the education between the two schools and that's what you're going to school for." And it turned out to be a very good thing for all of us.

LD: Your father was so active in the community. Was there a lot of entertaining that you were required to do at home or that your grandmother or your aunt, pardon me, your maternal...?

Byers: There was just the ordinary amount of entertaining in the social sense. There were very many prominent people who did come to visit my parents and who would either stay in our house, which was not the rule, usually. I will give you a rundown in the

memories of mine when you want it of very special things.

LD: Why don't we talk about that now, because as a youngster, I'm sure that there were some people who made quite an impression on you.

Byers: Yes, there were. The first one that I remember, and who still stands out really in my mind as far more outstanding than anyone was Madame [Ernestine] Schumann-heink. She was an opera singer with whom my father had been associated during the war years. He had volunteered in 1914, I believe it is, I can check that in a minute--as an American, he volunteered in the French Army as an ambulance corp driver. . .he and Robert Toms of Marion, Iowa. They went off together. Well, anyway, when the United States got into the war, my father came back and enlisted in the United States Army. Somewhere along the way--it was in February of 1916 that my father went to France and drove a front-line ambulance in Verdun. When he came back in December of 1917, someone in Washington who had discovered that he, as an Iowa editor, was enlisted in the 34th Division at Camp Cody in New Mexico, and that he had been a private in the French Army and during that time had taught for the Red Cross between his service in the French Army and his enlistment in American Army, helping the 34th Division to establish a record in the purchase of Liberty Bonds. Well, to make a very long story short, the War Department discovered whom he was during this period and during their effort to sell Liberty Bonds, pulled him out of his company in New Mexico and sent him all over the United States with various public officials and others, telling how essential it was to buy Liberty Bonds, contribute to the Red Cross and

to do everything possible as citizens to help in that war in Europe. The government finally directed him to accompany Madame Schumann-heinke because she was attracting enormous crowds as she contributed her services to the government. Incidentially, during that tour with Madame Shumann-Heink , he appeared in Madison Square Garden with her, he describing scenes at the front, she singing in her glorious, marvelous voice. They apparently attracted crowds in every city, all over the United States, from the east coast to the west coast--New York, Washington, California. I don't know how many years later it was, but I do think Barbara, my next younger sister was about five years old when Madame Schumann-Heink came to visit us in our house at 530 Knollwood Drive. The special memory of that visit is that Barbara, who was already a musician, was learning to sing "Trees". "Trees", I guess, was one of Madame Schumann Heinke's very favorite war songs and one that she sang during that Liberty Bond campaign. So, she sang it for Barbara and Barbara sang it for her and I remember tears streaming down Madame Schumann-Heinke'sface, listening to Barbara.

LD: Was she just traveling through or did she make a special trip to...?

Byers: I really can't remember, but I do remember at the time, she gave me a beautiful gold locket, which I still have. I don't know why I was chosen as the recipient of the locket, except that I'm the oldest of the four girls.

LD: Were there others that ...?

Byers: Yes. Let me get my little note on that.

LD: We were talking about people that came to visit your father during the years that you were growing up here. What other thoughts can you share?

Byers: Well, among others that probably is more well known than some of the others, two of them would be Will Rogers and Sinclair Lewis.

LD: Did they just drop by?

Byers: Will Rogers was a friend of my father. I really don't know where the relationship began or how, but he was in town for some sort of an appearance and came and spent the afternoon. I was quite small at the time, but I remember sneaking around and trying to eves-drop on the conversation. I remember Will Rogers out in the front yard, throwing a ball to each of us and in general clowning around as he was noted as doing, a great humorist. I don't really remember Sinclair Lewis other than his facial features. Now, this is odd that I don't remember more about him. He was a very unattractive-looking man.

LD: That impressed you as a child.

Byers: Yes. And Tom Mix, who was a famous cowboy, came to Cedar Rapids. The rodeo was sponsored in Cedar Rapids by somebody, and I can't tell you who, but among the famous cowboys who came were Tom Mix and Bob Crosby. We became very well acquainted with Crosby family. They had a daughter about my age and she came over and played with us in our playhouse and that sort of thing, while her father was riding. He was a nationally-known cowboy. Herbert Hoover figures very prominently in my life, and in my father's, in particular.

I do have some memories of him, not at our house...when he came, and was at Brucemore.

LD: Was that in the twenties?

Byers: It was in the twenties. I believe...

LD: It was the campaign in 1928, wasn't it?

Byers: I think it was after he had been nominated, after he had been elected, but before he took office. We were in Florida that winter and my father went off on a four-day deep-sea fishing trip with Herbert Hoover while we were in Florida being taken care of by my grandmother and some household help. I remember very distinctly being taken to Brucemore. My youngest of the four girls, of my three sisters, was too young to go, but Patty, Barbara and I were all taken over to Brucemore and Patty sat on then, President Hoover's lap, and he made a lot of remarks. There's something in one of my newspaper clippings about all this, but I just don't know where they are.

LD: You must have been about nine or ten years old at that time.

Byers: Yes. Yes.

LD: Do you remember physically? How did he impress you? Can you describe him?

Byers: He appeared to me as a very gentle, very loving person. Of course, he was trying to be nice to three little girls. It was a little different. Those are my memories of him, other than when he became an old man and came back to West Branch. I was there for,

I believe, it was his 80th or 85th birthday celebration. I can't remember which birthday it was.

LD: Was your father involved in working for him during that campaign?

Byers: Yes. Yes. We have a file of correspondence that was carried on back and forth between my father and President Hoover during those campaign years and through the many years until President Hoover died.

LD: Did your father actually hold, like a campaign chairmanship or something?

Byers: No. He was always in the background, never wanted or had any ambition to hold political office. He was a speech writer, among other things, for several presidents...for President Landon, with whom he traveled--I mean, candidate Landon. He traveled with him on his campaign. That question stumps me because there were others--Hoover was one. I guess it was just Hoover and Landon, probably.

LD: He was not involved when you were involved with the Eisenhower campaign?

Byers: No, because he was a great supporter of Senator Taft, with whom he was acquainted.

LD: So, he didn't get too involved...

Byers: No. He felt very strongly that Frank and I should follow our own convictions, so we simply were on the opposite side of the

fence. Our man was nominated.

LD: Did you often have state legislators in your home? I mean, your Dad was active in...

Byers: Yes. He was a very good friend of, of course, it was United States Senator Hickenlooper. Hickenlooper then was at one time governor of Iowa. He was a very good friend of my father. Even though my father was a very, very staunch Republican, he was a friend of Herring, who at one time was governor and I can't remember if he was United States senator after he was governor, but I do remember going to Washington with a then Senator Herring, arranging a special private viewing of Mt. Vernon for us, and we were taken in a chaeffeurred limousine from the Senate chambers out to Mt. Vernon and given a tour just all by ourselves, my parents, my sisters and I.

