

Interview with
Frank M. Borth
Interviewers:
Maria Mazzenga and Jordan Patty
Newville, Pennsylvania
May 10, 2006

Jordan Patty: We're at the home of Frank Borth. Jordan Patty, Maria Mazzenga.

Frank Borth: You don't need to pick [the microphone] up?

JP: No, it's fine sitting right there. So, the first thing I kind of wanted to ask you was just some biographical information, where you were born and . . .

FB: Born in Cleveland, Ohio back in 1918. I am 88 years old now. I attended Cleveland high schools and graduated, then attended the Cleveland School of Art. That's where I learned to be an artist. It's a four year term same as college. After the four years was up, I wanted to get into some employment for all of this artwork that I knew that I could do. You see, cause I had paid my way through art school by being a sign painter. Back in those days you didn't have supermarkets yet and every butcher shop was separated from the other. When they would want to advertise their prices, you know a leg of lamb or so forth, I would paint it on with show card paint, which you wash off with a hose. So, I would go around and charge 65 cents for five paints in the window, I mean can you imagine?

JP: Pictures of the meat?

FB: 65 cents way back then were a lot more than 65 cents today. But anyhow it was possible to, well I don't know, I think my parents also paid part of it, but I didn't want to spend it myself. So anyway, I left Cleveland because of this Reed Crandall, whose work is also in the *Treasure Chest*. He was a very excellent artist way back then, I mean he was better than anyone else in the class.

Maria Mazzenga: And you attended school with Reed Crandall, you said?

FB: Yes, that is except for the first year. The first year he wasn't there because his father had died and he hadn't come back, and so when he picked up he was one term behind all his friends, but we made friends. I even got him to help me with the sign-painting thing. He was an easygoing guy. But at any rate, he went to New York and immediately got employment because New York was just full of comic book publications.

JP: What year was this?

FB: Well, 1940 was when I graduated.

JP: Okay.

FB: He didn't work on any of the things like *Superman* or some of these captains and such. He did a famous one

called *Doll Man* where he would have to draw his hero in a foot and a half size compared to humans. So, when he would give them the sock in the jaw he had to have a great big face behind it. And the perspective is that he had to draw in a [unintelligible], it was no trouble. He became famous later on with *The Black Hawks*. It was six guys that were aviators. They had their own airplanes and so forth, no government, but they would always beat the hell out of everybody. I would never do this strip because six different guys and they all had to look themselves and think, but he could handle it. I don't want to get too far on that, he made very good money and he immediately told me to come and, as a matter of fact, we shared the same bedroom from a lady who had a place on 37th street. It was just the opposite of my grandmother's house on 73rd street, in Cleveland. It was very funny, I got in there at nighttime and we went up to go to bed and I couldn't see much out the window. When I woke up in the morning, I saw there was a big factory thing where they made stuff for women's clothing, hats and stuff, and it just stopped and there was a space like that and guess what was standing in the middle of that space? The Empire State Building.

MM: Do you remember what year you followed Reed to New York? 1940?

FB: Yes, well we graduated and then I came to New York in 1941 and he came in 1940.

MM: Before the war started? That would have been December, before the war started.

FB: No, I can't remember now when we...mind if I stop to get a Kleenex over there?

MM: Would you like me to get one?

FB: I, oh, you were asking about the...I think, I remember the first time I was called. Yes, it was after the beginning of the war, but they would ask you to come to a doctor's office at night time where he would inspect you and see whether you were capable of being a soldier, or you know anything, Navy, anything. I was healthy enough except my eyesight. I was nearsighted. So, that made me a special qualification and I was not drafted for at least two or three years. Some of my friends were in the army five years, but I was only in for three years. And, so then, where are we?

MM: I was just wondering when you came to New York. Or what caused you to come to New York? Was it Reed? Or did you have to come to do your physical to be inducted into the military?

FB: No, no it was come to get a job.

MM: A job, because Reed was there.

FB: Well, he already had checked out the thing and they had a special guy in the business who, now I can't remember the name of the thing. You know when you get to 88 years old, you can't remember the name of things.

MM: Perfectly understandable, I'm only 39 and I can't remember things.

FB: Anyhow, they would get the artist and the writers and so forth for these publishers, because a lot of these publishers were into this comic books stuff. But they had other things like True Comics, where the subject for, what is it that magazine, for *Parents* magazine or something like that. I remember I got an assignment. I took all my sample work over there to them, that's what you had to do and they were quite impressed. They sent me over to talk to the editor and he was showing me this copy where he wanted me to do this thing about Saboo the Elephant Boy, an Indian kid. They were making a movie and when they found out that this kid could ride on a big elephant and control him, the director said, "Can you make this elephant gallop?" So either way I told the editor, I said, "You say True Comics and if you are going to do that, you have to change it because an elephant can't gallop, it's not possible." "Oh, no" he said, "Do you know all about that? Yes, why don't you rewrite it?" So, I got my first assignment there to rewrite this stuff, as well as do the illustrations. Those were stories of my humble beginning.

MM: So you were with True Comics when you started?

JP: That's what the name of the place was?

FB: They didn't want to have a section with a bunch of comic book [plays?] and they would get the right artists, I almost caught his name. But I would get assignments from them, and if they gave me a script, I would prefer rather to go home and do it from even that early age. So I had a...no, this drawing table was not the one, but I had just a drawing board and table at home. Anyhow, I got quite a few assignments from them, then all of a sudden I got called again, they wanted me for the army. I had to go and take the test. So I left New York, packed up everything, and went back to Cleveland to go through the whole paraphernalia where they...did you ever go through one of those things?

MM: A physical?

FB: Yes, the physical and they do it in groups. It is funny to be in the same room with a whole bunch of other guys without things on, you know.

MM: What year was this? Was this 1943, 1944?

