

George Seldes
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Mark Greenberg
Interviewer

MG I am speaking with George Seldes and it is October 29, 1987 in Hartland, Vermont and we are doing this for the Green Mountain Chronicles. Okay, now there are a number of topics that I wanted to ask you about that might tie into some of the things we are doing in this...

GS Go right ahead, ask anything.

MG So we will start out with Vermont and maybe we'll go...

GS How did you come to Vermont?

MG No, I'm not going to ask you that one for...we'll come to that later okay.

GS That's a good question, alright.

MG Well alright, we'll start with it then. How did you come to Vermont?

GS Well, I worked 17 years in Europe, foreign correspondent. Ten years for the Chicago Tribune. That is from 1916 - 1933 and at that time we had what they called a bank holiday and the money was no good and I didn't have a cent to my name. Luckily I had purchased a year or six months or earlier before the bank, I had return tickets for myself and wife. So we got back to America. Well we were invited to Brattleboro by a man that summer. He had a summer home in Brattleboro. His name was Paul Osborne. He's a famous Broadway writer at the time. I think he still is. We spent a couple of weeks there and we liked everything about Vermont and there was a woman who ran a little inn there in West Brattleboro and we, well I think we lived there for \$25.00 a week with all our meals, and a room and bath and everything. It was wonderful. Well while we were there, an old friend of mine named Sinclair Lewis. Now Sinclair Lewis had bought a place in 1928 I think in Barnard. I had known him since 1927. He was really an old friend of mine. In fact of all the notable people that I've mentioned in my book, I think he's the only real close friend. Well anyway, he came by, driving from New York to Barnard and he knew I was in Brattleboro, stopped by and looked me up and said "Why don't you buy a house in my neighborhood". He said, "You'll be near the best college library in the United States and the best medical installation in New England," meaning Mary Hitchcock Clinic, Mary Hitchcock Hospital, etc. I said Red, that sounds beautiful, everything except I haven't got a cent. He said, "I got to much money" and he said "Why don't you and Helen jump in the car and let's go to Woodstock and get a real estate agent". So we did and she

was a woman and she took us down on the road between Woodstock and South Woodstock. There's one long road to the left in the valley. It's the only one that you see on the account of Dunham Hill. It's past Dunham Hill. It's really long. I think we went 4 miles along that road, came to a crossroads and there was a little house 1783. That was the last year when they were still fighting the revolutionary war. It was built with wooden pins, I'll have you know. Just the thing that I wanted. \$4,500 with 125 acres of land overlooking Killington and Camels Hump and Pico and the whole Green Mountain Range. It was a tremendous place for \$4,500. Sinclair Lewis wrote me out a check for \$2,000 and he said "George, that's a present". He said "You don't ever have to return it. If you ever strike it right with a book or something, and you feel that your conscious bothers you, well send it back, otherwise you can keep it". And he guaranteed a mortgage at \$2,000 and my brother sent me \$500. \$4,500 we bought this place.

MG It's amazing.

GS Let me tell you, it's a great place. So I became a Vermonter. I registered immediately. I don't know why, but because I had never voted before. After all, 17 years in Europe. I went to Europe in 1916. I had never voted before, so just because, you know, just to be contrary wise and I was always a dissenter about everything and just because I knew it was a republican state I registered as a democrat. But that doesn't mean that I ever voted totally democratic ticket. In fact when I was up before, the McCarthy committee, Senator Simington asked me what party I belonged to. I said, "Well I'm an Aiken Democrat. He said "What do you mean, you vote the democratic ticket but it gives you a stomach ache?" I said "No, I spell Aiken, A-I-K-E-N." I said, "I think George Aiken's the best man in Vermont, I'd like to see him President of the United States, but as it is I'd vote for him, Republican ticket for the senate and FDR for President." Well about that time McCarthy says I don't see much of a case against you and wait outside or something like that. That helped my case a lot.

MG Did you know George Aiken?

GS Yes, I knew him before he was a senator. When we first came here, I told you about that little house in South Woodstock. It had a nice brook around it and all like that and we heard about the wild plant nursery that he ran in Putney. So we drove down there early in the 1930's and started buying Wild Orchids and other things that we

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planted along the brook and in our garden. We had a beautiful garden there. Also each year I went there and each year I met George Aiken. That's, I mean I don't, I just knew him as a business man that's all. I had business with him.

MG What were your impressions of him?

GS I liked Aiken very much. I also thought he was a very capable senator.

MG What were the qualities that made him so able?

GS Huh?

MG What qualities did he have that made him so capable?

GS Well, I don't, the usual qualities, I don't know what, I don't know. I had a very fine impression of him. Just as I have of Pat Leahy today. I mean I think we are well represented in Washington incidently on both parties. You know republican and democrat.

MG Do you remember during the Vietnam War the speech that Aiken made about that we should simply declare victory and get out?

GS Yes I think, I remember that. That's probably what we exactly did at the end, didn't we. Well we didn't declare victory, we got out and it was practically a defeat I mean I don't know. Not that Vietnam could defeat the United States if we'd thrown in what we could you know but that was, yea, he was capable of some very clever ideas like that too, wasn't he. That was a very clever idea.

MG Now apparently people are now saying that that's not really quite what he said, but that's sort of become the popular version of it.

GS I forgot what I was going to say. Listen, I want to mention one thing to you and since this is going to be heard in Vermont, everybody who has been here from Vermont, I have this fact. If you go to Barnard, there isn't a trace of the fact that Sinclair Lewis lived there for maybe 10 years or more and wrote 5 books there including that famous book "It Can't Happen Here" about how a Vermont country editor defeated a plan by a senator to establish a fascist government in the United States. He calls him Doramus Jesup and he says he came from Brattleboro. In other words, he was hinting at the Brattleboro Reformer I suppose, I'm not quite sure. But

anyway, it's, the book is called "It Can't Happen Here" and that's one of 5 books he wrote there. Now it seems to me, anywhere where some, and he was the first man in America in all history to get the Nobel Prize for Literature. There isn't a plaque on the house. There isn't a sign. You ask people, they've never heard of him. It's called the Summer Burke Ski Resort or something. Now, and nobody in Barnard seems to care, but it seems to me that the state should be proud of the fact that the first Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to a man who had become a resident and citizen of Vermont.