LD: Did you ever have Senator Byers over when you were growing up?

Byers: Yes. My father and Senator Byers were friends. I remember him as a very distinguished, very impressive...

LD: His photographs are. They look like Craig to me.

Byers: Oh, really. Do you think so?

LD: Oh, I think they look stunning. What a resemblance there.

Byers: Well, I think both Craig and Scott do look like him, especially in his younger days. Yes, I do remember him, the distinguished Senator Byers very well.

LD: Before you ever knew how important that family would be in your life.

Byers: Oh, yes. Yes.

LD: Did your father have ambitions for you when you were growing up beyond the traditional ones?

Byers: Not really.

LD: Not even as the oldest daughter in a household of daughters?

Byers: No. He was very proud of all of us because we each had some little distinctive characteristic that he thought could be developed. I guess mine was in writing, but I never pursued it beyond the newspaper job I described to you earlier. I did finally become a feature writer. The Monrovia News Post is one of the Copley chain of papers. That was lots of fun because I was able to interview movie stars and often times movie companies would come on location to Monrovia.

LD: It's kind of hard to believe that we got you back in Cedar Rapids. That would be kind of...

Byers: Well, that was an interesting life, but it was during the war years and, you know, social life was very limited there, or anywhere then.

LD: I'm shifting a bit here. I'm really ready to go on and talk about your dad's role at the Gazette. Jean, how long has your family been involved with the Gazette?

Byers: My grandfather was with the Gazette Company from the early 1900's. My grandfather Marshall became the editor of the paper in 1914. The history of the Gazette involves him in that he had been a long-time superintendent of the Composing Room of the Gazette Company. It was in 1914 that he bought an interest in the paper and became its secretary and its editor. He remained with the paper until he died. This is my grandfather--until 1932. He name was Harry Lincoln Marshall.

LD: When did your dad become editor then?

Byers: My father became editor before he enlisted in the French Army, which was in February of 1916, so he carried the title of editor and co-publisher from the very beginning of 1916. Of course, my grandfather had the ability to carry on in his absence.

LD: Sure. Then when he came back he just took up...

Byers: Yes.

LD: Was he writing and sending back things to the Gazette during the war?

Byers: Yes. All of his letters were published and there's file of them right there on that chair, which I have not reviewed at all, but they are fascinating...scenes at the front.

LD: When he returned from the war, he was obviously still a young man at that time. How did he develop his attitude as to what an editor's role was? I think that the kind of belief and values that he put into that, you know, and made it a personal kind of life cause is not always so typical. Was your grandfather--did

he have the same attitude toward the role of an editor?

Byers: Yes, in a way he had. I was reviewing this morning something that I had never remembered even owning and these are some letters that my grandfather had written to my father while he was in France, describing what was going on in Cedar Rapids. This is in 1916. And some things that were happening at the newspaper and referred to the rival paper, which was the Tribune, Cedar Rapids Tribune, which the Gazette later bought. Those two papers merged. I guess I really don't know much about my Grandfather Marshall's style. He was not a writer, but he wrote for the Gazette. In fact, he refers to it during my father's absence, but my father developed a column which was on the front page always, called "Current Comment." I don't know what year that began being published, but that is one thing that made the paper more personal, I guess, as far as readership was concerned. It was considered a very dynamic paper and not in the true style of a newspaper chain, for instance. It was very much more personal and...

LD: It was probably the first thing that everybody read when they picked the paper up because it was right there on the front page.

Byers: Well, that's what I've always been told. Of course, as I grew up and read the paper myself, naturally I would. As I say, it was called "Current Comment" and it was his views of current events, primarily, but it was an editorial. It was, I don't know how to really describe that. It was very policical in some

ways because he took up every issue that ever came along and took a stand on it.

LD: I was going to ask you about that. Did he have special pet causes or certain areas that he was really interested in, or did he just follow the current day and remark on things?

Byers: It really depended on the, as you say, the events of the day. There were some very outstanding ones in which he, more or less, carried the flag himself, not only through the newspaper, but through speech making and radio addresses. Among the very first of these campaigns, so to speak, was, and this is when I was a baby, so I don't have any personal recollection of this--but it was through the newspaper initially and then he got into political battles about it, concerning pasteurizing milk in the state of Iowa.

LD: I've read about that.

Byers: Where did you read about that?

LD: That was part of the newspaper. Now, that was not in Cedar Rapids, so he must have...

Byers: He was in Cedar Rapids, but this was a state-wide issue.

LD: It was a state-wide issue and he just...

Byers: Very many of the things in which he was interested were not local. It was mainly his concern to keep the city of Cedar Rapids a clean and wonderful place in which to live through

his efforts by publishing everything that ever happened in the city in the paper, good or bad. He always reminded us that if ever we were to get into trouble, it would be on the front page. He would never protect us.

LD: That would certainly affect your behavior, wouldn't it?

Byers: But that wasn't a threat, it was just really, and I shouldn't state it in those words, it's just that I'm saying it just as an indication of how forthright he was. He wouldn't cover for anyone.

LD: He had a very democratic attitude towards what the news was, then in that sense?

Byers: Yes, he did.

LD: What are the campaigns or crusades that you remember personally that he was so active in?

Byers: I suppose the first one in which he was extremely active--and I was sixteen at the time--was when he ultimately won the Pulitzer Prize as a result of his efforts to do everything possible to try to clean up the graft in the state of Iowa.

LD: Now, this was a surprise to me. I've always thought of the state of Iowa as being kind of one of the neatest, cleanest states in the Union.

Byers: Well, prior to 1936, there were some years where, beginning in Sioux City, Iowa, as I recall, there were all kinds of underworld people around and gambling and illegal slot machines and all kinds of graft. The slot machines were illegal, but they were

as I recall, but there was all kinds of graft and all kinds of payoffs and all kinds of everything, which led right up to the steps of the state house, according to the indictments. The Lt. Governor of Iowa, thanks to my father's efforts, was indicted. It was quite a serious...

LD: Far-reaching.

Byers: Yes, and it resulted in many, many threats to our family. We had body guards. Well, as I say, because he was literally fighting the underworld through the newspaper and beginning through the newspaper, but often times he would have to go to Sioux City, under guard, and was run off the road one time, he and two body guards who were accompanying him in the car. They were doing everything to try to wipe him out, to try to get rid of him. They didn't want this effort to succeed.

LD: Do you know how he got his initial--he obviously had to have factual evidence. Did he develop some relationships with people who were involved and protect them as sources? I'm just interested because investigative reporting is fascinating.