FB: Not yet. I have to look at my discharge papers. To be able to...so open in a big room and the desks for the sergeants and so forth was up high. The marines were the first desk, so I put it up there. The guy looks at it and hands it back to be, he says, "Over there, to the Navy." Okay, I go across the thing, put it up on his desk and he says, "Go over to army." I go over to the desk for the army put it up and he says, "Ok, you can go." I said, "Where you want me to go?" He says, "Out the door, we don't want you." I was never so...humiliated, I think

was the word. I walked to the door and I thought, that I came all the way back to Cleveland, I thought I was going to be in the army and was going to do my share and so forth. And I just walked out. I had to walk over to the, where they had some places to sit down outside, benches and I just had to sit there for a half hour before I even got in the street car and went back home. This, of course, really cuts you off, I gave up all the jobs I had in New York. I wasn't going to go back there and go through the whole process because they didn't say that I was completely not available. Anyhow, I got disgusted. I had met a guy who had a summer stock theater company and he said, "Yes, come on." Anyway, I ended up in his thing and we had to do it in a small summer theater in Deal, New Jersey. Deal was the prime shoreline and we were living in a big mansion type place that nobody wanted to buy. You had to pull all of the shades down at nighttime because it could be seen from the ocean and the damn German subs would lie out there and they would watch for the lights. If they saw the lights start to go black in one area and the area keeps moving, they know perfectly well there is a ship going in there. So, depending upon the size of the ship, they wouldn't hit it or they would. But any rate, they didn't do any of that then, but I can still recall that we always had to be very careful to bring the things down. Well, it was a very happy summer. I still, I got in contact with...I was doing *The Phantom Lady*; oh she's not on the floor there. I had been doing a thing called *The Phantom Lady*. As a matter of fact, in one of the framed things leaning against this wall, that's got *The Phantom Lady* too and that has the date on it.

MM: 1943.

FB: Ok, I was still in the, well 1943 was when it was printed because you have to do these things a couple of months before published. And so I was able to still get some income by working at nighttime but I was having more fun being an actor. The other thing I learned then was how to smoke. I had ignored starting smoking because both my mother and father had smoked and I said, "I'm not going to get suckered into that." But, the girls were smoking so I smoked too, which lasted for...I guess it was almost 30 years before I finally quit. Anyway, now to get back to New York...four flights to get to it but it had a bigger skylight. It was all right, it had one big room, I guess it was a little bit bigger than this, and a bathroom and a kitchen. And so I was, artists were being drafted and so forth, and I had a thing from Cleveland, which said I should come to go through the, and I said "To hell with it, I am not going all the way to Cleveland to be told I'm not going in the army." So, I wrote and asked them to shift my association [unintelligible] to New York. They had a, in Washington Square there, was where the room was for the signup thing and so forth. Sure enough, this time, oh I had to be examined in a big area above Grand Central Station, imagine going through there. And again, I met the eye doctor and he says, "Well, it's up to you, if you want to stay out you can stay out. If you go in, you can be Continental United States

because of your eyesight.” Because I was near sighted, and if I was a soldier and I lost my glasses and had them smashed and I see another soldier across the street, I’m going to shot him without being able to tell whether he was a German or not. So, now what? Oh Yes, anyway he asked me and I said, “Well, I’m sick and tired, I feel like the scum on the inside of the barrel, all of my friends have been drafted before me and stuff like that,” so I said “I’d rather sign up and do my share.” “Oh, all right.” So that’s where I was drafted from. And I remember, I went to Fort Dix and I had a, I was sharing this artist loft and he hadn’t been taken yet...oh well. Anyway, I ended up at Fort Dix and Fort Dix you go through maybe a week or more issuing your clothes. I remember, I had to take care of the furnace in one of these big barracks, one corner separated from the thing is where the duct works for the furnace and I took care of that. Finally, I get my issue through and I was going to be shipped out to where I was going to be assigned, they didn’t tell me where. Except when we got out to the train it went down to Philadelphia, but then it had to stop and lay over in a railroad yard before it could go on anymore, cause its not a vital thing. We were sitting and we didn’t know where we were going and one of the guys leaned out the window and there was a lady who does the cleaning in the cars. And he said, “Hey, can you tell where this train is going to go?” And she says, “Yes, Indian Town Camp.” He said, “Indian Town camp? Holy...” We all envisioned we were going to go out to the West, you know to the real Indians. So, we got back in, confident that we were going to sleep in the car. No, in about an hour and a half or so the train comes to a stop and we look out, what kind of a stop is this? There are no other tracks, you look out and there’s nothing but vegetation around. Where are we? Way out in the middle of a field. Sergeant comes out and he reads the first 5 names, my name being Borth, I was among. I’m going on you won’t have any tape left but we’re almost getting there. Anyway, I was called to put the duffle bags into the trucks separate from the guys, you know everybody else gets in the other trucks. I was one of the last persons on and then trucks have this canvas thing around except the back thing you look out, I thought I don’t know why this is Indian Town Camp. It came up past the guard entrance and made a 90-degree turn and I looked out and there was a boat, a big boat, with mast and a thing, you know picking up [unintelligible] and putting it in the hold. And I thought to myself what is going on here, I thought we were up in mountains and now how does this boat get here.

MM: That’s a good place to do that I guess.

FB: As I looked at it more carefully, I noticed that the boat didn’t have a middle section. It didn’t have any stack or anything, just had a front or back, it was a dummy ship. So I was called in there and, of course, I had to put the damn bags out of the thing again. By the time I was finished, I had to take whatever was left in the barracks. And from then on, okay I’m ready for my basic training. I guess it was the first day or after I got in, I was out

with the company in the shade of the barracks because the corporal was reading to us from the first aid book and he said “When you get a shot down below the arm you have to put a tourniquilt on the man’s arm and you’ve got to tighten the tourniquilt.” I thought if this guy’s going to call it a tourniquilt, he don’t know nothing. But just about then, another person comes up to corporal and handed him a note and the guy looks at it and says, “Is there a Frank Borth here?” “Yes,” you know and now what? “Yes, What?” I said. He says, “Follow this guy and report to Lieutenant so and so.” Well, I thought, did my parents have a death in the family or something? I thought why was I being called? They take me to this Lieutenant and I hadn’t met anything with any brass on it and so forth, so I’m thinking how do you do it, this way or this way? So, I salute and he says, “At ease.” He says “I see by your...” when you’re in the army they have a heavy, sort of a thick thing, almost like a...if you were an artist or not and mine was the only one that showed in the whole company. So, he says, “We need you to paint this sign to the headquarters of this TCU.”