MG He lived here for 10 years you say?

GS Oh, he lived here for more than that.

MG Where did he live besides Barnard?

GS Just in Barnard. They bought what they called Twin Farms. A big farm and the next farm. And in the main house that he lived, there was actually two houses and later after he died and his wife who is Dorothy Thompson, when she married again, she married an artist and built a third house that is in the first place there because, for the artists you see. And the other place, the other place was about, oh we'll say 500 feet up the road and I think they rented that out. I know that Vincent _____ who was a noted writer at the time at one time Vincent _____ had rented that house. I don't know, for one year or more. I remember always meeting Vincent _____. He'd been a pal of mine in Europe before. One of the European correspondents of my generation. Incidentally, they are all gone now. When you get to be 97, pushing 98 as they say around here, all your friends are gone.

MG There was quite a collection of artists and writers around the time _____.

GS All due to, all due to, I would say to Sinclair Lewis. William E. Woodward who wrote "Meet General Grant" and a novel called "Bunk" which, which started the phrase debunking and everything else, he lived here. Then, oh, what was his name. He was a sergeant to Marines. Oh, I can't think of his name. Next time I think of it, I'll have to write it down. He married a descendent of John Fitch. Now John Fitch was a Vermonter and built the first steamboat in history. And he got a, you can see it in an encyclopedia. He got the first patten from the Colonial, from the Continental Congress, imagine. He got a patten for a steamboat and he ran it on Lake Champlain, from Burlington across to New York State and it was a

professional steamboat. It printed tickets. It carried passengers every day. I mean, but Fulton, Robert Fulton, but the steamboat that he had on the Hudson, gets all the credit. It was 10 years later mind you. There is another Vermont thing that I'd like to get straight you know. Well I mean some of us who are not real Vermonters love the state so much that we want to see it get all its credit.

MG Sure, do you remember any of the other writers who were associated with _____ at that time? Was Dorothy Canfield Fisher?

GS I don't remember her. Among the visitors here, he had H. G. Wells, was one of his visitors here. You know Lewis was always wanting to write what he called the "Great Labor Novel" and so you would find notable people were always at his place and he'd, he was a great what we call an ear biter. He could question you. When he was writing "It Can't Happen Here" which is about fascism you know. Of course his wife had been put out of Germany by Hitler and I had been thrown out of Italy by Mussolini. Well he certainly, I mean I was there for lunch at least once every week. And he would spend, he would spend hours questioning Dorothy and me. And believe it or not when he wrote something he knew what he was writing about. But he never got to write the Labor novel. And he once said to me "I guess it's because I was never a working man, that I can't write the "Great Labor Novel". But he says someone ought to write the "Great Labor Novel" in America. He never did.

MG Was he living in Vermont at the time of his death?

GS The time of what?

MG Of his death.

GS No, no, after about 10 or 12 years here, his wife who had started writing a column for the New York Herald got big space with Walter Lipman on one side and Dorothy Thompson on the other. And she became famous throughout the United States because she appeared five days a week, she appeared in the newspapers or six I don't know. And that made her famous. And the more famous she got, the more important she got. And the less important Red seemed to become. People forgot all about him. I mean he was just known as Dorothy Thompson's husband or something. He was greatly upset by that and I think that's when, you know they always talked of him as a big souse. He never was a souse. There was one short period in his life when he did

do a lot of drinking and that incidently was the time when she became famous and he was neglected by the whole press of the country. You have no idea how famous those columns were by Lipman and Thompson. Of course it was Mrs. Whitelaw Reed, I think was the owner of the, it was the Herald or the Tribune. It wasn't the Herald Tribune in those days. I forget. I think it was the Tribune, I'm not quite sure. But anyway that's what it was and Dorothy became the famous. At one time it was proposed that it was time that we had a woman president of the United States and some said well it would be a choice between Eleanor Roosevelt and Dorothy Thompson as the two leading women of the United States. You see. Well at first Red was very proud that his wife was getting that, but after awhile he was thoroughly forgotten it seemed and Dorothy was remembered and he was just Dorothy's husband. Poor man, I mean he had a vietnamese couple, one of them was a gardener and chauffeur and the other was a housekeeper and they used to call up, we lived in South Woodstock and say, "Mr. Seldes come at once. Mr. Lewis got the Libyan tremors." So Helen and I would jump in the car. Helen was the driver. She'd drive over. She'd put ice packs on his head, give him coffee and get him straightened out you know. But a week later, they'd call us again or something like that you know. Oh, we had quite a time with them. Yea. I'm trying to think, there were 4 or 5 other authors here, some of whom bought homes here. I'm trying to think. Let me see. Well I don't know. There were 5 or 6 names. I really ought to make a note of these because everybody in Vermont asks me about them.

MG Coming here from Europe and from being a foreign correspondent and all of that, wasn't Vermont a little on the sleepy side?

GS Well I don't know. I was, I had had enough of everything by 1933 you know. I mean I had been through the Russian up and you know the fascist and everything else and I'd been, I had actually filed news items from 37 countries. I mean there isn't a country in Europe that I hadn't filed anything from except Luxembourg and San Marino or places like that. The Republic of Andorra which is in the Pyrenees Mountains. But I mean I had worked even in Paris. And Paris, the only time I worked in Paris, was the two weeks that the Paris man was having a vacation. I took his job and when I got two weeks off, he or his assistant would take my job in Berlin. I had the Berlin office, the Vienna office and once the Rome office of the Chicago Tribune.

MG Where are you from originally?