Byers: Yes. It's fascinating. And, yes, of course, he did have to have back-up material, but I can't tell you whom. If I could look through all my records of the storeroom, I'm sure I could come up with that. The Hoover Library has a record of all of this. Because of his friendship with Herbert Hoover, I was approached, I think it was probably fifteen years ago by Robert Wood, who was then the assistant administrator of the Hoover

Library. When he found me, he told me he had been hunting over several years trying to find an heir of Vern Marshall. He didn't know that I lived in Cedar Rapids. Anyway, it was just at the time that we were storing monumental boxes full of interesting things about my family, but we were at the point where we were going to have to do something with it, when the Hoover Library came along and took absolutely everything.

So they had it manuscripted, and all of that is on record there.

LD: How did--you were 16, you would have some pretty strong memories. How did all this effect your family life? How did your Grandmother feel about this, for instance?

Byers: For a while it seemed exciting. But we were not allowed to play croquet in the side yard, which was very fun to do in those years, without Mr. Haverly, the body guard, standing in the yard with us. So I would say for a while it seemed a little bit exciting, but then we got very bored with it. We had to be driven to and from school; I was at McKinley then and couldn't walk to or from.

LD: It affected you personally?

Byers: Yes, it really did.

LD: You were also involved--before we pass on--were there any special ceremonies that were involved when your father received the Pulitzer? Were you aware of the significance at that point?

Byers: Yes, I was. I'm trying to remember--I don't think there was any ceremony. My brother has the award, which is beautiful, gold

circular coin, really, embossed with the words "for the most distinguished and meritorious service offered by a newspaper man in the year 1936.

LD: Now this is for the United States?

Byers: Yes.

LD: Not just Iowa?

Byers: No, that was a national award. And it was because of that campaign.

LD: Right. And as a result of that, I presume, a lot of things did change?

Byers: A lot of things did change. Everything changed. No more graft in Iowa and no more illegal slot machines. He literally cleaned up the state of Iowa and that was his effort and his goal.

LD: What was your involvement or memory of his 'no foreign war' campaign? Because that one wasn't quite as successful, was it?

Byers: Well, no it wasn't. My father ended up in March, I guess, it was 1941 before war actually broke out, having a very serious nervous breakdown. It would have continued had it not been for the failure of his health.

But there were many, many facets to that, in that there was another committee called America First which most people in my era remember. And America First was formed before the No Foreign War Committee. The No Foreign War Committee was formed, really,

at the behalf of Colonel Lindberg and Wendel Wilke. I was in college at the time--I was at Northwestern University. I do remember some exciting times at the Pi-Phi house when my father would telephone and say, "There is someone here who would like to say hello to you". And it was Wendel Wilke and I would shout to everyone in the house to get on all the extensions and he would be very gracious about talking with all of us.

But they convinced my father that another committee--and he agreed--that would be a little more active with someone who had a little more push. It was Colonel Robert Wood of the Chicago Tribune who was the chairman of America First, also a friend of my father's. But he did take on this job of heading up another committee, and through the newspaper it was widely publicized and it did require raising a lot of money. I would never say that it failed, it served a purpose, but it did really end in failure of my father's health. With that the committee was disbanded.

And I should say, too, that Lindberg and Wilke both eventually backed away from it. They really didn't want to be involved once they got my father into it. So he had support, he had wonderful support from some very prominent people in New York, and he traveled all over this country making speeches constantly, including at Fanual Hall in Boston and at Constitution Hall in Philadelphia where he debated Dean Acheson, who later became Secretary of State.

LD: I presume that that was a time that was a popular stand? especially with Pearl Harbor . . .

Byers: Definitely. My father just simply had a very, very strong attitude of patriotism stemming back to his days when he fought in that war--first in the French Army and came back and tried to raise money for this war effort in World War II. He did that all with the idealistic viewpoint that it was the war to end all wars and save democracies. He simply was not convinced that our physical entry into the war in Europe was going to really do that much to help. He, in recent years, has been vindicated for that attitude. But at the time he was strongly criticized.

LD: He had no fear of taking a controversial stand?

Byers: Not at all. Never would he back down if he was convinced that he was right.

LD: Do you find that as time goes on that in many of those things that he was such a controversial figure, have become kind of accepted goods? Most of the things that I have read about--misuse of contract labor in Iowa prisons . . .

Byers: Things that he fought against.

LD: Things that he fought against are things that we now just accept as being right. It often takes a person of strong character.

Byers: I think his contribution in that direction really did--you mean, don't you, that now we take it for granted that everything is all right now?

LD: Yes, things that he should have done. That's so often the case, after the fact.

Byers: Yes. There were so many other things, even after he retired, that I really can't recall without reference to a lot of notes to which I don't have access because they're all in the basement storeroom. Someday I'm going to try to write a book. I don't know, I'd like to.

LD: It would be wonderful, to capture your personal memories.

Byers: But I wanted to go back, for just a minute, to the No Foreign War Committee, because I was in college at the time. On the campus of Northwestern there was a branch of the No Foreign War Committee, as there was on many campusses. I have many, many letters that came from my father and lots of correspondence throughout the years that I'm awfully glad I saved.

Just as happened in many cases there were many vicious attempts to smear my father--calling him a Nazi. I remember seeing him in the Pathé's News one afternoon when I happened to go to a matinee in Evanston, Illinois at the theatre, and there he was. But being criticized for trying to keep us out of war, he was called an isolationist. He was not, he called himself a non-interventionist. He was not an isolationist he just wanted peace and he felt there was another way to accomplish it.

LD: I'm going to backtrack for a moment. You said you recall seeing him in . . .?

Byers: The Pathé's News. You've never heard of the Pathé's News?

LD: I don't know what that is.

Byers: Well, it is never shown any more in a movie theatre. But it always preceeded the major film.

LD: News scripts?

Byers: Yes. And the reason I say the Pathé's News, I guess there were other kinds of news but Pathé's which later became quite well-known as a movie camera usually sponsored the news that would accompany movies.

LD: Okay. And he was right there on the screen, right in front of you?

Byers: Yes, see that was before television so it was a lot more important in those days. Now it would mean nothing.

LD: What part did you play-- when you were on campus--in the committee?

Byers: I circulated petitions to get memberships, which was quite important. Not my part of it but enlarging the roles of the supporters of this effort. I gave a few speeches there at Northwestern, not very many, and very haltingly because I was not that articulate. What else did I do? I saw to it that the Daily Northwestern, which was our newspaper, carried news about the No Foreign War Committee and it's efforts at trying to just solicit people to help on the committee.

LD: Did you have any opportunity to travel with your father during that time?

