

Ormes, Robert M., 1904-  
Colorado College Professor of English, 1952-1973

SIDE ONE - CASSETTE ONE

FINLEY:

This is side one of two sides of tape recording number 7 of the Colorado College Archives Oral History Project. I am Judy Finley, and the date is January 18, 1977. I'm interviewing Professor Emeritus Robert M. Ormes in his hideaway office in the subbasement of Palmer Hall. Professor Ormes taught English at Colorado College from 1952 to 1973. He is also well known and highly regarded as a mountaineer, raconteur and author of several books, including A Guide to the Colorado Mountains, Colorado Skylines, Pike's Peak Atlas, Tracking Colorado's Ghost Railroads and Railroads and the Rockies. He is currently working on some mapping projects of trails in the Aspen/Crested Butte area and the San Juan mountains of southwestern Colorado.

Bob Ormes, you were born in Colorado Springs in 1904, so your memories go way back, and I know that, not only as a teacher at Colorado College, but also as the son of a former librarian of Colorado College, you have many recollections of your early days. So why don't you begin by telling us a little bit about your childhood, and your recollections of your father, and your summer activities?

ORMES:

Very well. One of the things I remember as a child was watching the streetcars on Tejon Street, with my nose pressed against the window, because once in a great while, an automobile would come by. For instance, that of Dr. Arnold, who used to mend birds' wings, and he had a chain-driven car of some sort. The chain would frequently break. One time it broke in front of our house, and he got out and got under, fixed the chain, and drove off. This is just to remind you that I do date back pretty well. Prompt me again.

FINLEY:

Your dad came to CC as the librarian, you said, the same year you were born--

ORMES:

--The same year I was born. I always used to make a joke of that, because he must have foreseen that I wouldn't make a good preacher's son--they're always bad! [laughter] So both for his sake and mine, he changed professions. However, this is not quite the case. President Slocum asked him to come up because Coburn Library had been built, but they hadn't had a full-time librarian, I believe before that. My father got interested in running down manuscripts--not manuscripts so much, but pioneers. He would say to me, "I've got to see So-and-So, he's the one that's likely to die soonest among the pioneers." [chuckle]

FINLEY:

What did he do--interview them?

ORMES:

He interviewed them. These were people up Ute Pass--he was very much interested in the Ute Pass area--and I guess he did a lot of interviews up there. He did other pioneers, just as Charlie Cragin did, and Charlie Cragin, of course--my father knew about Charlie Cragin's failing. He would get so much material that he could never close with it--he could never write it. Well, actually, you might even say the same of my dad, although he did finish things, many things that he set out to do, which I guess you couldn't quite say of Cragin.

He used to ride, as I remember when I got a little older, he rode one of the sort of second generation of early bikes, the kind with a couple of small wheels the same size--not the big and little wheel. But the frame was quite tall, and it had a little, slippery metal peg sticking out from the rear hub, and if you didn't have anything in your hands, you could sort of run along and swing your legs, if you were as tall as he was, up over the seat and ride off. But you couldn't reach the ground from your seat with your feet.

And when he was--he did a lot of cataloging of the articles in the Gazette Telegraph, or Gazette and Telegraph, which were separate some part of the time, and together part of the time. He took those books home, one at a time, so he could work in the evening up there at the house. He would get the book--he'd get up on his bike from the big, flat, red sandstone kind of a porch--it would be a railing, except it was two or three feet wide, flat sandstone. He'd get up on that and mount his bike, and get his book in one hand, and his handlebar in the other, and give a vigorous pushoff, and then start pedaling.

The whole thing would shake all the way up Tejon Street

[chuckle] and as cars got a little more numerous, we were terribly afraid he'd have an accident. But fortunately, someone who was looking for antiques stole this bicycle, just as my father began to seem a little too frail to use it any more. [laughter] So we were happy about that!

FINLEY:

Now, this index that he compiled of the Gazette, did he have any assistance on it from helpers at the library?

ORMES:

I don't think so. I think he did it himself.

FINLEY:

It was his own project?

ORMES:

Yes. One of the other things that he did as librarian--he had no formal library training at all. He had Miss [Eva T.] Canon and Miss Doris Green, who were trained, Miss Canon as a librarian, the assistant librarian, and really the true librarian. And he was sort of an archivist. Miss Green was a cataloguer; she had been trained in that department. And they were all good friends.

I had a little hike with them one time; my father took me and the two gals up to Bottomless Pit. I saw my first bighorn up there, and I ripped a hole in the back of my pants sliding over some rocks, and stuck my glove in it, so they wouldn't see my little butt! [laughter] And the girls made all kinds of jokes about that!

FINLEY:

You must have--

ORMES:

--I felt very important!

FINLEY:

Of course, your father must have been very active in going off in the mountains frequently, and I guess you went along. What did you do in the summertimes, as a family?

ORMES:

We went up to Crystola. He and Professor [William] Strieby of the chemistry department pushed their bikes up that old dirt road, looking at various places where they might establish a tenting area for their families. And when they came to Mr. Childs' place at the mouth of Crystola Canyon, Mr. Childs said, "Why, yes, there's a canyon around there."

And this was just south of the main Crystola Canyon--a brook runs into the main Ute Pass drainage just about a quarter of a mile or so southeast of it--and they built a little road around there. He and Strieby, and later six other families set up tents or cabins and so on.

The first year, they were in tents, and then we had a cabin for a living room, with a fireplace, and then a little lean-to kitchen next to that. And then long afterwards, we built, out of the tent platforms, which were wood, we tore those apart and put up a kind of a sleeping cabin, which was right adjacent to the other.

I went up there every summer for--oh, until I was near the end of high school, and I loved it, just loved it. The people up there that I played with were people sort of sensitive, faculty-type kids. Dan Hale, who still comes back to Colorado Springs--the son of the music man, and Don, who is now deceased, and two or three others of us--and their sister, Helen. We played stone stores under the bridge, and we played in the willows, and we had a special language, like Pig Latin, only different, and--

[Noises in background--chuckle, calls out to someone].

I can remember sitting in classes in Steele School, and one of the teachers told me that--I would answer the questions, but I'd still be looking out the window; I wouldn't look at--[laughter]. I think I was daydreaming about Crystola! [laughter] I was wishing I could go up there! [laughter]

FINLEY:

So the mountains got in your blood at an early age!  
[laughter]

ORMES:

Yes! We had picnics there, family picnics. My dad and Mr. Strieby--there were lots of pitch pine stumps up there, and my dad and Mr. Strieby blew them up with dynamite. They drilled a hole, and stuck the dynamite in, and of course, we kids just had a field day! We loved this danger, you know. We had to go and hide behind a tree, and watch this thing explode! And then after the explosion, they'd go with the pick-axes and crowbars and shovels, and dig up the stump, which was rich with pitch. Of course, the roots apparently went on running pitch up into the stump after the tree had been cut.