GS Me? I was born on a farm in a place that doesn't exist anymore. It's called R.F.D. #3, Viland, New Jersey. It was then called Alliance, New Jersey. It was a colony of farmers and my father tried to make a co-op out of them or something and it didn't go with the farmers. And we always had the Post Office in our hands because the majority of them couldn't read or write. So they were only to glad when first my mother was Postmaster. Oh, first my father was Postmaster and then when my brother and I were born, he found he had to go to Philadelphia and get a job. Which he did, he got a job in a drug store because to help out the farm. You know we made a total of \$300 from 7 acres of grapes. We only had about 8 acres on the cultivation of the 15 that we owned. We sold them to a man named Charlie Welch. He told my grandfather that he'd invented something he was going to put on the market and he's going to become a millionaire. He was going to call it alcohol less wine. You know what that is? Welch's Grape Juice. That was Charlie Welch. And after a few years, he told grandfather, "I have not only become a millionaire, but there isn't enough grapes in New Jersey for me and I'll have to move to New York State". And he did and so the Viland Grape Juice Company took over his plan, but they never made a go of it. And my father of course became a pharm assistant and eventually owned a drug store and that's how we made a living because living on a farm on \$300 a year, that's what the farmers were doing in those days. Can you believe it?

MG I guess it must be. How has Vermont changed in the time that you've been here?

GS What was what?

MG How has Vermont changed in the time that you've been here?

GS Since I was here in the '30's. You see I don't know when you live here all the time you don't notice the changes are so gradual. I don't know. I mean I think the most amazing change is this that in the last election when that nobody in the White House carried every state in the union except Minnesota. He carried Vermont, but Vermont elected not only a, not only a democrat, but a woman governor which I think is an amazing thing and it makes me proud of Vermont that it had the courage to do what it wanted to do. You know what I mean. I mean it certainly, there had been other woman governors and members of the senate and all like that and there's a woman in the Supreme Court right now, but it's a fine thing to know that Vermont did a thing like that. I'm very proud of this State. I mean also incidently look, my wife died in '79. I've been

living alone in this house since. I have everybody, my neighbors, if it wasn't for Vermonters, some of them are like myself you know outlanders. I mean we weren't born here or our parents weren't born here, but everybody in Vermont is wonderful to me. I mean there's a lady that lives up the road here. She's a novelist, she's Mrs. Ambrose, but she writes under the name of Melissa Mather, a decedent of John Mather who was the third brother of Cotton Mather and Increase Mather of you know the Mayflower time and Colonial Days. She takes me to Hanover once a week and she does research work in the library. She wrote a book on Greece recently and I do research work at Baker Library and there is no question it's one of the greatest libraries in the world, in America I mean. I couldn't have done without it. I mean some, a couple of my books like my "Great Thoughts" and the "Great Quotations", the first. This is a 900 page book you know. I mean where do you do your work? Baker Library. Well alright, so I get taken there you see. A retired nurse lives across the way from me and she knows that I've had some troubles here and I have a pacemaker and at 97 pushing 98 as Vermonters say, I'm liable to fall down any day or you know what I mean, not be able to get up from the bathroom or something or maybe reach the telephone, so she told me to fix up a system of flashing the outside light and she'd be here in 5 minutes. She's a retired nurse. I mean this is what people do for you in Vermont. And I can't imagine anybody of those mean people who are neighbors, not that they were mean to me, just ignorant people couldn't read or write most of them. In New Jersey, on the New Jersey farms doing anything for me or anything, doing anything for anybody where everybody does something for me when I came here all alone. Every neighbor came here and offered to do things for me.

MG You mentioned the McCarthy period.

GS Yes.

MG And testifying. Do you recall the case at the University of Vermont, the Novicoff case?

GS No I don't know.

MG Or did you...

GS I testified when he subpoenaed a 100 authors, everyone of whom had a book in the overseas USIA it was called "The Overseas Libraries at the Army". Every man who's had a book there, no matter what his name was, got subpoenaed. And so they, that's when they said do you swear on the,

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put your hand on the Bible, do you swear, have you ever been or are you now a member of the communist party. Of course I swore I'd never been a member of the communist party. I had been an Aiken/Republican, Aiken/Democrat rather all my life. Well that's when I'd, it was Senator Simington who asked that question. That's when I told them that.

MG It was the Vermont senator Flanders who introduced the scienter measure.

GS Oh, who introduced what?

MG The measure to sentence McCarthy.

GS It was Flanders who did that? I didn't know that. I'm glad you told me that. Well if we didn't have Aiken, we had Flanders. Well that's fine.

MG Did you know him?

GS \ No I never met him, no.

MG Okay.

GS I know Pat Leahy quite well. Oh no, last letter, no it was lying here, but it's gone. I must have put it in the other room. No it's gone, it's in the other room.

MG What about, I guess this was before you came to Vermont but we are looking for any kind of reminiscences or thoughts about Calvin Coolidge.

GS Yes, about 6 months or a year ago, this this there is this society in Plymouth. When they heard that when I returned from Russia. See I was thrown out of Russia in '23, but Calvin Coolidge was President and he asked Colonel McCormick that on my way back to Chicago, I made one trip back to America between 1916 and 1933. This was in '23 after Russia that I should drop in at the White House. He wanted to ask me questions. Well, Colonel McCormick was very pleased to know that the President of the United States, he was a republican too was interested. So I got orders to go to Washington. Well I was taken in I suppose things haven't changed there, so it must have been the Oval Room, I don't know. Anyway and for about an hour that man asked me the most intelligent questions about Russia that I have been asked since I returned from there. No newspaper man could have asked, who had lived there or worked there could have asked more intelligent questions. This myth of silent cow is absolutely just one of the

myths that grows up you know and you can't stop it. And about being a Connecticut yankee that wasn't talkative and never said a word and didn't know much, it's all nonsense. He was one of the most intelligent and the finest men I've ever met in the presidency and we've had good men and we've had twerps like I won't mention who.

MG That was the only meeting you had with him?