Byers: Yes, very limited, but--I'm trying to remember--oh no, I didn't travel with him when he was doing his speech making, no. I

shouldn't say that. We would simply meet him. We would be suddenly telephoned from New York and--Barbara and I were both at Northwestern then--and asked if we could meet in Charlottesville, Virginia or somewhere where we could have some time together. But, no, I never was on the trail. My mother was, my stepmother and he, they stuck it out together. And one of my uncles, my Uncle Proctor Fiske, became active on the committee and went with them many, many places. It was a very arduous, strenuous time for them.

LD: If you had to evaluate it, what would you say was the impact of the Gazette during that time on the thinking--political thinking--in the state of Iowa? It was different than what it is now, I think.

Byers: Yes. I would imagine--I wasn't here as I told you--I was away at college during all of the month that this was going on. It was started in September of 1940 and ended sometime in the spring of 1941. Well, actually it started, I guess, before September, but I wasn't aware of it. I was away at camp. I continued going to camp as a junior counselor in Minnesota practically until the day I entered college. So I wasn't really aware of the actual beginning date of this. I'm sure it's in here somewhere in my notes. I've wandered, I'm sorry.

LD: The crust of my question was that I think that the Gazette must have strongly influenced the beliefs of the people in Iowa.

Byers: Well, that was the intention of my father. And it wasn't only through that campaign but the Gazette was widely read. It was a very colorful paper in those days.

SIDE TWO

LD: This is side two of an interview with Jean Byers on May 7, 1985. I'm interested in whether or not your father's role--whether you ever felt that it polarized the community? Were there times when you felt that there was hostility toward you as a family? Not just during the period when you were concerned because of the danger but within the community itself?

Byers: Yes, there was. There was a time during this No Foreign War effort that some of the advertisers in the newspaper--and this was what did lead to some problems between my father and the newspaper--some of the advertisers threatened to withdraw their advertising because they did not believe in this cause. I prefer not to name them. And along with that, the Gazette's building was threatened with bombing. My father, as I say, was accused my some people--and there were those representatives in Cedar Rapids who felt that he was on the wrong side. As a result of the accusations that came, and some even through Time-Life publications--talking about my father being on the wrong side and having Nazi affiliations and so forth and so on because he was trying to keep us out of the war--made him finally realize that he had to vindicate himself. He spent some time in New Hampshire after this was all over and he had more or less collapsed.

Looking at the family history he was determined that he was going to prove to people that he was a real patriot and he had, certainly, no intention of trying to undermine the government of the United States by letting us fall to the Nazi's. I just would like to

read you this one thing which was his philosophy. Let's see. In order that the students of Northwestern may know exactly what the No Foreign War Committee and its Chairmen stand for, three things and three things only. Are you interested in this?

LD: Sure.

Byers: Number one--prevention of the United States' and Europe's everlasting economic, political, and idealogical war which has nothing to do with either the extension or the destruction of the democratic way of life. It's causes were almost entirely economic and it is is a war that is centuries old with only an occasional armistice to permit the governments and people to replenish their strength and resources for renewal. A few years later of their--let's see--their strength and resources for renewal a few years later of their international slaughter.

Number two--and this is a misprint--giving away of our defenses.

Number three--defeat bill 1776 which creates a White House dictatorship. As you know, and I am now quoting him, I went to France in February of 1916 and drove a front-line ambulance in Verdun only because I thought this was the war to save the world for democracy. Fourteen months later America got into the war and in June I enlisted as a private in our army.

And it goes on then about his history, but in the same letter he describes to me why he then decided to spend some time in New Hampshire. In the library looking up all the background of our family. And he traced it back to, let's see, to a Daniel Colby who came over on the Mayflower and to former chief justice, John

Marshall. Anyway, his conclusion is you five Marshall girls and John Randolph are descendants of one of the original Winthrop colonists Daniel Colby and of John Marshall as well as of John Randolph of Virginia. This goes on and on but along with that family history that he had a librarian help him with in New Hampshire, which comprised 60 typewritten pages, I now have a geneology of my family going back to the 1600's that would have very difficult for me to ever trace.

LD: To find the time and the place?

Byers: Yes.

LD: That's an unpublished letter then, I presume?

Byers: Yes.

LD: That he wrote to you?

Byers: Yes, and I have letters from him that I have saved and one of my sisters, Frances, has just copied all of them and has put them in more or less a manuscript form for each of our sisters. I have them and if you have any need or desire to refer to them you're very welcome to them.

LD: I would certainly like to get the date on that one in case anybody would like to refer to it. It's a letter of January 21, 1941 to Miss Jean Marshall, Pi-Phi House, 636 Emerson Street, Evanston, Illinois.

Byers: It's from my father, Vern Marshall.

LD: From Vern Marshall?

Byers: Yes. You're very welcome to use that if you need it.

LD: That may very well lead someone in the future to the letters that they--you know would like to do future research.

Byers: That's true, yes.

LD: Are there any other things that you would like to share with us about your dad and his involvement either with the Gazette or as a father to you? We certainly have talked about his public role. There may be things that you alone can share that are not so public.

Byers: Well, there are some interesting things, wonderful episodes and sad ones, too. Some of them, in fact, primarily surround his relationship with Grant Wood.

LD: Yes.

Byers: I can't remember how old I was when I was taken, with at least two of my sisters, by my father to Grant Wood's studio several times on Sunday mornings. This was when the studio was at Five Turner Alley. I remember watching him paint one Sunday when we arrived. He was working on his easel on Woman With Plant. And his mother was there posing for that portrait, or painting I should call it.

But Grant Wood was in Colorado with my parents before my mother died, on a vacation. Did I say in Colorado?

LD: Yes.

Byers: In, let's see, I think this must have been about 1926. I'm not sure. The date is on the painting that he did paint for them in Colorado and that painting is owned by my sister, Marie Louise Plain, who lives in South Bend. The painting is called Lock Vail and it's a beautiful scene. It was done before his style was developed in the late twenties that made him famous.

But going back to memories concerning him and my father, after my mother died, my father took us to Florida for the winter. But before we left for Florida, he commissioned with the McKay brothers, who were builders, a new house. He bought the lot next to the house we were living in at 530 Knollwood Drive. And Grant Wood was the one who was the consultant on the house. He helped with the design of it. He designed our playroom which was in the basement of the house. He chose posters for the playroom and personally gave-- I mean he bought them and gave them to us. They were scenes in England.

He personally stained all the woodwork in the den. And I remember this very well; one evening over there when all the knots were falling out of the pine paneling. Grant Wood was absolutely distraught about this. This was before we moved in.

When we came back from Florida that winter we rented a house near us on the corner of 21st Street and Fifth Avenue while the house was being completed. So we were up there watching him a lot.

He knot by knot glued back every single knot that fell out of the pine panelling and re-did it. It was too dark and he had used too

much acid. He designed that room around the portrait that he painted of my mother. And that room had a panel, well it still has it I guess, over the fireplace which was for that purpose. In that he did that portrait, I guess, isn't it?