FINLEY:

This was used for firewood?

ORMES:

Yeah, we used it for our fireplace, and we also had campfires up there!

FINLEY:

Oh, yes.

ORMES:

Well, I might go on all day about this! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

Tell me a little bit about the trains that ran up there. Didn't you come back and forth on the--

ORMES:

Oh, the Midland! We went up on the Colorado Midland! We went down to--this was a big thing, you know--ride the train over that big trestle in Manitou, across Ruxton Creek, and then come up through all these tunnels, and the train would whistle. We loved to go down and meet the train, see the train come in.

We had a funny little go-cart kind of thing--a handcart, about three or four feet wide. It was just a box on wheels, with a handle, and we would unload from the train, the first time we got up there in the summer, two great, big tent canvasses, into which all the bedding and all clothes and all kinds of stuff had been piled. They were tied up into knots, so they'd be a kind of a sphere--each one was a kind of a sphere. And we'd load those into the handcart and push it around the road to the camp. And--you know, this train was a big thing!

FINLEY:

Was your father able to be with you the whole summer, or did he have to--

ORMES:

No.

FINLEY:

--stay down and tend the library?

ORMES:

He took his vacation in August, which was a month, and the rest of the time he commuted, weekends.

FINLEY:

I see.

ORMES:

He stayed down to the weekends, and commuted up.

FINLEY:

Then--go ahead.

ORMES:

He took us on picnics from down in the Springs, too. I remember going out to Cheyenne Canyon, and all sort of places like that.

FINLEY:

He was collecting all those interview of pioneers during all those years. At what point did he decide to write The Book of Colorado Springs?

ORMES:

I don't know. He had in mind publishing, and he never did publish. He was always busy getting more material; he was busy with that cataloguing operation. There were other things he did in the library. One thing he did was collect periodicals, a lot of which--the library happens to have a rather extraordinary early periodical collection because of this.

He wasn't a good writer. He had written a little of the history; he had written a chapter on churches. It was long enough to make a book out of. He was very much interested in churches--he was a minister, and he had a history of every church in town. You wouldn't believe how many there were, even in those days.

The only way we could keep that material was to turn it into a kind of a catalog--no script, really, just a cataloguing of all that information.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. When he died, what form was the book in?

ORMES:

Well, that part was the only part that was written, that I can remember. My mother and I finished it up--she did more than I did, but I helped her a good deal. And the Denton brothers were very kind and helpful. We would change a comma, and they'd have to pull the whole page out and do it over, you know--that kind of thing. We didn't have any idea of their printing problems, and they didn't complain about it.

FINLEY:

You must have worked, though, from your father's extensive notes--

ORMES:

Oh, he had lots of notes, yes, yes! All the real history was his research. It's just the writing itself. It was repetitive, and passive voice, and that sort of thing--it wasn't very good style. And I'm sure we helped the style a good bit.

FINLEY:

Right. What ever happened to the original notes and manuscripts--are they in Tutt Library?

ORMES:

[laughter] I wouldn't know! [laughter] I was a great guy to clean out! When I got through with a job, it was so nice to clean out!

FINLEY:

You probably threw them all away--

ORMES:

Oh, invaluable material! [laughter] Some people think it's invaluable--that kind of thing. I don't think it is [laughter]--at least I don't at the time! If I look back 25 years, maybe.

FINLEY:

Of course, you also were a student at CC in those later years of your dad's life. What do you recall as your feelings, being the son of the college librarian--did that--

ORMES:

I don't think it was very good for me. I had free tuition; I had a certain scorn of the college because of that, I think. [laughter] And I was antisocial, I was immature, and I didn't enter into the college life very much. I had my own friends and we went out in the mountains--that sort of thing. And as I got toward my last year or two, I was--I developed into a kind of a cynical, disagreeable person.

FINLEY:

[chuckle]

ORMES:

I really did! But I do have some amusing memories.

FINLEY:

What, for example? [laughter] That is repeatable!

ORMES:

I remember--well, this isn't repeatable, but I'll repeat it anyway! You can delete it if you need to!

[laughter] I remember one time--after chapel, which was compulsory, we used to go--everybody used to collect over at Murray's. I didn't go there very often, but once in a while, I sort of staggered around on the edge of things.

I remember one time there were two dogs in there--two Airedales celebrating--or rather, consummating their marriage in-- [laughter] at this Murray Drugstore! There was a round--there was a post with round seats, and it was always just full of people--boys and girls. I remember thinking how efficient this method of evacuating that building that was-- [laughter] --on that strange occasion! [laughter] Delete! [laughter]

FINLEY:

You must certainly have had some recollections of some of your professors in those days?

ORMES:

Yeah! I was very fond of them, and this is really--I began to have theories that I still hold to some degree. I'm sort of anti-professional--partly because I have an inferiority feeling about never having had a doctor's degree, and I don't really quite belong on a proper faculty [chuckle] or at least the knowledge that other people don't think so! [chuckle] I had my two professors that I was very fond of, and they were very interesting, exciting teachers were [Albert H.] Daehler and [Milton S.] Rose.

And there was another chap in the department who had a doctorate, who was very dull, and I remember the same thing had obtained way back in the best days of the college--the early golden age of the college, which was--[Homer] Woodbridge had no doctorate, and I don't know whether there was anybody else in the department that did, but I think maybe Motton did--I don't know.

Woodbridge was one of the great teachers. Everybody remembers, that ever had him--he was wonderful. Very articulate, and a wonderful sense of humor, and a vital man that excited people--made them write, and all that sort of thing.

So I've sort of held with that philosophy. For instance, I wrote to Tom Ross a little note about Bob Armstrong, to the effect that he was maintaining the tradition of being one of the finest teachers, without having a doctorate! I don't think that's as--you know, you can't carry that too far, because they've got some excellent people that have. But I don't think that the doctorate makes them great teachers.

FINLEY:

Had you thought all along of becoming a teacher  
yourself?

ORMES:

Mercy, no! I never thought about anything in an organized, systematic way of making a career for myself. It was just the line of least resistance, and [laughter] so I became sort of a professional by accident in the mountaineering world. And that's really because I really have always had to have--my work has had to be play, or I wouldn't do it! [laughter]

FINLEY:

That's the best way to do it!

ORMES:

And my play has to be work! I have to--the reciprocal effect, too. I have to make designs out of my play, so that I am achieving some described goal, like mapping such-and-such as completely as possible. And this is the kind of thing I've been doing, and having gorgeous fun with.

FINLEY:

At what point did you start your mapping for your original Guide to the Colorado Mountains?

ORMES:

Well, whenever it was published--which I believe was about '59, I had been--I remember counting up--I had been walking for seven years to go over those trails. This was all spare time, but lots of time in the summers.