GS Yes, but let me tell you that was a great hour at the end of which he said "Mr. Seldes, I find this very important because you're actually an eye witness". I'd been there a year and a half. He said, "Would you mind repeating every word that you said to me to Secretary Hughes"? So I said, "Alright". Oh incidently, when I went to see the president, I was tipped off that if you have an interview with the President that's one thing, but if the President asks you to come or something like that, it is not diplomatic to ask questions. So I never asked him a question. But when he said Secretary Hughes, I said well I said him I could ask questions. So he called up. He had a special phone and he said, "Mr. Hughes, the Chicago Tribune man was kicked out of Russia is here". So I went to the State Department and for about another hour, I repeated everything that I had said and I also asked Mr. Hughes a lot of questions whether we'd ever recognize Russia and we didn't for 10 years later you know. It was not until '33 that we did. And a lot of other things. But I give you my word that Mr. Coolidge was a much more intelligent man on the subject of Russia than the Secretary of State Hughes who had a national reputation. I mean that was my impression of the two men and I didn't come there to be impressed by Coolidge. I had all the rumors and you know the myths that had been going around like everybody else.

MG Were you involved at all in any reporting or any way with the Sacco and Vanzetti case?

GS Not a thing no. Not in the least. I know I know practically nothing about it. I've heard people say that one of them was probably guilty, but one of them was positively innocent.

MG Yea, I guess that's the most recent revision of the...

GS Yea, but I mean I don't know anything about it. Whether both of them were in it or not.

MG Right. So have you kept abreast of Vermont politics? Do you follow it much?

GS No, no I don't. No I don't know much about Vermont politics, but I do, I have exercised my right to vote ever since I became a Vermonter in '33 and another thing I do on the first Tuesday in March of every year, I do attend town meetings. Now I sort of feel that being still an outlander, I don't get up and make speeches or anything like that. Like one of my neighbors made a speech in demanding zoning here. Well you didn't notice it coming here. There's one place that has a lot of cars in front. But we used to have. We had two or three places. I don't know why but people around here like to have a lot of wrecks dumped all over their front yard. Well when this person made a plea for zoning, a man got up and said you outlanders don't understand what freedom really means to a Vermonter. It means total freedom. If he wants to have a garbage lot in front of his house, he can have a garbage lot. He has a piece of land and it's his and he's free to do it. There's no zoning here. I don't really believe in that. I mean I believe in cooperatives and all like that. I mean especially in a country place like this it would be a very nice thing. But nevertheless I can understand the man's point of view. It's been that way for hundreds of years and it's that way now. Well I just take it all in and then I vote. I have never missed voting.

MG Do you think that town meeting is a...

GS I think that town meetings are a great thing. I mean I don't know how it works out, how it would work out in the city. I don't think it could quite work out for cities, but for the country I think a village, or country place, it's a great thing. I like the town meeting very much. I mean, I remember when the head, the presiding officer was Ogden and you know Ogden has a reputation of being the leading reactionary of in Vermont. Incidentally, he as I found out later, he's not a Vermonter. He was born in, he came from Watertown or something like that New York. I guess the other day was Herbert Ogden, Jr. To my great surprise I find that I remembered him the first time I came here as a little boy and he's now a grown up man. He's a lawyer or something and he's a liberal you know. Totally opposite of his father. Which well, maybe Vermont has something to do with his politics, I don't know.

MG How would you describe your politics?

GS Well I mean, I've been, I have been for 30 - 40 years smeared and denounced and the press you know is a dirty red and all like that. I was thrown out of Moscow and I've been anti-communist for a long time. But what this country refuses to accept is the fact that the best, the

best defense against communism would be a liberal or even radical organization opposed to dictatorship. I mean take for instance countries that have a socialist government. Now in this country I would say including the press people will draw absolutely no line between socialist and communist. They are both marxist parties. That's quite true. But the socialists are absolutely opposed to dictatorship. Under a socialist regime like say Denmark which in my estimation is the most civilized of all the countries I've ever visited. I think Denmark is first and Sweeden is second, Norway I'm not sure about. But Finland is a very civilized country. Believe it or not those people are highly civilized progressive countries and they at times, they voted in a socialist party or the next time they may not vote in a socialist party. But they have socialist parties there and the socialist parties keep the communist from establishing a dictatorship. And I know my father told me that after he quit the drugstore, he was mixed up in all type of Utopian colonies. They were called Mt. Airy Colony, Mohegan Colony, Stelton Colony and in each of these colonies there were all kinds, liberals, radicals, socialists, communists, anti-communists, anti-radicals, fascists even for all I know, but everybody had their say. That was the whole idea of it see. But the only people who ganged up and had secret conferences and finally took over were the communists. And the last, before my father died, he never succeeded. He was trying to establish another colony called Belltair and he wrote the charter for it. And all through the charter he wrote in ways by which no group, no single group no matter how strong it was would be able to take over and run the colony. What he meant was to keep the communists from ganging up and taking over because they had a solid click working at it. Well that's the way I was brought up and that's my viewpoint too.

MG You came to Vermont during the depression?

GS '33, oh sure.

MG Yea, it's right in the middle of it really.

GS Just after the bank holiday.

MG Can you describe what conditions were like here?

GS Well I'll tell you what happened to us and first what happened to us in Spain. I was living, I married an American girl who was actually born in Cincinnati and whose father was one of the Proctor & Gamble chemist who invented Ivory soap. Well she was going to the Borbonne

in France and when we got married she spoke Spanish. She had been on the Island of Minorca at one time or summers, several summers, so we decided to spend our honeymoon in Spain. What was the point that I was making?

MG I asked you about the depression here in Vermont.