LD: Yes, it is.

Byers: Someone else has talked to him . . .

LD: Just about everything is getting to be well-known about him, but it sure is.

Byers: So that's known about the portrait of my mother but I wonder if anyone with whom you've chatted knew the circumstances. I'm sure that it's documented that it was painted after my mother died but it was painted not only from photographs of her but from his memory of her.

LD: Which makes it very special.

Byers: Yes.

LD: Where is that painting now?

Byers: It's in the Cedar Rapids' Art Museum.

LD: That's the one that's in the museum?

Byers: It was a gift of my three sisters and I, the three daughters of Frances and Vern Marshall and it hangs there now.

LD: I didn't know if that was the same one?

Byers: Yes, that is the original, yes. That's the only one.

LD: The only one?

Byers: Yes. We simply have photographic copies of it. I did want to mention a very humorous incident; to me it was humorous at the time, and it was just at the time that Grant Wood had decided he was going marry Mrs. Sherman. And have you heard about this from others?

LD: No, I have not.

Byers: Well, Mrs. Sherman was an actress and felt very much above Grant Wood's friends in Cedar Rapids, most of whom had been wonderful, wonderful business men and who had recognized his talent, and had seen to it that he finally was recognized and so forth and so on. David Turner, primarily.

But along the way he always had appeared to me to be a confirmed bachelor with a pixy face and a very, very nice smile, very shy. And all of a sudden he announced to his good friends, among them my father, that he was going to marry Mrs. Sherman. They were all absolutely horrified because they felt he certainly, you know, was above this woman. She was not his type at all. So one evening, and as I recall it was the day before he was to marry her, several friends and my father closeted him in our library. I just remember trying to eavesdrop. They shut the door and did everything they could to . . .

First of all he didn't drink a lot, but they tried to get him drunk enough so that he would submit to their wishes and not marry

this woman! (Laughter) It didn't succeed. He did marry her and Grant Wood was spirited away from Cedar Rapids by Mrs. Sherman and they lived in Iowa City for not too many years. He died soon after they were married. She would not allow any of his friends to come and visit him, nor would they ever return to Cedar Rapids. She simply wanted to shut all of his friends out of their lives. It was very sad, it was very sad for him. That's the way he ended his life.

LD: I have not heard that story so that's excellent to have that. I suppose many men get to that point in life where suddenly they think needed that log . . .

Byers: I guess so, he just choose the wrong woman.

LD: I have only some general things that I'd like to kind of do with you, but I would like to let you go ahead . . .

Byers: I was going to say, before we do that, because you did ask me about childhood memories of my father or growing up memories that don't involve his work towards supporting political candidates. That was another big effort through the newspaper.
He would stand up for a cause, political or otherwise, but often the Gazette would take a very strong stand to support a candidate regardless of party. They supported Governor Harring, I can't remember against whom he was running. But anyway, I just wanted to give that as a little bit of background because there was a lot of that life that entered into my memory.
But getting back to the more personal things; I do remember the

Cedar Rapids Gazette always sponsored the Golden Gloves, which I guess no longer exists in Cedar Rapids. But it was amateur prize fighting.

LD: I think they're going to bring it back here.

Byers: Is that right?

LD: Just this coming year, I believe it's going to be here in Cedar Rapids.

Byers: Well, we were often taken to the boxing matches even though we didn't enjoy them that much. And so the fun part for us was to look around and see people and you know, just see what people were wearing and reacting to these matches. I remember my father always saying, "If you're going to come with me to these boxing matches, you have to watch and see what's happening".

Well that wasn't very interesting to us. The same thing happened with the Raiders baseball team. That was one of the early teams that was sponsored here in Cedar Rapids.

I wanted to--we were talking about the Golden Gloves and the Cedar Rapids Raiders--I wanted to mention Paul Engle. Before he was ever known by anyone, we used to walk from our house to the corner of--it was Mt. Vernon Avenue and Forest Drive I believe. It may have been one little block east of that corner that I'm mentioning. On that corner which was then really just more or less a wooded area, were, or was the stable and riding school of Paul Engles' father. Paul was always there helping with the horses and helping us mount and dismount and do all that

sort of thing long before, you know, anyone dreamed that he was going to be a famous poet when he grew up. I have no idea how old he was. He was probably in his mid-teens when he was doing that.

Then there was Miss Prescott at McKinley High School. The principal not only of the junior but also the senior high school.

LD: She must have been outstanding.

Byers: She was absolutely marvelous. She had taught my father in earlier years and then she had all of us in school and she was absolutely wonderful. And of course a great admirer and a great booster of Grant Wood.

LD: He actually taught for her for a while, didn't he?

Byers: Yes, at McKinley.

LD: In his own style from what stories I have heard. His teaching methods were unorthodox.

Byers: You see, I don't know that because he was gone by the time I was in school there.

LD: We've interviewed a number of people who were actually students under him.. . .

Byers: Really!

LD: ....Or who remember him as a contemporary and in that setting. We have some wonderful stories about how he taught art by painting

the dining room at McKinley with scenes and things.

Byers: Yes, and on the walls of some of the halls, as I remember, there were some of his murials. Incidentally, that painting of Marvin Cone which was given to my father was done in France when he was there studying in France with Grant Wood. The paintings they brought home, and this is rather interesting, I don't know if anyone has told you this, all had to be of a size that would fit into their foot lockers. So, I don't know how many of these Marvin Cone or Grant Wood paintings of that era that you have seen but . . .

LD: They are small.

Byers: Yes, and that was the reason. Because they needed to be able to pack them and bring them home in their foot lockers.

LD: I know that there were a number of businessmen who sponsored their travels to Europe.

Byers: Yes.

LD: Was your father involved with that?

Byers: Yes, he was one of those, yes.

LD: Who else did that?

Byers: You see, I don't know. I'm sure David Turner was one but I really don't know.

LD: They were a very unassuming group.

Byers: Yes.

LD: They never tried to take any credit for that?

Byers: No, they didn't. I did have something on that that Barbara and I were talking about the other day. I don't know where it is to tell you the truth right now. We were talking about, you know, early memories that might involve my father. These don't necessarily involve him.

But I do remember when my Grandfather Marshall asked Dan Hunter to take Barbara and me up in an airplane when airplanes were quite new in this area.

LD: At the Hunter Airport, right?

Byers: Right, Dan Hunter of the Hunter Airport. My father crashed in a plane with Dan Hunter one time, on one of his trips. But they landed belly down in a corn field and neither one of them was hurt, they were just shaken up a bit.

Barbara mentioned yesterday on the telephone, my sister, knowing I was going to have this interview, recalling that in the dime-stores of those days, which are called something else now, you could buy a popular song as sheet music for ten cents.