I didn't go much with the Saturday Knight Hikers in those years. I was too absorbed with trying to get all that huge piece of country mapped, you see. I would take the newly--they were just coming out at that time with the new quadrangles, and I would take those quadrangles and I would know exactly where I was, by the fact that this was really good topography--topographic representation, which the old maps weren't. Accurate, from the air, you know. And so I worked from those.

FINLEY:

Let's backtrack a bit now. When you were a student at CC, what were--what did the buildings and the student body look like in terms of your perceptions? Of course, it was very familiar to you by then, but it's hard for us, these days, to reconstruct a sort of a social atmosphere, I guess is what I am driving at. You said you didn't participate too much--

ORMES:

No, I was not in a fraternity, I didn't go very much to games, and I was pretty much of an outsider, sort of a loner,

a mountaineer on the campus, you know. Of course, there are a lot more of those now, because the mountains have become more interesting and popular with people.

FINLEY:

Yes.

ORMES:

It's always been a part of the college picture. Those early students, part of their life--when I was trying to think about what this conference would bring forth, I think for my dad, life had three important facets. One of them was the mountains; one was the college; and one was his home. On that sort of triangle base, he rounded his life, and things fit together for him, and somewhat the same--

FINLEY:

For you, really.

ORMES:

Yeah, yeah.

FINLEY:

Now, didn't the students go off on picnics frequently, like, say, Bruin Inn?

ORMES:

Yeah, Bruin Inn was a place that people were going to all the time. They would go up there and have a dance, and they'd have dinner; they'd just hike up there and back. It was a hang-out, sort of. And the passing of Bruin Inn was kind of a sad thing to me, you know, because--and I think to other people who have come back, and remembered that as one of their favorite places. It was so much just Colorado College.

FINLEY:

Yes. I've often wondered how well chaperoned all of those mountain expeditions were.

ORMES:

Well, they tended to be chaperoned a lot. You know, Miss Loomis was a real tiger! She was tough on this thing, and--just like a French household, you don't let that girl out of your sight! [laughter] --[can't understand--sounds like "judgment to fall!"]

FINLEY:

So these were always very healthy, outdoors affairs, with no hanky-panky?

ORMES:

Well, whatever hanky-panky was managed was very sub rosa. I don't even think the students talk to each other much about it, because there was so much probability of--so much likelihood for disgrace--so much general--even people who did it, you know, would look down on others who did it! [laughter] It's a whole new ball of wax--it really is!

FINLEY:

Times have changed!

ORMES:

I think it was rather hard. I remember going out as a chaperon--this was toward the end of the chaperon days. We went out, two couples of faculty, ourselves and the Ruckers. We were very good friends, and so we agreed to chaperon if they would ask both of us! [laughter]

We went out to the Cliff House in Manitou--it was closed, but they had opened it up for this party, in the wintertime. We were put in a kind of an anteroom--it was open, but we had a little, sort of semi-privacy, so we could talk and not be bothered too much by what was going on on the dance floor. We suddenly looked up and realized that there wasn't anybody around any more! So were going to say good-night and leave, but there wasn't anybody to say good-night to!

We went out into the street, and all the windows of this closed hotel were [laughter] shining with the lights! [laughter] So we decided they didn't need any chaperon--at least, we weren't going to be it if they did! [laughter]

FINLEY:

[laughter] I don't blame you!

ORMES:

That was the end of the era for me! I had never liked it anyway! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Right! Well, let's backtrack again. Before you came to CC as a professor in the English department, you had taught at the old San Luis school, and also Fountain Valley school for a number of years?

ORMES:

Yes. I taught at Fountain Valley during the war, but I tutored also, and taught classes out there. It was only during the war that I was out there as a full-timer, and I really didn't like that very much, because the dormitory

duties and all that. You didn't have any free time. You'd have 20 minutes, you know, and then it would be time to do something else. The day was all cut up in little pieces.

FINLEY:

Were you still teaching there when you were hired at CC?

ORMES:

No. No, I had done some work with the Army as a civilian instructor for the rock climbing and mountain training cold weather command for Fort Carson, and I was doing part-time work at CC as an instructor for occasional classes. And I taught some officer classes down at Fort Carson, owing to a desire that the general down there had to get those guys to stop writing journalese--or, you know, some kind of "ese." Maybe it's "reportese."

FINLEY:

[chuckle] Reportese!

ORMES:

And Gill sort of arranged that--General Gill.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. How did you happen to get your job at Colorado College?

ORMES:

[laughter]

FINLEY:

Tell us the circumstances of that.

ORMES:

[chuckle] That's supposed to be a secret! [laughter]  
I had promised to take Louis Benezet--he was a man of quick impulses, and when I went in to see him, we made a deal. He would take me skiing, which I hadn't done any of since I was in college, just on toe straps, and I would take him rock climbing.

He was afraid, and he wanted to get over being afraid. It was just like everything else he did--he was a man that just had to buck some real challenge. He bucked it here, and he bucked it everywhere else, and he had infinitely better fortune here, I think, than he's had elsewhere. But he was a great person for us at CC, because of that fact.

Anyway, to get back to your question. We made this deal, and at the end of it, he said, "Well, why don't you go and suit up and join us--join the faculty?"

I said, "Okay."

FINLEY:

This was after a rock climbing expedition?

ORMES:

No, this was after a conference with him about all this. And we did go every year. We went on--oh, a couple of walks or a rock climb, something of that sort. He took his son, Joel, whom he lost later, when he got big enough to go.

We were very close, because I didn't really ever try to--I was sort of unprofessional, and didn't really want to grind any axes with him, and he did confide in me a little bit more, I think, than he would have most people, because he could sense that I was not--didn't have any interest, you know--

FINLEY:

Yes.

ORMES:

--make any use of it.

FINLEY:

Was he able to really relax on these expeditions--

ORMES:

Oh, yeah. He loved it.

FINLEY:

--cast aside his--

ORMES:

He loved it. He had been the head of the Dartmouth Outing Club, and he had this in his bones. But this--wanting to meet the challenge. We went down to the Crestones one time to climb, and it was just plain fear that spoiled that trip. And the next time--we were sort of determined to go, and it was cloudy, and we started out walking anyway, just for the heck of it. And we took a rope along, anyway. And the clouds sort of disappeared. It was a late start--we didn't get back until way after dark. But it was the big climb of his climbing career, and I think he [[chuckle] felt a great deal of satisfaction about it! [chuckle]

[Tape change]

ORMES:

We both had been talking about it off and on, and so has Glenn Brooks, since! [chuckle] Because the three of us did this.

FINLEY:

You must have had some hair-raising experiences.