GS Yea, well I remember that going to, you see at that time, just before the depression, the American dollar was awfully high. So I went in there and had the best tailor and I ordered a gray and a brown flannel suit from him. It was going to cost me I don't know 1/10,000 of a peseta, each suit which amounted to \$10 or \$11 mind you. Well one day in '33 or something during the bank holiday and when we came in he said "I'm sorry Mister, but I can't take your money. Your money is no good. Your travellers checks are no good. Even if you had silver dollars, a 1,000 silver dollars they wouldn't be any good, only if you had gold, we could weigh it. But outside of gold, nothing is good. But they said well America is a great country it will make a come back. You take those two suits, they'll be ready Thursday and send me the money from America within a year or whenever you make it". And the same thing happened at the hotel. The hotel man said "You've been here 5 months". I wrote my best book there by the way. He said, "I know you want to stay 6 months", he says, "Well you can just continue to stay, but I can't accept your money so you'll owe me for one months board and lodging and the hotel and the cafe bill and everything else. But act as you did before. If you want to give a party, give a party or anything like that and you'll send me the money within a year or so when things recover". That's how nice they were there. Well we came back here and luckily I had bought my steamship tickets several months in advance, so we did get back to America and my brother had some money and met me at the boat with it. And when the banks finally were open, the only bank that didn't open was the Harriman National Bank and that's the bank in which I had all my money. I had \$1,800 in it, which at that time was a lot of money, let me tell you. But we got loans you know somehow, everybody and I came to Vermont almost immediately. By that time money was back and was able, as I tell you with Sinclair Lewis' help he bought the house really you see and I sold one book after another, kept writing and everybody was wonderful to me and I can't imagine it happening in any other part of the United States. I've never met anyone who had had a calamity such as we had and who were helped by the whole neighborhood. Alright.

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MG Was Vermont pretty hard hit by the depression? Was it poor around here? Were people out of work?

GS No when, let me see. The first house was in South Woodstock. Well you know Woodstock is the richest town in the United States. Did you know that officially?

MG No I didn't.

GS Well the New York Times about a year ago ran an article on the subject of because of inflation that certain people in America, thousands of them, who had always had a quarter or a 1/2 million, now find themselves to be millionaires, but our money is inflated and isn't worth what it used to be, so they are millionaires with this new money that isn't so good. On the other hand, it says there is no question that the richest town in the United States remains Woodstock, Vermont. The Woodstock Center which is 3,000 population was listed as having 220 authentic millionaires according to the New York Times. Well we lived near Woodstock which was a rich town and I will say I don't, they didn't seem to be hit by the, by the bad times all over the United States. We had you know one of the most famous authors of our, actors of our time had one of those beautiful homes on the Green in Woodstock. His name was Otis Skinner. He was a friend of ours and he lived there. And there was a Dr. Goodrich who was the President of the New York Medical Association. He had a summer home there. And we had a lot of fine friends you know. I mean the misery or unemployment or things like that hardly, hardly affected a non-industrial place like Woodstock. It's not like Windsor which seems to be very badly off but the closing of the Goodyear works it seems to be much, you know they have stopped, they've taken down the meters so that you have free parking on every street and you can drive in now and find on some blocks there are one or two cars parked even if it's free parking. That's how bad things are there since they were, it's thrown out of work in Windsor. Now you see Windsor was a totally industrial town and one by one the corporations moved out. A great misfortune.

MG Do you remember the debate about whether to build a parkway along the top of the mountains, the Green Mountain Parkway?

GS No. no, I don't remember. I do remember that in our time the only way to get to Hanover was by Route 5. I remember that we were here long before 91 was built.

MG Sure. So it used to take a long time to get anywhere?

GS Yea.

MG But you didn't feel isolated?

GS No, no, we liked it here. Well I don't know you see after all I spent the first 16 years of my life on a farm. I had never even been to a city, so I mean I like isolation. I mean now not total isolation, I mean I like living in a farm house like this. This is 1820. My first one was 1783 in South Woodstock. This house I bought in 1950 and it's, it was 1820 or 1822, in the first days of 1820's. It was built with the first, did you know that all the famous buildings like Nathaniel Hall and Independence Hall and the great homes and buildings in Boston and elsewhere were built with bricks that came over in ballast in British Ships that came to America for tobacco.

MG No, I didn't know that.

GS Well the people from whom I bought this house told me they said, "Look at the bricks on your house especially if you rub them a little, rub off the edges a little bit, you'll see that they are not anywhere near as red as the bricks on the old colonial homes because they were built with Vermont bricks. They found clay deposits here and started to build to make bricks here because when the American fleet started going to England they didn't come back in ballast with bricks, they came back with goods to sell to the farmers of America and so they had to find their own bricks. So they found bricks and started the brick business and this house if you'll look at it, you'll see how yellowish these bricks are in comparison". You won't notice them unless you are told.

MG Well that's interesting. Your most recent book and I must confess I have not read it, but I've read about it a little bit, the three SOB's were whom?

GS Yes, yes yes.

MG Hitler, Mussolini?

GS No, no no.

MG No!

GS I have, I write a little introduction saying that I'm not going to mention dictators or mass murderers or something like that. I said I want people who pass as intelligent, respectable people who in cold blood are terrific betrayers. Those are my idea of an SOB. Now I said my

first one was Gabriel Dinuncio. He lived for 8 years with the most famous actress of our time, Eleanora Duse. I've seen Duse and Sarah Burnhardt both and I will tell you that Duse was the greatest actress and Sarah Burnhardt was what we would call, what do we call these people who rant and shout. You know. Well anyway Burnhardt had the good reputation but Duse was the great great actress. And after 8 years she writes a book about her. Well a book her love affair is what authors would write, but this book was really pornographic. I'd mean for public, if you would turn the machine off, I would describe to you some of the pornography in this book because I read it. Well, she heard about it, rushed back from wherever she was to talk to him and he said well what should I do, I'm a poor author and the Miland Publishers are offering 25,000 American dollars for this book. She says well can you wait a few months and she said, he said what for. She said and then he said well I'll make a trip to America and make a farewell American trip. She already made several farewells and I'll certainly come back with \$25,000. I'll buy the manuscript from you. And she made this last trip to America. I think it was 1910 because or 1911 because the place she was in was called Encometa "the comet" and Haleys Comet was 1910. See so at that time it was big news everyday in the papers at that time. So she got \$25,000 and she came to see him and he handed over the manuscript. And she took it and went to her villa and this was winter and she set by the fireplace reading a few pages every day and horrified by it and putting them into the flames and that was that. Three months later the book was published by the Miland Publishers. She didn't know a thing about carbon paper and carbon copies of a manuscript and that betrayer not only betrayed her, but double crossed her on the \$25,000 deal and went to the same publisher and sold him the carbon copy. Now that was my number one you see. Then I met a man that causes a fora in Hollywood every time I repeat it. I've been attacked by all sorts of columnists and the Hollywood papers because I say my number two SOB is Aero Flynn who was the handsomest man on the stage at the time. I mean I think he was handsomer than Gable and the famous handsome men. Well during, in 1936, the Spanish Republic was attacked by the generals and the army who tried to take it over and they failed almost immediately if you will get the papers about three or four days after the attempt it says that total failure you see. Well then Mussolini sent in a 100,000 infantry and Gerring sent in his entire Air Force so it became the fascists were in there. The American press it seems to me that was the greatest crime that the American press committed. Almost, but not 1% about 1% exception. The thousands of American papers and the same