MM: A mural?

FB: No, not yet.

MM: Oh, something different.

FB: No, he wanted me to paint the sign that said the headquarters of this company, and it was done on a wheel they already had constructed with the spokes out like on a boat. And I said “Well you lucked out, you not only got an artist but you got one that went through art school by painting signs, so, yes, I can do it.” “Good, go over to supplies.” What they had for paint was the yellow stuff that they put on the pavement that says stop and it dries up within five minutes. As far as brushes, all they had was dime store brushes that nobody had ever cleaned out. So, I had to go back to the officer again and say, “I can’t paint this unless you have the proper thing. You have to have paint brushes that are designed for sign painting.” I mean you get the flatter ones, you know. I said, “I can go into Harrisburg and probably buy it.” “Oh, we couldn’t let you do that.” “Well,” I said, “I can’t paint it with what you got there. If you really want it and could give me a three day pass, I could get on the train, go to Cleveland where my stuff was stored up in the attic and all of my sign painting stuff is up there.” “Oh well, that’s impossible you haven’t you know, you can’t leave the camp, you know, until you pass.” Anyhow, the next thing I know, he gives me this three day pass and I can leave on Saturday at noon so it was actually four and half days. And I went back to Cleveland and I never bothered to call my mother and so forth to tell her I was coming I thought I was going to surprise her. I came in the door and she was in the kitchen, she turned around and looked at me in uniform and says, “You didn’t run away did you?” She was afraid...

MM: That you went AWOL [Absent With Out Leave] or something.

FB: Right, but we got that straightened out and I got the stuff together. I went back there and I painted their sign and it was perfect, just what they wanted. Ok, and I go back to, supposedly, to being trained. Next thing they wanted was to make them a dummy that they would throw down in the hold of this ship and so that they could practice how you should pick the guy up and put his arm and things. I thought, well, I had a marionette this little wooden thing and make the joints and so I did, and even made a head on and thought that that was it. The next thing they wanted me to report to a Major somebody. So I report there and the Major he tells me that he and I are going to start training [unintelligible]. Here, I am sitting without a strip. That's the start of it and how I ended up with the ones above that. So I was in charge of getting [unintelligible]. We had to make all kinds of large things for the officer to, when he was giving, he had to have something that he could point to. So fine, I could draw that. And so it was fine and dandy. I mean we were getting along there fine. Pretty soon, he said we were going to need to do them on silk screens so we have more copies. Do you know how a silk screen works? It is a silk screen and its got little holes in it same as any other screen and you put it on a frame and you can do letters and put a thing that, well its pretty hard to tell, but you can see the screen where you don't want to print. For instance, in the letter "O" the center would drop out if you cut it, that's why on most of the things you see these little bars holding up the sides. Well anyway, the thing is that we set up a whole factory to produce this thing. We got four, no five, more artists and two sign painters. The upstairs of the barracks, we were given a barracks to produce, was where the art department was and the lower part was where [recording stops]. Up to the point, where I saw a notice on the bulletin board that they were going to paint a mural at the service club in the center of the camp and anybody that could paint or draw could submit their thing, and that's what I did.

JP: Oh, okay.

FB: Well, it was two other things that were offered and they weren't done as professionally as this one. So, I was notified that I was going to paint that mural. It's 52 feet across and 18 feet high in the middle and I'm going to do it all by myself. But I did get help from a guy when we had to take the canvas and stretch it and prime it and then we had to paste the unpainted canvas on the wall, not paste it glue. And that took two people, especially when you are working on scaffolding, so we got it all covered up with white and then the rest of it was up to me. At first, I was expected to do it on my own time but all of a sudden the governor of Pennsylvania wanted that thing done, finished, because the...those days in Hershey, Pennsylvania and he wanted the bring the moment to his camp. Boy everything had to be done spic and span and so forth, so I had to do this. I worked at nighttime when they had bands and dances because for some of the stuff I didn't need the same light. I managed to do and get it and there were some fascinating stories because the scaffolding was only three feet wide you couldn't step

back. The Indian heads were big, you know, and also you had to make sure the blue over here with the sky was the same over there, so I had to get down from the scaffolding and walk back in the room to check out things whether I had the head too big or not. Invariably, if there were any G.I.s spending free time there they would walk over and they would say, "Are you an artist in civilian life?" and I said I told them "Yes I was." But I got tired of answering, I don't know, how did they expect you to paint this thing if you weren't an artist in civilian life? But anyway, I started saying "Oh no, no, no the army has a special thing in Fort Dix where you can take a three months course" and they...

MM: How much did your painting experience in the military affect your post-war illustrating career, would you say?

FB: No, I, most of the work I did this was only three months of my total three years, I was just one week short of actually being three years, so I'm not...I think being in charge of the place gave me a greater, well I believe that I could do this, I mean I could be in control and so forth. I would dream up things for Training Aids I mean I remember, I'll give you an example. The officer that was going to be giving a lecture on gas you know wanted to tell them the difference between the various amounts of gas that you might meet and the worst one of course was mustard gas and they wanted that to be very effective. So, we drew a head, a skull inside of the thing you could tell that it was a skull because and it said that you had to have protective clothing.

MM: Do you want to jump ahead a little bit?

JP: Yes, maybe about when, did you go back to New York after the military?

MM: Just tell us a little without the tape and then maybe we can put the tape back on when you talk about *The Catholic Messenger*.

FB: Well, finally well the war was over and most of the things I did in the latter half was to decorate the camp because it became a separation camp and the men, soldiers, who had served over in Europe were issued, allowed out first but most of them had been in for five years. I had to do a considerable amount of things in decorating the mess hall. They had a special thing for your final, you know, service when you were dismissed. We had to paint the American emblem, the eagle, you know spread out and he was about six feet wide on a blue curtain behind it and it was in full and I made the things so it looked like it was round you know like that. So, anyhow after I was released from the army, the big question is, "Okay, now what do we do?" I know I tried getting a few...when I painted that thing, I had to have it done before the first of July because, not only were they going to have this big thing with the governors, but I was going to get married to Bobby and go on a two week honeymoon so it had to get done. Anyway, so she was, we were living, I mean I was living off post because her mother lived in Harrisburg the house is still there on Front Street but now is the office of a lawyer

and the backyard has been turned in a parking lot.