ORMES:

Well, at one point, with his impulsive reactions, he said, "We can't go on! We'll have to stop in this cave all night!" [laughter]

And so I fixed up some rope loops out of the rope, and dropped them to him. I had climbed up out of there, and it was tough, a difficult passage, and they came struggling up with these rope loops. It wasn't very easy to do it that way, but they did get out of there.

And we got up on top where it was getting dusk. And Louis was in such a hurry to get home, he started to run all the way down to the San Luis Valley, and I had a terrible time getting him back up on the ridge where we had to be to go down the other side [laughter] of the ridge [laughter] to the car, to where our camp was! We got home at dawn the next morning! [laughter] Big day!

FINLEY:

Yes, indeed! Well, now, your own teaching at Colorado College--how would you describe your teaching style and the pace of your day?

ORMES:

Well, I--pretty often--I looked forward to teaching, usually. I always had a good time with kids. I didn't plan things--oh, we read from plans, always. I didn't plan things much. I didn't plan effects that I would work on kids' dramatic effects, which I think some teachers do. But we had an informal relationship, a pretty happy one.

I never thought I was one of the really good teachers, because I think I probably wasn't as well founded in English. Also, I'm a little stupid about some things--I found that it took me longer to understand people like Faulkner, and T. S. Eliot, and some of the other people. I would stay with it, and about three years after I started teaching one of those guys, I was getting up to where the other guys were when they started.

But I always enjoyed it, and I guess the kids didn't--well, I think the very best students never came to me, really, in the department. But I had a following that liked me, so that I fulfilled a useful function, I think, in the department.

FINLEY:

Freshman English was required at that time, wasn't it?

ORMES:

Well, for a long--yeah, when I was first there, we had freshman courses, and this had a lot of writing in it. I think it was really laziness that took those out of commission--out of use--rather than a genuine situation of need. I think that at least two-thirds of the students ought to have that kind of a course where they have to write and have somebody read a lot of stuff and correct it. It's very much drudgery, but it's one of the reasons why people can get--they can know a whole lot about a subject, for instance, and be quite unable to do any writing.

FINLEY:

Did you involve your students much in your extracurricular activities?

ORMES:

Well, no, not in the winter--well, yeah, a little bit, especially toward the end. I taught a freshman seminar in railroading, and I took those kids out--we had this block system by then--and I took them out, and we'd go camping some place where I didn't know where the railroad was. And I would divide them up into teams, and give them maps, and used some of the material that they brought in, on my railroad book later. Not much, because I was too busy.

Well, in one case I was getting them out of jail in Cortez, and this kind of thing. [laughter] And I was always cooking for them-- [laughter]--they took a little attention! So it wasn't pure exploration!

FINLEY:

Right. Among your faculty colleagues, who do you remember as memorable and good friends, and some of the incidents that--

ORMES:

Well, I've had specially pleasant relations with those who wanted to go climbing--mountaineering. And lately, Dan Tynan, Bob Armstrong, Tom Mauch, particularly. And, oh--very much Alexey Malyshev, who wasn't an English colleague. And of course, Lester Michel--I've talked mountains with him always. And--who else, I don't know. Some of the faculty have been on the Saturday Knight group, and I've know them that way.

FINLEY:

Now, for the benefit of future scholars, Saturday Knights means something to you and means something--

ORMES:

Yeah!

FINLEY:

--can you describe what--

ORMES:

Well, the name is--which Mr. Hodgetts, one of the members, used to say, savored too much of the sword and the plume--

FINLEY:

Is it spelled with a "K"?

ORMES:

Yes!

FINLEY:

Yes.

ORMES:

Actually, they went out for Saturday night. They went out at 1:00 on the streetcar. My dad--Mr. Woodbridge would always--he loved his wife, and he hated to leave her, and he would always run over to the streetcar just as it was ready to leave the corner, with his bootlaces untied. Sometimes he would trip on one of them, and fall headlong into the door of the streetcar! [laughter]

But anyway, it was a Saturday evening affair that went from about 1:30 or so 'til 9:00. And this went on until--oh, the middle of Earl Bryson's period with it, when it seemed to dwindle away. People had so much going on socially on Saturday nights.

And they decided, you know, so they got so they didn't like to sit out in the mountains that long, on a rock, because they didn't get tired enough to make it comfortable!

And they instituted a different plan. They go out for the morning. Now we go out at 9:00 Saturday morning, and we get back, usually, about 1:30 in the afternoon.

FINLEY:

And this group has been going since 19--

ORMES:

1903, there were three people walking--[Sidney F.] Pattison, [A. G.] Hodgetts, and [Henry C.] Skinner, and in 1904, my father joined them. It got a little bit larger from then on, and my recollections of it date back to when they spent all their time hashing over the Slocum-Parsons controversy, and the Duniway business.

FINLEY:

What can you recall of that controversy?

ORMES:

Well, I didn't hear so much of that, but I heard about it at home afterwards. [chuckle] These conversations--they were just full of it, you know--all of them were upset and stirred up.

I remember Mr. Woodbridge--he lived over the back fence, and he had a couple of daughters, one of whom became Judge Jackson's second wife. But the older one, Dorothy, I was very fond of. She was a little, jolly, kind of sweetie-pie of mine, and we played and laughed about things. And . . . what was I trying--

FINLEY:

You were talking about the Slocum--

ORMES:

Yeah! Yeah! They talked about that all the time. They were upset and angry, and Duniway wanted to become a member, and I think--

FINLEY:

Of the Saturday Knights?

ORMES:

Yeah! And I think they either told him he couldn't, or they brought him along and walked his tail off! I don't know--it was something like that! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Was he not, then, very well accepted?

ORMES:

Oh, not at all by those old people! Of course, they left, and in fact, he only lasted a year or so. He was a sort of--he was brought there to help them get out of here. He was brought by the trustees to sort of justify--you see, this was a very purist thing, that Parsons brought against Slocum.

Slocum had been a great and capable president, and he did get a little bit soft upon women, and he was certainly a hypocrite all around. But, you know, he had an apostolic rumble, and very dignified, but he--and in those days, any kind of a little spot, you know, in a man's sex life was just too much for anybody to swallow.

FINLEY:

Do you think the charges against him were probably true?

ORMES:

Oh, they were true, but so what? You know, we wouldn't think of that now.

FINLEY:  
No.

ORMES:  
I mean, he slipped his hand over somebody's butt, or something like that, you know, and they got into a tizzy about it! [laughter] Same thing I do every time I go to a dance! [laughter] And we know what the kids do now, too. They do as they decide they're going to.

FINLEY:  
That's right! Well, was Duniway--

ORMES:  
And he only was here a year or two.

FINLEY:  
Was he sort of forced out by--

ORMES:  
Oh, I think so.

FINLEY:  
--public opinion?