thing in England, France, Italy everywhere came out on the side of Franco and the fascists believe it or not. Well the New York Post was the only paper in New York that was on the republican side and they sent me and my wife to Madrid. We were there during the seige. That was pretty bad let me tell you. For a year and a half I did not taste meat or fish or fruit or vegetables. I lived on 4 starches like bread, potatoes, and rice and something called chewroos which is I don't know, it's something made out of dough and it's a spanish dish thing. Well we had an awful time. Nevertheless we tried to tell the story and we all lived in the Hotel Florida. I think I lived there about oh, over a year, a year and a half so among all the notable correspondents Hemingway was the most notable. And everyone without exception wrote an article at one time or another saying that this is the fascist attempt to start the conquest of Europe and if they are successful in Spain, Hitler will march into France this year in which the war ends here and that's what happened. The war ended in '39 in Spain. At the end of '39 Hitler marched into France believe it or not. Well Aero Flynn in the middle of the war, now he afterwards wrote a book called "My Wicked Wicked Ways" in which he denied among other things that the man with him was a nazi agent. The man with whom he went to Spain and second he denied that he ever told anybody. But he told it to me even before we were in Spain. I met him at the police station in the Ileseata in the _____ in Paris. You had to get a visa to leave France to cross the border into Spain. The French were so against Spain. Because if you crossed from France you would be in republican Spain. They didn't care if you went on the other side into fascist Spain, you didn't have to have a visa. Well anyway my wife and I were there waiting to get our visa and we were talking and a beautiful, beautiful couple came over. The handsomest man and a beautiful woman. Her name was Lily Dometa. She was of an Italian decent and she was his legitimate wife. Not that he didn't have women all the time. You know, in fact when I asked him once what about the 8 rape cases that you are accused of he said, he said "Why do the papers all say that I am accused of rape, rape, rape." He says "When I wake up in the morning and open the door, there are girls lined up begging to come to bed with me". He said "Would you call that rape?" I don't know how true it is, but that's the kind of stories he told. Well that didn't bother him. What happened was this. When he came there of course although he had met Helen and me you see. We were not on the same train going there, but he remembered seeing us in Paris. He paid no attention to us because the big Hemingway was there and Herbert Mathews of the New York Times. So he said, he asked them if when

they went out to the front which was in a place called University City to the northwest you see was where the University of Madrid was and every building had been shattered by shell fire and the trenches were actually in two lines in the middle of that section and Hemingway had found a building, a wrecked building where he could crawl into and take a peep out through a hole in the wall and see the trenches and see what was going on. Wrecked tanks and airplanes in the middle of no mans land and sometimes attacks and things. So he asked to be taken to the front. So when they took him to the front, well you can censor this because I am going to use a word, when they got near the front he knew what shellfire was but and he also knew what machine gun fire was because when the shell fire didn't bother him but when they got near the front and he started hearing the rattle of machine guns, he got scared and he said "Do either of you gents know where there is a good clean whore house?" and they said "Well they are forbidden in Madrid itself, but just as you enter these cities on the out skirts in the northwest, the red light district is a little on the out skirts on the northeast and you are not far away. Just walk in this direction and you'll eventually see the houses and you'll see the red light burning and the transoms and that was their signs. And that's where he spent the night. The next day we didn't see him, but he did go to the telaphonica, that was the telegraph building owned by Colonel Sastenesse Bain of the United States is the IT & T at that time owned the Spanish telephone system and there was a telegraph and telephone system and he sent a cable to Paramount or Metro Globe, I don't know which one he was working for saying everything going as planned and they let it go through. He took the, he had a car given him. None of us could ever get a ride in the car. I mean there was no gasoline at all, but they found some for him because he had claimed he had \$10,000,000 and he told everybody, told Hemingway, told them I'm building a hospital and I'm going to buy ambulances and what's left over goes for medicine and food for the loyalist and especially for the Abraham Lincoln brigade and things like that. Well he disappeared in his car. The next we heard of him we got called up from Barcelona. He had appeared in Barcelona, rolled up his sleeve and there he had a scratch. But all kinds of brown, greenish stuff on it, but not only iodine, but it looked like a horrible wound see. He said "That's where I was, he told everybody, that's where I was hit by a franco bullet when I was with Hemingway in the front line trenches which was a total fake. He didn't have a cent which was a total fake. He was all a fraud and within a few weeks his company announced that he was appearing in a new film which had already been made previously and in