MM: What was your wife's name?

FB: Stroh.

MM: Bobby Stroh, S-T-R-O-H?

FB: Barbara Stroh, yes, just like the beer.

MM: Sure, was she from that family?

FB: No, I was very disappointed. Her father had been a lawyer and had died two years earlier than I meet her. She had a job in the government thing...oh well, doesn't make any difference but she was happy with that. So I told her I said, "I've got to you know find some way of earning a living." So that is when I went back to New York and I looked up the old lady who had rented the room to me. She had another rooming house and so I was driving out onto Long Island to see if I could rent any places. No, no real estate people had any rent, because you know 6 million people were discharged from the army and the air force and so forth and when they all got back they wanted an apartment too. So, I was telling my land lady about that and she said, "Well why don't you come out to...I've got an apartment over the garage out in Montauk." And she says, "You could rent it for the whole summer." "Oh, fine." But she says, "There's no heat in it." "Oh good." Well I had never been to Montauk I had been out to Lake Ronconchamo and I didn't think it would be further than that, but Ronconchamo is only halfway.

MM: Yes, all the way at the end.

FB: Anyhow, I got out to her place there, and I didn't want to get involved in that and, again, she had one of these big old places that really...owned and built by a wealthy person...so we did. Bobby had given up her job and she came out. I had...now I'm going to tell you how my first contact was with the publisher in Dayton, Ohio.

MM: Pflaum?

FB: Yes, Pflaum. In the latter month or so of my leaving the army, I was buying some art supply stuff and they had the art magazines there. I picked one up and was leafing through it and I noticed on the back, the whole back thing had just a square thing in the middle and it said if you can draw, produce drawings for comic books and so forth apply to Pflaum.

MM: Do you remember what magazine it was?

FB: Pflaum.

MM: No, well it was their magazine? The art magazine in which you saw the ad?

FB: Oh, no. I can't remember. There weren't that many artist magazines at that time, there are now.

JP: What year was this?

FB: Well, when I was discharged, [unintelligible] gee I had a nice little reproduction.

MM: Let's see it.

FB: That's what you get when you go in.

MM: It says you were discharged February 15, 1946.

FB: Okay.

MM: And you started March 8, 1943, so it was 1946 that you saw the ad in Pflaum.

FB: Yes, it must have been. So, anyway I did contact them but at the time they weren't in production they were just wanting to know, I'll put it in afterwards, you know they wanted to see your work so I sent them my work but they weren't ready to do... Except in the *Young Catholic Messenger* they did give me a couple of assignments there with the first WAC [Women Army Corps]. Now, what was that woman who manned the guns? Her husband was the guy who reamed out the cannons during the Civil War.

JP: Molly Pitcher?

FB: Yes, Molly Pitcher. They wanted them to know that she was a Catholic girl and she was the first WAC, simply because she went over and it was close enough to her home that she could get a bucket of water over there.

MM: That was your first assignment for the *Young Catholic Messenger*?

FB: That was it. And I got a fair amount of them I can't recall all of them.

MM: Do you remember if this was the very earliest version of the *Young Catholic Messenger*?

FB: I don't know how long it was...but it was not in the comic book form, they had decided kids like to read comic books and they go to the drug stores and they sit there and read your comic books. But, the comic books, as a matter of fact, during the war, believe it or not there were more soldiers reading those comic books. Every time we had pay day once a month, the guys would immediately go over and spend most of their pay for how many cigarettes they were going to have, of this and that, and how many comic books. But anyhow, that was the initial thing. But again, that wasn't stuff that I could be doing one week after another, I mean I couldn't rely on it, it was random assignments.

MM: Can I ask you another question? When you were doing work for the *Young Catholic Messenger*, who ran that? Who was the editor of the *Young Catholic Messenger*? And did you have a sense of whether they were Catholic? Were you expected to write Catholic ideas into the *Young Catholic Messenger*?

FB: I didn't write any of the material, and they never asked me if I was Catholic. I don't think they would want to do

that because it would tend to be assumed that they weren't going to hire any black people or weren't going to hire any Presbyterians. That was the strangest thing about all those years that I did work for *Treasure Chest*, I was the elder in my church, which was a Presbyterian Church. But they never asked me, never asked me what my religion was so I didn't purposely let them know. But I developed great rapport with the various editors. Especially the only who, I would have to look on the, if you look on the inside page where it says who publishes it, it always lists the editor. I worked underneath, I think there were five editors in the total process of things.

JP: And this is with *Treasure Chest*?

FB: Oh, yes. Yes, this was a regular production thing, they had nobody in Dayton, Ohio. They had one guy who did touch up work, if you made a misspelling on the balloon or so forth it would have to be corrected by him, they weren't going to ship the whole art work back and forth. So, they shipped it out to the place that did the coloring, I usually was quite impressed with how well they did the, they did better coloring than they did in comic books, you know.

MM: Are you talking about the *Young Catholic Messenger* or *Treasure Chest* now?

FB: *Treasure Chest*. The *Young Catholic Messenger* was only one color.

MM: How many issues of the *Young Catholic Messenger* did you work on, roughly?

FB: I think you got them. I don't know for certain.

MM: How long did that last, the *Young Catholic Messenger* stuff?

FB: I really can't tell, maybe you can get a date off of this stuff. Then they started producing the regular magazine. I didn't start right with them. At first...

MM: *Treasure Chest* now?

FB: No, I managed to...I had a syndicated strip called, oh goodnight I'm really ready for this, I know what it is but it goes and hides on me. Ken Stewart was the captain of a two-mast sailboat that he takes people that want to hire him in the boat.

MM: This is your syndicated strip?

FB: Yes, and I managed to get that in a rather round about way. Anyhow, we did it and I did it for almost three years but we couldn't sell it inland because all of the editors of the papers inland said, "Nobody goes sailing and so forth what do they care about it." So, they wouldn't get it more than and I was only earning about a one hundred dollars a week on it. I still have packages here with original stuff. So, when it finally collapsed and I needed to get something to earn, I found out that I could contact...