ORMES:  
I guess so. The students didn't have any respect for him, and of course, there was a layover of students from that earlier period, you see. It took a student four years to go through college. The trustees then gave the presidency to [Charles C.] Mierow, who was a fine classical scholar, and a very gentlemanly fellow, but he hadn't any gift for administration. He lost respect because of that, you know. He didn't know how to handle situations.

So the college was certainly in the doldrums as far as its leadership was concerned. There were some great men in that period that came in, and didn't have any rancor left from the old days, at all. [Lewis] Abbott, and Daehler, and--oh, [Ralph] Gilmore was a capable man. It was a little rough.

FINLEY:  
Hmmm. I guess the Depression years probably didn't help the college in that situation--

ORMES:  
No, no, that's right!

FINLEY:  
--because of the financial difficulties!

ORMES:

Double trouble, yeah!

FINLEY:

Yes, indeed. Well, now, back to the Saturday Knights. You had said that Dunningway was not [chuckle] really accepted. Were the Saturday Knights always kind of considered the inner circle of the college, or--

ORMES:

No, no.

FINLEY:

--were they people who were interested in the mountains?

ORMES:

No--well, I think--they didn't ever have a formal organization. I know that they took President Slocum out one time--this was earlier, before any trouble had come up. They talked about that occasion a good deal afterwards, because Slocum was cold. There was a little cool breeze along in the darkness, and he stood up with his back to the fire, and I guess his pants hung a little loose, and when he sat down [laughter] he [laughter] exploded with some very unpresidential [laughter] language [laughter] and they were laughing about that forever after, because he wouldn't have liked that--didn't like that sort of thing to escape him! [laughter] It just came out! [laughter] Most people, when they get upset about anything--[laughter].

FINLEY:

How many members are there in the Saturday Knights? Is it a--

ORMES:

It is not a fixed membership. We have now, and I think you might say, a dozen average, on the average. There was a period when there were fewer. There was a split-off.

[Professor Guy H.] Albright of the faculty wanted to take his son along, and the men felt that would restrict some of their ribaldries, and so he had to quit--either leave the son at home or quit, and he took the son and organized another party. And I used to go with them some of the time, but they got so they played horseshoes instead of hiking--out in the mountains! [laughter] Dusty business, you know! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Right! Have the Saturday Knights always been mainly

faculty people, or do you have some--

ORMES:

No, no. Of late, it's been a number of--sort of a scattering of various people who just sort of introduced their friends, and so on. The membership is larger, and--I've been sort of interested in bringing some faculty back into it, because--well, frankly, they're most interesting people than some of the others we've had. We always had doctors. We always had Dr. McLanahan, and Dr. Dennis, who were lots of fun, and Dr. McCue, I think, went with us a little. We have--now we have Dr. Williams.

FINLEY:

Oh, yes. He's very interested in local history.

ORMES:

Local history, and he's got a--he's part of the fire department, and he's witty, and amusing, has good stories and stuff. Always can dig up a good limerick! [laughter]

FINLEY:

I really would like to know a little bit about your impressions of the changes over the years, particularly as the characters and personalities of the administration--the presidents--affected the college. What kinds of big social movements do you see as sort of changing the character of the college over the years?

ORMES:

Well, I don't know as I can say anything new about that. Everybody knows that there's been a big revolution in mores. My own reactions to it were slow--I was slow to feel that this was anything but a downhill movement. But I don't think so any more. I see present students being just as fine people, and also just as . . . just as much daydreamers about reality in their way as their forebears were. We have a franker approach to behavior; we have something that's almost anarchy as far as real morality goes, but this is worldwide--it isn't just the college.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. When do you think this really began to take place?

ORMES:

Well, I'm very poor on dates. But it's probably a phenomenon of the sixties and seventies--maybe earlier, but not so much earlier. Of course, there were hints of it. I remember my dad's library assistant--librarian, Miss Canon, said to me about the time I was fascinated by such books as Robin Hood and Lorna Doone, and so on [chuckle]--she was condemning the romantic outlook on life--the thing of putting

a woman on a pedestal and pretending a lot of things weren't so, and were so, and so on. And I was a little shocked by that, because I loved these books, and I loved to [chuckle] daydream about the things I read that were romantic.

And yet, she was a kind of forerunner, and many other people were, I'm sure. I remember there was a period when we heard about "companionate marriage" with considerable shock from Judge Lindsey in Denver. I didn't think there was anything good about that, you know! [laughter] I've never had much imagination! [laughter] But the way all these changes are being handled, I approve of. I think that people do adapt themselves, and the whole place doesn't go to pot when you get a change like that. But it looks as if it would.

FINLEY:

So you feel the current--

ORMES:

Oh, yeah--

FINLEY:

--attitudes at college--

ORMES:

--yeah! And I think the human relations between the kids are just as eclectic as ever, you know. I don't think this--I think there's promiscuity in some areas, and probably always was. But I think that by and large, people still live by their standards, and their standards are very real and very much geared to sensible human relationships. I've got grandnieces and so on, that live with people they are not married with, and this took me a little while. But of course, I mean--they know how to do it.

Oh, there are some things lost, I think in the loss of the romantic--the obstacle approach to pleasure and sex and so on. And I think I sort of deplore that also in our affluence. There are people, I think, who actually believe nowadays that affluence contributes to happiness. It doesn't.

FINLEY:

No.

ORMES:

No, the thing that contributes to happiness is being able to function--to do things.

FINLEY:

Yes.

ORMES:

Employ your powers.

FINLEY:

You certainly seem to have made good use in your own life of the involvement in doing things, and combining work and play. Can you enlarge a little bit further on your own philosophy and teaching, and your own approach to--

ORMES:

Well, I think I said something about being anti-professional.

FINLEY:

Yes.

ORMES:

I think as far as teaching was concerned, this was kind of real.

FINLEY:

Did you try to impart this to your students, or not?

ORMES:

No, only through casual comments. I wasn't trying to tell them anything. In fact, I wasn't even sure I was right, you know--right for me, but maybe not the next guy! I think you've got to have professional standards, and all that sort of thing. I think that they are overrated, but I think you would have chaos without them, probably. The kind of standard, for instance, that bothered me for not having a doctorate, and so on. I would never have stayed--I started to go for an advanced degree in sociology for awhile. But--one summer in Chicago. Fascinating courses, but I didn't want to go on with that, and do the kind of stuff they have to do. As long as I could get a job without it . . .

FINLEY:

You must have been away from your own family and also from your job at the college rather frequently in your pursuit of your work in your mountaineering. Did this ever cause any conflict?

ORMES:

Well, really, there never was any problem. I think my family were not unhappy. When Ellingwood took us on a month-long trip--I was a sort of a chaperon for himself and two of his chicks from the athletic department, females [chuckle]--and I was just a boy, really, just a big boy.