LD: Oh really?

Byers: And that there was always a woman there playing whatever song you wished to have her play to see if you really liked it well enough to buy the sheet music for ten cents.

LD: You know, that woman is still around.

Byers: She is!

LD: Yes, this was one of those things that I heard because we were doing the interview with someone who said we should interviw so-and-so who used to play down at Woolworth's downtown.

Byers: Yes! I wonder . . .

LD: I have the name written down.

Byers: Is that right?

LD: Yes.

Byers: Well that was just one little thing that we remembered in talking with each other. And another thing that I very, very much would like to mention is the Shakespeare Garden at Ellis Park. Have others mentioned that in the interviews?

LD: Not with me.

Byers: My Grandmother Fiske, my grandmother who did live with us and took such loving, beautiful care of us, was a member of this Sheakspeare Club, among some of her other affiliations that were very special to her. I remember their instructor, the woman who led the group and, you know, would assign a certain play to a certain member to research and to review, was Mrs. Wolverton's mother. I don't know if you've heard of Mrs. Wolverton and her sisters, but anyway, their mother's name was Mrs. Sailor. A very, very prominent

old lady; much older than my Grandmother when I was small. When the Shakespeare Club decided to do something about--I hope I'm right in this, I may be wrong but I think it was in memory of Mrs. Sailor--that they contributed to Ellis Park a lovely Shakespearian garden and a bust of William Shakespeare. Have you seen it?

LD: Yes, and it's still beautiful.

Byers: Is it really? Well, I haven't been there in so many years.

LD: I was there, it's just wonderful.

Byers: Really? But I do remember the dedication of that garden.

LD: I didn't know the background on it.

Byers: Yes. Then under people in the community, amusements and recreation and all that sort of thing; I suppose you've heard from other people about Thornwood which was a screened in ballroom that was out in the counrty?

LD: No, I have not.

Byers: Big bands would come there. I was in high school when this began.

LD: I've heard of Danceland.

Byers: And Danceland, of course. Danceland lasted longer than Thornwood.

LD: Where was Thornwood?

Byers: Thornwood was somewhere south, southeast. Quite a ways southeast, and it was out in the country but I think it was on the river. I believe it was on the river. And as I say, big-name bands would come there; among them, Griff Williams who also came to Danceland and auditioned my sister Barbara as a singer at Danceland here.

LD: How did it turn out?

Byers: She wasn't hired by him, and I think that was a relief to my father because she was too young then. But she later did become a professional singer and later did sing with Griff Williams at some hotel in Chicago. I can't remember--I think it may have been the old Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. But then there was Hallwood's Cafe in Marion. Has anyone ever told you about that? Where there was a juke box, and as I say, this was in the thirties. It was the popular place to go on Friday and Saturday evenings and dance to the jukebox and drink mostly Coca Colas. People weren't drinking in high school in those days.

LD: Even though prohibition was over, it was possible then?

Byers: Oh yes. Well, there were a few possibly, but we weren't spiking drinks nor were any of my friends. You know, among my good friends.

LD: I'm glad you brought that up because that makes me--brings up

something I was interested in, too. And that was, what was it like in your household? Did you have a very strick set of standards for dating and ages that you could go out, and how late you could go out and things of that sort?

Byers: Yes, we did. I very clearly remember, because I was the oldest in the family and Barbara was just a little over a year younger than I, but I was not allowed to date until Barbara could also go along on a double-date. That was how strick my father was about that sort of thing.

LD: Safety in numbers sort of?

Byers: Yes. And we had very good friends in the neighborhood with whom--Jim Coquillette being one of them,and Tom Barry the other--with whom Barbara and I ofter double-dated. So, oh heavens, there were some things that in those early days I very well remember, especially when I was at Buchanan School and having to wear long underwear in the winter time. And really feeling so embarrassed that I would stop half-way to school and roll it up above my knees and pull the stocking--you know, I'd have to rearrange my whole . . .

LD: Your wardrobe.

Byers: Yes, my whole wardrobe and then go on to school. But you did ask me something else just now.

LD: Well I guess you were talking about dating.

Byers: Oh yes. In my family and in, really, most of the fairly prominent families among whom there were people my age, there was

prominent families among whom there were people my age, there was very little drinking. When my sister, Patty, went to Coe College--and I've got to find this somewhere--I was reminded of this by one of my other sisters the other day--the dean of women at Coe College, and teaching some class there, it was probably Health, and Patty was in that class. The girls were told to carry a small pillow on dates in case any one of them would have to sit on a boys lap in an automobile.

LD: To keep them from actually touching them?

Byers: Yes. (Laughter) And my father had told Frances, the youngest of the original four girls in my family, that she must tell him any time that she held hands with anyone much less kiss a boy. So, yes, there were much stricter rules in those days. At least in my family, than today.

LD: During those years, this is one of the general things I wanted to ask you about, that was the period that is now known as the great depression and hard times--do you have any personal memories of it's effect on you as a family?

Byers: We were very, very fortunate. My father always had a very good income and he never, fortunately for us and for him, never played the stock market and he was not a gambler. He was very conservative. I shouldn't say so conservative, but we didn't spend everything he made because we went on wonderful trips and we all went away to camps in the summer time and had, you know, marvelous, marvelous times. But he didn't spend money foolishly

so we always were very fortunate and we didn't encounter hard times.

LD: That's wonderful. I know that there are a number of people that I have talked to whose memories of that period are really very good memories versus

Byers: Well you see Laura, Cedar Rapids was noted in those years as being one of the ten most prosperous cities in the United States, among other things. And it was one of the not too many that was least hit by the depression.

LD: It was a good time to be in an agricultural area, wasn't it?

Byers: Yes, it was. And so many home-owned industries, you see, that weren't affected by a crash in the stock market because they were home-owned and they were'nt publicly--I mean their stocks weren't publicly traded. The banks were the things that were affected. And my father was instrumental, incidentally, in forming the Guaranty Bank.

LD: Oh, really?

Byers: Yes, and I wish I could tell you more of the details, but he was. He was one of four or five who literally started the Guaranty Bank.

LD: Was that bank begun before the depression era, or did it come out as a result of the bank holidays?

Byers: I think it was a result of some of the banks that folded. I really can't tell you the names of them now. My husband could,

he has a much better memory in that regard than I have.

LD: I'm sure that that's something that we can also find out historically.

Byers: Yes, but it did come out of that era, and was formed at that time. And I think at that time--I remember my father persuading Van-Vectin Schafer to become president of that bank. You know, of a new bank. We had stock in the bank for many, many years. I sold mine after my parents died. We didn't have any kind of a majority interest, ever. Just a little.

LD: I have pretty much covered the areas that I felt were most important. Are there other things that you would like to add to what we have said?