which there are scenes very similar to the civil war in Spain. So it was all done by a hollywood publicity man. So I think he's my second SOB. Now the third SOB I mentioned three newspaper men and I say it's readers choice. I said I have worked for what 70 - 80 years with newspaper people. I don't know of any crooks among them or any crooked people among them but these three people actually received money and took money and they took, I mean two of them, well you know one of them actually took money from the National Association of Manufacturers. The other took money from the Coal and Iron Institute. These were all organizations of big corporations which were trying to stop unions from being formed in America. And one of them was Fulton Lewis, Jr. who was the leading radio speaker in America at the time. He had all 6, he had over 600 of the 640 mutual stations at that time, mutual broadcasting. He had 640 radio outlets in America. He was their main speaker. And he was in the _____ of the National Association of Manufacturers. And the second crook was George Sulkowsky. He had at one time worked on the China News which was run, the Chinese government was running an English weekly and he was the editor. Then they found out that he was secretly selling stuff to the Japanese so they fired him. And then he worked, and when he was in America, he was working for the Iron and Coal Institute you see and one of the things they asked him to do was to go to the Pittsburgh district and make speeches against forming unions. Well I mean all and all a real SOB and my third SOB was a man who started out very fine and became one of the worst in America and that was Pegpler. Do you know that Pegpler was so bad that Hurst fired him so he went to work for the Scripts Howard Paper and his first column for Scripts Howard he favored lynching. He said justice is to slow in America and it's a fine thing that we have lynching and this dealt with the lynching of a white man in California. It was a rape case or something and the man, white man, I don't know whether he was lynched or not, but at least an attempt was made to lynch him and so he came out in favor of lynching. Well eventually he became such a drunkard that he was thrown out of Billingsly's Club, night club in New York City. He was thrown out into the gutter where he could have been run over and killed easily. So the first taxi that went by stopped and the man, the taxi driver pulled him up on the sidewalk and tried to get him to, he was dead drunk of course and said look if you can tell me where you live, I'll take you home, it won't cost you anything either. So the man, so Pegpler finally opened his eyes and looked at him and drew back and said "I don't want to be helped by no god damn niger". Imagine saying that because it was a black man that tried to save his life. Well I mean I

think he deserves to be called an SOB too. And although of the three he was the only man who, he had been in the press section of the American army by the way. That was intelligence. G2 was intelligence. G2D was the press section of the intelligence section of Pershing's army. Incidentally he was the only man of the 21 members who was ever forced to leave and no one, we who were also members, I was a member, we were not told why, but even before we were doing much in the way of fighting, Pershing's whoever it was, General Nolan in charge of intelligence asked the United Press to please replace their correspondent and we were never told why. Now I don't think anybody was ever disloyal. Mind you we were shown everything, every attack General Nolan had of intelligence and General Fullwar, the head of Operations. They would come to Pershing's headquarters and the press, the members of the G2D would be there and he would show us the battle plan every 5 minutes of a battle plan. That's how we were trusted and I won't mention the man's name, but this acting president of the United States wouldn't permit the press to be on the inside of the great war against the island of what he called Grenada. I call it Grenada. I don't know, I've lived in Grenada, Spain. G-R-A-N-A-D-A is Grenada with me. Well anyway imagine. We were trusted with everything and only one person was asked to leave in the whole history of the press department and that was in the early part of the war when before the real, our real fighting began and that was Pegler and he died in a drunken stupor you know. Everybody says well he had a, he married a beautiful young woman who unexpectedly she died or was killed in an auto crash or something shortly after he married her and that ruined his whole life. That's the explanation that people will give you. Well alright so maybe there's a reason for it. Okay that's my 3 SOB's.

MG Do you read the Vermont Press at all, any of the newspapers in Vermont?

GS Oh yes, I read Rutland Herald and the Valley News every day. I think they are both fine papers. I certainly think the Valley News is one of the finest of the small newspapers of the United States. I mean the Valley News is a good free honest paper. A paper which will run a real good editorial denouncing smoking as the cause of cancer and emphysema and something and it will accept as long as it's legal will have an ad for Camels or Lucky Strike or Virginia Slims or something for a page ad. And they just explained it to me as long as advertising is legal. You know there are only two newspapers on account in the United States that have thrown out advertising.

George Seldes
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MG All advertising?

GS Yea, of tobacco. Do you know what they are?

MG No. The New York Times?

GS The, no, hell no. The New York Times has one of the worst records. The Christian Science Monitor which is owned by a church and the Deserete. I think it's called the Evening News of Salt Lake City which is owned by the Mormon Church. So, and these are big daily newspapers. In fact the Christian Science Monitor I would say is one of the 10 great papers of the United States. These two papers will not accept cigarette advertising but otherwise none of the great papers has turned down advertising. Some of them will when it's declared, if it would be declared illegal or something would immediately drop it, but not until then.

MG You don't see the Barre-Montpelier newspaper at all, the Times Argus?

GS No, I sometimes see the, the Reformer, the Brattleboro Reformer and I see the weekly, the Windsor and the Standard. The Standard is Woodstock. What is it? The Windsor Journal, I forget now. It's the weekly from, the Windsor Weekly and the Woodstock Weekly, I read those every week also. Well that's a lot of papers to read you know. I've just clipped out the last weeks, last weeks Christian Science Monitor. I guess I've already put them in the other room.

MG Uh huh. So you keep files of clippings?

GS Huh?

MG You keep files of clippings and...?

GS Man alive, you have no, I don't know why, but I still keep, you see the 10 years ago the University of Pennsylvania, when I was 85 - 86, the University of Pennsylvania wrote me and said what are you doing with literary remains. I figured, they figured out it's about time. So I said well since you asked for them, you can have them. So they sent a truck and I sent, I had 9 filing cases, four drawer metal cases and I gave them 8 of the 9 with the metal cases and sent they away. The ninth I kept. I took the stuff out, but I kept the file my old stuff. I have the whole history of in fact. They sent me a list of the letters that they found written to me and they said you can take, this is the only thing we found in

which we can give you credits for which you can take off your income tax return. A letter from Einstein they estimated at \$1,000. A letter from Bernard Shaw \$250, a letter from Aldus Huxley \$50, W. Somerset Moore \$50 and a lot like that. Then on the second page it says 9 letters from J. Edgar Hoover at \$10 each and that wound up. But there was a couple thousand dollars worth of letters they credited me with which they have. Well I don't know why, but I wish I'd kept out the Einstein and Bernard Shaw and other letters. However, what would have happened. Eventually I would have given, left them in my will to my niece or nephew. I have no children you know. So that's what eventually would get them. Yea.