FINLEY:

This was Albert Ellingwood?

ORMES:

Yes. He had been a student, and he was then a faculty member. So there was no problem there. He just simply had to promise my parents that he wouldn't take them on any of these horrible cliff-climbs that he was doing. And of course, he gave me enough enthusiasm, so that's exactly how I spent a whole lot of my time, trying to climb every cliff in Colorado! I got cooled out once or twice by [chuckle] slipping and falling, and began to find out I did have some limitations. I was pretty good! [chuckle] By those standards! But the way kids climb now--the good ones--they are real acrobats, for one thing. And they have better equipment, too.

FINLEY:

You once climbed Lizardhead, didn't you?

ORMES:

Yes.

FINLEY:

Was that your most difficult cliff of all?

ORMES:

Maybe. Well, it was a rotten rock! It wasn't the most difficult climbing, but it was the most dangerous. In fact, I wrote a line that's become the only funny line in my guidebook. I gave them the route to go up there, and then I said, "Take a photograph and go home." [laughter] Instead of climbing it, because it is too rotten to depend on. It isn't rockclimbing, it's a conquest of hazards.

FINLEY:

Did you frequently go off alone--

ORMES:

My wife is the one who's really been good about--I don't know whether she's glad to have me out of the house--that's part of it, perhaps. But she never has worried. I usually can tell her to the hour when I'm going to be home, but there's been a couple of times when I haven't been, and she doesn't get upset--she knows I'll come back!

FINLEY:

Right.

ORMES:

Maybe I won't, someday! [laughter] Then she'll have a hard time for a few days!

FINLEY:

In your expeditions, did you get interested in the railroad end of things later than the other?

ORMES:

Sort of. I had that in my blood from that old Colorado Midland railroad running up to Crystola, and also from a trip. I started to hitch-hike across the state one time, and I ran in, by accident, to--I decided I'd hike from Poncha Springs over somewhere west, and get on the road to Gunnison on the other side of the range. I just ran into that D&RG narrow gauge running up through the aspens on the side of a mountain! Very exciting! I got up to the top, and got into a train, and had a train ride.

But I don't know, this is just sort of one of those things. It started out as being part of the mountains. And in my first edition of The Guidebook to the Colorado Mountains, I had a whole chapter on the mountains by rail, as well as the mountains by car, and so on. That was the way I divided the--that has since disappeared from it, because there was so much mountain material to put in.

But I loved the mountains, and I loved the mountain railroads. I haven't ridden a lot of them--that's a little dull. And George McHugh says you are apt to get your--he was talking about this wonderful ride he'd had across the narrow gauge, clear over to Silverton, from Antonito. He was describing the marvelous trip, and how everybody was picking cinders out of each other's eyes on the way back! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Your interest, I take it then, has not been specifically as a railroad buff interested in all the mechanical--

ORMES:

No, no.

FINLEY:

--details? It's more in the trail routes--

ORMES:

Yeah, really, it's the railroad on the ground. And this is why my book has been sort of successful, because I don't know a tenth as much about these railroads. All the material I have in there--there's very little original research. I have discovered one or two things, but more or less by accident.

But the usual railroad buffs, the kind that make up a

railroad club--those guys just--they dote on all kinds of accurate, detailed numerical statements about railroads. They don't want you to--I mean, they remember the whole boxcar number series on some railroad. Locomotive numbers are very important to them.

I don't know anything about that stuff, at all. But I love to get out and see where the tracks ran. And I have a unique collection of spikes. I have the biggest collection of spikes, I'm sure, that is, from the largest number of railroads and railroad branches--defunct--that there is!

FINLEY:

I hope they're all properly labeled and ready to go.

ORMES:

Well, they are. Each one has a little paper wrapped alongside it, and a little wire wrapped around the paper. One or two have fallen off--I hope I can match them up.

FINLEY:

Remember. Tell us a little bit--

ORMES:

It's idiotic, because nearly all of them look exactly alike! [laughter]

FINLEY:

You must be becoming a railroad buff in spite of yourself! [laughter] Are you, at the moment, working on some more mapping projects?

ORMES:

Yeah. This is fascinating fun.

FINLEY:

Describe what you're doing. I think it's very interesting. We're sitting here in this room full of quadrangle maps.

ORMES:

Yeah. I'm taking these quadrangles, as with the Pikes Peak atlas, but with some refinements that I didn't have at that time, copying the master, or 200-foot contours, and on one sheet of mylar--which is a plastic paper that doesn't stretch or anything--and on another, on the same map, I put a sheet and do the water, the drainage, and on a third, I do the culture, which requires larger printing, because these are all reduced in scale in the photographic process.

I'm interested in doing this for the most spectacular

and interesting high mountain areas. It isn't a trail-centered thing as much as a trail and peak thing. I have peak groups marked for not only the fourteeners, but all kinds of other interesting peaks. For instance, the one I just completed, and it was published--it was ready to sell before Christmas--is of the Elk Range, which covers the ground west of Independence Pass down to Paonia Reservoir, and between Aspen and Crested Butte. I'm doing now three of these things--they'll be on a little more favorable scale to read--for the three parts of the main San Juan region. Lake City to Telluride to Ouray, to Silverton, and all that big block of marvelous mountains!

FINLEY:

Uh-hum!

ORMES:

And these are the best way--they're better than my guidebook, really, to really understand what you're going.

FINLEY:

When do you expect this San Juan one to be finished?

ORMES:

Well, I don't know. I want to have at least one summer, probably two summers, before I do all the publishing. I may concentrate on one of the three for each of the next summers.

FINLEY:

I see.

ORMES:

I'll have everything ready except the culture. I've got a lot of the culture, because I know a lot of that stuff from my guidebook explorations. But I want to be up to date, and I want to get into each area. I don't try to climb every peak--it would just take three lives! But I'm going to go up certain ones from which I can see others, and see where the routes look feasible, and where it's rough. I can tell a lot of that from the contours, because I've developed a lot of ability to read maps now. It's a lot of fun.

FINLEY:

Let's see--you're--

ORMES:

Steffie here--

FINLEY:

She's doing--

ORMES:

--is doing the contours for this whole set of three San Juan maps. This involves--oh, I don't know--probably 45 or so--50 quadrangles. Not complete quadrangles, in all cases; some of them are cut--

FINLEY:

That's fantastic!

ORMES:

--where the trail . . .

FINLEY:

Well, now, you must be approaching--let's see--70 years of age or so--[chuckle]

ORMES:

I'd have to approach backwards! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Approach backwards! [laughter] And I take it your knees don't keep you from going off in the mountains as much as you used to?

ORMES:

Oh, I have a cartilage--I had a cartilage accident, jumping off--falling off a bus in Guatemala, and that leg--I can't come downhill as fast as I could.