Byers: Well, there's just one little thing in trying to make our lives in Cedar Rapids sound, you know, just a little more interesting than I've depicted so far.

LD: Actually, I think yours is one of the most fascinating family lives I've covered so far, believe me!

Byers: But we did do some things that were lots of fun. I'm sure you've heard of Dr. and Mrs. Wayne Foster, both of whom are still living. I grew up with their oldest daughter. They lived just around the corner from us on Hillcrest Drive. Actually she was in my sister Barbara's class. The three of us were very good friends as were we--the same group of friends included Jean and Joan Newburger who is now Joan Greenblatt. And Phyllis Sheehy;

Henrietta Sheehy is her mother who lives here. Anyway, those girls who I've mentioned, and Barbara and I were often taken out to Wellman, Iowa to Dr. Foster's brother's turkey farm. And it was more than a turkey farm in that we all learned how to milk a cow. I think they only had two or three, and that poor one or two that had to be milked by us must have suffered from it! But anyway, we did do things like that. We would go out to the Cedar Rapids Country Club and ski often. Now skiing downhill--downhill skiing in Cedar Rapids wouldn't even be attempted because it's, you know, so limited.

LD: Not really the vistas that people are used to.

Byers: No! Not now. But we wore the kind of skis that had to be clamped on and are really dangerous now that I look back. But we had marvelous times out there on the toboggan slides and skiing down the hills.

LD: We really didn't talk about that; the things that you did for fun.

Byers: Those were the things we did for fun. And I remember when the Cedar Rapids Country Club's swimming pool was built.

LD: That was in the twenties, wasn't it?

Byers: Yes, 1926 or 1928, and I'm not sure which but I do remember. I was quite small. But I was on one of the first Cedar Rapids' Country Club's girls swim teams. I have funny old pictures.

LD: That's still a wonderful pool. I'm sure it just must have seemed like heaven out there?

Byers: Yes. And incidentally, the winter I told you we spent in Florida just after my mother had died, and by that time I had turned nine, all of us were taught to swim by Johnny Weismeuller at the Plaza swimming pool at Miami Beach.

LD: Well, if you're going to be taught . . .

Byers: Yes, and he became a hero of ours, of course, because he was our swimming instructor.

LD: Was that just some sort of promotion, that they had him there?

Byers: Apparently, because he was there that winter. I don't really know why. But we do have some movies.

LD: He was a celebrity!

Byers: Yes, he was well-known then. We have some movies of us being taught by him.

Under family life, too, I noticed that you asked about household help. I mentioned earlier that, yes, of course we did have household help because for five years there was no one to really do the cooking or the . . . My Grandmother did all the wonderful things such as reading to us and taking us to community concerts and the symphony, and all those wonderful things.

LD: Real motherly.

Byers: But all the help in our house, everyone of them except for one, was a Czech girl. And I remember them all very well.

LD: Did they stay with you for a long time?

Byers: Yes. Well one stayed with us until I was married. No, she came back for my wedding and helped at that time. But there was one woman among those, and she was a cook, and her name was Emma. She married a Greek who lured her away from my family's household to help him in his new Greek restaurant which was called--oh, I don't know what it was called but it was on the railroad tracks. George Stevens was his name; one of the first Greek restauranteurs in Cedar Rapids.

LD: That's not the one that still the Olympia Cafe, or something of that sort?

Byers: Is it on the railroad tracks?

LD: Well, there's one down there, yes.

Byers: It probably is.

LD: It would have changed hands, I know, but it was one of the few Greek restaurants left in town.

Byers: Well it just may be but I know that his was either the first or among the very first. This was somewhere in the thirties, sometime in the early thirties I think.

Oh, and then I wanted to mention the Sunday rides in automobiles because my Grandfather Marshall had a Marmon I think it was called.

And then he had a Chandler. These are cars that you never hear of these days. In fact had I not read some of his letters to my father I wouldn't have remembered those names. But I do remember being driven to Strawberry Point and all these outlaying towns. It seemed as if to me they were as far away as Chicago then, Driving a very slow pace on dirt roads!

LD: That's right, the mud roads were still a fact in those days.

Byers: That's right.

LD: To get around town when you were growing up, did you primarily still use the streetcars in the twenties and thirties?

Byers: Streetcars didn't come out where we lived unfortunately. We lived in Vernon Heights. They did go up and down Fifth Avenue I believe, and that wasn't too far away. And of course I do remember riding in the streetcars. More than anything I remember our neighbor across the street, Mrs. Deacon, who had an electric. An electric car even then was kind of passé. It was very, very old fashioned but it was such fun to drive around with her in her electric car. That was an outstanding activity once in a while, when Mrs. Deacon would invite us to go with her.

And then another thing that I was going to say about the home delivery of babies, and house calls; my sister Patty was born in the house at 530 Knollwood Drive. It's where, I think Duane Arnold and his wife live there now. But when we left that house, Earl Muzzy who was then the top manager at the Quaker Oats in

Cedar Rapids, bought the house from us. And then John Turner was the next owner after Mr. Muzzy , and now Duane Arnold. Anyway, my sister, Patty was born in that house and she is now 62 years old so that was a long time ago.

But Dr. Bailey was an eye, ear, nose, and throat man before Dr. Wayne Foster. I remember him very well. Of course, the Fosters lived in our neighborhood and Dr. Bailey retired, I suppose, when I was very young. But he would come to the house if we had a cold or a sore throat or anything; as did Dr. B. J. Moon, who happened to be our family doctor. But anyway that was kind of interesting. And they would come to the emergency room!

When my sons were tiny and we were often in the emergency room, or I was with them, for stitches and broken bones and you name it, I said I'm just not going to let anyone touch so-and-so--usually it was Craig--until you call Dr. Greenblatt. I'll just sit here for as long as it takes for him to come. And he always would come. Now isn't that amazing!

LD: It's a much more personal aspect of care.

Byers: Oh yes, it really was. So that's the difference in today's medicine I think. They--fortunately for some of us, Dr. Greenblatt is still practicing. But they made time in those days to do what they felt was really something important for their patients.

LD: In many ways, I think, we've institutionalized so many of the things that we valued and have lost something in the process.

Byers: Yes. And I do want to mention one more thing, and that is the

role that Claude Guy, a colored man, played in our family for 40 years. When we went to Florida that winter and went on a train, and were all bundled up--you know January climate--and got to Miami Beach, and immediately my father was invited to go on a deepsea fishing trip that I mentioned, with Herbert Hoover, he needed to have someone who could drive my Grandmother and his four little girls around; get us to our swimming lessons and just for anything. We had two maids with us but neither one of them could drive, they were quite young darling girls but they couldn't drive either. So someone at a gas station recommended Claude Guy who happened to be standing around at that gas station that day, as someone who was reliable and who could drive us. The upshot of the whole thing was, Claude stayed with my family for 40 years. Claude was a very special part of all of our lives.