MG You don't work with a, do you use a computer?

GS No I don't know and I don't want to know. I use a 1937 typewriter which the company gave me when they found out that I had written 4 books on a Royal Portable they asked me if I would be willing to give them a testimonial and let them use it in an ad and I did. So they handed me a 1937. They handed me a Royal and it's standing there in the other room and I have written 18 books on it I think and I have never had \$.05 worth of expenses on it except for ribbons. So I think that's pretty good huh?

MG Yea, pretty good, yea. Do you have any other books planned?

GS Yes there's a book and there's the title of it. Look at the title.

MG "To Hell With the Joys of Old Age".

GS That's what Ballantyne wants me to write now. You see I proposed that book 10 years ago and they said no, no, no. And now they want me to write it. Well, you see that file is pretty thick but if 10 years ago I had started keeping notes on things that came into my mind or things that happened to me, I would have had the material so I could just sit down and type it off now. So it's going to be a difficult job I'm afraid, but they want me to write a new book you know. When you have a best seller you know, I was 4 weeks on the Times best seller list. When you have a best seller, they want you to follow it up because they figure out that people, well they will make money on it of course. They don't, that's what their interested in.

MG Does it take you a long time to write a book?

GS Well it depends what book. For instance, this book, "The Great Quotations" you see this is an 800 page book. This first appeared in a hard bound cover for \$15.00. Well this book must have taken me 10 or 12 years to compile and the great thoughts although I had already read all the great books, but for instance I had to read Froude. Six months it took me to read 24 volumes of Froude. I have read every word Froude ever wrote and if you are interested in Froyd, I will suggest something. Skip all his scientific books and read, I think there is one or two books. One of them is called "Lectures in America". Now in his lectures he was talking to doctors and laymen you see. And he was not to psychoanalyst. And he really is understandable and you will get enough of Froude in those lectures. They were really brilliant. That's Froude for you. Well I wrote 40 pages of quotations and Ballantyne just through up their hands and said you are not going to have an 800 page book with 40 pages devoted to one author. I said well you do the cutting, I can't. Well they cut it down to 18 pages. That is 9 pages of double column. It is still the largest chapter in the book of the great thoughts. Froude is first.

MG Did you ever meet Froude?

GS No, he's the only person I didn't meet. Dorothy Thompson well she bitched me on that. She, well she went to the, she knew Mrs. Froude better than Froude. But she was a friend of the family. See she was the Vienna correspondent of the ledger syndicate. And she said to Dr. Froude, "I know you are troubled every week by somebody that whole press of the world wants to see you". She says "Why don't you turn over the press section to me and I will go through it and handle all questions, letters and everything and I'll arrange that you only get to see about one or two a month of these people". Well she never permitted another American ever to interview Froude. She had Froude exclusive. Well I don't know if you employed Dorothy, you might say she was very clever. But she certainly was not a friend of the other newspaper people. I give you my word. Well she married my best friend, Sinclair Lewis.

MG Where did you and Sinclair Lewis meet?

GS In Berlin in '27. He came on a walking tour with a man named Ramon Guthrie. Guthrie had been, he wasn't a member of Rickinback Squadron in the first world war, but he was on the same field in another squadron. And he was also a hero in our aviation. As a result he asked he be given a scholarship to the University of Taloos in France. So he

became a teacher of, he became French. He married a French, his French nurse when he was wounded. He eventually wound up here at Dartmouth as in the French Department and before he died he was the head of the entire French Department at Dartmouth. He came on a walking tour with Sinclair Lewis. They had been through France and walked through Germany all the way to Berlin in '27. And that's where Red Lewis who was getting a divorce from his first wife and Dorothy Thompson who was getting a divorce from her first husband, that's where they met and eventually within a year they went to London and got married and had their honeymoon in England. Then came back at the end of '27 or '28 and I think it was Dorothy's idea anyway they bought the house in Vermont. They wanted a quiet beautiful place to work in and he wrote as I say 5 or 6 of his great books here and nobody knows a thing about it. Maybe if this appears in a lot of Vermont papers, somebody will do something about it. I certainly hope so. I mean do you realize that if you are in Venice or Rome or any place like that wherever you are you are liable to come across any kind of a house at all in which it says Percy, Bissy, Shelley spent three months in this house. Or Teats lived here before his death or something. You will find British authors plaques all over, all over Italy where it was the thing to do at that time apparently was to go to Italy not France. But anyway at least they are remembered there. But nothing here and I mean after all I mean people don't know he was the first man to get the Nobel Prize for literature. The first American. Pearl Buck I think was the second and Hemingway was the third.

MG Do you know besides "It Can Happen Here" what the books that he wrote in Vermont were?

GS What it's about?

MG No, which books he wrote in Vermont beside "It Can Happen Here".

GS Oh, I don't know. If I saw a list of his books and the dates. I mean you could easily get that at any library. The books and the dates. You see, he was here from about 1928 at least for about you know he lived here and then and then Dorothy became famous and he took to drink and all that and I don't know how many years he lived here and he wrote a play and then he went off with the play and I think he had a part in it and then he fell in love with the, with the leading actress and eventually and I don't know who owned the house, probably Dorothy, but I don't know how many years, but I know at least 10 years he lived

here in the house.

MG Did you ever pay him back the \$2,000?

GS Oh, I paid it back almost immediately. You see, I no sooner got this house in South Woodstock off the road some, then I wrote a book and of course I mean at that time, do you realize they only gave \$500 at most \$1,000 advance for a book. Now my nephew is a literary agent and he won't handle an author if he can't get \$15,000 or \$20,000 advance on a book. He says I can't afford to do, to handle \$500 and \$1,000 writers. He said I pay 7 salaries every week. Well he certainly has done well for me between him and Dear Abbey, they have made a success of...

MG I don't understand about Dear Abbey.

GS Well she wrote a piece, she wrote a piece when the "Great Thoughts" came out and she said, she usually has it's two columns wide and one whole column of the two she said "I've got good news for you", she said. This was in May