FINLEY:

But you still go--

ORMES:

And I probably can't go quite as long as I could.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ORMES:

But I don't expect to, at this age. Boy, I can have just as much fun, though! [laughter] All you have to do is just not set your sights quite so high! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

Oh, that's wonderful!

ORMES:

If I were asked if I would like to go up Mount Rainier, I'd probably say "No," now. Certainly that's the case with Mount McKinley, or some big--

FINLEY:  
Right.

ORMES:

I've always liked Colorado so much that I think it's really a pity to go somewhere else for vacation! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

If you had to sum up your entire career in some mythical autobiography, what would you say in the final paragraph [chuckle] about your life and career?

ORMES:

I wrote that the other day! [laughter] I'm doing my memoirs, but--

FINLEY:

Oh, you are going to write your memoirs?

ORMES:

--but I don't know whether they'll ever see the light of day. It's very hard to organize, and I'm going to go ahead. Some of it's very dull, but I think there's probably some pretty good stuff in there, too. And if I can ever--you know, I want to get this mapping sort of along, and then I want to go back to that.

I started this--oh, long, long ago, and put it away. It was pretty well written stuff, but it didn't come to anything--it didn't go anywhere. It just didn't have any conclusion. I called it Mirth in the Making, and this was sort of the fact. This was sort of the usual kind of first novel thing, where you try to tell your story, and how messed up you were, and how, finally, you got on top of it! [laughter]

FINLEY:

So you were--

ORMES:

And I'm as much on top of it right now as I ever was, if not more so, you know. Bad leg and all that!

[Tape change]

FINLEY:

We've turned the tape over to Side 2 here, so that Bob Ormes, you can give us a little more of your fascinating recollections about the life and times of Colorado College. [chuckle] And I thought you might like to describe in some detail, since it's no longer with us, the old Coburn Library, and then perhaps contrast your feelings about such old buildings with the newer buildings on campus.

ORMES:

Well, there certainly is a contrast. I remember Coburn. You went in--this was one of the big, red sandstone buildings, like Palmer, and like Perkins. Perkins had a cheaper grade of local sandstone from the Red Rock quarry. The others were the same color, but really good, hard sandstone from somewhere else--I don't know where. It may have been Lyons. It's a deep red, beautiful sandstone. Palmer, excuse me, was brick, mainly.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ORMES:

But it fits in. The library was thick-walled. It had a strange design. It went up to a very high ceiling all through the center, and it had dreadful little circular iron stairways going up to a shallow upper-story of--shallow depth from the fence that fenced it in to the wall--shelves--shelf area. And there was a ladder up there that was almost vertical, that you could move around--the one that Miss [Louise] Kampf fell off of a couple of times, to her real injury.

In the middle, as you came in, was the Niké of Samothrace, this piece that was a copy that the Noyes family--a person who I think--Mrs. Fette of the English department--her son-in-law was in the English department--had given the library.

FINLEY:

How do you spell that name?

ORMES:

F-E-T-T-E. She had money, and she gave that and some other money to the college, I think, from time to time.

FINLEY:

Whatever happened to that statue--

ORMES:

I don't know.

FINLEY:

--did it stay there?

ORMES:

No--well, yes, it was there, I think--

FINLEY:

--before I was a student--

ORMES:

Was it gone? Yeah, I don't know when that was taken out, or why. I never heard of its being injured or anything, but it really was an imposing thing--very big. It was a full-sized copy, and on a pedestal--dominated the approach, and of course, accentuated the classical . . . the dominance of the classics in the college, the liberal arts tradition of the college.

I worked in the library for my dad, just manual stuff like cleaning and so on, that had to be done, and I sort of liked the old building; it was great. When they got ready to take it down--by that time I had had some appreciation of architecture, and I thought it was a tremendous pity that they had to take that down.

It was taken down, we were told because the people who were going to give Armstrong Hall, the Olin Foundation, wanted that corner, and wanted to use that space. It would have been a hard building to do anything with, I suppose. There was some talk of making it a museum, partly since the other museum was in a bad location, up on the third floor of Palmer Hall, or maybe fourth floor--three-and-a-halfth floor. And some of the things up there were pretty mangy by then--very little attention was paid to the museum.

Palmer Hall is one of the great buildings--college buildings, considered countrywide, I think. It's cool in the summer, and pleasant in the winter, without the help of a malfunctioning cooling system--I mean air conditioning--which we have in Armstrong. And it is a generously built building. To build a building that was that big, and held that much and have it architecturally very satisfying was--it was a great achievement!

The sort of middle-period building was the one that went up in the Depression years--the chapel. A beautiful building, very much in the traditional manner, Norman architecture.

I think the newer buildings leave something to be desired. Of course, architecture has gone this way. I think Olin is an interesting building, with its thick walls--its double wall structure, pipes and sort of all extra things being housed between the inner wall and the outer wall, and those sunken windows.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. What about Armstrong?

ORMES:

Armstrong is--well, I had a room on the second floor, an office on the second floor corner, northeast corner, and I had to wear my overcoat all winter in there, always. But I sort of liked it, too. I think that as a building it somehow has less character. I think the theater is a good one, that part of it. It seemed to me to be--to have sort of--of course, the hallways in Armstrong are not pleasant; they are narrow. Well, they're not awfully narrow, but they're not like the great hall all the way along, in Palmer.

I'm talking too much about this one thing.

FINLEY:

Well, just in general, I take it you--

ORMES:

I'm pretty conservative.

FINLEY:

--old buildings, rather than new! [chuckle]

ORMES:

Yes, yeah! The good old buildings, I think have a lot--you know, you seem as if they were there for good. And I think the new ones look as if they had been made for a shorter period.

FINLEY:

What do you think your father would have said if he was given a Tutt Library--about the building--the library?

ORMES:

Well, it certainly has a lot more space. It's a good library building. I do know that there was a big hassle about lights, and there was a big hassle about some--we've been told, I don't know whether this is true or not, but one of the room downstairs was not provided with a door in the plans--the original plans! [chuckle] So if all had gone according to plan, it would have been a sealed room! [laughter] I don't know whether it's true or not. [laughter] That may be an exaggeration for something that did happen! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Right!

ORMES:

The old library didn't have separate rooms for study, or a lot of the new things that this library has.

FINLEY:

The Colorado Room collection, which your father assembled, I guess almost single-handedly, was located where in the old library?

ORMES:

It was at the north end of the library. I hardly remember it. I think there was a lot of stuff in a basement room, and he had on the opposite side of the basement, in the back, in that north end, he had a workroom down there, where he did some of his newspaper cataloguing--not cataloguing, but indexing.

FINLEY:

Okay. Let's switch now to a discussion of people. We have discussed old and new buildings. Perhaps you would like to--

ORMES:

Talk about some of the old--

FINLEY:

--talk about the style of people old and new--perhaps contrasting someone like Slocum with our current administrative--

ORMES:

Yes!