LD: What did he do for you, was he a chauffeur?

Byers: He did absolutely everything, yes. He was a chauffeur, but that was his original role when he was talked, by my father, into driving north with us. We bought a car there and Claude and my father and Barbara, and one of the maids and I came home in the car; and my Grandmother and the other maid came home by train with the other two little girls.

I remember when we got as far as Chattanooga , Claude said, 'I have to turn around and go back, I can't even look at those mountains, let alone try to drive up one!' And my father wanted us to see the top of Lookout Mountain. He wouldn't go! He stayed down below and my father drove us up. And at that point

he announced that he simply had to turn around and go back. The arrangement was that my father would send him home at any time he wished to return, along the way or after we got there, to Cedar Rapids. Well, my father finagled him to go a little further, and a little further, and we finally got all the way to Cedar Rapids and then he talked him into staying. As I say, he remained for 40 years, married twice, had children in Cedar Rapids; still lives in Cedar Rapids. I'm absolutely devoted to him. He is about 77 now.

But when you say what was his role in the family, he could do anything. He would cook for us if need be. He ended up in later years doing all the marketing for my parents when we were all gone and my father was very ill and my mother never wanted to leave him. Claude did everything like that. He could repair the plumbing, he took care of the cars, he mowed the lawn, he trimmed the bushes.

LD: I wish we had one of those!

Byers: He painted all the shutters, he did everything. He was simply wonderful. And along the way, really guided--especially my brother, because my father was quite old when my brother was born. My father, well I can't remember, but John is 17 years younger than I. So when it came to the time when John wanted to learn to hunt and fish and do all those thing, it was Claude who took him to learn to do all those nifty things that he had to know, wanted to know how to do.

LD: That's really special.

Byers: It was very unusual. Especially the fact that he hung on for those many years.

LD: Well he obviously fell in love with your family.

Byers: He was devoted to all of us, and we were to him. Now let me see if there's anything else that might just quickly be mentioned. I forgot to mention that in the very early years, because I've noticed one of the questions is about the community theatre, the Cedar Rapids Community Theatre. I don't remember how many years ago it was, but it was then called the Community Players. It later bacame Footlighters and after that Community Theatre. But when it was called Community Players there was a rather famous actor who by this time who was in Hollywood, by the name of Robert Downing, who was from Cedar Rapids. He would come back occasionally to Cedar Rapids. At one time he agreed to appear in a play called 'Sun Up'. And I don't remember the theme of the play other than the fact that my Grandmother, who was quite a dramatist, was asked to play an elderly lady who smoked a corn cob pipe. Well, my Grandmother was very straight-laced, and of course had never smoked or drank a drop. But because she felt this was her great opportunity to be on stage, did learn to smoke a corn cob pipe which I still have. She gave it to me. And that was something that I remembered in the very early days.

And then, I guess it was at that time, that the theatre was at the YMCA.

LD: In the early years?

Byers: Yes.

LD: And then moved down . . .

Byers: Then moved to, is it First Street West, southwest? First or Second Street southwest. Oh heavens, that wasn't--I think they even gave some plays in the little gallery at the library.

LD: I think they did.

Byers: Yes.

LD: I know they've had several locations.

Byers: They've moved around trying to find a proper location and it took a lot of . . .

LD: They certainly have settled now.

Byers: Oh, it's marvelous now. But it did take a lot of effort raising the money to buy that first--it was the old Strand Theatre that they bought on the west side for the Community Theatre. I feel as if I've said much too much and I'm sure I could tell you a lot more but I just . . .

LD: I really appreciate your bringing in the anectodal things because I think there's a time where you run out of the right questions to ask.

Byers: Well, I hated to keep talking but I thought perhaps some of those things, especially about the Shakespeare Club and the Shakespearian Garden, how it started you might not have known.

LD: Those are the things that oral history can do that just don't get remembered otherwise.

Byers: Have you interviewed--oh I'm sure you have--Roby Hickok?

LD: Yes.

Byers: Or Roby Kestler, I should say.

LD: She has helped both as an interviewer and an interviewee.

Byers: Oh, she would be absolutely marvelous. My grandparents lived next door to her parents on Fifth Avenue so one of my aunts was a very good friend on Roby's. My aunt was older but they were devoted friends. I remember her parents very, very well. They were simply wonderful.

And then there's one more thing I really should say on tape, am I still on tape? And that is about my grandfather Fiske. I mentioned that my grandmother Fiske helped to raise us after he had died but he was a professor of languages at Coe College. He spoke seven languages fluently. They had a house on First Avenue--it was 608 First Avenue SE, directly across the street from where Rapid's Chevrolet now is. And where Rapid's Chevrolet now is is where Conger Metcalf grew up. My grandparents and Conger's parents were very, very close friends.

I remember being taken down to my grandparents to spend an afternoon or something, and Conger and Malcolm, his two brothers, would come over. They were older than I but I was often there with one of my younger sisters and they would love to push one of my sisters around in her baby carriage. I reminded Conger of that

the last time I saw him!

But my grandfather's library in that house at 608 First Avenue was very, very comprehensive. People who would come to this country, especially Czechs who had moved to Cedar Rapids and have a difficult time with the language in the beginning, would be helped by him. And Greeks would be helped by him. He spoke Greek fluently which is a very difficult language.

LD: How wonderful!

Byers: And my mother was tutored by my grandfather until she was a senior in high school. He would not allow her to go to public school which is a shame, I think, for her sake. But my uncle, her only brother, finally talked my grandfather into allowing her to go to high school for her last year. She graduated valedictorian of her class from Washington High School and magna cum laude from Coe College.

LD: So obviously he gave her excellent education.

Byers: Yes, but she wasn't that bookie. She died when she was 32 years old. That was when I was eight. People who knew her . . .

LD: Your mother would put on a black face and go over and act as a maid?

Byers: They were very good friends, the Pickfords and my parents. Often times, naturally, the Pickfords would not have included my parents in a party, but that didn't bother them at all. My mother would think it was an hysterical joke to come out of the kitchen in a black face and perform the waitress duties in the dining room.

David recalls that she would often go upstairs at a party at which she had been included and spend time with the children before she would join the rest of them, reading stories to them.

LD: That is special. Now that's unusual for an invited guest.

Byers: Well it is, especially such a young one.

LD: Jean, I'm going to close this off but I hate to.

Byers: Oh, goodness I've kept you.

LD: I've kept you and we had thought that we would be finished before now, but thank you so much for all your memories. I think they're wonderful.

Byers: I've kept you too long, Laura. Thank you.

LD: We appreciate your contribution.