MM: Pflaum?

FB: Yes, I was trying to think of the editor's name. Anyway, that was the start of it. As a matter of fact, there is one other person called Frank Moss who lived out in Montauk. He had a charter boat for fishing and his wife and Bobby were very good friends and, as a matter of fact, we would often go fishing on his boat whenever he didn't have a charter and he'd sell the fish except what we would have for dinner that night. She was very helpful to my Bobby who was expecting. That was the other thing all the sudden, here I am with a failure of syndication and well... Anyway, when I got back into contacting, Frank Moss would often come over to our place and, while my wife and his wife would be chewing the fat out in the kitchen, he'd come and sit and he said he always wanted to write things and I gave him the script that I had to work on, and he says "I can write a better story than that." I said, "Why don't you? You don't have to write the whole story but you just have to write a synopsis and I'll send it to the editor and see what he thinks." That was the one if you, I think the cover shows the entrance to a harbor and I really did more work on that thing than I would usually do on, you know there's a set price that they pay you and they don't move around on you. It was about a story that involved a Catholic priest who traveled from one island to another in upper Maine. If anybody lived on these islands that was Catholic, they had to wait until the priest came to them, they couldn't be leaving every Sunday you know to go...So, anyhow he sent in the thing and he got an ok and write it up now and then he wanted to see how you think. So, I gave Frank my copies of old, the way you should write it you know, as far as laying out the page, how you say panel so and so and all that kind of stuff. He did and before long, well, he wrote that and he was a fisherman during the summer but he was always looking for something in winter so the next thing he, every winter, he immediately was sent out to write something. You can find out in reading your things he also uses the word Max Pine as a substitute for him because he didn't want them to think he was writing everything in the place and so you could find it. One of the things about *Treasure Chest* is they had no aversion to you saying "by" so and so and they had no objection to your illustrating it and signing the thing. I put it down, illustrated by Frank Borth and so forth because I think that the kids should know that one desk is writing it and another is drawing it. So, anyhow Frank ended up doing it for years and got to the point where he was starting to write up articles and things for Yachting magazines in New York. He was offered to be the editor of *Sport Fishing* put out by the...which was quite an accomplishment. As a matter of fact, he and his wife left Montauk because he had to go into the office everyday. But we kept our friendship and his family had owned an old farm up in not Maine, but Vermont. Anyhow, he was very helpful. He did a lot of Chuck White's stuff and he did a lot of things that I did and I don't know what else if I come across it I'll let you know.

MM: Was he Catholic?

FB: No, his father was a Methodist minister. So the Catholic publication got some good work from...

MM: Protestants.

FB: Yes, the other side.

MM: Did you ever put anything together that the editors found objectionable?

FB: No. Believe or not and you'll notice on some of the front pages, it had to be approved by comic book things and so forth. Sometimes they would make you change something, you couldn't show Christ on the cross that was torture or any other reasonable evil type of stuff.

JP: So, you couldn't have the devil or Satan or stuff like that?

FB: Well, most of it was that they were more concerned about whether this would inspire kids to go and do the same thing so I never had any problem with it. Oh, in "the Champ Goes into the Circus," I remember there was one thing where the bad guy hits a straw man or something in the back of the head with a wrench. Well, they actually made a copy of that same guy from the preceding; you want me to show it to you?

MM: Sure. [recording stopped]

MM: ...graphic at that point to draw your animals?

FB: No, one of the other things that I did was...any pictures that I could see of any animal on all of the magazines I used to get, I would rip them out and file them. I had folders on everything like elephants because you got to draw them from any angle and you think oh that's easy. Yes, here it is. Now, when I drew this thing it said he had a monkey wrench or something in his hand, and he was going to attack him. Here, he goes Thwack! And now you'll see it's here, and it's gone here.

MM: The monkey wrench is gone; he hits him with just his fist.

FB: As a matter of fact, if you look at this character going over like that. It is exactly a copy of this. They put it in there.

MM: So they took the monkey wrench out?

FB: Yes, because that was too...

MM: Violent?

FB: Yes.

JP: Which issue is that? It is called "The Camp and the Circus?"

FB: Champ.

JP: "The Champ and the Circus."

MM: Here it is, [1958?]. How did you decide what you were going to draw and write about, you and Frank?

FB: Oh, I did not particularly sit down with Frank and go over this and that. When I had an idea, I wrote it myself. See the publication of the magazine was only during the school year, so there would always be a dead spot as far as the wanting of work done, all through that summer you know which actually you get before it gets there and so forth. I would get ideas for a story, and I did not want to tell anyone else about them. This is one of mine, Humpty Dumpty. Of course, he was a nasty horse because he would use his hind legs to come up and push the driver off.

MM: He was a very limber horse too.

FB: That is why he was a famous horse. Nobody could ride him until he got into New York where they were putting it on the television. They went back and slowed down the television and see here and caught him and so he was ruled out. Even all of the other horses were ashamed of him.

MM: See you decided to put a television in there. Were you influenced by the television at the time? I mean you put that into the storyline. You're showing the horse kicking off the man and people watching it on TV.

FB: Yes, well, this is...let's take a second. So, this is what people are seeing. All of the sudden, the horse finds everybody yelling, "Boo! Cheater!" and so forth, even the other horses.

MM: [Did you receive letters about] Humpty Dumpty or what kinds of letter from readers did you get?

FB: Oh, strangely enough, I didn't get much from students. But this one again is one of mine, this is what the magazine's cover looked like and I remember the editor said, "Is it done this way?"

MM: Shows a UFO [Unidentified Flying Object].

FB: And I said, "Yes, but it's going to be wrapped around, and you would see what the UFO looked like.

MM: The UFO's a bathtub.