FINLEY:

--and their manners, and--

ORMES:

Of course, Slocum belonged to the tradition of Congregational ministers--New England tradition. Dignity first--sometimes [chuckle] perhaps, a little hypocrisy. They used to--the students used to--I didn't know anything about him at the time, except from my older siblings, my brother and sister. And they would talk about the Friday morning Ethics that he would--he had a little class in ethics, or talk to them in chapel about this, or something, and he was very dignified.

But the professors, when the troubles came, felt that he was something of a hypocrite, in that he would--he had made some promises, I think, about wages, or some implications that he didn't carry out. I think this is almost inevitable with an administrator; they get into some of that trouble sooner or later. But to a person who pretended to so much piety, in a person--it seemed a worse thing.

I met Mr. Slocum with my little Ford car one time when he came back--I think it was the--or, it may have been a little better car than that--I guess it was a Model T. But I took him around the town, a few places he wanted to see, and

he was very much an old man. I think this was at the program--at the time of the program for the inauguration or the inception of the use of the Slocum Hall. [sic] He--well, he still had, sort of in a babbling fashion, the old suggestion of dignity.

I have a great memory passed on from my brother of the dignity of the dean, then, who was Edward S. Parsons. In telling my brother about his son's marriage, he said, "We are--Mrs. Parsons and I are delighted to tell you that Edward--our son, Edward--has formed an alliance with a girl who is in every way worthy of him." [chuckle] And my brother, who loves humor, rolled that around on his tongue an awful lot, I can tell you!

Rick Bradley is the kind of dean who debunks the special dignity, the accoutrements of dignity. He doesn't pretend to any great [chuckle] pompousities, and he is one of the finest examples of the new style, I think.

FINLEY:

It's always nice to see Dean Bradley--oh, for example, last weekend at a hockey game, he had just come in from cross-country skiing, and was rather disheveled, and had had a good day, and--no pretensions whatsoever!

ORMES:

Yes, yeah. He goes skiing far more than hiking. He doesn't seem to get excited about going hiking--which, of course, you can do a lot more of the year. I'm going to try to get him outdoors a little more.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. But you think the new style is definitely less formal, and more straightforward and--

ORMES:

Yes, yes. People don't go for the pretentious any more.

FINLEY:

Did Slocum ever sort of come down to the level of the students and enjoy--

ORMES:

No, I don't think so. Cajori was the one who would whoop and holler at a football game. He had a lot of the kid in him--he loved--he was enthusiastic about the athletics, and he was a big boy, as well as a great mathematician, and a great mathematical historian, and a delightful person.

FINLEY:

Let's see, your own--

ORMES:

I've been asked to--sometimes, when Barbara was running the magazine, the CC magazine, to put down some of these things that I've heard and remembered from old faculty--and really, there's quite a little stuff there. I sort of ran out, you know. I put down all the things I could think of, and then began to run out, and I begged off.

FINLEY:

But you did publish a few--

ORMES:

I put some of those in there--

FINLEY:

--things about--recollections?

ORMES:

Yeah, yeah.

FINLEY:

When were those published in the college magazine?

ORMES:

Well, my period--she was let out about a year ago, wasn't she, or so?

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ORMES:

Well, my period had ended about a year or two before that, and I was doing this off and on for--oh, maybe three years, three or four years. I don't know whether it was that much or not.

FINLEY:

Okay. When we finished side one of this tape, you were talking about your current writing, sort of refurbishing the memoirs that you had begun to write some years ago. Can you tell a little more about--

ORMES:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

--what sorts of things you're putting in there and--

ORMES:

Yes.

FINLEY:

--hope to publish them?

ORMES:

Yes. I used to tell my students--they would have an impulse to write, and they would join a writing course that I had. And I felt that the first thing they ought to decide was that they weren't trying to be writers, but they were trying to write something! [chuckle] I think there's sort of a bad thing that goes with the idea of writing, that it's mixed up with the idea of fame, somehow. So their vanity gets into it, and perhaps impedes them.

I think the real stimuli for writing often come from anger--social anger, whatnot. But all the same, in my own attempts to write, I've always failed where it came to organization. So I decided that I would have some fun this year, along with the mapping--something else to do--to put down the things that I remembered, from--oh, childhood on up.

The things that were most vivid--and let simply the vividness, the degree of vividness of memory be the criterion of whether the thing would go in or not. I think this will probably result in a very hodge-podge kind of compilation of experiences. But it will give me total freedom when I sit down, not to stare at an empty page and wonder how this is going to fit in with the next, how I'm going to manage transitions.

And I remember some things about--very much childhood--trains, going to Crystola, people, various people. Also, I'd sort of like to link this in with recollections of, I think, the most interesting people that I have known or known about in Colorado Springs, as a representation of the quality and type of town it is, as well as the college and so on. Some of these are college people, and a lot of them are not--people that lend the town its flavor. Nothing in the way of formal history.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ORMES:

I think Marsh Sprague has done a very good job of that kind. But it sort of puts the emphasis all on the movers, the prime movers, and sometimes even works on making a story a journalese kind of thing, whereas I think that the people around here are terribly fascinating. It might altogether constitute a kind of collection of the flavor of people. It's the first time I've done writing that has been, practically all of it, fun.

And I think this is, perhaps--it may be an improvement on the other because of this, simply because I'm not struggling to do something I can't do, make an arrangement out of it, that fits some kind of a plot, some kind of a theme. The thing as a whole may occur as a theme, just as a person himself is something of a theme.

FINLEY:

If there is a theme, what do you think it will be?

ORMES:

Perhaps the story of a transition from a very immature, maladjusted kid who was way out in left field and knew it, to a sort of a happy person, who really [chuckle] doesn't get too [chuckle] uptight about things most of the time!

FINLEY:

[chuckle] You say you don't get uptight about things?

ORMES:

I'm uptight a little bit about the brevity of life! And what I think it does is just--you know, Yeats' kind of reaction to things. He's a tattered something on a stick--a scarecrow. I have a feeling that--you know, I haven't--I think I've just missed the end of that tape said I didn't have any teeth and I had one bad eye, and I had--what else? Oh, a bum knee! [chuckle] And of course, I think about how short the rest of life probably is, without knowing [chuckle] exactly what this amounts to in time.

And I think it's good, it's probably good that we don't live forever. I think what this does is lend value to life, and it is--I feel that I'm scared enough by the brevity of life to be stimulated a great deal of the time. Maybe that's a good note to end on! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Thank you so much. This has been a delightful occasion; I've enjoyed every minute of it.

ORMES:

[laughter] You're welcome! [laughter] I've enjoyed it too! [laughter as tape is turned off]

THE END