FB: That's where I got my idea that this kid learns how to operate these things and make it fly like it was something on TV or so forth. I was inspired by this one when I visited somebody in Pennsylvania here. Bobby and I were invited to this big old place and it had, it was built all along the ridge so all of the rooms looked out this way. It had doors connecting each room, so if you had a big party or so forth it would be over five spaces you could wonder round to. And we went up and signed for a room and a bath. They had an old fashioned tub like this, with this kind of paraphernalia sticking up there and I thought what the...Then I thought, hey this isn't bad. You get the water level, you know I mean not too hot not too cold, and so forth but you turn the upper thing off until you get in it and so you know its going to be perfect as soon as you open it up.

MM: I see.

FB: So that's where I got my idea that this should be a flying thing. I think that the funniest part of it all was he got

into all kinds of trouble and nobody knew whose UFO that was. Anyhow, he's got a policemen in his thing here and the other cop is trying to catch the bad guys and they take off and you get up high enough to see and the bad guys are sneaking down the road to the dump. The bad guys don't know that it ends up in the dump, so they end up in the dump. He lands there to rescue these two guys but it is sinking because the plug had been, oh you have to put the plug in first.

MM: That's very clever.

FB: Anyhow, the final pages that I am rather proud of is, this is the chief of police here and he wants to know how this thing works. He's going to get into the tub and the kid is going to tell him what to do. So he tells him and nothing happens. So he says, "Get in here with me." So the kid is going to tell him what is going on. So he says, "Okay," and I take the glasses off see. Now he says, "Power plug in," and he has to repeat that [phrase] out loud, "Power plug in." He says, "Oh, brother. Power plug in," he says. "[Dyno?] tubes open." "[Dyno?] tubes open." "Flaps up." "Flaps up." "Cast off the magnetic mooring lines," and the captain has to repeat all this, "Cast off the magnetic mooring lines." "Vroom! Vroom!" the kid says. The captain says, "Vroom! Vroom! Lift off! Lift off!" and nothing happens. To me that's the funniest part.

MM: Only the kid can do it.

FB: Yes, only the kid can do it because he's the only one who believes it can be done...the diary of the old man that this place where the thing was part of his home. But they had found all of his books and he very definitely, said that there was mind over matter, was capable of making things happen as long as you believe it. So, the kid was the only one who really believed it would work. Everybody else say ok turn it on, I believe it, but they don't believe it and so that wouldn't work. That's part of the joy of working for *Treasure Chest*, I mean in the end the thing there whenever I write a story I had no problems at all. Although, I wanted to write a story about a girl and her horse and the editor says, "No, Frank, I can't use a story like that." "Why not?" He says, "The girls will read a story about boys and the boys would, but the boys won't read stories about the girls and so forth," and I said, "Oh, Yes? I'm going to bet you on that. I'm going to bet I can write a story that's going to..." So, instead of having a horse, Ella has an elephant. She wins an elephant in one of those damn things, you know, you send in a coupon and so forth.

MM: What about the coupon?

FB: Well, you know how these things use to be, and, well no, I keep forgetting you're not as old as I am. No, there used to be win this pony but you had to send something in there. It was just a promotion thing you see, and I guess maybe they did give a pony away but that was a pony not a baby elephant. I just wanted to make it funnier

and the baby elephant certainly did. There was a lot of motive about what, how you write, that was the only thing he turned down at first. But he didn't turn down Ella's Elephant and, as a matter of fact, kids liked best, guess what, he had me writing the continuation of it.

MM: What year, when did that start? What year did you introduce the elephant? Oh, you mean the Champ story that you were just showing me? Okay, well I can find out.

FB: Well, I guess...it's again, I know that there is a two-year lapse. I usually don't want to repeat something or a character one year after the other because then people are going to think it will be like Chuck White who is a character in...see. There were all kinds of artists that created Chuck White.

MM: Who created Chuck White?

FB: It was created from the very beginning, Chuck White was a boy in a Catholic High School and then he grew and then he still did things with other kids that were attending the school now. It's my idea that the reason the magazine terminated so abruptly was that there was no longer, Catholic Schools had declined and closed up, especially the high schools. Because you can't compete with the grade schools in chemistry, or some of the other things, even gymnastics, and all of that kind of stuff. If you don't have a catholic school to handle those things, see the magazine was never mailed to an individual and stuff, except me.

MM: Never? Okay.

FB: No, the teacher would take a subscription at the beginning of the year, and they would always include a few more than she ordered, I mean, in case there's some kids cannot afford it, you know, so that was it. If the teachers complied and would do this, they had a book of all the kinds of things they could ask for: charts, globes, teachers' things they could help in their own need. In other words, Pflaum would supply them for doing the business of taking the thing. And when the shipment was mailed, you could get ten of these wrapped up in the same amount of money that one would cost to put it through. So, that one of the reasons I took ten. I mean I was going to get one, and he told me that he said they don't do one subscription, so I said, "Okay, I'll order ten," but they didn't charge me.

MM: Can I get some clarification on that? So, this was disseminated through elementary and high schools, Catholic schools?

FB: Well, yes, it used to go up to...when they have regular nuns teaching. I remember I always felt sorry for them in the summer time, they had to wear these... Now days you could be a nun without having to wear anything like that, and it's about time. Anyhow, no, they built a school across the side street, and it was a good thing they did because eventually the church got condemned because the walls were cracking because something was settling

underneath there. So, they made a church out of the old basement. As a matter of fact, I went to quite a few Catholic services for funerals and so forth, and there was a great difference, too. When we first came to Montauk, they had a priest who kept telling people don't have anything to do with those Protestants and don't let your children play with them. That, of course, has all changed now nobody has the audacity to say that.

MM: But we were talking about the subscriptions.

FB: Well, she would take the subscription and the kids would bring her the money and she would send the money into Pflaum.

MM: So each kid had their own copy.

FB: No, it was sent in a bulk thing. I mean if it was 20 that they ordered, they would get 20, and it was up to teacher to dispense them. She would know which ones got it. I was never there when it was done, but that was what somebody explained to me. It was a worthwhile thing. It is one of the reasons why the public schools could do the same thing with a comic strip. Not exactly the same as *Treasure Chest* but they could come up with a decent thing that you could still get other things.

MM: [Could the editors visit you] at any given time?

FB: I never asked the details, although the editors finally felt it was necessary to come out and visit me. The magazine was printed up in, I think Massachusetts or something, but they figured if they are that close why couldn't they stop in to see me, they ended up...I can remember an accident, an automobile accident, on his way...he evidently liked to go to Cuba or something this was quite some time ago. Anyway going down through Ohio and Tennessee and so forth, he didn't take the car to Cuba. Anyway, he got into an accident. It really damaged him. He was in the hospital and so forth. I was informed by his secretary, who typed up all his letters so she knew me just as well as he did. She wanted all the artists and writers to know where he was. So anyway, I started, I said if the people who worked in the staff and so forth I'll make little cards you know show them doing something. So, I said tell each one of them to send a photograph. Well, she sent me [unintelligible] a dress, I swear the picture came down here, so I could see she had something on...but...

MM: Uh oh.

FB: I decided to...she's always carrying something here. And, he got the biggest kick out of this thing, well, so did she and all the rest of them. I was terribly sorry when they told me that it was closed up, do not finish the art assignment.

MM: Tell us more about that. What happened? Did you have any indication this was coming?

FB: No, it was a ten episode...

MM: Contract, or...?

FB: Well, I can show you the strip that I was doing when they said don't bother finishing the rest of them. I thought, "Well, gee, what am I going to do?" I could get it for you.

JP: What year was this in?

MM: 1966 maybe?

FB: I don't remember all of these things, but I will in just a moment. Jim Lawrence and...

MM: These are a lot, these are different from the old ones. I see you have some mixed-race panels here. When did you start including African Americans or blacks in your work?

FB: When? Let's see, I don't know. Yes, see, he was the very beginning.

JP: Yes, it says 1972.

FB: He was a good idea, and I'm glad that...yes, from the very beginning, as a matter of fact, he was doing a lead intelligent assignment character you know.

MM: The black character.

FB: Yes.

MM: How did you decide to include the black character?

FB: I didn't. It was...

MM: The editor? Was it the editor that made that decision?

FB: No, he edited the thing, and I don't know that he's got it until he assigns it to somebody, but he picked me out of this...he had a good...in the later years, you will notice that he gave a lot of cartoonists that had worked for some of the other magazines that are...

MM: Is that what you are looking at right now?

FB: Yes, Sock Jones was a whole series that he did. Now, where is it? I know I can tell the last thing that I thought I was doing. At this point, I was told forget it, you know, don't bother.

MM: Did they give you any reasons?

FB: Yes, Pflaum was not going to finish the year. I mean, they didn't have enough people to pay for everything and so forth. I presume, they didn't give me the reason. But I felt almost like saying, "Now wait a minute. We really had a contract. When you send me a assignment, you expect to have it delivered." If I went halfway along and decided, hey, I cannot finish this thing I do not like it, well, they will never hire you again, you know. And so they never want to make you think they are going to quit you in the middle of the thing, but it made it absolutely understandable from my point if there's no place for... They evidently found, settled the problem of finishing it,

so it was finished. They called me a back up and said, “Yes, pick it up where you left off.” I would have to...he would come up with some really...[unintelligible] animals.

JP: So, they did finish out that year?

FB: Yes, no, this is not the last one. I have the last one in there.

MM: Mr. Borth, I'm wondering...do you think anyone was offended by the inclusion of blacks in the strip?

FB: Not that I know of and certainly nobody, I mean they have black Catholics don't they?

MM: Of course, but I wonder if some people thought, racists thought, that, you know, “I don't want my kids reading a strip that includes blacks.”

FB: Well, I suppose there are some, but, today, black people can usually get a far better job than they always had to do, you know, menial jobs. They have been able to college. I mean, my God, look at the football teams. Now when they show you the whole football team, three-fourths of the team are black.

MM: Right, I was just talking about this period. I was talking about the 1960s and the 1970s?

FB: Well, I can find out here.

JP: You were talking to me about people writing you, and I remember you said something to me on the phone one time about when one of teachers wrote to you and wanted you to do illustrations? Draw along [with Frank Borth]?

FB: I can't quite understand what you're....

JP: Did a teacher suggest that you...?

FB: Letters back and forth but after the original editor was gone the rest of them didn't want to type that much. Yes, he called me up and said, “Can you do a ten chapter thing on drawing?” So, I mean, he knew I knew how to draw so why couldn't I teach somebody else? It's quite a different ball game. You do not show off your work you start from the very simplest beginning. As a matter of fact, I start out with pointing out to the kids that the first artists painted on the walls of caves twenty thousand years ago.

MM: Right, I saw that one.

FB: Now, where did they get the...to go to school to learn how to be an artist and so forth so now I've lost track of what I was going to tell you...

JP: Just how you did the ten part series.

FB: Oh, he said, “Can you do it?” I said, “You want me to sit down and do ten easy chapters, how to draw in ten easy chapters?” Well, fortunately, I had a lot of other books on drawing and so forth. The height of a person is usually seven-and-a-half heads, so the same distance from here to here and down to here and so forth. Once you

get the knowledge of it all...you know, it's crazy we have a foot, right? Well, it's a foot long, so that is one of the things that's said, it was a foot. But, I was quite pleased with explaining all of the things like the bones, out of all of our bones in the body the two greatest ones that I write are these two that come down here like this [points to his forearm] because if wasn't for those two... A dog and cat doesn't have any of that, neither does a horse, only humans do because if you didn't have those two you couldn't do this, you couldn't turn that on and you couldn't play piano. Well, maybe if it was that way but then you wouldn't be able to catch a ball this way. It's really functional and those two bones... [unintelligible] room that was in a box thing and it was all connected together with little brass wires and I [dearly loved?] to turn his hand to just see these two without bumping into to one another. You think to yourself, now how did that happen? I mean the basic skeleton is very similar with all the animal life. We all have a spine, so do horses, so do dogs. And we all have four...well, we don't have four legs, we have four arms. In showing the relationship to dogs. With a dog toes is what he's walking on and [referring to a picture] then this comes up and now this thing is very short, and on horses it is that way as well. Do not know what is happening out there [outside].

MM: It's a truck.

FB: But anyway, I found that I really enjoyed explaining all of these things and by giving them the end, the nuns and the teachers sent letters that they really...[doorbell. recording stopped]

MM: *Treasure Chest* is known for its anti-communist storylines. Did you do any of those?

FB: No, Reed Crandall did. As a matter of fact he deserved the honor because that was the hardest work. Have you seen them?

JP: Yes, we've seen them.

MM: Yes, they are really interesting.

FB: Yes, well he did the whole thing. Now, sometimes you have to look for his name. Sometimes he only uses the RC, or he will have Reed C., and things like that. But, most of the time he never was one to feel that it was necessary to sign his name, and, to some extent, he was right because his work was so...you could almost...I could tell by the way he would draw the hands and other things that...

MM: Okay, thanks. I think Jordan has a couple questions.

JP: Yes, so one of the other things I wanted ask you about was the "Uncle Harry's Gold Mine" and the "Uncle Harry's Monkey's Uncle." Were those just stories you came up with yourself? Yes, you created those?

FB: Oh, yes. I wanted to do a story of an old building with all kinds of spooky things around you know. That allows you the freedom of getting things like in that one I had these two owls. Well, as a matter of fact, I remember

reading a story in one of those nature books about a family that had an owl, not two of them, that they had one window with no glass on it and he would fly out at night time and in the daytime he'd fly back in and was virtually a pet. So, I said, "Why can't we do it with two of them?" and it allowed me the privilege of not being able to tell which is which you know. And they would get mad at you if you had gone and thought you were the wrong one. And the other thing was, you see those two trains up there and you've probably seen that [model] train [set] over there on that table I haven't been able to do anything with it since I've been out here. I was always interested in tracks because tracks go somewhere, you know. I was always, when I was a kid and I had a Lionel train and so forth. I wouldn't make a big loop. I would have it from one end to the other, you had to stop it, you know, or it'd run right off. But, what were we talking about?

JP: Uncle Harry's...

FB: Oh, Uncle Harry's thing. Well, yes, when I wanted to have this mine, it would need something like that to get to the mine, and it gave me the opportunity...did you ever go out to Colorado and travel on all of these narrow gauge places they still operate?

JP: Like at Cripple Creek or something like that?

FB: No, I like the one that goes from Durango up to Silverton. That railroad track was created because Silverton had silver and they needed a train to carry stuff back and forth. This here wall thing had a cut like this and so forth, and you get on this train and it starts [unintelligible]. As a matter of fact, I got some pictures of that place. In order to get everything, I had a camera that was one of those...what do you call them?

MM: Panoramic?

FB: Panoramic and in order to get everything I took the picture this way because down here you could see everything and up here you could see the top. Yes, it is a great thing to be able to spend more time on a lot of this stuff than you would normally do for income because you are just filling in an awful lot of time. Well, it paid off because people kept coming back to me and saying you know...well, all of these things you were talking about this shark guy. I did a fair amount of illustrating of books and things of that nature. Most of these painting, here, I did for...oh, what the hell was his name? I can get you it.

MM: Now you are talking about after *Treasure Chest*?

FB: Yes.

MM: Because I was going to ask you what you did after *Treasure Chest*?

FB: I never starved to death, there was a sufficient amount of interest in what I could do and most of the time I was good and now these...

MM: Oh Yes, the science fiction journal.

FB: Yes, I got one here. [unintelligible] This one is on display at an art exhibit.

JP: Oh, wow. So this was what you were working on after *Treasure Chest*, the science fiction magazine?

FB: Yes, well I had a story once I wanted to try to sell but I sent some artwork on and the editor became very friendly. This particular story, [unintelligible] as a story was printed this way and has that much script and on the other page is enough script to fill the bottom but it added up to one page and I had a page and half to illustrate it. But its funny, it's an argument between Moses and his brother. His brother is trying to take his dictation and asks him, "How many..." He starts with the beginning and tells him all this stuff.

MM: This story is called "How It Happened."

FB: Yes and finally he gives up on it. Let me see if I can find the thing, now here's that train one again.

MM: Do you still do illustrations?

FB: No. Oh, here's one of my better ones. The author of this story actually wrote to me, a woman novelist. She made a point of that doll lying on the ground. Her basic story was that nobody could have any children any more, it was, nothing happened, and it didn't work. These remaining children had to be protected and so forth. This is why they are being rounded up. Looks like they are going to go into a place like the Germans did but it's the other way around. It's to protect them from people who don't think that they should live if we're not going to live. So, it was some crazy thing like that. Anyway, this one...

MM: That's wonderful.

FB: It shows you the difference between the actual drawing and what it looks like when it is printed and so forth. This was in an exhibit and I felt it was wise to show them the way these things look. How much bigger that you draw them than they are printed. Most of this stuff that I've all done, is twice the size of the printed thing even all of these *Treasure Chest* things. The one peculiar thing about *Treasure Chest* was they never returned the originals. And I don't know what they did when they went out of business. I can only think that they took them down to the dump or something. But it's just as well that they didn't because you see how much I've kept of my own work here. I'd have to have another room, that room next door would be chock-a-block full of them.

JP: So after this science fiction magazine, you just did more freelance work, I guess?

FB: I did almost anything that people asked. For instance, this is the East Hampton town seal. It's a little worn down. I designed the thing and did the lettering on it as well. And the one on the other side is their celebration of 350 years. Imagine having a town that is that old.

MM: In America.

FB: Yes, whenever anybody asked me to do anything like that, “Well, okay.” I have taken on a lot of things that I was not absolutely certain that I could do, as long as it could be done in black and white. I’m not an illustrator in full color like Norman Rockwell was. I got a book on him.

JP: So, what you were sending to *Treasure Chest*, the color was done later?

FB: Oh, yes. When they had some guys who were poaching lobster and they were about to be captured so they said, “We have to dump these lobsters.” Because, you know, you get lobsters out of traps, and if you steal them out of someone else’s traps, well, then that is stealing. Anyway, they had to dump all of the lobsters back in the water, so when they come out printed those were nice red lobsters being dumped back.

MM: So, they were cooked? I mean they were dead, if they were red.

FB: Well, they just didn’t know.

[End of Interview]